



NEWS RELEASE

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HELPING FAMILIES BUILD THEIR FUTURE

USDA Rural Development Celebrates National Homeownership Month

MECCA, Calif., June 21, 2007 – With sky-high housing prices and construction costs on the rise, owning a home can seem an impossible dream for many Californians. However, USDA Rural Development is making that dream a reality for hundreds of low-income rural families with the agency's Mutual Self-Help Housing program. Through the program, families are given the tools to build their future, utilizing their own labor as "sweat equity" to reduce construction costs. During June, National Homeownership Month, USDA Rural Development will celebrate the many successes of the Mutual Self-Help Housing program, utilized for over 40 years in California.

"Homeownership is the first big step to financial security for millions of Americans," said USDA Rural Development State Director Ben Higgins. "Our Mutual Self-Help Housing program helps bridge the affordability gap in California and provides an opportunity for families to build personal equity that transforms the options they and their children have in the future."

Self-Help Housing families spend a minimum of 40 hours per week on home construction, working with 10 to 12 other families. Typical projects take from 10 to 12 months to complete all homes in the development. Upon completion, these families have new homes in a safe and secure neighborhood where they know everyone as a result of their team effort.

"Through self-help housing, families are doing more than just building affordable homes; they are developing skills that can lead to new opportunities, and strengthening families and communities," said Higgins.

Today in the Riverside County city of Mecca, USDA Rural Development Deputy Administrator for Single Family Housing, David Villano and Higgins joined Coachella Valley Housing Coalition (CVHC) to celebrate the completion of 39 Mutual Self-Help Homes.

CVHC, based in Indio, Calif., is one of 13 non-profit affordable housing development companies in California that works with USDA Rural Development. CVHC coordinates loan applications and then trains and supervises families as they work together to build their own homes. California's Self-Help Housing program is the largest in the nation, with annual funding totals exceeding \$50 million for Self-Help projects.

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Since 2001, USDA Rural Development California has provided nearly \$800 million in loans and grants to help over 6,000 California families move into their own home or improve their current home. Nationally, the Bush Administration has invested \$24.7 billion to help over 353,000 families become homeowners.

As part of National Homeownership Month celebrations, Higgins has four additional stops at Self-Help Housing sites where USDA Rural Development funds are being put to work in rural communities.

On May 31, Higgins kicked-off the month with a wall-raising in Biola, Fresno County at the site developed by Self-Help Enterprises. On June 7 he congratulated the families of the Los Amigos subdivision in Windsor, Sonoma County developed by Burbank Housing. USDA Rural Development staff joined families in Linda, Yuba County on June 19 to help with the construction of 31 homes in the Sierra Vista subdivision developed by Mercy Housing. The final event of the month will take place on June 22 at the 14-home subdivision in Red Bluff, Tehama County developed by Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP).

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development has invested over \$76 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. As a result, over 1.5 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at one of California's 25 local USDA Rural Development offices or by visiting <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ca>.

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"Committed to the future of rural communities"
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