

# High-speed Internet arrives slowly

## Broadband in Wisconsin

Week 1:  
Extending the lines of communication

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**C**an you guess this technology? It changed the lives of urban residents, transformed communities and created new economic opportunities for businesses in Wisconsin's cities.

However, most rural homes, farms and businesses didn't have access to this technology. The low population density and distances between rural households and communities meant too little demand relative to the high cost of constructing a delivery network and thus little potential for profit.

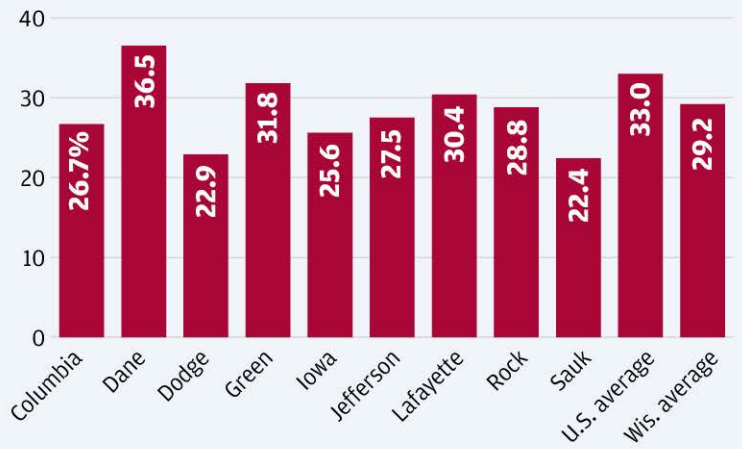
As a result, rural Wisconsin went without service for over two decades. Rural residents, communities and businesses that wanted access had to finance the infrastructure themselves. When they did, the prevailing rates were commonly twice as high as urban

rates. What was this powerful and essential technology? Electricity. Local rural leaders responded by creating rural electric cooperatives. With low-interest loans from the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), local co-ops built networks of transmission lines and provided farmers with electricity. On May 7, 1937, Wisconsin's first co-op, Richland Electric Cooperative, went into service. Within 15 years, 90 percent of American farms had electricity.

High-speed Internet access, commonly referred to as broadband, is one of today's essential technologies. According to a recently released study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 84 percent of urban households had broadband access by 2007.

## Farms with high-speed Internet access, 2007

By percentage



Source: 2007 Ag Census, WI Table 46,  
[http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1\\_Chapter\\_2\\_County\\_Level/Wisconsin/st55\\_2\\_046\\_046.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_2_County_Level/Wisconsin/st55_2_046_046.pdf)

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The Census of Agriculture reports that in 2007, only 29.2 percent of farms in Wisconsin had high-speed Internet access compared

to 33 percent of U.S. farmers. The following chart provides data for several south-central Wisconsin counties.