

Local Contact: Jane Grant, (701) 530-2037

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NORTH DAKOTA COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT CENTER TO GET \$200,000 GRANT FROM AG DEPARTMENT

Funding Will Help Local Cooperatives Improve Products and Expand Their Appeal in the Marketplace; 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' Initiative Will Help Strengthen Local Food Systems

A Mandan-based nonprofit that provides technical assistance to cooperatives was awarded a \$200,000 grant Tuesday from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

The grant to North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDREC) was part of approximately \$4.8 million in grants announced by Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan.

Merrigan said 28 organizations in 21 states were selected to receive the grant money to spur economic development and create jobs in rural communities.

It's part of the "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative." That's a USDA program designed to connect people more closely with the farmers who supply their food and to increase the production, marketing and consumption of fresh, nutritious food grown locally in a sustainable manner.

"The cooperative business model continues to be successful in creating wealth in rural communities and can also play an important role in strengthening our food systems," Merrigan said. "USDA is proud to be a partner in the effort to bolster these cooperatives and help them increase the value and appeal of the products and services they deliver."

NDREC provides technical assistance to existing and potential cooperatives, in which members own the business and have a say in its operations. NDREC also provides a range of services to such cooperatives, including helping them form, doing project planning, filing legal documents, seeking funding sources, exploring operating options and conducting board training.

The grants are being provided by USDA Rural Development's Rural Cooperative Development Grant program and are part of USDA Rural Development's annual budget and are not funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Three other North Dakota groups receiving grant funds include:

Common Enterprise Development Center, Mandan, received a \$200,000 grant to assist individuals and entities in the startup, expansion or operational improvement of rural businesses, especially those that are cooperatively or mutually owned.

ABLE Inc., Dickinson, was awarded a \$50,000 grant to identify a start-up company that can provide individuals with developmental disabilities meaningful employment opportunities throughout southwestern North Dakota. ABLE will provide technical assistance for current and future work related tasks.

Griggs Steele Empowerment Zone, Finley, received a \$30,600 grant to provide technical assistance in bringing leadership, organization and capacity building to the individual communities within the Griggs-Steele Empowerment Zone.

