

Nearly \$28.6 million was delivered to Nebraska in federal fiscal year 2012 through the Rural Utilities Service Electric and Telecommunications programs, according to USDA Rural Development State Director Maxine Moul.

“Solid utilities infrastructure is important for rural Nebraska. The Electric and Telecommunications programs keep our communications and electric systems up to date, allowing for top grade services to our rural communities,” said Moul. “We look forward to fiscal year 2013 and continuing to help meet the needs of rural residents.”

USDA Rural Development’s Electric program provides leadership and capital to upgrade, expand, maintain, and replace America’s vast rural electric infrastructure.

The electric programs make direct loans and loan guarantees to electric utilities to serve customers in rural areas.

The loans and loan guarantees finance the construction of electric distribution, transmission, and generation facilities, including system improvements and replacement required to furnish and improve electric service in rural areas, as well as demand side management, energy conservation programs and on-grid and off-grid renewable energy systems.

Funds are available for fiscal year 2013 and applications are being accepted.

Nebraska received three electric guaranteed loan recipients of funds totaling \$27,619,000 for fiscal year 2012.

KBR Rural Public Power District of Ainsworth, Neb. received \$13,314,000 to build and improve 129 miles of distribution line and nine miles of transmission line, and make other system improvements. The loan amount includes \$791,475 in smart grid projects.

The Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association in Alliance, Neb. was awarded \$7,839,000 to be used to serve 113 consumers, to build and improve 49 miles of distribution line and to make other system improvements. The loan amount includes \$1,823,200 in smart grid projects.

The Midwest Electric Cooperative Corporation of Grant, Neb. will utilize \$6,466,000 to serve 409 consumers, to build and improve 175 miles of distribution line and 22 miles of transmission line, and to make other system improvements. The loan amount includes \$612,600 in smart grid projects.

USDA Rural Development’s Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) program is designed to meet the educational and health care needs of rural America.

The DLT program is available to entities that provide education and medical care via telecommunications. Applications are accepted annually via a competitive process announced through a Notice of Funds Availability in the Federal Register.

Funds can be used for equipment, wiring, hardware and software.

There were four Nebraska recipients in the 2012 fiscal year. Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation of Kearney, Neb. received \$253,345 that will be used by the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation to expand telemedicine services to central Nebraska and Kansas through the Midwest Telehealth Network.

The additional equipment will introduce eight more locations, providing video end points for these rural clinics to connect to the telemedicine network.

Patients accompanied by their rural clinicians and doctors will be able to link to Good Samaritan and other larger hospitals from their remote location and receive one-to-one consultation, medical training, and health care coordination.

The Educational Service Unit 17 of Ainsworth will use \$180,000 to purchase videoconferencing equipment for 21 public schools in a four-county area of North Central Nebraska.

Grant funds also will purchase the central control equipment that manages the video connections, content capture and streaming, and video bridging.

The classes held over the system will include regular high school classes, college and dual credit, agriculture and agri-business classes and seminars, and specialty classes that are conducted in conjunction with rural attendance centers.

Mid-Plains Community College in North Platte, Neb. received \$123,042 to purchase video teleconferencing equipment for a distance learning system between Mid Plains Community College and their affiliated end user campuses in an 18-county area of Western Nebraska.

Equipment will be installed in campus locations at Broken Bow, Ogallala and Valentine, and video communications bridge equipment will be installed at Broken Bow. The equipment will allow the College to expand dual high school college credits and other coursework leading to a number of degrees, certification and licensing.

Collaboration with various industries bonds the project to job and career training, with an immediate focus on increasing the number of qualified nursing professionals.

This will address the nursing shortage in rural and frontier areas, and save students the 100 to 200-mile daily round-trip they currently travel to attend certification classes.

The Educational Service Unit 16 in Ogallala, Neb. was awarded \$412,925 to be used in a system-wide upgrade to outfit schools with video conferencing equipment and update their video bridge in this vast sparsely populated area of southwest Nebraska.

The modernized bridge unit is better able to leverage available bandwidth. This allows for richer content to run through the system while using less bandwidth expenses, thus saving on connection expenses.

The project will provide students and others in their communities with expanded curriculum offerings, virtual travel opportunities, and career advancement.