NEW CROP OF FOOD INNOVATION CENTER GRANTS BOLSTER FARMER ENTREPRENEURS THROUGHOUT NEW JERSEY
- Goat Farmers, Wineries, Cranberry/Blueberry Growers Among Grant Recipients -

Bridgeton, N.J. – Rutgers Food Innovation Center recently awarded $47,500 in grants to farmers and agricultural organizations throughout New Jersey through a Value Added Producer Grants program. A total of 11 grants, with a maximum amount of $5,000, were awarded to recipients from eight counties representing almost every corner of the state.

The Food Innovation Center’s grants program originates from a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development grant recently awarded to the center. “Value-added programs have been very successful from the USDA’s perspective,” said Andy Law, New Jersey’s State Director for USDA Rural Development. “They offer small growers opportunities to become leaders of change in agriculture in New Jersey,” he said.

According to Law, farmers who are looking at changing operations are often afraid of the risks involved and won’t make the necessary changes to ensure the long term viability of their farms. “The center’s grants have reduced the risk and made it possible for growers to change the ‘culture’ of agriculture to make it work,” he said.

"These value-added grants are an important part of New Jersey agriculture's efforts to adapt 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."

Among the grant recipients are Goat World in Hunterdon County, which seeks to assess the potential market for high quality goat meat; Villa Milagro Vineyards in Warren County which plans to develop and market varietal wine jams; and Landisville Produce Cooperative Association of Atlantic County which will tap into the popular fresh cut and bagged salad market by introducing a line of Jersey-grown fresh cut, bagged salads.

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NEW CROP OF GRANTS
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“The grant winners represent a tremendous cross section of New Jersey agriculture and the state’s
growing specialty foods business,” said Food Innovation Center Director Louis Cooperhouse. “We
received applications from farmers and entrepreneurs throughout the state; all with a vision of how
they plan to succeed in their particular niches,” he said.

According to Cooperhouse, the grant program is one way the center is fulfilling its mission to support
sustainable economic growth and prosperity of the food and agricultural industries in New Jersey. “In
many cases funding such as this is vital to farmers whose success with ‘value-added’ products may
mean the difference between profit and loss - preserving the family farm or selling it and moving on”,
he said.

While the funding provided through the grants is the foundation for each recipient’s plans, the
partnerships forged with their Food Innovation Center coaches are integral to their success. Each
recipient is assigned to a staff member who works closely with the business, beginning with the
application process and continuing through the execution of the grant. They coach and motivate
center clients to reach their goals.

“The best thing about working with the Food Innovation Center is the motivation they gave me to
move forward,” said grant recipient Dee Johnson of Spring Creek Farms in Cumberland County. “As a
small food entrepreneur, I didn’t know how to deal with the whole ball at once, but the center’s staff
had the energy and experiences to help me get going. They had faith enough to push me and, in their
wisdom, knew more than I did about the potential for Spring Creek Farm’s success,” she said.

“The Food Innovation Center is a one-of-a-kind place in the state, and possibly the nation, where
farmers and producers can go to plan their value-added ideas and get the assistance they need to take
those ideas from concept to reality,” said Law. “It shows how farming in urban states can succeed if
the necessary changes are made. The New Jersey model can work for other states, where farmers are
experiencing similar cultural and economic pressures,” he said.

Note to editor: A complete list of Value-Added Producer Grant recipients is attached.
This year’s recipients are farmers who are adding value to their existing crops through further processing or seeking to expand into new markets and exploring new marketing strategies.

**Atlantic County**

*Bellview Winery* – Bellview Farms, Inc. is seeking to build upon the positive sales trend of their wines. The winery will have new labels professionally designed and produced, and a new expanded advertising campaign developed to attract area tourists to the winery for visits, tastings and sales.

*Blu-Jay Farms* – In the heart of New Jersey’s blueberry country, Blu-Jay Farms produces blueberry preserves as a value-added product and hopes to share their recipe for success with other New Jersey blueberry growers. The grant will fund a feasibility study of structuring a value-added blueberry preserves business for the benefit of NJ blueberry growers.

*Landisville Produce Cooperative Association* - Landisville Co-op’s goal is to help New Jersey farmers break into the fast-growing market of fresh-cut and bagged salad with a Jersey-grown, seasonal bagged salad. The grant will fund a study to assess the supply and demand for such products.

**Burlington County**

*Birches Cranberry Company* – A fourth generation family farm, Birches will use the grant to expand the market and distribution channels of its Paradise Hill labeled specialty blueberry & heirloom tomato products. The study will identify product categories, markets, and distribution channels that offer the greatest potential growth.

**Cumberland County**

*Spring Creek Farm* – This farmer-owned business produces a line of 28 gourmet jams and jellies sold at gift shops and farmer’s markets, and will use grant funds to expand the production and marketing capabilities of this growing value-added business.
Hunterdon County

Goat World – Goat World seeks to tap into the market for high quality goat meat. As a result of this funding, Goat World will conduct a survey of restaurant management; develop programs for the production of a high quality goat product; and determine consumer acceptance of the product.

Michalenko Farms – Capitalizing on the benefits of sorghum-based products – gluten-free, rich in antioxidants, and having some unique carbohydrates – Michalenko Farm looks to develop and market products using sorghum, and funding from this program will help them achieve their goal.

Mercer County

Garden State Wine Growers Association – The Wine Trails program, initiated by the Wine Growers Association two years ago, is the most successful marketing program in the state. In 2004, the Association hosted two Wine Trails, one in February and one in November, attracting 10,000 and 25,000 visitors, respectively. The grant will be used to expand advertising for this highly successful and growing program.

Salem County

Cedar Run Farms – Asparagus salsa and guacamole are unique value-added products from Cedar Run Farms that have great national distribution potential. The grant will fund the development and implementation of a food service marketing plan, as well as the creation of sales materials.

Sussex County

Sussex County Cooperative Milk Producers Association – Based on a recent assessment of opportunities in the dairy industry, the Association seeks to add value to the fluid milk of its dairy farm members. The goal is to implement business strategies and infrastructure requirements for enabling the supply of Jersey Fresh fluid milk to consumers, which will ultimately increase returns to producers.

Warren County

Villa Milagro Vineyards – This start-up winery hopes to develop varietal wine jams for sale at their farm and other outlets. The grant will fund a market study of value-added wine products as well as a full study of regulations, marketing/sales, and scale up requirements. The winery also aims to develop a business plan; identify a processing facility; design a logo, packaging and marketing materials; and test market the products.