



**Agriculture Finance News:
FCC Acting Chairman Copps Releases Report On Broadband Strategy For Rural America**

Source: USDA news release

Concluding that all rural Americans must have the opportunity to reap the full benefits of broadband services, Acting Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael J. Copps released a report today providing a starting point for the development of policies to deliver broadband to rural areas and restore economic growth and opportunity for Americans residing and working in those areas.

Recognizing that the need for broadband in rural America is becoming ever-more critical, Congress in the 2008 Farm Bill required the FCC Chairman, in coordination with the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, to submit a report to Congress describing a rural broadband strategy. Entitled "Bringing Broadband to Rural America: Report on a Rural Broadband Strategy," the report by Acting Chairman Copps identifies common problems affecting rural broadband, including technological challenges, lack of data, and high network costs, and offers some recommendations to address those problems.

Broadband "is the interstate highway of the 21st century for small towns and rural communities, the vital connection to the broader nation and, increasingly, the global economy," Acting Chairman Copps said in the report. "Our nation as a whole will prosper and benefit from a concerted effort to bring broadband to rural America."

According to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, "Providing broadband access to rural communities will not only enhance farmers and ranchers' ability to market goods and enhance production, it will help residents in rural communities obtain needed medical care, gain access to higher education, and benefit from resulting economic activity and job growth."

Consistent with the statute's provisions to make recommendations concerning improving inter-agency coordination, the report includes a number of recommendations, including: enhancing coordination among and between federal, Tribal, state, and community agencies, governments and organizations; reviewing existing federal programs to identify barriers to rural broadband deployment; coordinating broadband program terminology consistent with current laws; coordinating data collection and mapping efforts at the federal, Tribal, and state levels to better inform the public and policymakers; supporting consumer education and training initiatives to stimulate and sustain broadband demand; and identifying important policies and proceedings that support further broadband deployment such as universal service and network openness. The report also recognizes that the new administration has already taken important steps to improve coordination efforts and to prioritize broadband initiatives.

In the report, Acting Chairman Copps notes that Congress has provided new direction and support for federal broadband policies and initiatives, in particular through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. In addition to providing \$7.2 billion for broadband grants, loans and loan guarantees administered by the Agriculture and Commerce departments, that law charges the FCC with developing a national broadband plan by next February.

"I view this report as a prelude to, and building block for, the national broadband plan, which will address in greater detail and on a vastly more complete record, the input of all stakeholders and the steps the nation must take to achieve its broadband goals," Acting Chairman Copps said in

the report. Although the national plan will be broader in scope and will focus on bringing broadband to all Americans regardless of where they live, the Rural Broadband report released today "provides another, critical step in the Commission's efforts to develop an effective, efficient and achievable national broadband plan."

The report can be found on the Commission's website at [FCC Broadband](#)

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