

# RURAL REVITALIZATION AGENDA



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## *New Dem Rural Revitalization Working Group*

### I. Introduction

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New Dems know that supporting our rural communities helps lower costs for all American families, strengthens our supply chains, and opens new markets for innovation and clean energy. Rural communities are at the heart of our economy, our food systems, and our national identity. They've been overlooked by outdated policies, harmful trade decisions, and inconsistent federal support. Yet, despite these challenges, rural communities continue to lead with resilience and resolve.

It's time for federal policy to reflect that same spirit. The New Democrat Coalition is committed to a new rural agenda — one that builds lasting economic growth and opportunity, expands access to housing and infrastructure, and ensures rural communities are full and equal partners in America's future prosperity. Central to this agenda is the recognition that rural communities are vital stewards of our natural resources. Producers who adopt sustainable practices preserve soil, protect water, and keep their land productive for generations. Next-generation specialty crops and renewable fuels complement these efforts by creating new markets, advancing economic opportunity, and helping rural communities thrive in a changing economy.

Going forward, we must remove barriers hindering rural America. Embracing fair trade supports American workers and producers, while modern solutions like affordable broadband, housing, healthcare, and workforce development connect local talent to 21st-century jobs. As we shape the future, rural America must be at the center, ensuring that these communities thrive for generations to come.

### II. New Dem Principles

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1. **Empower rural communities for long term prosperity**
  - a. Align federal policies to keep land affordable and in production.
  - b. Promote affordable housing and economic opportunities that will keep families together in rural communities.
  - c. Expand workforce development and training in rural communities to prepare workers for an evolving job market.
  - d. Honor our relationships with Tribal Nations by positioning the federal government to be a partner in development.

- e. Strengthen technical assistance capacity for small and rural communities to navigate federal programs and fully access available resources.
2. **Support the care economy and fight for rural healthcare**
    - a. Combat rural hunger through federal nutrition programs.
    - b. Address rural childcare needs and ensure it remains affordable, accessible, and high-quality.
    - c. Stabilize rural hospitals and undo disastrous cuts to federal healthcare programs like Medicaid.
    - d. Invest in the rural workforce to connect local talent to high-paying, impactful jobs.
  3. **Invest in the farm economy so the whole nation can thrive**
    - a. Pass bipartisan legislation that authorizes and invests in the Farm Bill programs left behind in the Republican reconciliation process and reinvests in national anti-hunger programs.
    - b. Support new economic opportunities in rural areas such as agritourism, new and specialty crops, and by streamlining regulations to help small and mid-sized producers thrive.
    - c. Create a strong federal support system for farmers from the time they start farming to when disaster strikes, ensuring a durable agriculture economy for all communities.
  4. **Close the digital gap by supporting programs that connect all of America to the internet**
    - a. Strive to ensure every American has affordable and reliable high-speed internet.
    - b. Connect areas that do not have broadband internet, or need upgrades to boost internet speed.
    - c. Reform programs to maximize efficiency and lower barriers to internet access.

### III. Policy Priorities

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#### I: Empower rural communities for long term prosperity

*New Dems aim to empower rural communities by expanding access to affordable land, supporting small and beginning farmers, and addressing rising costs like healthcare, food, childcare, and housing. This involves reforming US Department of Agriculture (USDA) lending, curbing land speculation, establishing a federal land-link program for new producers, strengthening consultation with Tribal Nations, and increasing federal rural development funding. We also support updating the federal workforce system and strengthening training pathways to ensure rural communities thrive in the modern economy.*

- a. **Expand access to affordable land** by revising USDA lending and subsidy programs with higher credit limits, more flexibility on guarantees, and faster approval times to favor small and mid-size producers over large corporate owners.
- b. **Curtail or penalize land speculation by big investors and foreign nations** to lower the cost of land for American purchasers.
- c. **Keep land in production and support beginning and disadvantaged farmers** by piloting a federal land-link program to connect retiring or transitioning farmers with beginning farmers or neighboring farmers seeking land.
- d. **Support business development in rural areas** by providing resources for rural development programs at the USDA.

- e. **Promote fair trade opportunities** for agriculture and industry to help build and bolster new markets for rural economies and invest in American workers.
- f. **Keep rural communities together and make sure families don't have to leave home to find a home** by increasing funding for rural housing through programs like the Section 504 Home Repair Program, establishing new federal resources to promote affordable housing like shared equity homeownership models, and assisting low- and moderate- income households in rural areas through [H.R. 5728, the Rural Homeownership Continuity Act](#).
- g. **Modernize the rural workforce and invest in rural jobs** by reauthorizing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to expand workforce training, apprenticeships, and adult education in rural and Tribal communities. This involves partnering with employers and educators to build local talent pipelines, create quality jobs in emerging and traditional industries, and expand place-based supports and sector-based partnerships to connect rural workers to growing industries and good-paying jobs close to home.
- h. **Honor our relationships with Tribal Nations** by formalizing additional consultation mechanisms in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, improve data reporting on federal funding to Tribes, and developing interagency collaboration mechanisms to lower administrative burdens on Tribes.
- i. **Expand technical assistance** so rural communities and Tribal Nations can better access federal investments and rebuild critical rural infrastructure.

## II: Support the care economy and fight for rural healthcare

*Federal investments should be combating rural hunger through federal nutrition programs, addressing childcare needs via USDA-prioritized projects, modernizing the rural workforce with expanded training and job creation, and stabilizing rural hospitals and maternity care by reversing cuts and supporting healthcare infrastructure and staff. We must also strengthen the rural health workforce and maintain virtual care through expanded placements, EMS investment, and extended telehealth flexibilities.*

- a. **Fight rural hunger** by supporting federal nutrition programs, including by undoing harmful cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
- b. **Address rural childcare needs** by directing the USDA to authorize and prioritize projects that address the availability, quality, and cost of childcare in agricultural and rural communities.
- c. **Stabilize rural hospitals and maternity care** by undoing disastrous cuts to Medicaid, pausing scheduled Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital cuts, sustaining rural Medicare add-on payments (including the Low-Volume Hospital adjustment and the Medicare-Dependent Hospital program), targeting support to Rural Emergency Hospitals and obstetrics units to prevent service losses and closures, and supporting the nursing workforce in line with [H.R. 3333, the MORE Nurses Act](#).
- d. **Strengthen the rural health workforce and maintain virtual care options** by expanding National Health Service Corps and Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education placements in shortage areas, investing in rural Emergency Medical Services recruitment and training, and extending key Medicare telehealth flexibilities for quality primary care and behavioral health.

### III: Invest in the farm economy so the whole nation can thrive

*Congress needs to strengthen the farm economy, provide stability to our farmers, and fight hunger. We can do this by providing new opportunities in farm country like agritourism and cutting red tape, expanding job creation through initiatives like the RECOMPETE program, and investing in buying local foods.*

- a. **Pass bipartisan legislation that authorizes and invests in the Farm Bill programs** left behind in the Republican reconciliation process and reinvests in national anti-hunger programs.
- b. **Address rural food insecurity** by investing in the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program.
- c. **Support agritourism, outdoor recreation, and local businesses** by bolstering the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in line with [H.R. 3470, the AGRITOURISM Act](#).
- d. **Cut red tape for ranchers** by exempting routine activities like fence repair or water improvement from bureaucratic restrictions.
- e. **Meet the needs of rural communities** by providing flexible funding to create jobs and economic opportunities through the RECOMPETE Program.
- f. **Improve forestry management** by allowing Tribes and counties to retain forestry revenues and use those funds to conduct restoration projects on private forestry lands.
- g. **Encourage responsible agriculture practices** by investing in USDA's conservation programs that promote the use of cover crops to improve soil health, reduce erosion, enhance water quality, and increase long-term farm resiliency.
- h. **Expand biofuel and clean fuel markets** to increase farm income, reduce carbon emissions, strengthen domestic energy security, and grow new rural manufacturing capacity.

### IV: Close the digital gap by supporting programs that connect all of America to the internet

*We can ensure every American has access to high-speed internet and the opportunities it provides. By streamlining and consolidating programs, providing money for rural households to get connected to the internet, and reducing the burden on local governments to access funds, Congress can close the digital gap.*

- a. **Bridge the digital divide and promote opportunity** by providing monthly subsidies for broadband service and one-time discounts for internet-enabled devices, similar to how the Affordable Connectivity Program operated.
- b. **Consolidate federal broadband programs and standardize definitions**, eligibility criteria, and maps to reduce inefficiencies and give providers clarity on where their services are needed and to give potential program beneficiaries transparency on what resources they can get.
- c. **Provide a common application for federal broadband programs** and enable better data sharing between agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of the Treasury, Department of Commerce, and Federal Communications Commission, to simplify the application process for providers in rural communities and to minimize duplicative subsidized networks.
- d. **Enhance stability in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program** by issuing guidance on how funds can be used for non-deployment purposes such as cybersecurity, outreach, and subscription subsidies. Current confusion around eligibility undermines the program and heightens the risk of funds being misused.

- e. **Reauthorize broadband programs** such as the Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program in line with [H.R. 5037, the Middle Mile for Rural America Act](#), which would expand broadband access into rural areas.

## IV. Next Steps

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The New Democrat Coalition looks forward to engaging in discussions with our colleagues in the Democratic Caucus and across the aisle to develop a bipartisan Farm Bill, bolster programs targeting rural areas, and address disparities to unlock the full potential of rural regions as vital contributors to the nation's prosperity.