



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**USDA FUNDS ASSIST IN MARKETING
NORTHEAST NEBRASKA COMMUNITIES**

--Economic development planning, technical assistance and online access available--

Norfolk, Neb., December 18--USDA Rural Development presented a symbolic funding check of \$50,000 today, which represents USDA funds provided to the Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District (NENEDD) to help strengthen the business infrastructure of Northeast Nebraska. The monies will assist in the delivery of economic development planning and technical assistance to 16 counties with the potential of helping to create and or retain approximately 125 jobs in the area.

With the USDA monies, the NENEDD hired a Community Economic Development Coordinator, Michela Keeler. Ms. Keeler is a native of Niobrara, Nebraska and graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha with her Masters Degree in Public Administration with a concentration in Local Government. She received her Undergraduate Degree from Wayne State College and Associates from Northeast Community College. During her college years, Ms. Keeler worked in the distinguished offices of the Mayor of Omaha-Mike Fahey, Norfolk City Administrator-Michael Nolan, and Norfolk City Attorney-Clint Shukei.

Keeler will coordinate efforts in the region to prepare community data and information on available buildings and industrial sites to be posted to on-line economic development data systems. Systems such as the Nebraska Economic Development Information (NEDI Online) (<http://nedionline.com/>) and Location One Information Systems (LOIS) (<http://www.aquilaeconomicdevelopment.com/>) along with other online data systems used in marketing Nebraska communities will be utilized.

Online data profiles of communities contain detailed information about a community's labor force, business environment, quality of life, infrastructure, transportation, utilities and other information used by site selection consultants and business officials making site selection decisions. NENEDD will also assist communities in assessing infrastructure, evaluating the need for industrial sites and buildings, and other necessary steps in assisting in the expansion of existing businesses and industries and in the attraction of new jobs to the area.

“The USDA funds will enhance NENEDD's partnering with state and federal officials and economic development service providers from electric, gas and telecommunications utilities. This will help provide greater assistance to communities through economic development strategic planning sessions and steps taken to bring new jobs to the region,” said Renay Robison-Scheer, executive director of the NENEDD.

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The NENEDD utilizes federal, state, and private financing programs and leverages private investment dollars in pursuit of assisting communities to gain the needed infrastructure to attract and develop private investment into the region. Assistance includes not only preparing grant or loan applications, but more importantly facilitating the planning and citizen involvement process that leads to the setting of goals and priorities and the development of written plans of action. Counties served by NENEDD include Antelope, Boone, Burt, Cedar, Colfax, Cuming, Dixon, Dodge, Knox, Madison, Nance, Pierce, Platte, Stanton, Thurston, and Wayne.

Dale Wemhoff, rural development manager for USDA Rural Development stated, "A community that has detailed information and statistical data about its business environment and quality of life online will reach a larger audience of business and industry and economic development professionals. Communities need to identify their potential for bringing new and better jobs to their communities and to utilize their existing labor pools to the fullest. Today's economic development project will help communities move towards this objective."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) dollars will be used over a two-year period. These funds will be joined by a \$54,000 contribution by the NENEDD. Through the Rural Business Opportunity Grant program, grant funds are awarded to non-profits, public bodies, federally recognized tribal groups and cooperatives to provide technical assistance for business development and to conduct economic planning in rural areas.

For more information regarding the USDA funding contact Deborah Drbal, USDA Rural Development, Room 152, Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln, NE 68508 or phone (402) 437-5558, (402) 437-5093 TDY. Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne/>.

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