

PART III  
*Chapter 9*

**United States rural policy:  
Increasing opportunities  
and improving the quality of life  
of rural communities**

by  
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*United States rural policy seeks to mobilise the assets of rural areas for national prosperity and offer opportunities for greater quality of life across all rural communities. This chapter considers the diversity of rural places and how rural policy and other place-based approaches and bodies, such as the White House Rural Council, can contribute to their vitality. It further describes how several programmes and plans are being implemented to fulfil these goals, including: Promise Zones; StrikeForce Initiative; Partnership for Sustainable Communities; Local Food, Local Places; Community Economic Development approaches; Strategic Economic and Community Development; Investing Manufacturing Communities Partnerships, and rural elements of the Climate Action Plan.*

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## Introduction

“Strong rural communities are key to a stronger America.” – *President Barack Obama*

Rural America features a remarkable set of assets that contribute to the nation’s economy and overall well-being. Not only is rural America home to the natural resources that feed and fuel the rest of the country and much of the world, it also hosts significant manufacturing, service sector, and recreational opportunities. In order to tap into the potential of rural economies and strengthen opportunities for the Americans who live there, the Obama Administration has set in place a modern approach to rural policy that ensures the federal government is working across agencies to support locally-led strategies that are asset-based and measured to track success toward both short- and long-term outcomes. This approach is aligned with the New Rural Paradigm that the OECD set out in 2006 and that was highlighted and affirmed in the Chair’s Statement for the 10th OECD Rural Development Conference in Memphis, Tennessee in 2015, discussed below.

While “rural” describes a very diverse geography and can be characterised in many ways, one definition cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service identifies rural areas as counties that feature communities with fewer than 50 000 people. By this definition, nearly two-thirds of the United States’ 3 143 counties are rural, and rural communities comprise 14% of the population (46.2 million people) and about 72% of the country’s total land area. These statistics only begin to describe the importance of rural places to the national economy.

From the hills of eastern Kentucky to the wide desert expanses of the southwest, the particular assets of rural regions varies greatly. At the same time, challenges such as low population density, physical remoteness, population decline and ageing, and limited diversity in economic structures expose rural communities to different types of economic barriers. The Obama Administration recognises that for communities to be more resilient, a federal-level approach to rural development policy that is specifically tailored to the attributes, resources, and priorities of each place is required. For these reasons, rural policy that reflects the diversity and realities of rural regions is an important part of any national strategy promoting inclusive growth. For example:

- Struggling rural economies are lost opportunities for national economic growth. Improving rural economic performance advances overall economic performance of cities and national economies as a whole.
- Job losses in rural communities tend to be structural and can be difficult to recoup. In general, rural economies can achieve solid economic performance over the medium and long run, but some rural communities are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns, especially in historically under-resourced, extraction-based, and high-poverty regions.
- Investments in young people, through programmes such as early childhood education, are especially important to the future of rural places, because most people who live in

rural places as adults were born and raised in rural places. Investing in children in rural areas today not only ensures that individuals in poverty have a ladder up, it also makes it possible for their personal success to contribute to the future success of their rural communities, as well as the national economy. These early-life stage public investments also serve to ameliorate the longer-term challenges of an ageing population base and demographic decline in many rural areas.

To ensure that individuals, families, and communities in rural America have an opportunity to reach their economic potential, the Obama Administration has championed a modern approach to federal engagement in rural communities.

#### Box 9.1. **USDA Rural Development**

In order to anchor federal support in rural places, the United States features a community economic development finance agency within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) called Rural Development. During the course of the Obama Administration, USDA Rural Development has invested more than USD 224 billion in more than 1.2 million projects in rural communities across the country. Rural Development has worked closely with partners to drive investment in rural small businesses and entrepreneurs; help rural families achieve the dream of homeownership; grow the bio-based economy; make critical upgrades to electric, water, and telecommunications infrastructure; and support renewable energy and energy efficiency. An increasing number of rural communities are looking for development approaches beyond the conventional dispersed land use patterns that make it difficult for them to meet their fiscal, social, public health, and environmental goals. They are using a range of strategies to pursue economic opportunities while maintaining the rural character that residents value.

USDA Rural Development investments nurture the growth that fuels the national economy. The Department's investments in rural communities run deep. Since 2009, USDA has made 1.1 million direct loans, guaranteed loans, and grants to support housing; 12 000 loans and grants to support community facilities; 10 600 loans and grants to support rural water and wastewater services; 2 500 projects to support broadband and rural electric services; and nearly 24 000 projects to support rural businesses and entrepreneurship. As a result, USDA's partnership with America's rural communities has supported the emergence of a more vibrant, diverse rural economy led by makers, creators and innovators. These significant and transformative investments in housing, community facilities, businesses, and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns, and rural communities.

### **US place-based strategies**

The United States has created policy and programme innovations consistent with principles long reflected in the OECD's New Rural Paradigm, the OECD approach to rural development policy, including: i) promoting competitiveness in rural areas as the central goal of rural development policy; and ii) taking a more holistic, place-based approach to rural development, encouraging more flexible policy design and delivery, and supporting interaction across all levels of government and with the private and NGO sectors. In particular, the Obama Administration has deployed policy, programmatic and human resource levers to advance this approach, as discussed below.

### ***White House place-based memorandum***

On 11 August 2009, the White House released a memorandum addressed to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on the subject of “Developing Effective Place-based Policies for the FY 2011 Budget”. The document served as a visioning document for the federal government acting in service to community priorities, and it presaged the many place-based innovations developed by the Obama Administration. The memorandum includes the following language:

“Place-based policies leverage investments by focusing resources in targeted places and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action. Effective place-based policies can influence how rural and metropolitan areas develop, how well they function as places to live, work, operate a business, preserve heritage, and more. Such policies can also streamline otherwise redundant and disconnected programs”. (The White House, 2009)

This White House commitment, coming from the highest levels and so early in the new Administration, has framed the place-based principles in federal programme design, funding, and execution ever since. Over the last seven years, the Administration has worked to transform the federal government into a more effective partner for local communities. Based largely on the direction provided by the foundational memorandum, federal leaders are working hand in hand with local stakeholders to craft solutions that harness resources across multiple agencies in response to local needs and priorities.

### ***Establishment of the White House Rural Council***

On 9 June 2011, President Obama signed an Executive Order establishing the White House Rural Council. This Council, comprised of the President’s Cabinet, along with other senior federal officials, was given a specific policy charge to:

“[...]work across executive departments, agencies, and offices to coordinate development of policy recommendations to promote economic prosperity and quality of life in rural America; [...] to address the needs of rural America, this order establishes a council to better coordinate federal programs and maximize the impact of federal investment to promote economic prosperity and quality of life in our rural communities.” (Obama, 2011)

Since its establishment, the White House Rural Council has provided an avenue for cross-departmental discussion, policy, programme and funding co-ordination, as well as White House-level attention to the rural differential in all major US policy considerations. Recognising that persistent rural challenges such as poverty and de-population require a holistic approach beyond individual programmes and funding streams, the Rural Council seeks to engage disparate agencies to develop coherent and well co-ordinated solutions. The Rural Council is chaired by the Agriculture Secretary, ensuring a direct institutional and senior leadership alignment for US rural development policy and programme design.

### ***Chair’s statement from the 10th OECD Rural Development Conference***

In May 2015, as the Chair of the White House Rural Council and Secretary of Agriculture, I chaired the 10th OECD Rural Development Conference in Memphis, Tennessee. The conference made clear the imperative that nations recognise the potential for growth in

rural areas, while also considering some of the localised features, such as low population density, remoteness, limited economic diversity that exposes rural places to downturns, and an ageing population.

To capture these opportunities and meet these challenges, the Chair's statement from the conference highlighted a number of strategies to guide new rural policy, including:

- Leverage private investment, mobilise skills, and capitalise on local assets.
- Provide rural communities with national policy that supports the assets, opportunities and needs of distinct regions.
- Connect rural and urban regions to optimise the regional assets and facilitate public services.
- Support Native communities with specific strategies appropriate to their culture and geography.

### Initiatives in rural regions

Since 2009, more than 15 federal agencies have launched dozens of initiatives and partnerships with over 1 800 rural, tribal, and urban communities. From Fresno to Detroit, Southeast Kentucky to Baltimore, federal leaders are working across agency lines and offering hands-on support to build local capacity, provide expertise, and unlock resources to help community leaders achieve their goals. The Obama Administration's work to incorporate regional, place-based approaches for integrative community and economic development includes a variety of measures, discussed below.

#### **Promise Zones**

In Promise Zones, federal experts help local leaders more efficiently navigate federal resources, focusing on those that best advance a local plan for community vitality. The Promise Zone designation enables the federal government to work more collaboratively across all federal agencies and in partnership with local leaders on efforts to create jobs, improve educational opportunities, increase economic activity, and improve public safety, among other local priorities.

This initiative is bringing much-needed targeted investments and creating ladders of economic opportunity in impoverished rural and tribal areas that have the greatest needs. Thus far, over a dozen federal agencies have come together to help teams of local leaders across the country accelerate community revitalisation efforts in 13 designated Promise Zones. Investments in the first four rural and tribal Promise Zones – Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Kentucky Highlands, South Carolina Low Country, and Pine Ridge Reservation of the Oglala Sioux Tribe – are yielding substantial results.

For example, in Southeastern Kentucky, residents decided to help diversify the local economy by introducing high-speed Internet that would connect them to work in any kind of industry, anywhere in the world. Coal miners who were previously stymied by the perception that they lacked 21st century job skills are now learning to program computer code thanks to improved broadband, and federal agencies are co-ordinating through the Administration's TechHire initiative to provide quality training and tools.

**Box 9.2. Promise Zone rural success**

Southeastern Kentucky and Choctaw Nation have received USD 246 million and USD 169 million, respectively, since their Spring 2014 designation. USDA invested over USD 8 million in water and waste infrastructure in Hampton County, South Carolina, supporting the development of a regional industrial park. In total, the South Carolina Promise Zone reports a whopping USD 312 million in capital investment since September 2015.

The Pine Ridge Promise Zone has received federal technical assistance and investments to help build basic infrastructure such as water and waste systems, as well as vital community facilities supporting a tribal college and the Oglala Sioux Tribe's public safety system. The Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone has seen enormous strides in developing a strong local food economy. In early July, local partners of the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone announced the creation of a low-interest loan fund for small farmers in the 54-county region of eastern and southern Kentucky. Investments like these mean real opportunities for small growers who want to make strategic plans to expand their operations, and they create opportunities for businesses throughout the regional food supply chain.

**StrikeForce Initiative**

Launched in 2010, the StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity is a USDA agency-wide effort to accelerate assistance to historically underserved groups. The initiative is part of the Obama Administration's commitment to address persistent poverty across America, where 85% of persistent poverty counties are located in rural areas. StrikeForce teams have collaborated with more than 1 500 community groups to bring targeted assistance to rural areas experiencing chronic poverty. StrikeForce delivers results by building partnerships with community organisations, businesses, foundations, universities, faith-based, and other groups to help challenged communities shape a future based on local assets and regional strengths. Each StrikeForce project is a commitment to America's economic future.

**Box 9.3. StrikeForce results**

- Since 2010, these efforts have invested more than USD 23.5 billion to create jobs, build homes, feed children, assist farmers and conserve natural resources across more than 20 states.
- In 2015, StrikeForce projects resulted in:
  - USD 7.49 billion invested
  - 75 482 986 summer meals for kids
  - 9 997 farmers assisted
  - 14 629 conservation efforts
  - 133 232 home investments
- In 2016, StrikeForce expanded to include Florida, Missouri, Montana, and Ohio.
- StrikeForce teams now operate in 970 counties in 25 states and Puerto Rico.

### **Partnership for Sustainable Communities**

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities includes the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Along with these three formal agency partners, other agencies such as the USDA collaborate to support locally-led regional strategies. The aim is to ensure that the agencies' spending, policies, and programmes are aligned to support communities' efforts to be economically vibrant and environmentally sustainable.

Sustainable communities' approaches are as diverse as the communities themselves. Communities select the most appropriate strategies for their contexts and adapt them to respond to local needs and interests.

#### **Box 9.4. Lake Village: Reusing a historic building to support downtown**

In 2010, the community of Lake Village, Arkansas, population 2 823, received funding to rehabilitate a historic structure in its town centre in an effort to consolidate public service providers into one location and channel future development into the Main Street area of an economically distressed community. The USDA – Rural Development Community Facilities Program provided USD 840 000 and the Arkansas Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant Program provided USD 750 000.

Like many small communities whose main streets have declined, Lake Village had seen public and private investments migrate to the outskirts of town over the years. In an effort to reverse that trend, Lake Village leaders explored ways to revitalise their community and decided that reusing an existing building, one listed on the National Register of Historic Places, would be a good way to provide a boost to the community. The mayor, police, and court clerk all used spaces in separate buildings; the town hoped that combining those departments into one centrally located building would help provide services to the community more efficiently while also bringing people and economic activity back to Main Street. Once complete, the historic John Tushek Building would be one of the first LEED-certified buildings in Arkansas, home to all the town's public service providers, and a place that could attract other offices and businesses to Main Street.

Lake Village is one example of a rural community that worked with federal agencies to attain their quality of life, environmental, and economic goals. By consolidating public services into one building, Lake Village sought to create a critical mass of employment downtown, helping attract other businesses to the area and renewing its vitality. The decision to use an existing building was a much more efficient use of scarce resources than constructing a new facility. Combining USDA-Rural Development and state funds enabled the city to rehabilitate the Tushek Building using LEED development standards, reducing energy costs and advancing the community's goal of revitalising its Main Street. Finally, rehabilitation and reuse of the Tushek Building as a civic space is a testimony to the community's appreciation for this historic asset, as well as for their distinctive Main Street and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

### **Local Food, Local Places**

Local Food, Local Places (LFLP) helps communities increase economic opportunities for local farmers and related businesses, create vibrant places, and promote childhood wellness by improving access to healthy local food. It features a strong inter-agency component with funding from USDA, EPA, the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), as well as support from the White House Rural Council. In communities working with LFLP, federal experts work side-by-side with residents and local leaders to create customised solutions; bolster co-ordination across agencies to improve interaction with communities and a “one Government” partner; and rely on valuable data to help inform solutions and evaluate what is working and what is not.

Launched in 2014, LFLP has already helped more than 50 communities make a difference in people’s lives. With technical assistance through LFLP, participants are taking innovative approaches to common challenges, like launching business incubators to support food entrepreneurs and starting co-operative grocery stores to help revitalise main streets. For example, Clarksdale, Mississippi, (population 17 011) is working with an inter-agency team to develop a vegetable farming-based job training programme and a series of community gardens that will supply food for a new farmers market and café.

#### Box 9.5. **USDA and local and regional food systems**

Rural Development’s efforts to support rural producers, rural communities, and the food enterprises, like food hubs, that reside in and support these communities are part of USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative<sup>1</sup> (KYF), which co-ordinates the Department’s work to develop strong local and regional food systems. Starting in 2009, USDA began embedding local and regional food systems into policy making and programming, and by 2012, Secretary Vilsack named it one of the four pillars supporting a new rural American economy<sup>2</sup> – along with bio-based manufacturing, conservation markets, and agricultural production. Since then, USDA has been working to incorporate local and regional food systems across the department’s sizeable footprint by investing in projects that recruit and train farmers, expand economic opportunities for small businesses, and increase access to healthy foods.

Between 2009 and 2015, USDA has invested over USD 1 billion in more than 40 000 local and regional food businesses and infrastructure projects, from the smallest on-farm projects like high tunnels, to large-scale investments like food processing facilities. Today, more than 160 000 farmers and ranchers nationwide are selling into local markets, from farmers markets and CSAs to local restaurants, grocery stores, and institutions, generating huge returns for local communities. Industry estimates show US local food sales totalled at least USD 12 billion in 2014, up from USD 5 billion in 2008, and experts anticipate that value to hit USD 20 billion by 2019. This segment of agriculture is a vibrant growth area that is drawing young people back to rural communities, generating jobs and entrepreneurship, improving quality of life in rural communities, and expanding healthy food access and choice.

“Over the last four years, I’ve seen a shift. People who have never been on a farm are becoming interested in where their food comes from. Towns and neighborhoods that didn’t have regular access to fresh fruits and vegetables are getting them. Farmers and ranchers are tapping into new markets and keeping more money in their pockets by selling locally. And all across the country, innovative local food businesses are starting up and staffing up. Local food systems work for America: when we create opportunities for farmers and ranchers, our entire nation reaps the benefit.” (President Barack Obama)

Notes:

1. See <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/knowyourfarmer?navid=kyf-kyf>.
2. See <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2015/05/0142.xml>.



### **Community Economic Development**

Working with high-poverty communities requires planning, targeted technical assistance, partnerships, leveraging, and active oversight. Recognising the importance of this approach, USDA Rural Development is supporting a cross-cutting effort around Community Economic Development (CED). The programme encourages and supports regional rural economic development by building capacity and providing technical assistance in high-poverty rural communities to help residents get access to financial, social, and environmental capital. All Rural Development State Offices have a CED staff lead to help:

- Engage with local leaders and community members, support community-based and tribal efforts to form regional strategies, set benchmarks, and measure progress.
- Collaborate with strategic partners to create greater impact by combining USDA Rural Development funding programmes with other funding sources. Partners include other federal agencies, co-operatives, non-profits, philanthropic organisations, and local institutions.
- Spearhead poverty strategies, such as the StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity and Promise Zones initiatives, along with Rural Development programmes like Stronger Economies Together.

#### **Box 9.6. CED accomplishments**

Rural Development has exceeded its goal of training and mentoring 50% of staff on CED approaches, tools, and programmes. By the close of FY 2015, more than 4 000 employees – out of around 5 000 – were trained through a variety of CED-related courses. Employees receiving training included state directors, agency administrators, and programme and field staff.

In FY 2015, Rural Development met its goal of identifying 100 target communities to provide intensive community economic development activities. The majority of these target CED communities are in persistent-poverty counties with low capacity and minimal infrastructure. State CED and programme field staff created work plans for intensive capacity building, matched their needs with the appropriate financing solutions, and successfully invested a total of USD 2.13 billion in these areas.

### **Strategic Economic and Community Development**

Strategic Economic and Community Development (SECD) was authorised by the 2014 Farm Bill to prioritise projects that are part of multi-jurisdictional plans. Under this provision, up to 10% of each programme's annual appropriations can be set aside and made available to eligible SECD applicants. SECD is jump-starting community planning by providing an incentive for communities to work together and create regional plans, capitalise on a region's unique strengths, and creatively use resources for multiple purposes. It enables high-poverty rural communities to have greater access to certain competitive programmes and encourages organisations and communities to think more holistically when proposing a project to ensure that the outcomes benefit the broader region.

### Box 9.7. Strategic Economic and Community Development – Big Lake Area Sanitary District

In 2015, 47 SECD applications were submitted from 15 states. Of these, 25 received SECD awards, for a combined total of USD 13.2 million in loans and grants. The funding increased to USD 300 million in 2016. For example, the Big Lake Area Sanitary District in Minnesota, will receive a USD 2.9 million loan and a USD 4.5 million grant to build a wastewater treatment plant serving Perch Lake and Sawyer townships and the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation in 2016. This collaborative effort will convert the treatment plant into a pressure sewer collection system. The project supports the Fond du Lac Community Economic Development Plan, which highlights the importance of providing adequate wastewater treatment services and protecting the health and welfare of people who live or work on the reservation. Improving water quality will also increase the fish population, which will boost local tourism revenue.

### Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnerships

Technological innovation, increasing labour productivity, and new global markets have created new rural business opportunities. The Investing Manufacturing Communities Partnerships (IMCP) is an initiative designed to revolutionise the way federal agencies leverage economic development funds. It encourages communities to develop comprehensive economic development strategies that will strengthen their competitive edge for attracting global manufacturer and supply chain investments. Through IMCP, the federal government is rewarding best practices – co-ordinating federal aid to support communities' strong development plans and synchronising grant programmes across multiple departments and agencies. Led by the Department of Commerce, IMCP features many agencies that have programmes to support the manufacturing infrastructure and supply chain. For example, USDA has been making targeted investments to help manufacturers in rural areas increase production and capacity.

Table 9.1. Snapshot of USDA-RD investments in manufacturing, FY 2009-15

State	Rural manufacturing jobs supported	USDA-RD investment to help rural manufacturers increase production and capacity (USD, million)
Alabama	90 527	28.8
California	18 075	85.9
Georgia	95 732	274.9
Illinois	83 938	49
Iowa	116 806	112.8
Kentucky	90 258	62.4
Louisiana	22 667	58.5
Michigan	93 864	85.2
Mississippi	94 160	33
Missouri	73 048	36.8
New York	65 151	61.7
North Carolina	112 695	169.5
Oregon	27 521	277.8
Pennsylvania	89 095	78.8

Source: USDA (2016).

### **Climate Action Plan and rural America**

From day one, President Obama and his Administration have transformed the US economy into a global leader in renewable energy and an aggressive champion of using practical, science-based solutions to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Central to the President's Climate Action Plan are agriculture, forestry, and land stewardship. To meet the national goal of reducing GHG emissions by 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025, the plan calls for US food and forestry producers to embrace innovation and conservation like never before.

For over 150 years, American farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and rural communities have adapted in the face of weather challenges. But climate change posed unknown threats. Last year marked the 19th consecutive year that our annual average temperature was above the 20th century average. One region of the United States now experiences historic droughts while another is hit by stronger and more frequent storms. Invasive species and pests lay siege to forests in the Mountain West while increasingly intense wildfires rip through landscapes from the Southwest to the Pacific Northwest up to Alaska.

In this new reality, farmers, ranchers, and landowners have begun to seek out tools, technologies, and new partnerships to manage their investments against these risks. Agencies across the federal government have been called on to address this monumental challenge. For example, working with rural communities, farmers, and landowners since 2009, USDA has:

- enrolled record acres in conservation programmes through a new model of stewardship that brings together local, national, public, and private partners
- set the nation's first measurable benchmarks in food and forestry to reduce net emissions and enhance CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration by 120 million metric tonnes per year
- implemented the nation's first comprehensive planning rule in a generation to ensure the health and sustainability of our national forests and grasslands
- set the first-ever national food waste reduction goal of 50% by 2030
- established seven regional climate hubs and three sub-hubs to give producers and landowners data and guidance for decision making
- invested unprecedented resources in climate research and developed science-based tools to help landowners evaluate management options
- helped rural businesses save enough energy to power 959 000 homes annually
- co-founded an alliance of 120 nations and partners to enhance agricultural productivity and incomes, reduce GHG emissions, and increase CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration.

The evolution happening today in US food and forestry to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts is historic, and it all began with a commitment to renewable energy.

### Box 9.8. The lightbulb moment in renewable energy

Helping thousands of rural small businesses, farmers, and ranchers shift away from fossil fuel based energy by installing renewable energy systems and energy efficiency solutions has been one of the most important components of USDA's climate mitigation investments. Thanks to USDA investments in renewable energy projects of all sizes, rural Americans are saving more than 10.4 billion kWh each year – enough energy to power more than 959 000 American homes annually. USDA has invested USD 38 billion in electric loans and more than USD 1 billion for smart grid technologies since 2009, helping build more than 185 000 miles of transmission and distribution lines serving approximately 5 million rural customers annually. Today, more than 2 200 USDA wind and solar renewable electricity generation projects power more than 130 000 homes annually.

USDA's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) provided over USD 365 million in grants and over USD 430 million in loan guarantees to agricultural producers and rural small business owners, financing over 11 000 projects. All told, REAP projects are generating and saving power equivalent to removing more than 1 million cars from the road. In the forestry sector, USDA invested nearly USD 1 billion through grants, loans, and loan guarantees to support over 230 wood energy projects across the country, thereby reducing reliance on costly fossil fuels, supporting rural economic growth, and advancing forest restoration.

## Conclusion

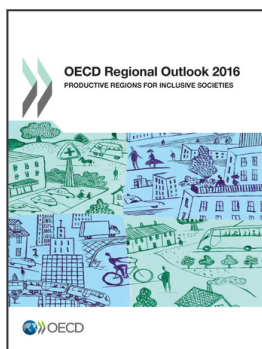
The United States, through the White House Rural Council and the leadership of USDA, has transformed the way it serves and interacts with rural communities. This approach was echoed in the proceedings of the 10th OECD Rural Development Conference in Memphis, Tennessee. The United States has answered the call from that conference with national policies that support a new rural approach – one that recognises the importance of rural areas to the national economy, strives to ensure that all citizens have an opportunity to succeed, and seeks to create flexible approaches that match the diverse assets of rural regions.

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