



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) 366-2921, ext. 214

Contact: USDA Office of Communications (202) 720-4623

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Funding To Improve Access to Education and Health Care in Rural Areas

WASHINGTON, December 8, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that recipients in 34 states and one territory will receive funding to improve access to health care and educational services in rural areas. Funding is provided through the USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program.

“This program delivers educational and medical opportunities that are urgently needed in remote, rural areas,” Vilsack said. “President Obama has said that no matter where you live in America, you should have access to quality educational opportunities. Rural Americans deserve the same opportunities for education and medical care as metropolitan-area residents, and these funds will make that happen.”

The grants, administered by USDA Rural Development through its Rural Utilities Service, will help fund 100 distance learning and telemedicine projects, including six in North Carolina. In Duplin County – about 60 minutes from Fayetteville, James Sprunt Community College will receive a \$192,870 grant that will enable faculty to offer college-level and advanced placement courses to a network of five surrounding high schools. Other North Carolina recipients include UNC-Chapel Hill, East Carolina University, Easter Seals UCP NC & VA, Sampson Regional Medical Center and Mission Healthcare Foundation, Inc. Rural Development Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager made today’s announcement on Vilsack’s behalf at James Sprunt Community College in Kenansville, N.C.

In **West Virginia**, The Board of Education of the County of Roane dba Roane County Schools has been selected to receive a Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant in the amount of \$298,339. Rural Development funds will be used to purchase equipment for a distance learning network between 12 public school sites and West Virginia University in two counties of North West and North Central West Virginia. Challenged by factors of isolation and poverty endemic to rural Appalachia, the two school districts have teamed up to address these and related issues of high dropout rates, obesity, lack of technical job skills and the need for professional development. Media carts equipped with desktop video units, PC tablets, and computer workstations will be deployed at each school location. West Virginia University at Parkersburg will serve as the academic hub, offering an array of classes, including advanced placement and college level classes and professional development for teachers. Roane County Board of Education offices will serve as the administrative hub and house the control equipment of multi-point bridge, video communications server, other management software, including scheduling and firewall transversal functions. Nearby Roane General Hospital will link into the system and offer wellness programs and exercise classes.

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).

Also included in this round of awards is funding to the Maine Sea Coast Missionary Society to buy video equipment for a ship-based medical examining room. In Sac City, Iowa, Loring Hospital will receive video conferencing equipment to connect the emergency room, outpatient and inpatient centers with local schools and area nursing homes. In Mississippi, a grant will link the University of South Mississippi with 27 schools to provide a wide range of classes to students. The Kiamichi Technology Center in Oklahoma will use grant funds to provide training to firefighters, emergency medical technicians and community members.

The DLT program provides expanded educational opportunities to students in extremely remote areas. For example, in Native communities above the Arctic Circle in Alaska, there are sometimes up to three grades in a single village classroom, and DLT funding allows teaching through remote teleconferencing. In Barrow, Jana Harcharek, Director of Inupiaq Education, uses distance learning to provide dual-credit courses through Ilisagvik College. She uses the Inupiaq values, culture, history, language and philosophy as a foundation from which to provide instruction to students over a distance learning system.

For a list of awardees that will receive funding under Rural Development's DLT Program, please see <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/SupportDocuments/rdDLTNRChart12-8-2011.pdf>.

Awards are contingent upon the recipients meeting the terms of the agreement with USDA.

Since taking office, President Obama's Administration has taken historic steps to improve the lives of rural Americans, put people back to work and build thriving economies in rural communities. From proposing the American Jobs Act to establishing the first-ever White House Rural Council – chaired by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack – the President wants the federal government to be the best possible partner for rural businesses, entrepreneurs and people who want to live, work and raise their families in rural communities.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of 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 a portfolio of more than \$160 billion in loans and loan guarantees. Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/> for additional information about the agency's programs or to locate the USDA Rural Development office nearest you.

#