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For Immediate Release

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## *Connect Ohio Releases Fairfield County Broadband Study Results*

**Lancaster, Ohio** – Fairfield County residents have a strong interest in improved broadband service; rural areas of Fairfield County suffer from lack of access to broadband service; there are a high percentage of telecommuters in the county; and residents are frustrated with the broadband speed they currently receive. These are four of the takeaways from a study done by Connect Ohio in partnership with the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance and other entities throughout the county.

Fairfield County was selected to receive the study after identifying broadband access as one of its critical goals to remain competitive from an economic and workforce development standpoint. A survey was circulated and more than 1,500 residents responded. The response time and high percentage of respondents shows an interest level that Connect Ohio hasn't seen in many markets.

"Our in-depth analysis in Fairfield County identified the geographic and demographic trends perpetuating the digital divide, including significant coverage gaps leaving more than 15,000 households without internet accessibility," said Stu Johnson, Executive Director of Connect Ohio. "Nearly 55% of those who do subscribe report that they are dissatisfied with their connection, generally suggesting that the speed is not adequate to meet their needs."

Eighty-seven percent of the county has access to at least 25 Megabyte per second internet, which is higher than many rural counties. But more than 38 percent of those households only have one choice for a fixed internet provider. The study showed that the largest gap in digital equity can be found in Amanda, Hocking, Clear Creek and Madison townships as well as lower income households.

"I think the study reaffirms that Fairfield County residents are using technology at a high rate but there's a demand for better service," said Rick Szabrak, Fairfield County Economic and Workforce Development Director. "I hope broadband providers see this need and expand in our county. Broadband is important in rural areas so farms can remain competitive and technology can be used to help educate students."

The full results can be found at <http://connectmycommunity.org/fairfield-county/>. Szabrak said that the Alliance will create a committee to focus on recommended actions from the survey that help increase broadband usage among vulnerable populations, whether due to location or budget constraints.

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