

**Comments to USDA Under Secretary, Mark Rey at the 2007 Farm Bill Forum
State Fair Park, Douglas, Wyoming
August 18, 2005**

**By Mary Randolph, Chairman – National Rural Development Partnership and
Executive Director of the Wyoming Rural Development Council**

Good morning, Mr. Secretary and a warm welcome to the rural state of Wyoming. My name is Mary Randolph and I serve as Executive Director of the Wyoming Rural Development Council. Wyoming Rural Development Council is Wyoming's official Federally Recognized State Rural Development Council in the National Rural Development Partnership. In addition, I serve as Chairman of the Executive Board of the National Rural Development Partnership.

In 1972, the Rural Development Act gave the Secretary of Agriculture the responsibility for coordinating federal rural development programs.

In 1990, the Presidential Initiative on Rural America created the National Rural Development Partnership - and State Rural Development Councils.

In the Farm Security Act of 2002, the National Rural Development Partnership was authorized giving SRDCs and the National Rural Development Coordinating Committee unique and unprecedented authorities. The Farm Bill's Conference report set high expectations for the Partnership: we expect the NRDP, Congress said "to make significant progress toward the goal of better coordinating the rural policies and programs of federal agencies and developing greater collaboration between the federal government, the states and others with resources to invest in rural areas."

In my remarks today, I will be addressing the portion of the Farm Bill that is not addressed in your six questions – and that is Rural Development.

THE CHALLENGE – Rural America faces many challenges – challenges resulting from economic, demographic and social elements such as low population density, out-migration, poverty and lack of community capacity and advocacy. The rural population, both older and less educated than its urban counterparts, is deeply impacted by changes in agriculture and the loss of industry and manufacturing. Additionally, rural communities are distance and geographically separated rendering uncoordinated programs and services ineffective. Policymakers must understand the elements that make rural America unique, before they address their needs.

CONSTRAINED RESOURCES – Rural America must have adequate financial and human resources to address the challenges faced by its communities and residents, but more money in the same old one-size-fits-all uncoordinated programs is not the answer.

THE ANSWER – The National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP), a national rural development organization made up of State Rural Development Councils (SRDCS) and

the National Rural Development Coordination Committee (NRDCC), is already recognized in the 2002 Farm Bill as an organization with strong linkages at both the governmental policy level and with rural communities and resident. In enacting the NRDP provisions, Congress did not intend to create a new delivery system, but to empower a state/federal network to help public officials and local rural leaders as they address local needs.

The National Rural Development Partnership is the natural vehicle through which rural challenges may be addressed. The SRDCs, by working with the NRDCC, will provide an important and unique means through which the federal government can constructively interact with other public entities and the private sector to efficiently and cost effectively serve rural America. The SRDCs have a history of helping shape significant programmatic realignment and innovative public policies. The key to this success is threefold: Collaboration – bringing to the table both public and private partners with dollars, human talent, knowledge and ideas to help rural communities; Coordination: assuring that public and private entities work together to efficiently and effectively use their resources to positively impact the challenges of rural communities and residents; and Facilitation: providing a neutral forum within which the public and private sectors can together work on positive remedies to rural issues. At the same time, SRDCs can serve in a rural advocacy role as a unified rural voice.

What we are asking of USDA for the 2007 Farm Bill is to continue to reform and improve the delivery and structure of rural development programs to better serve the well being of rural communities, reauthorize the National Rural Development Partnership language and USDA support to funding through an appropriation.

Thank you for your time and interest in our input for the 2007 Farm Bill.

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