

Wisconsin

DEVELOPMENTS

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Mission:

To increase economic opportunity and increase the quality of life for all rural Americans

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Agriculture Deputy Secretary Merrigan Highlights USDA Investments and Job Creation Efforts in Wisconsin

In April, Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan traveled to southwestern Wisconsin to highlight the importance of local and regional food systems as key contributors to job creation and economic development opportunities for the region. Deputy Secretary Merrigan gave keynote remarks at the Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool Cooperative's Annual Meeting, toured the Viroqua Food Enterprise Center, and hosted a White House Rural Business Roundtable discussion with local producers. She also highlighted USDA's rural job creation efforts and local and regional food systems in Wisconsin that are increasing economic opportunities for local farmers and ranchers while expanding access to healthy food.

"The Obama Administration supports efforts to strengthen local and regional food systems as one strategy to promote job creation in rural communities," said Merrigan.

"Investments in local foods can help stimulate the Wisconsin economy, create jobs and support our country's diverse agricultural industry so we can create an America built to last."



Sampling of products produced by Keewaydin Organics, a business in the Food Enterprise Center.

In February, Merrigan announced funding of 298 Value-Added Producer grant projects across the country, many of which support local and regional value-added processing and marketing. Wisconsin received 27 of these grants totaling more than \$7.1 million. For four years Wisconsin has led the nation in both number of grants awarded and dollars received in the Value Added Producer Grant Program. Since the program's inception in 2001, USDA Rural Development has funded 110 projects in Wisconsin, bringing over \$21.6 million in grants to the State.

Continued on next page, Deputy

USDA, HUD and WHEDA Eliminate Barriers to Affordable Rental Housing Programs in Wisconsin

Wisconsin affordable housing developers and owners will be relieved of regulatory redundancies and burdens on receiving government financial assistance for low and moderate income housing developments as a result of a new Memorandum of Understanding.

USDA Rural Development, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) jointly announced the implementation of the program at a signing ceremony in Madison, Wis.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Deputy, continued from front page,

These projects have aided in the creation of new economic opportunities for farmers and communities looking to keep a greater share of retail food dollars at home by processing and packaging them locally, rather than shipping commodities elsewhere for processing.

In addition, the Vernon County Economic Development Association (VEDA) received a \$99,945 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from USDA Rural Development. Funds were used to purchase equipment for use within the



Deputy Secretary Merrigan looking at an organic diaper wipe solutions at LuSa Organics located in the Food Enterprise Center.

new Food Enterprise Center facility, a new food hub in Viroqua, Wis. The Food Enterprise Center is located in the former NCR building. Currently undergoing renovations, the new center can house and support a variety of businesses under one roof and offers tenants space to aggregate, process, store, and distribute food and value-added food products. The Food Enterprise Center provides the local infrastructure to expand business; increase revenue for area producers; create industry jobs; and increase the availability, affordability, and accessibility of fresh local food.

During her visit to southwestern, Wis., the Deputy Secretary toured the Food Enterprise Center, and met with the representatives of the three current tenant businesses of the center: Keewaydin Organics, LuSa Organics, and Fifth Season Cooperative.

The day concluded with Deputy Secretary Merrigan, and the Vernon Economic Development Association (VEDA) holding a White House Rural Business



White House Rural Business Roundtable hosted by Deputy Secretary Merrigan.

Roundtable, titled *Strengthening Existing Markets*, with 20 regional businesses and agricultural producers on job creation, economic competitiveness, and business development.

Since April 2011, the White House Business Council has held over 500 roundtables with business and civic leaders in all 50 states, Washington DC and Puerto Rico. The purpose is to get feedback on what the Administration can be doing more – or less – of to support job creation; and to ensure that business leaders are aware of the programs and resources that can help them grow, hire and succeed.

Manufacturing Businesses Invited to the White House

In February, the U.S. Department of Agriculture honored 71 manufacturing businesses at a White House event to recognize the success of manufacturing in rural America. The event also honored financial institutions that have provided capital and support for these businesses.

“The manufacturing sector plays an important part in the nation’s economy,” USDA Rural Development Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager said. “These companies demonstrate that U.S. manufacturing – through innovation, dedication and tireless hard work – will continue to create jobs that keep Americans working and our rural communities thriving.”

The businesses honored received support from USDA Rural Development’s Business & Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, which helps provide capital and technical assistance to create jobs and spur economic development.

“These companies exemplify what can be accomplished when government works with businesses, local officials and rural residents,” said Tonsager.

The Wisconsin companies honored include:

- * Salm Partners, LLC, in Denmark, Wis. Salm processes more than 1 million pounds of blended meat per week into prepared specialty sausages and hot dogs.
- * Skana Aluminum Company in Manitowoc, Wis. Skana is a cold roll aluminum mill, projecting to ship 30 million pounds of product in 2012.
- * Crystal Finishing Systems in Schofield, Wis. Business operations include high performance coatings, powder coatings, plastics coatings, aluminum extrusions, fabrications, and aluminum anodizing.

Together these three businesses support nearly 800 jobs in our state and local communities.

Financial institutions who partnered with USDA Rural Development using the Business and Industry program that were recognized are:

- * Community Bank & Trust in Sheboygan, WI.
- * Denmark State Bank in Denmark, WI
- * River Valley Bank in Wausau, WI

“Wisconsin businesses selected to attend the White House event exemplify the importance of manufacturing on Wisconsin’s rural economy,” said Business and Cooperatives Programs Director, Jeff Hudson. “USDA Rural Development’s Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program assists partnering community banks by providing a credit enhancement that allows banks to provide capital to rural businesses. WI Rural Development is proud to support banks and businesses in rural Wisconsin that promote manufacturing job retention and creation. Congratulations to the attendees.”

For a complete list of honorees, visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/supportdocuments/rd-MnftrgWhiteHouseEventFeb2012.pdf>.

USDA Rural Development Notices of Funding Availability

RUS - Community Connect

Program: The Community Connect program serves rural communities where broadband service is least likely to be available, but where it can make a tremendous difference in the quality of life for citizens. The projects funded by these grants will help rural residents tap into the enormous potential of the Internet. Funds may be used to build broadband infrastructure and establish a community center which offers free public access to broadband for two years.

Complete applications must be received by close of business on June 18, 2012. For further details about eligibility rules and application procedures, visit: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-05-03/html/2012-10614.htm>

Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants (REDLG)

Program: The REDLG program provides funding to rural projects through local utility organizations to help increase economic productivity, job

creation, and incomes in rural areas.

Projects may include business start-ups and expansion, community development, incubator projects, medical and training projects, and feasibility studies.

Complete applications must be received by close of business on the last business day of each month during FY 2012. For further details about eligibility rules and application procedures, visit: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-03-02/pdf/2012-5043.pdf>.

Housing Preservation Grants

(HPGs): The HPG Program provides qualified, public, non-profit organizations and public agencies funding to assist very low and low-income homeowners to repair and rehabilitate their homes in rural areas. **Complete applications must be received by close of business on June 25, 2012.** For further details about eligibility rules and application procedures, visit: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-05-09/html/2012-11036.htm>

538 Guaranteed Rural Rental Housing Program (GRRHP):

Under Section 538 the Rural Housing Programs guarantees loans under the Rural Rental Housing Guaranteed loan program for development of multi-family housing facilities in rural areas of the United States. Loan guarantees are provided for the construction, acquisition, or rehabilitation of rural multi-family housing. **Complete applications must be received by close of business on December 31, 2012.** For further details about eligibility rules and application procedures, visit: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-02-06/pdf/2012-2539.pdf>.

Future Notices of Funding Availability

including Current and Past Notices, can be viewed at:

www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/nofas/

USDA Launches Two New Informational Websites

USDA has announced the launch of two new websites that will better assist customers, businesses, and communities to access information and resources on USDA and our programs.

The **Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Compass** is a digital guide to USDA resources related to local and regional food systems. The Compass consists of an interactive U.S. map showing local and regional food projects and an accompanying narrative documenting the results of this work through case studies, photos, and video content. The KYF Compass organizes USDA's work on local and regional food systems into seven thematic areas. Among the themes covered on the map and in the narrative portion of the Compass are: Local Food Infrastructure, Farm to Institution, Careers in Agriculture, Stewardship and Local Foods, Local Meat and Poultry, Healthy Food Access, and Local Food Knowledge. Visit the KYF Compass at http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF_COMPASS.

The newly launched **USDA Energy Website** provides stakeholders fast and efficient access to USDA energy efficiency and renewable energy data. The website provides access to all USDA energy resources, including: agricultural, forestry, economic, and social data. This is done in part through a set of new complementary web-based tools: the *USDA Renewable Energy Investment Map*, the *Renewable Energy Tool* and *Energy Matrix*. These tools focus on USDA's energy, energy efficiency and renewable energy investments and projects; provide information and data to a broad spectrum of stakeholders; and empower the user with the ability to easily navigate USDA's energy web resources. In addition, the site provides a link to all USDA state and local offices and energy resource coordinators. Visit the USDA Energy Website at: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=ENERGY>.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

USDA Rural Development Celebrates Earth Day in Solon Springs New Wastewater Treatment Facility Protects Upper St. Croix Watershed

By Kevin Tuttle, USDA Rural Development

The Upper St. Croix Watershed was the centerpiece of an Earth Day celebration in the community of Solon Springs, Wis.

The Village of Solon Springs and the Solon Springs School District commemorated the completion of a new and expanded wastewater treatment facility with ceremonies at both the Solon Springs School, and the site of the new treatment facility.

Village President Mike Blaylock said the village worked with USDA Rural Development, the Solon Springs School District, Ayers Engineering, education and community leaders, and others to use the occasion as a way to teach the importance of environmental

Senator Gaylord Nelson, of Wisconsin, to initiate the formation of Earth Day in 1970. It was following the first Earth Day celebration, which demonstrated widespread grassroots support for environmental legislation, that Congress passed many important environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, as well as laws to protect wilderness areas.

The Upper St. Croix Watershed is environmentally sensitive as the St. Croix River has origins from the springs and waterways that are located in the area. The St. Croix River is classified as a wild and scenic area and the construction and operation of a municipal wastewater treatment plant in Solon Springs is a desired method to protect the valuable water resource that originates there.

To meet existing and future wastewater treatment requirements of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), it was necessary to do major renovations to the existing wastewater treatment plant. The needs were funded with an Army Corps of Engineers grant in the amount of \$1,092,000, and by USDA Rural Development with a \$1,541,000 loan and a \$727,000 grant. Funding from USDA Rural Development was through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The upgrades bring the plant into compliance with WDNR requirements, prevent contamination to surrounding groundwater, and protect the nearby headwaters of the St. Croix System and Watershed.

“The Upper St. Croix watershed impacts the quality of water



School District of Solon Springs, WI celebrates Earth Day with USDA Rural Development.

resources from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico,” said Stan Gruszynski, USDA Rural Development State Director. “The citizens of Solon Springs deserve to be commended for their civic-mindedness and willingness to make the investment in a clean environment and responsible stewardship of one of our most critical resources....water!”

The celebration featured Earth Day and conservation demonstrations and exhibits created by the students, and a school assembly recognizing more than 33 students who have shown outstanding efforts and leadership in environmental stewardship. Children also participated in an Earth Day logo drawing contest, with third grader Elijah Molina creating the winning design. The logo will be used as next year’s USDA Rural Development Wisconsin Earth Day logo.



New lagoon and project sign for the Solon Springs Water Treatment Facility improvement and expansion project.

protection and a way to reflect on the history and heritage of Earth Day in Wisconsin.

Attendees of the celebration included USDA officials, Army Corps of Engineers officials, representatives from McCabe Construction and Ayers Associates, and Solon Springs School District officials.

The Upper St. Croix Watershed and the focus on the need to protect the environment moved former U.S.



Winning logo designed by Elijah Molina, third grader at the School District of Solon Springs.

First Annual USDA National Service Day

In honor of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack declared the first ever USDA Day of Service, challenging all employees to volunteer in their communities and make service a part of their everyday lives.

The first annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Service Day was observed on January 12, 2012. Numerous events and a variety of service projects were held by USDA offices across the Nation in their respective communities.

USDA Rural Development offices and staff across Wisconsin took part in the National Day of Service. Participants include:

Shawano Area Office: Laura Prodel, Amy Minshell, Deb Laehn, and Jennifer Schenk, volunteered services at Safe Haven, a domestic abuse shelter in Shawano.



Shawano Area Staff volunteers at Safe Haven in Shawano, WI.

Spoooner Area Office: Lance Ausing provided assistance to the Washburn County Food Share program.

Menomonie Area Office: Landis Wagner spent time at Stepping Stones of Dunn County, a non-profit community food pantry, shelter, and caregiver program; and Wesley Hoem volunteered at the Community Pantry and Clothing Closet.

State Office: Brenda Heinen, Kristin Peterson, Mike Daniels, Luann

Sliwicki, Carrie Jones, Debbie Biga, Mary Niemczyk, Tracy Wojcik, Kathy Zurawski, and Sherry Engle volunteered their time at St. Vincent De Paul thrift store.



Sherry Engle assists a customer at the St. Vincent De Paul Store in Plover, WI.



Mike Daniels moves a shelf at the St. Vincent De Paul Store in Plover, WI.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

FAREWELL - - -



USDA Rural Development is saying farewell to Cora Schultz, Area Director for the Spooner Area Office. Cora has been a Federal employee for more than 35 years; her knowledge and expertise will be greatly missed. *Good Luck as you begin a new path Cora. We wish you all the best!*



Years of Service Honored:

Kim Crabb
Human Resources Manager,
State Office
25 Years of Federal Service

Roxy Martzke
Area Technician,
Shawano Area Office
25 Years of Federal Service

Lance Ausing
Area Specialist,
Spoooner Area Office
5 Years of Federal Service

Julie Giese
Area Specialist,
Stevens Point Area Office
25 Years of Federal Service

Jessica Mancel
Area Specialist,
Stevens Point Area Office
10 Years of Federal Service

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

USDA Forum Highlights Efforts to Create New Wisconsin Jobs

Recently, in Dodgeville, Wis., USDA Rural Development hosted a “Partners in Building Community Forum” in which the primary focus was to generate ideas that would promote job growth in Wisconsin. Over the past three years, USDA Rural Development has helped to create or save more than 1450 jobs in southwestern Wisconsin alone.

The forum explored regional efforts and partnerships, in conjunction with USDA Rural Development’s assistance, that have contributed to economic development, job creation/sustainability, and the expansion of necessary community services, on a regional level, in southwestern Wisconsin.

“While this forum provides an opportunity to reflect on some pretty significant accomplishments in this region, there is still much to be done. We need to look for ways to build new partnerships, gain greater cooperation between federal, state, and local governments, add value and diversity to our productive capacity and build rural communities that will last,” said Stan Gruszynski, USDA Rural Development State Director.

USDA Rural Development assisted 29 businesses and producers, helping to create more than 780 jobs. This includes a Value Added Producer Grant to Willow Creek Farms Charcuterie, Inc., an old fashioned purebred Berkshire hog farm in Prairie du Sac, Wis., to provide working capital to expand products and market penetration.

In addition, more than \$11.8 million went to support critical projects including schools, hospitals, and first responder equipment through the Community Facilities Program, in 31 communities. For example, the Village of Gays Mills was awarded \$1,383,800 in loans and grants in disaster recovery from the 2008 floods, and to assist in moving the village to higher ground. Projects include: the new Village Community Center, fire truck, snowplow equipment, and public works building.

Guest speakers explained current efforts, and the positive affect they have had on improving the economic climate in southwestern Wisconsin. The organizations represented cited the successful use of Rural Development programs to expand needed community services, create jobs, and promote economic development.



Tony and Sue Renger, owners of Willow Creek Farms Charcuterie, Inc., told attendees about their naturally raised Berkshire hogs. They operate a small USDA certified processing facility.



Forum attendees listen to guest speakers describing current efforts, and the positive affect they have had on improving the economic climate in southwestern Wis.

Those attending the event also toured the new Southwest Community Action Program (SWCAP) offices and expanded dental clinic facility, currently under construction. A USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan helped to fund the project. The existing facility was inadequate for the volume of patients in the area that need medical and dental services. To help fulfill this need, SWCAP has partnered with Access Community Health Center for the purpose of providing essential dental services to low income families.

The S.W. Wisconsin “Partners in Building Community Forum” is the first of a series of forums Rural Development is planning in rural regions of interest across Wisconsin in conjunction with Regional Planning Councils and other partners with shared missions.



January 26, 2012 - Tribal Listening Session

John Berge, Executive Director of the National Food and Agriculture Council for the Department joined representatives from Rural Development, the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service at a State Tribal Listening Session held in Green Bay, Wis. Each Wisconsin Tribe shared ideas and comments, and highlighted future initiatives and plans. The day ended with a discussion on how we can work together to strengthen partnerships to support economic and community development among Tribal Nations in Wisconsin.

March 14, 2012 - USDA Interagency Conference

The Wisconsin USDA Interagency Conference, hosted by the Federal Women's Program (FWP), is held annually during the month of March. The Conference has the primary goal of providing training in the areas of career advancement, service improvement, and interpersonal skill enrichment. By bringing together employees from the various agencies, it creates an opportunity to network and interact socially. This year, the one-day conference took place in Wausau, Wis., with more than 115 attendees.



March 23 - 25, 2012 - Employee Associations Zone C Meeting

The employee associations, National Association of Credit Specialists, National Association of Support Personnel and National Association of Support Employees are consultative employee associations. The purpose of the employee associations is to initiate and promote improvements in the delivery of Rural Development and FSA programs and services to Rural America and fellow employees. The Associations have been very successful in this endeavor due to the dedication of its members, as well as its successful relationships with the agency's administration. Zone C is comprised of 19 states throughout the Midwest and Northeast.

Featured: A Cultural Demonstration preformed by Madison Area Hmong students.

April 23, 2012 - Rhinelander Dental Clinic Grand Opening

Family Health Center of Marshfield, Inc. (FHCM) received a Community Facilities Loan for \$2,492,000 to construct and operate a new dental center in Rhinelander, Wis. that will be part of the FHCM network. The center houses 26 operatories, and employs 5 dentists, 2 oral surgeons, 4 hygienists, and 27 support staff including dental assistants, health information clerks, and appointment coordinators.



April 24, 2012 - Eagle River Earth Day Funding Announcement

In observance of Earth Day 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development has awarded the City of Eagle River \$972,000 in a federal grant and loan combination to upgrade and rehabilitate the current sewer and water systems. In addition, USDA Rural Development has selected Eagle River as a 2012 Wisconsin Earth Day Project. During a formal program USDA Rural Development Community Programs Director Brian Deaner presented the Mayor with an Earth Day Award recognizing the City's initiative and accomplishments, which will provide area residents with clean and safe drinking water, and allow for future growth of the community.

April 26, 2012 - Spring Valley Water Treatment Facility Open House

USDA Rural Development approved a Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant combination totaling more than \$3.65 million to the Village of Spring Valley for upgrades and renovations to the aging wastewater treatment facility. The upgrades will ensure that the facility is in compliance with recent Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination standards and extends the system to the business park. The extension provides service to the new Spring Valley Health Care Services and assisted living facility and enables future growth within the community.

Photo by Paul Seeling, My Gateway News



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MOU continued from front page

USDA Rural Development State Director, Stan Gruszynski, joined officials in signing an agreement that allows the State to align Subsidy Layering Review (SLR) requirements between the three agencies to reduce duplicative and unnecessary paperwork, and help state and federal agencies better serve low-income families who rent their homes.

"It only makes sense that all levels of government work together to better coordinate services and remove redundancies. By partnering to find efficiencies and leveraging our resources, we are helping to generate greater opportunities and create jobs," said Gruszynski. "This is an important step forward in the Obama Administration's action plan to streamline government policies and build strong inter-agency partnerships to serve the American public as cost-effectively as possible."

The new initiative will increase communication between agencies, provide a "one-stop-shop" for development applicants, ensure timeliness of reviews, and simplify the application process. This will benefit owners, developers, tenants, and local communities working to create and preserve affordable housing.

"The more we work together, the more likely it is that we'll be able to find other ways and new opportunities to collaborate and address the responsibilities that fall to government," added Gruszynski.

Nearly all federal housing programs have statutes requiring the administering agencies to confirm that the total amount of subsidy provided does not exceed eligible costs. When developers of affordable housing are awarded multiple sources of public funding, they are subject

to multiple SLRs, which cause delays and add costs to projects that are preparing to start construction.



Subsidy Layering Review MOU signing with WHEDA Executive Director, Wyman Winston; and HUD Midwest Regional Administrator, Antonio Riley at the WHEDA Offices in Madison, WI on February 27, 2012.

Since April 2011, USDA Rural Development, HUD, and WHEDA have been working to repair irregular requirements affecting government supported affordable rental housing programs in response to the White House's Domestic Policy Council's request to improve the coordination. Gruszynski signed the MOU along with HUD Midwest Regional Administrator, Antonio Riley, and WHEDA Executive Director, Wyman Winston.

This signing is the second pilot program launched in Wisconsin to reduce regulatory burdens and pave the way for developers and owners to focus on delivering more housing and resources to those in need. On November 7, 2011, the three agencies signed an MOU making Wisconsin the first state in the country to launch a program to reduce duplicate physical inspections of rental housing projects by multiple sources.

"Once again Wisconsin is blazing a new trail for the rest of the country to follow," said Riley.

ONLINE TOOLS



Notices of Funding Availability



Properties For Sale



Online Forms



Recovery Act Website