NEWS RELEASE

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RUTGERS CENTER RECEIVES USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDS
Monies will help New Jersey-based cooperative business ventures

Bridgeton, N.J. – The Rutgers Food Innovation Center has received a grant of approximately $119,000 from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, which will enable it to continue its very successful Business Association Mentoring program and support New Jersey cooperative entities during 2008. This Rural Cooperative Development Grant will enable the Food Innovation Center to continue providing New Jersey businesses with a one-stop resource for cooperative marketing, distribution, purchasing and production initiatives.

The Food Innovation Center’s Business Association Mentoring (BAM) program was the first of its kind in New Jersey when it began in 2005. The focus of BAM's initial services was to revive interest in cooperatives and collaborations that provide marketing, distribution, purchasing and operational synergy for small businesses, nonprofit organizations and trade groups. Assistance made possible through the new grant will allow the center’s personnel to focus in 2008 in a number of areas that demonstrated earlier potential and momentum.

The 2008 USDA grant will enable the Rutgers Food Innovation Center to provide businesses with consultations regarding the economical, legal and other benefits that can exist as a result of cooperative business models. Areas of focus will include farmers market vendors, towards the organization of marketing and distribution cooperatives that will strengthen their abilities in purchasing, marketing, distribution, etc. Municipalities and farmers market community sponsors will also benefit from such collaborative practices, especially those
interested in developing a state or regional Farmers Market Association that can provide benefits in management, marketing, and operational procedures for participating vendors. Plans are also underway to support small farmer/entrepreneurs who want to form cooperatives for dairy, goat meat and value added agricultural products. Other types of businesses that will receive assistance through the BAM program will include, for example, wood recyclers who have expressed an interest in the creation of a statewide wood recycling cooperative.

The Rutgers Food Innovation Center offers business and technical expertise to farmers, agricultural cooperatives, food business entrepreneurs, small and mid-sized established food companies, and retail and foodservice operations that promote locally sourced food products. Business incubators like the Rutgers Food Innovation Center provide entrepreneurs with the expertise, networks and tools they need to make their ventures successful. The Food Innovation Center is currently constructing a 23,000 sq. ft. food business incubator facility that will be located in the city of Bridgeton, and open during the summer of 2008.

More information about the Rutgers Food Innovation Center can be found at www.foodinnovation.rutgers.edu. Service providers and manufacturers that want to explore ways that the BAM program can help them are encouraged to visit the BAM website at: http://www.bam.rutgers.edu/.

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