

House Agriculture Subcommittee explores issues of rural America

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WASHINGTON – Executive Director of Hudson Valley Agribusiness Todd Erling went to bat for the region’s rural areas, as he testified to the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy and Credit advocating for federal investment in rural infrastructure.

During the subcommittee’s first hearing Tuesday on examining opportunities for investment and growth in rural America, Erling said there is a gap in the funding provided by various USDA programs for local agriculture and rural development currently.

He claims rural areas need critical investment in the areas of infrastructure, education, broadband, water and specifically one-on-one business technical assistance in order to be competitive coming out of the pandemic.

To fulfill these needs, Erling advocated to the subcommittee the Rebuild Rural America Act, which was introduced by subcommittee Chairman Representative Antonio Delgado (D-NY19) in April of this year.

The legislation would provide block grant funding to rural communities, similar to those which urban areas already receive, for a five–year period which can be renewed after that time. At risk areas can additionally receive up to three times the standard funding if they qualify and the legislation will also call for the creation of a Department of Rural innovation and Partnership Administration.

“This would be a real opportunity for our rural communities to have similar tools and strategies of year over year funding to implement strategy that was created by the rural communities knowing that there is multi-year opportunities and flexibility not only for the hard infrastructure, but the soft infrastructure,” said Erling.

The Rebuild Rural America funding can be used for virtually any aspect of infrastructure and is available to municipalities, non-profits, private organizations, co-ops and educational institutions.

The hope is the funding in the legislation can be a vehicle to help create robust networks of services for rural areas, while integrating them with and bolstering contiguous areas, including close-by urban areas.

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Todd Erling