



RURAL BROADBAND

BRINGING WISCONSIN FARMERS INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), nearly 50% of rural Wisconsin residents do not have access to a broadband Internet connection. Many of the rural residents who do have access face data caps and limited competition, resulting in monthly internet bills that are much higher than those of their urban counterparts.

Wisconsin's 2017-2019 budget brings Wisconsin closer in line with other states when it comes to rural broadband spending, but it is still short of the investment that is needed to maximize the entrepreneurial potential of rural communities. A recent needs assessment in Minnesota recommended broadband investments of \$35 million per year to fill gaps in coverage.¹ Wisconsin's need is likely greater due to historic under-investment.

Investment in Rural High-Speed Internet Infrastructure, Wisconsin vs. Minnesota				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Wisconsin	\$468,361	\$452,579	\$1.5 million	\$17.5 million
Minnesota	\$20 million	\$10 million	\$34 million	\$20 million

Source: Public Service Commission of Wisconsin & Minnesota Office of Broadband Development

Net Neutrality is Critical, especially in Rural Areas

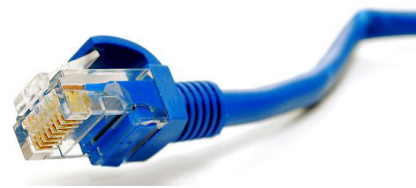
Even as the state of Wisconsin is increasing investment in broadband infrastructure, actions at the Federal level are presenting new challenges for bridging the digital divide. In December 2017, the Federal Communications Commission reversed its previous position and eliminated the "Net Neutrality" requirement for Internet Service Providers. ISP's can now prioritize certain websites over others, generally from the content providers that pay for priority access.

Why is the lack of Net Neutrality a problem for farmers, in particular?

1. Because the content providers that farmers rely on – farm and agricultural publications, local rural newspapers, and University Extension, for example – are not priorities for internet service providers. While critically important to farmers, internet service providers may slow down access to these sites because they cannot pay for priority access on an internet service provider's network.
2. Because rural residents have few choices already when it comes to internet service providers. If a rural internet provider slows down or limits access to the websites that a farmer needs, the farmer has no realistic option to "vote with the wallet" and take his or her business elsewhere.

Fortunately, states have the power to require Net Neutrality for internet service providers operating within their state borders. Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the Net Neutrality bills and other Broadband-related legislation listed on the back of this sheet.

¹ Minnesota Governor's Task Force on Broadband 2017 Annual Report



BUILDING TOWARD BETTER BROADBAND WHAT CAN THE STATE DO?

Wisconsin Farmers Union Supports:



Senate Bill 740 (Erpenbach)/Assembly Bill 908 (Anderson) - Net Neutrality Requirement for State Contracts

This bill prohibits the state from contracting for broadband internet service with any provider that engages in the following practices that violate Net Neutrality principles: blocking, throttling, or prioritizing lawful content that does not harm the network, and making any unjust or unreasonable discrimination in charges.



Senate Bill 743/Assembly Bill 909 - Net Neutrality Requirement for Internet Service Providers Operating Within the State

This bill prohibits internet service providers from blocking, throttling, or prioritizing lawful content that does not harm the network, and making any unjust or unreasonable discrimination in charges. The bills also require a broadband provider to disclose information on pricing, fees, data caps, and network performance.



White Space Technology Resolution – Senate Joint Resolution 96 (Marklein)/Assembly Joint Resolution 100 (Felzkowski)

"White Space Technology" makes use of the unused broadcasting frequencies in the wireless spectrum. Television networks leave gaps between channels for buffering purposes, and this space in the wireless spectrum is similar to what is used for 4G, and so it can be used to deliver widespread broadband internet. White Space broadband can travel up to 10 kilometers (roughly 6 miles), through vegetation, buildings, and other obstacles. The Senate and Assembly Joint Resolutions urge the Federal Communications Commission to open up "White Space" currently reserved for television broadcasting and make it available to internet providers.



LRB 4638/1 – Municipal-Owned Broadband Service (Vinehout)

This bill eliminates a requirement for a city, village, or town (local government) to prepare a report before holding a public hearing on a proposed ordinance or resolution authorizing the local government to construct or operate facilities for providing telecommunications service, cable television or similar video service, or broadband service to the public. The bill also allows a local government or county to apply for a broadband expansion grant without submitting the application in partnership with another applicant.



LRB 4621/1 – Defining Broadband (Vinehout)

Under this bill, no person may advertise as providing broadband service or sell a service represented as being broadband unless the service is capable of consistently providing a minimum download speed of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and a minimum upload speed of 3 Mbps.

Also under the bill, no person may advertise as providing Internet service at a specific speed or sell Internet service that the person represents as being at a specific speed unless the service is capable of consistently providing that speed.

