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Nebraska—Rural Business & Cooperative Service

Regional Collaboration

USDA Awards Grant to NCTA For Business Builder Pilot Program

Outline Of Need:

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents sought funding to develop a community-based Business Builder Pilot program to help reverse the population decline of small towns in Nebraska. The program connected business owners nearing retirement with high school students interested in returning to a small community and owning their own business.

How Rural Development Helped:

USDA Rural Development awarded \$91,200 in grant funds in August 2009 through its Rural Business Enterprise Grant program to the UNL Board of Regents. The funds were utilized by the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) in Curtis, Neb. to develop the Business Builder Pilot program in the pilot communities of Grant, Neb. (Population 1,225) and Oshkosh, Neb. (Population 887).

The Results:

Fast Facts

Program: USDA Rural Development Rural Business Enterprise Grant

Investment: \$91,200

Partners: University of Nebraska Board of Regents, Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, Southwest Nebraska Community Betterment Corporation, Grow Garden County, Garden County High School and Perkins County High School

Congressional District: NE-3

Demographics

- Population—Grant 1,225; Oshkosh 887

Impact:

- Rural Community Career Development course
- Will foster the wind industry
- Learning opportunities

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The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture partnered with the Southwest Nebraska Community Betterment Corporation and Grow Garden County to implement the program in Grant and Oshkosh. The project coordinators worked with the school administration to recruit students and conducted business visits to identify business mentors in the community. Each student participated in a career assessment and was paired with a business owner to serve as a mentor. Seven students from Garden County High School in Oshkosh and four students from Perkins County High School in Grant participated in the program during the 2010-2011 school year.

The Rural Community Career Development course created awareness in students of opportunities for a career in their home community once they complete the education they seek. Each community has secured funding to continue the program for the 2011-12 school term. The four Perkins County students plan to continue their mentor relationships through work study and/or on their own time.

While the program to date has only been completed by 11 students in two schools, two rural counties have been introduced to the importance of bringing their youth home after college as business partners and professionals. Each county is developing a countywide position list of possible openings in the next five to 10 years.

Perhaps most important, the Business Builder Pilot Program formed the basis for the Rural Community Career Development course and seminar available to any community faced with out-migration and declining economic activity. The Board of Regents is seeking additional funding to market the program