

TITLE VI—RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Section-by-Section

Sec.601.Definition of Rural.

Requires the Secretary to assesses the varying definitions of rural used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), describe what effect the varying definitions have on the programs USDA administers, and make recommendations Congress to better target funds through rural development programs.

Sec. 602.Water or Waste Disposal Grants.

Reauthorizes section 306(a)(2)(A) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (Con Act), which allows the Secretary to make grants available to finance projects for the development, storage, treatment, purification, or distribution of water or the collection, treatment, or disposal of waste in rural areas; authorizes an appropriation of \$30 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.603.Rural Business Opportunity Grants.

Reauthorizes section 306(a)(11) of the Con Act, which allows the Secretary to make grants available for business development or labor training in rural areas; authorizes an appropriation of \$15 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.604.Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Program.

Reauthorizes section 306(a)(22) of the Con Act, which requires the Secretary to establish a national rural water and wastewater rider program to provide technical assistance to help bring small public water systems into compliance with state and national environmental regulations. The program is modeled on the rural water circuit rider program of the National Rural Water Association; increases funding for the program to \$25 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.605.Tribal College and University Essential Community Facilities.

Reauthorizes section 306(a)(25) of the Con Act, which allows the Secretary to provide cost-share grants to tribal colleges and universities (as defined in Section 316 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059(c)) for developing essential community facilities in rural areas; authorizes an appropriation of \$10 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.606.Emergency Imminent Community Water Assistance Grant Program.

Reauthorizes section 306A of the Con Act, which requires the Secretary to provide grants to assist residents in rural areas and small communities comply with the Water Pollution Control Act or the Safe Drinking Water Act; authorizes an appropriation of \$35 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.607. Water Systems for Rural and Native Villages in Alaska.

Reauthorizes section 306D of the Con Act, which authorizes the Secretary to make grants to Alaska for the benefit of rural and native villages in that state to provide for the development and construction of water and waste water systems to improve the health and sanitation conditions in those villages; authorizes the appropriation of \$30 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.608. Grants to Nonprofit Organizations to Finance the Construction, Refurbishing, and Servicing of Individually-Owned Household Water Well Systems in Rural Areas for Individuals with Low or Moderate Incomes.

Reauthorizes section 306E of the Con Act, which authorizes the Secretary to make grants to private nonprofit organizations for loans to eligible low-income individuals for the construction, refurbishing, and servicing of individual household water well systems in rural areas; authorizes an appropriation of \$10 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.609. Rural Cooperative Development Grants.

Amends section 310B(e) of the Con Act to allow the Secretary to award multi-year Rural Cooperative Development Grants, which are competitive grants to establish and operate centers for rural cooperative development:

- awards one-year grants to centers that have received no prior funding;
- requires the Secretary to evaluate programs receiving assistance under the program, and if the Secretary determines that it is in the best interest of the program, the Secretary is authorized to award one to three year grants.

Authorizes an appropriation of \$50 million for each of the fiscal years 1996 to 2012.

Sec.610. Grants to Promote Technical Infrastructure of Rural Healthcare Facilities.

Amends subtitle D of the Con Act by adding a new section that authorizes the Secretary to award grants to rural health facilities for the purpose of assisting the facilities in:

- 1) purchasing health information technology to improve quality health care and patient safety; or
- 2) improving health care quality and patient safety, including the development of—

- quality improvement support structures to assist rural health systems and professionals; and
- innovative approaches to financing and delivery of health services to achieve rural health quality goals.

Authorizes appropriations of \$30 million for each of fiscal years 2008-2012.

Sec.611. Rural Entrepreneur and Microenterprise Assistance Program.

Amends subtitle D of the Con Act by adding a new Section that authorizes the Secretary to establish rural entrepreneurship and microenterprise grant and loan programs.

- The goal of the grant program is to provide training, operations support, or a rural capacity-building service to a qualified organization to assist the organization in developing microenterprise training, technical assistance, market development

assistance, and other related services – the program is primarily for businesses with 10 or full-time-equivalent employees.

- The goal of the rural microloan and technical assistance program is to provide technical and financial assistance through qualified organizations to sole proprietorships and small businesses located in rural areas with a particular focus on business with 10 or fewer full-time-equivalent employees.

Authorizes an appropriation of not more than \$20 million for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.612.National Sheep Industry Improvement Center.

Amends section 375 of the Con Act by eliminating the requirement that the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center be required to privatize its revolving fund. Provides for a reauthorization of \$10 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.613.National Rural Development Partnership.

Reauthorizes section 378 of the Con Act, which establishes the National Rural Development Partnership, which is composed of the National Rural Development Coordinating Committee (NRDCC) – the NRDCC is established by the Con Act.

Included among the partnership’s purposes are the following:

- 1) the enhancement of state and local rural development capacities; and
- 2) the engagement of federal, state, local, tribal, and private and private and nonprofit sectors in such efforts.

Authorizes an appropriation of \$10 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.614.Historic Barn Preservation.

Reauthorizes section 379A of the Con Act, which allows the Secretary to make grants, or enter into contracts with state departments of agriculture or certain nonprofit organizations for historic barn preservation; authorizes an appropriation of “such sums as necessary” for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to carry out the grant program.

Sec.615.Grants for NOAA Weather Transmitters.

Reauthorizes section 379B of the Con Act, which allows the Secretary to make grants to public and nonprofit entities, and to borrowers of loans made by the Rural Utilities Service, for the federal share of the cost of acquiring radio transmitters to increase rural coverage by the all hazards weather radio broadcast system of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration(NOAA); authorizes an appropriation of “such sums as necessary” for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to carry out the grant program.

Sec.616.Delta Regional Authority.

Reauthorizes Section 382 of the Con Act, which provides federal and state funding for 240 distressed counties across eight states in the Mississippi Delta. Authorizes an appropriation of \$30 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012. Extends the Delta Regional Authority to October 1, 2012.

Sec.617.Northern Great Plains Regional Authority.

Amends section 383B of the Con Act, by continuing the formula for the federal share of authority’s administrative expenses – the formula is for fiscal year(FY) 2007 100 percent; for FY2008 75 percent; and for FY2009 50 percent; broadens the Authority’s support for resource conservation districts.

- Eliminates the order of priority with respect to funding for economic and community development projects[Section 383C(b)(2)];
- Eliminates the “isolated area of distress” designation, which are defined as areas located in “nondistressed counties” – (nondistressed counties are counties that are not the most severely and persistently distressed and underdeveloped and do not have high rates of poverty, unemployment, and outmigration) – that have high rates of poverty, unemployment or outmigration [Section 383F];
- Reduces from 75 to 50 percent the minimum amount of funds that the authority is to allocate to “distressed counties,” which are defined as counties that are the most severely and persistently distressed and underdeveloped and have high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration [Section 383F];
- Eliminates the prohibition of providing funds to “nondistressed counties” [Section 383F];
- Reduces from 50 to 25 percent, the minimum amount of funds that the authority is to allocate to transportation, telecommunication, and public infrastructure projects [Section 383F];
- Includes “renewable energy projects” among the those projects [Section 383F].

Authorizes an appropriation of \$30 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.618.Rural Strategic Investment Program

Amends section 385E of the Con Act to appropriate \$25 million for the Rural Strategic Investment Program, which establishes a National Board on Rural America that is to make planning grants and innovation grants to certified Regional Investment Boards.

Sec.619.Expansion of 911 Access.

Amends Section 315 of the REA to reauthorize (from 2008 to 2012) the Secretary to make telephone loans to state or local governments, Indian tribes, or other public entities for the expansion of rural 911 access and integrated emergency communication in rural areas.

Sec.620.Access to Broadband Telecommunications Services in Rural Areas.

Amends Section 601 of the Rural Electrification Act (REA) by:

- Changing the definition of an “eligible rural community” to include any area in the United States that is not:
 - 1) included within the boundaries of any city, town, borough, or village, whether incorporated or unincorporated, with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants; and
 - 2) the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such a city or town;

- [The current definition of an “eligible rural community” in section 601 is “any area of the United States that is not contained in an unincorporated city or town with a population in excess of 20,000 inhabitants.”]
- Adding a definition for the term “incumbent service provider”;
- Requiring the Secretary when making loans or loan guarantees under this section to give priority to eligible rural communities based on the number of incumbent service providers located in those communities;
- Prohibits the Secretary from making a loan to any community where there are more than 3 incumbent service providers;
Increasing the percentage of subscriber lines that an eligible entity is allowed to serve from 2 percent to 10 percent;
- Requiring that not more than 25 percent of loans be made available, in a single fiscal year, to entities that serve more than 2 percent of the telephone subscriber lines in the United States;
- Requiring the Secretary to ensure that the type, amount, and method of security used to secure a loan or loan guarantee is commensurate to the risk involved with the loan or loan guarantee;
- Requiring the Secretary to annually report to Congress on the rural broadband loan and loan guarantee program;
- Establishing a “National Center for Rural Telecommunications Assessment”:
 - The Center’s duties include: assessing the effectiveness of rural broad band loan and loan guarantee programs, increasing broadband penetration and purchase in rural areas; and developing assessments of broadband availability in rural areas.
 - The Center must report annually to the Secretary on its activities and the results of its research.
 - Authorizes an appropriation of \$1 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.
- Authorizes an appropriation of “such sums as necessary” for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to carry out the rural broadband loan and loan guarantee program:
 - Requires the Secretary to set aside 10 percent of the appropriated funds for eligible tribal communities;
 - Allows the Secretary to use amounts in the reserve that are not obligated by June 30 to make loans and loan guarantees to eligible entities as determined by the Secretary.
- Extends the authority to issue loans until 2012.

Sec.621.Community Connect Program.

Amends Title VI of the REA to add a new section which authorizes the Secretary to provide financial assistance to eligible applicants to provide broadband transmission service that fosters economic growth, and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety services.

- Authorizes the Secretary to prioritize grants that will enhance community access to telemedicine and distance learning.
- Requires grant applicants to provide a matching contribution of at least 15 percent of the grant amount requested.

Authorizes an appropriation of \$25 million for fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.622. Agriculture Innovation Center Demonstration Program.

Reauthorizes the Agriculture Innovation Center Demonstration Program, which directs the Secretary to provide grants to eligible entities for assistance to agricultural producers in order to establish and enhance businesses to produce value-added agricultural commodities or products. The program also provides technical assistance and planning to assist producers in establishing value-added businesses.

Sec.623.Rural Firefighters and Emergency Medical Service Assistance Program.

Amends section 6405 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act to make grants available to local governments, Indian tribes, and other entities to train rural firefighters and emergency medical personnel in firefighting, emergency medical practices, and hazardous material and bioagent response and to provide improved emergency medical services in rural areas.

- Requires eligible entities, in order to receive a grant, to provide matching funds.

Authorizes an appropriation of not more than \$30 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.624.Reservation of 10 Percent of Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grant Funding for Projects to Benefit Beginning Farmers and Ranchers or Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers.

Amends section 231(b) of the Agricultural Risk Protection Act (ARPA) to require the Secretary to set aside 10 percent of the funds for value-added agricultural market development grants for projects benefiting beginning farmers and ranchers or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

- Allows the Secretary to use amounts in the reserve that are not obligated to beginning farmers and ranchers or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers by June 30 to make grants to eligible entities as determined by the Secretary.

Changes mandatory funding of \$40 million to an authorization of appropriations of the same amount for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Sec.625.Telemedicine and Distance Learning Services in Rural Areas.

Amends section 2335A of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act to authorize the Secretary to award loans and grants to schools and medical facilities for acquiring advanced telecommunications technologies to support medical and educational functions in rural areas.