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Department of Agriculture Funds Wastewater Infrastructure For Rural Communities.

Federal funding of rural wastewater infrastructure projects is often assumed to predominantly flow through the Environmental Protection Agency (U. S. EPA)'s [Clean Water State Revolving Fund](#) created in 1987 under the Clean Water Act. However, in an interesting development, Anne Hazlett, Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), recently announced that the USDA would make a historic commitment to upgrade and rebuild rural wastewater infrastructure.

USDA is providing the funding through its [Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program](#). It can be used to finance drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater systems for rural communities with 10,000 or fewer residents. The commitment follows the findings of President Trump's Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity which recommended investing in rural infrastructure as a means to support and sustain rural communities.

"USDA is committed to being a strong partner to rural communities in building their futures," Hazlett said. "All people — regardless of their zip code — need modern, reliable infrastructure to thrive, and we have found that when we address this need, many other challenges in rural places become much more manageable."

According to the [Rural Community Assistance Program](#) (RCAP), 51,356 water systems in the U.S. serve less than 3,500 customers (83 percent of all systems) and of that number, 65 percent serve less than 500. In FY 2018, Congress provided a historic level of funding for water and wastewater infrastructure through the USDA with the 2018 Omnibus spending bill including \$5.2 billion for USDA loans and grants, up from \$1.2 billion in FY 2017. The bill directs Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue to make investments in rural communities with the greatest infrastructure needs.

As many of the water and wastewater treatment industry are aware, EPA officials have been working with the States to shed or share responsibilities, under the pressure of proposed cuts to its budget. However, this move suggests that offsetting funding for wastewater infrastructure may flow through the USDA. Ironically, it's the non-point source runoff from agriculture that wastewater industry professionals often point to as the main source of nutrients causing harmful algal blooms (HABs) in the Country's lakes, oceans and gulfs. The investment in wastewater infrastructure for rural communities can only help the agricultural community to focus in on efforts to reduce non-point source nutrient pollution.

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