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News Release

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FARMERS' MARKETS GETTING CLOSER LOOK

Indianapolis (#02-19; 4-25-2002): Indiana farmers and other rural residents continue to closely explore alternative business ventures to boost their incomes. While farmers' markets are not a new idea in the state, they are receiving more attention lately as a profitable option for rural entrepreneurs and communities.

At a recent workshop held at the Venture Out Business Center in Madison over 150 individuals attended to learn more about how to bring together local business talent and local products. The Southeastern Small Business Development Center (SBDC), a program of the Madison Area Chamber of Commerce, is one of 14 such centers around the state and is located at the Venture Out Business Center in Madison. The Venture Out Business Center is an incubator site designed to help new and expanding businesses in their area grow and prosper.

As part of their business development services, the SBDC in Madison became the first in Indiana to offer technical assistance in agriculture through a full time agricultural business development consultant on staff. Out of this increased emphasis in agriculture, came the idea to sponsor the workshop on farmers' markets.

The workshop attendance was encouraging and somewhat surprising since farmers' markets have been around for a long time. Linda Wood, SBDC Regional Director in Madison, said, "There is such potential here and when we see the enthusiasm, we think its something that's going to continue to grow." At the workshop participants studied changes in the area's agricultural industry and the rise of farmers markets. Many of the participants were community leaders who wanted to learn more about how to strengthen the relationship between town and country while enhancing the income potential of both.

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The workshop was sponsored by the Southern Indiana Rural Development Project, USDA Rural Development, Southeastern Indiana Small Business Development Center, Indiana Rural Development Council, Historic Hoosier Hills RC&D, and the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service. Breakout sessions at the workshop were held for the producers and local government officials interested in starting, expanding or improving their hometown farmers' markets.

Jerry Hay, USDA Rural Development Cooperative Development Specialist, who participated in the workshop, said, "Farmers' markets are just one of the many examples across Indiana of farmers vertically integrating their operations to improve the financial condition of their business. The further a producer climbs this ladder of integration the higher his share of returns, such as when farmers' markets allow the producer to sell direct to the consumer."

Individuals interested in learning more about the activities of the state's Small Business Development Centers and their Venture Out Business Centers can contact the Indiana Small Business Development Center Network, One North Capitol, Suite 900, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204; phone: (317) 234-2082. The SBDC website is www.isbdc.org.

For more information about the farmers' market workshop initiative described in this article, you can contact Hay at 812-346-3411 or Wood at 812-265-3127.

Single family home loans, rural rental housing, water and waste water facility funding, business and industry loans, and community facility loans and grants are financial resources available from USDA Rural Development. Questions concerning USDA Rural Development programs can be directed to the Rural Development office in your area. Information on where the nearest office is located to you can be obtained at www.rurdev.usda.gov/in.