

Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches, and Communities

A Guide to Federal Programs for Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Entrepreneurship, Conservation, Food Systems, and Community Development

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working together for sustainable places

in collaboration with

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October, 2014

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Programs by Category

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Introduction

This guide is written for anyone seeking help from federal programs to foster sustainable and innovative initiatives in this country associated with agriculture and forestry. Sustainability is commonly understood to embrace the triple concepts of economic, environmental and social viability. Specifically, the guide provides information about program resources pertaining to economic development, farm loans, insurance and risk management, natural resources conservation and management; nutrition and consumer food access, renewable energy and energy conservation, research and outreach, and value added and marketing innovations.

The guide can help farmers, entrepreneurs, community developers, private landowners, conservationists, and other individuals, as well as private and public businesses and organizations. The guide describes program resources ranging from grants and loans to technical assistance and information resources.

The guide can also help USDA and other agency employees become aware and take better advantage of the enormous array of federal programs and resources available to their clients in supporting sustainable innovations in agriculture and forestry. This edition is the guide's sixth printing and fourth complete update, incorporating programs from the 2014 Farm Bill.

How can the guide help you?

We introduce you to programs that can be useful to your work, including some you might not otherwise have thought to pursue. It is not the definitive guide to any program, but an introduction. After a general overview of each program, the guide describes assistance it offers, its purposes, and restrictions on that assistance. When possible, we give specific examples of how the program has actually been used.

This guide includes longstanding programs as well as some newly authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. Although program descriptions are accurate as of this printing, aspects of some programs will change. Please conduct Internet searches to obtain updates and applications for programs.

How is the guide organized?

You can find potentially useful programs in two ways:

- * The **Table of Contents** lists federal programs as they appear alphabetically in the directory.

- * **Programs by Category** shows one way to think about program offerings. Since programs may fall within several of the categories but are listed only once, readers should explore enough categories to be sure of having found all programs of interest.

What categories of programs are included?

Economic Development for Farms, Businesses and Communities – Many rural communities with historically agriculturally dependent economies have suffered as agriculture has concentrated toward fewer, larger farmers, serving and served by fewer local businesses. Programs in this guide offer direct and indirect support through loans, grants, and technical assistance, including for cooperative development.

Farm Loans – Farms and farm businesses often need access to capital, both for land and operating costs. This guide describes several USDA direct and guaranteed loan programs, which increasingly are available to enterprises of all sizes, with terms and availability designed to serve beginning, underserved, and veteran borrowers.

Insurance and Risk Management – Farmers seek to manage risks associated with farm production as well as market fluctuations. Some use only crop insurance, but many also use strategies like diversifying their farm enterprises or seeking organic or other higher value markets. Historically, crop insurance policies have been unavailable or poorly designed for organic and diversified farms. This guide features several programs offering steps to correct such inequities, as well as other risk management education programs.

Natural Resources Conservation and Management - Farmers, foresters, and other landowners seek to adopt resource management practices that protect soil, air, water and wildlife on their land in an economically viable way use many

strategies. These include sustainable forestry practices; intensive rotational grazing of livestock; soil conservation; organic or biodynamic farming systems; cover crops and crop rotations; farmland protection, wetland and other habitat restoration; riparian buffers, and many other practices. This guide describes funding, technical assistance and other resources to support such land management changes.

Nutrition and Consumer Food Access – The nation’s struggle to address the health, fiscal and social implications of obesity has brought a renewed awareness of the importance of affordable, culturally appropriate, safe and nutritious food, including fresh fruits and vegetables. Many families and communities in both urban and rural areas lack community food security. Remedies range from creating market linkages between local producers and consumers to more systemic efforts to address underlying poverty in a community. This guide describes several forms of federal economic and technical assistance.

Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation – Fluctuating fuel prices, concerns about climate change, and desire for greater national energy self-sufficiency have resulted in several programs supporting renewable energy and energy conservation. Some programs support energy production on farms and ranches, including biomass production and processing, wind turbines, manure digesters, solar panels, and geothermal. Others help build community infrastructure that supports renewable energy or conservation. Others in this guide support individual landowners or producers’ interest in creating energy or reducing energy costs on their farms or ranches.

Research and Outreach – As farmers, ranchers and landowners move toward more sustainable agricultural and forestry practices, they often need reliable, research-based information, technical assistance, or other informational help. Several programs offer outreach, research, or community assistance, and the last two Farm Bills have included provisions to focus particular assistance on underserved, beginning or veteran farmers and ranchers.

Value-added and Marketing Innovations - Because earnings in extractive industries (for example, agricultural production and timber harvesting) are generally low and volatile, many entrepreneurs seek to add value to agricultural or forestry resources. Some communities want to build economic and

environmental sustainability by adding value to natural resources through processing, packaging, marketing, distributing the products themselves, or by producing their goods with methods that gain market premiums. This guide describes programs offering financial, technical, marketing, and other assistance for such enterprises, as well as programs that support local marketing or market development, including organic or food safety-related certifications.

What are successful strategies to finding resources to support work?

Starting with a well-designed project, identifying and targeting appropriate resources, and following some sensible and logical grantwriting steps will help increase your chances of successfully obtaining resources. The following sections of this Introduction lay out some basic advice to help you.

What are the hallmarks of a well-conceived project?

A successful federally funded project — whether a research proposal, conservation plan, marketing or other proposal — is no different from any other good project. It has tightly defined purposes; a clear strategy to accomplish them on a realistic timeline; the necessary people, money, and other resources; a basis for evaluating the process when done; and an effective means of communicating results.

Many projects are improved by a thoughtful effort to build supporting coalitions. A funder will look favorably on, and may require, local matches of funding. Remember that funding matches usually can also come in the form of existing staff salaries and other "in-kind" contributions, as well as actual dollars.

In designing a good project, be sure that you have included the right people in the planning process itself. Every participant should not only care about the idea, but also be prepared to contribute to its execution. Some questions to consider in developing your proposal include the following:

- What problem do you seek to address?
- What is your principal strategy to resolve that problem?
- Why is this strategy better than other approaches you might consider?

- Have other people, locally or otherwise, addressed this problem? If so, what have you learned from their work, and how does your effort relate to theirs?
- Who else might be concerned about your issues? Should they be involved in your project?
- What is a realistic timeline for action?
- What resources do you need to implement your project? What resources can you use for a non-federal match?
- If others would profit from knowing about your initiative, how do you plan to get the word out?
- How will you measure and evaluate your project's outcomes?

How can you identify potential federal programs?

Once you have a good idea of what your project should look like and what resources it requires, it is time to explore funding options and figure out what federal programs, if any, can help achieve your goals. Besides this guide, there are many ways to locate resources potentially useful to you. Ask colleagues doing similar work about who has funded them, and use reference sections in larger public libraries, most university main libraries, and the development office of any large university; these reference sites often have many useful directories, some dealing with private sources and others with federal ones.

Many resources are available on the Internet, including:

- Grants.gov, <http://www.grants.gov>, a site for grants in most federal agencies. Because this site is so important for many submissions, we list its customer support info: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week except [federal holidays](#). Email: support@grants.gov
- The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, <http://12.46.245.173/cfda/cfda.html>
- The Federal Register, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>
- The Foundation Center, <http://www.fdncenter.org> (subscription required)
- This Guide, <http://attra.ncat.org/guide/>.
- The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition often has many description of federal programs <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/>

Many other private and public resources at the state and local levels are not covered in this guide. Contact

your State Department of Agriculture, State Forester, State Rural Development Office, and local Extension and conservation offices to explore those possibilities. Also, asking yourself who might have a stake in the outcomes of your work might suggest additional potential funding sources.

How can you decide which programs are most appropriate for your needs?

Identifying programs in this guide and from other sources whose purposes and available resources suit your objectives is an art form. Instead of wasting your time chasing programs that have incompatible goals, a little methodical research will help you assess how well your project fits within various programs.

You may want to talk with program staff, people previously funded, or organizations that have worked with a program to decide whether there is a fit and if so, how to argue for it. It comes down to asking good questions and thinking strategically. For example:

- What are the program's stated mission and objectives? What projects has it funded or collaborated with in the past? Is its form of assistance appropriate to your needs? (Think creatively about your project's needs. Problems for which you seek help from federal resources are likely complex, and often more than one type of assistance may be useful.)
- What are the program's funding pool, percentage of applicants who typically get funded, average funding amounts, and duration of program grants?
- What are eligibility requirements, financial match requirements, and restrictions on a program's use? Is funding available up front or (more typically) on a reimbursement basis?
- Are deadlines for applying and the timeframe for funding appropriate to your project timeline? Does the program fund multiyear projects? Do past grantees say that its reporting requirements are reasonable and the program well administered?

What are some tips for submitting successful applications?

Once you have designed a good project, prepare it for submission to any program to which you're applying so that it stands the greatest chance of being approved. Read the Request for Proposals (RFP - sometimes called Notice of Funding Availability or other titles)

several times, even if it's in small print or poorly worded! Carefully follow directions explained in the RFP, including any format requirements. Get on the list to receive notices from program staff about any training webinars they may conduct to explain the RFP and answer questions from applicants.

Identify the central points you want to make, including how your proposal addresses a program's key goals. Be precise and accurate; do not be tempted to exaggerate the need or over promise results. Use clear, concise language to make your application or proposal readable. It is smart to have your application reviewed by someone whose editing skills you trust. Is it clear? Readable? Grammatically correct?

Pay close attention to formatting, deadline, nonfederal monetary match and other stated requirements. Be sure that your budget is accurate, clear, and is accompanied by a budget narrative to clarify any points you think could be misunderstood by reviewers. And, of course, do not be daunted by having to readjust your proposal for each program to which you submit it.

Make sure you understand the review process. Is it based on a review by only a few people, or will the review be more comprehensive? If the contact person makes funding decisions, get to know their preferences. Call program staff if you have questions about the application process. Of course, always be pleasant in discussing your project.

Give yourself more time than you think you'll need – you'll need it! Many applications processes are complex, and even simple ones require time to work out matching contributions, get letters of support, share your proposal with partners and readjust your text accordingly.

Many federal grants are submitted electronically. Although a visit to www.grants.gov will explain the process, some extra steps are required that take time, sometimes a few weeks. Be sure you submit the proposal in plenty of time (at least a day or two in advance) if submitting it electronically, as lines sometimes back up for electronic submission.

Finally, but very importantly – do not be discouraged! Many successfully funded grants and applications for federal resources are the result of earlier failed attempts. Understanding why your earlier efforts were rejected is likely to help in future ones. Be sure to ask.

Getting a copy of this guide

To obtain a free copy of this guide, please contact ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, at P.O. Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR 72702, 1 (800) 346-9140, or e-mail debbier@ncat.org. It is also available for download at ATTRA's website: <https://attra.ncat.org/publication.html> (click Other Resources at the bottom of the publication list)

Workshops on using the guide

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) offers workshops to help use this guide. The workshops cover how to envision and design sound projects; identify programs offering resources; and maximize your chances of submitting successful proposals. www.michaelfields.org.

For more information, contact Margaret Krome, MFAI Policy Program Director, at 608-238-1440; mkrome@sbcglobal.net

Last updated October 16, 2014

Advanced Biofuels Payment Program

Providing incentive payments for the production of fuel derived from renewable biomass

Program Basics

Authorized under section 9005 of the 2008 Farm Bill and renewed under the 2014 Farm Bill, the Advanced Biofuels Payment Program re-titles, renews, and extends the program formerly known as the Bioenergy Program. Advanced Biofuels Payment Program is administered by the USDA's Rural Business and Cooperative Service, Energy Division. This program provides incentive payments to ethanol and biodiesel producers on an incremental basis to increase production. Biofuel producers entering into a contract with USDA are reimbursed based on quantity, duration and net nonrenewable energy content.

Project Examples

- **Riverview LLP in Minnesota** received \$8,040 to help offset the cost of producing electricity from two anaerobic digesters. The two digesters use manure from two of the company's dairy operations to produce electricity, which is sold to Great River Energy.
- **A California company** received \$47,186 for its quarterly production of biodiesel from a variety of sources, including canola and soybean oil. The biodiesel reduces emissions and is primarily used as an alternative to diesel fuel. In the past, Community Fuels has used funds from the Advanced Biofuel Payment Program to install equipment and increase production at its bio-refinery at the Port of Stockton, Calif.

Application and Financial Information

The program will provide payments to eligible advanced biofuel producers to support and ensure expanding production. The program authorization provides mandatory funds of \$15 million from FY14 through FY18 and additional discretionary funding of up to \$20 million from FY14 to FY18.

In FY14, applications for participating in the Advanced Biofuels Payment Program were accepted between Oct. 1 and Oct. 31. A Notice of Contract Proposals (NOCP) was sent to ABPP participants

notifying them of how much funding was available and how to qualify for those funds.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Eligible producers entering into a contract are paid based on the quantity and quality of advanced biofuel production and on the net nonrenewable energy content of the advanced biofuel. Payment amount will depend on the number of producers participating in the program, the amount of advanced biofuels being produced, and the amount of funds available.

Website

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_Biofuels.html

Contact

Lisa Noty, Loan/Grant Specialist
Phone: 712-243-2107 x116
Lisa.Noty@wdc.usda.gov

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Conserving wetlands, grassland, and farm and ranch land through long-term conservation easements

Program Basics

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), helps private landowners, land trusts, and other entities preserve working farms and ranches and restore, protect, and enhance wetlands and grasslands.

The 2014 Farm Bill created ACEP by combining the previously separate programs known as the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Farm and Ranch land Program (FRPP).

ACEP is divided into two tracks: a wetland easement component, which largely mirrors the former WRP, and an agricultural land easement component, which largely retains the purposes and functions of the former GRP and FRPP.

Under the agricultural land track, funds are provided to non-profits, state and local agencies, and Indian tribes to purchase easements to protect farms from development or to conserve grazing land, including rangeland, pasture and shrub land. Agricultural land easements are permanent, or as long-term as allowed by law in states that do not allow permanent easements.

Funding for wetland easements goes directly to landowners for the purchase of permanent or 30-year easements, or, in states that do not allow permanent or 30-year easements, as long-term as possible. Wetland easement funds are used to restore, protect, and enhance wetland values and functions on wetlands that have been in agricultural production.

While wetland easement payments are primarily made to producers, the new farm bill reauthorizes a wetlands reserve enhancement option -- formerly known as the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) -- through which NRCS partners with states, non-governmental organizations, or Indian Tribes to protect, restore, and enhance high priority wetlands.

The 2014 Farm Bill allows producers to retain grazing rights as part of a wetland easement if the grazing activity is consistent with the easement's long-term wetland protection and enhancement goals. The easement payment would be reduced by an amount equal to the grazing value.

Project Examples

- A producer with a diversified bison, cattle, and commodity crop operation in **Monroe and Marion Counties, Iowa** enrolled nearly 280 acres in ACEP's predecessor Wetlands Reserve Program to conserve 20 various sized wetland basins and the surrounding land. The land was seeded with a diverse prairie mix of over 60 grasses, sedges, and forbs. The farmer and his family use the wetland and surrounding land for hunting, hiking, canoeing, and educational purposes.

- A ranch in **Worth County, Missouri** enrolled 610 acres of highly erodible native grassland in ACEP's predecessor Grasslands Reserve Program in 2003. Their GRP contract has provided habitat for many species of grassland wildlife, while helping them stay profitable. The ranchers see GRP as a program that "rewards grassland farmers and ranchers for keeping highly erodible land in a vegetative state."

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

In order to qualify for an *agricultural land easement*, the proposed easement must:

- Be subject to a pending offer for purchase of an agricultural land easement from an eligible entity; and
- Have prime, unique, or productive soil, and meet one of the following criteria:
 - Contain historical or archaeological resources; or
 - Protect grazing uses by restoring and conserving land; or
 - Further a State or local policy consistent with the purposes of the program; and

- Meet one of the following criteria:
 - Be cropland, rangeland, grassland; or
 - Be land that contains forbs or shrub land for which grazing is the predominant use; or
 - Be located in an area that has been historically dominated by grass-land, forbs, or shrubs and could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value; or
 - Be pastureland or nonindustrial private forestland that contributes to the economic viability of an offered parcel or serves as a buffer to protect such land from development.

In order to qualify for a *wetland easement*, the proposed easement must be:

- Farmed or converted wetlands, together with adjacent land that is functionally dependent on that land; or
- Flooded cropland or grassland that was used for agricultural production prior to flooding from the natural overflow of either a closed basin lake or a pothole; or
- Farmed wetlands and adjoining lands that are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), have high wetland functions and values, and would return to production after they leave CRP; or
- Riparian areas that link protected wetlands; or
- Other wetlands that would not otherwise be eligible, if USDA determines that the inclusion of such wetlands would add to the functional value of the easement.

The program is competitive. Applications are ranked based on criteria developed by both the NRCS National Headquarters and NRCS State Conservationists. For both components of the program, the 2014 Farm Bill authorizes USDA to prioritize applications that include acres that will expire within a year from the Conservation Reserve Program.

Financial Information

For agricultural land easements, NRCS provides up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the easement.

For grasslands of special environmental significance, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the easement.

For a permanent wetland easement, NRCS provides the lowest of the fair market value of the land, the amount corresponding to a geographical cap, and the offer made by the landowner. For a 30-year easement or contract, NRCS provides between 50 and 75 percent of the compensation that would be paid for a permanent easement.

Website and Application

Farmers, ranchers, and partners interested in ACEP should contact their local NRCS office.

- NRCS local office locator
<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>
- National NRCS Website
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/easements/acep/?cid=stelprdb1242695>
- ACEP Fact Sheet
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA_NRCSConsumption/download?cid=stelprdb1247880&ext=pdf

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative

Providing grants that address the key problems of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of agriculture

Program Basics

AFRI is the largest competitive grants research program offered by USDA, and addresses key challenges that farmers, rural communities and consumers face including farm efficiency and profitability, renewable energy, urban and agroforestry, aquaculture, rural communities and entrepreneurship, human nutrition, food safety, biotechnology, and conventional plant and animal breeding.

AFRI programs solicit research, education and extension proposals on the following:

- Plant health, production, and products
- Animal health, production, and products
- Food safety, nutrition, and health
- Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment
- Agriculture systems and technology
- Agriculture economics and rural communities

In addition to these “foundational” programs, AFRI solicits “challenge” grants on many topics, including climate change, food safety, food security, childhood obesity, sustainable bioenergy and water issues.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) administers AFRI.

The annual agriculture appropriations bill provides all AFRI funding. Recent annual funding levels are \$274.8 million and \$316.4 million in Fiscal years 2013 and 2014 respectively.

Project Examples

- **University of Wisconsin** and NGO collaborators are analyzing key ingredients in community food security in regional food systems and the roles of local organizations in these food systems.
- A multi-institutional project led by **University of California** researchers is working on developing new varieties of wheat and barley that will tolerate changes in climate.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

The eligibility for AFRI programs is linked to the program of interest. For non-integrated grants (research only, education only, or extension only) eligibility extends to state agriculture experiment stations, colleges, universities, federal agencies, other research institutions, national laboratories, private and nonprofit organizations and corporations. Integrated research, education, and extension program eligibility is restricted to colleges and universities. See program RFA for additional details on eligibility and restrictions.

Application and Financial Information

Each year the AFRI Requests for Applications (RFA) are published on the NIFA website. Proposal guidelines and submission deadlines are outlined in the RFA. A peer review panel evaluates and ranks each proposal based on scientific merit and relevance. Farmers, non-profit researchers and other stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the peer review panels.

Website

See AFRI's Requests for Applications on the NIFA website for individual program descriptions: www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/afri.html

Additional information on how to apply or serve on the peer review panel can be found on the AFRI program website:

www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/afri/afri.html

Contact Information

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ATTRA

A National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

*Providing technical information to producers and information providers
on a wide range of sustainable agriculture topics*

Program Basics

The ATTRA program is a national sustainable agriculture information service developed and managed by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). It provides technical information to those engaged in or serving commercial agriculture, such as farmers, ranchers, extension agents, farm organizations and farm-based businesses. People can call in requests on a toll-free telephone line, use the frequently updated website, and learn about workshops featuring technical presentations by staff.

ATTRA offers a wide variety of information on sustainable agriculture, from horticultural and agronomic crops to livestock and farming systems. ATTRA's services seek to help U.S. farmers increase profitability and provide more healthful food for consumers while becoming better stewards of the natural resources and environment.

ATTRA's agriculture program specialists respond to requests from callers on how to:

- Improve farm income with a diversity of crops and livestock
- Produce alternative crops and livestock
- Reduce dependence on off-farm inputs
- Improve soil fertility and water quality
- Institute sustainable and organic farming practices
- Save or produce energy
- Assess new marketing methods
- Incorporate value-added products

Information Available

ATTRA specializes in responding to questions about specific sustainable enterprises or practices. ATTRA agriculture program specialists will research the

question, summarize findings in writing, and compile supporting literature and research as appropriate to accompany the report, which a caller receives either via email or U.S. mail. Publications based on frequently requested topics are also available. ATTRA provides more than 300 topic-specific publications on its website, covering a wide variety of topics related to organic and sustainable agriculture. Most are free. A small fee is charged for some publications, which can be waived in the case of financial hardship by contacting ATTRA staff at the toll free phone number below.

ATTRA also provides a free weekly electronic newsletter on national events and advances in sustainable agriculture, to which anyone may subscribe at no charge via the ATTRA website below.

Financial Information

Funding is provided for ATTRA through USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service as part of the annual agriculture appropriations bill. This funding supports the informational and educational work of more than 30 staff assigned to the ATTRA program, which is managed by the nonprofit National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). NCAT is headquartered in Butte, Montana and has regional offices in Arkansas, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

Website, Free Hotline, Contact

All of ATTRA's publications and multimedia information (including webinar and radio broadcasts) are available for download on the NCAT website: www.attra.ncat.org.

For the ATTRA toll-free hotline or to contact program staff, call 1-800-346-9140.

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Accounts

Helping beginning farmers and ranchers finance their agricultural endeavors

Program Basics

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Accounts (IDA) Pilot Program is designed to help beginning farmers and ranchers (see page 57 for criteria) of limited means finance their agricultural endeavors through business and financial education and matched savings accounts. The new program will promote a new generation of farmers and ranchers by helping them establish a pattern of savings. Ultimately, the savings can be used as part of a down payment on farmland or to purchase breeding stock, farm equipment, or other productive assets.

The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorizes this program and directs USDA to establish pilot projects in at least 15 states. Selection of the IDA organization or agency within a state will be chosen on a competitive basis. The program must receive a congressional appropriation before it can launch. Once that happens, the pilot project states will be selected.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Eligible beginning farmers or ranchers are those who do not have significant financial resources or assets and have an income less than 80 percent of the median income of the state in which they live, or 200 percent of the most recent annual Federal Poverty Income guidelines. An eligible beginning farmer or rancher must agree to complete a financial training program.

Any non-profit organization or tribal, local, or state government or collaborations thereof can submit an application to USDA to receive a grant once this program receives funding. The selected groups will establish and administer IDA programs and also be responsible for providing access to business and financial education for farmer participants.

Application and Financial Information

The organization or collaboration will establish a reserve fund made up of the total amount of the IDA grant awarded to them (up to \$250,000) and a non-federal match of 50 percent of that total amount awarded. The grantees can use up to 10 percent of the

federal grant amount (up to \$25,000) to support business assistance, financial education, account management, and general program operation costs. The local, non-federal match may be used for program expenses without limit. Interest accrued on the federal grant award can be used for matched savings or for program costs.

Once a participating organization establishes an IDA project, an eligible beginning farmer or rancher can set up a savings account with the participating organization and deposit a certain amount that is “matched” by that organization at a rate of at least 100 percent and up to 200 percent. For instance, if a farmer participant deposits \$100 a month into the IDA, the program will match them up to \$200 a month. After the two-year program period, up to \$7,200 would be available for the farmer to put toward the assets he or she has been saving for. Up to \$3,000 of an individual’s savings can be matched per year, so at the 2:1 rate, there can be a total of \$9,000 in annual leveraged savings.

Website

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

A guide to developing and using IDAs is found at: <http://www.californiafarmlink.org/storage/document/IDA-Guide-2014.pdf>

Contact

Because as of this publication date, IDA has not received an appropriation, no contact within USDA has been designated. Groups advocating for this program may have information about its status, including:

California Farmlink
www.californiafarmlink.org

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
www.sustainableagriculture.net.

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program

Training new farmers to ensure their success in starting successful farm businesses

Program Basics

BFRDP is a competitive grant program administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) that funds education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives directed at helping all types of beginning farmers and ranchers (see page 57 for detailed eligibility criteria).

The 2014 Farm Bill increases total funding for BFRDP, providing \$100 million for competitive grants over the next five years, at a rate of \$20 million per year.

BFRDP is targeted especially to collaborative local, state, and regionally based networks and partnerships to support financial and entrepreneurial training, mentoring, and apprenticeship programs, as well as "land link" programs that connect retiring with new farmers; vocational training and agricultural rehabilitation programs; and education, outreach, and curriculum development activities to assist beginning farmers and ranchers. Topics may also include production practices, conservation planning, risk management education, diversification and marketing strategies, credit management, and farm safety training.

Project Examples

- In **California**, BFRDP is helping develop organic incubator farms that will help generate entrepreneurial opportunities for farm workers and limited resource farmers in the Salinas Valley.
- In **Iowa**, BFRDP supports farm transition planning courses for women landowners and farmers; women own nearly half of the farmland in the United States today.
- BFRDP funds helped a **Minnesota community**-based, farm-membership organization to expand a new farmer training curriculum collaborative which has now been adopted in 12 states.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Applicants for BFRDP must be collaborative state, tribal, local, or regionally based networks or partnerships of public and private groups. Networks or partnerships may include: community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations; school-based educational organizations, cooperative extension; relevant USDA and state agencies; and community colleges.

BFRDP sets aside 5 percent of annual funds for projects serving limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, including minority, immigrant, and women farmers and ranchers, as well as farmworkers desiring to become farmers in their own right; and an additional 5 percent for projects serving military veteran farmers and ranchers.

Application and Financial Information

BFRDP grants have a term of 3 years and cannot exceed \$250,000 a year. Eligible recipients can receive consecutive grants and must provide a cash or in-kind contribution match equal to 25 percent of the grant funds provided. Projects can serve some farmers who are not beginning farmers, provided that the primary purpose of the project is fostering beginning farmer opportunities.

Website

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/beginningfarmerandrancher.cfm>

Contact

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Biomass Crop Assistance Program

Promoting the cultivation of biomass for bioenergy production

Program Basics

The Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), administered by USDA's Farm Services Agency (FSA), is intended to promote the cultivation of bioenergy crops that show exceptional promise for producing highly energy-efficient bioenergy or biofuels, and to develop those new crops and cropping systems in a manner that preserves natural resources. BCAP is not intended to fund crops that are primarily grown for food or animal feed.

Both farmers and bioenergy production facilities participate in BCAP through "projects."

Farmers participating in a BCAP project will be eligible to enter into a 5-year agreement with USDA to establish annual or perennial crops or a 15-year agreement for woody biomass. BCAP provides:

- Annual incentive payments for the production of perennial and annual crops;
- Cost-share payments to establish perennial biomass crops; and
- A matching payment to assist with the collection, harvest, storage and transport of a BCAP crop or certain types of woody biomass to a biomass conversion facility.

Project Examples

- A BCAP project in nine **New York** counties funded participants to plant shrub willow on up to 3,500 acres. USDA provided \$4.3 million for the project, which was sponsored by ReEnergy Holdings LLC. The company uses willow feedstock as biofuel to generate electricity. The State University of New York conducted outreach to local government officials, agricultural leaders, farmers and landowners about willow-growing opportunities.

- In **Maine's** poorest county, with high unemployment rates, BCAP enabled Hardwood Products Company to hire 62 employees, lower their prices, and be competitive internationally. Co-

generation of lower cost electricity reduced heating costs at an area textile plant that employs 400 people, and lower costs for an area wood pellet manufacturing company also resulted from this project, generating economic gains in the region.

- In **Butte County, California**, BCAP funds made it economically feasible for a small lumber operation with scorched private forestlands to convert 15,500 dry tons of its charred timber into clean energy. This enabled Bamford to keep 37 employees on the payroll during tough economic times. Using damaged timber for electrical generation helped California utilities meet mandates for renewable fuels and avoided the air pollution caused by burning the charred material in the forest, which is the standard practice for disposal.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Agricultural land and non-industrial private forestlands within a BCAP project area are eligible for funding. The following lands are *not* eligible:

- Federal- or state-owned land;
- Land that is native sod as of the date of the 2008 Farm Bill; or
- Land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, unless the contract will expire at the end of the current fiscal year.

In general, the term 'eligible material' means renewable biomass harvested directly from the land, including crop residue from any crop, such as corn, that is eligible to receive commodity payments under Title I of the 2014 Farm Bill. The following are *not* included:

- Any crop that is eligible to receive payments under Title I of the 2014 Farm Bill (corn, wheat, barley, grain sorghum, oats, upland cotton, rice, peanuts, and oilseeds);
- Animal waste or byproducts;
- Food waste or yard waste;

- Algae;
- Bagasse;
- Woody biomass that is removed outside of contract acreage and that is not a byproduct of a preventative treatment to reduce hazardous fuel or to reduce or contain disease or insect infestation;
- Woody biomass that would otherwise be used for existing market products; or
- Any plant that is invasive or noxious or has the potential to become invasive or noxious, as determined by USDA.

Under a BCAP contract, producers are required to implement a conservation or forest stewardship plan in conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Financial Information

Under the contract with USDA, producers participating in a BCAP project are eligible to receive the following payments:

- 50 percent of the costs of establishing an eligible perennial crop covered by the contract but not to exceed \$500 per acre (\$750 in the case of socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers); and
- An annual payment to be determined by USDA.

USDA has the discretion to reduce an annual payment, if:

- An eligible crop is used for purposes other than the production of energy at the biomass conversion facility;
- An eligible crop is delivered to the biomass conversion facility and paid for by the facility;
- The producer receives a payment for collection, harvest, storage or transport (see below); or
- The producer violates a term of the contract.

Collection, Harvest, Storage and Transportation Payments --

In addition to establishment and production payments under a BCAP project, USDA also pays producers or other eligible individuals for the collection, harvest, storage and transportation (CHST) of an eligible crop on land under a BCAP contract. The payments are to be provided on a matching basis at a rate of \$1 for

each \$1-per-ton provided by the biomass conversion facility, up to an amount not to exceed \$20 per ton, for a period of two years.

The 2014 Farm Bill provides \$25 million per year in mandatory funding for BCAP. Of that amount, USDA must use between 10 percent and 50 percent for CHST payments. The remaining funds are used to make project payments to producers and to provide technical assistance.

Website and Application

A proposal for a BCAP project is submitted to the USDA by a project “sponsor,” defined as either a biomass conversion facility or group of producers who own or operate acreage within a specified project area.

To see if your county is covered by a BCAP project, view the current project list:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ener&topic=bcap-pjt-bloc>

If you are located in a BCAP project area, you may apply to the program through your local FSA office:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

Biomass Research and Development Initiative (BRDI)

Supporting research, development, and demonstrations on cost-effective ways to produce alternative fuels and chemicals from biomass resources

Program Basics

Authorized under section 9008 of the 2008 Farm Bill, the Biomass Research and Development Initiative (BR&DI) extends the program originally created under the Biomass Research and Development Act of 2000 and amended by the Energy Policy Act (EPA) of 2005.

This program provides competitive grants, contracts, and financial assistance to eligible entities to carry out research, development, and demonstration of biofuels and bio-based products, and the methods, practices and technologies for their production.

Project Examples

- **The University of California – Santa Cruz** was funded to research sustainable pathways to achieving biofuel policy goals
- **Kansas State University** received funds to explore how to make oilseed camelina a cost-effective bioenergy and bio-based product feedstock.
- **The University of Hawaii** was funded to investigate how to convert high-yield tropical biomass into sustainable biofuels

Application and Financial Information

The Department of Agriculture's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) and the DOE Office of Biomass Programs competitively award Biomass Research and Development Initiative (BR&DI) grants to eligible entities to research, develop, and demonstrate biomass projects. As amended by the 2008 Farm Bill, there are three main Technical Areas: (1) Feedstocks Development, (2) Biofuels & Biobased Products Development, and (3) Biofuels Development Analysis.

This is a joint solicitation, and DOE manages the pre-application process. All eligible applications are evaluated in a joint USDA/ DOE technical merit review process, in addition to reviews by each agency

based on cost and programmatic priorities. Only those applicants who have submitted a pre-application and received notification from the DOE inviting them to submit a full application will be allowed to submit a full application.

Applicants must clearly demonstrate the value chain element they intend to focus on and specify whether the project is conducting research or a demonstration. The value chain can be characterized as consisting of the following elements: feedstock development and growth; feedstock harvesting and preparation; feedstock logistics and transportation; feedstock storage and handling; biomass pre-processing (as appropriate); biomass conversion; production of biofuels/bioenergy/biobased products; product logistics and handling; and product delivery and distribution.

All projects should be planned and implemented in accordance with a life cycle point of view that considers both direct and indirect environmental and economic impacts.

The program awarded \$35 million in FY12.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Eligible applicants include institutions of higher learning, national laboratories, federal research agencies, private sector entities, nonprofit organizations, or consortia of two or more entities. Grants are awarded competitively based on technical merit and program priorities identified in the solicitation package. This solicitation requires a 20 percent minimum non-federal match.

Website

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/biomassresearchanddevelopmentinitiative.cfm>

Contact

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Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program

Providing grants to develop community food projects in low-income areas

Program Basics

The Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (CFPCGP) provides grants to projects that:

- Meet the food needs of low-income individuals through food distribution, outreach to increase participation in federally assisted nutrition programs, or improving access to food as part of a comprehensive service;
- Increase self-reliance of communities to meet their food needs;
- Promote comprehensive responses to local food access, farm, and nutrition issues; or
- Meet specific state, local, or neighborhood food and agricultural needs including equipment necessary for the efficient operation of a project, planning for long-term solutions, or innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers

Project Examples

There are three types of grants:

1. Community Food Projects, examples of which include community gardens with market stands, value chain projects, food hubs, farmers markets, farm-to-institution projects, and marketing and consumer cooperatives. As of 2014, the maximum award in a single year is \$125,000 and the maximum award over five years is \$300,000.

2. Planning Projects, examples of which include community food assessments, GIS analysis, and farm-to-institution research. As of 2014, the maximum project award is \$25,000.

3. Training and Technical Assistance Grants, examples of which include grant-writing assistance for applicants and project development and evaluation assistance for current grantees. As of 2014, the maximum award for a single year is \$250,000.

More detailed examples of funded projects can be found in two places:

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>

and

<https://www.whyhunger.org/cfp>

Eligibility, Uses, Restrictions

Eligible entities include public food program service providers, tribal organizations, or private nonprofit entities. Applicants must have experience in one or more of the following areas: (1) community food work, particularly concerning small and mid-sized farms, including the provision of food and development of new markets in low-income communities, (2) job training and business development experience for food-related activities in low-income communities, or (3) efforts to reduce food insecurity, including coordinating and improving access to services.

Applicants are encouraged to seek and create partnerships with other organizations. Both Community Food Projects and Planning Projects require a dollar-for-dollar cash or in-kind match for all federal funds awarded. Grant periods can last up to five years.

Website

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>

Contact

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Conservation Innovation Grants

Stimulating the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands

Program Basics

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary NRCS program that stimulates the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. Under CIG, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or nongovernmental organizations, Tribes, and individuals.

CIG accelerates technology development and transfer, and the adoption of promising technologies and approaches to address some of the nation's most pressing natural resource concerns; projects often result in production and operational benefits as well. NRCS identifies successful projects for potential integration of technologies and approaches into NRCS' toolkit of conservation practices. CIG will benefit agricultural producers by providing more options for environmental enhancement and compliance with Federal, State, and local regulations.

What's New

This sub-program was first authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill now facilitates on-farm conservation research and demonstration and pilot-testing of new technologies or innovative conservation practices.

Project Examples

- The **InterTribal Buffalo Council of Rapid City, South Dakota** received \$639,735 to enhance Tribal system resilience to drought by developing models using the Tribal Bison Programs to demonstrate various technology transfer means and methods for use by other Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers and Indian Tribes.

- The **University of Minnesota** received \$190,231 will increase adoption of winter annual legume cover crop use in high tunnels by identifying species of interest and transferring evidence-based information to growers, including improvements in both soil quality and cash crop productivity.

Application and Financial Information

CIG applications are accepted from state or local governments, federally recognized American Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

NRCS recognizes the need to provide special consideration to historically underserved producers, and strives to ensure that these producers benefit from innovative technologies and approaches. CIG offers two programmatic exceptions intended to encourage the participation of beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, and Indian Tribes, in CIG.

- 1) Each year, up to 10 percent of National CIG funds may be set aside for applicants who are beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers, or Indian Tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.

- 2) CIG allows applicants that are historically underserved to derive a higher percentage of project matching funds from in-kind contributions.

National CIG: A CIG funding notice is announced each year. Funds for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years, will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process. Projects may be watershed-based, regional, multi-State, or nationwide in scope. The natural resource concerns eligible for funding through CIG will be identified in the funding announcement and may change annually to focus proposals on new and emerging high priority natural resource issues.

State CIG: The State component emphasizes projects that benefit a limited geographic area. Projects may be farm-based, multi-county, small watershed, or Statewide in scope. Public notices in each participating State will announce the availability of funds for the State CIG competitions.

At least 50 percent of the total project cost must come from non-federal matching funds (cash and in-

kind contributions) provided by the grantee. The grantee is also responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully complete the project. NRCS will provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

Proposed projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers. CIG funds provided directly or indirectly to producers are counted toward a producer's EQIP funding cap.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Conservation approaches or technologies must be sufficiently studied to indicate a likelihood of success to be considered likely candidates for technology transfer. CIG funds innovative on-the-ground conservation projects, including pilot projects and field demonstrations. Proposed projects must conform to the description of innovative conservation projects or activities published in the funding notice. For example, technologies and approaches commonly used in the geographic area covered by the application, and which are eligible for EQIP funding, are not eligible for funding through CIG.

Website

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmland/?cid=stelpdb1242734>

Contact

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NRCS State Service Center Website

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>

Conservation Loan and Loan Guarantee Program

Helping farmers finance conservation projects on their farms

Program Basics

The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorizes the loan authority for USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to provide direct* or guaranteed conservation loans to qualified borrowers. FSA loan programs are funded through the annual agriculture appropriations bill. Eligible farmers or ranchers, including farmer cooperatives, private corporations, partnerships, or limited liability companies, can apply for a loan to cover the costs of qualified conservation projects such as:

- installing conservation structures or water conservation systems;
- establishing forest cover;
- establishing permanent pasture;
- conservation practices needed to comply with highly erodible land "compliance" requirements; and
- conservation buffer practices such as --
 - grassed waterways
 - shelterbelts
 - windbreaks
 - riparian buffers and filter strips, and
 - living snow fences.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

A conservation project is "qualified" for a loan if it is included in a conservation plan that is approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

This program gives priority to:

- qualified beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
- owners or tenants that use the loans to convert to sustainable or organic agricultural production systems; and
- producers who use the loans to build conservation structures or establish conservation practices to comply with highly erodible land "compliance" regulations.

In addition, USDA gives strong consideration to applicants who are on waiting lists to receive farm bill conservation program financial assistance.

Direct* and guaranteed conservation loans operate under the same rules and loan limitations as regular direct and guaranteed FSA farm ownership loans with two exceptions. First, for guaranteed loans FSA can guarantee no more than 80 percent of the principal amount of the loan (lower than the normal rate) or 90 percent in the case of a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer. Second, for both direct and guaranteed loans, the borrower does not have to be a family-sized farm, does not have to demonstrate an inability to secure credit from private sources at reasonable terms, and does not have to apply for commercial credit during the term of the loan should it become available at reasonable terms.

Websites and Application

The Conservation Loan program is administered by the Farm Service Agency of USDA. Information about the program is available at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/consv_loan_pr_2013.pdf

For more information or to apply, contact your local FSA regional Service Center or state FSA office. For that contact information, click your state on this website:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Information about all FSA programs is available on the FSA website: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

*At the time of this writing, there are no appropriations for direct conservation loans.

Conservation Reserve Program

Establishing long-term ground cover on environmentally sensitive land

Program Basics

The primary purpose of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is to conserve and improve natural resources by establishing long-term conserving cover, primarily grasses and trees, on land that has been in row crop production, retiring the land from crop production. Under periodic “general sign-ups,” land is bid into the program on a competitive basis and ranked based on environmental benefits and cost.

The CRP also has a **continuous signup option, the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP)**, which pays farmers for partial field conservation practices, including conservation buffers. Farmers and landowners may enroll such land at any time rather than waiting for specific sign-up periods. CCRP eligible practices include riparian buffers, wildlife habitat buffers, wetland buffers, filter strips, wetland restoration, grass waterways, shelterbelts, living snow fences, contour grass strips, salt tolerant vegetation, and shallow water areas for wildlife.

In addition, USDA may enter into a **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** agreement with a state, under which the state and USDA together pay farmers to address targeted conservation issues within the state.

CRP contracts are for 10 or 15 years, with the longer agreements for tree plantings. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers CRP, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) overseeing land eligibility determinations, conservation planning, and practice implementation. State forestry agencies also provide technical support.

The 2014 Farm Bill ratchets down the CRP acreage cap from 32 million acres to 27.5 million acres in 2014, and eventually to 24 million acres in 2017 and in 2018. No acreage limits are imposed on CCRP or CREP within the overall acreage cap.

Generally, no more than 25 percent of a county’s cropland can be enrolled in CRP and federal wetland easements at any given time. USDA can waive this

limit in order to enroll cropland in CCRP or CREP, if the county agrees.

The 2014 Farm Bill includes three transition options for expiring CRP land. First, it reserves 2 million acres for re-enrolling expiring CRP acres in grass for livestock production. Second, it allows producers with expiring CRP land to enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program in the final year of their CRP contract, so long as no double payments are made. Third, it provides two years of extra rental payments to owners of expiring CRP land, who rent or sell to beginning or socially disadvantaged producers who will practice conservation on the land.

Examples

- A producer with a diversified bison, cattle, and commodity crop operation in **Monroe and Marion Counties, Iowa** enrolled 500 acres in CRP to help restore native Iowa prairie, keep the ranch economically viable, and enhance water quality, flood control, wildlife habitat.
- The **Minnesota River** benefited from CRP contracts to improve buffer strips along that river. As of 2010, such riparian buffers and grass waterways had helped filter 365 million pounds of nitrogen and 72 million pounds of phosphorus from entering lakes, rivers, and streams nationwide.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

To be eligible for CRP, a producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months preceding the first year of the contract period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner’s death;
- The ownership change occurred due to a foreclosure; or
- FSA is otherwise satisfied that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

To be eligible for CRP, land must be:

- Highly erodible cropland that is planted or considered planted in 4 of the previous 6 crop years, and that can be planted in a normal manner; or
- Marginal pasture that is suitable for use as a riparian buffer or for similar habitat or water quality purposes; or
- Ecologically significant grasslands that contain forbs or shrubs for grazing; or
- A farmable wetland and related buffers.

Offers for general sign-up CRP contracts are ranked and compared using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). Currently, FSA uses the following EBI factors:

- Wildlife habitat benefits;
- Water quality benefits;
- On-farm soil-retention benefits;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;
- Air quality benefits; and
- Cost.

For CCRP, offers that meet eligibility requirements are automatically accepted into the program, without any competitive bidding.

For CREP, agreements are limited to specific geographic areas and to farmland where specific conservation practices can address conservation issues identified by the CREP project. Farmers should contact their county FSA office to determine if land in their county is involved in a CREP.

Financial Information

FSA provides CRP participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentive payments, and cost-share assistance:

Rental Payments: FSA bases rental rates on the productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent. The maximum rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or offer a lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

Cost-share Assistance: FSA provides up to 50 percent cost-share to establish the appropriate cover on the land.

Incentive Payments: USDA may make additional payments of up to 150 percent of the total cost of thinning and other practices to improve the condition of resources, promote forest management, or enhance wildlife habitat. USDA also provides bonuses of up to 20 percent on rental rates for windbreaks, filter strips, grass waterways, and riparian buffers, a 10 percent rental rate bonus for land located in wellhead protection areas, and upfront sign-up bonuses of \$150 per acre and 40 percent cost-share assistance for some eligible CCRP practices.

CREP participants receive the annual rental payment, certain incentive payments, and up to 50 percent cost-share. CREP generally includes a sign-up incentive as well for participants to install specific practices.

Website and Application

To learn about current funding opportunities, contact your [local FSA office](#).

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Conservation Stewardship Program

Rewarding farmers and ranchers who implement and maintain advanced conservation activities on working agricultural land

Program Basics

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a comprehensive working lands conservation program designed to protect and improve natural resources and the environment. Through CSP, farmers and ranchers receive technical and financial assistance to actively manage and maintain existing conservation systems and to implement additional conservation activities on land in agricultural production. CSP targets funding to:

- Address particular resources of concern in a given state or region;
- Assist farmers and ranchers to improve soil, water, and air quality;
- Provide increased biodiversity and wildlife and pollinator habitat;
- Sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gases to mitigate climate change; and
- Conserve water and energy.

Farmers and ranchers anywhere in the country can apply any year and at any time of the year. Enrollment is competitive and, typically once each year, NRCS will rank applications and develop contracts with those farmers and ranchers that have the highest-ranking applications until funding for that ranking period is exhausted. The 2014 Farm Bill provides sufficient funding to enroll 10 million acres in CSP each year, on top of the 60 million acres already enrolled under the previous farm bill.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

All private agricultural land, including cropland, pasture, and rangeland, is eligible. The 2014 Farm Bill now allows for a seamless transition from CRP to CSP; landowners with expiring CRP contracts can enroll in CSP during the last year of their CRP contract.

Eligible land includes all acres of an agricultural operation under the effective control of a producer,

whether or not it is contiguous, and whether it is owned or rented. Applicants must enroll all acres that they operate.

To qualify for CSP, farmers and ranchers must satisfy several criteria designed to address natural resource concerns that are designated as a priority for a particular state or region. At least five priority resource concerns will be selected for each state or region in the country.

Farmers and ranchers must demonstrate that they:

- are currently meeting or exceeding the stewardship threshold (a standard that NRCS sets for improving a natural resource's long-term sustainability) for at least two priority resource concerns; and
- will meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional priority resource concern by the end of the five-year contract period.

The contract will specify the new conservation activities that the producer agrees to install or adopt, and the existing conservation activities that the producer will maintain, manage, and improve.

An Applicant and Land Eligibility Self-Assessment form is available from NRCS to help determine whether the program is for you. The CSP Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT), filled out by the farmer with the local NRCS staff, is used to rank proposals and determine payment rates. The questions and conservation activity choices in the CMT are available electronically on NRCS websites and from the local office.

Ranking Criteria -- The CSP ranking system is based on how much farmers and ranchers have already done, and what else they are willing to do, to address natural resource concerns. Primary ranking factors are:

1. The extent of baseline conservation on the ground relative to the priority resource concerns at the time of enrollment;

2. The degree to which proposed new conservation activities address the priority resources and improve conservation outcomes over baseline levels;
3. The total number of priority resource concerns addressed in the contract, and the extent to which those proposed will meet or exceed the stewardship threshold;
4. The extent to which other priority natural resource concerns, in addition to those identified as priority resource concerns for that state or region, are addressed;
5. The extent to which the environmental benefits from the contract are provided at the least cost relative to other similarly beneficial contracts; and
6. The extent to which priority resource concerns will be addressed on land transitioning from CRP to CSP.

Application and Financial Information

Payments – CSP pays producers to improve, maintain and actively manage conservation activities in place at the time of application and to adopt new conservation activities during the contract term. Payment amounts are determined by multiple factors, including the costs incurred (for planning, design, materials, installation, labor, management, maintenance or training), income forgone, and expected conservation benefits. Additional factors include the:

- extent to which priority resource concerns will be addressed;
- level of stewardship in place at the time of application; and
- degree to which conservation activities will be integrated across the entire farm.

Farmers willing to adopt resource-conserving crop rotations that include cover crops, forages, or green manures, can receive special supplemental payments. Payments are also available to assist in the development of a comprehensive conservation plan.

Payments are capped at \$40,000 per year, or \$200,000 over the life of the 5-year contract. Nationwide, payments and technical assistance average \$18 per acre. However, payment amounts vary greatly, from lower-cost rangeland improvement contracts to mid-range pasture contracts to higher-range cropland

contracts. Annual payments are made after October 1 every year.

Contract Renewals - All CSP contracts last for five years, with an option to renew for another five years if a farmer or rancher has met the terms of the preceding contract and is willing to adopt additional conservation activities or solve additional resource concerns. Farmers or ranchers should work with their NRCS office to outline their existing conservation activities and new proposed new activities.

Website and Additional Resources

NRCS Headquarters:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/>

How to locate a state or local NRCS office:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>

Cooperative Extension System

Solving public needs with college or university resources

Program Basics

The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is a nationwide, non-credit educational network that links research and outreach programs of land-grant institutions to state and local needs, using expertise of thousands of people. State Extension Specialists, who are also university faculty, offer in-depth information on various technical subjects; approximately 9,000 local Extension educators staff, over 2,900 county offices in every state and territory, and hundreds of thousands of trained volunteers work locally on Master Gardener, 4-H and other programs.

Through USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the Federal Government provides annual funding to CES, but local and state funds are its primary support, and the structure and services it provides are largely determined at state and county levels.

Cooperative Extension does not normally provide financial assistance, but instead focuses on delivering information through Internet and printed publications, newsletters, broadcast media, staff presentations at public meetings, and one-one-one assistance in person or by phone. Most publications and programs are free or at nominal cost.

Typically, a state-level publications office has a list of all currently available extension publications in that state. In some locations, diagnostic services are available for soil testing and farm or garden pests.

Program Examples

Over the last century, Cooperative Extension has responded to hundreds of thousands of questions and inquiries on literally thousands of topics, as well as proactively delivering educational programs. CES has adapted to changing times and continues to address a wide range of human, plant, and animal needs in both urban and rural areas, serving a growing, increasingly diverse constituency with fewer and fewer resources.

The type of information available through Cooperative Extension is comprehensive and usually

tailored to local needs. Key program areas include:

- **Agriculture**
- **4-H Youth Development**
- **Natural Resources**
- **Leadership Development**
- **Family and Consumer Sciences**
- **Community and Economic Development**

Accessing information

Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by one or more experts who provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.

Websites

<http://www.extension.org/>

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/extension.html>

Call or visit a local office to talk directly to an Extension staff person. Find the office nearest you at: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/Extension/index.html>

The Cooperative Extension System also supports the eXtension Web site (<http://www.extension.org/>), a coordinated, Internet-based information system with round-the-clock access to trustworthy, balanced views of specialized information and education on a wide range of topics.

Information on the eXtension Web site is organized into Communities of Practice organized around many topics, such as diversity, agrosecurity, cotton, dairy, entrepreneurship, and more.

The eXtension Web site also includes a collection of news stories from partner institutions, Frequently Asked Questions, a calendar of extension events, online-learning opportunities, and content feeds.

Contact

Edwin Lewis, National Program Leader

Phone: 202-690-4565

elewis@nifa.usda.gov

Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States Program

Delivering crop insurance education and information to producers in underserved states

Program Basics

The purpose of the Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States Program, a USDA Risk Management Agency cooperative agreement program, is to deliver crop insurance education and information to U.S. agricultural producers in certain, designated States that have been historically underserved with respect to crop insurance. The States, collectively referred to as Targeted States, are Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Eligibility, Uses, Financials and Restrictions

Entities receiving funding will use funds to plan a local program of crop insurance education for agricultural producers, develop and assemble instructional materials, promote awareness for crop insurance and educational opportunities, deliver crop insurance educational activities to agricultural producers and agribusiness professionals, and document project activities. RMA will be substantially involved in the management and direction of the project.

Eligible applicants include State departments of agriculture, universities, non-profit agricultural organizations, and other public or private organizations with the capacity to lead a local program of crop insurance education for farmers and ranchers in a Targeted State. Individuals are eligible applicants.

In Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13), over \$4,970,000 was awarded to eligible applicants. For FY14 \$5 million was provided for the Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States Program.

Project Examples

- The **New Jersey Department of Agriculture** and **Rutgers Cooperative Extension** received \$282,000 to develop and implement a comprehensive crop insurance program so farmers throughout the state know about and can use

existing and emerging crop insurance products to mitigate their risks.

- **Pennsylvania's Department of Agriculture** received \$700,000 to deliver crop insurance education and information to Pennsylvania farmers in order to help them better understand and more fully utilize the many risk management options available.

- **Hawaii Department of Agriculture** received **\$245,832** to inform and educate Hawaiian producers on risk management techniques including crop insurance. This effort is built around a partnership with the highly successful LIFE (Local & Immigrant Farmer Education) to target socially disadvantaged, limited resource and beginning producers with the goal of bringing them into mainstream agriculture, while also serving mainstream growers.

Application

Entities interested in applying for the Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States Program should contact their regional field office (see below)

Website

For more information about the Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States Program, visit the RMA Partnership and Cooperative Agreements website.

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements/>

Contact

Risk Management Agency Regional Field Offices
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/rsos.html>

Crop Insurance for Organic Producers

Expanding safety net options to help organic farmers manage risk

Program Basics

Unlike conventional agriculture, organic agriculture has not always had the support of a crop insurance safety net tailored to meet its needs. However, there has been significant headway in recent years to develop risk management products that are available and accessible to organic producers. USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) has taken several important steps to remove barriers and increase access to crop insurance for organic agriculture, particularly (1) the development of crop insurance price elections that reflect the organic premium; (2) the option for organic producers to elect to insure their crop at their contract price; and (3) the removal of an organic premium surcharge that applied to organic farmers until 2014.

Eligibility

Organic crop insurance is available for all certified organic acreage, transitional acreage, and buffer zone acreage. Crop insurance payouts are made for insurable causes of loss where damage is significant enough to lower a yield below the deductible for the entire insured unit. Insurable causes of loss include drought, excess moisture, freeze, hail, prevented planting, insect damage, disease, and weeds, but the producer must have been using practices generally recognized as good farming practices for organic agriculture in order to receive an indemnity payment.

To insure an organic crop at a price that reflects the organic premium, there must either be an RMA-established organic price election for that crop, or an approved written agreement contracting the production of that crop at a specific price. In the latter instance, the producer can elect the contract price rather than the RMA price election, or use the contract price in lieu of the conventional price, if there is no RMA-established price election for that crop.

Organic Price Elections

RMA has established price elections for 16 crops, though there are limitations in availability. The list

currently includes almonds, apricots, avocados, blueberries, corn, cotton, fresh stonefruit (freestone peaches, nectarines and plums), grapes for juice, mint, oats, pears, processing tomatoes, and soybeans. These prices may not be available in all states or counties, so checking with RMA on availability in your location is advisable. The 2014 Farm Bill requires USDA to establish price elections for all organic crops by the 2015 crop insurance year, and while it is unlikely RMA will be able to meet that deadline set by Congress, the agency nonetheless should be making substantial numbers of additional crops available with organic price elections over the next few years.

Contract Price Option

Under RMA's Contract Price Addendum (CPA), organic producers who have a written contract from a buyer by the acreage reporting date can insure the organic crop at the price agreed upon in the contract. The CPA applies to 62 crops, listed on the last page of the RMA Fact Sheet.

- RMA Fact Sheet: <http://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/rme/addendum.pdf>
- Contract Price Addendum: <http://www.rma.usda.gov/policies/2014/14cpa.pdf>

Organic Premium Surcharge

RMA has eliminated the imposition of a surcharge on organic premiums. Beginning in the 2014 crop insurance year, organic producers will no longer be subject to the 5 percent organic surcharge. Instead, RMA will use actual transitional yields (T-yields) for organic crops to determine premium rates. T-yields are used to calculate payments where the producer does not have at least four years of crop yield history for a particular crop (also known as actual production history). Where actual production history is unavailable, RMA uses county averages of crop yield to determine t-yield.

RMA has decided to reduce the county average crop yield by 35% when applying it to organic producers, which means that organic producers are still at a disadvantage, at least until RMA obtains sufficient data on organic prices and organic yields. As more organic producers obtain crop insurance, making more data available on organic crop yield, RMA should be able to establish county or regional averages of organic crop yield, rather than relying on an across-the-board assumption in yield differential between organic and non-organic production systems.

Whole Farm Revenue Protection

Another option that organic producers may wish to consider is insurance through the new Whole Farm Revenue Protection policy [see page 77], particularly if you have a diversified farming operation. Rather than insuring crop-by-crop, WFRP provides an attractive option for organic diversified operations.

Websites and Application

These programs are developed by the Risk Management Agency, but risk management products are sold and delivered through private crop insurance agents. Visit RMA's website for more information, including a tool to help search for an agent near you.

- Organic Crop Insurance:
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/news/currentissues/organics/>
- Crop Insurance Agent Locator:
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/tools/agent.html>
- 2014 Organics Fact Sheet:
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/rme/2014organicsfactsheet.pdf>

CRP Transition Incentives Program

Encouraging landowners to transition farmland to beginning, minority and veteran farmers

Program Basics

The Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentives Program (CRP TIP) offers a special incentive of two years of extra CRP rental payments to owners of land that is currently enrolled in CRP but returning to production, who rent or sell to beginning, socially disadvantaged or veteran farmers or ranchers (see page 57 for criteria) who will use sustainable grazing practices, resource-conserving cropping systems, or transition to organic production.

One year prior to the termination of a CRP contract, a CRP owner or operator who is participating in the CRP Transition Option can allow a beginning, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmer or rancher to begin to make conservation and land improvements and/or begin the organic certification process on the land covered by the CRP contract.

On or near the date that a CRP contract is terminated, the retired or retiring owner or operator must sell, enter into a long-term lease, or lease with an option to purchase, some or all of the land that was covered by CRP to the participating beginning, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmer or rancher.

The participating farmer must develop and implement a conservation plan on the land that was covered by CRP. On the date that the participating farmer takes possession of the land through ownership or lease, they will have the option to enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) or the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). They will also have the option of re-enrolling portions of the land into the CRP through the “continuous sign-up” CRP which is for conservation buffer practices such as contour grass strips, riparian buffers, or grassed waterways. USDA will continue making payments to the retired or retiring owner or operator for two additional years after the date that the CRP contract terminates.

Application and Financial Information

CRP TIP is administered through USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). The Natural Resources Conservation Service is responsible for approving TIP conservation plans and for offering new farmer and rancher enrollment opportunities in CSP or EQIP.

Requests for participation in the CRP TIP are taken on a continuous basis at FSA County Offices. In addition, FSA administers TIP NET – a website that helps retired and retiring CRP landowners or operators connect online with beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers and post when land is available or needed through TIP.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

All eligible CRP landowners or operators and beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers are eligible to participate in CRP TIP. The CRP transition incentive payments, however, cannot be made to the retiring CRP owner or operator if transition of the land is to a family member. But a beginning, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmer or rancher family member may participate in TIP to receive the conservation benefits and assistance.

Website

To apply, contact your local FSA office:
<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Direct Farm Ownership and Operating Loans

*Providing loans to family farmers and ranchers to purchase land and assets
or finance annual operating expenses*

Program Basics

The purpose of the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) direct farm ownership (DFO) and operating loan (DOL) programs is to provide financing and assistance to family farmers and ranchers to establish farms and ranches, achieve financial success, and graduate to commercial credit or self-financing.

Loan Eligibility Requirements

Eligible borrowers must be:

1. U.S. citizens or U.S. non-citizen national or qualified aliens;
2. unable to obtain credit elsewhere through commercial lenders
3. have sufficient education, training, or experience;
4. have an acceptable credit history; and
5. be an owner or operator of a family-sized farm, at loan closing.

A family farm is defined as one in which the farm family provides all of the management and a substantial portion of the total labor.

For DFO loans, an applicant must also have substantially participated in the operation of a farm for at least three of the last 10 years, with flexibility to consider additional experience for at least one of the three years.

An applicant who applies for DFO assistance must not have had a direct DFO loan outstanding for more than a total of 10 years prior to the date the new FO is closed. An applicant who applies for DOL assistance must not have had a direct DOL loan outstanding for no more than a total of 7 years before the date of the proposed loan.

Additionally, the loan recipient must be able to repay and to provide enough collateral to secure the loan on at least a dollar-for-dollar basis, and use the loan for authorized purposes.

Loan Purposes, Repayment, and Limits

DFO loans may be used to purchase a farm or ranch, make capital improvements, pay closing costs, and pay for soil and water conservation improvements, including sustainable agriculture practices and systems.

DOLs may be used to pay the costs of reorganizing a farm or ranch, buy livestock or equipment, annual operating expenses, finance conservation costs, pay closing costs, comply with OSHA requirements, pay tuition for borrower training classes, refinance farm-related operating loans, and family living expenses.

DOL repayment schedules are from 1-7 years. Payments can be in equal or unequal installments.

DFO loans terms are up to 40 years. Interest rates are the lowest rates in effect at the time of loan approval or loan closing.

Loans may be made for up to \$300,000 and as little as \$100 (see Microloans for more information)

Target Participation Rates

A portion of available loan funds is reserved annually for minority and beginning farmers. Refer to page 57 for detailed eligibility criteria.

Each year, 75 percent of DFO funds and 50 percent of DOL funds are reserved for beginning farmers for the first 11 months of the fiscal year.

For minority farmers, the percentage of DFO funds reserved is determined based the percentage of the minority population of a county, while the percentage of DOL funds is determined by the percent of minority farmers relative to total farmers in the state. Those loan set-asides last the entire year.

Application and Financial Information

Loan application forms are available online but farmers must apply for direct loan assistance in person at an FSA county office or USDA Service Center. FSA officials will meet with the applicant to assess all aspects of the proposed or existing farming or ranching operation to determine if the applicant meets the eligibility requirements. FSA loan programs are funded through the annual agriculture appropriations bill.

Websites and Application

Information about this and all FSA loan programs is available at the following FSA websites:

www.fsa.usda.gov.

Fact Sheets:

http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/newsReleases?area=newsroom&subject=landing&topic=pfs&newstype=prfactsheet&type=detail&item=pf_20140328_farln_en_loaninfo.html

FSA's Guide to FSA Farm Loans:

www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/fsa_br_01_web_booklet.pdf

To find your local FSA regional Service Center or state FSA office select your state from this website:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Down Payment Loan Program

Helping beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers purchase farmland

Program Basics

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has a special down payment farm ownership (FO) loan program to help beginning farmers and ranchers (BFR) and socially disadvantaged applicants (SDA) buy a farm or ranch.

Application and Financial Information

A producer can apply for beginning farmer down payment loan assistance at the FSA county office serving the county where the headquarters of the operation is located.

To qualify, an applicant must make a down payment equal to 5 percent of the purchase price and must be able to secure a commercial loan for at least 50 percent of the purchase price. FSA can provide up to a 95 percent guarantee on the private loan and the participating lender does not have to pay a guarantee loan fee.

Downpayment loans will not exceed 45 percent of the purchase price or appraised value or \$667,000. The maximum loan amount financed by FSA is thus \$300,000. The interest rate on the FSA portion of the loan is a fixed rate that is 4 percent below the direct FO rate but not lower than 1.5 percent. The repayment period for the FSA portion of the loan is scheduled in equal, annual installments for a term not to exceed 20 years.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

To be eligible for this loan, a farmer must be considered either a qualified beginning farmer or rancher (BFR) or socially disadvantaged applicant (SDA). A BFR is an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years, substantially participates in the operation of the farm, and does not own a farm bigger than 30 percent of the average acreage of the farms in the county. SDAs include American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and women (see page 57 for detailed eligibility criteria).

Additionally, all FO applicants must have at least 3 years of farm management experience. If the applicant is a business entity, all members must be related by blood or marriage, and all must be beginning farmers, or socially disadvantaged individuals must hold a majority interest. All entity members must substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

Financing from participating lenders must have an amortization period of at least 30 years and cannot have a balloon payment due within the first 20 years of the loan.

Websites and Application

Information about this down payment loan program is included at this site:

http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/beginningloansoct14.pdf

For more information or to apply, contact your local FSA regional Service Center or state FSA office. For that contact information, click your state on this website:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Information about all FSA programs is available on the FSA website: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Helping farmers and ranchers address natural resource concerns through cost-sharing

Program Basics

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP helps eligible producers integrate conservation practices on eligible agricultural land and nonindustrial private forestland.

EQIP participants install or implement structural and management practices on working farm- and forestland. In return, through a contractual agreement, NRCS provides financial cost-share assistance and technical assistance.

EQIP contracts can last up to ten years, but most last two to three years. Contract activities are carried out according to a plan of operations that NRCS develops together with the producer. The plan identifies the appropriate conservation practice or practices to address the relevant resource concerns. Practices are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions. Examples of vegetative and structural conservation practices include grassed waterways, filter strips, terraces, fencing, waste lagoons, and irrigation systems. Examples of management practices include conservation tillage, cover cropping, nutrient management, and integrated pest management.

EQIP also supports conservation on working lands through several national initiatives that may be available to producers engaged in specific kinds of agricultural activities or located in specific geographic areas. Current national initiatives include the On-Farm Energy Initiative, Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative, National Water Quality Incentives Initiative, and Organic Initiative.

Project Examples

- A beginning rancher located near **Wellsville, Missouri** used EQIP funds to grow her cow-calf operation. As part of her conservation plan, she implemented a rotational-grazing system on paddocks of warm-season grasses and legumes, separated by

solar-powered electric fencing. Management-intensive rotational grazing maximizes the forage base for her hogs and cattle and uses nutrient-rich animal manure as fertilizer.

- Through the EQIP Organic Initiative, a produce farmer located in **Kings Valley, Oregon** was able to incorporate soil and water quality projects onto his certified organic farm. Projects include installing a grassed waterway to reduce erosion, minimize sediment runoff, and improve habitat for threatened and endangered fish; planting a hedgerow for pollinator habitat; developing a waste management plan; and implementing crop rotations and cover crops for soil health.

- A small vegetable farmer north of **Minneapolis, Minnesota** received an EQIP contract that funded the construction of a high tunnel. Also called "hoop houses," high tunnels operate like greenhouses to help producers extend the growing season. NRCS also provided technical and financial assistance to install a native grass field border to keep nutrients and sediments from entering nearby waterways.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Applicants must control or own land in agricultural, forestry, or livestock production. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pasture, nonindustrial private forest land, and other farm or ranch lands.

The program is competitive, and applications are ranked based on criteria developed by both the NRCS National Headquarters and NRCS State Conservationists. Ranking criteria vary by state.

All activities under this program must work toward conservation of natural resources. All approved applicants must develop and submit a conservation plan that will address the situation on the applicant's land relevant to the identified conservation needs or objectives that are to be addressed.

Financial Information

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, individual EQIP payments are capped at \$450,000 in aggregate payments over the life of the five-year farm bill, regardless of the number of contracts a producer may have.

Organic producers and those transitioning to organic production can apply to the general funding pool or the Organic Initiative pool, but payments through the Organic Initiative are capped at \$80,000 over a six-year period, or \$20,000 annually.

EQIP may share up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. However, socially disadvantaged, limited-resource, beginning, and veteran farmer and ranchers (see page 57 for descriptions of eligibility criteria) are eligible for cost-shares up to 90 percent. This same population of producers is also eligible for up to 50 percent advance payment for costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, or training. Five percent of EQIP funds are set-aside in a designated pool for beginning, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and veteran farmers. At least five percent of EQIP funds is required to target practices that support the restoration, development, protection, and improvement of wildlife habitat. Sixty percent is set-aside for livestock producers.

The 2014 Farm Bill provides mandatory funding through Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) at the following amounts: \$1.35 billion for FY14; \$1.6 billion for FY15; \$1.65 billion for FY16; \$1.65 billion for FY 17; and \$1.75 billion for FY18.

EQIP payments are set relative to income foregone as well as costs incurred that are associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, and training. When determining the amount and rate of payment to compensate income foregone, USDA can weight those practices that promote soil health; water quality and quantity improvement; nutrient management; pest management; air quality improvement; wildlife habitat development (including pollinator habitat); and invasive species management.

Website and Application

Farmers and ranchers interested in enrolling should contact their local NRCS office.

- NRCS local office locator
<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>
- National NRCS EQIP Website
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/>

Locate a state or local NRCS office at:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>

Farm Storage Facility Loans

Financing farmers to build or upgrade storage, cold storage, and packing facilities

Program Basics

The Farm Storage Facility Loan Program, administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency, provides low-interest loans for producers to build or upgrade permanent facilities to store commodities, including fruit and vegetable cold storage, washing, packing, and handling buildings and equipment.

The following commodities are eligible for farm storage facility loans:

- Corn, grain sorghum, rice, soybeans, oats, peanuts, wheat, barley or minor oilseeds harvested as whole grain
- Corn, grain sorghum, wheat, oats or barley harvested as other-than-whole grain
- Pulse crops - lentils, chickpeas, dry peas
- Hay, renewable biomass, honey, and fruits (includes nuts) and vegetables

The program has permanent Commodity Credit Corporation mandatory funding.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Among the eligible cost items are site preparation, installation, appraisals, legal fees, purchase price, sales tax, shipping and delivery, and off-farm paid labor.

The local FSA county committee must approve all loans. Among eligible uses are:

- Grain storage cribs, bins, and silos, and related electrical equipment
- Equipment to maintain, improve, or monitor stored grain quality
- Grain drying equipment
- Hay and biomass storage structures
- Cold storage buildings and equipment
- Packing sheds and handling equipment

Portable equipment, used bins, and used equipment are not eligible.

Among the eligibility stipulations for the borrower are to:

- Produce an eligible commodity;
- Have a satisfactory credit rating and the ability to repay; and
- Provide proof of multi-peril crop insurance and all peril insurance; however, fruit and vegetable growers may request a waiver from the requirement to hold multi-peril crop insurance or Non-Insured Crop Assistance Program (NAP) coverage.

The maximum loan amount is \$500,000. A 15 percent cash down payment and a \$100 non-refundable application are required. Loan terms are for 7, 10, or 12 years depending on the amount of the loan. The interest rate is fixed and set at the rate of interest charged on comparable U.S. Treasury securities.

For loans that exceed \$100,000, the borrower must provide a first lien on the real estate where the facility is situated, other real estate sufficient to secure the loan, or a letter of credit sufficient to protect the government's interest. Loans of up to \$100,000 may be secured by a promissory note only.

Website and Application

For information specific to this program, see http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/frm_storage_facility_lns.pdf

For more information or to apply, contact your local FSA regional Service Center or state FSA office. For that contact information, click your state on this website: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Information about all FSA programs is available on the FSA website: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

Farm to School Grant Program

Connecting local farmers with schools and teaching children healthy eating habits and agricultural literacy

Program Basics

The Farm to School Grant Program (F2S), administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, provides technical assistance and competitively awarded grants to schools, nonprofits, state and local agencies, agricultural producers, and Indian tribal organizations to improve access to local foods and expand educational activities in agriculture and gardening for K-12th grade students. Grants can be used for planning, training and technical assistance, purchasing equipment, developing school gardens, building partnerships, implementing farm to school programs, and supporting operations.

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act (CNR) of 2010 created USDA's F2S Program and provided \$5 million a year for eight years (\$40 million total) in mandatory funds. 2012 was its inaugural granting year.

Project Examples

Projects that have been awarded F2S funds include:

- A collaboration of community groups, local government, farmers, and a new food hub to scale-up production and aggregation, allowing schools to meet their needs and increase local food purchases;
- Training and technical assistance focused on fruit and vegetable purchases from small and mid-sized farmers and training in Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices certification;
- A partnership between a school district and local farms helps students apply biology, American history, and horticulture skills in farm management; the farms sell organic produce to the school district and offer outdoor educational space for students.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

These entities are eligible to apply for F2S funds:

- K-12 schools and school districts that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program;
- State and local agencies;
- Indian tribal organizations;
- Non-profit entities; and

- Agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers.

Eligible grant uses include:

- developing strategies that support local sourcing at schools;
- building partnerships and planning for farm to school activities and programming;
- increasing the purchase and consumption of locally produced fresh food;
- investing in school kitchen infrastructure;
- training farmers and food service workers in food safety;
- creating school gardens and high tunnels; and
- implementing nutrition education and garden-based curriculum.

USDA allows each applicant to define "local" as each definition may be specific to individual contexts. Depending on the type of grant applied for, a cash or in-kind match, in an amount equal to 25 percent of the total cost of the project, may be required.

Grant funds cannot be used for F2S projects focused on pre-K environments or for providers participating exclusively in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Additionally, F2S grant funds may not be used for Summer Feeding Program activities not provided by a K-12 school or school district participating in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program and that do not complement activities focused on these school meal programs.

Website

For more information about F2S grants and how to apply, please see:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school>

Contact

Matt Russell, Grant Program Manager
202-720-6765
farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov

Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program

Developing and expanding direct and intermediated local food marketing

Program Basics

The Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP), administered by USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service, is designed to help promote domestic consumption of agricultural commodities by expanding direct farmer-to-consumer and intermediated marketing opportunities.

FMLFPP's predecessor, the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), was created in the 2002 Farm Bill but not launched until 2006, when it first received funding. From 2006 through 2012, the program received total of \$35 million in funding, the bulk of which was awarded as grants.

The 2014 Farm Bill expanded FMPP into the FMLFPP to include grants for local and regional food enterprises that are not direct producer-to-consumer markets but act as intermediaries between producers and consumers by providing aggregation, storage, processing, and/or distribution services for locally or regionally produced food products to meet local and regional market demand.

The 2014 Farm Bill also increased funding for FMLFPP to \$30 million per year, with:

- \$15 million available for direct-to-consumer projects like farmers markets, CSAs, roadside stands, agritourism, and other forms of direct marketing (currently administered as FMPP), and
- \$15 million available for local and regional food enterprises involved in intermediated marketing such as food hubs, aggregators, distributors, and value-added production enterprises, such as shared-use kitchen or kitchen incubator operations. This funding is currently administered as the LFPP.

Project Examples

The following examples are from FMPP, the FMLFPP predecessor program.

- **Juneau Arts and Humanities Council in Alaska** received funds to expand the Juneau Farmers

Market, enabling local fishermen to sell fish at the farmers market.

- **Angelic Organics Learning Center in Illinois** used funds to develop farmers markets, farm stands, and a CSA in food desert areas, conduct training and promotions, and to pilot a food aggregation center.

- **Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture** expanded a direct producer-to-consumer marketing program by broadening its Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL) campaign to include low-income populations.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

For both direct marketing and local food enterprise projects, eligible entities are:

- agricultural businesses and cooperatives;
- producer networks and associations;
- community supported agriculture (CSA) networks and associations;
- local governments;
- nonprofit corporations;
- public benefit corporations;
- economic development corporations;
- regional farmers market authorities; and
- tribal governments.

For both direct marketing and local food projects, USDA gives priority to projects that:

- primarily serve low income/low food access communities as defined by the USDA in its ERS Food Access Research Atlas map; or
- involve Promise Zone Lead Applicant Organizations.

At least 10 percent of funding will be awarded to these priority projects.

As of this writing, FMLFPP is administered through two distinct programs – one pertaining to direct marketing (FMPP) and one pertaining to non-direct-to-consumer supply chain activities (LFPP).

Direct Marketing (FMPP) Eligibility and Match Information

FMPP-funded Projects must assist in developing, improving, and expanding domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, agri-tourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities. Also, projects must demonstrate benefits to two or more farmers, producers, or farm vendors who produce and sell their own products through a common distribution channel directly to consumers.

Matching funds are not required.

Eligible grant uses for direct marketing include:

- market startup, operation, infrastructure;
- farmer/rancher/manager training and education;
- advertising/outreach;
- market analysis and planning;
- customer and producer surveys;
- vendor and customer recruitment; and
- new venue establishment.

Local Food (LFPP) Eligibility and Match Information

LFPP-funded projects must be designed to assist in the development, improvement, or expansion of local and regional food business enterprises. Projects must demonstrate benefits to two or more agricultural producers or individuals.

Local or regional food is defined as a food product that is raised, produced, aggregated, stored, processed, and distributed in the locality or region where the final product is marketed to consumers. The total distance the product is transported must be within 400 miles from the origin of the product or, both the final market and the origin of the product must be within the same State, territory, or tribal land.

A cash or in-kind match, in an amount equal to 25 percent of the total cost of the project, is required.

Eligible grant uses for intermediated marketing include:

- market research, feasibility studies, and business planning;
- training and technical assistance for the business enterprise and/or producers working with the business enterprise;
- outreach and marketing to buyers and consumers;
- working capital; and
- non-construction infrastructure improvements or information technology systems.

FMLFPP funds cannot be used to construct or acquire buildings, facilities or land, or to make additions or improvements to an existing building or facility.

Website and Application

For more information about the program and how to apply, please see:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/amsgrants>

Contacts

Carmen Humphrey, FMPP Program Manager
202-720-8317
Carmen.Humphrey@usda.gov

Nicole Nelson Miller, LFPP Program Manager
202-720-2731
nicole.nelson@ams.usda.gov

Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program

Improving marketing opportunities through research and innovation

Program Basics

The Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP), administered by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, provides matching funds on a competitive basis to State Departments of Agriculture, State colleges and universities and other State agencies and institutions to explore new market opportunities for agricultural products and to encourage research and innovation aimed at improving the U.S. marketing system's efficiency and performance. FSMIP funds a wide range of applied research projects, which may:

- Determine cost-effective methods for processing, storing, distributing, and marketing products;
- Develop and improve standards of quality, condition, grade, quantity, and packaging
- Eliminate artificial barriers to the movement of products in markets, and foster new or expanded markets;
- Collect and disseminate marketing information to anticipate and meet consumer demand, maintain farm income, and balance production and utilization;
- Assess challenges and develop methods that assist local and regional producers in marketing products consistent with food safety requirements; or
- Create economic opportunity in rural areas through research on local and regional food systems and value-added products

Project Examples

- **Virginia State University** identified deficiencies in the local food marketing system and developed marketing strategies to meet the needs of small farmers and consumers in select counties.
- **Cornell University** examined the roles and opportunities for small farmer marketing cooperatives and food hubs in addressing the growing demands for local, source-identified food products.
- **Maryland Department of Agriculture**, in partnership with the **University of Maryland** and

the **Maryland Farm Bureau**, will determine the best potential contractual arrangements for farmers using a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) business model, and examine the potential for a certification and/or regulatory structure to address consumer confidence and allow the continued successful growth of CSAs in the state.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Only State Departments of Agriculture, State colleges and universities, and other state agencies and institutions are eligible to apply for direct funding. However, projects may involve and must benefit multiple agricultural entities. Preference is given to projects that reflect a collaborative approach between the States, academia, the farm sector, and other stakeholders. Projects must have a strong marketing focus, must involve research, and the primary beneficiaries must be producers and agribusinesses. FSMIP will also consider projects on a smaller scale that may serve as pilot projects or case studies. FSMIP projects are generally two years in duration.

FSMIP funds must be matched dollar for dollar, in cash or in-kind, from any non-federal source, including state appropriations or resources contributed by project partners.

Grants typically average \$65,000 each. In recent years, grants have ranged from \$25,000 to \$135,000. In 2014, \$1.1 million was awarded to 17 projects in 13 states. FSMIP is funded through the annual agricultural appropriations bill.

Website

Interested organizations should contact their State Department of Agriculture. To learn more about FSMIP, go to: www.ams.usda.gov/FSMIP

Contact

Janise Zygmunt, Staff Officer
Phone: 202-720-5024
janise.zygmunt@ams.usda.gov

Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program

Increasing the purchasing power of low-income communities for fruits and vegetables while expanding economic opportunities for farmers

Program Basics

The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program (FINI) provides competitively awarded grants for projects that increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase. A cash or in-kind match, in an amount equal to 50 percent of the total cost of the project, is required.

The 2014 Farm Bill created FINI and committed \$100 million in mandatory funding between 2014-2018, of which approximately \$90 million will be for grants and \$10 million will be to evaluate how FINI-funded projects have increased fruit and vegetable purchases and health outcomes. In October, 2014, FINI offered its first solicitation, combining funding for fiscal years 2014 and 2015 and totaling \$31.5 million.

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- Test innovative or promising strategies that would increase understanding of ways to increase fruit and vegetable purchases by SNAP participants;
- Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;
- Provide locally- or regionally-produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally-appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience;
- Are located in underserved communities, particularly [Promise Zones](#) and [StrikeForce](#) communities.

All FINI projects must (1) have the support of a state SNAP agency; (2) increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in

SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (3) operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and be in compliance with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (4) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation; (5) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals receiving SNAP benefits as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not SNAP participants; and (6) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other states and communities.

Project Examples

As of this writing, no funding round has been completed, but examples of initiatives that provide SNAP incentives can be found on these websites: <http://wholesomewave.org/dvcp/> and <http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/projects/double-food-bucks>

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Eligibility to receive this grant is limited to **government agencies and non-profit organizations** (FCEA, § 4405(b)(2)(A)). Such entities may include: an emergency feeding organization; an agricultural cooperative; a producer network or association; a community health organization; a public benefit corporation; an economic development corporation; a farmers' market; a community-supported agriculture program; a buying club; a SNAP-authorized retailer; and a State, local, or tribal agency. All applicants must demonstrate in their application that they are a government agency or non-profit organization.

Website

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/fini.html>

Contact

Dr. Jane Clary Loveless
jclary@nifa.usda.gov
202-720-3891

Forest Legacy Program

Protecting environmentally important forests from conversion to nonforest uses

Program Basics

Created by Congress in 1990, the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) supports states' efforts to protect environmentally important, privately owned forestland from conversion to non-forest uses. The FLP protects "working forests" that provide environmental services and public benefits. FLP tracts can be managed for sustainable timber production as well as water quality and watershed protection, maintenance of open space, scenic lands, wildlife habitat and opportunities for outdoor recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking.

Participating states work with a variety of partners to accomplish the goals of the FLP. Conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land, as well as local non-profit land conservancies, help develop projects and leverage additional dollars to complement federal money. Partners also play crucial roles in the pre- and post-acquisition work. The federal government may fund up to 75% of project costs, with at least 25% coming from private, State or local sources.

States receive funds and, in some cases, local units of government hold title to conservation easements or lands in fee simple. Projects are selected through a two-part competitive process – first at the State level and then in a national competitive project.

Land enrolled in the Forest Legacy Program must remain forested and requires a forest stewardship or multiple-use management plan. As of March 26, 2014 the Forest Legacy Program had protected 2,336,749 acres in 46 States and Territories.

Project Examples

- The Central Sands Pine forest in Wisconsin received a \$3 million conservation easement, protecting more than 7,500 acres of working forest in central Wisconsin held by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Ensuring continued forest production on large forest blocks is important to the local, state and regional economy, contributing to Wisconsin being first

among states in forestry jobs. This property contains critical habitat for the endangered Kirtland's warbler and Karner Blue butterfly.

- Since 2006, FLP has partnered with the Montana Division of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the Trust for Public Land to protect nearly 8,000 acres in Montana's Swan Valley. This project complements the work of 13 other groups that have permanently protected more than 60,000 acres of this valley, which is a biologically diverse ecosystem and provides important wildlife habitat for wildlife, from bull trout to grizzly bears.
- After three years of trying, efforts to protect Muschopauge Brook in central Massachusetts was finally successful in 2007 with help from the Forest Legacy Program. Surrounded on three sides by protected land, the Muschopauge Brook tract is a key linkage for over 1,000 acres of forest and open space protection. The brook is a major tributary of the Quinapoxet Reservoir, which is a vital source of drinking water for over 200,000 people. Development along the Muschopauge Brook would affect the quality of water negatively for the cities of Worcester, Rutland, Holden, and even Boston. These forest lands sustain diverse wildlife with 10 species of warblers as well as many red-eyed vireos, grouse, beavers, deer and moose.

Website

<http://www.fs.fed.us/>

<http://www.fs.fed.us/cooperativeforestry/programs/loa/flp.shtml>

Contact

Scott Stewart, Forest Legacy Program Manager
Phone: 202-205-1618

sstewart@fs.fed.us

Forest Products Laboratory (FPL)

Conducting research and providing information on wood housing, forest products technologies, and commercial applications that contribute to conservation and productivity of forest resource

Program Basics

USDA Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory (FPL) was established in 1910 in Madison, Wisconsin as a centralized national wood research laboratory and clearinghouse for information on uses of wood. FPL's research and demonstration programs are accomplished through coordinated partnerships with industry, universities, and government.

FPL's five main research areas include advanced composites, advanced structures, forest biorefinery, nanotechnology, and woody biomass utilization.

Innovations developed at FPL are patented and licensed for use in private companies for commercial application. FPL's Forest Products Marketing Unit helps transfer information by matching customer needs with existing research. The general public, industry, regulatory agencies, state and private foresters, educators, and other government agencies and organizations use FPL information to build better wood homes, solve wood use problems, and develop improved wood processing systems.

Project Examples

- **Three-Dimensional Engineered Fiberboard** (or 3DEF) is a newly developed product from FPL that may provide an outlet for overstocked fire prone forests. It can be produced from virtually any biomass fiber, including small diameter trees, invasive woody plant materials, recycled paper, corrugated boxes and various agricultural residues. A wood fiber slurry is vacuum formed over a three-dimensional engineered mold, and the 3D fiber mat is cured during hot pressing to create structures with the engineering properties of hardboard, and solid fiberboard at a fraction of the weight.

- **Creating sustainable uses of woody biomass** aims to reduce wildfire and forest disease and increase profits in rural communities by finding profitable uses for small-diameter and thinned trees in overstocked forests. FPL research projects are exploring the potential of using small-diameter roundwood resulting from forest ecosystem

management as structural material for uses in bridges, boardwalks, trail structures, picnic shelters, storage sheds, and other rustic-type buildings.

- FPL's **nanocellulose pilot plant** opened in 2012 to worldwide acclaim. Some of the many applications of molecular-level cellulose-derived substances include very lightweight armor and ballistic glass. Using structural, chemical, and mechanical techniques, interdisciplinary teams of scientists continue to expand FPL's nanocellulose research program. Nanotechnology will play an increasing role in restoring our nation's forests and creating economic benefits from low-value wood.

Accessing Resources

FPL staff can provide most information upon request, develops information where needed, or suggests alternative sources of information or expertise. No financial assistance is available, although the FPL's website sometimes provides information about Forest Service calls for proposals for various wood- and biomass-related programs. In some cases, where a technology being developed requires partners to demonstrate or evaluate them, the FPL helps private-sector partners find sources of capital either through other USDA agencies or participating state government incentive programs.

Website

<http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us/index.php>

Contact

Doug Clawson, Director of Communications
Phone: 608-231-9200
dsclawson@fs.fed.us

Urban and Community Forestry Program (UCF)

Providing financial and technical assistance to local governments and others to encourage stewardship of urban and community trees and forest resources

Program Basics

Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) is a US Forest Service cooperative program that focuses on stewardship of urban natural resources. With 80 percent of the nation's population in urban areas, the program aims to conserve green spaces to guide growth and revitalize city centers and older suburbs.

UCF maintains, restores, and improves urban forest ecosystems on more than 70 million acres. It provides technical, financial, research and educational services to local government, non-profit organizations, community groups, educational institutions, and tribal governments. The program is delivered through its legislative partners, the [state forestry agencies](#) in 59 states and US territories.

As of this writing, USFS cooperative programs were being redesigned. It is expected that programs will increasingly focus on issues and landscapes of national importance and prioritized through state and regional assessments and that funding will be focused on landscape scale projects. Three national themes provide a framework for this work:

- Conserve working forest landscapes,
- Protect forests from harm, and
- Enhance benefits associated with trees and forests.

Project Examples

- UCF funds were used to analyze perceptions, issues, and concerns of a wide range of stakeholders related to urban forests in **Savannah, GA** to help develop opportunities for the growing sustainable tourism industry.

- **Jobs for the Future** was awarded a \$175,000 challenge cost-share grant to conduct a labor market analysis to build a business case for important green infrastructure investments in communities nationally in both the private and public sectors.

- Urban and community forestry projects that promote livable communities have also been granted UCF funds in **Bath, ME, Sacramento, CA, Minneapolis, MN** and **Fort Mitchell, KY**.

- In **North Carolina**, UCF funds helped establish and restore city parks.

- In **Nebraska and Kansas**, CFS funds helped fund hazard tree assessments, planning assistance, and tree planting, following devastating tornadoes.

Application and Financial Information

Assistance for local governments and community organizations is available primarily through State Forestry organizations. Each state issues its own application procedures. Funds are limited by availability and sometimes by Congressional or Administration-identified priorities. Federal funds cannot exceed 50 percent of total project costs.

Some USFS regions also provide competitive grants directly to local governments and local or regional organizations for regionally significant projects. UCF funds a competitive, challenge cost-share program in cooperation with the National Urban & Community Forestry Advisory Council to support urban and community forestry activities that are national or widespread in their impact or application.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Cities, towns, municipalities, local governments, and non-governmental organizations are eligible. Priority is given to projects that build local capacity and have the support and involvement of communities and volunteer groups.

Website and Contacts

<http://www.fs.fed.us/ucf/index.shtml>

National Program Managers:

Anne Buckelew
(202) 401-4073
ambuckelew@fs.fed.us

Beattra Wilson
(202) 401-4070
bswilson02@fs.fed.us

State Contacts:

http://www.fs.fed.us/ucf/contact_state.shtml

Regional Contacts:

http://www.fs.fed.us/ucf/contact_regional.shtml

Forest Stewardship Program

Helping private forest landowners develop plans for sustainable management of their forests

Program Basics

Authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) provides technical assistance, through State forestry agency partners, to nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) owners to encourage and enable active long-term forest management. Approximately forty-five percent of all forestland in the United States, or 354 million acres, is under nonindustrial private ownership, contributing significantly to America's clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreational resources and timber supplies.

A primary focus of the FSP is the development of comprehensive, multi-resource management plans that provide landowners with the information they need to manage their forests for a variety of products and services.

Project Examples

- Bambi Jones and David Moskovitz own nearly 1,000 acres in Jefferson, Maine. Their land serves as the foundation for the The Hidden Valley Nature Center which uses a FSP plan developed with the Maine Forest Service. Goals for the forested land include increasing high-quality timber and maintaining good forest health.
- The State of Delaware entered into partnership with the Maryland Forest Service, the Pinchot Institute and Sustainable Solutions, LLC, to establish a spatial land registry (SLR). This will enable small acreage landowners to do an online registration of their woodlands and be combined with other similar landowners in the area to qualify for carbon credit sales through the Bay Bank.
- Melvin and Elaine Hooker own the longest stretch of undeveloped shoreline along Long Lake near Park Rapids, Minnesota. Their 167-acre lakeside forest, along with 3 other forested parcels of land, is under Minnesota DNR Forest Stewardship Plans, to meet the Hookers' goal of managing and reforesting their land in a sustainable and profitable way for themselves and future generations.

Application and Financial Information

The USDA Forest Service administers the FSP in partnership with state forestry agencies. Contact a state forestry agency for more information.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Participation in the FSP is open to any non-industrial private forest landowner who is committed to the active management and stewardship of forested properties for at least 10 years.

A landowner may be any private individual, group, association, corporation, Native American Tribe, or other private legal entity. There is no restriction on the maximum number of acres owned, although some states may have a minimum acreage requirement.

Website

<http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/fsp.shtml>

For more details on how the FSP operates, see the [National Standards and Guidelines](#)

To search the member roster for state forestry agency contacts see:

<http://www.stateforesters.org/about/who-we-are>

Contact

Karl DallaRosa - Forest Stewardship Program
Manager

Phone: 202-205-6206

kdallarosa@fs.fed.us

Forestry Products Advanced Utilization Research Initiative

Providing research and extension grants on forest management and forest products engineering and manufacturing

Program Basics

The 2014 Farm Bill authorized the establishment of a research and extension initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools that address the needs of the forestry sector and their respective regions, forest and timberland owners and managers, and forestry products engineering, manufacturing, and related interests.

This Initiative is administered through USDA's National Initiative on Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in coordination with the Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory and other relevant partners.

The Initiative is authorized to offer competitive grants to fund research and outreach projects addressing several priorities.

It funds **research** that:

- improves wood quality with respect to lumber strength and grade yield;
- develops novel engineered lumber products and renewable energy from wood;
- enhances the longevity, sustainability, and profitability of timberland through sound management and utilization.

The Initiative funds **demonstration** activities and technology transfer to demonstrate the beneficial characteristics of wood as a green building material, including investments in life cycle assessment for wood products.

The Initiative funds projects designed to improve

- forestry products, lumber, and evaluation standards and valuation techniques;
- lumber quality and value-based, on-forest management techniques; and
- forestry products conversion and manufacturing efficiency, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including forestry product marketing).

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Priority will be given to activities that are carried out by entities that:

- are multistate, multi-institutional, or multidisciplinary;
- have explicit mechanisms to communicate results to producers, forestry industry stakeholders, policymakers, and the public; and
- that have:
 - extensive history and demonstrated experience in forestry and forestry products research;
 - existing capacity in forestry products research and dissemination; and
 - a demonstrated means of evaluating and responding to the needs of the related commercial sector.

Grants may not exceed 10 years in duration.

The Initiative is authorized at \$7 million annually for 2014 through 2018, but as of this writing, no funds have been appropriated.

Matching Funds- To the extent practicable, the Secretary shall match any funds made available under paragraph (1) with funds made available under section 7 of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Research Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C.1646).

Website

Until funds have been appropriated for this program, there is no website for it. Contact the NIFA National Program Leader responsible for this program, below.

Contact

Catalino Blanche, National Program Leader
Phone 202-401-4192, cell 202-445-3471
cblanche@nifa.usda.gov

Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices Audit Verification Program

Assisting produce farmers, packers, and distributors meet food safety certification requirements from buyers

Program Basics

The Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices (GAP & GHP) Audit Verification Program is a voluntary, user-fee-funded independent audit program offered to the produce industry to verify that fresh fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored according to food safety practices that minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. Audits are based on recommendations from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) *Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (FDA, 1998). Many schools, grocers, wholesalers, and others require such certification.

The program does not guarantee a product is free from microbial contamination, but verifies that a participant has taken proactive measures to reduce risk of contamination by adhering to generally recognized industry best practices. GAP covers on-farm production and harvesting practices, while GHP covers packing, storage, and the distribution of crops.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) offers GAP & GHP audits through AMS or state department of agriculture employees who are licensed and trained to conduct audits on its behalf. FDA has regulatory authority for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Audit Types

There are three types of audits:

- Initial - the annual announced audit that verifies the farm/facility's compliance with requirements. valid for one year.
- An unannounced verification visit, which is conducted at some point after a farm/facility successfully passes an initial or follow-up audit.
- A follow-up audit, performed when either a farm/ facility's initial audit or unannounced verification visit does not meet program requirements.

Audit Process

A USDA GAP & GHP audit is divided into sections, each covering a specific portion of the supply chain:

- General Questions - overarching food safety issues
- Part 1 – Farm Review

- Part 2 – Field Harvesting and Field Packing
- Part 3 – House Packing Facility
- Part 4 – Storage and Transportation,
- Part 6 – Wholesale Distribution Center/Terminal Warehouse
- Part 7 – Preventive Food Defense Procedures (Part 5 is no longer in use.) Generally, a GAP audit comprises Parts 1 and 2 and applies to producers, while a GHP audit consists of Parts 3 and 4 and applies to packing houses. Part 6 covers a wholesale distribution center or terminal warehouse for GHP.

The General Questions section is required for all audits (except for a Part 7-only audit). It requires programs for food safety (including a manual), traceability, and recall (including documentation of having completed at least one mock recall prior to the audit). It also covers worker health and hygiene and pesticide/chemical use.

A written food safety manual covers all aspects of the growing and handling process. The plan indicates steps and procedures the operation will take to reduce risks of chemical, physical, or microbial contamination.

Producers/packers/distributors must ask to schedule an audit at least two weeks before their anticipated audit date by contacting their local USDA inspection office. A copy of the food safety manual must be with that request. The operation must provide contact information for their food safety officer, who must be present at the time of the inspection and must know the operation's food safety practices in detail. Operators can choose to have a single crop or multiple crops included in the same audit.

In scoring an operation, an auditor uses a USDA checklist, which also defines necessary documentation and is available on USDA's GAP & GHP website or by contacting the local inspection office.

Website

For more information, please see:

www.ams.usda.gov/gapghp

Guaranteed Farm Ownership and Operating Loans

Offering federal guarantees on commercial loans to family farmers and ranchers to purchase land and assets or finance annual operating expenses

Program Basics

The purpose of the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) guaranteed farm ownership (GFO) and guaranteed operating loan (GOL) programs are to help family farmers obtain commercial credit to establish or maintain a family farm or ranch. FSA guarantees against potential loss of the commercial loan at 90 percent of the loss of principal and interest. A 95 percent guarantee is provided in the case of loans to refinance an existing direct FO or OL or for loans made in conjunction with a down payment loan or approved state beginning farmer program loan. (See page 57 for detailed eligibility criteria).

Farmers may also use FSA guaranteed loans to buy stock in a member-owned cooperative. The cooperative must be engaged in production, processing, packaging, and/or marketing of agricultural and forest products.

Loan Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for an FSA Guarantee, a loan applicant must:

- Be a citizen of the U.S. (or legal resident alien);
- Have the legal capacity to incur the obligations of the loan;
- Have an acceptable credit history as determined by the lender and FSA;
- Have not had a previous FSA loan that resulted in a loss to FSA and not be delinquent on any federal debt;
- Be unable to obtain sufficient credit elsewhere without a guarantee at a reasonable rate and terms;
- Be the owner or operator of a family farm after the loan is closed;
- Not be delinquent on any Federal debt.

Loan Purposes, Repayment, and Limits

For GOLs, authorized purposes include:

- Payment of costs associated with reorganizing a farm to improve profitability;

- Purchase of livestock, equipment, and cooperative stock;
- Minor real estate improvements and other farm and home needs;
- Payment of annual operating expenses;
- Payment of costs for land and water development for conservation or use;
- Payment of loan closing costs; and
- Refinancing of debt incurred for any authorized OL purpose.

For GFOs, authorized purposes include:

- Acquiring or enlarging a farm
- Making capital improvements
- Promoting soil and water conservation and protection
- Payment of loan closing costs
- Refinancing debt incurred for authorized FO or OL purposes

Interest rates and payment terms are negotiated between the lender and borrower. The repayment terms may be up to seven years for GOLs and up to 40 years for GFOs. For most loans, FSA charges a 1.5 percent guarantee fee.

The maximum loan amount for both guaranteed FO and OL is currently \$1.392 million and is adjusted annually for inflation.

Target Participation Rates

A portion of available loan funds is reserved for minority farmers and beginning farmers. Refer to page 57 for detailed eligibility criteria.

Each year, 40 percent of both GOL and GFO funds are reserved for beginning farmers for the first six months of the fiscal year. Any unused GOL funds as of the end of the 10th month of the fiscal year are transferred to the down payment loan program, or

starting in the 12th month of the fiscal year, to any type of beginning farmer direct farm ownership loan.

For minority farmers, the percentage of GFO funds reserved is determined based the percentage of the minority population of a county, while the percentage of GOL funds is determined by the percent of minority farmers relative to total farmers in the state. Those loan set-asides last the entire year.

For more information or to apply, contact your local FSA regional Service Center or state FSA office.

For that contact information, click your state on this website: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Application and Financial Information

Farmers apply for guaranteed loans as they normally would with local commercial lenders that make agricultural loans in their community. The lender analyses the farmer's business plan and financial condition.

If the farm loan proposal looks realistic, is financially feasible, and there is sufficient collateral, but it cannot be approved because it does not meet the lending institution's loan underwriting standards, the lender may apply for an FSA loan guarantee.

Once an applicant provides all the financial and organizational information to the lender, the lender submits a guaranteed loan application to the local FSA office and the request will be approved or disapproved within 30 days after receipt of a complete application.

The number of guaranteed loans that FSA can provide each year varies depending on the demand for loan guarantees and the amount of guarantee authority approved by Congress, as FSA loan programs are funded through the annual agriculture appropriations bill.

Websites and Application

Information about FSA's loan programs is available on the FSA website: www.fsa.usda.gov, as well as in FSA's *Guide to FSA Farm Loans*, available for download at:

www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/fsa_br_01_web_booklet.pdf.

Information specific to the Guaranteed Loan Programs is available at:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=gfl>

Intermediary Relending Loan Program

Offering revolving loan funds for rural small business and community development projects

Program Basics

The Intermediary Relending Program (IRP) provides direct loans at 1 percent interest to intermediaries for establishing revolving loan funds for small businesses and community development projects in rural areas. Intermediaries are nonprofit organizations or public agencies that relend money through loan pools to ultimate recipients, including businesses, individuals and others such as Indian groups. Final recipients of loans from IRP revolving loan funds involved in agricultural production are not eligible. However, businesses processing, packaging, and marketing agricultural products will be considered.

Project Examples

- As part of the **Pacific Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative**, an IRP loan of \$1.5 million supplemented an existing revolving loan fund for relending to small businesses in **rural Jackson and Josephine counties in Oregon**. Businesses that create or retain permanent jobs involving skills related to manufacturing, industrial production, and wood products are given preference. Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc., the intermediary, estimates that by targeting a maximum of \$20,000 per full-time equivalent job created or saved, the IRP loan will create or save at least 50 jobs in the fund's first round of loans in these communities.
- **Maine's North Kennebec Regional Planning Commission** made a \$150,000 working capital loan to **KD Wood Products** out of its revolving loan fund, created with a \$2 million IRP loan. KD buys lumber from local sawmills and processes it into about 200 different products, including unfinished furniture and lawn and garden items, such as fences, edging, and planters. KD used the loan to expand its operations and create new jobs.
- A **Salem, Oregon hop farm** received a loan from the local revolving loan fund established with IRP funds. **BC Hop Farms** provides processing facilities for local farmers who grow hops and contract with breweries for sale of their processed hops. The loan supported purchasing

equipment and expanding facilities, providing the capacity to process a larger volume of hops.

- **American Cedar, Inc., of Arkadelphia, AR**, received loans of \$225,000 from a local revolving loan fund, partially funded by IRP. American Cedar produces dimensioned lumber, finished lumber, finished panels, closet accessories, decorative moth repellents, and custom products for the domestic and international markets.

Application and Financial Information

Intermediaries with experience and expertise in running revolving loan funds apply to the USDA state offices of Rural Development. Applications are considered in a quarterly national competition.

An intermediary may borrow up to \$2 million under its first financing and up to \$1 million at a time thereafter. Total aggregate debt is capped at \$15 million. In recent years, loans to intermediaries have been capped at \$750,000. Ultimate recipients may borrow up to \$250,000.

Loans to intermediaries average \$812,000. Intermediaries receive a 30-year loan with a fixed annual interest rate of 1 percent. The funding available for fiscal year 2014 was \$18.8 million. There were \$18,889,403 in funds obligated in Fiscal Year 2014.

Intermediaries develop their own application procedures for ultimate recipients.

Factors considered in judging applications from intermediaries include:

- Financial condition
- Assurance of repayment ability
- Equity
- Collateral
- Experience and record of managing a loan
- A programmer providing other assistance to rural businesses
- Ability to leverage with funds from other sources
- The extent assistance would flow to low-income people

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

The following entities are generally eligible to apply for loans from intermediary lenders provided they owe no delinquent debt to the Federal Government:

Individual citizens or individuals who have been legally admitted to the U.S., Those located in a rural area defined as an area with a population of 25,000 or less (50,000 or less for applications funded on or after February 7, 2014 per the 2014 Farm Bill), An entity that is able to incur debt, give security, and repay the loan, A corporation, partnership, LLC, individual, nonprofit corporation, public body.

Nonprofit corporations, public agencies, Native American tribes, and cooperatives are eligible to receive IRP funds as intermediaries. Intermediaries must have adequate legal authority and a proven record of successfully assisting rural businesses and industries. Both intermediaries and ultimate recipients must be unable to obtain the loan at reasonable rates and terms through commercial credit or other federal, state, or local programs.

Final recipients of loans from IRP revolving loan funds involved in agricultural production are not eligible. However, businesses processing packaging and marketing agricultural products will be considered. Intermediaries may not use IRP funds to finance more than 75 percent of the cost of an ultimate recipient's project or for a loan of more than \$250,000 to one ultimate recipient.

Website

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_irp.html

Contact

Lori Hood, Loan and Grant Analyst

Phone: 202-720-9815

lori.hood@wdc.usda.gov

For a list of intermediaries see:

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_IRP_Map.html

For intermediary service areas, more detailed information, or an application, contact your USDA state or district office of Rural Development.

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html

Land Contract Guarantee Program

Providing federal loan guarantees for farmers who self-finance the sale of their land to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer

Program Basics

The Land Contract Guarantee Program, administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), provides federal loan guarantees to farm owners who self-finance the sale of their land to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers. The program is designed to encourage private land contract sales by providing a degree of protection to retiring farmers or farm owners who do not want the cash from the sale of land upfront. It provides the seller with a federal guarantee much like that available to commercial banks.

The program is structured to provide the seller of the farm or ranch two choices:

1. A Prompt Payment Guarantee that covers up to the amount of three annual installments plus the cost of real estate taxes and insurance; or
2. A Standard Guarantee plan that covers an amount equal to 90 percent of the outstanding principle of the loan provided the seller has a servicing agent.

For either option, the loan guarantee stays in effect for 10 years. The purchase price or appraisal value of the farm or ranch that is the subject of the contract sale cannot be greater than \$500,000. The buyer must contribute at least 5 percent as a down payment.

Under the Prompt Payment Guarantee option, if the new farmer/buyer does not pay an annual installment due on the contract, or pays only part of an installment, FSA provides the scheduled payment or the unpaid portion to the seller through an escrow agent after the seller unsuccessfully attempts collection. In that circumstance, the buyer would then try to restructure the debt and obtain an approved repayment plan.

Under the Standard Guarantee option, the seller is protecting against the possibility that the value of the

farm may have sharply declined between the time the contract was entered and any default by the buyer. The land contract guarantee program is funded out of the annual appropriation for guaranteed farm ownership loans.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

To be eligible for a land contract guarantee, the buyer of the farm or ranch must:

1. be a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer (see page 57 for criteria);
2. have an acceptable credit history;
3. be the owner/operator of the farm or ranch when the contract is complete; and
4. be unable to obtain sufficient credit elsewhere without a guarantee to finance actual needs at reasonable rates or terms.

Additionally, the seller must also meet eligibility criteria established by FSA. Contact your local FSA office for more information.

Websites and Application

Information about the program is available at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/lc_guarantee_program.pdf

To apply, contact your local FSA regional Service Center. For that contact information, click your state on this website:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program's Local and Regional Food Enterprise Provision

Bolstering the existing private credit market to help finance local and regional food businesses in rural areas

Program Basics

The Rural Business Service's Business and Industry (B&I) loan program helps develop or improve rural businesses and employment by bolstering existing private credit market through federal guarantees. The guarantees help banks, credit unions, and other lenders provide loans to businesses that might not otherwise meet their underwriting standards.

B&I loan guarantees are available year-round. Priority is given to projects that benefit communities with limited access to affordable and healthy foods and that have a high rate of hunger, food insecurity, or poverty. Recipients of loan guarantees are required to inform consumers of the locally- or regionally-produced attribute of their food products.

Project Example

- With a B&I loan guarantee, **Iowa Choice Harvest (ICH)**, a farmer-owned business, set up a local produce aggregation, processing, and distribution facility in **rural Marshall County in central Iowa**. ICH began with corn, later adding asparagus and apples from six Iowa orchards. The bank would not lend to the project without B&I's guarantee.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

A borrower may be a cooperative organization, corporation, partnership, or other legal entity organized and operated on a profit or nonprofit basis; an Indian tribe on a Federal or State reservation or other federally recognized tribal group; a public body; or an individual. For B&I loan guarantees in general, a borrower must be engaged in or proposing to engage in a business that will provide employment and improve the economic or environmental climate.

Loans may be used for business conversion, enlargement, modernization, purchase and development of land, buildings, facilities, purchase of equipment, machinery, supplies, inventory, and similar purposes, and may also be used for business acquisitions when the loan will keep a business from

closing or prevent the loss of employment or expand job opportunities.

B&I loans are generally available in **rural areas**, i.e., all areas other than towns of more than 50,000 people and those adjacent to urbanized areas. However, in 2014, USDA clarified that food aggregation and distribution enterprises located in **non-rural areas** are also eligible to receive loan guarantees if they meet certain criteria. This allows such facilities to be located nearer to their consumer market, improving business prospects to them and farmers supplying the market and expanding markets for locally and regionally produced food. The option for a non-rural facility location also has a goal of increasing food access in poor areas.

Financial Information

The maximum loan guarantee is 80 percent for loans of \$5 million or less, 70 percent for loans between \$5 and \$10 million, and 60 percent for loans exceeding \$10 million. Generally loans to a single borrower are capped at \$10 million, though some exceptions apply.

A minimum of five percent of B&I loan guarantees support and establish enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, store, and market foods produced either in-state or transported less than 400 miles from the product's origin. At least \$40 million a year is typically available for local and regional food enterprise loan guarantees.

Website and Application

Loan applications are available from your local [Rural Development state office](#).
http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html

Potential borrowers work directly with their commercial lending source to develop a loan package that can then be submitted as a candidate for the federal guarantee.

Microloan Program

Offering small and simplified loans to farmers to cover annual farm operating expenses

Program Basics

The purpose of the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) microloan program is to meet the smaller credit needs of small, young, beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers (see page 57 for criteria) through a simplified loan application process. This program may also be appropriate for farmers serving local and regional food markets, including urban farmers.

Loan Purposes and Repayment

Microloans may be used to cover farm purchases, such as seeds, animals, small equipment, or other investments that young and other beginning farmers require for their operations. Microloan repayment schedules and loan terms are similar to those of Direct Operating Loans (see page 28). Loans may be made for up to \$50,000.

Loan Eligibility Requirements

The same eligibility criteria for FSA Direct Operating Loans apply to microloans (see page 28 for loan eligibility criteria).

Microloans made to beginning farmers do not count towards the total number of years that a farmer can receive assistance through FSA's direct loan program.

Additionally, the loan recipient must be able to repay and to provide enough collateral to secure the loan on at least a dollar-for-dollar basis, and use the loan for authorized purposes. Similar to other FSA loans, a third party pledge of security or co-signer may be accepted to meet these security requirements.

In order to be eligible for the new microloan program, a farmer must have sufficient prior experience working on a farm. Microloans are more flexible than some other loan programs when determining acceptable experience. Experience can be gained by small business experience, participating in a self-directed apprenticeship, or having prior involvement with an agricultural organization, such as 4-H, FFA, farm incubator programs, and farm training organizations.

Application and Financial Information

FSA will not require an itemized cash flow budget for microloan applicants. There is a streamlined application process for microloans that requires less paperwork for farmers to fill out and appropriately reflects the smaller loan amount. Microloan application forms are available online but farmers must apply in person at an FSA county office or USDA Service Center.

Websites and Application

For more information about the program, go to FSA's information page:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=landing>

For more information or to apply, contact your local FSA regional Service Center or state FSA office. For that contact information, click your state on this website:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=fsa>

Information about all FSA programs is available on the FSA website: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

National Organic Program

Ensuring the integrity of USDA organic products in the U.S. and throughout the world

Program Basics

The National Organic Program (NOP) was established under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA) and developed national organic standards, which were implemented in 2002.

The NOP develops, implements, and administers national production, handling, and labeling standards for organic agricultural products. The NOP accredits certifying agents (foreign and domestic) who inspect organic production and handling operations to ensure that they meet USDA standards. There are currently 82 certifying agents and over 25,000 NOP-certified organic operations worldwide. The NOP also handles compliance and enforcement of the standards. It currently has four organic equivalency agreements, with Korea, Japan, European Union, and Canada.

The OFPA provided that an advisory board, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), be given jurisdiction over the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances section of the NOP standards. No substance can be added to this list without the recommendation of the NOSB. The NOP also consults with the NOSB when developing new or amending current standards. The board is composed of 15 members, each representing different segments of the organic industry.

Information Available

Interested parties can obtain a wealth of information about U.S. organic regulations and practices from the National Organic Program. This includes information about:

- Certifying agents: Includes accredited certifying agents, accreditation status table, application for accreditation, appeals process, compliance and enforcement, and cost share.
- Consumer issues: Includes background information about NOP, the USDA organic seal, organic labeling photo, and fact sheets such as Organic Standards, Labeling and Certification.
- NOP regulations and policies: Includes NOP standards, National List information, policy statements, and trade issues.

- Producers, handlers, and processors: Includes National List information, labeling packaged products, labeling alcoholic beverages, and questions and answers.
- State programs: Includes approval procedures, approved state programs, accredited state Departments of Agriculture, state contacts, and the cost-share program.

Website

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop>

Contact

Joan Avila, Secretary
National Organic Program: Standards Division
Phone: 202-720-3252
NOP.guidance@ams.usda.gov

Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative

Integrating research, education and extension to solve critical issues facing organic producers

Program Basics

The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, funds research, education, and extension projects to enhance the ability of producers and processors to grow and market high quality organic agricultural products. The 2014 Farm Bill provides \$20 million in mandatory annual funding for fiscal years 2014 through 2018.

Several legislatively defined purposes have guided grant making under the program since it was first established in 2002. These include:

1. Facilitating the development and improvement of organic production, breeding, and processing methods;
2. Evaluating the potential economic benefits of organic agriculture to producers, processors, and rural communities;
3. Exploring international trade opportunities for organic commodities;
4. Determining desirable traits for organic commodities;
5. Identifying marketing and policy constraints on the expansion of organic;
6. Conducting advanced on-farm research that emphasizes innovation for working organic farms;
7. Examining optimal conservation and environmental outcomes for organic production; and
8. Developing new and improved seed varieties suited to organic agriculture

Project Examples

- **Cornell University** researchers partnered with local farmers and nonprofit organizations to develop regionally adapted heritage grain varieties and information on growing practices needed to meet the

growing demand for organically and locally produced wheat -- particularly among the region's bakeries, breweries, and distilleries.

- **The Farmers Legal Action Group** developed a farmer's guide to understanding organic contracts -- specifically as they related to USDA's National Organic Program regulations.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

State agricultural experiment stations, all colleges and universities, other research institutions and organizations, Federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations, corporations, and individuals are able to apply for OREI grants.

Each project requires a farmer research advisory team and many projects involve farmers in on-farm research. Fieldwork of proposed projects must be done on certified organic land or on land in transition to organic certification. Additionally, farmers are encouraged to serve on the peer review panel that evaluates the scientific merit and relevancy of proposed projects.

Website

Additional information on how to apply or serve on the peer review panel can be found on the OREI program website:
www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/specialtycropresearchinitiative.cfm

Contact

Mathieu Ngouajio, NIFA National Program Leader
mngouajio@nifa.usda.gov
Phone: 202-401-4895

Organic Certification Cost Share Programs

Funding states to reimburse operations for the cost of organic certification

Program Basics

The National (NATL) Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) and Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) OCCSP Program are noncompetitive reimbursement programs that help defray the costs of organic certification for organic operators. These organic cost share programs provide reimbursements of up to 75 percent of certification costs, up to a maximum payment of \$750 per certification scope.

The Agricultural Marketing Service of the USDA manages both NATL and AMA OCCSP. Reimbursements are generally made available to operators through State Departments of Agriculture. Organic operators should contact their State Departments of Agriculture (please see the websites below) to apply for reimbursement under these cost share programs. Recipients must be certified organic by a USDA accredited certifying agent under the National Organic Program Regulations.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

NATL OCCSP

Certified organic producers and handlers in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, the American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are eligible to participate in NATL OCCSP.

\$10.6 million in mandatory funding for NATL OCCSP is available per fiscal year, from 2015-2018. Unused funds may be rolled over into the next fiscal year.

AMA OCCSP

Certified organic producers (but not handlers) in the 12 Northeast states (CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV) plus Hawaii, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming are eligible to participate in AMA OCCSP.

While producers in AMA states are eligible for reimbursement under both the NATL and the AMA, producers receiving reimbursement for certification

costs under the AMA are not eligible for reimbursement for the same certification costs under the NATL and vice versa. Additionally, State Agencies should exhaust AMA funds prior to using NATL funds for organic producer reimbursements.

\$1.0 million in mandatory funding for AMA cost-share is available each fiscal year from 2015 through 2018. All funds must be used within the fiscal year in which they are allocated.

Websites

For more information about NATL and AMA OCCSP and how to apply, please see:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateQ&leftNav=NationalOrganicProgram&page=NOPCostSharing&description=Organic+Cost+Share+Program>

For a list of State Agency points of contact for NATL and AMA OCCSP, please see:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5107877>

Contacts

CostShare@ams.usda.gov

Dana Stahl, OCCSP Manager
Phone: 540-361-1126
dana.stahl@ams.usda.gov

Rita Meade, OCCSP Coordinator
Phone: 202-260-8636
rita.meade@ams.usda.gov

Organic Transitions Program

Supporting Organic Research To Increase the Competitiveness of Organic Farmers

Program Basics

The overall goal of the Organic Transitions Program is to support the development and implementation of research, extension, and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers, as well as those who are newly adopting organic practices.

Each year, the program focuses on a discrete set of research topics that are relevant to organic production. In recent years, the program has focused on evaluating the impacts of organic practices on the environment, optimization of environmental benefits, alternatives to substances recommended for removal from the Organic Program's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances, the impact of organic agriculture on water quality, and the ability of organic systems to sequester carbon.

Projects should address practices associated with organic crops, organic animal production (including dairy), and systems integrating plant and animal production.

Application and Financial Information

Program funding is determined through the annual appropriations process. Historically, the program has received approximately \$4 to \$5 million per year. In 2014, individual awards were capped at not more than \$200,000 per year and not more than \$500,000 in total over a three year grant period.

To view more information about the most current Request for Applications and proposal deadlines, see the program website.

Research Priorities and Eligibility

The most recent Request for Applications for fiscal year 2014 prioritized these four areas:

- Documenting and understanding the effects of organic practices on ecosystem services, greenhouse gas reduction, soil health, and biodiversity;

- Improvements to technologies and models that optimize the environmental services and climate change mitigation ability of organic farming systems;
- Development of educational tools for students, Cooperative Extension personnel and other agricultural professionals who advise producers on organic practices; and
- Development of cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from the National Organic Programs National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

All projects must integrate research, education, and extension activities. Only colleges and universities are eligible for this program.

All project applications are expected to show evidence of stakeholder (including farmer) involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation

Website

For more information on the program, please refer to the NIFA website for Organic Transitions: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/organictransitionsprogram.cfm>

Contact

Mathieu Ngouajio, NIFA National Program Leader
mngouajio@nifa.usda.gov
Phone: 202-401-4895

Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program

Providing grants to educational institutions and nonprofit organizations that offer outreach and technical assistance to minority and veteran farmers and ranchers

Program Basics

The Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers program, also known as the “Section 2501” program, provides grants to organizations that work with minority and veteran farmers and assist them in owning and operating farms and participating in USDA programs. The 2014 Farm Bill provides \$10 million per year in mandatory funding for fiscal years 2014-2018.

The purpose of the program is to assure that socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers have opportunities to successfully acquire, own, operate, and retain farms and equitably participate in all USDA programs. The program supports a range of outreach and assistance activities, including:

- Farm management
- Financial management
- Marketing
- Application and bidding procedures

Applicants are also encouraged to coordinate with existing regional projects to complement pertinent and relevant cross-regional activities.

Project Examples

- The **Agriculture Land Based Training Association** used funding to design business management and agricultural training programs to **help former migrant farmworkers** become thriving farm owners in **California**.
- **Alabama A&M University** used funds to assist **socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers** in accessing equitable access to capital, USDA programs, and markets.
- The **Federation of Southern Cooperatives** used funds to strengthen the farm management and marketing skills of **minority farmers in the South**.
- The **New Entry Sustainable Farming**

Project used funds to **assist immigrants**, and **refugees** develop commercial farming opportunities across **Massachusetts** using a farm incubator site for business and production training.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Eligible recipients include Land Grant Institutions (1862, 1890, or 1994), Tribal Governments and organizations, Hispanic Serving Institutions, State Controlled Institutions of Higher Education, and community-based organizations. Organizations must have demonstrated expertise in working with underserved, socially disadvantaged and veteran farmer communities (see page 57 for definitions).

Application and Financial Information

USDA’s Office of Advocacy and Outreach administers the program. A Funding Opportunity Announcement is published in the Federal Register for each Fiscal Year, and applicants typically have 60 days to prepare and submit their application. Matching funds are not required.

Website

Additional information on how to apply can be found on the program website:
www.outreach.usda.gov/grants

Contact

Kenya Nicholas, Acting Program Director
Phone: 202-720-6350
kenya.nicholas@osec.usda.gov

Program Priority for Beginning, Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers

Providing special incentives and priority for new, minority, and veterans farmers

Program Basics

This is not an individual program. Rather, USDA provides special incentives, targeted funding, and priority for beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers in many of their loan, conservation, and rural development programs. In order to qualify for these additional considerations and priority status, a farmer must meet the following eligibility criteria.

Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

In order to qualify for the priority for “beginning farmers and ranchers,” a farmer or rancher must 1) be an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years, 2) substantially participate in the operation of the farm, and 3) not own a farm bigger than 30 percent of the average acreage of the farms in the county.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers

In order to qualify for the priority for “socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers,” a farmer or rancher must be a member of a socially disadvantaged group, including American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and women.

Veteran Farmers and Ranchers

In order to qualify for the priority for “veteran farmers or ranchers,” a farmer or rancher must have served in the Armed Forces, including the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof.

For some loan programs, a veteran must also have operated a farm for ten years or less.

Additional Loan Eligibility Requirements

In addition to the criteria to qualify for the special priority given to beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers, there are additional loan eligibility criteria. Eligible borrowers must 1) be U.S. citizens or U.S. non-citizen national or qualified aliens, 2) be unable to obtain credit elsewhere through commercial sources, 3) have sufficient education, training, or experience, 4) have an acceptable credit history, 5) and be or plan to be an owner/operator of a family-sized farm.

Additionally, all Direct Farm Ownership loan applicants must have at least 3 years of farm management experience, or other comparable experience.

Programs and Incentives

Beginning, socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers are given special priority in the following programs:

- FSA Farm Loan Programs
- Transitions Incentive Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Conservation Stewardship Program
- Value Added Producer Grants
- Federal Crop Insurance Program

There are additional programs that provide outreach and training for beginning, minority and veteran farmers – including the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (see page 11) and the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (see page 56).

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Targeting natural resource concerns through conservation partnerships

Program Basics

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), fosters the creation of partnerships between farm and conservation organizations, States, and Federal agencies to help farmers tackle priority natural resource concerns in a state or region.

NRCS publicizes RCPP partnership opportunities through an Announcement of Program Funding (APF) to which potential partners submit project proposals. Once selected, farmers and ranchers in the identified project area can apply for conservation program assistance through the partner or directly to NRCS at a local USDA service center.

Program assistance is delivered through any of four programs covered by RCPP: the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP). Additionally, in Critical Conservation Areas, NRCS may also utilize the authorities of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1956, other than the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

RCPP projects may focus on specific resource issues of heightened concern in a given watershed or region, or a given set or type of farm operations within a state or area where producers are interested in pursuing innovative conservation objectives.

The 2014 Farm Bill created RCPP by consolidating the purposes of four previously separate programs: the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, and Great Lakes Conservation Program.

In addition to providing assistance directly to producers to implement conservation activities as part of an RCPP project, RCPP funds may also be directed through partners to support a variety of technical assistance (TA) activities, including resource

assessment, conservation practice survey and design, conservation planning, and resource monitoring. RCPP funds are not available to reimburse a partner for their administrative expenses.

Partners cover a significant portion of the overall cost of the project, and their contributions include in-kind services.

The Farm Bill allocates 35 percent of total RCPP funding for projects in Critical Conservation Areas (CCAs), 40 percent to other projects competed at the National level, and 25 percent to projects competed at the State level.

The Secretary has established eight CCAs: California Bay Delta, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Columbia River Basin, Colorado River Basin, Great Lakes Region, Longleaf Pine Range, Mississippi River Basin, and Prairie Grasslands Region.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

The following entities are eligible project partners:

- a producer association or group;
- a State or unit of local government;
- an Indian tribe;
- a farmer cooperative;
- a water, irrigation, or rural water district or association, or other organization with water delivery authority to producers;
- a municipal water or wastewater treatment entity;
- an institution of higher education; or
- an organization or entity with a history of working with producers on agricultural land to address natural resource concerns;

RCPP projects must address one or more resource conservation goals, including:

- water quality, including nutrient management and sediment reduction;
- water quantity, including, conversion of irrigated cropland to dry land farming, or irrigation system efficiency improvement;
- drought mitigation;

- flood prevention;
- water retention;
- air quality improvement;
- habitat conservation, restoration, and enhancement;
- erosion and sediment reduction; or
- forest restoration.

Under a partnership proposal, partners:

- Define the scope of a project, including eligible activities, geographic area targeted, and planning, outreach, implementation, and assessment to be conducted;
- Conduct outreach and education to producers for potential participation;
- If requested, act on behalf of a producer in applying for participation in the project;
- Leverage financial or technical assistance provided by NRCS with additional funds;
- Conduct an assessment of the project's effects; and
- At the conclusion of the project, report to NRCS on results and funds leveraged.

Financial Information

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress authorized \$100 million annually and an additional 7 percent of the annual funding from each of the four covered programs (ACEP, CSP, EQIP, and HFRP). RCPP funds may be used in any of the three funding pools.

Website and Application

For more information:

- NRCS RCPP webpage
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp>
- Announcement of program funding
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA_NRCSConsumption/download?cid=stelprdb1254369&ext=pdf
- RCPP Critical Conservation Areas map
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/?cid=stelprdb1254053>

Contact

Mark A. Rose, Director
Financial Assistance Programs Division
202-720-1844

Mark.Rose@wdc.usda.gov

Locate your local NRCS Service Center at:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>

Regional Integrated Pest Management Program

Providing competitive grants for research and extension activities related to integrated pest management (IPM) administered through regional networks

Program Basics

This competitive grants program for research and extension activities related to integrated pest management (IPM) is administered through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), through the four Regional IPM Centers, located at land grant universities. This program funds projects amounting to about \$2.8 million annually.

Projects can range from developing new IPM tactics to combined research-extension implementation projects to extension education and training.

Because production systems and specific pest management problems vary significantly across the country, each of the four regions is given maximum flexibility in setting research and education priorities. Each region runs its own competition, establishing regional priorities for funding of projects.

Some priorities are crop-specific; others are based on various approaches to problem solving through IPM. Collaborators are encouraged in both programs.

Project Examples

- **Auburn University** was awarded \$139,182 to reduce vegetable production losses from viruses and insects. The research on inter-row living ground covers and biologically-based plant growth promotion formulations seeks to enhance root-soil environment and availability of nutrients for uptake by plant roots, which increase efficiency of crop fertilization systems and may allow reduced application of some fertilizers.

- **Purdue University** received \$93,990 to study late-season weed control in Midwest vegetable production. Since most Midwestern row crop producers do not manage late season weeds, a gap in weed management results as fields are rotated to vegetable crops. Late season weeds increase the weed soil seed-bank which put additional weed pressure on the following vegetable crop.

- **University of Maryland** researchers were awarded \$83,058 to develop economic and ecological sustainable weed and insect management plans in solanaceous and leguminous vegetable crops. The

team will conduct four field investigations in two Northeastern states.

- **University of Florida** researchers received \$150,000 to improve adoption of IPM principles in schools and included collaborators from regional land grant universities. This two year grant addresses adoption of integrated pest management in public schools, capitalizing on the current interest in building **green schools** to increase awareness of IPM as a green technology.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Only staff of land grant universities in the U.S. may apply for this competition. Other organizations and individuals may work as collaborators or as subcontractors. This is highly encouraged by NIFA.

Application and Financial Information

Requests for proposals are available at:
<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/regionalintegratedpestmanagementcenters.cfm>

Your regional contact person can suggest the best way to obtain information on funding opportunities, priorities for research and extension projects, and application deadlines. (see website below)

Proposals are evaluated through a peer review process and ranked according to the program's goals and objectives, scientific merit, and appropriateness of the budget.

Website

<http://www.ipmcenters.org/>

Contacts

Robert Nowierski, National Program Leader
Phone: 202-401-4900
rnowierski@nifa.usda.gov

For individual State contacts see:
<http://www.ipmcenters.org/contacts/IPMDirectory.cfm>

Risk Management Education Program

Providing grants for training on agricultural risk management strategies

Program Basics

The Risk Management Education (RME) Program funds projects to provide farmers with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to make informed risk management decisions for their operations.

Risk management strategies can range from futures, options, and forward contracts to broader strategies such as crop and enterprise diversification, conservation planning, new and value-add markets, and asset building. The program currently has five priority topics -- production, price or marketing, human resources, legal, and financial risk.

The program is managed by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and operates through four regional centers and a fifth national digital center:

- North Central Center: University of Nebraska – Lincoln Extension
- Northeast Center: University of Delaware Cooperative Extension
- Southern Center: University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture
- Western Center: Washington State University Cooperative Extension
- Digital Center for Risk Management Education: University of Minnesota.

The 2008 Farm Bill directed NIFA to emphasize grants to risk management education projects that assist:

- Beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers (page 57 has detailed eligibility criteria);
- Legal immigrant farmers or ranchers
- Farmers preparing to retire and pursuing transition strategies to help new farmers get started; and
- Farmers converting production and marketing systems to pursue new markets.

Project Examples

- University of Wyoming Extension for *Annie's Project* to deliver risk management programming targeted at women, including components on production, price, financial, legal, and human resources risks.
- San Juan RC&D in Southwest Colorado to address price, production, and financial risks associated with alternative direct marketing to restaurants, retail outlets, and schools.

Application and Financial Information

The 2014 Farm Bill funds the RME at \$5 million in annual mandatory funding. Generally, the range of awards, for single region projects is from \$5,000 to \$50,000; however there is no absolute upper or lower limit on the funds provided to a project.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Organizations eligible for grants are land grant and other colleges and universities, Cooperative Extension, and other public and private entities with a demonstrated capacity to develop and deliver educational programs for agricultural producers, including farm groups, lenders, risk management service providers, and community-based organizations. Collaborative proposals are strongly encouraged.

Website

http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/economics/in_focus/farm_if_risk.html#risk

Contact

RMA National Headquarters:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/>

RMA Regional Offices:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/rsos.html>

RMA County Office Locator:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/cfos.html>

Risk Management Partnership Agreements

Advancing education and community outreach on risk management strategies

Program Basics

The Risk Management Education Partnerships Program is a competitive cooperative partnership agreement program that provides crop insurance education and risk management training. The program is managed through USDA's Risk Management Agency and aims to help agricultural producers identify and manage production, marketing, legal, financial, and human risk.

Risk Management Education Partnerships Program

The Education Partnership Program prioritizes educating producers of crops currently uninsured under Federal crop insurance, specialty crops, and underserved commodities, including livestock and forage. It also prioritizes collaborative outreach and assistance programs for limited resource, socially disadvantaged, new and beginning, and other traditionally under-served farmers and ranchers (see page 57 for criteria). The program encompasses production, legal, financial, and human risk. **See Education Partnership Program examples on page 61.**

Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States Program

The Targeted States Program is aimed at educating producers in sixteen historically underserved states for crop insurance on how to use financial management, crop insurance, marketing contracts, and other risk management tools. The targeted states are CT, DE, HI, ME, MD, MA, NV, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, UT, VT, WV, and WY. Applications can address:

- The kinds of risk addressed by crop insurance and use of crop insurance to manage risks.
- The features of existing and emerging crop insurance products.
- Where applicable, the proper use and application of cover crops.
- How crop insurance can affect other risk management decisions, such as the use of marketing and financial tools.
- How to make informed decisions on crop insurance prior to the sales closing date.

See Targeted States Program Examples on page 24 of the Guide

Application and Financial Information

The funding for the program is mandatory funding, but the specific amount sometimes varies from year to year. In fiscal year 2014 the Partnerships program had \$2 million available and the Targeted States Program had \$5 million available. An annual request for proposals will detail specific priorities for the coming year.

The minimum award for a cooperative partnership agreement is \$20,000 and the maximum award is \$99,999. The awards are made on a competitive basis.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, State Departments of Agriculture, State Cooperative Extension Services, Federal, State or tribal agencies, groups representing producers, community-based organizations, colleges and universities, and similarly appropriate partners.

Partnership agreement funds may not be used for building or equipment purchases, building rental or repair, to repair or maintain privately owned vehicles, or to prepare a partnership agreement application.

Website

www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements

Contact

RMA National Headquarters:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/>

RMA Regional Offices:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/rsos.html>

RMA County Office Locator:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/cfos.html>

Rural Business Development Grant Program

Assisting the development of small and emerging rural businesses

Program Basics

The 2014 Farm Bill consolidates the Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) and Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEAG) programs into one program, the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) Program. The new streamlined program, which has yet to be launched as of this writing, helps support the development and growth of small and emerging rural businesses through competitive grants for planning, technical assistance, and job training.

Project Examples

The following examples of funded projects are from RBEAG and RBOG, the predecessor programs to RBDG.

- **The Northeast Organic Farming Association** received funding to expand the online farmers market platform YourFarmstand.com, which helps farmers market their goods online and allows customers to purchase from multiple producers in one order.

- **Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Foundation** received funding for an expansion evaluation for **High Plains Food Cooperative** and to develop a strategic plan for increasing capacity for fresh local produce delivery in **Kansas and Colorado**.

- **The Town of Estancia, New Mexico** received funding to renovate and purchase equipment for a commercial kitchen.

- **The New Jersey Department of Agriculture** received funding to assess the feasibility of incorporating local shellfish into local food markets and to establish a sustainable business model.

- **The Southern Tier West Regional Planning & Development Board** received funding to establish a multi-county food hub in **southwest New York**.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Eligible entities are government agencies, Indian tribes, and nonprofit organizations.

Eligible grant uses fall under two categories:

- Business opportunity projects that identify and analyze business opportunities, train rural entrepreneurs and managers, help establish and maintain businesses, and do economic development planning and leadership development.
- Business development projects that finance or facilitate the development of small and emerging private business enterprise, rural distance learning networks, rural job training, and passenger transportation services or facilities.

For each fiscal year, not more than 10 percent of RBDG funds are to be made available to the first category of projects.

Websites

The RBDG website does not yet exist as of this writing.

Information on RBEAG is at

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_rbeg.html and for RBOG at

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_rbog.html.

To apply, contact your state Rural Development office, whose contact information can be found at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html

Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program (RCDG)

Providing grants to establish and operate centers for cooperative development

Program Basics

Rural Cooperative Development Grants are made for establishing and operating centers for cooperative development to improve the economic condition of rural areas by developing new cooperatives and improving operations of existing cooperatives. The USDA aims to encourage and stimulate the development of effective cooperative organizations in rural America as a part of its total package of rural development efforts. In Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13), RCDG received \$6.5 million in federal appropriations. In FY14, RCDG received \$5.8 million.

Project Examples

Examples of cooperative development activities that could be funded under this program include:

- Providing services to newly developing cooperatives in its geographic area on organizational guidance, cooperative development strategies, business plans, and feasibility analyses
- Arranging **training** on cooperative organization and management skills
- Developing expertise in financial management, bookkeeping/accounting, and cooperative law to enable hands-on assistance to developing cooperatives
- Evaluating the potential for development of a base of support for cooperative programs within local communities to ensure that needed leadership is mobilized.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Nonprofit corporations and institutions of higher education are eligible to receive grants. Grants may go to eligible recipients in rural areas to form and operate centers for cooperative development — for providing education, research, and technical assistance to rural cooperatives and assisting the cooperative development process.

Grants may be awarded for up to 75 percent of the total cost of the project with a maximum award of

\$200,000. Grants are limited to a one-year time period. The applicant must contribute at least 25 percent from nonfederal sources. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis and are based on specific selection criteria. These criteria are published each year in Federal Register notices. Preference will be given to applications that:

- Demonstrate a proven track record in administering a national, regional or statewide project
- Demonstrate previous expertise in providing technical assistance to cooperatives in rural areas
- Demonstrate an ability to assist in business retention
- Facilitate the establishment of cooperatives and new cooperative approaches, and generate employment opportunities that will improve the economic conditions of rural areas
- Demonstrate the ability to work with cooperative businesses among various sectors in the rural United States and link to domestic and international markets
- Commit to providing assistance to underserved and economically distressed rural areas
- Commit to providing more than a 25 percent matching contribution with private funds and in-kind contributions
- Show evidence of transferability or demonstration value to assist rural areas outside of project area
- Demonstrate positive environmental stewardship

Website

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_rcdg.html

Contact

Andy Jermolowicz, Assistant Deputy Administrator
Phone: 202-690-0361
andrew.jermolowicz@wdc.usda.gov

Rural Energy for America Program

Promoting on-farm renewable energy production and energy efficiency

Program Basics

The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), administered by USDA's Rural Business Service, includes two categories of funding: (1) *grants and loans to farmers and businesses for energy efficiency improvements and purchase of renewable energy systems*, and (2) *grants to help farmers with energy audits and renewable energy development*.

Grants and loans for energy efficiency improvements and purchase of renewable energy systems

REAP grants cannot provide more than 25 percent of the cost of the activity carried out using the funds from the grant. REAP loan guarantees cannot exceed \$25 million. Projects may receive both a grant and a loan guarantee but the combined amount of a grant and loan guarantee cannot exceed 75 percent of the cost of the funded activity.

The 2014 Farm Bill maintains a 20 percent reservation of REAP funding each fiscal year for grants of under \$20,000 until June 30 of each fiscal year. However, the 2014 Farm Bill removed a provision that authorized USDA to provide up to 10 percent of the funds available for this component of REAP for grants to farmers or rural small businesses to conduct feasibility studies for projects to make energy efficiency improvements and establish renewable energy systems eligible for REAP grants or loan guarantees.

Grants to Help Farmers with Energy Audits and Renewable Energy Development Assistance

Four percent of REAP funding is reserved each fiscal year for the energy audit and renewable energy development grants up to April 1 of the fiscal year, after which time any remaining funding will be available for the energy efficiency improvement and renewable energy system grants and loan guarantees.

A grantee may not use more than 5 percent of a grant for administrative expenses. In addition, a grantee that conducts an energy audit for an agricultural producer or rural small business must require that, as a condition of the energy audit, the agricultural producer

or rural small business pay at least 25 percent of the cost of the energy audit.

REAP funding may not be used to subsidize renewable energy delivery through ethanol blender pumps.

Project Examples

- An Iowa farm with 750 acres of land, 10,000 laying hens, and 75 milking cows installed solar panels, reducing utility bills by 90 percent. When the 360 solar panels on the poultry barn roof and farm generate more electricity than needed, the farmer can “bank” the extra electricity on the grid. REAP also helped fund smart meters for the chicken coop and other buildings to monitor where electricity demand is highest.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

USDA considers the following in awarding REAP grants for *energy efficiency improvements and the purchase of renewable energy systems*:

- Type of renewable energy system to be purchase;
- Estimated quantity of energy to be generated by the renewable energy system;
- Expected environmental benefits of the renewable energy system;
- Quantity of energy savings expected to be derived from the activity, as demonstrated by an energy audit;
- Estimated period of time for the energy savings generated by the activity to equal the cost of the activity;
- Expected energy efficiency of a renewable energy system;
- Other appropriate factors.

USDA considers the following in awarding REAP grants for *energy audits and renewable energy development*:

- Ability and expertise of the applicant to provide professional energy audits and renewable energy assessments;
- Geographic scope of the program proposed in relation to the identified need;
- Number of agricultural producers and rural small businesses to be assisted;
- Potential of the proposal to produce energy savings and environmental benefit;
- Plan of the applicant for performing outreach and assistance to agricultural producers and rural small businesses on the benefits of energy efficiency and renewable energy development; and
- Ability of the applicant to leverage other sources of funding.

Entities eligible to apply for grants for energy audits and renewable energy development assistance include:

- Units of state, tribal, or local government;
- Land-grant colleges or universities or other institutions of higher education;
- Rural electric cooperatives or public power entities;
- Any other similar entities, as determined by USDA.

Agricultural producers and rural small businesses are eligible to apply for *grants and loans for energy efficiency improvements and purchase of renewable energy systems*.

Financial Information

Unlike the 2008 Farm Bill, which provided REAP with only five years of funding, the 2014 Farm Bill established a permanent funding baseline of \$50 million per year for the program. The program also has an authorization for discretionary funding of \$20 million per year; whether any of that discretionary funding is provided will be decided in the annual agriculture spending bill.

Application and Website

The 2014 Farm Bill establishes a three-tiered application process that reflects the size of proposed projects. Applications in Tier 1 will compete with other applications in Tier 1, and so on. Tier 1 projects will cost no more than \$80,000; Tier 2 projects will

cost between \$80,000 and \$200,000; and Tier 3 projects will cost at least \$200,000.

Contact

Producers and eligible entities interested in enrolling in REAP should contact their state's renewable energy coordinator:

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_Energy_CoordinatorList.html

Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program

Promoting Rural Economic Growth through Small Business Development

Program Basics

The Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP), administered by USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service, provides loans and grants to Microenterprise Development Organizations (MDOs), which in turn provide technical services and microloans to rural microentrepreneurs.

RMAP provides three categories of funding:

1. Loan capital to MDOs provides fixed interest rate microloans of less than \$50,000 to rural entrepreneurs for the development microenterprises in rural areas. Through MDOs, RMAP will assist rural sole proprietorships or businesses with less than ten employees. Loans through MDOs cannot exceed a twenty-year timeframe and need to bear an annual interest rate of at least one percent. Each MDO must establish a loan loss reserve fund and keep at least five percent of the outstanding loan balance in reserves.
2. Grants to MDOs to provide training, operational support, business planning, market development assistance, and other services to microentrepreneurs.
3. Grants to MDOs to provide marketing, management, and other technical assistance to microentrepreneurs who have already received or applied for an RMAP loan through an MDO. The maximum annual grant award can be no more than 25 percent of the organization's outstanding microloan balance.

The federal share of the cost of an RMAP project shall not exceed 75 percent. For any RMAP grant, MDOs must match at least 15 percent of the total amount of the grant in the form of matching funds, indirect costs, or in-kind goods or services.

Project Examples

- An RMAP microloan through the **Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation** helped a

small business that provides tools and manufactures replacement parts for area businesses in Science Hill hire seven new employees and expand from a 1,000 sq. ft. to a 30,000 sq. ft. facility. The business owner relied on KHIC not only as a lender, but also for business support and guidance.

- **Fay-Penn Economic Development Council in Lemont Furnace, Pennsylvania** received \$500,000 in loan funding to provide microloans to microenterprises in **Fayette and other surrounding Pennsylvania counties**. Through its RMAP funding, Fay-Penn was able to **provide a microloan to Stefano's Printing in Dunbar Township** and as a result of this microloan, Stefano's was able to retain 6 jobs.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

MDOs are not required to be located in a rural area, but microentrepreneurs they lend to must be rural. Microentrepreneurs must be unable to obtain sufficient training, technical assistance, or credit elsewhere.

MDOs can include nonprofit entities, Indian tribes, or public institutions of higher education; they must facilitate access to capital and have a demonstrated record or future plan of delivering relevant services.

Financial Information

The 2014 Farm Bill provides \$3 million in mandatory funding for RMAP each year from 2014-2018. The bill also authorizes Congress to appropriate up to \$40 million per year in additional discretionary funding.

Contact and Website

Lori Hood, Loan and Grant Analyst
Phone: 202-720-9815
Email: lori.washington@wdc.usda.gov

Interested RMAP candidates should contact their state Rural Development offices at the website below.

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_rmap.html

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program

Helping low-income seniors buy healthy food from local farmers

Program Basics

When low-income seniors buy local produce at farmers markets or from CSAs, they increase farmers' revenue, enjoy nutritious food, and socialize with their community. The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides coupons to low-income seniors that can be exchanged for fruits, vegetables, herbs, and honey from authorized farmers, farmers markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture programs (CSAs). The goal of the program is to increase low-income seniors' access to nutritious, local foods and to help expand and develop local markets.

SFMNP was created in 2001. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) provides cash grants to state agencies to administer the program, disbursing coupons to low-income seniors and authorizing farmers, farmers markets, roadside stands, and CSAs to accept them. The majority of the grant funds must be used to support the costs of food, though state agencies may use up to 10 percent of their grants to support administrative costs.

In 2013, SFMNP provided coupons to 840,000 seniors nationwide. More than 20,000 farmers at 4,000 markets, 3,000 roadside stands, and 200 CSAs participated in the program.

Seniors are eligible if they are at least 60 years old and have household incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line. Qualifying seniors may receive no less than \$20 and no more than \$50 per year, though state agencies may supplement those levels with state, local, or private funds. SFMNP receives \$20.6 million a year in mandatory farm bill funding.

SFMNP Examples

- In **Rhode Island** in 2010, more than 90 percent of the 51,000 coupons distributed were redeemed, funneling \$231,550 into the local agricultural economy. Rhode Island achieved this

higher-than-average redemption rate by distributing coupons and hosting weekly nutrition education sessions at 42 senior meal sites.

- In **Georgia**, one program increased SFMNP's voucher redemption rate from 82 to 96 percent by streamlining registration and voucher distribution and providing transportation to farmers markets at select senior centers. Participating seniors' fruit and vegetable intake increased as a result of the program.

Eligibility, Uses, Restrictions

Currently, 42 states administer SFMNP. To accept SFMNP benefits, farmers, farmers markets, roadside stands, and CSAs must become authorized by state agencies, typically the Departments of Agriculture, Health, or Aging. Vendors who exclusively sell produce grown by someone else, such as wholesale distributors, cannot be authorized.

Applications and Website

Interested farmers, farmers markets, roadside stands, and CSAs should contact the contact person within the participating agency in their state, a list of whom can be found here:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SeniorFarmersMarketcontacts.pdf>

Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR)

Stimulating participation in technological innovation and commercialization

Program Basics

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program is a government-wide program that provides competitive research funding for qualified small businesses.

SBIR's objectives are to stimulate technological innovations in the private sector, strengthen the role of small businesses in meeting federal research and development needs, increase private sector commercialization of innovations derived from agency-supported research and development efforts, and foster and encourage participation by women-owned and socially and economically disadvantaged small business firms in technological innovations.

Eleven federal agencies participate in SBIR including the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Each agency administers its own SBIR program, but the U.S. Small Business Administration oversees the program across the federal government.

SBIR's grant program is divided into two phases.

Phase I supports technical feasibility studies.

Phase II provides financial assistance for Phase I projects to enter the development stage to the point of commercialization. Businesses are encouraged to pursue Phase III — commercialization — through other sources, as SBIR does not provide funding for expansion, marketing, and application of the developed technology.

USDA's SBIR program awards grants in the following 10 topic categories: forests and related resources; plant production and protection - biology; animal production and protection; air, water, and soils; food science and nutrition; rural and community development; aquaculture; biofuels and bio-based products; small and mid-size farms and plant production and protection - engineering.

USDA SBIR Project Examples

Phase I

- **Applied Nanotech in Austin, Texas** received \$99,944 to create a quick (minutes), point-of-test analysis for critical food borne pathogens. Efforts will provide information needed to assess feasibility of detecting foodborne pathogens on representative

foods (spinach and netted cantaloupe) for two common foodborne pathogens.

- An **Iowa-based small business, Agren, Inc.**, received a grant to work with ARS's Sedimentation Laboratory and the University of Tennessee to test two GIS-based soil loss modeling tools. The research and development of these erosion models could significantly improve existing soil loss modeling tools.

Phase II

- **Learnimation LLC of Brooklyn, NY** received \$449,995 for a Phase II project to increase math and science problem solving skills of high-need rural high school students and their teachers by providing them access to research-based instructional material that develops student mastery of problem-solving content from K-8th grade.

- **ICSA Technologies, in Riverside, CA** received \$450,000 to commercialize a guava-derived repellent to manage the Asian citrus psyllid, which is the key vector of citrus greening.

Application and Financial Information

Phase I grants are for 6 months and do not exceed \$150,000. Phase II grants are for 24 months and do not exceed \$1,000,000. Permission for no-cost extensions may be granted.

Website

<http://www.sbir.gov/about/about-sbir#one>

Contact

Dr. Charles F. Cleland
SBIR National Program Leader - USDA
Phone: 202-401-6852
ccleland@csrees.usda.gov

Edsel Brown
Assistant Director - SBIR
Phone: 202-401-6365
Edsel.Brown@sba.gov

Small Farm Program

Enhancing the economic viability of small farms and ranches

Program Basics

The goal of the NIFA National Small Farm Program is to enhance the economic viability of all small farm and ranch enterprises, and promote research, extension, and outreach programs, primarily through partnerships with the Land-Grant University System and with other public and private sector organizations. The Small Farm Program facilitates several small farm programs at Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. An overview of some of these state programs is available on the Small Farm website.

The National Small Farm Program facilitates a national small farm conference, a train-the-trainer event held every three or four years in different regions across the country to promote successful programs for small farmers and ranchers.

The program also publishes monthly newsletters (Small Farm Highlights and Small Farm News) that are sent through list-serves to outreach professionals working with small scale producers. The program also publishes on-line a Small Farm Digest that highlights a topic of importance to small scale farmers and ranchers every six months.

The Small Farm Program facilitates the USDA Grant writing workshop series, conducted at selected sites nationwide to benefit smaller institutions and community-based organizations. USDA agencies have designated leaders who are involved in this effort to ensure that this workshop is undertaken with the mindset of increasing success rates in proposal submissions from smaller institutions and community-based organizations.

Other services include the Small Farm Resource Guide, and the NIFA Small Farm toll-free InfoLine (800-583-3071) that helps farmers and ranchers speak to NIFA small farm experts Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. eastern time.

Website

http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/small_farms.html

Contact

Dr. Denis Ebodaghe, National Program Leader
Phone: 202-401-4385
debodaghe@nifa.usda.gov

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops: fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and nursery crops

Program Basics

USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) is designed to solely enhance the competitiveness of "specialty crops", including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and horticulture and nursery crops. SCBGP can be used to support a wide array of projects, including marketing and market development, technical innovations, plant breeding, disease resistance and other projects that improves production efficiency as long as they address the competitiveness of specialty crops.

The department of agriculture in each state administers the block grant, under guidance from USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service. Projects can focus on a variety of outcomes, including:

- Enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crop farmers;
- Increasing nutritional knowledge and specialty crop consumption;
- Improving efficiency within the distribution system;
- Supporting research;
- Enhancing food safety;
- Promoting the development of good agricultural, handling and manufacturing practices while encouraging audit cost-sharing for small farmers and processors;
- Developing new/improved seed varieties;
- Controlling pests and diseases;
- Creating organic and sustainable production practices;
- Establishing local and regional food systems;
- Expanding access to specialty crops in underserved communities; and
- Developing school and community gardens and farm-to-school programs.

The 2014 Farm Bill increased mandatory funding for SCBGP to \$72.5 million per year through 2017 and at \$85 million per year in 2018 and thereafter. The amount allocated to each state is based on a formula

that considers specialty crop acreage and production value within the state.

Project Examples

- **Florida** partnered with **Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.** to improve food safety among small farms by establishing a cost effective and scale appropriate food safety certification and cost share reimbursement program for small-scale specialty crop producers and processors
- **University of Wisconsin** researchers helped state cranberry growers evaluate automatic sprinkler system technology, resulting in a 60 percent reduction in water used for irrigation.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

USDA allocates SCBGP grants to state departments of agriculture, which administer the funding to support projects that meet Federal requirements. The projects are approved through the State run competitive process. . Grants can supplement existing programs or start new projects. All projects must focus on specialty crops.

Grant funds cannot be used to solely benefit a single organization, institution, or individual but rather must be used for projects that impact and produce measureable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and the consuming public.

Applications and Website

Interested parties should contact their State Department of Agriculture:
<http://www.nasda.org/9383/States.aspx>

For more information on SCBGP, visit:
www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

Supporting research and extension on critical issues facing specialty crop producers

Program Basics

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), administered by USDA's National Food and Agriculture Institute, seeks to solve critical specialty crop issues through the integration of research and extension activities. Specialty crops are defined in law as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. SCRI gives priority to projects that are multistate, multi-institutional, or trans-disciplinary.

SCRI has five mandated focus areas:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, and genomics to improve crop characteristics
2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases
3. Efforts to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long-term
4. New innovations and technology
5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, and respond to potential food safety hazards in production and processing

\$80 million per year is available in mandatory funding through fiscal year 2018. In recent years, the following project types have been available:

- Standard Research and Extension Projects to support problem-solving efforts
- Coordinated Agricultural Projects to address multiple components of the production, processing, and distribution, or the consumer and marketing system
- Regional Partnerships for Innovation to provide the local infrastructure needed to fully utilize future technology adoption
- eXtension Projects to develop Communities of Practice for the eXtension online educational system

- Research and Extension Planning Projects to provide assistance for the development of quality future proposals

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Entities eligible for SCRI include land-grant institutions, for-profit organizations including small businesses, non-profits organizations, private institutions of higher education, and State Agricultural Experiment Stations.

All SCRI applications are peer reviewed by a panel of experts in the applicable scientific, extension, and education fields. Volunteering to serve on the peer review is also a good way to get involved in shaping SCRI.

Project Examples

- **Michigan State University** conducted research to develop sustainable pollination strategies, integrating biology, sociology, economics, and extension to address growers' priority pollinator issues.
- **The North-South Institute** is developing strategies to increase production and access to ethnic and specialty crops produced by **Alabama and Florida** small farms, including the establishment of local food networks for these crops.

Website

www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/specialtycropresearchinitiative.cfm

Contact

Tom Bewick, National Program Leader
Phone: 202-401-3356
tbewick@nifa.usda.gov

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education

Advancing innovations that improve farm profitability, stewardship, and quality of life by investing in groundbreaking, farmer-driven research

Program Basics

SARE is a competitive grant research and outreach program advancing sustainable agriculture across the whole of American agriculture. Successful SARE grantees are producers, researchers, nonprofit organizations and educators engaged in projects that simultaneously advance and improve productivity, profit, stewardship and quality of life for farmers, ranchers and society as a whole.

SARE is administered through USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and is run by four regional councils of producers, researchers, educators and government representatives that set SARE policies and make grants.

In addition to research, SARE also conducts education and extension programs in an effort to increase knowledge about – and help farmers and ranchers adopt – sustainable farming practices. The SARE Outreach office produces and distributes practical information based on the program's more than 25 years of research results – including a searchable database of all SARE funded research projects – available at www.sare.org.

The annual agriculture appropriations bill funds SARE. Since its beginning in 1988, SARE has invested a total of \$204 million in more than 5,100 initiatives.

Grant Making Program

SARE's four regional offices administer three primary grant programs: Research and Education, Professional Development and Farmer/Rancher. Some regions offer additional grant opportunities for graduate student research, agricultural professionals conducting on-farm research, and region-specific initiatives.

Each SARE region solicits proposals and awards grants. All grant programs have only one application period per year and each grant type (see below for

three primary grant types) has its own application, deadline, and focus.

- Research and Education Grants fund projects that usually involved scientists, producers and others in an interdisciplinary approach. Many projects involve on-farm research trials, economic analysis and outreach. The program also funds education and demonstration projects. Award limits vary by region, with a maximum of \$300,000.
- Producer Grants are aimed at farmers who want to test a research idea. Projects typically involve on-farm research with crops or livestock, marketing and/or educational activities. Producers are expected to partner with an extension professional or other agricultural advisor, and share their results with others. Award limits vary by region, with a maximum of \$22,500 for group projects.
- Professional Development Grants spread knowledge about sustainable concepts and practices among Cooperative Extension Service staff and other agricultural professionals using workshops, educational videos, on-farm training sessions and other approaches. Proposals that involve both extension staff and producers are preferred, as are partnerships with nonprofits and/or Natural Resources Conservation Service staff. Award limits vary by region, with a maximum of \$150,000.

Check SARE's regional offices for information on other grant opportunities. SARE's regional contacts and websites are listed at the end of this section.

Project Examples

SARE has funded more than 5,100 projects since 1988. Some examples are:

- **Dairy farmers in the Northeast** now have new nutrient management tools thanks to a SARE-funded research team. Farmers are able to improve environmental stewardship, profitability and

productivity by using these tools to better understand how nutrients enter and exit their fields.

- A group of SARE-funded **University of California researchers and Central Valley dairy farmers** are showing that conservation tillage systems offer a better way to grow feed crops: They produce comparable yields, use less energy, conserve water and improve soil health.

- **Dryland farmers in Nebraska** used a SARE grant to show that cover crops could conserve moisture and improve their cash crop yields. They became such believers in the practice that they started a cover crop seed business now distributing nationwide.

- **A South Carolina nonprofit** used a SARE grant to conduct market research and outreach before launching a food hub that now supplies produce from 40 farms to **Charleston-area** businesses.

Eligibility, Uses and Restrictions

Universities, nonprofit organizations, government agency staff and agricultural producers are eligible for SARE grants. Uses and restrictions vary by region and each year's specific call for proposals. Contact regional offices for additional details.

Outreach: Information Resources

The SARE Outreach office and regional communications specialists promote effective communication about sustainable agriculture through a variety of print and electronic information tools, including those produced by grantees during their SARE-funded projects.

Free downloads of research-based publications on a variety of sustainable agriculture topics are available at www.sare.org/Learning-Center. Print copies of books (at a cost) and bulletins (free) are available. Offerings include:

Books

- *Crop Rotation on Organic Farms*
- *Manage Insects on Your Farm*
- *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*
- *Building Soils for Better Crops*
- *Building a Sustainable Business*

Bulletins

- *Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers*
- *How to Conduct Research on your Farm*
- *Smart Water Use on Your Farm or Ranch*
- *Rangeland Management Strategies*
- *Transitioning to Organic Production*

Online Topic Rooms

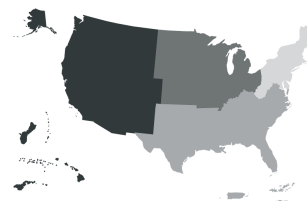
- *Cover Crops*
- *Farm to Table: Building Local and Regional Food Systems*
- *High Tunnels and Other Season Extension Techniques*
- *The Small Ruminant Toolbox*

Website

www.sare.org

Contacts

For grant information, contact your regional SARE office:



- North Central Region: (612) 626-3113, ncrsare@umn.edu, www.northcentralsare.org
- Northeast Region: (802) 656-0471, nesare@uvm.edu, www.nesare.org
- Southern Region: (770) 412-4787, ssare@uga.edu, www.southernsare.org
- Western Region: (435) 797-2257, wsare@usu.edu, www.westernsare.org

For information on national program management and national initiatives, contact:

Rob Hedberg, SARE Director
USDA-NIFA, Stop 2223
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-2223
(202) 720-5384, rhedberg@nifa.usda.gov

For books, bulletins and other information resources, contact:

SARE Outreach
1122 Patapsco Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-6715
(301) 405-7955, info@sare.org

Value Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG)

Encouraging producers to create and develop value-added producer owned businesses

Program Basics

The Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program provides grants on a competitive basis to individual independent agricultural producers, groups of independent producers, producer-controlled entities, organizations representing agricultural producers, and farmer or rancher cooperatives to create or develop value-added agricultural products. These ventures help increase farm income and marketing opportunities, create new jobs, contribute to community economic development, and enhance food choices for consumers.

The term “value-added” includes an agricultural commodity or product whose value has been increased by undergoing a change in physical state (e.g., turning fruit into jam, etc.), being produced, marketed, or segregated for its special character or identity (e.g., GMO-free, organic, grass-fed, etc.), being aggregated and marketed as a locally-produced food (e.g., as part of a Buy Local campaign, state-produced branding or labeling effort, etc.), or linking farmers with local and regional supply networks in which they are equal partners (e.g., farm to school or other mid-tier value chain, etc.).

The program was first authorized in 2000 and was expanded as part of the 2002 Farm Bill to include inherently value-added production, such as organic crops or grass-fed livestock. In the 2008 Farm Bill, the program was expanded again to include locally produced and marketed food products and mid-tier value chains. The 2008 Farm Bill also provided two 10 percent funding set-aside categories, one for mid-tier value chain projects, and one for projects creating opportunities for beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers (see page 57 for criteria).

Additionally, the 2008 Farm Bill required USDA to prioritize projects that increase opportunities for: (1) small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches, (2) beginning farmers or ranchers, and (3) socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

The 2014 Farm Bill added veteran farmers and ranchers as a new fourth priority category.

Additionally, the 2014 Farm Bill changed the process for providing priority consideration for projects by groups of producers. Rather than having group applicants meet a numerical requirement, USDA will now prioritize those projects by group applicants that “best contribute to creating or increasing marketing opportunities for small and medium-sized family farms and ranches or beginning, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmers and ranchers.”

The 2014 Farm Bill provides \$63 million in mandatory funding for the program for the years 2014-2018, or approximately \$12 million a year. In addition, Congress also appropriates annual discretionary funding for the program.

Project Examples

Sample projects receiving VAPG funds include:

- In 2012, **McKaskle Farm in Braggadocio, Missouri**, which grows a variety of organic grains, received a planning grant to evaluate the financial feasibility of purchasing equipment to clean, process, and package their products. The VAPG grant allowed McKaskle to examine and evaluate options for scaling up business to sell to more local retailers.
- In 2013, **Burbach Countryside Dairy in Hartington, Nebraska** received a working capital grant to help with the marketing and promotion of fluid milk products. With Burbach milk products already being sold in more than 70 stores in Nebraska, Iowa, and South Dakota, the VAPG grant helps the dairy expand, retaining four existing jobs and creating four to five new jobs.
- In 2013, the **Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative in Madison, Wisconsin** received a working capital grant to assist in the startup of a regional fresh produce food hub and packinghouse created to enhance access to wholesale markets for the local farm economy. The food hub plans to aggregate local produce sold under the Wisconsin Farmed brand.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Entities eligible to apply for VAPG funds are:

- individual agricultural producers;
- groups of agricultural producers;
- majority-controlled producer-based business ventures;
- organizations representing agricultural producers; and
- farmer or rancher cooperatives.

Agricultural producers include independent farmers, ranchers, and harvesters, including fishermen and loggers, who engage in the production or harvesting of an agricultural commodity.

There are two types of grants under VAPG:

- (1) Planning grants to fund economic planning activities such as the development of business plans and feasibility studies (including marketing plans) needed to establish viable marketing opportunities for value-added products; and
- (2) Working capital grants to fund the operation of a value-added business venture, specifically to pay for eligible expenses related to the processing and/or marketing of the value-added product.

Working capital requests of \$50,000 or more must be supported by an independent feasibility study and business plan.

Grant funds may not be used for repair, acquisition, or construction of a building or facility or to purchase, rent, or install fixed equipment.

All grant funds must be matched on a 1:1 basis. Matching funds may be in the form of cash or eligible in-kind contributions. Up to 25 percent of the total project cost, or in other words, up to 50 percent of the match, may come from the farmers' own time and effort (sometimes known as "sweat equity") put into the project. The other half or more of the match must be in cash or other in-kind match from the applicant or third parties.

Proposals are reviewed and evaluated by independent grant reviewers and by state rural development offices, whose staff can also answer questions and provide

feedback about your proposed grant in advance of its submission. Your state office contact information can be found here:

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html

Websites

This program is administered by the Rural Business-Cooperative Service of USDA:

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/Home.html>

For more information about the Value Added Producer Grant program, please see:

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_vapg.html

Whole Farm Revenue Protection for Diversified Farms

*Providing New Tools to Help Sustainable and Organic Producers
Manage Risks on Diversified Farms*

Program Basics

Insurance for farmers typically comes in two forms – crop insurance and revenue insurance. Crop insurance policies provide indemnity payments when crop yield drops below an insured amount, as long as the reason for low yield is an insured cause of loss (e.g. drought, excess rain, etc.). Revenue insurance is similar, but insures against drops in price as well as yield.

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) develops the insurance policies, sets premium rates, and subsidizes costs for farmers and approved insurance providers. The federal policies are sold and administered through private crop insurance agents.

The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes RMA to create a new revenue insurance product for diversified farming operations. Unlike traditional crop or revenue insurance, this product is not for a single, specific crop, but for all crops and livestock on a farm.

This new insurance policy – Whole Farm Revenue Protection, or WFRP – will be available for enrollment in time for the 2015 insurance year. For diversified specialty crop growers, mixed grain and livestock producers, and other sustainable and organic producers, the new WFRP policy will offer an insurance option that rewards the inherent risk management benefits of on-farm diversification.

Some of the benefits WFRP will offer include:

- an 85 percent coverage level;
- a premium discount for increased diversification;
- coverage for both crops and livestock; and
- inclusion of some incidental processing expenses necessary to make the commodity ready for market, such as washing, trimming, and packaging; and
- an \$8.5 million liability limit.

Full details on the policy were not available at the time of publication; readers are encouraged to go the website below for full, up-to-date information.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

WFRP will start off as a pilot product, which means it will only be available in select geographic areas. However, it is expected to expand nationwide as underwriting becomes available.

In 2015, WFRP will be available for sure in AL, AZ, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, KS, ME, MD, MA, MN, MT, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NC, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI, WY, plus particular counties in CA, MI, and NY. It may also be IN, IA, KY, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, and the rest of MI, and NY plus some additional counties in CA.

Application and Website

Interested farmers should speak to a local crop insurance agent about purchasing WFRP, or contact a Regional or County RMA office with any questions (see below)

WFRP expands and improves upon two existing whole-farm revenue policies – Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) and Adjusted Gross Revenue-Lite (AGR-Lite). More information on AGR and AGR-Lite can be found on these webpages.

AGR Website:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/policies/agr.html>

- Fact Sheet:
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/rme/agr.pdf>

AGR-Lite Website:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/policies/agr-lite.html>

- Fact Sheet:
<http://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/rme/agr-lite.pdf>

Contact

RMA National Headquarters:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/>

RMA Regional Offices:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/rsos.html>

RMA County Office Locator:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/fields/cfos.html>

Farmers Market Nutrition Program

Helping low-income mothers buy fruits and vegetables from local farmers

Program Basics

The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is part of the larger Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, popularly known as WIC, that provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education at no cost to low-income pregnant and postpartum women and to infants and children up to 5 years of age who are found to be at nutritional risk.

FMNP provides low-income pregnant and postpartum women with coupons or electronic benefits to buy fresh produce from authorized farmers and farmers markets. FMNP also teaches WIC participants how to select, store, and prepare fresh produce to improve their families' diets. The goal of the program is to increase low-income mothers' and children's consumption of healthy local produce and to expand the awareness, use of, and sales at farmers markets.

FMNP has been increasing low-income families' access to farmers markets and investing federal dollars in local economies since 1992. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service provides cash grants to state agencies, which support 100 percent of the food costs and 70 percent of the administrative costs of the program. State agencies administer the program, authorizing farmers, farmers markets, and roadside stands to accept coupons or electronic benefits and signing up, educating, and disbursing benefits to low-income mothers. Mothers may receive no less than \$10 and no more than \$30 per year. However, state agencies may supplement the benefit levels with state funds.

FMNP Successes

- In 2012, FMNP provided fresh produce to more than **1.7 million WIC families**, resulting in \$14.3 million in income for more than 18,000 small farmers.
- According to an evaluation of **Wisconsin's** FMNP, more than **6 in 10 WIC participants** went

to a farmers market for the first time after receiving the coupons.

- According to a study from **Washington**, 50% of interviewed farmers reported that sales from FMNP are strong enough that the revenue from FMNP is a deciding factor in whether or not to participate in a specific market.

Eligibility, Uses, and Restrictions

Currently, 36 states administer FMNP. To accept FMNP benefits, farmers, farmers markets, and roadside stands must become authorized by state agencies, typically Departments of Agriculture or Health. Authorized vendors are selected based on WIC participants' geographic concentration in the area and access to the marketplace. Vendors who exclusively sell produce grown by someone else, such as wholesale distributors, cannot be authorized. Benefits cannot be redeemed for prepared foods.

Website

More information about FMNP can be found here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp/wic-farmers-market-nutrition-program-fmnp>

Interested farmers and farmers markets should contact their respective state agencies. A list of participating states' administrating agencies and their coordinators' contact information can be found by going to this website and clicking on "state contacts":

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/Contacts/farm.htm>

Contact

National Contact
Debra Whitford
Phone: 703-305-2746
Debbie.Whitford@fns.usda.gov

Wood Utilization Assistance Program

Providing technical and financial assistance to state foresters, tribes, and public and private organizations

Program Basics

The Wood Utilization Assistance Program annually offers grants and cooperative agreements to substantially expand and accelerate wood energy and wood products markets throughout the United States to support forest management needs on National Forest System and other forest lands, especially those in need of hazardous fuels treatments. The State & Private Forestry staff provides expertise in science-based management decisions concerning forest products utilization, wood energy, and woody biomass utilization.

Eligibility, Uses, Financials and Restrictions

Entities receiving funding will engage in activities such as the development of potential new products via projects that showcase innovative uses for small diameter and low-valued wood, reducing the challenge to economic and market barriers to the use of wood, providing seed money and gap funding for demonstration projects, and facilitating the creation or expansion of harvesting, processing, and transporting enterprises around wildland urban interface areas threatened by catastrophic wildfires.

Eligible applicants include for-profit entities; State, local, and Tribal governments; school districts; communities; not-for-profit organizations; or special purpose districts (e.g., public utilities districts, fire districts, conservation districts, or ports)

Over the past few years, the Forest Service has issued roughly \$4 million each year to eligible applicants.

Project Examples

- The **California Statewide Wood Energy Implementation Team (WEIT)** used \$250,000 in funding from the Statewide Wood Energy Team Cooperative Agreement and cash match from its partners to conduct wood energy outreach and education activities. Additionally they supported promising early stage wood energy projects through technical assistance and seed funding for feasibility assessments and formalized future operation of the WEIT and larger Biomass Working Group through an interagency MOU and financing mechanism.

- The **New Hampshire Wood Energy Council** received \$250,000 to provide information and education targeting interested groups and individuals, engaging communities, and facilitating the exploration and implementation of wood energy projects. This project reached out to potential users of wood energy, particularly those in underserved communities. NHWEC targeted builders, engineers, financial service providers, local energy committees, and planners with information, case studies, and on the road visits to facilities.

Application and Website

Entities interested in applying for the Wood Utilization Assistance Program should visit the Wood Education and Resource Center (WERC) website. At the date of publication for this guide, the Request for Proposals (RFP) had not been released for this program. Future RFPs will be posted to this website.

<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/werc/>

Contacts:

Ed Cesa, Wood Education and Resource Center
ecesa@fs.fed.us

or

Julie Tucker, National Lead for Renewable Wood Energy, U.S. Forest Service
julietucker@fs.fed.us

Regional Woody Biomass Coordinators

Angela Farr – Region 1

406-329-3521

afar@fs.fed.us

Mike Eckhoff – Region 2

970-219-2140

mike.eckhoff@colostate.edu

Walter Dunn – Region 3

505-842-3425

wdunn@fs.fed.us

Scott Bell – Region 4

801-625-5259

sbell@fs.fed.us

Larry Swan – Region 5
707-562-8917
lswan01@fs.fed.us

Ron Saranich – Region 6
503-808-2346
rsaranich@fs.fed.us

Daniel Len – Region 8
404-347-4034
dlen@fs.fed.us

Lew McCreery – Region 9/Northeastern Area
304-285-1538
lmccreery@fs.fed.us

Dan Parrent – Region 10
907-743-9467
djparrent@fs.fed.us