



ARA-PP-1: BROADBAND

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Adopt

PROPOSED POLICY STATEMENT:

SUPPORT increased efforts to promote access to broadband and provide resources to support accessibility, speed and affordability of broadband in Florida. **SUPPORT** improving service mapping accurately by requiring more granular data from service providers, allowing crowd sourced data to be used to inform the map, and creating an appeal process to challenge demonstrable inaccuracies.

BACKGROUND:

For years, rural residents have argued that actual coverage is much lower than the FCC's data reflects and have questioned the accuracy of the data. In Florida, the barriers to internet ubiquity appear to be two-fold: (1) the lack of last-mile service due to the cost to construct and operate a network; and (2) refusal of prospective end-users to subscribe to available service, typically due to cost. The overreporting of connectivity in Florida, may have led Florida's State and Congressional officials to underestimate the extent of the problem. Florida counties are not alone in questioning the data provided by the FCC. The FCC's 2019 Broadband Deployment report counted 21.3 million Americans as lacking internet, while a 2019 Microsoft study found that 162 million Americans do not have access to an internet connection meeting the definition of broadband. One of the primary factors creating this overreporting is the current requirement that providers information on coverage via the "Form 477" which allows an entire census tract to be considered "covered" if one person within that tract has access to broadband service. This creates a barrier to identifying those areas that actually lack service and to hold service providers accountable for providing services that they may have promised in consideration for public subsidies for broadband expansion. The poor quality of the FCC maps has been recognized both by Congress and the FCC with some movement toward improving the quality of the maps.

ANALYSIS:

While no State-level programs have successfully supported broadband infrastructure construction, several Federal programs have been created to fund expansion of broadband infrastructure. Two programs of note: United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Utilities Services. The March 2018 Federal omnibus spending plan created a new broadband pilot program within the USDA. The \$600 million authorization charged the USDA to "conduct a new broadband loan and grant pilot program under the Rural Electrification Act of 1936..." and



requiring that at least 90% of the households to be served by a project be in rural areas with insufficient access to broadband. The newly authorized pilot program is supplemental to the USDA's Rural Utilities Service existing telecommunications programs aimed at expanding broadband access to rural areas, including the Rural Broadband Access Loans and Loan Guarantees Program. Federal Communications Commission—Rural Digital Opportunity Fund The FCC approved a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), which would provide \$20.4 billion over 10 years to help companies expand broadband in unserved remote areas. RDOF will assign funding in two phases: Phase I will target areas with no broadband service and Phase II will target areas that are partially served. The program will leverage repurposed revenue from the Connect America Fund, which is set to expire in 2021.

Activity to Improve Mapping: NACo's TestIT App: To address the FCC's broadband data disparities, NACo partnered with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) and Farm Credit, to develop "TestIT" – a mobile app designed to crowdsource connectivity data in areas with little or no connectivity. Through TestIT, users can report their broadband speeds from anywhere with the push of a button. The data collected through this app will help identify areas where broadband service is overstated and underfunded by comparing the data to the FCC's National Broadband Map.

Congressional Action: Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability (DATA) Act (H.R 4229 116th Congress) Requires the FCC to collect data more granularly and would establish process to challenge map data.

FCC Action: Perhaps in an effort to preempt legislative action, on August the FCC proposed the Digital Opportunity Data Collection (DODC), a new process for collecting broadband data to better pinpoint where broadband service is lacking. The proposal would continue to rely on provider-supplied data, but it opens the door for crowdsourcing data collection – a method supported by counties. According to the FCC, the proposed order includes three significant changes to the process:

- Collects geospatial broadband coverage maps from broadband Internet service providers. This geospatial data will facilitate development of granular, high-quality fixed broadband deployment maps, which should improve the FCC's ability to target support for broadband expansion through the agency's Universal Service Fund programs.
- Adopts a process to collect public input on the accuracy of service providers' broadband maps, facilitated by a crowd-sourcing portal that will gather input from consumers as well as from state, local and tribal governments.
- Makes targeted changes to the existing Form 477 data collection to reduce reporting burdens for all filers and incorporate new technologies. Stakeholders will be allowed to provide comments to the FCC regarding the proposed rulemaking 30 days after the notice is published in the Federal Register, August 1, 2019.



FISCAL IMPACT:

Unknown

SUBMITTING COUNTY: Small County Coalition

ASSIGNED COMMITTEE: ARA

BOARD SUPPORT: N/A



ARA-PP-2: AQUACULTURE

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: ADOPT

PROPOSED POLICY:

- Encourage state regulatory relief designed to encourage increased commercial production and harvest of aquacultured bivalve shellfish (e.g., clams, oysters) in state waters through review of submerged land leasing requirements and revision of restrictive or outdated regulatory policies.
- Direct the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and/or Farm Service Agency to evaluate the reestablishment of a viable crop insurance program for shellfish aquaculture producers, specifically designed to cover crop and market losses due to mortality or extended harvest moratoriums and disrupted ability to sell product after environmental perturbations (hurricanes and harmful algal blooms).
- Direct FDEP to evaluate the potential for regulatory reform which considers the use of live clams to enhance the success of seagrass impact mitigation requirements.
- Direct FDEP to evaluate implementation of a nutrient credit program to incentivize production of commercial shellfish aquaculture.
- Encourage FDEP, FWC and other relevant state agencies to advance additional grant opportunities for the scientific research required to promulgate regulatory standards for deployment of bivalve shellfish for large scale water quality improvement and nearshore habitat creation.

BACKGROUND:

Bivalve shellfish aquaculture is a rapidly growing sector of the seafood industry, and Florida currently ranks 4th in domestic production of farmed shellfish (clams and oysters). The industry provides economic value to the state of Florida, and shellfish aquaculture is estimated to support at least 550 jobs and contribute \$39 million annually to Florida's economy. In addition, this green agricultural enterprise is unique in its capacity to provide significant environmental benefit. Shellfish filter water to feed, thus improving water clarity, sequestering carbon, and perhaps most importantly, absorbing nutrients including nitrogen and phosphorous. This is especially relevant for bodies of water that must abide to Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) nutrient criteria (examples of regulated estuaries include Apalachicola Bay, Tampa Bay, Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon). Shellfish are being promoted in multiple US states (New York, Maryland, Virginia) as well as a large number of Florida counties making up the Indian River Lagoon, Panhandle, Cedar Key, Tampa Bay; Charlotte Harbor regional areas among others as water quality enhancers and restoration tools. A growing aquaculture industry benefits production for local consumption as well as a supply for these regional environmental efforts. However, the state of Florida consumer currently lacks the regulatory framework to compensate shellfish growers for the environmental benefits that their crops provide, nor the ability to incentivize shellfish farmers to produce



additional product for restoration initiatives. This mitigation framework, combined with enhanced lease availability, updates to overly restrictive or outdated regulations for harvest, and a viable crop insurance program would support existing farmers and provide incentive for the industry to expand in Florida.

ANALYSIS:

Regulatory reform which incorporates live clams as part of a nutrient credit or seagrass impact mitigation strategy and development of additional grant opportunities for related supporting research provides an expanded market niche beyond production for table consumption for bivalve shellfish farmers across the state. One impediment to entering the shellfish aquaculture industry is the uncertainty inherent in loss of crop due to naturally occurring events such as hurricanes, red tide or other harmful algal blooms and the regulatory harvest closures which result. Extended harvest closures often result in a crop that has grown too large for profitable marketing to wholesalers and restaurants, resulting in devastating economic loss to farmers. Incorporating large clams into restoration efforts or mitigation strategies aimed to enhance water quality or habitat development would provide a secondary market and another level of profitability for the clam shellfish industry. Creation of a crop insurance program that accommodates for loss of marketability due to harvest restrictions because of hurricanes and harmful algal blooms would increase the commercial viability of locally grown and harvested clams and oysters and provide a level of protection that would encourage expansion of the industry.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Bivalve shellfish aquaculture production in Florida ranks 4th in the nation. The industry supports over 550 jobs and contributes at least \$39 Million in gross revenue to the state economy. Highlights from a University of Florida study on environmentally beneficial ecosystem services provided by hard clam production in 2012: Almost 550 million gallons of seawater were filtered by the statewide production farmed clams in 2012. Through Florida's aquacultured hard clams harvested in 2012, over 25 thousand pounds of nitrogen were removed, and 760 thousand pounds of carbon were stored from the coastal environment. The economic value of these benefits was estimated at \$99,680, which represents the public good value that the industry generates to Florida citizens at no cost. This estimate was about 1% of the farm gate value of clam sales (\$11.9 million) in that year.

SUBMITTING COUNTY AND CONTACT: Manatee; charlie.hunsicker@mymanatee.org, 941-737-4765

ASSIGNED COMMITTEE: ARA

BOARD SUPPORT: Yes



ARA-PP-3: FOOD INSECURITY

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: ADOPT; Add to Guiding Principles

PROPOSED POLICY:

Proposal to add the following Guiding Principle: The Florida Association of Counties supports increased state funding and policies that reduce food insecurity among Floridians, in order to: 1) increase the health and productivity of those currently without consistent access to healthy food, 2) consequently reduce the demand for public health and human services, 3) improve the financial security of those in need, and 4) accelerate the recovery and increase the resiliency of Florida's economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND:

For many years, the Governor and Florida Legislature have provided much-needed funding to the Feeding Florida food bank network to support its anti-hunger efforts during 'blue skies' (normal operations) as well as 'grey skies' (in response to disasters and emergencies). But to date, no state funding has been designated to address the surge in food insecurity that has occurred since the pandemic began. The federal CARES Act provided much-needed funding for some of the state's regional food banks. In Leon County, for instance, the County Commission allocated \$3.3 million to Second Harvest of the Big Bend for the expansion of child nutrition programs, senior grocery food boxes, and other programs. All CARES Act funds, however, must be expended by December 31, 2020 and to date there is no subsequent federal legislation to assist states once these resources are exhausted. And yet, helping the most vulnerable Floridians rebound quickly from a disaster (whether a hurricane or a pandemic) is a robust approach to accelerating the state's economic recovery, as well as increasing resilience to any future economic shocks.

One of the fastest, most cost-effective ways to help those in need is to provide them with consistent access to healthy meals. Doing so provides benefits to those individuals as well as to our state and local governments. With greater access to nutritious food, Florida's most vulnerable population will be healthier, thus reducing the state's public healthcare and human services costs. Also, by enabling low-income families and individuals to shift more of their income from food toward other necessities like rent, utilities and transportation, Florida will experience an accelerated, more resilient economic recovery after the pandemic.

ANALYSIS:

Prior to the pandemic, 2.77 million Floridians were food insecure; 800,000 of those were children. (Source: <https://www.feedingflorida.org/staying-informed/hunger-food-insecurity>. Retrieved 8/9/20.) Unfortunately, the pandemic has made the problem much worse. Food insecurity has surged since the arrival of COVID-19, with an additional 1.2 million Floridians lacking access to healthy food. The state now



has 3.97 million people who are food insecure – an increase of 43% in just the past few months. Every county in the state has been negatively affected. In Leon County, for example, food insecurity has increased 44% since the pandemic began. More than 27% of the county’s total population is now food insecure, as are 30% of the county’s children. Research shows that food insecurity has a significant, measurable effect on a person’s health (Source: <https://afmc.org/afmc-healthspot/what-does-hunger-cost/>. Retrieved 8/9/18.): - Children who struggle to get enough to eat are more likely to be obese and have problems in school and other social situations. - Seniors who are food insecure are 50% more likely to have diabetes, 60% more likely to have heart disease, and 30% more likely to have at least one physical impairment. With the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic likely to extend beyond CY2021, Florida’s food insecure population is likely to experience even greater hardship. This, in turn, will hinder their own financial recovery as well as that of the entire state.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The fiscal impact will depend on the level of state funding allocated and/or the cost of the policy adopted to reduce food insecurity. However, the economic benefits of such an investment will be significant to low-income Floridians, and the investment will accelerate the state’s economic recovery after the pandemic.

SUBMITTING COUNTY AND CONTACT: Leon; MinorR@leoncountyfl.gov, 850-445-1914

ASSIGNED COMMITTEE: ARA

BOARD SUPPORT: This policy proposal will be submitted to the Leon County Commission for its approval at its next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, September 15, 2020.