



# NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture

**NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE**

**NORTHEASTERN REGIONAL FIELD OFFICE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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August 23, 2019

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## **Farms with Internet Access Up in Pennsylvania**

**HARRISBURG, PA** - - Farms with internet access in Pennsylvania increased to 64 percent in 2019, compared to 62 percent reported in 2017 according to King Whetstone, director of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, Northeastern Region. Sixty-six percent of farms also reported having access to a desktop or laptop computer. Farms that used a desktop or laptop computer to conduct farm business remained at 40 percent, the same as 2017. Thirty-nine percent of the farms in Pennsylvania used a smart phone or tablet to conduct farm business, compared with 35 percent in 2017.

In 2019, thirty-nine percent of farms in Pennsylvania used a Digital Subscriber Line, or DSL, and 30 percent of farms used cable to access the internet. Since 2017, DSL and cable continue to be the most popular choices that Pennsylvania farms use to access the internet.

Nationally, 75 percent of farms reported having access to the internet, with 73 percent of farms having access to a desktop or laptop computer. The 2019 computer usage estimates are based on responses from more than 20,000 agricultural operations, and represent all sizes and types of farms.

- **HEALTH**

A fact of rural life is difficulties in receiving health care. With fewer people, there are fewer health care providers per capita. There are fewer hospitals and they struggle because revenue does not keep pace with expenses. These days, some of the strategies to increase availability of health care involve telemedicine. Rather than require travel of in some cases hours, remote monitoring can advise health care providers of problems with devices such as a pacemaker. Telemedicine means that counseling can take place over a computer. Telemedicine is seen as a way to stretch resources to serve the rural population.

**However, telemedicine does not work if there is no connectivity.** Remote monitoring of a health condition? No. The doctor reviewing a condition with a patient communicating real-time data? No.

Pennsylvania State Grange understands the importance of telemedicine but it doesn't work when there is no access to high-speed Broadband. As you may know, the Federal Government is funding a pilot rural hospital program for five rural hospitals in the Commonwealth. A big part of this program is community outreach using technology. Without Broadband access, how will that goal be achieved?

It's a little like the TV commercial where a woman falls and pressing a button she wears, tells an operator miles away, "Help! I have fallen and can't get up." Now picture the same scene where the woman has fallen and there is no 'magic' button.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen some progress but face it, Pennsylvania is behind.

The Pennsylvania State Grange is encouraged by recent legislative progress with Senate Resolution 47 (Commission), Senate Resolution 48 (making sure that telecommunications firms meet their existing Broadband obligations).

House Bill 305 directs PA to inventory structures that it owns to determine which ones can be "piggybacked" by telecommunications companies and then leases the use of those structures. It passed the House and is now in the Senate State Government Committee.

I note that Senators Kristin Phillips-Hill and Pat Stefano are members of this committee who also serve on the Senate State Government Committee. The Pennsylvania State Grange hopes that you will talk with State Government Committee Chair Mike Folmer to request action on HB 305.

The good news right now is that policymakers in PA are more aware of the problem and are beginning to consider ways to remedy this inequity in our society where some have access to the technology so necessary in today's society and where many in rural PA are simply left behind.

This spring and early summer, the General Assembly showed that it can be involved in issues affecting rural Pennsylvania as shown by enactment of the Farming First initiative and the PA Farm Bill. That is encouraging but the next step has to be taken – universal access to high-speed Broadband.

We appreciate the work of the Senate Communications & Technology Committee in helping Pennsylvania bridge the technological divide. Back in the 1930s, rural electrification was seen as an almost insurmountable challenge just as Broadband is today. America solved that problem and we will have to solve this one as well. Thanks to this committee, we appear to be on our way.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony to you today on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Grange.