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Applications Available for a New “Stronger Economies Together” Program (Provides Technical Assistance for Rural Regional Development)

Application Deadline May 3, 2010

Alexandria, March 30, 2010 - USDA Rural Development, in conjunction with the Southern Rural Development Center, the Louisiana State University (LSU) AgCenter Extension Service, the Southern University AgCenter Extension Service, Louisiana Economic Development, and other key community/economic development organizations or agencies in the state, has released details of a program called “Stronger Economies Together” (SET), a program designed to help regional teams develop new approaches to strengthen and enhance regional economic development activities. The SET program is an opportunity for current or newly formed multi-parish teams to receive the latest tools, training, and technical assistance to help their region move forward and take advantage of positive growth and quality of life opportunities. Two rural Louisiana multi-parish area entities will be chosen.

The SET program eligibility requirements are: 1) Applicants must be multi-parish regions (two or more parishes) in Louisiana (or in conjunction with counties in neighboring states) where the average rural population is 51% or more of the region’s total population based on Census data or other sufficient data or documentation; OR, 2) Applicants must be multi-parish regions (two or more parishes) in Louisiana (or in conjunction with counties in neighboring states) where 75% of the region's land area is located in rural areas of that region based on Census data or other sufficient data or documentation.

Applications are available upon request by emailing Lee Jones at lee.jones@la.usda.gov or Karen Nardini at Karen.nardini@la.usda.gov. A Letter of Intent to file an Application must be sent electronically to LA-SETAPPS@la.usda.gov no later than April 12, 2010 (11:59 pm Central). A complete application must be sent electronically to LA-SETAPPS@la.usda.gov no later than May 3, 2010 (11:59 pm Central). An Acknowledgment of Receipt of Application will be sent within 36 hours. The final decision will be announced by June 8, 2010. There is no application fee, but chosen applicants should be prepared to supply some minor logistical support.

The successful applicants will receive the following: 1) Valuable intensive strategic planning training for their regional team, including the newly developed “Stronger

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Economies Together” program, a program designed to help your regional team develop new approaches to strengthen and enhance regional economic development activities; 2) Database tools specifically designed to help the regional teams examine the critical drivers of their region and identify emerging growth sectors and regional competitive advantages; 3) Technical assistance and educational support from the Southern Rural Development Center, Rural Development staff, Cooperative Extension Service, and other key community/economic development organizations in the state; and 4) Other educational and information-sharing opportunities with other SET program participants around the country.

If you have questions, please contact:

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USDA Rural Development serves as the lead federal agency for rural development needs by offering financial and technical assistance to individuals, businesses and communities. USDA Rural Development programs include funding for day care centers, fire trucks and other community facility projects; the purchase, construction or repair of homes; loans and guarantees to rural businesses to save or create jobs and renewable energy; and loans and grants for water and sewer utility projects.

USDA Rural Development provides a full range of rural development credit services in rural Louisiana. The USDA Rural Development State Office is located at 3727 Government Street, Alexandria, Louisiana 71302, and the telephone number is (318) 473-7921. There are four area offices located throughout the state to serve Louisiana residents. Further information on USDA Rural Development’s loan and grant programs can be obtained by visiting USDA Rural Development’s web site at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>. USDA Rural Development is an equal opportunity lender, provider, and employer. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20250-9140.