



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development
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Release No. 0358.10

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USDA Launches Ask The Expert, an On-Demand Online Knowledge Database

WASHINGTON, July 7, 2010 – Today, USDA announced the launch of Ask the Expert, a knowledge-based search engine that optimizes customer experience while conserving taxpayer dollars. This intuitive tool relies on self-service to deliver reliable and relevant information 24/7, greatly reducing wait time and USDA resources associated with the previous system.

"This exciting new tool is one of the many ways that USDA is working hard to use technology to provide the public with high quality service while using taxpayer dollars as efficiently as possible," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, "At USDA.gov, Ask the Expert now welcomes your questions and will continue to develop easily accessible responses to online questions in the months and years ahead."

Ask the Expert connects with pre-existing USDA knowledgebase systems and leverages information from Food Safety and Inspection Service's [AskKaren](#) and the Farm Service Agency's [AskFSA](#), enabling consumers to visit one place and receive a range of answers. Currently, the system holds nearly 2,000 questions and answers for a wide range of USDA issues and programs. This interconnected system provides access to expanded information and resources, better customer experiences and the ability to easily access a wide range of information.

Frequently asked questions are stored in an online knowledgebase that pulls data and information from all of USDA's agency resources. Through this, users can find relevant information on Animal Assistance, Loans and Grants; Civil Rights; Commodity Grading and Standards; Conservation; Energy and Environment; Food and Nutrition; Forest Services; Markets and Trade; Research and Education; Rural and Community Development, to name a few.

In two short weeks, Ask the Expert has seen more than 1,625 customer use sessions and has answered more than 1,475 questions, boasting a self service rate of 90.8%. Over the next six months, additional questions and answers will be added to the knowledgebase as a result of public inquiries, search patterns and new information. This system will "learn" based on feedback about the usefulness of answers and will expand over time. Visit Ask the Expert online today and view available information or submit an inquiry at <http://www.usda.gov/askexpert>.

Through its Rural Development mission area, USDA administers and manages more than 40 housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a network of 6,100 employees located in the nation's capital and 500 state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents,

Committed to the future of rural communities.

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farmers, and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of nearly \$140 billion in loans and loan guarantees.

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Further information on USDA Rural Development may be obtained by visiting USDA's website at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>. In West Virginia, call 1-800-295-8228 to be put in touch with the appropriate personnel serving your county. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202.720.2600 (voice and TDD).

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