



JOBS AND ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR RURAL AMERICA

White House Rural Council

AUGUST 2011





Letter from the President of the United States

Rural America—represented by its peoples, businesses, and communities—is central to the economic health and prosperity of our Nation. Rural communities provide our country with affordable agricultural products, competitive manufacturing capabilities, and an independent, renewable energy supply. These communities are also stewards of America’s great outdoors—an important source of jobs and an invaluable treasure for all Americans.

Today, our country faces great economic challenges. Many Americans in rural communities have felt the economic downturn personally and deeply. In response to this severe crisis, my Administration pursued aggressive policies to bring our economy back from the brink and stave off a second Great Depression. While our economy is growing again, the pace of recovery is still not fast enough. The bottom line is we need to do more to create jobs.

In this spirit, I established the White House Rural Council to accelerate the ongoing work of promoting economic growth in rural America. In the coming months, the Rural Council will focus on spurring agricultural innovation, expanding infrastructure, increasing access to capital in rural areas for small businesses, and creating economic opportunities through conservation and outdoor recreation.

This report on “Jobs and Economic Security for Rural America” underscores the commitment my Administration is making to rural communities. It highlights some of the many programs and policies my Administration has implemented in rural America to support economic growth. It also offers a look at the economic agenda we will continue to pursue during my Presidency.

The journey ahead will not always be easy, but there is no doubt that the inherent strengths of rural communities remain strong. I look forward to continuing the important work of expanding economic opportunities and creating jobs in rural America.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama

President of the United States



Letter From the Secretary of Agriculture

On June 9, 2011, by way of an Executive Order, President Barack Obama created the White House Rural Council. The President's signature on this order represents a truly historic moment for rural America, and I am honored to serve as the Chair of the Council.

The White House Rural Council focuses on actions to better coordinate, streamline, and leverage Federal program efforts in rural America. In particular, the primary goals of the Council are to create jobs and economic opportunities through increased access to credit, promote innovation through renewable energy and broadband expansion, improve access to quality health care and education, and expand opportunity through conservation.

In addition to coordinating Federal programs, the Council is developing public-private partnerships to promote economic prosperity and improve the quality of life in rural areas nationwide. By engaging with a variety of rural leaders, including agricultural organizations, small businesses, and state, local, and tribal governments, the Council is able to synchronize and better leverage public and private investment in rural America. As a result of the collaboration through the Council, the Federal Government will be able to do more with less and ensure maximum benefit from every dollar spent.

As Secretary of Agriculture, it is my goal to assist the resilient, hard-working residents of rural communities in creating and maintaining prosperity so that they are self-sustaining, growing, and economically thriving. Rural communities have unprecedented opportunities for economic growth, and we must assist rural residents in capturing these opportunities.

This report highlights the importance of understanding some of the specific needs as well as unique opportunities found within rural America. It also presents vital strategies that can and will be used to seize those opportunities and tackle some of the toughest challenges facing our rural communities.

I welcome your cooperation in this initiative and look forward to working with you to help set rural America on a path to a more successful future.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack

Secretary of Agriculture & Chair of the White House Rural Council



Executive Summary

The vitality of rural America is critical to ensuring the strength of our economy, the affordability of our food, the independence of our energy supply, and the vibrancy of small communities. President Obama values rural America's important contributions to our Nation's well-being, and has worked tirelessly to strengthen the economic security of rural communities across the country. By enacting policies that have helped stave off a second Great Depression and get our economy growing again, the President has laid the foundation for economic growth that will create high paying jobs for all Americans.

These policies have made significant impact in rural areas, but the pace of job growth is still not fast enough. In response, the President has redoubled his efforts to strengthen the economy and ensure that all Americans living in rural communities have equal access to a first-class education, affordable healthcare, and real economic opportunities

This report lays out the economic landscape rural America faces today and presents some of the Administration's many efforts to promote economic growth and job creation in rural communities.

Rural America is home to a vibrant economy supported by nearly 50 million Americans. These Americans come from diverse backgrounds and work in a broad set of industries, including manufacturing, agriculture, services, government, and trade. The agricultural sector alone supports 1.8 million American jobs and represents 5% of our exports. In fact, American farmers are the most productive in the world. This productivity has given Americans access to an affordable food supply that allows us to spend more of our income on other everyday goods.

Moreover, many of the Nation's small businesses are located in rural communities. Small businesses are the engine of job growth and an important source of innovation for the country. Likewise, many fast growing clean energy companies that are helping to secure our Nation's energy independence are also located in rural communities. Renewable energy efforts in rural America are leading the way in developing important technologies that commercialize alternative energy sources. These enterprises not only create new jobs, but also improve our competitiveness globally.

Rural Americans are also an integral part of our military. Although rural residents account for 17% of the population, they make up 44% of the men and women who serve in uniform. In fact, approximately 6.1 million veterans currently live in rural communities. Despite their contributions, many of our veterans face enormous economic challenges. The unemployment rate as of July 2011 among post-September 11 veterans is 12.4%. Many of these unemployed veterans need educational training and job certification to successfully transition back into the civilian workforce. To fully honor the service of the men and women in uniform, this Administration has worked hard to make sure our veterans receive the medical care, training, and employment support they deserve in the rural communities where they live.

The great American outdoors is another important aspect of rural communities. The outdoors represents a critical source of jobs and an invaluable national treasure. More than 261 million acres of land are set aside for the National Park System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the National Landscape Conservation System for the enjoyment of current and future generations. Department of Interior-managed lands alone attract more than 400 million visits each year, representing approximately 8%

of overall tourism spending in the United States. Moreover, spending by recreation visitors around our National Forests is estimated to be nearly \$13 billion annually, sustaining more than 224,000 jobs.

Despite its many strengths, rural America still faces significant challenges. Many rural communities have lower incomes, higher poverty rates, worse health outcomes, and lower educational attainment than urban and suburban areas. The Administration cares deeply about solving these important challenges facing rural communities. To that end, President Obama has implemented an agenda that addresses many of the most significant obstacles faced by rural America.

With the establishment of the White House Rural Council led by the Secretary of Agriculture, the President has committed the Administration to build on its efforts to improve the economic security of rural communities. Specifically, the Obama Administration has proposed and implemented policies to promote economic expansion, create jobs, improve access to quality healthcare, foster innovation, and expand outdoor opportunities in rural America.

The following highlights some of the accomplishments that this Administration has achieved in rural communities.

Supporting Rural Small Businesses and Farmers

Creating Jobs and Economic Growth

- Provided more than \$6.2 billion in financing to **help nearly 10,000 rural businesses** expand, grow and innovate, creating or saving over 250,000 jobs.
- Provided more than **\$5 billion in farm operating and ownership loans** to help over 35,000 small and medium sized businesses.
- Provided over **\$3 billion in disaster assistance to over 100,000 farmers and ranchers** to help them recover from natural disasters.
- Expanded **U.S. agricultural exports, supporting over 800,000 American jobs** and generating a 35-to-1 return on investment.
- Provided **\$78.4 million in National Farmworker Jobs Program** grants in 2010 to counter the impact of chronic unemployment and underemployment experienced by migrant and seasonal farm workers.
- Mentored or trained over **1.5 million entrepreneurs and small business owners**, many in rural communities, through Small Business Administration's (SBA) vast network of Small Business Development Centers, Women Business Centers, and SCORE Chapters.
- **Supported more than 1.3 million jobs and \$246 billion in economic activity** through conventional energy development and hydropower on Department of Interior-managed lands, largely in rural areas.

Promoting Innovation and Investment

- Expanded **broadband access to over 7 million rural Americans, including 3 million rural households and over 350,000 rural businesses**. This expansion of rural broadband access is helping to lower costs for businesses and bring jobs back to rural communities.
- Established the **Smart Grid Investment Grant Program** to integrate clean energy into the country's electricity system, resulting in new jobs and lower energy costs in rural America.
- **Committed nearly \$21 billion in loan guarantees to 32 clean energy projects that will create or save nearly 21,000 jobs**, including 22 generation projects that will produce over 14 million megawatt hours of power annually, enough to power over 1.2 million households and avoid over 8 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) annually.
- Created the TIGER Discretionary Grant Program focused on investing in infrastructure vital to rural communities. **TIGER invested more than \$220 million in rural areas, resulting in projects worth \$438 million that built or rehabilitated 24 infrastructure projects.**
- Financed over 416 loan guarantees to **furnish or improve electric power service in 41 states, connecting nearly 800,000 new rural residents** to the electric grid, including more than 130,000 Native Americans.
- Installed **energy efficiency solutions for more than 5,000 rural small businesses, farmers, and ranchers** to help save energy and improve their bottom line through the Department of Agriculture program.

Improving Access to Quality, Affordable Healthcare, Housing, Education, and Other Critical Facilities

- Provided **assistance to over 400,000 rural homeowners** to purchase, build, or repair their homes.
- Financed nearly **6,000 Community Facilities**, including over 2,500 public safety facilities, 1,500 public buildings, 1,000 educational facilities, and 750 health care facilities.
- Provided distance learning and telemedicine services **to over 2,500 healthcare and educational facilities** throughout rural America.
- **Placed 2,641 clinicians in rural communities** through the National Health Service Corps
- **Invested \$3.5 billion in 2010 and \$535 million in 2011** in School Improvement Grants to help turnaround the Nation's lowest performing schools. **For the 2010 funds, 18% of all awards were made to schools in rural areas.**
- Provided nearly **9 million rural residents access to a safe water supply and sanitary sewer system** and over 3.7 million rural residents access to new or improved systems that will deliver safe, clean drinking water.

Expanding Opportunities for Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, and Tourism to Create Sustained Economic Growth

- Established the **America's Great Outdoors Initiative** which has engaged over **10,000 citizens** in 51 public listening sessions and received more than 105,000 written comments, launching one of the most robust conversations about conservation in our Nation's history.
- Enrolled **7.1 million acres in the Conservation Reserve Program** which retires environmentally sensitive farm lands and set aside 300,000 acres in the program specifically to benefit game species like ducks, quail and pheasants.
- Partnered military with state and local governments, land trusts, and landowners to secure conservation easements through the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI). REPI has resulted in **more than four dozen conservation buffer projects across the country and protects more than 170,000 acres of land.**
- **Removed 86,927 tons of biomass** from our National Forests to produce energy.
- Worked with farmers to **restore wetlands habitat on 470,000 acres** in the Gulf coastal plain following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in order to conserve migratory waterfowl like ducks, geese, shorebirds and other birds.

Supporting Our Veterans and Military Families

- **Hired over 100,000 veterans in the federal government** through the President's Veterans Employment Initiative.
- Provided **education benefits to over 215,000 veteran students in rural areas** and 3,600 veteran students in highly rural areas under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.
- Invested in more than 500 projects across the VA health care system in support of rural health care, including 404 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and 48 outreach clinics in rural areas, to provide **primary health care access to nearly 3.3 million veterans.**
- Helped over **300,000 rural veterans and service members purchase a home or refinance an existing mortgage** through the veterans' home loan guaranty program.
- Challenged private companies to **hire or train 100,000 veterans by 2013**, and announced commitments from numerous companies and organizations who have already stepped up to meet that goal.



The State of Rural America

Rural America is leading the way in our economy's transition into the 21st century. By investing in innovation, building next generation technologies, and opening up new global markets for rural entrepreneurs, rural communities have built leading manufacturing capabilities, promising renewable industries, and the most productive agriculture sector in the world. These structural shifts, however, have not benefited all rural Americans equally. Many rural communities continue to lag metropolitan areas in educational attainment, health outcomes, and income. President Obama is keenly aware that rural communities still face many difficult challenges, and he has redoubled his efforts to create jobs and strengthen economic security in rural America.

This section takes a closer look at the state of the economy and society in our Nation's rural communities.

Jobs and Industry

The rural economy is made up of an increasingly diverse and vibrant set of industries and businesses. As agricultural productivity increased, many rural Americans shifted from agriculture to alternative forms of employment. Today, the diversity of jobs and industries in rural communities closely mirror that of metropolitan areas. For instance, more residents of rural areas work in services, trade, government, and manufacturing than agriculture.

More importantly, over the past year, rural communities experienced strong job growth. Many of these jobs were created in manufacturing and the emerging clean energy sector in rural America. The Administration is committed to continuing its support for these vital industries. Despite the strong growth, unemployment remains high in many rural communities. One of the hurdles of entrepreneurship and job creation in rural America is access to capital for small businesses. Rural entrepreneurs often have to travel farther than urban entrepreneurs to obtain venture capital for new businesses. Moreover, rural entrepreneurs often face a greater two-way information gap—there is less information about rural entrepreneurs for potential funders, and there is less information in rural communities about sources of funding. The President is committed to increasing access to capital and to ensuring more new businesses find their homes in rural communities.

Agriculture

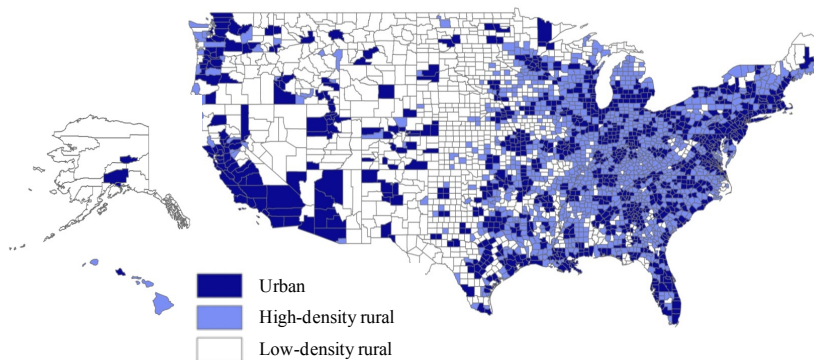
Like the rest of the economy, the agriculture sector has faced difficult economic times in recent years. But after declining 28% in 2009, farm sector income experienced a rapid rebound, growing 27% in 2010 and is forecasted to grow 20% in 2011. Just as important—this recovery was sector-wide. While an increase in the value of livestock accounted for much of the upward movement, farmers also experienced an increase in the value of other agricultural production. This progress is having an immediate effect on the lives of millions of Americans: average farm family household income is projected to reach \$83,000 in 2010—up 7.6% from 2009.

The strong performance of American agriculture is made possible by an extraordinary surge in agricultural productivity, rise in agricultural prices, and adaptation of agricultural goods for new markets. While nonfarm productivity increased 75% in the second half of the twentieth century, farm productivity increased more than twice that rate or 200% in the same period. The agricultural productivity gain has meant more Americans can buy high quality agricultural products at a cheaper price. It has also allowed families to spend a smaller fraction of their incomes on food, and more on other everyday goods.

Moreover, this productivity gain has made American agricultural goods highly competitive on the global markets. In fact, agriculture is one of the major sectors of the economy with a trade surplus, expected to be \$40 billion this year. Overall, agricultural exports are expected to generate \$137 billion in goods shipped in fiscal year 2011. More importantly, agricultural exports are supporting good jobs for Americans. USDA studies show that every billion dollars in agricultural exports supports over 8,000 jobs and generates an additional \$1.4 billion in economic activity. The President recognizes the importance of agricultural exports for the health of our economy and has set the goal of doubling the amount of American goods we sell abroad by 2014.

Demographics

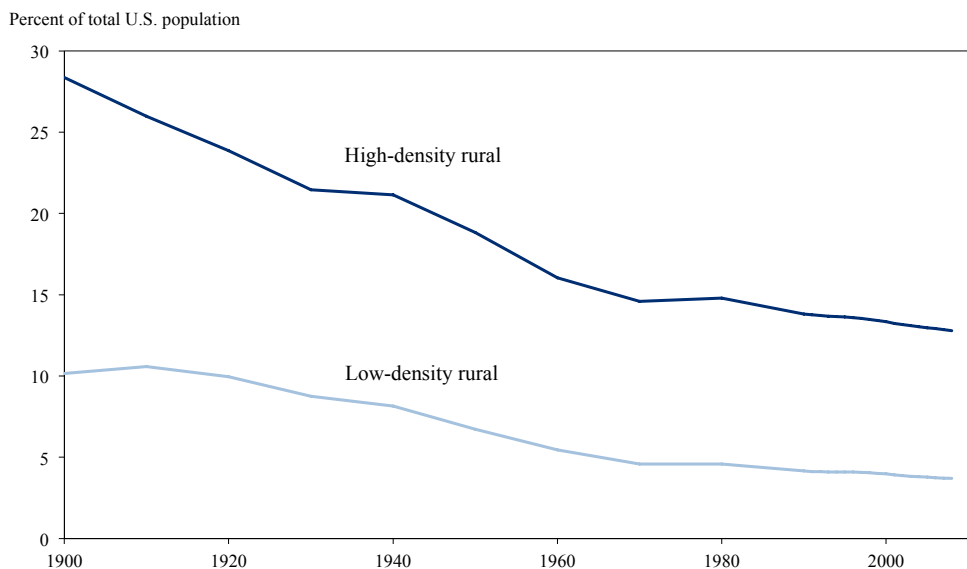
Figure 1
Rural-Urban Classification by County, 2003



Note: Counties classified based on Department of Agriculture urban influence continuum codes and CEA methodology.

Rural America is a vibrant and diverse community, representing nearly 1 in 6 Americans or approximately 50 million people. In our lifetimes, the demographics of rural communities have undergone several dramatic transformations. Over the last century, the percentage of Americans living in rural communities has declined by nearly 50%. Moreover, outmigration trends among young people have fundamentally shifted rural age demographics. This demographic shift could create long-term challenges for job creation in rural areas, as having fewer people of working age weakens the economic environment to attract businesses that will create more jobs. This is why the Obama Administration has made it a priority to provide more support to small businesses in rural communities. Making sure that businesses continue to find rural America a great place to call home will be critical to securing the economic security of Americans living in rural communities.

Figure 2
U.S. Population Concentration over Time



Source: Department of Commerce (Census Bureau), Decennial Censuses and Intercensal Population Estimates.

Rural America is also home to 565 federally recognized Indian tribes with whom the United States enjoys a special relationship. Approximately 43% of the Native American population lives in rural areas. Many of whom face unique economic challenges. In fact, some 14% of homes on reservations do not have electricity, 12% do not have access to safe water supply, and nearly a quarter of all Native Americans live in poverty. Though the challenges of Indian Country are difficult, President Obama is committed to forging a brighter future with Indian tribes by identifying and breaking down barriers that impede economic growth in Indian Country.

Veterans and Military Families

Rural Americans are also an integral part of our military. Although rural residents account for 17% of the U.S. population, they make up 44% of the men and women who serve in uniform. In fact, approximately 6.1 million veterans currently live in rural communities. Their immeasurable sacrifices have made our borders safer and our country stronger.

Despite their contributions, many of our veterans face enormous economic challenges. The unemployment rate as of July 2011 among post-September 11 veterans is 12.4%. Many of these unemployed veterans need educational training and job certification to successfully transition back into the civilian workforce. To fully honor the service of the men and women in uniform, this Administration has worked hard to make sure our veterans receive the medical care, training, and employment support they deserve in the rural communities where they live.

Specifically, the President's Veterans Employment Initiative has hired over 100,000 veterans in the federal government in the past year and a half. Moreover, under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the Department

of Veteran Affairs (VA) has provided education benefits to over 215,000 veteran students in rural areas and 3,600 veteran students in highly rural areas. Through the Office of Rural Health, the VA has also targeted \$250 million annually to improve access and quality of care to rural veterans. Further, VA's home loan guaranty program has helped over 300,000 rural veterans and service members purchase a home or refinance an existing mortgage. And First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden have led Joining Forces, the national initiative to mobilize all sectors of society to provide our service members and their families with the jobs and economic opportunities they deserve.

Furthermore, on August 5th, 2011, the President announced a sweeping initiative to boost veterans hiring and ensure that the men and women in uniform leave service with the credentials and training they need in today's civilian workforce. The proposal includes the Returning Heroes Tax Credit, which would provide strong incentives for firms to hire unemployed veterans, and the Wounded Warriors Tax Credit, which would increase incentives to hire unemployed veterans with service connected disabilities. The President also challenged the private sector to hire or train 100,000 veterans by the end of 2013, and a large number of companies have already stepped up to meet that challenge. Collectively, these efforts will help create jobs and improve economic outcomes for our veterans, and fulfill the promise we have made to the millions of men and women who have bravely served our country.

Educational Attainment

More than half of the public school districts, nearly one third of schools, and almost a quarter of American students are located in rural areas. Rural schools often have smaller class sizes, stronger parent involvement, and greater community support. In the last 30 years, share of rural residents who go on to institutions of higher education has nearly doubled. This has enabled more rural residents to compete for higher paying jobs and improve their economic outcomes.

Despite this growth, rural residents still lag urban residents in educational attainment, and more needs to be done to improve college completion rates for rural students. In fact, in 2000, an urban resident was between 10 and 15 percentage points more likely to have attended college than a rural resident. This Administration has committed itself to making sure we close this gap by increasing the availability of Pell Grants and making student loans more affordable to enable greater number of rural Americans to attend institutions of higher education.

Housing

The impact of the housing crisis has been severely felt in rural communities. Most rural homeowners experienced steep declines in home prices, which are often their most valuable asset. Some have found their mortgage payments increasingly unaffordable, while others have lost their homes to the foreclosure process.

President Obama has responded aggressively to help more Americans stay in their homes. Specifically, the Administration launched two major mortgage modification efforts through Making Home Affordable (MHA) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) that collectively reduced monthly payments on 1.6 million mortgages between April 2009 and April 2011. An additional 2.3 million mortgage modifica-

tions were completed during the same period working with private lenders. Many of the nearly 4 million mortgages modified are for homes in rural America.

The Administration also established the Hardest Hit Fund, which allocated \$7.6 billion to the hardest hit states to help struggling unemployed and/or underwater homeowners stay in their homes. Moreover, over 800,000 families in rural communities are directly assisted through Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing, and FHA Multifamily programs. An additional 400,000 families live in homes supported by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). In addition, the Administration created the Rural Housing Stability Program (RHSP) that helps the worst-affected rural homeowners stay in their homes and stabilize their communities.

Addressing the severe housing needs of tribal communities is also a high priority of the Obama administration. HUD partners with many rural American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments to support their efforts to create locally-driven solutions to economic development. Programs like Indian Housing Block Grants, Indian Home Loan Guarantees, and Indian Community Development Block Grants support economic development and nearly 40,000 homes on Indian Country—many in remote areas where safe, affordable housing is desperately needed.

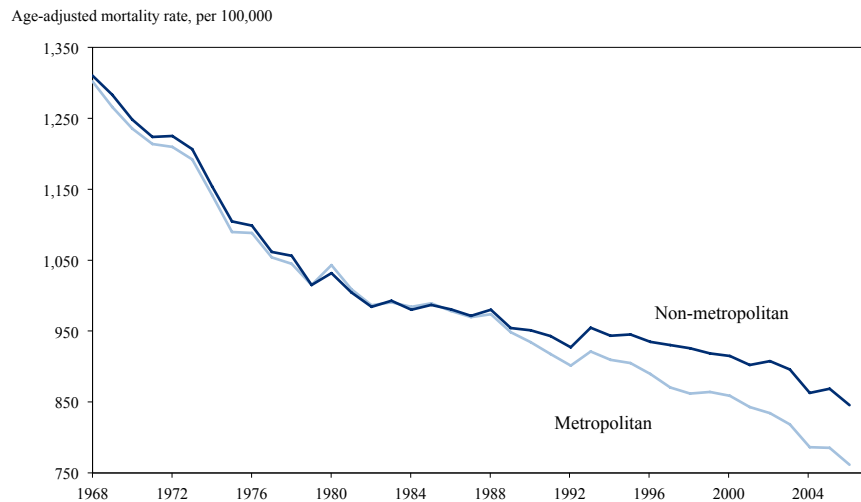
Healthcare

When the President took office, access to affordable healthcare in rural America was a significant challenge for many rural residents. One important barrier was the cost of healthcare in rural communities. Healthcare expenditures account for a much larger share of rural residents' average income than Americans living in metropolitan areas. The rise in healthcare costs in recent years had made the disparity worse. This means fewer rural families can afford the healthcare they need. Accordingly, rural residents are more likely to be uninsured and have coverage through public sources than urban and suburban Americans.

Rural areas also tend to have fewer primary care doctors per person than urban areas. In fact, rural counties had on average 62.0 primary care doctors for every 100,000 residents in 2008, compared with 79.5 primary care doctors for the same number of residents in urban areas. In addition, rural residents face geographic challenges in accessing medical care. Rural residents often have to travel farther for regular check-ups and emergency services. This can significantly increase the cost of medical treatment and impact outcomes in emergencies when time is critical. Fewer doctors and access points compounded by longer commutes, unfortunately, can translate to fewer check-ups, less early detection of disease, and worse health outcomes.

In fact, since the early 1990s, mortality rates in urban and rural areas have diverged. Specifically, rural mortality has declined at an average annual rate of only 0.73%, significantly slower than the metropolitan rate of 1.27%. While the source of this divergence is unclear, improvements in access to healthcare could help to narrow the disparity.

Figure 3
Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Mortality Rates



Sources: Cosby et al. (2008); Data for 2005-2006 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WONDER public data file.

The passage of the Affordable Care Act has begun to close these gaps. Through Affordable Insurance Exchanges that will become operational in 2014, more rural families will be able to find a health care plan that fits their needs. In some rural areas today, a single company dominates 80% of the market. The new law will foster competition and bring more choices to rural Americans.

Also beginning in 2014, premium tax credits will be available to help lower and middle-income individuals and families purchase health insurance. And many rural small businesses may already benefit from a tax credit for up to 35% of health care premium expenses in 2011. Together these provisions will ensure that more rural Americans have access to quality affordable healthcare, which means more check-ups and early detection that will result in better health outcomes.

The Affordable Care Act also included important provisions to help rural hospitals and doctors. The law provided a 10% bonus payment on Medicare primary care and major surgical procedures for qualifying primary care providers. It also provided a 10% bonus for general surgeons in health professional shortage areas for the years 2011-2015. In addition, funding for the National Health Service Corps was increased, and special payment policies that benefit rural providers were extended. Furthermore, the Affordable Care Act provided that Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs), rural referral centers, and qualifying sole community hospitals will be eligible for the 340B drug purchasing program that will make outpatient drugs more affordable.

Taken together, these policies will expand access to affordable health coverage for rural families and will ensure that rural providers—hospitals, doctors, and other health professionals—remain a strong and viable part of rural America's economy.



The President's Commitment to Rural America

President Obama recognizes the vital role rural communities play in the American economy. The Administration's many efforts in rural communities to strengthen its economy and create jobs are focused on several key areas:

Creating Jobs and Economic Growth

- Increasing opportunity and promoting entrepreneurship by expanding access to capital for small businesses in rural America
- Assisting producers and expanding markets for American agricultural and forest products
- Training a globally competitive workforce in rural America

Promoting Innovation and Investment

- Expanding broadband access and promoting global connectivity in rural America
- Investing in clean and renewable energy opportunities
- Developing high-growth regional economies by leveraging rural strengths

Improving Access to Quality, Affordable Healthcare, Housing, Education, and Other Critical Facilities

- Expanding access to healthcare and creating new healthcare jobs in rural America
- Improving educational outcomes for youth in rural America
- Providing sustainable, affordable housing to rural Americans
- Building 21st century rural infrastructure

Expanding Opportunity through Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, and Tourism

- Expanding opportunities through conservation, outdoor recreation, and tourism to create sustained economic growth

Supporting Our Veterans and Military Families

- Providing veterans with the employment, training, medical care, and credentialing support they deserve in the rural communities where they live.

This section takes a closer look at some of the many accomplishments and programs that this Administration has implemented in rural communities.

Creating Jobs and Economic Growth in Rural America

Increasing opportunity and promoting entrepreneurship by expanding access to capital for small businesses in rural America:

- The Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided more than \$6.2 billion in financing to help nearly 10,000 small and emerging rural businesses expand, creating or saving over 250,000 jobs.
- USDA provided more than \$5 billion in farm operating and ownership loans to help 35,000 small and medium sized businesses. In addition, USDA expedited \$173 million in Recovery Act loans for farm operations to 2,600 farmers.
- The Small Business Administration (SBA) supported rural small businesses with nearly \$3 billion in much needed loans through the 7(a) and 504 loan programs. Additionally, the SBA recently launched Community Advantage, which increases points of access in rural communities by opening the SBA 7(a) loan program to community-based, mission focused lenders.
- The Delta Regional Authority led investments in 144 rural focused projects that attracted an additional \$1.4 billion in private investments and \$431 million in public funds—resulting in over \$1.9 billion of investments in the Delta Region.
- The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) is investing \$20 million into 144 rural focused projects that will leverage public and private funds to produce \$426 million in investments in the Delta Region.

Assisting producers and expanding markets for American agricultural and forest products:

- USDA has helped expand U.S. agricultural exports to \$108 billion in 2010 which supports 800,000 American jobs and generates a 35-to-1 return on investment.
- USDA's crop insurance and disaster programs have provided over \$10 billion and helped over 100,000 farmers and ranchers to keep their family farms in business after natural disasters.
- With the assistance of the Farm Storage Facility Loan Program, farmers in rural communities have built over 4,000 storage facilities for the storage of grain, hay and fruits and vegetables. These facilities allow farmers increased flexibility to market their crops.
- USDA announced the deployment of a cross-agency "Strike Force" to better serve persistent poverty communities and socially disadvantaged farmers through the coordination of activities among all USDA agencies and the use of Community Based Organizations' (CBOs) local expertise.

Training a globally competitive workforce in rural America:

- The Department of Labor (DOL) provided \$78.4 million in National Farmworker Jobs Program grants in 2010 for job training and employment assistance for migrant and seasonal farm workers.
- The DOL's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grants program provides community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education with funds to expand and improve their ability to train workers for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations.
- The DOL also provided approximately \$65 million for job training and employment assistance for Indian and Native American youth and adults through the Indian and Native American Program in 2010.
- The SBA's Emerging Leaders 200 (e200) Program provides high-growth potential entrepreneurs with the network and resources required to build a sustainable business and promote the economic development within communities across the country. In 2010, the e200 program was expanded to provide support for entrepreneurs in Native American communities. Program results show nearly 60% have hired new workers with over 500 new full-time employees in 2009 alone.

Promoting innovation and investment in rural communities

Expanding broadband access and promoting global connectivity in rural America:

- The President established a Wireless Innovation Initiative with a goal to create wireless broadband access for 98% of all Americans.
- Through the USDA's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program, more than 2,500 healthcare and educational facilities have received access to distance learning and telemedicine services.
- Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has invested \$4.5 million to support 17 Telehealth Network grantees, which provided over 17,000 teleconsultations to patients in isolated areas across 207 locations.
- As a result of USDA's Broadband Initiative Program under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), 2.8 million households will have new or improved broadband services, reaching nearly 7 million people and 364,000 businesses across more than 300,000 square miles.
- The U.S. Chief Technology Officer launched the "Text 4 Baby" program to use mobile technologies to provide healthcare information to expecting and new parents. The service now has more than 135,000 subscribers.
- The SBA / SCORE Broadband Initiative helps small businesses accelerate growth through the use of broadband technologies, many of which are in rural communities. To date, its online resources have been leveraged by over 11,000 small businesses.

Investing in clean and renewable energy opportunities:

- The USDA's Electric Loan Program has made a total of 416 loan guarantees to furnish or improve electric power service in 41 states, connecting 787,715 new rural residents to the electric grid, including 130,582 Native Americans. The Electric Program has made 11 loans for renewable energy resulting in over 357 MW of clean renewable energy capacity.
- USDA has helped nearly 5,000 rural small businesses, farmers and ranchers save energy and improve their bottom line by installing renewable energy systems and energy efficiency solutions that will save a projected 4.3 billion in kWh—enough energy to power 390,000 American homes for a year.
- USDA has provided more than \$240 million under the Biomass Crop Assistance Program to encourage feedstock production.
- USDA's Rural Utility Service created a new framework that resulted in \$250 million in loans for smart-grid technology deployment, focused on upgrading the electric grid in rural America.
- USDA has invested in approximately 270 wind energy projects, creating over 200 jobs and 300 million kilowatts of energy.
- The Department of Interior (DOI) Smart from the Start initiative helps developers identify the best locations for renewable energy developments on public lands and waters. Through this effort, 12 renewable energy projects have been permitted on federal lands since 2009, which will eventually generate nearly 4,000 megawatts of energy and create more than 7,000 construction and operation jobs.
- In 2010, DOI permitted nearly 4,000 megawatts of solar, wind and geothermal power on federal lands, supporting the creation of over 7,000 jobs and multi-billion dollar investments in rural areas. These projects included 9 solar projects (3,671 MW), 1 wind project (150 MW), and 2 geothermal projects (79.5 MW).
- Since 2009, the EPA AgSTAR program has set up 33 new digester systems at livestock facilities across the U.S that collectively achieved greenhouse gas emissions reductions of 1.3 million metric tons CO₂ and generated 450 million kWh of renewable energy.
- Through the Bioenergy Program for Advanced Producers (9005), the USDA made payments worth nearly \$30 million to more than 120 recipients producing biofuels from non-corn feedstock in 34 states.

Developing high-growth regional economies by leveraging rural strengths:

- USDA has utilized the Rural Business Opportunity Grant, the Rural Community Development Initiative, the Broadband Incentive Program, and the Value Added Producer Grant Program to support locally-led regional strategies and lifted up best practices in its Great Regions Initiative.
- Established the Appalachian Regional Development Initiative (ARDI) which engages other federal agencies to identify ways for the Federal Government to help create a stronger and more diversified economy in Appalachia.

- Established the Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) to support local community efforts to plan for sustainable regional economies. 52% of applicants to the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant were from small towns and rural areas.
- Through the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), rural manufacturers created and retained over 20,240 jobs, experienced \$690 million in new sales, and made \$562 million in new investments in 2009.
- The Department of Defense's (DoD) Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) provides funding to secure conservation easements. These efforts prevent development encroachment into military test and training areas and conserves land surrounding DoD facilities.

Improving Access to Quality, Affordable Healthcare, Housing, Education, and Other Critical Facilities in Rural America

Expanding access to healthcare and creating new healthcare jobs in rural America:

- Since 2009, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has funded 444 community health centers in rural areas to serve more than two million patients, including 598,601 uninsured patients. HHS has also awarded over \$200 million to 52 health centers for health center construction and renovation projects in rural communities.
- In 2009, the Medicare program provided \$66.2 billion in health care services to help millions of seniors in rural areas.
- Through the Improving Rural Health Care Initiative, HHS has targeted \$76 million annually to support community-based projects designed to improve access to and coordination of health care services in rural communities, reaching 240 rural communities and serving 395,000 rural residents annually.
- Expanded and extended the Medicare Rural Community Hospital Demonstration under the Affordable Care Act to provide an estimated \$52 million in enhanced reimbursement for inpatient services at 25 rural hospitals.
- HHS awarded \$4 million to support 20 Rural Health Workforce grants that trained nearly 800 clinicians affecting approximately 250 communities.
- Through the Innovative Readiness Training program, the DoD partnered with many local organizations to provide service to rural residents. For example, it partnered with the Delta Regional Authority to provide free health care to more than 6,000 Delta residents.
- The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Justice Small Grant Program has provided support to more than 100 community-based organizations in rural areas to address local environmental and health issues since its inception.

Improving educational outcomes for youth in rural America:

- The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) invested nearly \$3.5 billion in 2010 and \$535 million in 2011 in Title I School Improvement Grants to help turnaround the nation's lowest performing schools. For the 2010 funds, 18% of all SIG awards have been made to schools in rural areas.
- Through the Rural Education Achievement Program, the Administration has given \$175 million annually to fund and support small and low-income rural schools.
- The Education Jobs Fund (Ed Jobs) program provided \$10 billion in assistance to States to save or create education jobs for the 2010-2011 school year. Many of these jobs are in rural areas.
- DOE's i3 competition for 2011 included a priority to "Improving Achievement and High School Graduation Rates in Rural Local Education Agencies" that will more effectively target solutions to rural challenges. In 2010, 39% of the first i3 competition grantees addressed rural students
- Since 2009 the Appalachian Regional Commission has given approximately \$11 million to provide training to 13,000 workers, enabling them to secure new jobs or retain their current positions.

Providing sustainable, affordable housing to rural Americans:

- Through the State Community Development Block Grant program, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has provided over \$800 million to rural areas to build needed infrastructure, economic development, and affordable housing.
- HUD committed to providing over \$500 million in grants for affordable housing and home-ownership programs in rural areas through the HOME Investment Partnership program. These efforts directly support over 4,300 jobs.
- Through better coordination between the HUD and USDA, over 1.25 million families in rural communities have received assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing, and Multi-family programs.
- Since 2009, USDA has provided assistance to approximately 400,000 households to purchase, build, or repair their homes.
- HUD's Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) program has provided over \$500 million through the Recovery Act (ARRA) to eligible Indian tribes that have helped thousands of Native families buy and stay in affordable housing.

Building 21st century rural infrastructure:

- The Rural Utilities Service at USDA provided nearly 9 million rural residents access to a safe water supply and sanitary sewer system.
- EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) has provided close to \$20 billion for water quality infrastructure to communities of 10,000 or fewer people, and \$142 million to repair or replace failing decentralized wastewater infrastructure.

- The Department of Transportation's (DOT) TIGER Discretionary Grant Program has invested more than \$220 million in rural areas, resulting in projects worth \$438 million that built or rehabilitated 24 infrastructure projects, including unsafe bridges, vital roads, and rail.
- DOT's Federal Highway program has 7,293 ARRA projects in rural areas valued at nearly \$13.67 billion. In addition, DOT is investing \$550 million for the Federal Lands Highway Program, including \$310 million for Indian Reservation Roads, \$170 million for Park Roads and Parkways, \$60 million for the Forest Highways and \$10 million for Refuge Roads.
- Through the Transit Capital Assistance funding program, rural transit areas received \$823 million of Recovery Act funds. In addition, DOT provided more than \$461 million in 2010 for rural and tribal transit. In 2009 rural transit supported more than 130 million passenger trips in rural areas.
- DOT provided \$89.5 million in loans to railroads in rural areas.
- DOT through its Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing Program will offer \$33 billion in loans to finance development of railroad infrastructure.
- The Partnership for Sustainable Communities has also provided technical assistance grants and other capacity building assistance to nearly 90 small towns and rural communities to develop and implement long-term, sustainable growth plans.

Expanding Opportunities for Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, and Tourism

Expanding opportunities for conservation, outdoor recreation, and tourism to create sustained economic growth:

- DOI's management and recreation activities result in \$47 billion in economic impact and support more than 388,000 jobs, largely in rural areas. In addition, spending by recreation visitors in areas around National Forests is estimated to be nearly \$13 billion annually, sustaining more than 224,000 full and part-time jobs.
- The President signed the most significant land conservation legislation in decades, which included authorization of three new national park units, designation of more than 2 million acres of new wilderness land, inclusion of more than 1,100 miles of rivers to the National Wild and Scenic River System, and enlargement of more than a dozen national parks.
- The President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative has engaged over 10,000 citizens in 51 public listening sessions and received more than 105,000 written comments, launching one of the most robust conversations about conservation in our Nation's history.
- USDA enrolled 7.1 million acres in the Conservation Reserve Program, which retires environmentally sensitive farmlands, and set aside 300,000 acres in the program specifically to benefit game species like ducks, quail and pheasants.

- USDA worked with farmers to restore wetlands habitat on 470,000 acres in the Gulf coastal plain following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in order to conserve migratory waterfowl like ducks, geese, shorebirds and other birds.
- USDA provided states nearly \$30 million through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (i.e., “Open Fields”) to assist in efforts to partner with farmers, ranchers and forest owners to make lands available for hunting and fishing.
- USDA launched the Sage Grouse Initiative to promote voluntary stewardship of habitat on private ranchlands for the benefit the once abundant sage grouse. In 2011 alone, USDA has provided nearly \$100 million to ranchers for voluntary conservation activities in 11 states.
- The USDA has improved 12,925 miles of roads and trails, treated 110,516 priority acres for pests, and removed 86,927 tons of biomass to produce energy in our national forests.
- DoD’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) provides funding to secure conservation easements. These efforts prevent encroachment of military test and training areas and conserves current land uses.
- DOI spent \$214 million on land conservation projects in 2010 that contributed about \$440 million in economic activity and supports about 3,000 jobs.
- The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), through AmeriCorps State and National (ASN), will be providing almost \$12.5 million to fund rural environmental programs and about 5,000 AmeriCorp members. Altogether, ASN will be funding \$96 million and 24,800 members for rural programs on a wide range of critical issues.
- DOI announced \$37.4 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in state grants to establish and renovate parks and open spaces in 2011. Since the inception of the Fund, over \$3.8 billion have been made available and approximately 41,000 projects have been funded.
- Nationally, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service spent \$2.8 billion on conservation in 2010 through both financial assistance and technical programs. It is estimated that this expenditure on conservation programs supported over 29,000 jobs.
- The Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, and Everglades restoration activities were estimated to contribute approximately 3,200 jobs and \$427 million to local economies many of which are rural communities.
- The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Fisheries Innovation Fund fosters new approaches to making fisheries management work for fishermen. This fund is helping fishermen take the lead in creating more sustainable fisheries and protecting jobs in their communities.
- HHS’ Administration for Children and Families funded \$4.9 million from the Rural Community Development grant, which provides training and technical assistance to low-income rural communities.

- EPA, through the Community Action for Renewed Environment (CARE) program, has awarded \$14.5 million to 80 communities in 39 states and territories, and plans to award an additional \$1.6 million to 10 community-based organizations selected from the 2011 Request for Proposals that closed in March, 2011.
- DOI's WaterSMART program fund on-the-ground improvements that improve water management, increase energy efficiency in the delivery of water in Rural America. More than \$77 million has been provided through the program to non-federal partners, including tribes, water districts and universities since 2010.
- DOI created a Youth in the Great Outdoors office under the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, through which more than 21,000 youth were employed in 2010, an increase of 45% from 2009.

Supporting Our Veterans and Military Families

Providing veterans with the employment, training, medical care, and credentialing support they deserve in the rural communities where they live:

- Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has provided education benefits to over 215,000 veteran students in rural areas and 3,600 veteran students in highly rural areas.
- The President's Veterans Employment Initiative has hired over 100,000 veterans in the federal government in the past year and a half.
- Through the Office of Rural Health, VA has targeted \$250 million annually to improve access and quality of care to rural veterans. Service to over 416,000 veterans was improved by investing in more than 500 projects across the VA health care system. This included 404 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and 48 outreach clinics in rural areas that serve nearly 3.3 million veterans.
- On October 10, 2010, VA and Indian Health Services signed a new memorandum of understanding in order to increase access and better serve the nearly 350,000 Native American veterans living in the U.S. and its territories.
- The President challenged the private sector to hire or train 100,000 veterans by the end of 2013. Numerous companies and organizations have already committed to hire or train tens of thousands of veterans.
- VA's VetSuccess.gov website was redesigned in 2009 to be a comprehensive resource for all veterans, providing a 'one-stop shop' for employment and other needs.
- VA's home loan guaranty program has helped over 300,000 rural veterans and service members purchase a home or refinance an existing mortgage.
- SBA and Syracuse University supported Entrepreneurial Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) at 7 academic institutions that provide training on how to start and grow a small business to service-disabled veterans, women, National Guard and Reserve members and their families of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- Through a Home-based Primary Care (HBPC) initiative, VA targeted over \$30 million annually to provide comprehensive, interdisciplinary primary care in the homes of veterans with complex medical, social, and behavioral conditions.
- VA established the Enhanced Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (E-RANGE) program in July of 2009 to provide intensive mental health case management and outreach services to rural veterans.
- VA has enhanced health care delivery capability for rural veterans through the Office of Telehealth Services and Office of Rural Health by providing \$98 million of funding to rural communities for services such as rehabilitation, mental health care, surgical consultation, and in-home care.



Moving Forward

“Strong rural communities are keys to a stronger America. That’s why I’ve established the White House Rural Council to make sure we’re working across government to strengthen rural communities and promote economic growth.”

— President Barack Obama

Since taking office, President Obama has taken significant steps to improve the lives of rural Americans and has provided broad support for rural communities. While rural America faces challenges, it also presents enormous economic potential. As the source of most of our country’s food, water, and energy, rural areas are essential to the well-being and economic growth of our Nation. To address these challenges and build on the Administration’s rural economic strategy, the President signed an Executive Order establishing the White House Rural Council.

Chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture, the White House Rural Council will continue to coordinate programs across government to create jobs and promote economic development in rural communities. Moreover, the Council will build upon and implement the President’s rural policy priorities.

The Council will also be responsible for creating new policy recommendations and proposals. These policy recommendations will build upon the significant programs and investments the Administration has already made in rural communities, which are outlined in this report. And they will be developed in partnership with a variety of key rural stakeholders, including agricultural organizations, businesses, civic and community organizations, and state, local, and tribal governments.

Most importantly, the Administration and the Council will take immediate steps to create jobs and improve the economy in rural communities. **The President recognizes that the economic security of rural America is vital to the economic security of our country. For that reason, creating jobs and encouraging formation of new businesses in rural communities will always be on the forefront of the President’s agenda.**

In the long-run, the Administration’s policies will improve access to capital, train workers for high paying jobs, promote innovation in agriculture, support new renewable energy sector, improve access to broadband, expand quality healthcare, strengthen education, and increase opportunity through conservation and outdoor recreation. **These policies will help ensure good jobs and economic security for all rural American and the generations to come.**



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