Center for Rural Affairs offers help line to assist applicants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced that Oct. 15, is the deadline to apply for the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program.

There is $14 million available for this round. Again this year, 10 percent of that is reserved specifically for beginning farmers and ranchers and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

“Farmers or ranchers needing planning or working capital funds to move their value-added ideas forward should check out the Value-Added Producer Grants program,” said Traci Bruckner, Assistant Director of Policy at the Center for Rural Affairs.

“In particular, we urge beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to consider accessing these grants,” added Bruckner. “The 10 percent of funding reserved for these potential applicants makes applying a very attractive possibility.”

Agricultural producers, businesses majority-owned by agricultural producers and organizations representing agricultural producers are eligible to apply for Value Added Producer Grants for business planning or working capital expenses associated with marketing value-added agricultural products.

Agricultural producers include farmers, ranchers, loggers, agricultural harvesters and fishermen that engage in the production or harvesting of an agricultural commodity.

Farmers and ranchers can find a working proposal template for the Value Added Producer Grant Program at the following link http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/supportdocuments/BCP_VAPGApplicationTemplate2012.pdf

Additionally, in an effort to assist farmers and ranchers applying for a grant, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition just released a Farmers’ Guide to Value-Added Producer Grant Funding. The guide (available free at http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/) includes clear information on new program rules and contains a step-by-step description of the application and ranking processes, with helpful hints to improve a producer’s chances of obtaining funding from the highly competitive program.

It also describes the program priorities for small and medium-sized family farms, beginning farmers and ranchers socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and mid-tier value chains (regional supply networks with active farmer participation).

Applicants are encouraged to contact their state USDA Rural Development offices well in advance of the deadline to discuss their projects and ask any questions about the application process.

“These grants are popular and competitive but help is available,” commented Bruckner.

The Center for Rural Affairs continues to offer as much help to producers as possible during the application period by operating a Farm Bill Helpline where producers can call (402) 687-2100 and ask for the Farm Bill Helpline to receive assistance in understanding the Value Added Producer Grants Program.