



COVID-19 Response: FARMERS and RURAL COMMUNITIES

- **What's being done to provide relief for farmers?**

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act includes a number of small business provisions designed to help farmers stay in business and take care of their employees during this difficult time. These include provisions that allow farmers to work with their trusted farm credit institutions for the purposes of securing payroll tax loans, along with one-year deferrals, 100 percent guarantees, and low rates.

The bill provides \$14 billion for the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), the funding mechanism for all major USDA programs. It also appropriates an additional \$9.5 billion to specifically respond to losses due to COVID-19.

Additional funding is provided for USDA agencies that are on the front lines of responding to COVID-19, including the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

- **What's being done to ensure farmers receive their H-2A workers?**

On March 26, 2020, the State Department issued a statement advising that H-2A applicants were to be viewed as mission critical, helping to ensure that the agriculture sector is able to keep our country supplied with food and critical items at this time. Consular officers now have the option to waive the visa interview requirement for first-time and returning H-2A applicants with no potential ineligibility.

- **What's being done to expand broadband and connectivity in rural communities?**

The CARES Act includes \$100 million to provide financing for rural broadband through the ReConnect program, and \$25 million for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine program to provide grants for equipment and connectivity improvements. It also includes \$200 million for a new telehealth program at the Federal Communications Commission.