

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Jeffery Hall. I am the Associate Director of Governmental Affairs for Arkansas Farm Bureau and a cow-calf producer.

Arkansas agriculture needs viable rural communities to supply the services needed to support their families and small businesses. This is no different than in the 1930's with need for electricity and telephone service in rural areas. This was accomplished by a successful public-private partnership.

The obstacle then was the problem of distribution. How could we get the much-needed electricity and telephone service to the homes in rural areas? The problem of access is the same for rural broadband.

To thrive, rural areas need access to health care, government services, and educational and business opportunities. For many rural communities, access can only be gained by using broadband services and sophisticated technologies that require high-speed connections. Rural business owners need access to new markets and employees for their businesses. Rural health care providers need access to health information technology. Rural students need access to educational resources and continuing education opportunities. Current and future generations of rural Americans will be left behind their fellow citizens if they are without affordable high-speed broadband opportunities.

The Small Business Administration conducted a study in 2010 that evaluated the methods used by small businesses to access broadband services and the impact of broadband on small businesses. The study found that broadband service is vital for small businesses in "achieving strategic goals, improving competitiveness and efficiency, reaching customers, and interacting with vendors." Farmers and ranchers in rural America rely on broadband access to manage and operate successful businesses, the same as small businesses do in urban America. Access to broadband is essential for farmers and ranchers to follow commodity markets, communicate with their customers, gain access to new markets around the world and, increasingly, for regulatory compliance.

Many farmers and ranchers conduct their business operations from their homes. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports a total of 62 percent of U.S. farms had Internet service in 2011, compared with 59 percent in 2009. This upward trend of Internet access must continue if farmers, ranchers and other small businesses in rural America are going to thrive and be successful in a global economy.

Precision agriculture technologies are used by about 50 percent of U.S. farmers and ranchers. GPS and auto-steer guidance systems are two types of precision agriculture used to increase crop yields, lower costs and reduce chemical use, which benefits the environment. These two types of technologies work together, helping farmers identify precisely where to plant seeds and how many and if needed, apply variable rates of pesticides and fertilizer. Auto-steer on tractors is not hands free, but it allows farmers to drive equipment in straight lines while reducing fatigue. It also ensures consistency when different people take a turn in the driver's seat.

Livestock sector also utilizes technology and has increasing need for better service.

Today's poultry farmer uses a monitoring system to provide added protection for the birds. The first is the main controller unit, which controls and monitors all operations of the two houses. It monitors the power and records temperature, humidity, water usage and exhaust fan run time, as well as other conditions. The second system is the SCADA 3000 system, which monitors the performance of

the main controller as well as specific environmental conditions like temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide levels and ammonia on the floor. This Sensaphone system monitors 48 parameters daily, collecting data on each parameter every minute and logging that data on a computer. The data is accessible through remote locations for snapshots of live conditions and trends.

Cattle are being sold through video actions with the ability to place bids from your smart phone or computer. The online market place has had a great impact on the cattle industry. Farmers are able to research information about herd management and cattle markets. It is fair to say that farmers now buy and sell cattle all over the nation? With online access, the perfect herd sire might be found hundreds of miles away. The Internet also allows cattlemen to find the right point of sale for their animals going to market. With the local auctions disappearing this has never been more important.

Another element that farmers and ranchers and all residents of rural America must consider is that the world communicates differently with the rise of the Internet. If elected officials are going to correspond with constituents via e-mail and the Web, then rural America must have access to the Internet. The immediacy of communication in today's world will leave farmers and ranchers behind if they can't have the same tools of advocacy that their more urban counterparts enjoy.

The importance of agriculture and its needs are critical to everyone. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that farmers will have to produce 70 percent more food by 2050 to meet the needs of the world's expected population of 9 billion people. To meet that goal farmers and ranchers must have access to the technology, information and markets. Providing access to high quality and affordable Internet is a part of that equation.

Farm Bureau supports using the Universal Service Fund (USF) to expand broadband deployment to rural areas. The first phase of USF reform was the creation of the Connect America Fund (CAF) to replace the current high-cost program that subsidizes telephone service. The CAF will begin to subsidize the deployment of broadband this year.

Internet providers are racing to work through the problems of service deficits. In order to get high quality and affordable service to the last mile, there must be cooperation between public and private interests. It is important that we continue to work together to resolve the issues that hinder better Internet service for rural Arkansas.