NEBRASKA FARM BUREAU®

2026 POLICY GUIDES

Revitalize Rural Nebraska

Issue

Should Nebraska better align its Revitalize Rural Nebraska Grant Program and Mainstreet Revitalization Act to be more helpful in building stronger, more sustainable rural communities?

Background

Rural communities across Nebraska continue to face challenges related to population loss, including vacant or deteriorating commercial buildings, housing shortages, childcare access, business succession and workforce recruitment.

The Revitalize Rural Nebraska Grant Program was created to help cities and villages address abandoned or dilapidated commercial properties. Eligible projects generally involve demolition of dilapidated commercial property within a city or village. The program gives priority to applications from villages and second-class cities, and projects require a local match.

During the 2026 legislative session, LB 883 proposed changes to the Civic and Community Center Financing Act and the Revitalize Rural Nebraska Grant Program. The bill raised broader questions about how Nebraska should approach historic buildings, downtown redevelopment, commercial property cleanup and economic development in smaller communities.

Separate from demolition-focused grants, Nebraska has also seen continued discussion around main street-style revitalization, including support for downtown business districts, historic restoration, entrepreneurship, and technical assistance for rural communities. This raises a broader policy question: should Nebraska focus rural economic development dollars on individual grant programs, or should the state better align these programs around a coordinated rural development strategy that includes downtown revitalization, housing, childcare, workforce development and agriculture-related entrepreneurship?

Farm Bureau Policy

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (2023). We believe greater emphasis should be placed on developing a public/private partnership for implementing a long-term strategy for rural economic development. Such strategy should give strong consideration for utilization of agriculture as a foundation for rural growth and opportunity.

We support the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture's 100 Beef Cow, Heifer Link and Dairy Programs and the development of other agriculture entrepreneurial programs to help produce the next generation of Nebraska farmers and ranchers. We support programs to assist in the transfer of main street businesses from older to younger generations in rural Nebraska.

Farm Bureau supports a policy to encourage legislation and economic development incentives for meaningful and supportive economic development programs to encourage and promote the creation and expansion of entrepreneurialism, microbusiness, and agriculture related enterprises and diversification in Nebraska to reverse population loss in rural areas.

We support a tax incentive for rural communities to help fund housing and daycare development. We also encourage the development of age-in-place facilities, i.e., senior duplexes, to open larger family houses for younger families.

We are in favor of expanding childcare options in Nebraska.

Questions

- To prevent the loss of rural commerce, should Nebraska Farm Bureau (NEFB) advocate for amending the Revitalize Rural Nebraska Grant Program to fund the rehabilitation and transfer of historic main street businesses, rather than focusing strictly on demolition?
- How should NEFB navigate the trade-off between supporting blanket economic development grants open to all municipalities versus lobbying for strict statutory carve-outs reserved exclusively for villages and second-class cities?
- How can NEFB leverage state revitalization incentives to actively recruit the next generation of agriculture entrepreneurs into vacant rural storefronts, effectively bridging the gap between farm gate and main street?