

Promoting Economic Development For Thriving Communities

The nation's rural areas need community and economic development assistance to reduce population decline and the loss of both farmers and farmland. Rural areas are increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters, including drought, flooding, and wildfires. Furthermore, both rural and urban communities will face continued instability and the risk of reduced capacity to respond to new pandemics, vector-borne diseases, and a changing environment.

The land-grant universities advance community economic development through research, education, and Extension. However, critical Cooperative Extension System programs remain underfunded and dramatically understaffed across the country. We must increase the investment in community and economic development programming.

Priorities:

- Foster economic growth.
- Improve quality of life.
- Preserve farmland.
- Increase rural vitality.
- Improve access to essential services.
- Reduce natural disaster impacts.
- Create more livable communities.

What's at stake:

- Rural America will continue to **lose population, farmers, businesses, and workers**, as well as **farmland**.
- The nation's long-term supply of **food, clothing, and shelter** will be threatened.
- Tacit **knowledge about food production** will be reduced.

Increased investment in agricultural research, education, and Extension can improve the lives of all Americans by:

- **Keeping Farmers On The Farm**
 - Current Problem: Both the number of farms and the total acreage of farmland continues to decline. As of 2024, there are [1.88 million](#) farms in the U.S., down 8% since the previous Census of Agriculture.
 - Land-grant Solutions: Use economic data to identify land use trends and provide science-based technical assistance to support farm success.
 - Benefit: Potentially prevent the loss of farmers and farmland, which is irreplaceable and is the foundation of our food security.
- **Preparing Communities For Natural Disasters**
 - Current Problem: Rural communities often struggle with weather-related disaster response and recovery and have access to fewer disaster and emergency resources.
 - Land-grant Solutions: Enhance the ability of rural communities to address natural disasters and reduce disaster-related losses by educating property owners about property protection and emergency preparedness.
 - Benefit: Every \$1 invested in disaster preparedness [saves an estimated \\$13](#) in damages, cleanup and economic losses.
- **Adapting To Shifting Demographics**
 - Current Problem: While rural America [lost population](#) from 2010-2020, rural counties grew post-pandemic—though often with fewer working-age residents.

- Land-grant Solutions: Help rural communities address the trends associated with population loss as well as in-migration by providing research-based information.
- Benefit: Community leaders can make more informed public policy decisions that support economic and business development, public health, and environmental quality.
- **Creating Jobs Through Small Business Development**
 - Current Problem: Rural entrepreneurs face a range of challenges that can prevent business success.
 - Land-grant Solutions: Provide local business training and counseling.
 - Benefit: Support small business development and local entrepreneurship, boosting and diversifying rural economies.
- **Expanding Access to Broadband**
 - Current Problem: [30%](#) of U.S. households currently have no or limited access to the internet.
 - Land-grant Solutions: Help communities access and use broadband effectively and cooperate with other agencies to expand coverage
 - Benefit: Internet access and training in digital skills is essential infrastructure that empowers individuals, businesses, and communities.
- **Supporting Informed Community Policy-Making**
 - Current Problem: Rural leaders face information gaps because economic data is often unavailable, inaccurate, or presented in inaccessible formats.
 - Land-grant Solutions: Provide access to and understanding of how to use research-based data sets, such as the U.S. Census, housing, economic and job reports, and other major sources of information such as the IMPLAN economic modeling software.
 - Benefit: Leaders can enact policies to improve the quality of life in rural America using research-based strategies that consider local people and places' varying needs.
- **Developing Pathways To Careers For Rural Youth**
 - Current Problem: Rural Gen Zers are [less likely](#) than their urban peers to say good jobs are available in their communities.
 - Land-grant Solutions: Provide rural youth with opportunities to discover future occupations in agriculture, technology and entrepreneurship that allow them to remain in rural America.
 - Benefit: A younger, diverse and skilled workforce in rural communities, which is essential to the future of rural economies.

Strategic investment in agricultural research, education, and Extension will expand opportunity, strengthen local economies, and ensure every community—rural and urban—can thrive in a changing world.