

USDA management changes coming. After a January 6 hearing, the Senate Agriculture Committee unanimously recommended that Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns be confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture. The National Rural Housing Coalition reports that the Administration may renominate Tom Dorr to be USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development. He was a recess appointment to that job during President Bush's first term, and later was a special assistant to USDA Secretary Ann Veneman. Also, Rural Utilities Service Administrator Hilda Legg has resigned. Contact Bob Rapoza, NRHC, 202-393-5225, bob@rapoza.org.

HUD corrects HOPE VI NOFA. Deadline remains Feb. 1. See *Federal Register*, 12/29/04, pp. 78099-78141 or <http://www.hudclips.org>. Contact Lar Gnessin, HUD, 202-708-0614 x 2676.

RHS raises bonding threshold. Currently a builder with a contract for more than \$100,000 must obtain a payment and performance bond. The new threshold will be the local maximum single-family lending limit; therefore, bonding will not be required for single-family contractors. This rule is effective April 7 unless RHS receives adverse comments by March 8. See *Federal Register*, 1/7/05, pp. 1325-26, or <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/regs/>. Contact Michel Mitias, RHS, 202-720-9653, michel.mitias@usda.gov.

Uniform relocation assistance rules revised. The amended rules under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act apply to many agencies including USDA and HUD. See *Federal Register*, 1/4/05, pp. 589-638. Contact Mamie L. Smith, Federal Highway Administration, 202-366-2529.

HUD proposes Consolidated Plan revisions. Comments are due January 31. See *Federal Register*, 12/30/04, pp. 78829-43 or <http://www.regulations.gov>. Contact Salvatore Sclafani, HUD, 202-708-1817 x 4364.

Release of more mortgage data suggested. Under a proposed rule, HUD would recategorize and release some previously proprietary Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac data. Comments are due March 11. See *Federal Register*, 1/10/05, pp. 1773-79 or <http://www.regulations.gov>. Contact Sandra Fostek, HUD, 202-708-2224.

GAO suggests changes to RHS "rural" definition. A Government Accountability Office study concludes the current statutory criteria lead to inconsistent RHS determinations about what areas are eligible for its programs. *Rural Housing: Changing the Definition of Rural Could Improve Eligibility Determinations*, GAO-05-110, is free at <http://www.gao.gov> or from GAO, 202-512-6000.

Anti-predatory lending materials offered. Rural organizations wanting to conduct anti-predatory lending education and outreach can obtain *Don't Borrow Trouble* toolkits from Annie Carvalho, Freddie Mac, 703-918-5045, annie_carvalho@freddiemac.com. Visit <http://www.dontborrowtrouble.com> for more information.

Housing policy myths debunked. *The Crisis in America's Housing: Confronting Myths and Promoting a Balanced Housing Policy*, by the National Low Income Housing Coalition and several other organizations, addresses three myths about housing assistance and is free at <http://www.nlihc.org/research/housingmyths.pdf>.

USDA and HUD publish 2004 performance reports. Both departments emphasize homeownership and mention the need for rental housing as well. HUD's FY 2004 Performance and Accountability Report is at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cfo/pafinal.pdf>. USDA's is at <http://www.usda.gov/ocfo/usdarpt/usdarpt.htm>.

Federal budget primer and state information available. *Budget Basics 101* is on the Coalition on Human Needs' website, <http://www.chn.org/pdf/budget101.pdf>. *How to Talk About the Impact of Federal Cuts on the People in Your State* is at <http://www.chn.org/issues/opportunityforall/stateimpacts.html>.

HUD award to recognize reduction of barriers. Nominations are due March 15 for a new "Affordable Communities Award," which will recognize ten local and state governments for waiving or reducing regulatory barriers to production of affordable housing. Visit <http://www.hud.gov/initiatives/affordablecom.cfm>.

Housing and services conference call set. On January 26, 1:00-2:30 EST, HUD's Rural Housing and Economic Development Rural Gateway (which is administered by HAC) will host a peer-to-peer conference call about the challenges and benefits of providing housing with services in rural areas. Register by January 19 at <http://www.ruralhome.org/gateway> or contact Lourdes Antezana, 1-877-RURAL-26, gateway@ruralhome.org.

HAC publishes colonias guide. A new directory of organizations, programs, and resources that serve residents in the colonias along the U.S.-Mexico border includes contact information, service areas, and types of housing programs offered. *Guide to Nonprofit Housing Organizations Serving the Colonias* is free at <http://www.ruralhome.org> or \$7.00 from Luz Rosas, HAC, 202-842-8600, luz@ruralhome.org.