

USDA invites applications for Value Added Producer Grant to assist farmers

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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Deputy Agriculture Secretary Kathleen Merrigan has announced that applications are being accepted for grants to provide economic assistance to independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives and agricultural producer groups through the Value-Added Producer Grant Program.

“By creating value-added products, farmers and ranchers can expand economic opportunities, create jobs and keep wealth in rural communities,” Merrigan said. “These funding opportunities will promote business expansion and entrepreneurship by helping local businesses get access to capital, technical assistance and new markets for their products and services.”

For example, Mick and Loretta McDowell, owners of Miletta Vista Winery in St. Paul, Nebraska, applied for a Value Added Producer Grant to assist in marketing their locally produced wine. They had been growing grapes since 2003 and used the grant funds to help them market their product in order to open a winery in Central Nebraska. The funds were used to help develop and implement a marketing campaign, purchase the inventory for bottling the wine, and to hire a marketing person. The McDowells provided matching funds for the grant. Since the opening of the winery, over 4,500 new customers from 26 states and five foreign countries have visited the winery. The grant funds helped them become a well recognized area attraction in the St. Paul area.

The application deadline is August 29, 2011. For further details about eligibility rules and application procedures, see the June 28, 2011, Federal Register. Value-Added Producer Grants may be used for feasibility studies or business plans, working capital for marketing value-added agricultural products and for farm-based renewable energy projects. Eligible applicants include independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives, and agricultural producer groups. Value-added products are created when a producer increases the consumer value of an agricultural commodity in the production or processing stage. To see a video featuring Deputy Secretary Merrigan discussing the VAPG program [click here](#).

In June, the President signed an Executive Order establishing the first WHRC chaired by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. To better coordinate Federal programs and maximize the impact of Federal investment, the White House Rural Council will work throughout government to create policies to promote economic prosperity and a high quality of life in our rural communities.

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Since taking office, President Obama's Administration has taken significant steps to improve the lives of rural Americans and has provided broad support for rural communities. The Obama Administration has set goals of modernizing infrastructure by providing broadband access to 10 million Americans, expanding educational opportunities for students in rural areas, and providing affordable health care. In the long term, these unparalleled rural investments will help ensure that America's rural communities are repopulating, self-sustaining, and thriving economically.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of state and local offices. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of more than \$150 billion in loans and loan guarantees. 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.

Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov> for additional information about the agency's programs or to locate the USDA Rural Development office nearest you. In Nebraska, contact Joan Scheel at 402-437-5594.