



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development

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SUNSWEEP GROWERS HAVE 300,000 REASONS TO CELEBRATE CO-OP MONTH

Grant will assist co-op in marketing new plum product

YUBA CITY, Calif., October 25, 2007 – As part of Co-Op Month celebrations, USDA Rural Development State Director Ben Higgins presented a \$300,000 Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) check to Sunsweet Growers, Inc. President and CEO Arthur Driscoll today. The grant funds will be used to assist the Yuba City-based cooperative in marketing a new plum juice product.

California is home to over 160 cooperatives with gross sales reaching over \$7 billion annually, ranking the Golden State fifth in number of cooperatives. USDA Rural Development has invested over \$9.3 million in California cooperatives since 2001.

VAPG funds may be used for planning activities, such as feasibility studies, marketing and business plans needed to establish a viable value-added marketing opportunity for an agricultural product, or to provide working capital for operating a value-added business venture, marketing value-added agricultural products and for farm-based renewable energy projects.

Eligible applicants are independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives, agricultural producer groups, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures. Additionally, applicants must provide matching funds at least equal to the grant.

“In today’s global marketplace, California’s agricultural cooperatives understand that they need to stay on the cutting edge of innovation to stay competitive,” said Higgins. “Today’s grant will help improve the competitiveness of Sunsweet Growers by supporting innovative new production and marketing strategies.”

Sunsweet Growers, Inc. is a grower-owned marketing cooperative of over 400 members, well known for their dried plum products. The cooperative represents more than one third of the dried plum market worldwide. Sunsweet Growers, Inc. will use the VAPG funds to help with the introduction of a new “light” version of their “PlumSmart” plum juice product.

“With assistance from grants like those announced today, Sunsweet Growers has been able to offer the highest quality dried plum products to our customers,” said Driscoll. “We look forward to the introduction of our latest product and appreciate the support we have received from USDA Rural Development.”

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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 has invested over \$76 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. As a result, over 1.5 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at one of California's 18 local USDA Rural Development offices or by visiting <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ca>.

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