



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **USDA Announces Funding to Improve 911 and Emergency Communications Services in Rural America**

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 9, 2011 — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced changes in federal regulations that will help rural communities obtain advanced emergency communications services, including 911 access to better respond to emergencies and disasters. These changes will help rural communities obtain next generation 911 services necessary to maintain the security and safety of rural residents and businesses.

"As we mark the 10th anniversary of an event that cost thousands of American lives, we continue to work to ensure the safety of our rural communities," Vilsack said. "Our telecommunications networks should work best when they are needed the most, and that is in times of emergencies. This change provides rural first responders with the tools they need to maintain mission-critical voice and broadband service during times of emergency or during natural disasters."

USDA published in the [Federal Register](#) interim telecommunications loan program eligibility requirements on financing the construction of interoperable, integrated public safety communications networks in rural areas. You can view the Federal Register information at : <http://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2011/09/12/2011-23152/expansion-of-911-access-telecommunications-loan-program>. Funding for the program will be provided by USDA [Rural Development](#) through the Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

The new eligibility criteria would allow USDA to leverage public and private resources to speed the rural deployment of dual-use public safety/commercial wireless networks, address homeland security communications needs along America's rural international borders, and finance enhanced 911 capabilities for carriers and communities. Advantages include the ability to precisely locate rural wireless 911 calls, contact 911 via text message, or send emergency responders photos or videos of crime scenes or accidents. The new regulation would also give RUS ability to finance wireless upgrades for public safety and security.

USDA is committed to helping rural communities obtain high-quality broadband service that can also be used by emergency responders at the state, local and federal level. Interoperability, or the ability of emergency responders from various agencies and jurisdictions to communicate during emergencies, is a priority of the Obama Administration.

"Rural telecommunications providers receiving RUS loan financing have successfully built out high-capacity fiber networks capable of carrying voice and data traffic to and from wireless

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towers and other mobile base stations," RUS Administrator Jonathan Adelstein said. "These fiber backhaul networks are necessary to enable the deployment of mobile voice and data services to rural and urban communities. This new lending authority complements the Administration's broader efforts to improve emergency communications throughout the nation."

Since taking office, President Obama's Administration has taken significant steps to improve the lives of rural Americans and has provided broad support for rural communities. The Obama Administration has set goals of modernizing infrastructure by providing broadband access to 10 million Americans, expanding educational opportunities for students in rural areas, and providing affordable health care. In the long term, these unparalleled rural investments will help ensure that America's rural communities are repopulating, self-sustaining and thriving economically.

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. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of more than \$155 billion in loans and loan guarantees. 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.

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