

THE RURAL REPORT | DEC 23 2025

Updates on Federal Action and Funding Opportunities
Supporting Development in Rural Communities

USDA Loses Almost 20% of Workforce in 2025

A recent report from USDA's Inspector General found that more than 20,000 employees have left USDA in the first half of this year, largely due to the Trump administration's deferred resignation program. The Forest Service lost 5,860 workers, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service lost 2,673 workers — the highest number of exits across all USDA agencies.

The Trump administration has sought to overhaul Biden-era climate-smart agriculture programs, federal nutrition programs, and wildfire policy, including by weighing a potential move of the Forest Service's headquarters. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins is expected to reveal details of a major reorganization in 2026 that will likely lead to further employee departures and could affect USDA services.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are calling for restaffing at USDA, particularly given the struggles farmers have faced this year. Several Republican Senators are pushing for Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices to be well-staffed.

Senate Confirms Almost 100 USDA Appointees

Last week, the Senate confirmed a slate of 97 Agriculture Department officials just before it adjourned for the holidays. Lawmakers in a 53-43 vote approved nearly 100 of President Donald Trump's nominees, including Mindy Brashears to lead USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and John Walk to be the department's Inspector General. Walk's confirmation comes as officials seek to ramp up scrutiny of so-called fraud in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The Senate also confirmed Michael Selig as chair and commissioner of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), which stands to take over as the primary regulator of cryptocurrency markets as Congress prepares to reauthorize the agency.

Funding Opportunities

[Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Programs](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides funding for rural projects through local utility organizations. USDA provides zero-interest loans to local utilities which they, in turn, pass through to local businesses (ultimate recipients) for projects that will create and retain employment in rural areas. ***Application deadline: 12/31/2025***

[Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development \(BUILD\) Grant Program](#)

U.S. Department of Transportation

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Office of Infrastructure Deployment provides grants for surface transportation infrastructure projects with significant local or regional impact. ***Application deadline: 2/24/2026***

[Electric Infrastructure Loan & Loan Guarantee Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides insured loans and loan guarantees to nonprofit and cooperative associations, public bodies, and other utilities. Insured loans primarily finance the construction of electric distribution facilities in rural areas. ***Application deadline: Open***

[Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides funding for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage and solid waste disposal, and storm water drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas. ***Application deadline: Open***

[On-Farm Labor Housing Loans](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides low-interest loans to eligible borrowers to develop or rehabilitate rental housing for very-low- to moderate-income farm laborers. ***Application deadline: Open until funds are depleted***

[USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development supports zero-interest loans and grants for current and former eligible Rural Utilities Service borrowers who then use the funds to help local businesses finance projects that create/retain jobs or support community facility projects. ***Application Deadline: Quarterly***

[Intermediary Relending Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides funds to local lenders or “intermediaries” that re-lend to businesses to improve economic conditions and create new opportunities in rural communities. ***Application deadline: Quarterly***

[Community Facilities Programs](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides funding to develop or improve essential public services and facilities. Projects include fire and rescue stations, town halls, health care clinics, hospitals, childcare centers, assisted living facilities, rehabilitation centers, public buildings, schools, libraries, and many other community-based initiatives. ***Application Deadline: Open***