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# News Release

Georgia Release 14006

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## **USDA Rural Development Celebrates Earth Day by Supporting Water Quality Projects in 40 States and Puerto Rico**

### *2014 Farm Bill Enables Record USDA Investments in Rural Water Systems*

WASHINGTON, April 22, 2014 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today celebrated Earth Day by announcing record support for 116 projects that will improve water and wastewater services for rural Americans and benefit the environment.

“Having reliable, clean and safe water is essential for any community to thrive and grow,” Vilsack said. “I am proud that USDA helps build rural communities from the ground up by supporting water infrastructure projects like these. I am especially proud that we can help communities that are struggling economically and those that have urgent health and safety concerns due to their failing water systems.”

Today’s announcement is USDA’s largest Earth Day investment in rural water and wastewater systems. [Nearly \\$387 million is being awarded to 116 recipients](#) in 40 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The Department is providing \$150 million in grants through the 2014 Farm Bill plus \$237 million in loans and grants from USDA’s Water and Environmental Program.

Also noteworthy this year are USDA’s accomplishments to help communities with the greatest needs. Sixteen of the Earth Day projects are in areas of persistent poverty. Twenty-nine are in communities served by USDA’s [“StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity.”](#) StrikeForce is a USDA initiative to reduce poverty by increasing investments in rural communities through intensive outreach and stronger partnerships with community leaders, businesses, foundations and other groups that are working to combat poverty.

Climate change in particular is putting more stress on municipal water systems. Many areas around the country have seen changes in rainfall, resulting in more floods, droughts, declines in snowpack, intense rain, as well as more frequent and severe heat waves. All of these are placing fiscal strains on communities – causing them to make more frequent (and often more expensive) repairs and upgrades.

Among projects funded this year, the city of McCrory, Ark., is receiving \$2.1 million to build a water treatment facility and two water supply wells, and refurbish its two water storage tanks. The improvements will reduce high manganese and iron levels in the

water supply to provide safe drinking water to McCrory's nearly 800 residents. McCrory is in Woodruff County, a persistent poverty area that is part of USDA's "StrikeForce initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity."

Paintsville, Ky., is receiving a \$4.9 million loan and \$2.1 million grant to rehabilitate its sanitary and stormwater sewer systems. This is one of 10 projects funded by USDA that will improve water infrastructure in rural areas of Kentucky. The Paintsville project will serve nearly 2,300 residents and businesses and protect the ecosystems of Paint Creek and nearby lakes.

The city of San Joaquin, Calif., is receiving a \$1 million loan/grant combination to replace a contaminated well. The city had to shut down one of its three wells due to high levels of bacteria. Once completed, this project will ensure San Joaquin residents have safe, clean drinking water.

**In Georgia**, the Franklin County Commissioners will use a \$2.2 million loan and a grant of just over \$1 million to replace the wastewater treatment facility in Carnesville. The County also will build a pump station at the site of the existing County-operated Land Application System. This project will address environmental regulations compliance issues as well as support future growth along the I-85 corridor in Franklin County and near Carnesville, Georgia.

Earth Day is observed annually on April 22 to raise awareness about the role each person can play to protect vital natural resources and safeguard the environment. Since the first Earth Day celebration in 1970, the event has expanded to include citizens and governments in more than 195 countries.

President Obama's plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities. USDA's investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of our American values. President Obama and Agriculture Secretary Vilsack are committed to a smarter use of federal resources to foster sustainable economic prosperity and ensure the government is a strong partner for businesses, entrepreneurs and working families in rural communities.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, has a portfolio of programs designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America.

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