For Immediate Release
October 28, 2005

Rutgers Food Innovation Center, USDA Rural Development, and the NJ Department of Agriculture to partner on presenting this highly successful program to NJ agricultural producers

Bridgeton, N.J. – The Rutgers University Food Innovation Center is holding a series of workshops to assist farmers and agricultural producers with a grant opportunity from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides funding towards the development or expansion of value-added agricultural businesses. The sessions are being held in northern, central, and southern New Jersey and are being conducted in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and USDA Rural Development.

Since the inception of the USDA Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program in 2001, $730,700 in grants have been awarded to New Jersey applicants. The joint effort of Rutgers University, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and the USDA has successfully assisted fourteen applicants selected for federal funding. Grant recipients from prior years include both cooperative organizations and associations, in addition to individual farm businesses.

Cooperatives and Associations that have received funding from the USDA VAPG program in prior years include: Sussex County Cooperative Milk Producers Association with a feasibility analysis and business plan for production of value-added dairy products; Jersey Fruit Cooperative Association with a market audit study for the New Jersey peach industry; Garden State Ethanol with a study to determine the feasibility of using carbon dioxide by-product from ethanol production for flash freezing of New Jersey grown produce; the New Jersey Tomato Council with an economic feasibility study for building a value-added processing plant in southern New Jersey, and the New Jersey Seafood Marketing Steering Committee with funding for a feasibility study for marketing live aqua-cultured clam products.

Individual farm businesses that have received funding in prior years from the USDA VAPG program include: Circle “M” Farms to produce peach cider from non-marketable peaches; Heritage Vineyards to expand production of wine; Birches Cranberry Company to evaluate the feasibility of marketing specialty cranberry products; M.R. Dickinson & Son to understand requirements for value-added products using culinary herbs and other products; and B.J. Farms towards a feasibility study for the establishment of a year-round, value-added tomato processing operation. In 2005, three individual farm businesses were successful in their grant applications, and include: Circle “M” Farms, Laurelwoods Organics, and Villa Milagro Vineyards.

(More)
Funding for this grant program originates from the United States Department of Agriculture. "Value-added programs have been very successful from the USDA's perspective," said Andrew Law, New Jersey's State Director for USDA Rural Development. "The Value-Added Producer grant program provides venture capital to preserve the farmer by improving the return on investment by implementing the value-added concept into New Jersey agricultural businesses", he said. Law added, "improving the net operating income of New Jersey farmers increases their chance of survival and is a necessary complement to the preservation of farmland by state, county, and local government'. According to Law, farmers who are looking at changing operations are often afraid of the risks involved and will not make the necessary changes to ensure the long term viability of their farming operation. "These USDA grants have reduced the risk and make it possible for farmers to change the 'culture' of agriculture to make it work," he said.

"Value-added grants have proven to be an important part of New Jersey agriculture's efforts to meet a changing marketplace," said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Charles M. Kuperus. "By developing new markets while expanding existing ones, our Garden State's agriculture industry will remain viable and dynamic."

Agricultural producers and producer groups are encouraged to participate in a workshop where this opportunity will be presented. Workshops will be both informational and hands-on, consisting of a presentation of the grant program, as well as a breakout working session to assist in the formulation of value-added ideas and in the construction of an application for funding. Sessions will be held on the days and at the locations indicated below. Continental breakfast and registration will commence at 8:30 am. The program will begin promptly at 9:00am and conclude at noon.

- November 22, 2005
  Sussex County Community College; One College Hill Rd., Building D – Theatre, Newton, NJ 07860
  Co-sponsored by Sussex County Community College, Sussex County Economic Development Partnership, Sussex County Agricultural Development Board, Skylands Small Business Development Center and New Jersey Economic Development Authority

- November 30, 2005
  Rutgers Food Innovation Center; 87 East Commerce Street; Bridgeton, NJ 08302
  Co-sponsored by The New Jersey Small Business Development Center’s at Rutgers University-Camden & Richard Stockton College and New Jersey Economic Development Authority

- December 5, 2005
  Cook College Campus Center; Multi-Purpose Room C; Biel Road; New Brunswick, NJ 08901
  Co-sponsored by The College of New Jersey Small Business Development Center and New Jersey Economic Development Authority

The workshop is free of charge. Pre-registration is necessary, and can be done online at www.foodinnovation.rutgers.edu, or by phoning the Rutgers Food Innovation Center at (856) 459-1125. Facilities for the workshops are accessible for the disabled.