



NEWS RELEASE

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Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Funding To Increase Educational and Health Care Access in Rural Communities

MORGANTOWN, WV, Jan. 31, 2011 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced recently that 106 projects in 38 states and one territory have been selected to receive more than \$34.7 million in grants to fund educational projects and expand access to health care services in rural areas through USDA's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program.

"Too many rural areas cannot take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by broadband for improved education and health care. These funds will help communities enhance their educational and training programs and deliver improved health care services for their residents," Vilsack said.

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant Program provides access to education, training and health care resources in rural areas. For example, an award of \$110,438 to Pretera Center for Mental Health Services will be used to install a video conferencing and behavioral health management system that will provide behavioral health and substance abuse services to rural residents in six West Virginia counties. This project will allow patients to receive medical care from doctors within their own homes, as opposed to driving long distances, and will allow health professionals to better manage their cases, and to reach more patients in these rural and mountainous communities.

An award of \$350,232 to the Alaska Gateway School District Project in Tok will bring distance learning to 11 schools in rural villages in the interior of Alaska. These funds will allow the school district to expand class availability and to purchase computers, interactive videoconferencing equipment, and whiteboards.

In Oklahoma, an award of \$496,516 to INTEGRIS Health, Inc. will replace outdated systems with modern video conferencing equipment throughout this network of 20 rural schools, hospitals and health centers. Links to 11 resource hospitals and physicians offices will provide a variety of health and educational services, such as speech therapy and instruction to students, telestroke services that connect patients with physicians, continuing medical education for healthcare professionals at the hospital sites, and a stroke recognition program to train students to recognize the warning signs of stroke and help save lives in their communities.

Committed to the future of rural communities.

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Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).

Funding is contingent upon the recipient meeting the conditions of the grant agreement. For a complete list of the DLT projects announced today, please go to the following web page: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/supportdocuments/ChartDLTAWARDSJan2011.pdf>.

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 6,100 employees located in the nation's capital and nearly 500 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 nearly \$142 billion in loans and loan guarantees.

Rural Development serves as the lead Federal entity for rural development needs and administers program assistance through its housing, business, community and infrastructure programs. 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).

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