

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 27, 2004

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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT ANNOUNCES GRANT FOR CONNECTICUT AG BUSINESS CLUSTER

TORRINGTON, CT – USDA Rural Development State Director, David Tuttle joined Congresswoman Nancy Johnson and members of the Litchfield County Dairy Committee at it's twilight picnic this evening to award The Connecticut Ag Business Cluster a USDA grant for \$72,130. The Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) will allow the cluster to conduct a formal feasibility study, create a marketing and business plan, and finance the trial production of a planting pot which will transform farm animal waste into a new, eco-friendly, biodegradable nursery and garden product.

The goal of the project being carried out by the Connecticut Ag Business Cluster, Inc. and Freund's Farm, the East Canaan farm where the pots will be produced and whose owners are members of the Litchfield County Dairy Committee, is to prepare a plan for market development and product launch of the composted manure planting pots. Enough composted manure planting pots for market analysis will be produced on pilot scale equipment already in place at Freund's Farm.

Since 1999 USDA Rural Development has provided funding for several stages of the biodegradable pot venture including the *Freund Farm Manure Pots Supplemental Market Survey*, an investigation of mold techniques, the *Connecticut Organic Waste Solutions (C.O.W.S.) Business Plan*, a comprehensive study of manufacturing alternatives, and patent research.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure.

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