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United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1300 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Alisa Harrison (202) 720-4623
Tim McNeilly (202) 690-0498

USDA ANNOUNCES \$15 MILLION FOR PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION DIGITAL TRANSITION GRANTS

WASHINGTON, July 21, 2003—Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced a new grant program to finance the conversion of television services to digital broadcasting for small rural public television stations. The Federal Communications Commission mandated that public television be converted to digital broadcasting by May 1, 2003. Almost half of the nation's 357 public television stations did not meet the deadline.

“The Bush Administration is committed to helping communities improve their technology infrastructure,” said Veneman. “These grants will assist the most rural, isolated communities to have access to public broadcasting in this digital age.”

This competitive grant program will make awards to applicants that are the most rural, have the least resources, and provide the greatest public need to their communities. Many rural communities depend on public television stations for services ranging from educational course content in their schools to local news, weather and agricultural reports.

To meet the requirements of transition to digital broadcasting, a station must install a new antenna, transmitter or translator, and new digital program management facilities consisting of processing and storage systems. If a station is to perform a program origination, which many do, digital cameras, editing and mastering systems are required.

This is a competitive grant program. Applications will be scored on the rural nature of the area served, the relative average earnings of the population in the applicant's service area, and the critical need the communities have for the broadcast services rendered.

The Notice of Funds Availability was published in the July 18 Federal Register. The deadline will be sixty days from that date, Sept. 16. Grants will be limited to a maximum of \$2 million for an individual station, or if it is an application representing a group of stations, the first will be limited to \$2 million and the others to \$1 million each.

Funds are provided from the USDA Rural Development Telecommunications Program. 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>.