



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development

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Release No. 13.08

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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT STATE DIRECTOR VISITS TWO CENTRAL CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES

Celebrates homeownership, announces investments in rural area

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, Calif., May 29, 2008 – USDA Rural Development State Director Ben Higgins stopped today in Orosi and Mendota, Calif. to celebrate homeownership and other investments made in these Central Valley communities as part of his tour through Central California.

The morning began at a self-help housing subdivision in Orosi where Higgins kicked-off National Homeownership Month with Visalia-based non-profit Self-Help Enterprises. Celebrations included commemorating the completion of eleven homes with the new homeowners and assisting other still engaged in construction with a wall-raising.

“Homeownership is the first big step to financial security for millions of Americans,” said Higgins. “Our Mutual Self-Help Housing program helps bridge the affordability gap in California and provides an opportunity for families to build personal equity that transforms the options they and their children have in the future.”

Self-Help Housing families spend a minimum of 40 hours per week on home construction, working with 10 to 12 other families. Typical projects take from 10 to 12 months to complete all homes in the development. Upon completion, these families have new homes in a safe and secure neighborhood where they know everyone as a result of their team effort.

The tour concluded at the Mendota Community Center where Higgins announced an investment of \$1.4 million in grant and \$2.4 million in low-interest loan to the City of Mendota for critical wastewater infrastructure upgrades.

“With these funds, we’re providing Mendota the opportunity to deal with serious environmental challenges, including the need for safe, adequate wastewater disposal and infrastructure,” said Higgins. “This is a significant investment by USDA Rural Development in the future viability of this community.”

Mendota’s existing wastewater system cannot adequately treat the city’s wastewater and is currently operating at capacity preventing economic growth in Mendota. USDA Rural Development funds will be used to construct new aerated treatment lagoons and disposal ponds, as well as raise existing levees above the 100-year flood plain protecting the facility and surrounding environment during storms.

“Like Mendota, many of California’s small towns and rural communities have difficulty affording critical water and wastewater infrastructure,” said Higgins. “Throughout the state, our agency is investing over \$50 million annually to provide clean drinking water, safe sanitation, and improved water service. We’re working everyday to give rural residents the same amenities and safeguards their urban counterparts have long taken for granted, and we’re proud to take time today to mark the progress made.”

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USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development has invested over \$91 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. As a result, over 1.7 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at one of California's 18 local USDA Rural Development offices or by visiting <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ca>.

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