

Clinton Co-op Gets USDA Grant To Upgrade Broadband

By Administrator

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Star Telephone Membership Corporation of Clinton, N.C., will use a \$23.7 million ReConnect Program grant to deploy a fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) broadband network capable of simultaneous transmission rates of 100 megabits per second (Mbps) or greater. The funded service area includes 8,749 households, 19 businesses, 10 educational facilities, and three critical community facilities. The project will facilitate more access to services and information for local residents, and it will improve the overall quality of life for people in the community.

The grant comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“Our core mission at USDA is to increase rural prosperity, and this mission cannot be achieved without addressing the digital divide our rural communities face due to a lack of high-speed broadband internet connection,” said Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development Donald “DJ” LaVoy. LaVoy said. “Under the leadership of President Trump and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, USDA is committed to being a strong partner to rural communities in deploying this critical infrastructure, because we know when rural America thrives, all of America thrives.”

Background:

In March 2018, Congress provided \$600 million to USDA to expand broadband infrastructure and services in rural America. On Dec. 13, 2018, Secretary Perdue announced the rules of the program, called “ReConnect,” including how the loans and grants will be awarded to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America. USDA received 146 applications between May 31, 2019, and July 12, 2019, requesting \$1.4 billion in funding across all three ReConnect Program funding products: 100 percent loan, 100 percent grant, and loan-grant combinations. USDA is reviewing applications and announcing approved projects on a rolling basis. Additional investments in all three categories will be made in the coming weeks.

These grants, loans and combination funds enable the federal government to partner with the private sector and rural communities to build modern broadband infrastructure in areas with insufficient internet service. Insufficient service is defined as connection speeds of less than 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload.

In April 2017, President Donald J. Trump established the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity to identify legislative, regulatory, and policy changes that could promote agriculture and prosperity in rural communities. In January 2018, Secretary Perdue presented the Task Force’s findings to President Trump. These findings included 31

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recommendations to align the federal government with state, local and tribal governments to take advantage of opportunities that exist in rural America. Increasing investments in rural infrastructure is a key recommendation of the task force. To view the report in its entirety, please view the Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity (PDF, 5.4 MB). In addition, to view the categories of the recommendations, please view the Rural Prosperity infographic (PDF, 190 KB).

USDA Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities and create jobs 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 areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov.