

**U.S. Senator Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food & Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations**

**Opening Statement
Hearing on USDA Rural Development
October 21, 2015**

This hearing will come to order. Good morning. Today's hearing will focus on Rural Development at the Department of Agriculture and its strategic investments in rural America. Thank you Under Secretary Mensah, Administrator Hernandez, Administrator Ridders, and Administrator McBride for being here today. Under Secretary Mensah, I enjoyed visiting with you recently in Kansas and hope you will return soon and often.

Agriculture remains one of the bright spots in our nation's economy, supporting more than 16 million jobs nationwide and forming the backbone of our rural communities. For those of us who grew up in rural areas, it is a lifestyle we cherish and hope to preserve for our children and future generations to come. Rural Development is largely tasked with maintaining and improving that quality of life. Whether it's providing loans for low-income families to own their first home, spurring economic development with grants to small businesses, or providing communities with financing to allow customers affordable utility rates, Rural Development continues to serve a significant role in the nexus between need and opportunity.

In my home state of Kansas, we determine economic development by whether or not your town has a grocery store. Many issues facing rural communities are unique to those areas in an ever-increasing urbanized and technologically-advanced world. I look forward to discussing the Rural Development mission and other relevant topics with our witnesses today. We have a lot to cover this morning, so I will turn it over to Senator Merkley for any remarks he may wish to give.