Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Economic Development Funding To Create Jobs in Rural Communities in 26 States

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M., - October 26, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced the selection of 36 organizations in 26 states and the District of Columbia for grants to help rural cooperatives and small businesses expand, create jobs and strengthen their capacity to serve rural citizens and communities. Rural Housing Service Administrator Tammye Treviño announced the recipients on behalf of Secretary Vilsack.

"These grants help cooperatives support local projects and initiatives that create jobs and improve rural economic conditions," Vilsack said. "As we celebrate National Cooperative Month, USDA is proud to continue its support of local and regional efforts to bolster these cooperatives and help them bring increased value and economic opportunity to rural residents."

The grants are being provided through USDA Rural Development's Rural Cooperative Development Grant program. Under this program, grants of up to $225,000 may be awarded to colleges, universities and non-profit groups to create and operate centers that help individuals or groups establish, expand or operate rural businesses, especially cooperatives and mutually-owned businesses. Grants may be used to conduct feasibility studies, create and implement business plans, and help businesses develop new markets for their products and services.

For example, Capacity Builders Inc., in San Juan, N.M., has been selected for a grant to improve the economic conditions of rural and tribal areas by providing hands-on cooperative development assistance. The Center of Southwest Culture, Inc. in Albuquerque, N.M, will create 46 jobs with a grant it will use to provide technical assistance in organic farming methods. The center also will help businesses create economic opportunities by using existing natural resources, and will develop strategies to preserve housing in traditional cooperative communities in northern New Mexico.

Cooperative Development Services, Inc., in Madison, Wis., has been selected to receive a grant to continue providing assistance to develop cooperatives in rural areas that specialize in value-added agriculture, forestry, renewable energy, energy efficiency, senior housing and food co-op development services.

In North Dakota, Common Enterprise Development Corporation (based in Mandan) is selected to receive a funding to provide assistance and guidance to rural businesses for start-up, expansion and operational improvement. It will focus specifically on tribal housing, health care, value-added agriculture, local and regional food systems and business conversions.

Vilsack announced more than $7.9 million in economic development loans and grants today. A complete list of projects that were selected for funding is below. Funding for each project is contingent upon the recipient meeting the terms of the grant agreement.

Since taking office, President Obama's Administration has taken historic steps to improve the lives of rural Americans, put people back to work and build thriving economies in rural communities. From proposing the American Jobs Act to establishing the first-ever White House Rural Council – chaired by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack – the President wants the federal government to be the best possible partner for rural businesses
and entrepreneurs creating job opportunities and for people who want to live, work, and raise their families in rural communities.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of state and local offices. Rural Development has an active portfolio of more than $155 billion in affordable loans and loan guarantees. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America.

Alabama

- Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund: $191,504 grant to provide technical assistance, training and other business development services to minority farmers, ranchers, fisherman and rural communities throughout Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to help develop new cooperatives and credit unions.

Alaska

- University of Alaska-Anchorage: $225,000 grant to improve economic conditions in Alaska by working to establish new cooperatives and providing technical assistance to strengthen existing ones.

Arkansas

- Winrock International: $224,993 grant to bolster the Arkansas Rural Enterprise Center by focusing on technical assistance, training, market development, business planning and innovation for cooperatives.

California

- California Center for Cooperative Development: $225,000 grant to improve the business and economic conditions of targeted rural areas in California.

Colorado

- Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Educational and Charitable Foundation: $225,000 grant to fund activities that focus on improving economic opportunities of rural communities in Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming.

District of Columbia

- Cooperative League of the USA, dba National Cooperative Business Association: $225,000 grant to provide guidance, resources and technical assistance for organizing and operating successful cooperatives.

Hawaii

- The Kohala Center: $224,860 grant to provide technical services and education to stimulate rural economic development by strengthening the development of cooperatives.

Indiana

- Indiana Cooperative Development Center, Inc.: $225,000 to support the efforts of the center to provide technical assistance to cooperatives and mutually-owned businesses, with an emphasis on local food systems, renewable energy development and child care cooperatives.
Iowa

- Iowa State University: $225,000 grant to provide support to the Iowa Alliance for Cooperative Business Development, which focuses on developing alternative economic development strategies through applied research and outreach programs.

Kentucky

- Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development: $225,000 to foster business success and growth in the state through technical assistance and educational opportunities.

Massachusetts

- Cooperative Development Institute: $225,000 to build a cooperative economy in New England and New York by creating and developing cooperative enterprises and networks in the northeast region of the country.

Michigan

- Michigan State University: $225,000 grant to provide financial support to comprehensive business development training and educational services to individuals and groups in rural areas seeking to organize or expand business cooperatives.

Minnesota

- Latino Economic Development Center: $225,000 grant to provide cooperative development assistance to Latino residents in rural communities in the state.
- North Country Cooperative Foundation: $225,000 grant to support training and technical assistance that focuses on transforming the manufactured housing sector in the upper Midwest by replacing investor ownership with resident cooperative ownership.
- Food Co-Op Initiative: $225,000 grant to provide support that will enable faster and more efficient start-ups of new retail grocery cooperatives.

Mississippi

- Mississippi Association of Cooperatives: $225,000 grant to improve the economic vitality of small and socially disadvantaged producers in economically distressed areas of Mississippi.

Montana

- Lake County Community Development Corporation: $131,812 grant to help provide technical assistance and access to capital for new and expanding businesses in a four-county region and to the Flathead Indian Reservation in northwest Montana.
- Montana Cooperative Development Center, Inc: $225,000 grant to expand the capacity and geographical reach of the center as it provides assistance to rural communities in the state.

New Mexico

- Capacity Builders, Inc.: $225,000 grant to establish the National Center for Rural and Tribal Cooperative Development, which will work to improve economic conditions of tribal areas.
- Center of Southwest Culture: $191,504 grant to provide technical assistance, training and instruction to preserve historical and cultural Indo-Hispanic communities.
Nebraska

- University of Nebraska: $224,995 grant to deliver customized technical assistance to groups that are developing cooperatives.

North Carolina

- North Carolina State University: $225,000 grant to coordinate and facilitate technical and financial assistance to help farmers in North Carolina.

North Dakota

- Common Enterprise Development: $225,000 grant to provide assistance and guidance to rural businesses for start-up, expansion and operational improvement, with an emphasis on tribal housing, health care, value-added agriculture, local and regional food systems and business conversions.
- North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives: $225,000 grant to provide technical assistance to new and expanding cooperatives, with an emphasis on rural cooperative housing, dairy production, processing, marketing and information sharing among cooperatives and external partners.

Ohio

- Kent State University: $225,000 grant to provide assistance to small communities by transitioning small businesses to worker-owned cooperatives.
- National Network of Forest Practitioners: $225,000 grant to provide technical, business planning and development assistance to cooperatives that are working in wood-to-energy businesses.
- The Ohio State University Research Foundation: $224,783 grant to provide cooperatives with technical assistance, grants and training as they work to enhance economic development through cooperatives in Appalachian and rural areas of Ohio and west-central West Virginia.

Pennsylvania

- Keystone Development Center, Inc.: $225,000 grant to support the formation and sustainability of rural-based cooperatives.

South Dakota

- Value-Added Agriculture Development Center: $225,000 grant to improve economic conditions in rural South Dakota through the formation and expansion of cooperatives.

Texas

- University of Texas-Pan American: $225,000 grant to improve economic conditions in rural Texas and New Mexico by helping new and expanding cooperatives.

Virginia

- Cooperative Development Foundation: $225,000 grant to conduct research and outreach to meet the needs of senior citizens in rural areas of the country.
- Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation & Rural Sustainability: $225,000 grant to support the center in its work to help rural Virginians develop and advance their agricultural, economic and social interests.
Washington

- Northwest Agriculture Business Center: $225,000 grant to improve the economic vitality of the agriculture industry within Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties through the development of business and cooperative services.
- Northwest Cooperative Development Center: $225,000 grant to improve the capacity of the center to provide responsive, consistent, quality assistance to cooperatives as they work to address economic needs of rural citizens.

Wisconsin

- Cooperative Development Services, Inc.: $225,000 grant to continue to provide assistance to develop cooperatives in rural areas, with an emphasis on value-added agriculture, forestry, renewable energy, energy efficiency, senior housing and food co-op development services.
- Cooperative Network: $225,000 grant to establish the Great Lakes Cooperative Center to help develop new cooperatives in the upper Midwest.