



## NEWS RELEASE

### **Electric Cooperatives Stepping in to Fill the Rural Broadband Gap**

*Repeating history, electric co-ops are bringing essential service to keep rural communities current, connected and operational*

**DENVER (September 21, 2017)** — Broadband telecommunications and internet access have become essential infrastructure for any community's future prosperity. However, today, people living in rural communities are four times more likely to lack access to broadband than those in urban communities.

While many remain without access to broadband today, rural electric cooperatives, some of which were formed nearly 80 years ago to bring electricity to rural America, are increasingly making the move into broadband to fill the supply gap.

A comprehensive 57-page report from CoBank outlines keys to success and lessons learned from six co-ops bringing broadband to their rural customers. Also, industry experts provide their insights, which will likely prove helpful to other co-ops considering the move.

"This is vital technology that is equally important for rural communities as it is in urban areas. Precision agriculture is hastening a revolution in data usage on the part of American farmers, and increased bandwidth is critical to health care, manufacturing, schools and even tourism in these communities," said Bill LaDuca, sector vice president for electric distribution, CoBank.

Within this landscape, rural electric co-ops are exploring how their existing distribution networks may lend themselves to highly efficient deployment of broadband.

Many co-ops have found that building out a broadband network using their existing infrastructure is an efficient way to help manage a modern, connected electrical grid as well as a productive way to serve rural customers with high-speed internet either on their own or through a partnership with established telecommunications providers.

"The consultants and co-ops we spoke with to develop our report were very candid in sharing their experiences and challenges," said LaDuca. "We believe these in-depth interviews can be tremendously helpful to other co-ops evaluating broadband and investigating funding sources. Bridging the data divide is critically important for our rural communities and CoBank is supportive of efforts similar to what these electric co-ops have done for their constituencies."

The full report, "Making the Move Into Broadband, Rural Electric Co-ops Detail Their Experiences," is available to media upon request.

#### **About CoBank**

CoBank is a \$125 billion cooperative bank serving vital industries across rural America. The bank provides loans, leases, export financing and other financial services to agribusinesses and rural power, water and communications providers in all 50 states. The bank also provides wholesale loans and other

financial services to affiliated Farm Credit associations serving more than 70,000 farmers, ranchers and other rural borrowers in 23 states around the country.

CoBank is a member of the Farm Credit System, a nationwide network of banks and retail lending associations chartered to support the borrowing needs of U.S. agriculture, rural infrastructure and rural communities. Headquartered outside Denver, Colorado, CoBank serves customers from regional banking centers across the U.S. and also maintains an international representative office in Singapore.

For more information about CoBank, visit the bank's web site at [www.cobank.com](http://www.cobank.com).

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