



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

E-connectivity listening session June 19 in Minnesota

FARIBAULT, Minn. June 14, 2018: Broadband providers and the people who use—or would like to be able to use—those services in rural America are invited to offer their perspectives on enhancing e-connectivity at a listening session Tuesday, June 19.

The Upper Midwest Listening Session of the project, *What's on the Horizon for E-Connectivity in Rural America*, begins at 9 a.m. Tuesday, June 19, 2018, at the Archery Building on the grounds of the Rice County Fairgrounds, Faribault, Minn. A live webcast of the session will be available and can be access using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/thefarmfoundation/live>

“We want to hear from the people who live and work with limited broadband access today, as well as those who have innovative solutions for expanding the availability of those services,” says Constance Cullman, President of Farm Foundation. There is no charge to participate but reservations are requested and can be made by sending an e-mail to Michelle@farmfoundation.org.

Farm Foundation is partnering with CoBank, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to organize broadband listening sessions across the country. The intent is to gather insights into the tools that are needed to improve e-connectivity to enhance the economic health of rural America.

Bill Esbeck, Executive Director of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association, will join Steve Fenske, Attorney and Government Relations Manager with the Minnesota Association of Townships, to discuss e-connectivity needs in the Upper Midwest.

“Access to broadband is critically important for the economic viability and sustainability of rural communities. This listening session is a great opportunity to share the accomplishments of small, rural broadband providers across Wisconsin. The rural providers I represent are continuously reinvesting in their broadband networks and closing the digital divide,” said Esbeck. “Conversations like these among diverse stakeholders allow us to develop a greater understanding of the issues, explore solutions and showcase what has worked so these efforts may be replicated to the benefit of rural communities across the nation.”

Innovative solutions now being used to deliver broadband will be the topic for three Minnesota officials: Kristi Westbrook, CEO/General Manager of Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC) of Brainerd, Minn.; Danna MacKenzie, Executive Director of the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development; and Brian Zelenak, CEO of the Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative, Aitkin, Minn.

“Enhancing the quality of life throughout our communities is our priority,” said Zelenak. “Broadband spurs economic growth in rural communities and opens the door to modern education, healthcare and telework options. We’re proud to help modernize our local economy by making broadband internet a possibility for our members.”

“With these experts and the other rural stakeholders attending, we want to identify the challenges rural communities now face in providing quality broadband services, as well as the innovative options being used to address those challenges,” says Cullman.

The June 19 listening session is part of a series planned across the country. A report of the feedback from those sessions will be provided to federal and state public and private leaders to better inform their decisions regarding improvements to, and expansion of, broadband services in rural America.

Dates and locations of future listening sessions will be announced by the end of June.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[Mary Thompson](#), Farm Foundation, 630-601-4152

[Kelly Wismer](#), NTCA, 703-351-2015

[Stephen Bell](#), NRECA, 571-205-7719

[Jo Solonika](#), CoBank, 720-583-9180

[Brad Captain](#), CFC, 800-424-2954

Farm Foundation is an agricultural policy institute cultivating dynamic non-partisan collaboration to meet society's needs for food, fiber, feed and energy. Since 1933, the Farm Foundation has connected leaders in farming, business, academia, organizations and government through proactive, rigorous debate and objective issue analysis.



CoBank is a national cooperative bank serving vital industries across rural America. The bank provides loans, leases, export financing and other financial services to agribusinesses and rural power, water and communications providers in all 50 states. CoBank is a member of the Farm Credit System, a nationwide network of banks and retail lending associations chartered to support the borrowing needs of U.S. agriculture and the nation's rural economy. In addition to serving its direct retail borrowers, the bank also provides wholesale loans and other financial services to affiliated Farm Credit associations serving approximately 70,000 farmers, ranchers and other rural borrowers in 23 states around the country.



NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association (NTCA) represents nearly 850 independent, community-based telecommunications companies that are leading innovation in rural and small-town America. NTCA advocates on behalf of its members in the legislative and regulatory arenas, and it provides training and development; publications and industry events; and an array of employee benefit programs. In an era of transformative



technological advancements, regulatory challenges and marketplace competition, NRECA members are leading the technological evolution for rural consumers, delivering robust and high-quality services over future-proof networks that make rural communities vibrant places in which to live and do business.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation’s landscape. As local businesses built by the consumers they serve, electric cooperatives have meaningful ties to rural America and invest \$12 billion annually in their communities.



National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) is the nonprofit finance cooperative created and owned by America’s Electric Cooperative Network. CFC provides financing to members in 48 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories. CFC also provides services to telecommunications systems that are members of the Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative (RTFC).



**National Rural Utilities
Cooperative Finance Corporation**

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