

STATE TREASURER'S AG-LINK PROGRAM HAS HELP FOR FARMERS STRUGGLING WITH DROUGHT

From Office of the State Treasurer

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) State Treasurer Robert Butkin doesn't have any rain for Oklahoma family farmers, but he does have money—\$19 million ready to loan. The low-interest money is available through the Treasurer's Agricultural Linked Deposit program.

"All Oklahomans hope the drought will end soon," said Butkin. "In the meantime, our farmers should know there is a program that may be able to help."

Butkin said the Ag-Link program provides low-interest loans to qualified family farmers by linking certificates of deposit with loans at participating financial institutions. Individual farmers may qualify for up to \$350,000.

"The Ag-Link program is designed for just this kind of crisis," he said. "Qualifying farmers will have two years on the initial term—with the option to renew the loan for up to six more years. Hopefully this will help get struggling farmers back on their feet following this terrible dry spell."

To qualify, Butkin said the applicant must have a debt-to-asset ratio of at least 55 percent and must earn at least 60 percent of his or her gross income from farming or ranching. The interest rate charged on loans is reduced by up to three percent.

"The best place to invest the people's tax dollars is in Oklahoma," Butkin said. "Ag-Link is a unique way for us to invest in what makes Oklahoma great—its family farmers. My staff and I are ready to help."

Butkin said farmers who believe they might qualify for an Ag-Link low-interest loan should contact their local financial institution or call the Treasurer's Office at 405-521-3191.

SOUTHWESTERN BELL HELPS FUND OKLAHOMA TELECOMMUNICATION CENTERS

From Oklahoma Department of Commerce

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Dr. Leo Presley, executive director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, received a \$1.4 million check Wednesday from Southwestern Bell-Oklahoma president, Dave Lopez, to help construct and maintain telecommunications centers across the state.

"Developing a statewide capability in telecommunications is absolutely essential to the future of economic development and education in Oklahoma, particularly in rural areas of the state," commented Presley in accepting the check. "Such a networking system will make an entire world of information, data and communications accessible to all Oklahomans. Southwestern Bell's contribution is a vital part of making that capability happen."

The money from SWB will be added to a \$1.5 million grant awarded last year to the Commerce Department funded by the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Partners in the project include the Oklahoma State Data Processing and Telecommunication Advisory Committee, OSU Institute for Telecommunications and the State Regents for Higher Education.

According to Beth Rodriquez, director of programs for the Commerce Department's research and planning group, the concept for the telecommunications centers originated from Oklahoma's 1993-98 Strategic Economic Development Plan. "Most centers will have equipment in several locations—for example, a public library, cooperative extension office, and a school—creating a 'virtual,' rather than physical, community center," commented Rodriguez.