

# Rural Broadband

## Bringing Wisconsin Farmers into the 21st Century

### Broadband Access is Critical for Farmers

A good internet connection is vital for a number of common farm activities:

- Filing taxes, participating in educational webinars, completing nutrient management plans
- Bidding in real time in online livestock auctions
- Maintaining a farm website and online sales for farms engaged in direct marketing/agritourism

### Yet Many Farmers and Rural Residents Lack Access to Broadband

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 23% of rural Wisconsin residents do not have access to a broadband internet connection.

### Wisconsinites Without Access to Fixed Broadband Meeting the Speed Benchmark

	Population (Millions)	Population without Access (Millions)	% of Population without Access
<b>All Areas</b>	5.710	0.396	6.9
<b>Non Rural Areas</b>	4.010	0.006	0.1
<b>Rural Areas</b>	1.700	0.390	23.0

Source: Federal Communications Commission Eighth Broadband Progress Report, August 2012

- The FCC also found that over 25% fewer rural residents than urban residents have access to a DSL connection, and nearly 50% fewer rural residents than their urban counterparts have access to a cable internet connection.

- ▶ This means that many people, particularly farmers, are still using dial-up to get on the internet.

Infrastructure improvements are also needed, as the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that Wisconsin ranks 22nd among states when it comes to average broadband internet speeds.

#### Where Wisconsin ranks in broadband

Wisconsin ranks 22nd among states in average broadband speeds, and it ranks 27th in average peak speeds. Vermont, Delaware, Washington, D.C., New Hampshire and Utah have some of the fastest average speeds.

		U.S. RANK
Average	7.3 Mbps	22nd
Average peak	31.1	27th
Broadband	More than 4 Mbps	26th
High broadband	More than 10 Mbps	17th

Source: Akamai Technologies Journal Sentinel

**Don't wait for the cows to come home ...**



**Be a part of the rural broadband solution today.**

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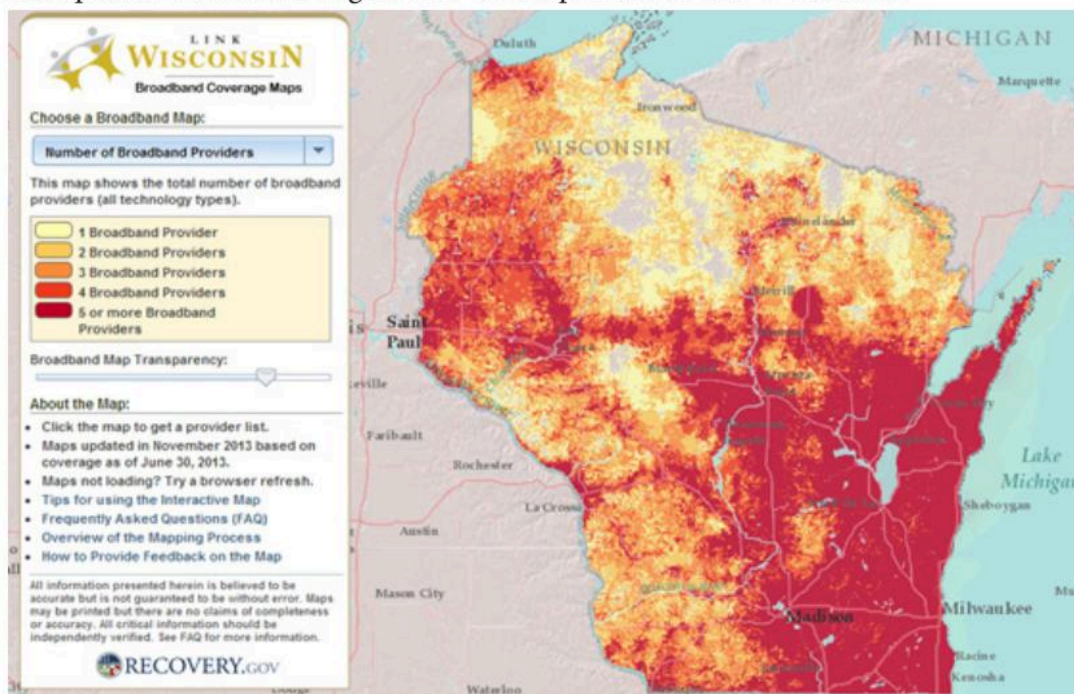
# Rural Broadband: What can the state do?

## Increase Broadband Expansion Grants

- The 2014-2015 budget included \$500,000 per year for community broadband grants. However, need significantly outstrips supply. In the first round of grant applications, there were \$5 million in requests from 25 different communities in Wisconsin.
  - ▶ Wisconsin Farmers Union advocates for an increase to state Broadband Expansion Grants in the 2015-2017 biennial budget.

## Eliminate the state law that hampers municipal broadband networks

- Municipal networks represent an important piece of the state broadband puzzle.
  - ▶ The city of Reedsburg municipal network, for example, recently rolled out gigabit service (about 100 times faster than the average DSL connection) to all businesses and homes within the city.
- In 2003, however, the state legislature effectively prohibited most other municipal governments from competing in the marketplace to offer broadband service (State Statute 66.0422.) The Wisconsin legislature should repeal the anticompetitive 2003 law and allow more municipalities like Reedsburg to offer this important service to residents.



## Implement a statewide “Dig Once” policy

- State law in Illinois requires that state-funded construction projects incorporate fiber-optic cable along the construction project right-of-way. Such “dig once” policies reduce the overall cost of broadband service by installing the line at the most cost-effective point in time – when the road is already torn up.
  - ▶ The Wisconsin state legislature, as well as local governments in Wisconsin, should consider implementing “Dig Once” policies to reduce the cost of broadband expansion.

*Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven farm organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors and civic engagement. Learn more at [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com).*