

## STAKEHOLDER ANNOUNCEMENT

### USDA Seeks Comment on Ways to Help Rural Businesses Produce and Market Value-Added Products

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24, 2021 – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development Justin Maxson today announced that the Department is seeking input on ways to make it easier for rural businesses to produce and market value-added agricultural products.

The Department is interested in stakeholders' recommendations to streamline application requirements and make other improvements to the [Agriculture Innovation Center Program](#). Through this program, USDA awards grants of up to \$1 million to eligible Agriculture Innovation Centers. The Centers may use the funds to provide technical assistance to help agricultural producers develop and market value-added agricultural products.

For example, the Department is seeking comments on how to:

- Make program definitions and requirements easier to understand.
- Expand the types of services the centers can provide.
- Enhance applicants' ability to demonstrate that they meet eligibility requirements.
- Improve the program's eligibility requirements, merit review process and performance assessment process.
- Update the application deadline.

USDA will hold a virtual listening session on these topics on Tuesday, Oct. 5 at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Interested parties may register at <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3831947973149428235>.

Comments on proposed changes to the AIC program must be submitted via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Oct. 25, 2021. For additional information, see page 47286 of the Aug. 24 2021, [Federal Register](#).

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