

USDA/Rural Development

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VENEMAN ANNOUNCES \$11.3 MILLION IN BROADBAND TECHNOLOGY GRANTS

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26, 2003 - Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced this week that \$11.3 million in broadband community grants will be awarded to 34 communities in 20 states to enable residents to access the Internet and take advantage of the opportunities available through the global digital community.

“Technology is key to the ability of rural businesses to compete in a global marketplace,” said Veneman. “Extending broadband technology to allow more families and communities to access business, education and health services is part of the Bush Administration’s effort to expand economic opportunity and improve the quality of life in rural America.”

“With the expansion of technology, fewer families will find it necessary to leave their hometowns to find jobs,” said Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas C. Dorr. “Technology can help bring jobs to rural America.”

Communities selected (list located at www.rurdev.usda.gov) do not have access to broadband connectivity for the essential services of police and fire protection, hospitals, libraries and schools. In return for receiving a grant, the communities will provide residents with computer and Internet access. The grant program supplements USDA Rural Development’s standard high-speed telecommunications loan program.

The Crawford Cultural Center, Inc. of Crawford, Neb. received \$153,328 in broadband community grant funds. The grant will bring broadband service to this small rural community of 1,107 as well as to the residents and schools of rural Eastern Sioux County.

Crawford is over 319 miles away from the nearest urban center making the need for broadband great. Broadband service is critical to the community’s economic survival as it will facilitate the creation of new jobs and increase the security of existing jobs. Two local businesses are facing either relocation or limitation on growth, directly tied to lack of broadband connectivity. Promoting tourism, new economic initiatives, telecommuting, telemarketing, development of home based businesses, software and financial services are all outcomes that can be achieved through broadband service, which in turn will strengthen the rural economy of the area.

The Community Connectivity Center will be housed in the city owned hospital building and will provide access for local citizens to use the computers. Participants in the project include the Crawford City Hall, Crawford Fire and Rescue, Legend Buttes Health Services, the Crawford Public Library and the Crawford City Schools.

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 www.rurdev.usda.gov. In Nebraska, contact Andre Boening, General Field Representative for USDA Rural Utilities Service at 2351 RD 43 Linwood, Nebr. 68036, by email at aboening@attmail.com or by phone (402) 543-2129.

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