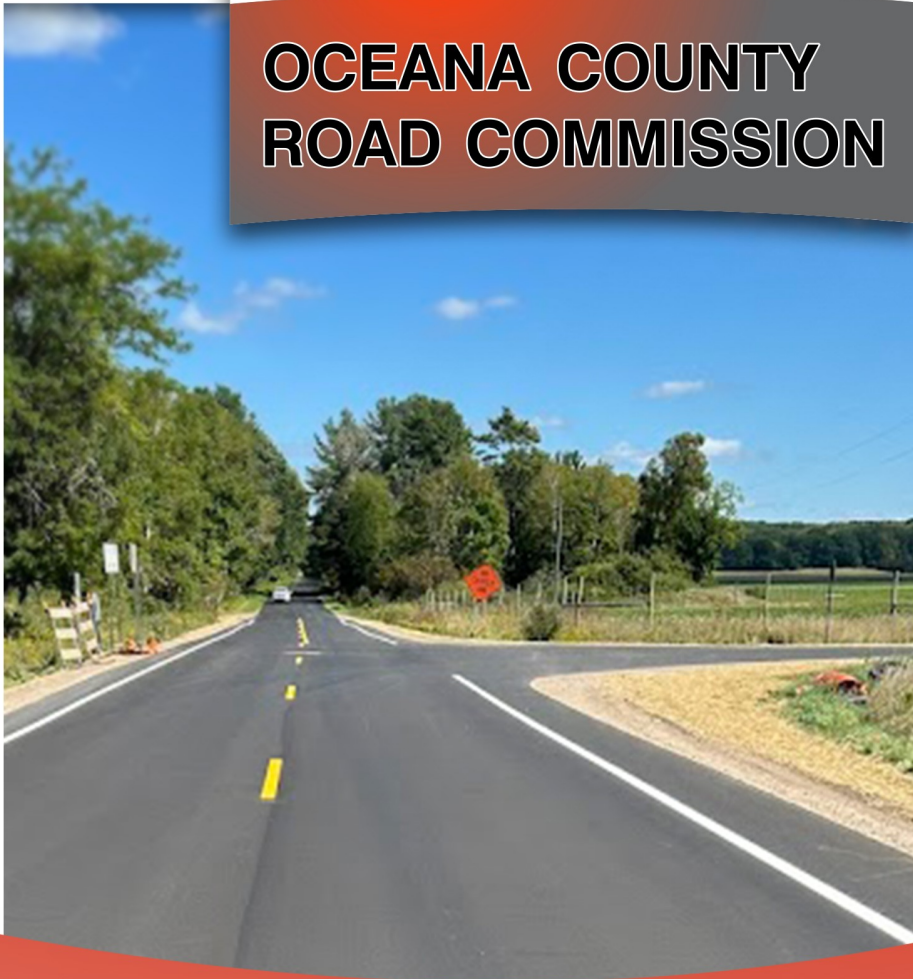


RAISE 2025 OCEANA COUNTY **RURAL ROADS** **FEEDING AMERICA**



**OCEANA COUNTY
ROAD COMMISSION**

submitted to

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

submitted by

OCEANA COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION

JANUARY 30, 2025

1. Project Description

Overview

The Oceana County Road Commission (OCRC), in partnership with the regional planning organization, the West Michigan Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), is requesting \$25 million from the 2025 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Program to support the upgrade of vital County roads to transport fresh produce. The proposed **Oceana County Rural Roads Feeding America Project** (the “Project”) will revitalize the County’s rural road network reaching farms and food processing companies that require reliable, continuous, and safe connectivity to highways and trunk routes to supply American tables with fresh produce. In addition to supporting a resilient national food supply, the farming industry powers Oceana County’s economy and provides jobs. Current roadways are under-built to support the size of contemporary farm equipment and the trucks needed to transport the diverse array of fruits, vegetables, and forestry products grown in Oceana County, and they do not meet the needs of farmers, distributors, or food processing companies. These roadways – many of them narrow and gravel – have become rutted and worn, jarring and bruising delicate crops (like squash, pumpkins, asparagus, apples, and cherries), and in some cases are completely impassable. After rain events, distributors may decline to pick up entire shipments, leaving carefully grown and harvested vegetables to enter our waste stream rather than our supermarkets.

In spite of the significant progress that OCRC has made to address roadway conditions across the County, and to implement new processes (like chip sealing) to maintain roadway upgrades for a longer duration, there is simply not enough money locally to support road upgrades needed to get products to consumers on time and in good condition. This investment will ensure stable revenue for farmers and for the County residents broadly, where three of the four Project census tracts are considered disadvantaged according to CEJST data; it will prevent food waste and inefficiency; and it will contribute to a sustainable and resilient national food supply.

Table 1-1 | Merit Criteria Implementation Strategies

Merit Criterion	Implementation Strategy
Safety*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install mumble strips, speed advisory signs, high-viz markings, and high friction surface treatment • Keep large farm industrial vehicles on roadways with fewer crashes, especially when changing elevation or during poor weather
Environmental Sustainability*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce VMT and harmful emissions for better local and national air quality and fresher produce • Install biodegradable mulch blankets to manage stormwater and protect native species • Berm road edges to prevent water from infiltrating and compromising restored pavement travel surfaces
Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure resilient access to fresh affordable food from efficient farm transport and power a strong regional-to-national economy

Merit Criterion	Implementation Strategy
Mobility and Community Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve public health and lower respiratory illnesses through better air quality from lower heavy vehicle emissions and idling • Improve system-wide connectivity across agriculture and food processors relying on safe and efficient trips to transport fresh produce on time without damage • Complement existing work across farm community initiatives investing in expanding agricultural growth
Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resecure vital “last mile” connections to farms to transport produce across key local and national markets and protect long-term industrial growth • Safeguard local farm employment and strong homeownership to retain residents through better County job access from more reliable travel
State of Good Repair*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring poor roads and bridges up to good condition starting with rebuilding the foundation to adding surface enhancements like slag toppings to eliminate blowouts and soft spots • Increase road and bridge load-bearing capacity to handle regular large heavy vehicles necessary for modern farming and food processors and reduce future maintenance costs
Partnership and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support existing multi-year partnerships across farmers and public officials collectively working for better farm access roads to provide affordable fresh local food to markets, food processors, and individual consumers
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploy innovative safety technologies like mumble strips, speed advisory signs, high-viz markings, and high friction surface treatment to enhance safety • Deliver project safely and efficiently

*Central to the project purpose.

Statement of Work

Technical and Engineering Aspects of the Project

The Project will reconstruct **over 43 miles** (228,025 linear feet) of rural roads within the Oceana County roadway system. This includes **24.5 miles** of existing paved roadway that will be reconstructed to all-season standards; **3.7 miles** of existing paved roadway that will be milled and coated with a hot-mix asphalt (HMA) overlay; and **14 miles** of existing gravel roads that will be regraded and compacted, with a slag (or equivalent) topping to prevent future damage. Slag topping is used to stabilize the roadway: it compacts over time and holds its shape, even under semi traffic. This reduces potholes, wheel ruts, and aggregate loss, and provides a safer driving surface for cars and trucks. The HMA overlay segments will include milling (either throughout or at existing joints) and applying a new 2” depth hot mix asphalt (HMA) overlay. The all-season upgrades will include crushing the existing asphalt layer and underlying gravel, then compacting

and shaping the material to regrade the roadway, and finally paving to 3.5” of depth HMA with mix designs that support semi traffic and farm equipment. A paved shoulder will be added to address safety and state of good repair, preventing the edge of the pavement from being damaged. [Berming](#) the roadway edge and constructing ditches where needed will prevent water backup on the roadway. This will help prevent water infiltration and cracked and damaged pavement that can occur during freeze-thaw cycles. Targeted tree removal at the edge of the road will also mitigate water infiltration (reducing snow, and ice on the road surface in the winter) and will create a clear zone for drivers, if they veer off the road. These scope elements will prolong pavement life and provide a “like new” condition. It will also allow seasonal weight restrictions (January to May) to be removed from almost 25 miles of roadway, allowing larger trucks to avoid long detours.

Modest roadway widening throughout the Project area will provide a safer route for large farm equipment and trucks, minimizing the potential for collisions. New safety elements will be incorporated, including the first-time use of “mumble strips” that vibrate the vehicle, alerting drivers that they are leaving the lane without creating noise pollution for neighbors. New reflective signage (with type XI sheeting) and lane striping will help alert drivers to intersections, curves, and the roadway edge. Safety improvements will be applied at a systemic level, following guidance from the [Manual for Selecting Safety Improvements on High Risk Rural Roads](#). All roadway work will remain within the existing footprint and is not anticipated to require any temporary or permanent property acquisition.

In addition to the road work, the Project includes upgrades to two bridges and one culvert. An existing double-barreled culvert and an existing homemade timber bridge will be replaced with pre-cast concrete box culverts. The new culverts will meet modern standards, provide equivalent or greater hydraulic capacity, and be designed to meet necessary loading standards. Modern culverts also allow for a natural bottom stream bed, improving sustainability. At the third location, an existing bridge will be rehabbed: milling the bridge deck, installing an epoxy overlay, retrofitting the beam, and replacing the guardrail at the approach.

Current Design Status

Concept planning and cost estimates have been completed by the OCRC staff and engineering consultants, identifying the scope for the roadway reconstruction and the three bridge/culvert upgrades. Surveys and soil borings will be completed as part of the final design phase; an consultant engineering RFP can be advertised, upon notice of grant award. MDOT LAP (a delegated authority for FHWA) will lead the environmental analysis, and the initial forms begin analysis of environmental resources have already been submitted to the MDOT LAP NEPA team. Based upon recent, similar projects performed by OCRC using federal funding, the NEPA class of action is anticipated to be a Categorical Exclusion. No property acquisition will be needed, and it is

not likely that a Section 106 or 4(f) analysis would be required given the Project’s scope and location.

Transportation Challenges to be Addressed

The Project addresses several constraints and challenges impacting farmers, distributors, and food processing companies. Although the County has made significant upgrades to their rural road network, many roads that farmers rely upon are underbuilt and deteriorated, which cause delays and damages fruits and vegetables. The crops produced at these farms are a critical part of America’s food supply, and while they can meet market demand, they cannot reliably get products to market on time and without waste. Road capacity cannot reliably handle necessary farm loads, with weather-induced delays causing fresh produce to spoil. RAISE funding will ensure on time deliveries by upgrading roadways and bridges/culverts to address the following transportation challenges:

Insufficient carrying capacity: Formal or informal load restrictions that impede contemporary farm vehicles and customer/market access to farms, including food businesses requiring full truckloads, especially during early growing seasons.

Delays to Market Poor roads limit how much product can be carried by outbound trucks and delay time sensitive fresh produce to markets and distributors.

Project Damage: Poor pavement and gravel road conditions cause bumpy rides, bruising and damaging fruits and vegetables.

Weather Impacts Rain and snow make roads unsafe, impassable, and limit load capacity due to poor shoulder and ditch condition.

Placing the Project in Broader Context

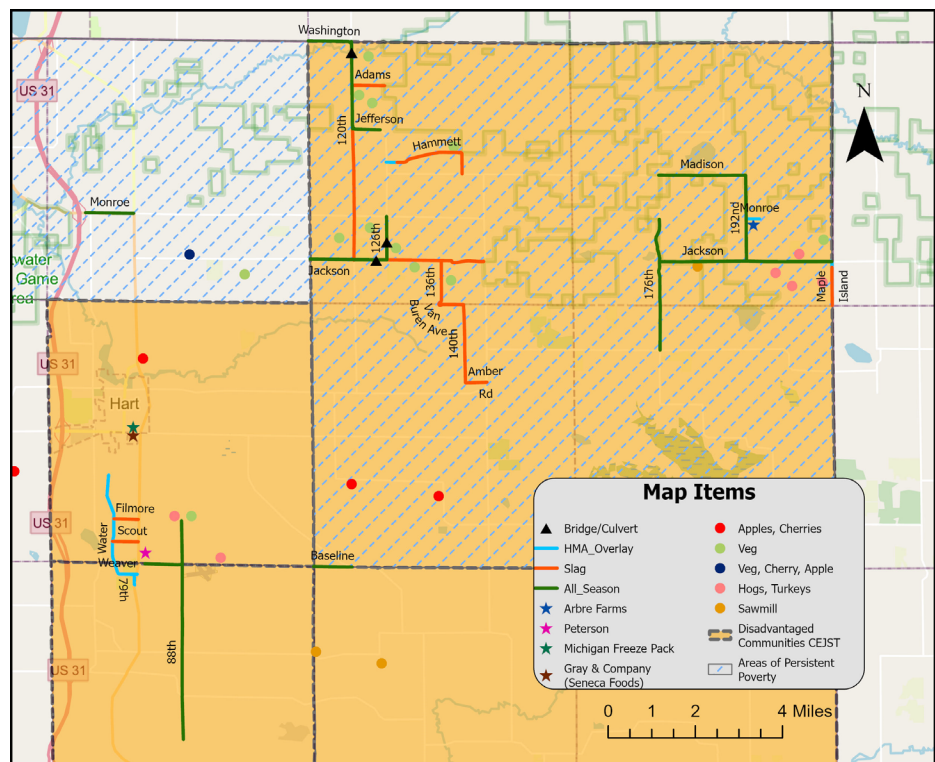
Given the temperate climate and access to the Great Lakes, Oceana County’s arable land appears to withstand some climate change impacts better than coastal agriculture, making the Project a strong investment for long-term agricultural resilience at the national level. Roadway infrastructure does not meet modern standards, is in poor condition, and continues to deteriorate, hampering Oceana County’s agricultural and food processing sector at a critically vulnerable juncture. As farming equipment and trucks have become larger, with local farms and processors expanding operations, underbuilt roads have deteriorated from ongoing heavy use by machinery and vehicles. Key customers (like [Peterson Farms](#), Meijer, and Gerber) are reluctant (or even refuse) to send trucks to pick up farm products in some cases. Meanwhile, local funding and federal formula funds are insufficient to address the substantial roadway needs for this agricultural powerhouse. Only 640 people across 36 square miles live in Crystal Township, and the road millage raises \$40,000 each year most of which must be spent on summer dust-control. Little is left for road and bridge capital improvements. RAISE funding will provide vital help modernizing Oceana County’s rural road network, which is crucial to connect farms and food processors to Interstates, feeder routes, markets, and suppliers, safeguarding access to one of America’s key agricultural regions.

Project Location Narrative

Oceana County is a **rural community** on the Western shore of Lake Michigan. With ample access to fresh water and a moderate climate well-suited for farming, the County is strongly agricultural, particularly in the Eastern part of the County. Oceana County is the top producer of asparagus in the US., in addition to growing green beans, soybeans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, corn, parsnips, peas, peppers, pumpkins, squash, zucchini, and wheat. They also grow soybeans and cereal grain as rotation crops, alongside pork, as part of a diverse agricultural economy. On a national scale, **Michigan ranks sixth in the US** for total agricultural production as the 16th largest agricultural exporting state ([USDA 2022](#)).

The seven largest vegetable farms at the northeast end of the County produce crops on over 12,000 acres. The County’s wide production base has also welcomed several major US fruit and vegetable processing plants: Peterson Farms, Arbre Farms, Seneca, and Michigan Freeze Pack, sourcing raw products from Oceana County and nearby, developing national markets for local produce. To meet growing demand, food

Figure 1-1 | Project Scope, CEJST and AOPP



processors also want to keep expanding, given the national value of a sustainable the resilient agricultural center, but poor local infrastructure threatens to curtail that expansion.

Agriculture and food processing are major economic drivers in the County State. Despite this strong rural agricultural base, the Project area includes four census tracts, three of which are identified as **Historically Disadvantaged** from CEJST using the 2010 census (103, 104, 105), and two of which are **Areas of Persistent Poverty** from the 2020 census (105 and 108). The USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer identifies the Project area as having Transportation Insecurity (86th percentile), consistent with the needs identified by this Project. In addition to reliably connecting farming businesses with larger distribution networks, the Project will improve access to jobs and health care, where health vulnerability (89th percentile in 103) and social vulnerability scores are also high (76th percentile in 105).

Figure 1-2 | Project Scope with Farms & Businesses

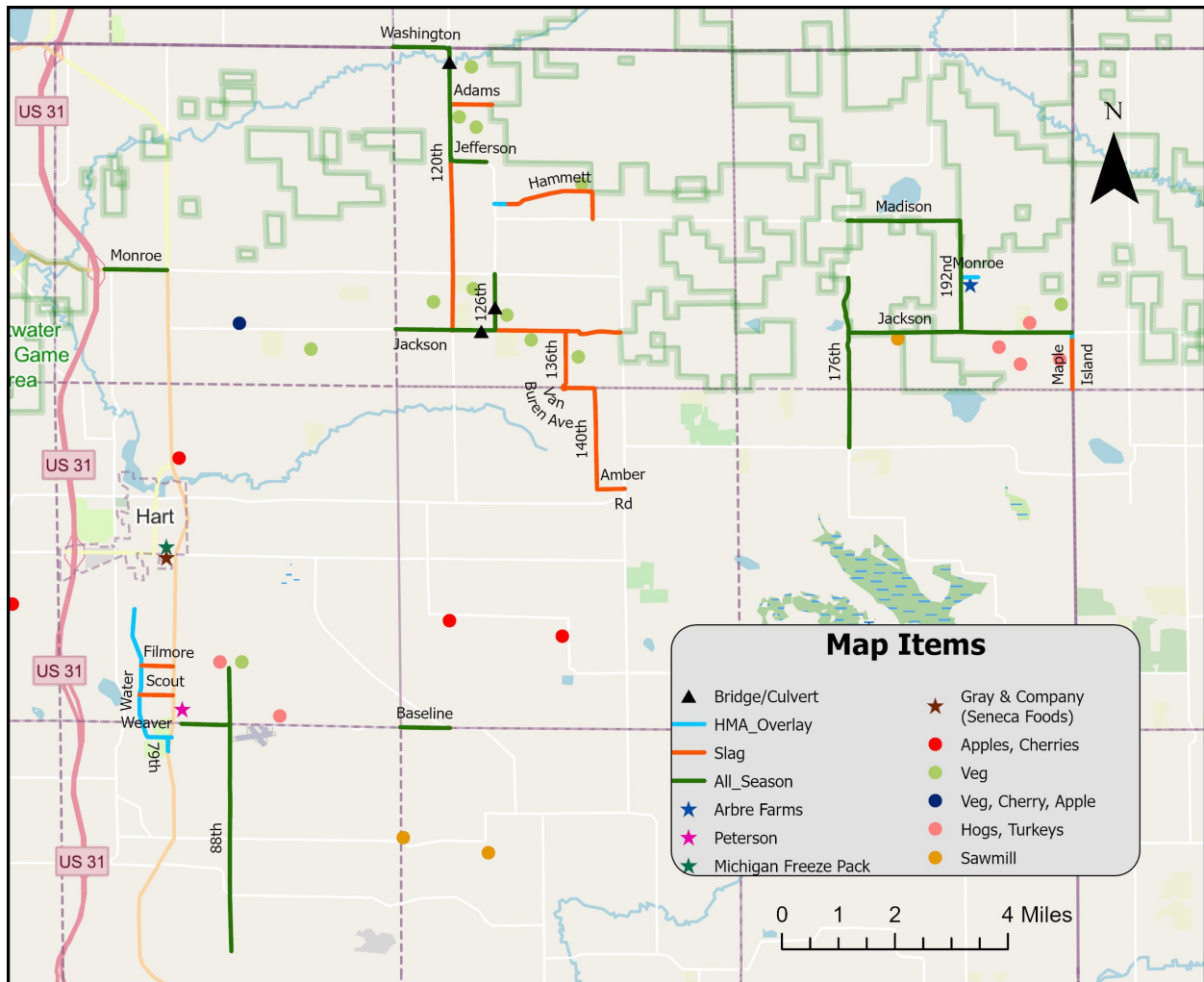


Figure 1-3 | Semi Stuck Due to Washouts

