



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA ANNOUNCES \$100 MILLION TO ASSIST RURAL EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

Agriculture Secretary Veneman and Homeland Security Secretary Ridge Visit New Center of Excellence for Agro Security

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn., July 6, 2004 – Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced that \$100 million is committed for a new USDA First Responder Initiative to support rural emergency responder efforts by prioritizing the financing for needed equipment and services.

“The Bush Administration is committed to assisting rural communities prepare for emergencies and the delivery of lifesaving services,” Veneman said during a visit here with Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to the University of Minnesota to recognize the new Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence for Agro Security. “The funds announced today are a major investment in the lives and security of our citizens and are part of USDA’s ongoing investment in the future of rural communities and their ability to better prepare for emergency situations.”

Veneman said that as part of USDA’s First Responder Initiative, a minimum of one dollar of every five dollars of fiscal year 2004 community facility funding available, will be dedicated to first responder type requests. USDA Rural Development provides financing of a variety of community facilities, such as: libraries, courthouses, fire and rescue facilities and equipment, police and emergency vehicles and services and other community focused facilities and services. The initiative will prioritize the funding of at least \$100 million to specifically strengthen the ability of rural communities to respond to local emergencies. The following types of projects are emphasized through this initiative:

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| Fire Protection Equipment | Police Station |
| Fire Station | Police Car |
| Fire Trucks | Civil Defense Building |
| Rescue and Ambulance Service - Equipment | Building |
| Emergency Response Training | Hospital |
| Physicians Clinic | Outpatient Care |
| Early Storm Warning System | Office Building (Health Care) |
| County Health Department Office | Migrant Health Centers |
| Food Preparation Distribution Center | Communications Center |
| Animal Shelter – Veterinarians | Mobil Communications Center |
| Education Facilities for Emergency | |

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Veneman said that so far \$81 million has been obligated to fund 20 fire stations, 24 fire trucks, 8 police cars and other fire and rescue equipment, including \$36,500 for a fire truck and ambulance for Minnesota. In addition, funding will support over 20 health care related efforts such as hospitals and medical centers, as well as nine ambulances. In total, over 100 first responder applications have been approved for funding. Funding of selected applicants will be contingent upon meeting the conditions of the loan and/or grant agreement. **Nebraska is the recipient of nearly \$6.8 million in funding for the following five projects:**

- **Warren Memorial Hospital Foundation, Friend** is awarded **\$200,000 in loan** funds joining the \$1,835,000 in loans awarded earlier in the fiscal year to construct a new rural health clinic and remodel existing hospital space serving 5,519 rural residents in Fillmore, Saline and Seward counties.
- **Community Memorial Hospital, Inc., Syracuse** received a **loan of \$2,560,000** to construct a new medical clinic and a link between the clinic and hospital, a maintenance building and for additional parking spaces. This project will primarily serve the near 15,400 rural residents of Otoe County along with parts of Cass and Johnson counties.
- **City of Creighton** awarded a **\$3,972,000 loan** to construct an addition to the hospital, and nursing home along with rehabilitating existing nursing home space and development of unfinished space for a Primary Care clinic and Operating Suite. The 40,760 rural residents of Antelope, Boyd, Holt, Knox and Pierce counties will primarily be served by this project.
- **Rock County Hospital** receives a **\$9,500 grant** for the purchase and installation of an emergency generator for backup power at the hospital, nursing home and clinic. This project serves the 1,756 rural residents of Rock County.
- **Village of Winnetoon** awarded a **\$13,200 grant** for a new emergency siren system benefiting the 70 rural residents of the Village.

A complete list of the individual awards can be found at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/newsroom/news.htm>.

During the Bush Administration over \$1.5 billion has been invested by USDA Rural Development to address essential community needs that assist with public safety, education, health care, cultural, transportation, and other public needs, including: the purchase of 508 fire trucks, 103 police cars, and 156 ambulances and construction or renovation of 79 hospitals, 71 public or charter schools, and 155 child care centers. In addition, \$29 million in grant funds have been invested in 93 telemedicine grant projects to develop technologies needed to enhance medical care involving 846 health care institutions.

Secretary Veneman and Secretary Ridge were in Minneapolis today to highlight a new Department of Homeland Security Centers of Excellence for Agro Security. In January of this year, President Bush signed a Homeland Security Presidential Directive, known as HSPD-9, which is a national strategy for food and agriculture. It formalizes security strategies and approaches, including the establishment of these university-based Centers of Excellence.

In April, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that Texas A&M University and the University of Minnesota were chosen to lead two new centers. DHS anticipates providing Texas A&M University, the University of Minnesota and their partners with a total of \$33 million over the course of the next three years to address security in two key

agricultural sectors -- foreign animal diseases and food security. The work that will be done at these two outstanding institutions is a vital component of our efforts to engage partners at all levels, including governments, academia and the private sector, to help protect food and agriculture.

“The stakes are very high, not only in terms of human health and our agriculture system, but also in terms of our economy,” said Veneman. “The food and fiber produced in our nation account for \$1.24 trillion or more than 12 percent of our gross domestic product. The food and agriculture sectors also employ nearly 24 million Americans or about 17 percent of our workforce. Research conducted at these institutions will greatly enhance our ability to protect against animal and plant pests and diseases and food pathogens.”

For more information about USDA’s effort in homeland security, visit www.usda.gov/. For additional information on Nebraska projects announced in this release, contact the USDA Rural Development State Office at 402-437-5551, Rm. 152 Federal Bldg. 100 Centennial Mall North Lincoln, Neb. 68508.

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