To require the Federal Communications Commission to establish a task force for meeting the connectivity and technology needs of precision agriculture in the United States.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

January 25, 2018

Mr. Wicker (for himself, Ms. Klobuchar, Mr. Daines, and Mr. Tester) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To require the Federal Communications Commission to establish a task force for meeting the connectivity and technology needs of precision agriculture in the United States.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Precision Agriculture Connectivity Act of 2018”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:
(1) Precision agriculture technologies and practices allow farmers to significantly increase crop yields, eliminate overlap in operations, and reduce inputs such as seed, fertilizer, pesticides, water, and fuel.

(2) These technologies allow farmers to collect data in real time about their fields, automate field management, and maximize resources.

(3) Studies estimate that precision agriculture technologies can reduce agricultural operation costs by up to 25 dollars per acre and increase farm yields by up to 70 percent by 2050.

(4) The critical cost savings and productivity benefits of precision agriculture cannot be realized without the availability of reliable broadband Internet access service delivered to the cropland and ranchland of the United States.

(5) The deployment of broadband Internet access service to unserved and underserved cropland and ranchland is critical to the United States economy and to the continued leadership of the United States in global food production.

(6) Despite the growing demand for broadband Internet access service on cropland and ranchland,
broadband Internet access service is not consistently available where needed for agricultural operations.

(7) The Federal Communications Commission has an important role to play in the deployment of broadband Internet access service infrastructure on unserved and underserved cropland and ranchland to promote precision agriculture.

SEC. 3. TASK FORCE.

(a) Definitions.—

(1) In general.—In this section—

(A) the term “broadband Internet access service” has the meaning given the term in section 8.2 of title 47, Code of Federal Regulations, or any successor regulation;

(B) the term “Commission” means the Federal Communications Commission;

(C) the term “Department” means the Department of Agriculture;

(D) the term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture; and

(E) the term “Task Force” means the Task Force for Meeting the Connectivity and Technology Needs of Precision Agriculture in the United States, as established under subsection (b).
(2) AGRICULTURAL TERMS.—For purposes of this Act, the Secretary shall define the terms “agricultural operations”, “cropland”, and “ranchland”.

(b) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commission shall establish the Task Force for Meeting the Connectivity and Technology Needs of Precision Agriculture in the United States.

(e) DUTIES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Task Force shall collaborate with the Secretary and public and private stakeholders in the agriculture and technology fields to—

(A) identify and measure current gaps in broadband Internet access service coverage of cropland and ranchland;

(B) assemble a comprehensive guide of all Federal programs or resources working to expand broadband Internet access service on unserved cropland and ranchland;

(C) develop policy recommendations to promote the rapid, expanded deployment of fixed and mobile broadband Internet access service on unserved croplands and ranchlands, with a goal of achieving reliable service on 95 percent
of croplands and ranchlands in the United States by 2025;

(D) promote effective policy and regulatory solutions that encourage the adoption of broadband Internet access service on farms and ranches and promote precision agriculture;

(E) propose new rules of the Commission or amendments to existing rules of the Commission to achieve the goals and purposes described in subparagraph (C);

(F) recommend specific steps that the Commission and other Federal agencies should take to obtain reliable and standardized data measurements of broadband Internet access service coverage as may be necessary to target funding support to unserved croplands and ranchlands in need of broadband Internet access service; and

(G) recommend specific steps that the Commission should take to ensure that the expertise of the Secretary and available farm data are reflected in developing Federal programs to deploy broadband Internet access service infrastructure and to direct available funding to
unserved croplands and ranchlands where needed.

(2) CONSULTATION.—The Task Force shall consult with the Secretary to develop recommendations for the Commission that utilize the expertise, data mapping information, and resources of the Department that the Department uses to identify croplands, ranchlands, and other areas with agricultural operations.

(d) MEMBERSHIP.—The Task Force shall be—

(1) composed of not more than 15 members who shall—

(A) be selected by the Chairman of the Commission in consultation with appropriate staff of the Commission and with the Secretary; and

(B) include—

(i) agricultural producers representing diverse geographic regions and farm sizes, including owners and operators of farms of less than 100 acres;

(ii) Internet service providers, including regional or rural fixed and mobile broadband Internet access service pro-
providers and telecommunications infrastructure providers;

(iii) representatives from the satellite industry;

(iv) representatives from precision agriculture equipment manufacturers, including drone manufacturers, manufacturers of autonomous agricultural machinery, and manufacturers of farming robotics technologies; and

(v) representatives from State and local governments; and

(2) fairly balanced in terms of technologies, points of view, and fields represented on the Task Force.

(e) REPORTS.—Not later than 1 year after the date on which the Commission establishes the Task Force, and annually thereafter, the Commission shall submit to Congress a report that details—

(1) the status of fixed and mobile broadband Internet access service coverage of croplands and ranchlands;

(2) the projected future connectivity needs of agricultural operations, farmers, and ranchers; and
(3) the steps being taken to accurately measure
the availability of high speed broadband Internet ac-
cess service on croplands and ranchlands and the
limitations of current, as of the date of the report,
measurement processes.

(f) EXISTING FUNDS.—The Commission shall use ex-
isting funds of the Commission to carry out the Task
Force and the duties of the Commission under this sec-
tion.

(g) TERMINATION.—The Task Force shall terminate
on January 1, 2025.