



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA AWARDS OVER \$29 MILLION IN DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE GRANTS

36 States to Receive Funding -- 79 Projects Selected

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5, 2005-- Deputy Agriculture Secretary Chuck Conner today announced the award of 79 Distance Learning and Telemedicine grants, which will provide improved educational and medical services to residents of 36 states. The grants total over \$29.4 million.

Of the 79 projects selected, 35 provide funding for medical service improvements and 44 promote educational opportunities.

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program is designed to enhance educational and health care services in rural America. This year 227 grant applications were received and 162 were found to meet program eligibility requirements. The 79 successful applicants were selected from that list. During the past five years, USDA's Rural Development has invested over \$4.6 billion in telecommunications programs across America. A complete list of the successful applicants can be seen at www.rurdev.usda.gov

The funds awarded will assist a wide range of facilities. In Polk County, Mo., for example, a grant of \$432,265 will be used to link Citizens Memorial Hospital in Bolivar to 16 rural health clinics and five long-term care facilities in rural areas, serving a population of 22,000. The Ozark Health Foundation in Clinton, Ark., will receive a grant of \$420,505 to integrate records handling between a hospital, two agencies, nine clinics and a nursing home. Both of those projects involve the deployment or expansion of Wide Area Networks.

Educational facilities will also benefit. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma will receive a grant of \$304,542 to provide distance learning services to children enrolled in the Head Start program at 23 sites spread across 15,000 square miles of southeastern Oklahoma. The system will also provide educational opportunities for Head Start staff and all adults in the communities served. In northwest New Mexico, \$486,100 in grant funds will be used to provide distance learning equipment and multi-media computer labs to 15 schools, including four high schools. The project will serve over 5,000 students in a three county area.

Of the 79 projects selected nationwide, West Virginia was awarded three (3) Distance Learning Grants to promote educational opportunities. Recipients of such grants were Harrison County Board of Education (\$349,935), Braxton County Schools (\$500,000) and Roane County Schools (\$485,825).

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USDA Rural Development's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life in rural communities. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development has invested over \$63 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. Over 1.1 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. 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>

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