



MEDIA RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development
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USDA TO HOST INFORMATION MEETINGS ON VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRAMS

USDA Rural Development will be holding six informational meetings across the state to introduce their Renewable Energy Program, as well as to give an update on the Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grant Program. The meetings will be offered free of charge and open to the public at large.

The Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Program was authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill. The purpose of the program is to provide funds for the purchase of renewable energy systems and make energy improvements for agricultural producers and rural small businesses. Renewable energy means energy derived from wind, solar, bio-mass, or geothermal sources or hydrogen derived from bio-mass or water using wind, solar, or geothermal energy sources. Agricultural producers and rural small businesses interested in learning more about the eligibility requirements and the application process are encouraged to attend. This is the first year of funding for the program and a notice of funding availability is expected to be announced in the near future with a short window of opportunity.

The Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grant (VADG) Program, in existence since Fiscal Year (FY) 2000, is designed to encourage independent producers of agricultural commodities to process their raw products into marketable, value-added goods, thereby increasing farm income. The two main principles are to assist the producer in entering emerging markets and to increase their profit margins. Ventures in which agricultural producers add value to their products through processing, segregation, or other means are eligible to apply for grants. Grants can be awarded for such activities as conducting feasibility analyses, developing business and marketing plans, or using as working capital while the venture develops cash flow.

Last year there were 231 VADG grants awarded in 43 states totaling over \$37 million, which funded a variety of agricultural ventures such as renewable energy, agri-marketing, high-value products from major crops and commodities. Washington State received grant money for 11 of 26 applicants who applied, placing us sixth in the nation as far as number of projects selected. Due to the interest nationally in this program, we expect the competition to be intense for grant funds when the availability notice is published later this year.

The informational meetings will be presented in the Kennewick, Yakima, Spokane, Wenatchee, Olympia and Everett. [A detailed list with locations follows.] The meetings will all follow the same format with the first session on the VADG Program beginning at 9 a.m. with a review of successes and lessons learned from FY 2002 and preparatory for the FY 2003 application period. The second session will begin at 1 p.m. on the Renewable Energy program to explain the intent and desired outcomes of the program. More information on the meetings may be obtained by contacting the Business Programs Division in Yakima at 509-454-5743, Ext.5.

The mission of USDA Rural Development's Business and Cooperative Programs is to enhance the quality of life for all rural Americans by providing leadership in building competitive businesses and sustainable cooperatives that can prosper in the global marketplace. To learn more about the programs offered by USDA Rural Development, contact any USDA Service Center or visit us online at www.rurdev.usda.gov/wa. ###

Informational Meetings To Be Held in The Following Locations:

KENNEWICK

17 April

Benton County PUD, 2721 W. 10th Ave., Kennewick

YAKIMA

18 April

Washington Department of Agriculture, 21 N. First Ave., Yakima

SPOKANE

21 April

Spokane County Cooperative Extension Offices, Lower Level, 222 North Havana, Spokane
(From I-90 exit on Thor-Freya and follow signs to the Spokane Interstate
Fairground, taking the entrance for the Extension Offices)

WENATCHEE

22 April

Wenatchee Valley College, Campus Theater, 1300 5th Ave., Wenatchee

OLYMPIA

23 April

USDA Rural Development, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Olympia
(Exit I-5 on Hwy 101, take 2nd exit for Black Lake Blvd and turn Left, collocated with US
Forest Service.)

EVERETT

25 April

WSU Cooperative Extension, 600 128th St. SE, Everett
(Exit I-5 at 128th St. SW, turn East and go ¼ mile to McCollum Park, the Extension building
is at the back.)