



Remarks by Deputy Under Secretary Vernita Dore for the Rural Community College Alliance and Seminole State College Seminar

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Thank you Dr. Smith. I am so pleased to be here at today's seminar. It brings together yet again my agency, USDA Rural Development, with the American Association of Community Colleges and the Rural Community College Association.

Our shared mission was formalized four years ago in a White-House-level Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and gained renewed strength under the 2014 Farm Bill. That mission – to advance education and training for rural residents – gathers momentum and energy, each time events like these are held.

I'd also like to thank our host for the event, Seminole State College, and its president, Dr. Utterback.

During his 19 years as president, Dr. Utterback has been an activist for the rural community. Under his leadership, the college expanded to a 90-acre campus, new buildings and facilities were erected and new, on-campus programs and technology improvements were created. In addition, the college has helped with local economic development.

I am so proud to be here today to help support and strengthen our nation's rural communities by bringing USDA resources and expertise to the seminar. Today's speakers include USDA administrators who will answer your questions and tell you how they can help you with facilities funding, business development and distance learning, among other things.



I congratulate you all for attending today. Some of you came quite a distance from community colleges in Louisiana, Texas, Colorado and other states. We at USDA Rural Development know the struggles that educators have faced over the past few years with severe budget cuts and dramatically rising costs. This has hindered your ability to assist residents in your communities and has spawned dire consequences. Prosperity and growth stagnates or even declines in the nation's farmlands, small towns and cities.

USDA Rural Development recognizes this problem. We are dedicated to battling it with tools that can create prosperity in your communities. We have a mix of programs to empower colleges, nonprofits, economic development agencies and businesses. With USDA funding new businesses, new equipment, new buildings and new programs can help our rural communities move forward and prosper.

This has happened in many places in the nation. Let me outline a few of our programs and give you some examples of what they have accomplished.

Our **Community Facilities Program** provides financing for rural colleges to upgrade, modernize or build state-of-the-art facilities to increase student enrollment.

Here in Oklahoma, Murray State College borrowed \$4 million in loans to build new student housing. The college also received a half a million dollar grant to construct an on-campus youth center.

Over the last three years, the College of the Muscogee Nation, Oklahoma's premier tribal college, received nearly half a million dollars in community facility grants. They are expanding their kitchen, student center, library, and community garden.

In 2014, Southeastern Oklahoma State University received a \$50,000 Community Facilities grant to improve their campus library.



Besides direct loans and grants to colleges, USDA Rural Development also acts like a central bank, in a way, under our **Intermediary Relending Program**. It works this way: We issue low-interest loans of 1% to local lenders like economic development corporations, tribes and nonprofits. They can receive anywhere from \$300,000 to more than \$1 million each.

Then, they take the money and re-lend it to small businesses and community development projects to create rural jobs, build infrastructure and establish services.

Over the past four years, more than \$20 million has been distributed to organizations in 19 states and Puerto Rico. In 2016, the East Texas Regional Development Corporation received more than \$364,000 to lend money to businesses and non-profits. In 2015, the Missouri Agricultural and Small Business Development Authority received \$500,000.

Another of our programs, **Rural Business Development Grants** helps small, privately-owned businesses expand through training or technical assistance. The businesses have to have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenues. Nonprofit corporations and colleges compete for grants to help these businesses.

In 2015, Eastern Oklahoma State College was awarded grants totaling more than \$300,000 to support local agribusinesses. Among other things, a commercial kitchen was established that enables local farmers to process foods used in local, school lunch programs.

East Central University, also in Oklahoma, received more than \$600,000 in rural business grants to establish a business incubator focused on the arts and creative enterprises.

USDA Rural Development also has competitive **distance learning and telemedicine grants**. These grants require matching funds from other sources, but only a small percentage, 15%. These grants can cover equipment costs for video conferencing and distance learning.



Some grant recipients have used the funds to provide learning opportunities for students in isolated areas. For example, Arizona's Coconino Community College used the grants to enable rural students to complete the state's general education prerequisites in the arts and lab sciences.

The Association of Computer Technology Educators of Maine used their grant to install video conferencing equipment at 25 schools in 18 southern Maine communities, plus link it to video conferencing centers at the University of Maine. Students then had access to elementary, high school, and college-level coursework.

Here in Oklahoma over the last decade, colleges and universities have received more than \$5.5 million in these grants. Recipients include Redlands Community College, Connor's State College, Carl Albert State College, Western Oklahoma State College, and Eastern Oklahoma State College.

Finally, to conclude my rundown of programs, we also have, as a separate agency within Rural Development, a **Rural Business and Cooperative Service**. This agency provides financial and technical assistance to help new businesses start up and existing businesses expand and upgrade.

In Maryland, the USDA awarded the Wor-Wic Community College a grant of more than \$59,000 to build a modular classroom. The Hagerstown Community College used a \$150,000 grant to create a laboratory/job training facility for students.

As you can see by this brief rundown, Rural Development has a variety of tools and funding categories. Using them, we help colleges and rural institutions, like yours, stimulate local economies.

We are here to help you create specialized training and technical assistance to small businesses and nonprofits in ways that you devise to fulfill the specific needs of your communities.



The programs you create to help your communities can be specialized, innovative and cutting edge because you are out here every day and know what's needed.

We're proud to help you and be part of the solution. Our goals are the same as yours: to create prosperity so that your communities are self-sustaining, re-populating and economically thriving.

I encourage you today to learn and network to come up with new solutions that will benefit your communities and ultimately, our entire country. That's because if our rural towns and cities are strong and prosperous, the country grows stronger and prospers as well.

Thank you.