



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development

1550 Earl Core Road, Suite 101 • Morgantown, WV 26505

Phone: 304.284.4860 OR 1.800.295.8228 • Fax: 304.284.4893 • TDD: 304.284.4836 • Web: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wv>

Gail Bennett, Public Affairs Specialist – (304) 284-4875

Contact: Weldon Freeman (202) 690-1384

USDA Announces New Broadband Program and Interim Regulations to Help Expand Economic Opportunity in Rural Areas

*New Program Will Help Build Foundation for Rural Areas
To Out-Educate and Win the Future*

WASHINGTON, March 10, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA issued a Notice of Solicitations of Applications and regulations implementing the 2008 Farm Bill for the broadband loan program. Building out broadband infrastructure remains an important Obama Administration priority to help lay a new foundation for economic opportunity to help rural America win the future.

“Broadband investments are an essential part of the Obama Administration’s effort to ‘win the future’ by out-innovating, out-educating, and out-building our global competitors,” Vilsack said. “Investments in rural broadband networks create jobs and economic opportunity for rural America. Broadband is critical communications infrastructure of the 21st century, and it is vital to building vibrant rural communities.”

The interim regulation for the Broadband Program requires that certain definitions affecting eligibility be revised and published annually by the agency in the *Federal Register*. For the purpose of this interim regulation, the agency has amended two definitions: Broadband Service and Broadband Lending Speed and Incumbent Service Provider. The application guide to assist in preparing of applications is available at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp_farmbill.html

USDA’s Farm Bill broadband loan program has invested over \$1 billion over the past decade in more than 100 projects nationwide. This loan program is fundamental to increasing access to broadband, which will enable rural communities to expand markets, compete in the global economy, and create high-paying jobs.

RUS is planning to schedule training opportunities to educate applicants on new program requirements, and how to submit complete and competitive applications. Dates for the training will be published on the USDA website shortly.

The notice is being issued prior to passage of the final appropriations act to allow potential applicants time to submit proposals and give the agency time to process applications within the current fiscal year. Upon completion of a 2011 Appropriations Act, RUS will publish a subsequent notice identifying the amount of funding available for broadband loans. Expenses incurred in developing applications will be at the applicant’s own risk.

Committed to the future of rural communities.

“USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.”

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages more than 40 housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of employees located in the nation's capital and state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of more than \$146 billion in loans and loan guarantees.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Further information on USDA Rural Development may be obtained by visiting USDA's web site 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).

##