



# NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development

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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*

**TEMPLE, Texas**, July 8, 2004 - Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman 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."

Bryan Daniel, Texas State Director for USDA Rural Development said, "We are pleased with projects funded in Texas for this important first responder initiative. We are proud of the job all first responders do in helping Texans with local emergencies."

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:

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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Committed to the future of rural communities.

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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. A 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 on July 6 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/](http://www.usda.gov/).

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