**OPINION EDITORIAL**

**by /s/ Julie Gross**

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*Julie Gross is the State Director for the USDA Rural Development in South Dakota. USDA Rural Development’s mission is “To increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all Americans.” There are eight Rural Development office locations throughout the state of South Dakota. Visit our website at:* [*www.rd.usda.gov/sd*](http://www.rd.usda.gov/sd)*.*

# USDA Rural Development: A Major Part of Rural America

**HURON, South Dakota, September 13, 2018** – Rural Development is likely not the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Most folks think of the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Food and Nutrition Service, or the Risk Management Agency. However, there is a good chance that USDA Rural Development touches your life every day.

We have long been known for our role in economic development, and that is one of the key elements identified by the President’s Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. Other areas highlighted by the task force report are innovation and technology, workforce development, quality of life, and e-connectivity. In other words, USDA Rural Development has and will continue to impact rural lives for the better.

In 2017, USDA Rural Development invested more than $466.4 million to promote economic development, improve community services and infrastructure, and increase rural homeownership in rural South Dakota communities.

Thanks to those investments:

* More than 1,400 families now have a place to call home;
* More than 45,100 rural subscribers enjoy access to new or improved telecommunications and broadband service;
* More than 72,000 rural residents are enjoying improved essential community facilities and equipment from squad cars to fire stations, from clinics to hospitals and more; and
* Nearly 17,700 rural residents received safe water or improved water systems through our Water and Environmental Programs.

From economic opportunity to public health and the environment, modern infrastructure, including water infrastructure, is a foundation for enhanced quality of life and prosperity in rural America.

Beyond the loan and grant dollars we invest is the assistance we offer through our field delivery system.

You don’t have to travel to the big city to find a Rural Development Office. Rural Development employees live and work in rural communities like yours and near yours. Our kids go to the same school, our families are protected by the same fire, ambulance and law enforcement workers, and we look for the same economic opportunities as you do. We know and understand the needs of rural communities and people because it is who we are and where we are.

We also are engaged in the fight against the misuse of opioids and other drugs. Too many communities are being consumed by the loss of people, resources, and productivity. Drug addiction is a multigenerational problem that can impact three generations or more.

Today, the leading cause of death in people younger than 50 is not automobile accidents or cancer – it’s drug overdoses. Rural areas have now surpassed the drug overdose death rates of the urban areas.

USDA Rural Development programs can directly assist by helping communities, health care providers, and emergency responders with facilities and equipment to provide essential services, or indirectly by providing contact to others with resources to help.

Lastly, after relaying this information about what we’re doing, I’d like to address what may be the best part: How we’re doing it. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue has set a goal for USDA to be the most efficient, most effective, and most customer focused USDA ever.

USDA Rural Development has those goals covered.

* **Efficient:** In 2017, for every dollar South Dakota USDA Rural Development received, we were able to invest 99 cents directly into our projects. Less than one cent of that dollar went to administrative costs.
* **Effective:** According to USDA’s Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Summary, USDA Rural Development turned actual appropriation dollars of $2.8 billion into nearly $34 billion in investments for rural America, more than a tenfold increase.
* **Customer Focused:** USDA Rural Development is the only agency within USDA that has a field-based delivery system in place that can reach all 449,130 rural residents of South Dakota, and nationally, all 41 million rural Americans

USDA Rural Development can work with almost any element a community or individual may need. We have a wide array of programs and are actively seeking innovations to help us do even more. As I like to say, when Rural Development shows up, someone’s life is going to improve.

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