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**USDA ANNOUNCES \$2 MILLION IN GRANTS TO SUPPORT RURAL HOMEOWNERSHIP
IN 21 STATES AND U.S. TERRITORIES**
2,500 Families Expected to Benefit From Technical and Supervisory Assistance

WASHINGTON, September 16, 2004 -- Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced the selection of 23 community and faith-based organizations in 21 states and U.S. territories to receive \$2 million in rural housing technical and supervisory assistance (TSA) grants. The grants support President Bush's commitment to help local communities increase homeownership opportunities in rural areas.

"Rural America's homeownership rate is at an all time high, but there are still more families in need of a place to call home," said Veneman. "By working with community and faith-based organizations, these funds will further expand our housing partnership efforts in rural communities."

In support of President Bush's challenge to increase minority homeownership by 5.5 million families by the year 2010, USDA Rural Development set a goal of increasing credit counseling and homeownership education to ensure that more families are able to successfully become and remain homeowners. The TSA grant program assists low-income families in obtaining adequate housing to meet their needs or to continue occupancy in existing housing. To achieve this, the grants support programs of counseling and housing delivery. Comprehensive TSA projects assist low income rural families by providing homeownership counseling, loan packaging for USDA Rural Development and other lenders, and delinquency counseling.

Applicants selected for technical and supervisory assistance grants include six organizations dedicated to serving primarily Native Americans and Alaskan Natives and five organizations will target Hispanic Americans. For instance, funds will be used by Catholic Charities bureau, Inc of Superior, Wisconsin, to provide technical and supervisory assistance for rural home ownership in northern Wisconsin. The technical assistance funds will provide housing counseling in Bad River, Lac du Flambeau, Menomonee and Stockbridge/Munsee Native American reservations in Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Oneida, Rusk, Sawyer and Washburn Counties.

In total, 15 of the 23 selected grant recipients will assist families in areas with a high minority population. A complete list of selected recipients can be viewed at USDA Rural Development's website at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>. Funding of selected applicants will be contingent upon meeting the conditions of the grant agreements.

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 provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development and critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.