



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA and Southwest Oregon Regional Airport Announce Distance Learning Project to Improve Training for Rural First Responders

PORTLAND, December 8, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced a \$440,000 grant to Southwest Oregon Regional Airport to establish a distance learning telecommunication hub that will improve training for volunteer first responders. Funding is provided through the USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program administered by USDA Rural Development.

“This program delivers educational and medical opportunities that are urgently needed in remote, rural areas,” Vilsack said. “President Obama has said that no matter where you live in America, you should have access to quality educational opportunities. Rural Americans deserve the same opportunities for education and medical care as metropolitan-area residents, and these funds will make that happen.”

The grant will fund thirteen computer portals with advanced video teleconferencing equipment at the airport. From there, local volunteers with rural fire protection and port districts will be able to access fire science, search and rescue, and emergency medical training.

“We are very excited about the opportunity this grant provides to our community and our regional neighbors,” said Theresa Cook, Executive Director of the Coos County Airport District.

“The Southwest Oregon Regional Airport is located on the Southern Coast of Oregon and is a vital supplier of services and economic value to Southwest Oregon. This project brings coordinated training opportunities to the region and centers it in a location that already has fire, Coast Guard, air ambulance, state police and other emergency services and resources, and allows those resources to reach out to rural areas,” Cook said.

North Bend Fire Chief Scott Graham congratulated the Southwest Regional Airport on obtaining the USDA Distance Learning Training grant. “The benefits of such a grant will provide regional training opportunities to North Bend Fire and Rescue and other departments,” he said. “The new system will

allow interoperability with many agencies, including Southwest Oregon Regional Airport.”

The project is among three in Oregon and 100 funded across the nation through the current DLT program announcement. USDA also awarded \$312,285 for the North Central Education Service District’s distance learning program to increase the capacity for interactive, 21st Century mobile learning programs available to rural schools and adult learners in Gilliam, Sherman and Wheeler Counties.

Providence Health and Services will also receive \$253,260 to bring their Telestroke Network to five additional critical access hospitals in Eastern and Central Oregon. Through secure videoconferencing, neurologists in Portland can help out in emergency rooms hundreds of miles away, providing faster access to treatment and better outcomes for stroke patients.

“In all, USDA funded three exciting and life-saving Oregon projects through the current announcement,” said USDA Rural Development State Director Vicki Walker.

For a complete list of awardees that will receive funding under Rural Development’s DLT Program across the nation, please [click here](#).

Awards are contingent upon the recipients meeting the terms of the agreement with USDA.

Since taking office, President Obama’s Administration has taken historic steps to improve the lives of rural Americans, put people back to work and build thriving economies in rural communities. From proposing the American Jobs Act to establishing the first-ever White House Rural Council – chaired by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack – the President wants the federal government to be the best possible partner for rural businesses, entrepreneurs and people who want to live, work and raise their families in rural communities.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has a portfolio of more than \$160 billion in loans and loan guarantees. Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/> for additional information about the agency's programs or to locate the USDA Rural Development office nearest you.

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