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USDA APPOINTS DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Amherst, MA – Local USDA officials announced today that USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack has formally selected Cheryl Cook to be Deputy Under Secretary for USDA Rural Development.

Cook will manage policies and programs in Rural Development's Business and Cooperatives, Housing and Community Facilities, and Utilities divisions.

"Cook brings with her a distinguished record of service as well as a keen understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural Americans today," Secretary Vilsack said. "I am confident that she will help USDA meet President Obama's goal to rebuild and revitalize rural communities by expanding Broadband networks, increasing investment in rural infrastructure and developing renewable energy."

Before joining USDA, Cook served as Deputy Secretary for Marketing and Economic Development at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. In that role, she often worked with several other USDA agencies, including the Food and Nutrition Service, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the Agricultural Marketing Service. Prior to that, Cook worked for the Keystone Development Center, a non-profit organization in Pennsylvania that helps new and emerging cooperatives. Cook also was a member of the National Farmers Union's public policy staff.

"I've had the pleasure of working with Deputy Under Secretary Cook in the past and I'm eager to work with her again" said Bill Gouzounis, Acting State Director for USDA Rural Development in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. "Deputy Under Secretary Cook has an ardent interest in community development and is a strong advocate of encouraging federal agencies to reach out to state and local organizations to develop the best strategy for delivering federal dollars."

USDA Rural Development's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural Americans. Rural Development fosters growth in homeownership, finances business development, and supports the creation of critical community and technology infrastructure. In 2008, the Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island Rural Development jurisdiction provided over \$167 million in financial assistance to the rural communities of those three states.

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