

# LAND O' LAKES, INC.

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May 1, 2019

Hon. Tim Walz, Governor  
130 State Capitol  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Hon. Paul Gazelka  
Senate Majority Leader  
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3113  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Hon. Thomas Bakk  
Senate Minority Leader  
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 2221  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Hon. Melissa Hortman  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
463 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Hon. Kurt Daudt  
House Minority Leader  
267 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Walz and Legislative Leaders:

I am writing to applaud the bipartisan effort thus far this legislative session to expand high-speed broadband internet connectivity across Minnesota. In the final weeks of this legislative session, I urge your continued collaboration and attention to bridge the significant digital divide that is impacting rural residents, farmers, businesses and communities across our state. I respectfully request that the biennial budget you are currently considering include at least \$70 million in state funding and continue to encourage public-private partnerships to further leverage the state's investment.

Land O'Lakes, Inc. is a member-owned cooperative with industry-leading operations that span the spectrum from agricultural production to consumer foods, ranking 216 on the Fortune 500. In addition to our iconic Dairy Foods business, we deliver crop inputs and insights through WinField United; animal feed and ingredients through Purina Animal Nutrition; and farmer-led stewardship solutions through Land O'Lakes SUSTAIN. Nearly a century since we were founded by Minnesota dairy farmers in St. Paul, Land O'Lakes remains farmer-owned and has a strong footprint in Minnesota, with 306 farms owned by our dairy members, 102 local farm supply co-op and ag retail members and 329 independent ag producer members, in addition to numerous production facilities and our headquarters located in Arden Hills. We are proud to directly employ more than 2,000 Minnesotans.

Access to high-speed broadband internet in rural Minnesota is a top priority for Land O'Lakes because bridging the digital divide is critically important for Minnesota's economic future. It is important that all parts of our state have the opportunity to fully participate in today's global internet-based economy.

Across our cooperative, cutting-edge ag tech and innovation plays an important role in equipping farmers and rural businesses to thrive. When farmers are able to deploy the latest technology to their fields, they are in a stronger position to grow and compete on a global stage – with a focus on productivity, profitability and natural resource stewardship fueled by insights and technology. New technology on the farm can also help farmers and food companies meet growing consumer interest in where food comes from and how it was produced. Much of this technology requires dependable broadband access to properly deploy and utilize.

Off the farm, access to reliable, high-speed broadband is critical to many day-to-day essential services for rural communities: providing patients greater, more affordable access to health care through telemedicine and telepharmacy; giving students, no matter where they live, the opportunity to broaden their horizons through distance learning; assisting workers in acquiring new skills and continuing education to advance their careers; and providing businesses an enhanced platform to market products both domestically and internationally.

A 2018 report by the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband estimated one in five Minnesota rural households are unserved with high-speed broadband, and more than 40 percent are underserved.<sup>1</sup> We have seen directly, and heard through our cooperative’s members, the challenges posed by a lack of high-speed broadband internet access and we remain focused on identifying solutions to help address the issue. We recognize that expanding high-speed broadband is a complex issue that carries significant costs – nearly \$1.5 billion according to the 2018 Governor’s Task Force report. However, given the economic and quality of life benefits associated with rural broadband, timely state investment is critical.

With your help, I remain encouraged that we can solve this problem. We look forward to working with you, our state’s leaders, to find innovative ways to accelerate the deployment of broadband technology to all corners of Minnesota. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Matthew Wohlman, Sr. Director of State and Industry Affairs at Land O’Lakes via email at [mwohlman@landolakes.com](mailto:mwohlman@landolakes.com), and he will work together with our leadership team and I to provide any assistance or information that could be helpful as discussion of this important issue moves ahead.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Beth E. Ford  
President & CEO  
Land O’Lakes, Inc.

CC: Senator Torrey Westrom  
Representative Jeanne Poppe

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<sup>1</sup> Governor’s Task Force on Broadband, 2018 Annual Report. October 2018. [https://mn.gov/deed/assets/2018-bbtf-report\\_tcm1045-354312.pdf](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/2018-bbtf-report_tcm1045-354312.pdf)