

USDA Announces \$30 Million Available for Food Entrepreneurs and Producers

Written by USDA
Friday, 15 May 2015 15:51 -

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Funding to support beginning, veteran, and socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to expand businesses.

STEVENS POINT, WI - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on May 8, 2015 that USDA is making \$30 million available to farmers, ranchers and food entrepreneurs to develop new product lines. Funding will be made available through USDA's Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program.

"Farmers and ranchers are creative people who, with a little help, can put that creativity to work and improve the bottom line for their operations," Vilsack said. "Value-Added Producer Grants enable them to develop new product lines to grow their businesses and expand their contributions to our nation's economy. This support is especially important for beginning farmers, military veterans engaging in farming and smaller farm operations participating in the local and regional food system."

More information on how to apply is on page 26528 of the May 8 Federal Register. The deadline to submit paper applications is July 7. Electronic applications submitted through grants.gov are due July 2.

The VAPG program can be used to develop new product lines from raw agricultural products or additional uses for already developed product lines. Military veterans, socially disadvantaged, and beginning farmers and ranchers; operators of small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches; farmer and rancher cooperatives; and applicants that propose mid-tier value chain projects are given special priority in applying for VAPGs. Additional priority is given to group applicants who seek funding for projects that "best contribute" to creating or increasing marketing opportunities for these type of operators.

Since 2009, USDA Rural Development has awarded 853 VAPGs totaling \$104.5 million. Approximately 19 percent of the grants and 13 percent of total funding has been awarded to

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beginning farmers and ranchers. During the 2013-2014 funding cycle, nearly half of VAPG awards went to farmers and ranchers developing products for the local food sector. The VAPG program is a key element of the USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative, which coordinates the Department's work on local and regional food systems. Secretary Vilsack has identified local and regional food systems as one of the four pillars of rural economic development.

Congress increased funding for the VAPG program when it passed the 2014 Farm Bill. That law builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the past six years, while achieving meaningful reform and billions of dollars in savings for taxpayers.

Since the bill's enactment, USDA has made significant progress to implement each provision of this critical legislation, including expanding access to rural credit, developing new markets for rural-made products, and investing in infrastructure, housing and community facilities to help improve the quality of life in rural America. For more information, visit www.usda.gov/farmbill

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 the lead federal agency for rural development needs, USDA Rural Development invests in jobs, infrastructure, community development, health, education, homeownership and affordable rental housing to improve the lives of people in rural areas and the economic health of rural communities. During the last year, the agency has assisted nearly 9,000 families and businesses in more than 100 communities, investing more than \$571 million into rural Wisconsin through affordable loans, loan guarantees and grants. Further information on USDA Rural Development programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting the web site at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/wi>.

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any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at

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m.intake@usda.gov

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