

ERS Peer Review Plan

Preliminary Title: Exploring USDA Rural Development Programs

Type of Report
(ERR, EIB, EB) EB

Agency: Economic Research Service [X] Influential Scientific Information
USDA [] Highly Influential Scientific Assessment

Agency Contact: Jeffrey Hopkins, jeffrey.w.hopkins@usda.gov

Subject of Review: This report examines federal investment for rural America administered by the USDA Rural Development (RD) Mission Area funding obligations, including those programs authorized by the Farm Bill. The report provides an overview of USDA RD programs, highlighting their objectives, funding mechanisms, regional distribution, and association with economic outcomes. The funding structure of RD programs relies heavily on guaranteed and direct loans, with grants playing a smaller role. RD funding trends between 2000 and 2024 show major fluctuations during the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic. The funding obligations peaked during the Great Recession and COVID-19 and declined in the recovery periods. Analysis of funding trends also revealed shifts in RD investment priorities. The Single-Family Housing program consistently received the largest share, followed by electric, water, and business development programs. Overall program participation varied across regions, and regions differed in focus for specific RD programs. Nonmetro farming-dependent counties had the highest RD program participation, followed by mining-dependent and manufacturing-dependent counties. RD funding was positively correlated with county income growth, with higher investment associated with stronger growth. Single-Family Housing investment was also positively associated with homeownership in rural areas.

Purpose of Review: The purpose of the review is to ensure the high-quality of the economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience.

Type of Review: [] Panel Review [X] Individual Reviewers
[] Alternative Process (Briefly Explain):

Timing of Review (Est.): Start: 4/24/2025 Completed:

Number of Reviewers: [] 3 or fewer [X] 4 to 10 [] More than 10

Primary Disciplines/Types of Expertise Needed for Review: Economists

Reviewers selected by: ☒ Agency ☐ Designated Outside
Organization

Opportunities for Public Comment? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, briefly state how and when these opportunities will be provided:

How:

When:

Peer Reviewers Provided with Public Comments? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Public Nominations Requested for Review Panel? ☐ Yes ☒ No