By: Alexis Gonzalez

On July 21, 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced $349 million in funding to be used for the improvement of electric infrastructure in thirteen states. The funding for the projects is provided through the USDA Rural Development’s Electric Program. According to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, the goal of the funding is to improve electric systems in rural communities in an effort to “build a sustainable and dynamic future for rural residents and businesses.”

A large part of the funding is dedicated to what is referred to as “smart grid technology.” Smart grid refers to the use of computer-based remote control and automation in delivering electricity to consumers. The new system offers the most notable benefit of providing big improvements in energy efficiency for both consumers and on the electric grid. An important feature of the smart grid is the automation technology that permits the adjustment and control of each individual device on the grid or millions of devices from a centralized location.

This recent funding is not the first time the USDA has shown a commitment to improving the life in rural America. In 1935, the Rural Electrification Administration was created and has continued to provide support for small rural communities. The new funding provides insured loans and loan guarantees to nonprofit and cooperative associations. It also aims to reach public bodies and other utilities.

The new funding acts as a step towards improving the life of those residing in rural communities that, historically, are viewed as being behind the curve with new technologies. With the new assistance, the old stereotype can be cast aside, and rural communities may continue to be the growth of state economies with improved infrastructure.
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