



## NEWS RELEASE

### **CoBank Contributes \$250,000 To National Rural Water Association**

*Grant Will Support Technical Training For Employees Of Rural Water Systems Across The U.S.*

**DENVER (November 21, 2017)** – CoBank, a cooperative bank serving agribusinesses, rural infrastructure providers and Farm Credit associations throughout the United States, announced today that it is partnering with the National Rural Water Association to underwrite a program that will target and train the next generation of technical workers needed to ensure the future operation of critical water and wastewater systems in rural communities.

The \$250,000 grant from CoBank will assist the NRWA with the creation of the WaterPro Apprenticeship Program designed to address the looming shortage of experienced personnel at water systems throughout rural America. CoBank's support will be in the form of apprentice scholarships and assistance to the NRWA and state rural water associations to launch and market the program.

Though still in the early stages of development, the program will create a consistent, nationally recognized standard of training for water and wastewater professionals registered with the Department of Labor. DOL registration means greater value for program participants by ensuring the credentials are transferable to and recognized by rural water systems in the U.S. Development and roll-out of the program is expected to occur over the next two years.

“More than 80 percent of the nation's approximately 50,000 water systems serve populations of less than 10,000 people,” said Tom Halverson, CoBank's president and chief executive officer. “These systems deliver a vital service to rural communities, and yet are having an increasingly difficult time finding the next generation of workers with the knowledge and expertise needed to fill technical roles. We are delighted to be partnering with the NRWA on the forefront of this initiative, and look forward to the benefits it will provide rural America.”

It takes more than 380,000 highly skilled water and wastewater personnel to ensure the public supply of safe drinking water and to protect the nation's lakes, streams and groundwater. Water professionals are responsible for meeting stringent regulatory standards, replacing aging infrastructure, recruiting and training new operations specialists, and responding to and recovering from disasters.

In addition to increasing professional demands, utilities will soon be forced to replace many of their most experienced employees. Over the next decade, the water sector is expected to lose between 30 and 50 percent of the workforce to retirement. Many of these employees have worked at the same utility for the majority of their careers, and they would depart with decades of valuable institutional knowledge. This program will help ensure this valuable knowledge will be passed on to the next generation of water professionals.

“The WaterPro Apprenticeship Program will provide the critical resources needed to train a qualified workforce for the safe operation of rural water systems well into the future,” said NRWA CEO Sam Wade. “CoBank has been a great partner in serving rural America with us; this underwriting is a testament to

their commitment and will help us tremendously as we look to attract, train and retain the next generation of rural water and wastewater professionals.”

### **About CoBank**

CoBank is a \$124 billion cooperative bank serving vital industries across rural America. The bank provides loans, leases, export financing and other financial services to agribusinesses and rural power, water and communications providers in all 50 states. The bank also provides wholesale loans and other financial services to affiliated Farm Credit associations serving more than 70,000 farmers, ranchers and other rural borrowers in 23 states around the country.

CoBank is a member of the Farm Credit System, a nationwide network of banks and retail lending associations chartered to support the borrowing needs of U.S. agriculture, rural infrastructure and rural communities. Headquartered outside Denver, Colorado, CoBank serves customers from regional banking centers across the U.S. and also maintains an international representative office in Singapore.

For more information about CoBank, visit the bank's web site at [www.cobank.com](http://www.cobank.com).

### **About NRWA**

The National Rural Water Association is the largest public drinking water and sanitation utility organization representing the interests of more than 31,000 water and wastewater utilities nationwide. NRWA provides training and technical assistance through 49 affiliated State Rural Water Associations dedicated to supporting and promoting the water and wastewater professionals that serve small communities across the United States. NRWA and the State Affiliates provide training on operator certification, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, utility management and governance to over 80,000 water professionals annually in all 50 states. Last year, over 55,000 on-site consultations were delivered by NRWA's technical experts for water quality, energy efficiency, source water protection, technical assistance and emergency response.

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