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USDA Awards $230,000 in Grants to Benefit New Jersey Farmers
USDA Under Secretary Dorr Presents Awards

New Brunswick, NJ--The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development awarded a total of $230,000 in grants that will benefit farmers in New Jersey at a ceremony at the Rutgers EcoComplex on October 17. The grants included three Value-Added Agriculture Producer Development Grants, two Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvement Grants, and one Rural Business Enterprise Grant. USDA Under Secretary Thomas C. Dorr presented the awards at a ceremony at the Rutgers EcoComplex.

“In New Jersey, gross domestic production on farms is about $500 million,” said Dorr in comments delivered at the ceremony “We have to do a better job at capturing that wealth at the farm level by enabling our producers to embark on a number of value-added development strategies. That is what the value-added development program is about. That’s what these grants are about.”

Under Secretary Dorr was accompanied by New Jersey’s Rural Development State Director Andrew Law in presenting the awards. Congressman Christopher Smith also attended the event and addressed the audience, remarking that “This kind of innovation, this kind of support (by USDA) is one small tangible modest way of saying ‘thank you’ to our farmers and to encourage them to continue their innovation, to continue their drive toward independence in regards to solar energy, which certainly is a great investment.”

“Since 2001, New Jersey farmers have been awarded 17 value-added grants and three renewable energy grants, totaling almost $1 million,” said Jerry Kukor, dean of academic programs and research at Rutgers’ School of Biological and Environmental Sciences. “This outstanding collaboration between the New Jersey USDA Rural Development, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and Rutgers’ New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station provides this comprehensive support system to ensure that these opportunities are going to be as successful as possible.”
“These grants are a direct result of the commitment of the Bush Administration to provide capital for our farmers so that they can create sustainable agriculture and preserve the remaining rural landscape,” said New Jersey’s Rural Development State Director Andrew Law. “The grants are part of a total ‘package’ to support production agriculture in New Jersey. The cooperation of each of the partners—Rutgers, the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, the Food Innovation Center, the Rutgers EcoComplex, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and USDA Rural Development—is critical to the preservation of sustainable agriculture in New Jersey.”

The Value-Added Agriculture Producer Development Grants were awarded to Sheppard Farms Inc. of Cedarville, John W. and Joan C. Bradway of Salem and Central Valley Farm of Asbury. An award of $30,000 to Sheppard Farms Inc. will be used to develop a business plan for marketing packaged fresh-cut asparagus. An award of $25,000 to John W. and Joan C. Bradway will be used to create a variety of value-added entree products prepared from farm products and served at a farmers market. An award of $20,000 to Central Valley Farm will be used to conduct a marketing analysis of organic dairy products produced from milk produced by the farm.

Rutgers’ Food Innovation Center assisted in the preparation of the winning proposals submitted for these grants. The Value-Added Agriculture Producer Development Grants cover 50 percent of the project costs; the awardees are required to cover the other 50 percent of the costs.

The Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvement Grants were awarded to Malcolm Cooper of Springfield and to RedSkye Farms of Stow Creek. An award of $43,630 to Malcolm Cooper will be used to assist with purchase of a 16 kWh solar photovoltaic system, which will address approximately 50 percent of the business’s electrical load. An award of $42,075 to RedSkye Farms will be used to assist with purchase of a 19.8kWh photovoltaic system. The System will supply 24.3 kWh of the electric usage of RedSkye Farms and generate additional farm income through the sale of excess electricity and the marketing of New Jersey Solar Renewable Energy Credits. These grants cover 25 percent of the operating costs of each project; the farmers are encouraged to apply for “green” energy grants available from utility companies, such as from New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program.

The Rural Business Enterprise Grant was awarded to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, which will collaborate with and contract with the Rutgers Food Innovation Center to complete this much-needed project. The $70,000 award will be used to survey community farmers markets throughout New Jersey, identify best practices, and develop a statewide marketing strategy for farmers markets, which will result in increased profitability for New Jersey farmers.