



PRESS RELEASE

E-connectivity listening session June 19 in Minnesota

FARIBAULT, Minn. June 11, 2018: The Upper Midwest Listening Session for the project, *What's on the Horizon for E-Connectivity in Rural America*, will be Tuesday, June 19, 2018, at the Rice County Fairgrounds, Faribault, Minn.

This is the second in a series of listening sessions planned across the nation to gather insights into the tools that are needed to improve e-connectivity in rural America. This event will focus on hearing from rural stakeholders about the need for, and solutions for obtaining, quality broadband services for the economic health of rural America.

This project is organized by Farm Foundation, in collaboration 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.

The June 19 session will begin at 9 a.m. in the Archery Building on the grounds of the Rice County Fairgrounds. There is no charge for this event, but reservations are requested by Friday, June 15. Reservations can be made by sending an email to Michelle@farmfoundation.org.

Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC), which is based in Brainerd, Minn., partners with and provides fiber optic services to a number of surrounding communities. “At CTC we see firsthand how much value broadband holds for the rural communities we serve,” says Kristi Westbrook, CEO/General Manager of CTC, who will participate in the listening session.

“I am very pleased to participate in this innovative meeting to discuss the importance of broadband in rural America and the vital role that partnerships can play in achieving creative solutions to the challenges of building quality broadband across our nation,” Westbrook adds. “Engaging in this discussion is an important step, not only to bring awareness, but also to build on the foundation for achieving robust, sustainable broadband throughout rural Minnesota.”

At the June 19 session, Westbrook will join Danna MacKenzie of the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development, and Brian Zelenak of the Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative, Aitkin, Minn., to discuss innovative solutions for broadband delivery. Addressing e-connectivity needs of the Upper Midwest will be the topic of a second panel, which will include Bill Esbeck of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association, and Steve Fenske of the Minnesota Association of Townships. The program also includes open mic sessions for stakeholders to provide their perspectives on e-connectivity in rural America.

“While these sessions will help identify the challenges rural communities are having in providing quality broadband services, a primary focus is to examine innovative options to address those challenges,” says Farm Foundation President Constance Cullman. “We will hear from regional experts, but most importantly, a majority of the session will be dedicated to hearing from the people who live and work with limited broadband access today.”

The June 19 listening session is the first of these regional sessions planned across the country to gather specific input from broadband providers and the people who use—or would like to be able to use—those services. A report of 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.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai joined executives from the five partner organizations April 18 in Washington, D.C., to kick off the listening sessions. Perdue and Pai both highlighted the importance of e-connectivity to all sectors of rural America.

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

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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
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