



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development

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Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Support For Small, Socially Disadvantaged Agricultural Producers and Cooperatives to Become More Profitable and Efficient

WASHINGTON, May 7, 2010 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA is accepting grant applications to assist small, socially disadvantaged agricultural producers and cooperatives in rural areas.

“Helping small agricultural producers better market their products creates economic opportunity and these grants will help small business owners add profit and efficiency to their operations so they can grow and create jobs,” Vilsack said.

Approximately \$3.5 million in grants are available with funding is being awarded through USDA Rural Development’s Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant Program, which was authorized by Congress in the the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. It is part of the Department’s ongoing effort to expand outreach to rural residents to ensure that all communities have equal access to USDA programs and services. Funding is available to cooperatives or associations of cooperatives where at least 75 percent of the governing board or membership has annual gross agricultural product sales of \$250,000 or less in the last three years. Grants can be used for product improvements, business plan development or economic development activities.

The grants are intended to assist eligible producers. For example, in 2009 Piedmont Farmers Marketing Cooperative, Inc. in Greenwood, S.C., used a \$43,600 Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant to complete several seminars and workshops on animal husbandry, vaccination requirements, and techniques on breeding and proper raising of offspring. The 31-member co-op developed a marketing study on a certification mark, collective brands, consumer assurance and alternative livestock planning. The grant also will allow co-op members to visit a livestock operation that uses livestock waste for renewable energy, reducing the operation’s energy costs.

Meanwhile, SCF Organic Farms, LTD received a \$33,100 Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant in 2009 to expand the farm, which in turn led to a greater presence in the community and higher sales of the farm’s organic vegetables. SCF has completed several workshops and provided technical assistance to other small, socially disadvantaged producers interested in organic farming. SCF is located in a rural area of Sumter County, S.C.

Committed to the future of rural communities.

“USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.”

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Applications for Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grants are due July 27. Application materials may be obtained at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/ssdpg/ssdpg.htm> or by contacting the USDA Rural Development State Office. A list of these offices is available at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html. For additional information, see the April 28 Federal Register, page 22358, <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-9820.pdf>.

USDA Rural Development administers and manages more than 40 housing, business, and community infrastructure and facility programs through a network of 6,100 employees in 500 offices at the national, state and local level. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers, and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of more than \$134 billion in loans and loan guarantees. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA Rural Development's web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/csdir.htm.

Rural Development serves as the lead Federal entity for rural development needs and administers program assistance through its housing, business, community and infrastructure programs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Further information on USDA Rural Development may be obtained by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>. In West Virginia, call 1-800-295-8228 to be put in touch with the appropriate personnel serving your county. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202.720.2600 (voice and TDD).

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