

# U.S. SENATOR DEB FISCHER'S *LAST ACRE ACT*

## BACKGROUND:

Existing broadband programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) support “last mile” broadband deployment — point-to-point buildout that is critical for extending networks to unserved and underserved households in rural America. USDA currently lacks programming that concentrates on extending connectivity across farmland and rangeland.

As a federal agency, USDA is in a unique position to provide connectivity to the last acre. This requires an updated broadband strategy that supports multipoint network expansion across acreage. USDA's broadband programs should address last mile and last acre connectivity in a complementary manner, ensuring that producers can adopt the technologies that power modern agriculture.

## BILL SUMMARY:

The *Linking Access to Spur Technology for Agriculture Connectivity in Rural Environments (LAST ACRE) Act* would leverage USDA resources for the expansion of high-speed broadband internet access. The bill would support ubiquitous last acre coverage, building off of recommendations developed by the USDA-FCC Precision Ag Connectivity Task Force, which was created by the 2018 Farm Bill. The *LAST ACRE Act* would:

### **(1) Establish a new USDA Rural Development competitive grant and loan program to advance connectivity across acreage. This would:**

- Enable eligible producers to engage with eligible providers to submit an initial bid application for broadband internet access service and secure network solutions across farmland, rangeland, and farm sites. This includes:
  - Broadband internet services provided by any technology that connects structures and devices on eligible land and farm sites, including tractors, combines, irrigation systems, drones, under-soil sensors, livestock facilities, and farm offices.
  - Multipoint network connectivity that facilitates data transmission between structures and devices on farmland, rangeland, and farm sites.
  - Wireless infrastructure construction, including retrofitting existing vertical structures, such as water towers, grain elevators, or center pivots.
- Allow for competitive bidding by eligible providers that use broadband service within or near a proposed project's location, ensuring that each award meets producers' connectivity needs and provides reliable, high-speed service at an appropriate cost.

### **(2) Direct USDA to update the Census of Agriculture to include questions about producers' adoption of broadband internet access services, which would document information including:**

- The service speeds to which they are subscribed.
- The purposes for which their connections are used, such as to power precision agriculture technologies.