Dept. of Agriculture: Provides $524,139 to improve access to jobs, health care and infrastructure across the rural partners network in Wisconsin

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STEVENS POINT, Wis., Feb. 15, 2023 – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Wisconsin State Director Julie Lassa today announced that USDA is providing $524,139 to improve access to jobs, health care and infrastructure for people in historically underserved communities across the Rural Partners Network (RPN) in Wisconsin.

“The Rural Partners Network shortens the distance between rural communities and federal government agencies,” said Lassa. “It allows us to better serve and partner with leaders across the state to help them achieving their community’s goals. RPN has shown that we can help build on to investments like the ones announced today that will benefit rural people and businesses in Wisconsin.” [Audio: Mp3, 443KB, 18 seconds]

The funding announced today will support four projects in Wisconsin. For example:

- The BRICK Ministries will use a $375,000 Community Facilities loan to remodel and renovate the BRICK Ministries, Inc. food distribution and warehouse facility and lobby area. The improvements will be done to rebuild in a more pandemic safe structure to better serve those who benefit from its services in a way that is more sustainable in a pandemic, and to be a more environmentally friendly and safe for continued social distancing and pandemic safe service. The

renovation includes a reconfiguration of the floor plan for better flow and efficiencies and to bring the building up to code for a public building and meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. The Brick Ministries is in the Northern Wisconsin Community Network.

- The Ashland Development Corporation will use a $88,000 Rural Business Development Grant to complete needed repairs and upgrades to the business incubator serving Ashland County. Upgrades will allow easier access for handicapped individuals and will ensure the long-term viability of the incubator. The project will serve 18 businesses and will help create 19 new jobs. The Ashland Development Corporation is in the Northern Wisconsin Community Network.
- Haly Schultz, an independent rancher in Neillsville, will use a $49,999 Value Added Producer Grant to process cattle into packaged meat as well as market and distribute the final product. The customer base is estimated to increase by 145 customers, resulting in a revenue increase of approximately $26,000. This producer is within the Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network.
- Wedges Creek LLC, a campground in Greenwood, will use a $11,140 Rural Energy for American Program (REAP) grant to install an 18 kilowatt (kW) solar electric system. The new system is expected to save the company $1,723 in electrical costs per year. It will replace 25,343 kilowatt hours (kWh) (70 percent of the company's energy use) per year, which is enough energy to power two homes. Wedges Creek LLC is in the Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Under Secretary Xochitl Torres Small today announced $262 million in funding while visiting with people and organizations in North Carolina participating in RPN. While there, she unveiled an annual report documenting RPN's accomplishments in its first year and how the network is helping to shape investment strategies for rural communities.

The funding announced today will support 68 projects in Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Puerto Rico.

Background: Rural Partners Network

The Biden-Harris Administration established RPN to transform the way federal agencies partner with and serve rural people and places, including Native American communities. Led by USDA with support from more than 20 federal agencies and

commissions, RPN is central to President Biden's commitment to ensure all rural people can benefit from federal resources. This includes historic funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.

Wisconsin Community Networks announced in November 2022 are:

- Northern Wisconsin Community Network including Ashland, Iron and Price counties
- Greater Menominee Community Network including Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and Menominee County
- Forest County Community Network
- Northwestern Wisconsin Community Network including Eau Claire, Dunn, Clark, Buffalo, Pepin, and Chippewa counties
- Adams County Visionary Community Network

Community networks receive on-the-ground support from full-time federal staff who live and work locally. These staff members provide technical assistance based on each community's needs, helping them navigate federal programs, build relationships, and prepare successful applications for funding.

RPN communities also benefit from coordination through other federal efforts such as the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization and President Biden's Justice40 Initiative. The Rural Prosperity Interagency Policy Council, co-led by the White House Domestic Policy Council and USDA, advises the RPN program and shares lessons learned through RPN for policy consideration. A team of Rural Desk Officers representing each participating federal agency or regional commission supports the RPN program and community networks.

For more information on RPN, visit Rural.gov.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety, and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural, tribal and high-poverty areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov/wi.

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