

# CONNECTING FARMERS TO THE WORLD: INTERNET CONNECTIVITY AND DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

## ■ OUTLINE OF THE CASE

- In order to increase production and manage land in a more sustainable way, U.S. farmers are implementing precision agriculture technologies, but not to their full potential.
- A lack of available broadband across rural America prohibits adoption of these technologies as well as other key economic development and quality of life activities.
- By studying the intersection of broadband internet infrastructure and the digital technologies within agriculture that depend on e-connectivity and estimating the economic benefits of expanding rural e-connectivity to farms and ranches, USDA is preparing to deploy a \$600 million innovative broadband pilot program that will catalyze increased private sector investment in broadband infrastructure.

“When we are able to deploy broadband ubiquitously, think of all the things we will be able to design, harvest and develop ... Broadband in rural America will be as transformative in the 21st century as rural electrification was in the last century.”

- USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue

## ■ UNITED STATES RURAL BROADBAND

- Of the 24 million Americans who lack access to high-performance broadband internet service, 80 percent live in rural areas.
- While urban centers enjoy widespread access to high-speed internet, much of rural America has yet to be connected.
- Disparate access directly impacts rural citizens and businesses, including in agriculture. This stifles the modernization of food production on which urban and suburban citizens rely.
- Digital technologies in agriculture can dramatically increase crop yields, improve distribution, and reduce input costs.
- Connecting farmers and rural families also facilitates extension, education, information sharing, and access to resources.



## ■ ADVANCING RURAL BROADBAND

E-connectivity is fundamental for economic development, innovation, advancements in technology, workforce readiness, and an improved quality of life. Reliable and affordable high-speed internet connectivity will transform rural America. This was laid out in U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Perdue’s Report to the President on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity ([available here](#)). USDA was a key leader in the American Broadband Initiative Report ([available here](#)) that stressed three workstreams to boost connectivity:



1. Streamlining federal permitting processes, reducing the regulatory burden, and expediting the deployment of broadband networks.
2. Leveraging federal assets such as towers, buildings, and land.
3. Maximizing the impact of federal funding to better target areas of need, improve consistency, and provide incentives for state/local policies that efficiently and effectively leverage federal dollars.



# BOOSTING RESILIENCE BY CONNECTING CONSUMERS TO PRODUCERS

## ■ OUTLINE OF THE CASE

- Consumers are increasingly seeking closer connections to their food producers, and many U.S. regions regard expansion of food marketing as a critical component of their economic development strategies.
- More than 167,000 U.S. farms locally produced and sold food through direct marketing practices, resulting in \$8.7 billion in revenue in 2015 ([available here](#)).
- To enhance economic opportunities, rural areas need stronger businesses and agricultural economies that can increase farm productivity and enhance the viability and competitiveness of rural America.
- USDA’s Local Agriculture Markets Program and Land-Grant University partnerships support the development of direct and intermediated regional and local food markets with a focus on:
  - value-added agricultural production;
  - business development, innovation, and training;
  - regional food chain coordination and mid-tier value chain development; and
  - strategies to reduce on-farm food waste and to increase food safety implementation and certification.



■ DOING THE WORK OF SUPPORTING RESILIENT FOOD VALUE CHAINS

Supporting Local Projects

In 2018, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service provided support to 900 locally led projects to expand markets for local food promotion and specialty crops.

Example of a supported project:

The Maryland Farmers Market Association (MFMA) focused on sustaining and growing the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program, improving community health through farmers markets, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, bolstering local economies, and improving the quality of Maryland farmers markets.

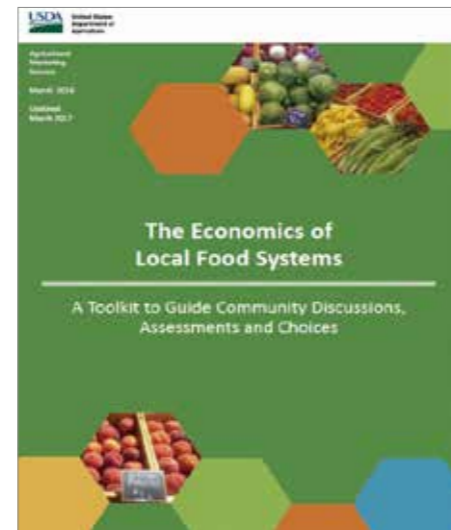
The project increased farmers’ market sales by 34 percent in just one year and provided 6,855 food-insecure households (17,163 individuals) with access to fresh, locally-produced foods in 2015, up 42 percent from 2014.



Technical Assistance/Marketing Outreach/Training

- In 2018, USDA partnered with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, Farm Credit Council, the Farmers Market Coalition, the Food Distribution Research Society, and the National Value-Added Agriculture Conference to organize the first-ever National Direct Agricultural Marketing Summit. The Summit offered 400 attendees the opportunity to receive training and technical assistance that would help them enhance their direct agricultural marketing and value-added food businesses.

- USDA also continued its education and outreach to local communities regarding its toolkit, “The Economics of Local Food Systems”, bringing the number of in-person and virtual training workshops carried out to 30 trainings, reaching approximately 2,000 participants within two years (localfoodeconomics.com (available here)).



Facilitating a National Directory of Local Food Enterprises

- USDA's Local Food Directories helps buyers quickly locate farmers markets (available here), on-farm markets (available here), Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) (available here), and food hubs (available here) .
- This service allows farmers, producers, and distributors of local foods to take advantage of opportunities in both direct-to-consumer and wholesale markets.
- Each directory provides key information about the business listed, including a mapped location, operating hours, months of operation, the types of products available, number of farmers at each market, and the accepted forms of payment.
- There are over 11,000 local food businesses (farmers markets, on-farm markets, CSAs, and food hubs) listed in the directories (available here) .



EQUIPPING CONSUMERS WITH KNOWLEDGE

■ OUTLINE OF THE CASE

- As global leaders in agricultural policy, our job is to ensure that participants in food value chains have access to the best tools available for producing safe, nutritious, affordable food and securing access to the global marketplace.
- At the same time, consumers need a fact-based, data-driven understanding of how they benefit from these tools and programs.
- Governments and agriculture communicators should therefore fight misinformation about farming and food production, and work to bolster consumer confidence in food.
- USDA shares research and information globally through programs, outreach, websites, and apps.

“We in the agriculture community must take up this challenge to connect with the consumers we ultimately serve. We must get better at telling our own stories, rather than letting others fill the void. Consumers need the truth. Don’t fear your food.”

- USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue

## GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN EDUCATING CONSUMERS

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service is responsible for protecting public health by ensuring the safety of the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and processed egg products. FSIS also provides consumers with easy-to-understand information on food safety ([available here](#)) and a chat-based helpdesk ([available here](#)).



KEEP YOUR FAMILY SAFER FROM FOOD POISONING Check your steps at [FoodSafety.gov](http://FoodSafety.gov)



The USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion provides consumers with a range of interactive tools and dietary information so that consumers can make informed choices about what they eat.

The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture is researching the social benefits of emerging technologies, including social welfare, equity, and ethical and cultural impacts.



## GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN BOLSTERING CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are coordinating scientific, educational, and research efforts to ensure the safety of foods we consume through the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). The two agencies have taken steps to increase clarity, efficiency, and potentially reduce the number of duplicate regulations. This can reduce costs for industry and free up government resources to target areas of high risk.

Through the Agricultural Biotechnology Education and Outreach Initiative, FDA and USDA are collaborating to produce and share science-based educational materials to inform consumers about the environmental, nutritional, food safety, economic, and humanitarian impacts of agricultural biotechnology.

Through research, the USDA Agricultural Research Service assesses the nutritional needs of Americans and ensures consumers eat high-quality safe food.

In addition, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service runs the Pesticide Data Program, an annual survey of detectable pesticide residues on foods available to American consumers.

