

VILSACK ANNOUNCES ENERGY AUDIT APPLICATIONS NOW BEING ACCEPTED

WASHINGTON, March 11, 2009 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that the department is accepting funding applications from eligible entities for grants to conduct energy audits under the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).

“For the first time ever, USDA will make grant funding available this year through the Rural Energy for America Program to help agricultural producers and rural small businesses obtain audits to identify ways to improve energy efficiency,” Vilsack said. “The assistance provided by this program is in keeping with President Obama’s energy conservation goals for our nation.” The program is authorized in Section 9007 of the 2008 Farm Bill.

The audits are intended to help rural small businesses and agricultural producers determine where to make changes in their operations to enable them to reduce energy consumption. Audits are required for renewable energy and energy efficiency projects funded through REAP that exceed \$50,000. States, tribal and local governments, land grant colleges or universities, other institutions of higher learning, and electric cooperatives and public power entities are eligible to receive funds to conduct the audits. Parties seeking audits from the grantees must pay 25 percent of audit costs.

Applications for grants must be completed and submitted on paper or electronically no later than June 9. For further details about eligibility rules and application procedures, see page 10533 of the March 11, 2009, *Federal Register* at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>. USDA Rural Development intends to publish and seek public comment on a proposed regulation for the REAP program later this year. USDA Rural Development’s mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural residents. Rural Development fosters growth in homeownership, finances business development, and supports the creation of critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA Rural Development’s web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.