



NEWS RELEASE



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Ohio's Broadband Conference Huge Success

Networking, Education and Funding Strategies Highlighted Day-Long Activities

COLUMBUS, OHIO, April 19, 2006 – U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine and Ohio's USDA Rural Development office sponsored a statewide Telecommunications Conference yesterday focusing on improving Broadband accessibility for Ohio's rural communities. More than 250 people from Ohio and surrounding states attended the conference to find out how to tap into the \$2 billion in USDA Broadband funding.

"We were encouraged with the level of response and expressed interest in improving Ohio's Broadband accessibility," said Rural Development State Director Randy Hunt. "The expertise assembled for the conference definitely helped to carve out a roadmap for the state's Broadband initiatives and fueled enthusiasm and cooperation among community leaders and service providers. With the goal being increased service, we're certainly headed in the right direction."

USDA's Administrator of the Rural Utilities Program James Andrews, was one of the featured speakers for the event. Andrews' slate of duties includes national administration of the Broadband Program. Additionally, a panel of regional and local professionals in the Broadband field presented information highlighting Ohio's capabilities and detailing its needs. The conference helped to generate momentum as the state continues to promote understanding and infrastructure development to bring Broadband access to all Ohioans.

Local service providers, community leaders and Broadband experts spent the day networking, expanding their knowledge base and strategizing on creative approaches to bringing Broadband technology to communities with the most immediate needs. The Broadband Program provides loans and loan guarantees for the cost of construction, improvement, and acquisition of facilities and equipment for broadband service in eligible rural communities.

USDA Rural Development serves as the lead federal entity for rural development needs, and administers program assistance through three agencies: Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, and Rural Utilities Service. Further information on USDA Rural Development can be obtained by contacting any USDA Service Center or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

For more information about the conference contact Michael Jones, USDA Rural Development Public Affairs Director at 614-255-2394 email at michael.jones@oh.usda.gov.

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(From left) Rural Development State Director Randy Hunt, U.S. Senator Michael DeWine (R) and USDA Administrator of Rural Utilities Service James Andrews share a moment during the April 18, 2006 Ohio Broadband Conference. The conference focused on improving Ohio's access to the available \$2 billion in USDA Rural Development Broadband funding.