

## **SECRETARY VILSACK ANNOUNCES ALMOST \$35 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE PROJECTS**

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Nov. 12, 2009 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that 111 projects in 35 states have been selected to receive more than \$34.9 million in grants to increase educational opportunities and expand access to health care services in rural areas. The funding will be provided through USDA Rural Development’s Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program.

Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development Dallas Tonsager made the announcement on behalf of Vilsack while attending the annual meeting of the National Association of Farm Broadcasting in Kansas City, Mo.

“The Obama Administration is working to ensure that rural citizens have access to a full range of educational opportunities and access to quality medical care,” Vilsack said. “The funding we are announcing today will deliver these opportunities by expanding telecommunications, educational resources and computer networks throughout rural communities.”

For example, Avera Health in Sioux Falls, S.D., was selected to receive a \$396,693 grant to provide video-conferencing and telemedicine service to connect 16 rural hospitals and clinics with regional medical facilities in Sioux Falls, Yankton and Aberdeen.

Horizon Health Care, Inc. in Howard, S.D. was selected to receive a \$378,631 grant to purchase videoconferencing and telemedicine devices to connect 11 rural clinics with the applicant. The goals of the project include the ability to connect rural patients with multiple specialty providers as well as to provide medical training for clinicians and staff.

Regional Health, Inc. in Rapid City, S.D. was selected to receive a \$386,549 grant to purchase videoconferencing devices to link 15 rural hospitals and clinics with regional medical resources at three sites in Rapid City. Among the goals of this project are specialty consultation, tele-dialysis, and tele-pharmacy as well as continuing medical education for providers.

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant Program provides access to education, training and health care resources in rural areas. Funding is contingent upon the recipient meeting the conditions of the grant agreement. These funds are part of USDA’s annual budget and are not part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

USDA Rural Development’s mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural residents. Rural Development fosters growth in homeownership, finances business development, and supports the creation of critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA Rural Development’s web site at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/dlt/dlt.htm>.

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