

NEWS RELEASE
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**VENEMAN HIGHLIGHTS NEARLY \$221.5 MILLION IN COMMUNITY
WATER/WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE LOANS AND GRANTS IN
CELEBRATION OF EARTH DAY**

122,500 Households and Businesses to Benefit From New or Upgraded Systems

KANE, Pa., April 22, 2004 – In recognition of the 34th Annual Earth Day Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today highlighted \$221.5 million in investments to 44 states by the Bush Administration for rural water and wastewater loans and grants to assist rural communities' environmental and safe drinking water needs.

“These funds are helping ensure a healthy and clean environment for future generations of rural Americans,” said Veneman. “These funds will enable rural communities to build and improve rural water and sewage systems that will provide cleaner water, recreation and wildlife resources.”

Funding for the projects is comprised of \$109 million in loans and \$112 million in grants. Included is \$21 million to fund the selection of 16 technical assistance and training grant applications and 46 solid waste management grant applications. The technical assistance and training grants go to nonprofit organizations to provide technical assistance and training to associations on a wide range of issues relating to the delivery of water and waste disposal services. The solid waste management grants are made to public and private nonprofit organizations for providing technical assistance and training to associations to reduce or eliminate pollution of water resources and improve planning and management of solid waste facilities.

A complete list of the selected loan and grant recipients and projects can be found at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/newsroom/news.htm>. Funding of selected applicants will be contingent upon meeting the conditions of the loan and grant agreements.

Veneman said that since the beginning of the Bush Administration, USDA Rural Development has funded \$4.9 billion in loans and grants, including \$762 million in 2002 Farm Bill financing, to assist communities in the construction or improvement of over 3,578 water or waste water systems, benefiting more than 2.7 million people living in rural areas.

USDA Rural Development celebrated Earth Day in Nebraska by presenting a symbolic funding check totaling nearly \$4.4 million to the City of Geneva. The funds will allow for needed improvements to the community's sanitary sewer system that serves 2,226 rural residents. Earth Day posters drawn by the local elementary school lined the inside of the Log Cabin at the City Park where the Earth Day program was held. Donated trees were

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planted in the park in honor of Earth Day. Donors included Geneva Rescue Squad, Geneva Ballplayers Association, American Legion Post 68, City of Geneva, Veteran of Foreign Wars Post 7102, Homestead Girl Scouts Council - Brownie Troop 91, Troop 406, Troop 203, Troop 390, Jr Troop 414 and Cadet Troop 234, Geneva Lions Club, Cub Scouts Pac 175, Chandler & Conrad Schelkopf.

"We are appreciative to USDA Rural Development for providing us with the funds needed to keep our city's sewer system compliant with mandatory regulations," stated Mayor Rodney Norrie.

Geneva's existing sewer system dates back to the 1920's with wastewater currently being treated with a rotating biological contactor system in which effluent from the treatment plant is discharged into Turkey Creek. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) regulates the effluent through a discharge permit which limits the amounts of Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD), suspended solids, and ammonia residuals. With the NDEQ lowering the ammonia limits under this permit in the very near future, the existing plant will be unable to meet the requirements of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit and the plant will be placed under an Administrative Order by NDEQ.

"The City of Geneva's sanitary sewer improvement project will upgrade and expand the existing treatment plant to meet National Pollution Discharge Elimination System requirements," stated Roger Meeks, rural development manager for USDA Rural Development. "Additionally, the improvements will assist in accommodating Geneva with its anticipated growth in population and business."

The USDA Rural Development \$3,418,400 loan and \$981,000 grant were provided through the USDA Rural Development Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant program. The loan term is 20 years at the rate of 4.375 percent interest. For additional information contact Roger Meeks at 6030 S. 58th Street Suite B Lincoln, Neb. 68516 or phone (402) 423-9683, (402) 437-5093 (TDY). Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne/>.

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