

WILLIAMS NEWS

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Tuesday, July 31, 2012

Guest column: Rural Coconino County boosted by money invested by USDA RD

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People in rural Arizona face unique challenges. Many still don't have access to modern broadband internet and in too many cases our rural communities rely on aging infrastructure to provide vital utilities.

Declaring that "all Americans deserve a fair shot," President Obama and Department of Agriculture Secretary Vilsack have made a strong commitment to helping rural America. They recognize that rural America is where our values as a nation and our "can-do" spirit as a people are rooted. That commitment has resulted in great strides in Arizona's rural communities, particularly in rural Coconino County.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has made record investments during the past three and half years of this Administration, strengthening the rural economy and communities and maximizing opportunity for folks who call rural America home.

For example, since 2009, USDA has invested in new and improved broadband service for nearly seven million rural Americans and more than 360,000 rural businesses. Many of those projects were in rural Arizona. There were 11 projects on Native American land in Arizona that received loans and grants for broadband development over the past three and one-half years.

This administration also contributed to the overall revitalization of rural American infrastructure, investing in more than 6,250 community facilities across the nation. In Arizona, our Community Facility Program invested \$96,194,029 in rural portions of 14 of Arizona's 15 counties - funding such projects as a refrigeration unit, sanitation vehicles, classrooms, health clinics, trucks, medical equipment, libraries, daycare centers, hospitals, a community center, police cars, fire stations, a composter, parking infrastructure, a community kitchen, a greenhouse, offices, a homeless shelter, a bookmobile and sidewalks - all of these in just one of our program areas.

In rural Coconino County, USDA Rural Development funded a \$46,695 grant to the Civitan Foundation in Williams to complete renovation on their building and to install equipment; made a \$823,818 loan to Flagstaff Ranch Mutual Waste Water Co. to expand their waste treatment facility; three grants to NAU to serve Native American students through tribal education programs; made a \$797,807 loan for a building addition for the Community Behavioral Health Services in Page; funded a \$305,833 distance learning center for [Coconino Community College](#); and made a \$161,258 loan to purchase energy efficient equipment for the Painted Desert Demonstration Projects. The cumulative impact of these loans and grants is huge for rural Coconino County.

These stories are playing out across the country - so while we all recognize America is in a time that requires fiscal belt-tightening, we also know that smart, targeted investments are needed to give rural businesses and communities a competitive advantage in the global market place.

Nationally USDA invested in more than 5,500 water and waste water treatment projects to help safeguard

the health of our rural residents. Water and waste projects in rural Arizona during this Administration have received nearly \$59 million in funding.

President Obama and Secretary Vilsack know how important rural America is to our strength as a nation. Through these important investments, USDA is committed to ensuring that hard-working folks in our small towns - those who are creating so much for our country - don't get left behind.

With close to \$2 billion of USDA Rural Development funding invested during this Administration in rural Arizona projects - in community facilities, business, water and waste, telecom, electric and housing programs - that commitment is paying off big time for Arizona's rural communities.

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