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**Gov. Whitmer Holds Roundtable on Newly Created Office of Rural Development**

The Office of Rural Development will focus on all rural matters and provide guidance on pressing issues in rural Michigan

**LANSING, Mich**. - Today, Governor Gretchen Whitmer hosted a virtual roundtable to highlight her latest [executive directive](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDEsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjAxMDcuNTE0NDI0MTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5taWNoaWdhbi5nb3Yvd2hpdG1lci8wLDkzMDksNy0zODctOTA0OTktNTc0OTI3LS0sMDAuaHRtbCJ9.4SSRbcz8Y5xjDfkkFLLsj6pDn8CdTzVorcbcsASdpqE/s/1199120441/br/124345226813-l) establishing the Office of Rural Development within the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). The roundtable featured MDARD Director Gary McDowell, Michigan Economic Development Corporation CEO Quentin L. Messer, Jr., and several key rural stakeholder groups.

"Since my first day in office, I have been focused on addressing the significant structural challenges our state faces by growing Michigan's economy, creating good-paying jobs, and building industries of the future, which includes our robust food and agriculture businesses," said**Governor Whitmer**. "The Office of Rural Development will be a critical component in how we tackle those challenges, create a resilient and equitable Michigan while opening the door to new and exciting opportunities within our rural communities. We will continue building on our economic momentum from 2021, when we added 145,000 jobs, and pursue a holistic approach to growing our economy."

The Office of Rural Development will help MDARD with its ongoing mission to concentrate on economic, social, and educational needs in rural areas while being a key connection point for leaders and stakeholders to the state's rural communities and putting Michigan first. Additionally, the office will be a crucial part of MDARD's workforce initiative to encourage job seekers and new talent to investigate food and agricultural-related careers.

"Michigan's food and agriculturally based business are a powerhouse for the state's economic engine. I’m excited to have the Office of Rural Development build upon that foundation," said **Gary McDowell, MDARD Director.** "This office will concentrate on a variety of issues, including investing in small and local businesses, ensuring new and expanding broadband access, and filling critical jobs along the food supply chain."

“The creation of this Office is an exciting victory for all of Michigan, but especially for our friends and neighbors in rural communities across our state who deserve to have a more coordinated and easier to navigate access to government, resources, programs and opportunities. Farms and other rural businesses throughout Michigan are the backbones of these communities and provide jobs and sponsorships of civic activities that are vital to making Michigan what it is,” said **Quentin L. Messer, Jr., CEO of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation**. “We look forward to growing our partnership with this new Office over the coming years as we continue our efforts to create an economy where everyone in our state is visible, participating and thriving.”

The Office of Rural Development will have the following responsibilities, among others:

* Collaborate with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and other stakeholders on rural economic development;
* Collaborate with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to facilitate rural affordable housing development;
* Promote sustainability, environmental preservation, and green energy development;
* Address the ramifications of population and demographic trends in rural Michigan;
* Analyze and provide guidance on education-related issues affecting rural communities;
* Collaborate with the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office to facilitate expansion of high-speed internet connections in rural communities; and,
* Coordinate with tribal leaders in this state on issues facing rural Michigan.

“Rural communities are critical for our state’s economic success and they cannot be left behind,” said **Chuck Lippstreu, president of the Michigan Agri-Business Association**. “The creation of this new Office of Rural Development demonstrates an important commitment by our state government to help tackle the many persistent, unique challenges faced by Michigan’s rural residents and Main Street businesses.”

“I thank Governor Whitmer for taking action to create the Office of Rural Development. Those of us who live and work in rural Michigan often feel left behind when it comes to state initiatives,” said **Wilfred Cwikiel, Superintendent-Principal, Beaver Island Community School**. “The Office of Rural Development will ensure the needs of rural Michiganders—whether it’s educational, economic, environmental, or health-related—will be at the forefront.”

“I am very excited to hear that Gov. Whitmer has created an Office of Rural Development,” said **David B. Jahn, President & CEO of War Memorial Hospital**. “This will provide much needed assistance and support for rural healthcare issues, which are vastly different from the issues that urban healthcare providers have to deal with.  Getting connectivity to remote rural areas will only enhance the quality of care that everyone in Michigan should be able to access.”

"It is encouraging that Governor Whitmer's first Executive Directive for 2022 is focused on the formal establishment of the Office of Rural Development within the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development,” said **David Emmel, President, Northern Lakes Economic Alliance**. “Building a robust and sustainable economic development ecosystem focused on the unique needs of Michigan's rural communities is something which will benefit rural Michiganders and set the stage for communities and people to achieve greater economic potential and prosperity. Our economic alliance, like so many others, look forward to working closely with MRARD Director Gary McDowell, MEDC CEO Quentin Messer Jr. and their teams to move this directive forward into action. "

“InvestUP joins a diverse set of statewide stakeholders in lauding Governor Whitmer for creating the Michigan Office or Rural Development to help build prosperity for the State’s rural communities,” said **Marty Fittante, CEO Invest UP**. “The Office is a major win for U.P. communities, businesses and institutions by having a dedicated, singular, systematic focus towards solutions for the undoubted, unique, and complicated challenges that are behind the challenges facing our rural communities.  Executive Order 2022-1 builds on the partnership that worked together on this initiative, including Governor Whitmer, Ag Director Gary McDowell, senior administrative staff, the Upper Peninsula legislative delegation, especially Senator McBroom, and local economic and community development organizations from the U.P. and the state. We are grateful to the Governor for her leadership and to Director McDowell for his persistent commitment in making the Office of Rural Development a reality, a reality that position’s Michigan to be a national leader on rural prosperity.”

"Housing development in Michigan gets more challenging as you get into smaller counties and communities across our state,” said **Yarrow Brown, Executive Director, Housing North**. “Housing North is thrilled to support the opening of the Office of Rural Development and help be a part of the Office's goal of facilitating rural affordable housing development."

“The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance applauds the creation of this office and looks forward to collaborating as close partners in the important work ahead,” said **Sarah Van Horn, Chair of Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance and President of the Charlevoix Chamber of Commerce**. “This office can lead efforts to create more tools and specific programs to help rural communities and businesses thrive so that Michigan can be a national leader in rural economic growth and stability.”

A new senior leader at MDARD, the Deputy for Rural Development, will run the Office and be the state's point of contact for community leaders on urgent rural issues. The individual designated as Deputy for Rural Development will have demonstrated competency in issues facing rural Michigan.

View a copy of the executive directive here:

[ED 2022-01 MI Office of Rural Development (final signed).pdf](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flnks.gd%2Fl%2FeyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDEsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjAxMDQuNTEyMTQ1ODEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL2NvbnRlbnQuZ292ZGVsaXZlcnkuY29tL2F0dGFjaG1lbnRzL01JRU9HLzIwMjIvMDEvMDQvZmlsZV9hdHRhY2htZW50cy8yMDM2NTQyL0VEJTIwMjAyMi0wMSUyME1JJTIwT2ZmaWNlJTIwb2YlMjBSdXJhbCUyMERldmVsb3BtZW50JTIwJTI4ZmluYWwlMjBzaWduZWQlMjkucGRmIn0.aWviae8gyNUa-iu-E5CdThc2lbMtjhyPWspC7thK1j4%2Fs%2F957064821%2Fbr%2F124093441205-l&data=04%7C01%7Cadhir%40michigan.gov%7C19547ea9103b4bfbff4d08d9cfa074dc%7Cd5fb7087377742ad966a892ef47225d1%7C0%7C0%7C637769110339458706%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=u8y0KNHc6PQOamMBNV04e9bImUdj4s3x3eK%2B%2FJwf5fY%3D&reserved=0)