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Secretary Vilsack Highlights Efforts to Decrease U.S. Dependence on Foreign Oil During Tennessee Visit

Nashville, Tenn., May 23, 2011 — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today highlighted the importance of moving toward a clean energy economy and breaking our country's unsustainable dependence on foreign oil while visiting Thorntons Convenience Store E-85 fueling station.

"Flex-fuel pumps give Americans a choice to purchase domestically produced renewable transportation fuels," Vilsack said. "The Obama Administration is working to transform the United States into a global clean energy leader because transportation fuels created from a wide variety of renewable energy sources will create a new generation of jobs here at home, reduce dependence on foreign oil and enhance our national security."

In April, Secretary Vilsack announced a series of initiatives to help farmers and rural small businesses implement renewable energy systems and become more energy efficient. One of those initiatives allows USDA's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) to now make funding available for flexible fuel pumps, sometimes referred to as "blender pumps." This is expected to encourage fuel station owners to invest the capital necessary to give American motorists the option of selecting the blend of renewable fuel that meets their needs. The Obama administration has set a goal of installing 10,000 flexible fuel pumps nationwide within 5 years.

The deadlines for submitting completed REAP applications are June 15 and June 30, depending on the type of project to be funded. For information on how to apply for assistance, contact your local USDA Rural Development office or see the April 14 Federal Register, <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2011/pdf/2011-8456.pdf>. A list of USDA offices is available at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/StateOfficeAddresses.html>.

Today, most gasoline sold in this country is a mix of 10 percent ethanol. Currently, there are 8 - 8.5 million flexible fuel vehicles on U.S. roads, constituting about 3.2 - 3.5 percent of the approximately 250 million vehicles on the road. These flexible fuel vehicles can be fueled with E85 (a blend of 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline). There are approximately 2,350 fueling stations that offer E85 of the more than 167,800 stations nationwide. Earlier this year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the results of E15 testing on vehicles years 2001 and younger. EPA's findings confirm there are additional vehicles on the road able to take advantage of higher ethanol blends than currently available at local, non-E85, pumps.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of nearly \$149 billion in loans and loan guarantees. Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov> for additional information about the agency's programs or to locate the USDA Rural Development office nearest you.

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