

HILLSDALE

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Workshop totes rural funding

By STEVEN HOWARD
steve.howard@hillsdale.net

The United States Department of Agriculture hosted a loan and grant workshop in Hillsdale Tuesday hoping to inform residents and businesses of federal funds available in rural areas.

U.S. Rep. Mark Schauer (D-Battle Creek) said these types of gatherings are why he is a congressman.

"My number one goal is to make federal resources available to the communities I represent," he said. "I think this meets my goal of bringing the government to Hillsdale County."

Representatives went over many of the 40 programs the USDA offers for rural development in the state.

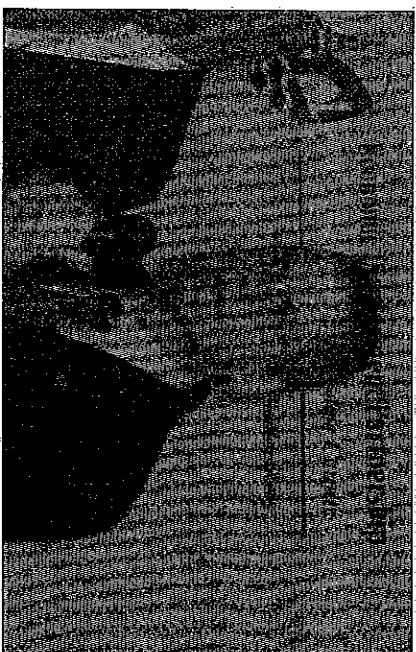
Area Director Kevin Smith said funding totals

have grown steadily over the past three years. He said the total for fiscal year 2008 was over \$733 million.

"There's a distinct possibility that when the year's all done, we'll eclipse \$1 billion," he said.

Given the current economic climate, Schauer said informational sessions are much needed.

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Rep. Mark Schauer (D-Battle Creek) spoke at a workshop held by the United States Department of Agriculture in Hillsdale Tuesday.

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"This is particularly timely because of how tight the financing markets are right now," he said. "To me, this is a big deal that people receive the resources that will help them. These are tough times."

Items discussed included direct loan and grant funding for home ownership loans, community funding for infrastructural improvements, as well as rural business programs.

Schauer said the workshop is a start, but there is a lot of work to be done.

"We wanted to provide this broad overview, but then provide the ongoing support," he said. "There is a desire to access federal dollars."

Schauer reminded those in attendance that agriculture is Michigan's second largest industry and needs support. He said he envies the state's largest industry, manufacturing, coming back to life in tandem with a thriving agricultural base.

"I would love to see a

healthy competition," he said. "I'm pleased that agriculture is growing and I would like to see manufacturing stabilize."

Schauer said the two industries can easily fuel each other.

"I think there is a direct relationship," he said. "We are making windmills and turbines that can help agriculture. This is all about helping to create jobs."

To Schauer, the need for such workshops is self-evident.

"We have a commitment to the people we serve," Schauer said.