

STRONGER RURAL COMMUNITIES

“Strong rural communities are key to a stronger America ...we’re working across government to strengthen rural communities and promote economic growth.” -- President Barack Obama

Under President Obama, American farmers are seeing record farm income, record agricultural exports and millions of acres enrolled in conservation programs. Agriculture has been one of the fastest-growing parts of our economy, creating one out of every 12 American jobs. President Obama believes strong and prosperous small towns and rural communities mean a strong and prosperous America

President Obama is making the rural economy built to last – one focused on reclaiming the security of the rural middle class by growing products that the rest of the world buys, and restoring the basic values of hard work and fair play that made our country great. His ten-point approach to strengthening rural communities is strengthening the middle class by helping rural small businesses access the capital they need to sell their products in markets around the world and boosting small town and rural economies through vital investments in clean energy, conservation and outdoor recreation. He is expanding water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure and investing in agricultural innovation to promote rural economic development, protect public health, and create a global economy for American agriculture. And he’s investing in the rural way of life, helping rural Americans stay in their homes during hard times while improving access quality education and health care, especially for rural veterans.

Since he came to office, President Obama has taken important steps to reduce federal spending and the deficit while protecting vital programs that serve our small towns and rural communities. Under his leadership, government programs are becoming more efficient – trimming waste and improving programs to better serve rural communities.

Rural America: The Backbone of America

President Obama knows that rural America and American agriculture is the backbone of our country, providing food and energy security and contributing to a strong economy for all Americans. Because of small town and rural farmers, worker, and manufacturers, our country benefits from:

- **Secure, Affordable Food:** Eighty-five percent of the food we eat is produced by American agriculture, providing domestic food security for millions of Americans. American agriculture also makes our country an ambassador of food aid to countries across the world, which promotes our national security interests.
- **Greater Energy Independence:** Last year, rural America helped the U.S. achieve the lowest reliance on foreign oil in 16 years by producing about 14 billion gallons of renewable fuels like ethanol and biodiesel– roughly 8 percent of total U.S. vehicle fuel.
- **Military Service:** Rural Americans are an integral part of our military: they make up 38 percent of military recruits even though they are only 16 percent of our total population.

Investing in a Rural Economy Built to Last

By investing in job creation, clean energy, agriculture and education, the President Obama is building a rural economy built to last – and where future generations can enjoy the way of life in rural America.

1. **Boosting Small Business for an Economy Built to Last:** The Obama administration has extended credit to a record number of small business owners, boosting economic growth in rural America. President Obama has helped 50,000 rural small businesses access new credit and financing that has spurred entrepreneurship and supported 266,000 jobs. In 2011, the President helped 32,000 small and medium sized businesses in rural America receive critical loans that helped them promote, build and sustain their family farms, and provided training over 1.5 million entrepreneurs and small business owners, many in rural communities, to get the tools they need to grow our economy. The President has cut taxes for small businesses 18 times, and has proposed a change to our tax code called the Buffett Rule, a simple principle that would make the tax code fairer with no household making more than \$1 million paying a smaller share of their income in taxes than middle-class families.

2. **Building a Clean Energy Economy and Promoting Energy Independence:** President Obama is working aggressively with our nation's rural communities, farmers, and ranchers to increase our energy independence and boost the transition to a clean energy economy that is helping lower energy costs for rural Americans and supporting jobs in rural America. Under President Obama, U.S. biofuel production is at its highest level in history. In addition to making historic investments to support the development and deployment of renewable fuels, the President increased the level of ethanol that can be blended into gasoline and implemented a new Renewable Fuel Standard which helped boost the production of biodiesel to nearly 1 billion gallons in 2011, supporting 39,000 jobs. President Obama is also making historic clean energy investments, supporting more than 5,700 renewable energy and energy efficiency improvement projects in rural America and partnering with more than 13,000 farmers, ranchers and rural businesses to help save energy and improve their bottom line.

3. **Investing in a 21st Century Infrastructure:** President Obama understands the economic competitiveness of rural America depends on its transportation and water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. That's why he expanded broadband access to nearly 7 million rural Americans, including 364,000 rural businesses, supporting over 25,000 jobs and helping rural businesses become more competitive. His Administration is also dedicating resources to accelerate 3G and 4G network deployment in rural areas throughout the US, closing gaps in mobile technology coverage. He is investing in building 21st century infrastructure in rural communities, including bridges, critical roads and rail in rural areas and 5,100 water and waste water community infrastructure projects to safeguard the health of 18 million rural residents and support 135,000 jobs.

4. **Opening New Markets for Farm Exports:** President Obama has expanded markets for American goods that help support over a million agriculture jobs here at home. In 2011, American farm income reached the highest point since 1974, with a record number of agricultural exports and a record agriculture trade surplus that means more of our products are being sold in markets around the world. The President signed three historic trade agreements with Panama, Columbia, and South Korea which will create tens of thousands of jobs by further increasing exports. He is also expanding regional food markets and increased the number of farmers markets by 53 percent since 2008.

5. **Strengthening American Agriculture:** The President understands the need for a strong farm safety net. He increased the availability of crop insurance and emergency disaster assistance to help 575,000 farmers and ranchers keep their farms in business after natural disasters and crop loss. He expanded farm credit to help more than 100,000 farmers struggling during the financial crisis to keep their family farms and provide for their families. The President is planning for a strong agricultural future, proposing a 23 percent increase in funding for research and development to improve agricultural productivity.

6. **Honoring the Service of our Veterans in Rural America:** President Obama is committed to ensuring that rural veterans receive the support they deserve. The President implemented and improved the most comprehensive educational benefit for veterans since 1944, providing education benefits to over 215,000 students in rural areas. He has invested in more than 500 projects across the country to support rural health care, helping provide primary health care access to nearly 3.3 million veterans. The President is also making homeownership a more accessible goal for military families, helping over 300,000 rural veterans and service members purchase or refinance a home.

7. **Investing in Our Future with Rural Education:** With nearly a quarter of American students located in rural areas, President Obama is committed to enabling greater numbers of rural Americans to achieve higher levels of education and compete for higher paying jobs by supporting the specific needs of rural schools. His administration has made critical investments to support small and low-income rural schools, providing them with skills and resources they need to learn and succeed. The President is working with states and local communities to turn around the lowest performing schools, targeting specific funding to rural schools. The President has also proposed a historic investment in our nation's community colleges to train two million workers with skills that lead to good jobs in industries that need workers—including advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and information technology. The President also understands the need for adequate infrastructure for education. He invested in over 6,200 critical

community facilities projects – reaching nearly 29 million rural residents – including 736 education facilities and 433 libraries.

8. **Securing the Middle Class by Helping American Homeowners:** President Obama knows that our economic recovery depends on our housing recovery, especially in our small towns and rural communities that were especially hard hit during the housing crisis. That's why he's launched programs to help millions of Americans to stay in their homes – including many in rural America. His administration has helped more than 1.25 million rural Americans in tens of thousands of communities purchase, refinance, and stay in their homes. His administration also launched a pilot program to help tens of thousands of rural homeowners in 19 states refinance their home loans and lower their mortgage interest rates.
9. **Providing Affordable Health Care to Rural Communities:** President Obama's policies expand access to affordable health coverage for rural families and ensure that rural health care providers remain a strong and viable part of rural America's economy. His administration has funded 444 community health centers to increase rural health care access, serving more than 2 million patients. The Obama administration is also supporting community-based projects to promote health, reaching 240 rural communities and serving 395,000 rural residents annually. His new health care law is paying more for qualifying surgeons and primary care doctors serving Medicare patients in rural areas– helping seniors access care. The law extended the life of the Medicare Trust Fund by eight years while working to close the prescription drug "doughnut hole," saving nearly 3.6 million patients an average of \$604 on their prescriptions in 2011. People with Medicare are now also guaranteed free recommended preventive care, with approximately 32.5 million seniors receiving free preventive service in Medicare last year. President Obama is also addressing disparities caused by a shortage of primary care doctors in rural areas, placing over 2,600 clinicians in rural communities and investing in 581 health care facilities across the country.
10. **Conserving Public Lands while Boosting Recreation and Tourism:** President Obama understands that the outdoors represent an invaluable national treasure, a critical resource for the tourism industry, and that our farmers and ranchers are leaders in protecting them. That's why his administration is working with more than 500,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices on more than 30 million acres of land. The President signed one of the largest expansions of wilderness protections in 25 years and is taking action to promote outdoor recreation, which contributes more than a trillion dollars to the economy and supports more than 9 million jobs.