

## USDA announces \$5.6M for Rural Community Development Initiative

Jim Lane | August 15, 2013

In Washington, US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is seeking applications for grants that will be awarded to organizations to help rural businesses create jobs and spur economic development. USDA is making \$5.6 million available through the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI), a program that generates economic activity in rural areas.

“This funding will help local and regional organizations as they assist small and emerging businesses,” Vilsack said. “The Obama Administration recognizes small businesses as the engines of job creation and essential to strengthening our national economy.” □ Strengthening the rural economy remains a main focus of USDA, despite budget uncertainties. Qualified intermediary organizations receiving the grants will provide financial and technical assistance to recipients to develop their capacity to undertake housing, community facilities, or community and economic development projects. Recipients will be non-profit organizations, low income rural communities, or federally recognized tribes. Intermediary organizations must provide matching funds at least equal to the RCDI grant. Funds are not directly provided to business recipients by USDA under the program.

The deadline for submitting RCDI applications is November 12, 2013. Applications must be submitted to the USDA Rural Development state office where the applicant’s headquarters are located. A list of these offices is available on the USDA Rural Development website. Full program details are here: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-08-14/pdf/2013-19773.pdf>

## USDA awards Penn State \$10 million grant for biofuels research

Meghan Sapp | October 16, 2012

In Pennsylvania, a \$10 million federal grant for biofuels research has been awarded to Penn State University by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack hopes the grant will develop biomass supply chains for the Northeast, as well as improve rural economies and create jobs through public and private sector partnerships.

This is the sixth such award made through USDA’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), aimed at developing regional, renewable energy markets, generating rural jobs, and decreasing America’s dependence on foreign oil. In September 2011, the Secretary announced five major AFRI grants for the formation of five regional systems in the Pacific Northwest, the Northwest, Northern states, Southern states, and the Southeast. Today’s announcement underscores USDA’s support for public and private research in building the framework for a competitively-priced, American-made biofuels industry in every major American region.

“This is the last of six regional systems supported by USDA and the Obama Administration,” said Vilsack in a call with reporters following the announcement. “It completes this phase of effort on regional feedstock development, as part of our overall effort to identify biofuels for aviation, marine and auto helping biorefineries.”

“The creation of this biofuel system will significantly contribute to improving rural prosperity and job creation in the Northeast by funding effective public and private sector partnerships,” Vilsack added.

The grants announced by Vilsack came through USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The NEWBio Consortium will focus on the non-food biomass sources of willow, miscanthus and switchgrass, which can be grown on former strip mines and marginal floodplains.

Through an integrated research, education and Extension approach, the consortium will address the entire biofuel production spectrum, including crop genetic development, harvesting, storage and processing techniques and sustainable production systems. The biomass research will develop sustainable production practices to improve yield by 25 percent and reduce costs by 20 percent.

By partnering with industry, the research will enable private-sector partners to produce advanced ready-to-use liquid transportation and aviation biofuels. The team aims to provide business support to generate at least 100 supply contracts and support more than 50 new supply chain businesses to harvest, transport and preprocess biomass.

Dr. Thomas Richard at The Pennsylvania State University will lead the team of researchers and staff from the following organizations: Cornell University, Delaware State University, Ohio State University, Rutgers University, West Virginia University, University of Vermont, Drexel University, American Refining Group, Ernst Conservation Seeds, Case New Holland, Praxair, Inc., Idaho National Lab, Mascoma Biofuels, Primus Green Energy, Double A Willow, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Aloterra Energy, Oak Ridge National Lab and USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

USDA awards \$45 million to four new BCAP projects | July 27, 2011

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today the creation of four additional Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) project areas in six states to expand the availability of non-food crops to be used in the manufacturing of liquid biofuels.

USDA has allocated approximately \$45 million for contracts that range between less than five years up to 15 years in the four project areas for producers who volunteer to enroll in BCAP. Producers who enter into BCAP contracts are eligible for reimbursements of up to 75 percent of the establishment costs of the perennial energy crop, and up to five years of annual maintenance payments for herbaceous crops and up to 15 years for woody crops.

According to industry estimates, these projects will create more than 3,400 jobs in the biorefinery, agriculture and supporting sectors, and provide the feedstocks to produce more than 2 million gallons of biofuels annually when full production levels are achieved.

Two of the new BCAP project areas, targeted for California, Montana, Washington and Oregon, will grow camelina at a significant scale. Camelina, an oilseed, is a rotation crop for wheat that can be established on marginally productive land. The project has a target of 51,000 acres. The sponsors are Beaver Biodiesel, LLC and AltAir Fuels LLC. The project areas are near biomass conversion facilities in Bakersfield, Calif., Tacoma, Wash., and Albany, Ore.

Another BCAP project area, part of an effort sponsored by cellulosic biofuels company ZeaChem, will encourage growth of hybrid poplar trees in Oregon. The goal is to enroll up to 7,000 acres. This project is part of a series of measures that comprise USDA's Wood-to-Energy Initiative. It seeks to build a forest restoration economy by integrating energy feedstock within the larger forest products sector to sustain rural jobs and prosperity. The project area surrounds a biomass conversion facility in Boardman, Ore.

Additionally, a BCAP project area in Kansas and Oklahoma, sponsored by Abengoa Biofuels, has been designated to grow up to 20,000 acres of switchgrass. The project area surrounds the future facility's biomass conversion facility in Hugoton, Kan.