



Farmers Mutual Telephone Company

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Rural Utilities Service  
Docket No. 090309298-9299-01

Ref: Don't overlook the small players!

Hello, my name is Eric Damman I'm the General Manager of a small not-for-profit local exchange telephone cooperative.

I'm writing to make you aware of and call your attention to a group of small independent telecom companies that I believe are uniquely situated to quickly and efficiently assist the Federal Government in meeting their goals of deploying broadband in rural and underserved areas and in doing so create long term economic benefit in these areas across the nation.

The companies I am referring to have been serving schools, libraries, health care and safety agencies in rural areas for many years, some for more than a century and truly are pillars of the communities they serve. These companies possess a thorough understanding of the challenges of providing state of the art services to sparsely populated rural areas. In my opinion, there is no other group serving in rural areas that is more committed to insuring the long term economic sustainability of the communities they serve.

Transparency and accountability have always been our method of operation, and that is especially true for the Cooperatives as they report not only to Government agencies but directly to the members they serve.

Operating on limited financial resources and tight budgets these companies have learned to be efficient, creative and agile while delivering the best service at the least cost.

The company I represent and possibly many others facing similar challenges are concerned that we will not be able to continue to improve our networks as in the past due to increased competition for voice and broadband customers. Although many of us have plans in place to upgrade and expand our networks, we have to date been unable to finance these projects.

Operating a small company causes a person by necessity to gain a thorough understanding of all aspects of providing quality services, but by no means does being small mean that these companies lack knowledge and understanding of the latest technology. In fact the opposite is true, as is evidenced by the fact that in many cases the smaller companies are the innovators in both technology and in finding ways to get the most bang for the buck. The large companies seem to get all the headlines but the small companies in many cases had already deployed the same technology.

The small companies have a long history of collaborating and partnering with other entities be they government or private sector for the mutual benefit and long term viability of the people and rural communities they serve.

My request is that you not overlook these uniquely qualified and perfectly situated channels to achieving economic stimulus and long term economic benefit to the rural areas of this Nation.

Sincerely,  
Eric L. Damman, GM

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric L. Damman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.