

USDA invites applications for loans and grants to support renewable energy, energy efficiency projects

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 08 May 2014 00:00 -

USDA Rural Development is seeking applications from rural small businesses and agricultural producers for funding to make energy efficiency improvements or to install renewable energy systems.

“Nebraska is rich in renewable energy resources representing an enormous economic opportunity for rural America,” said Nebraska State Director Maxine Moul. “This funding will help farmers, ranchers and rural small business owners evaluate their operations and incorporate energy efficiency improvements or take advantage of renewable energy resources to replace existing energy use. America will become more energy independent.”

The funding is being provided through USDA’s Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). Investments from programs like REAP help support the true engine of America’s economic growth – a thriving middle class. REAP is one of many USDA programs and initiatives to support an expanded domestic energy economy. In addition to increased renewable energy production, USDA makes investments in the bioeconomy, provides support for the emerging biobased products industry, supports new technologies, and energy efficiency improvements.

REAP is authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. It helps agricultural producers and rural small businesses reduce energy costs and consumption, and helps meet the nation’s critical energy needs. For fiscal year (FY) 2014, USDA plans to award up to \$12.3 million in grants and \$57.8 million in loan guarantees. Additional REAP funds provided by the Farm Bill will be made available with a subsequent notice.

USDA is accepting applications for:

- Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvement loan guarantee and grant combinations;
- Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvement loan guarantees;

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- Renewable energy system and energy efficiency improvement grants.

Requests for grant funding may not exceed 25 percent of a project's cost – either for stand-alone grant requests or for grants combined with loan guarantees. Loan requests from \$5,000 to \$25,000,000 are accepted. Total federal funding for a project cannot exceed 75 percent.

Since the start of the Obama Administration, REAP has supported more than 8,200 renewable energy and energy efficiency projects nationwide. During this period, USDA has provided more than \$264 million in grants and \$212 million in loan guarantees to agricultural producers and rural small business owners for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements.

Recent Nebraska recipients of REAP funding include T&K Five Star Cattle Company, Inc. of Lindsay. The company used a \$17,507 REAP grant to help install a 25 kilowatt photo voltaic solar panel system near an existing irrigation center pivot. Projected to produce 39,894 kilowatts annually, the solar power will help offset the system's existing energy needs. Outside of irrigation season, the energy generated will be credited to the company.

Mac's Creek Winery of Lexington used a \$15,421 REAP grant to make energy efficiency improvements to its winery. Wine tanks and chillers were replaced with more efficient equipment. The project is projected to have energy savings of 80 percent.

Charles Paulsen, doing business as Budaroo's, a floral shop in Oshkosh, will use combined funding of a \$17,000 grant and \$8,627 loan for energy efficiency updates projected to realize energy savings of 39 percent. The ceiling and walls will be insulated and the furnace and cooling system will be upgraded.

REAP funding is an example of the many ways that USDA is helping revitalize rural economies to create opportunities for growth and prosperity, support innovative technologies, identify new markets for agricultural producers, and better utilize our nation's natural resources.

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Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis through USDA Rural Development Offices.

Please contact your local Rural Development Specialist for further information on the REAP program: Marla Marx, marla.marx@ne.usda.gov or 308-632-2195 extension 1132 – panhandle including northwest and southwest counties.

For additional information visit:

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/NEBusinessPrograms_Renewable_Energy_EII.htm.

For more information about USDA loans and grants, call the Nebraska Rural Development Office at (402) 437-5551 or visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne/.

For additional information on RD projects, please visit Rural Development's new interactive web map featuring program funding and success stories for fiscal years 2009-2012. The data can be found at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RDSuccessStories.html>.

President Obama's plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities. USDA's investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of our American values.