



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

110 Maryland Avenue N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
www.msawg.org

Phone 202.547.5754
Fax 202.547.1837

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Contact: Ferd Hoefner (202) 547-5754

USDA on track with program to help farmers "manage risk"

Washington, DC -- The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition today applauded USDA's recent release of \$24.7 million in research, education, and outreach grants that will help women, minority, beginning and limited-resource farmers and farmers using sustainable and organic production systems. The grants, awarded by the Risk Management Agency (RMA), will reach farmers who traditionally are underserved by RMA and other USDA programs.

"For many producers, risk reduction means diversifying production, protecting natural resources, growing higher value crops, using fewer purchased inputs, and finding markets that give offer a premium price for their product," said Ferd Hoefner, Washington Representative for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

"These risk management grants will bring modest, but important federal resources to groups assisting farmers who are looking for sustainable farming systems that strengthen the economic viability of their business and their community." added Hoefner. "We will continue to advocate for this program and for a comprehensive approach to risk management."

Among the awardees are several Sustainable Agriculture Coalition member organizations:

- The Agriculture and Land Based Training Association will receive an outreach grant to provide information and training to new entry and immigrant farmers in California. ALBA Executive Director Brett Malone said, "This funding provides support to our education, outreach, technical assistance, farm incubator, natural resource management, and marketing programs, which together provide beginning and established limited resource farmers with information, resources and access to markets, so they can be better equipped to confront the risks associated with their farming operations."
- The Center for Rural Affairs will use an outreach grant to reach beginning farmers in the Midwest. Joy Johnson, farm transition specialist with the Center, said: "We are excited about our partnership with RMA. Beginning farmers face many challenges. The conference is being designed to help them be aware of the realities of farming and identify the many opportunities available to help them be successful."
- Future Harvest/Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture will use an outreach grant to hold conferences in Maryland and Virginia that will explore diversification of income through alternative production and marketing strategies. Executive Director Bruce Mertz notes, "We are aiming in particular to reach women farmers and small operators in a conference setting that will bring farmers together with agricultural educators and researchers to address key sustainable farming system issues."
- The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services, recipient of an education grant, will train Wisconsin farmers in organic production and marketing. According to Faye Jones, the group's Executive Director, "Organic agriculture is a form of risk management because it's a strong new market option for farmers, and a way to diversify. This grant will allow us to offer more

training to assist more farmers to transition to organic farming and reap the benefits of a positive route to value-added enterprises."

Included in the RMA research grant awards are projects at the Rodale Institute, University of Georgia, Kansas State University, Iowa State University, Washington State University, and USDA's Economic Research Service all addressing price, income, and market benefits and risks of organic production and marketing systems. The lack of adequate price and risk data currently results in organic farmers receiving inequitable crop insurance coverage, placing them at a competitive disadvantage with conventional growers.

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents farm, rural, and conservation organizations that advocate public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.

Attached is a list of some of the grants awarded to national and regional non-profit groups working on behalf of sustainable agriculture, beginning and minority farmers, and small and moderate-size family farms.

Risk Management Education Grants to Sustainable Agriculture and Related Organizations

Projects funded through the partnership grants that reward farmers for sustainable and organic agriculture practices include the following groups that are members of the five regional Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups:

- The Agriculture and Land Based Training Association to provide risk management information and training to new entry and immigrant farmers in California.
- The Center for Rural Affairs to conduct learning seminars for beginning and aspiring farmers in the mid-States region.
- The Community Food Security Coalition to provide limited resource farmers with information to enter the school and college food service market.
- Federation for Southern Cooperatives to improve legal training to improve the preservation and succession of limited resource farming operations and land.
- Future Harvest/Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture for conferences in the mid-Atlantic region on specialty crops and alternative markets.
- Georgia Organics for education workshops for African American organic specialty crop growers.
- Grassworks, Inc. for risk management and marketing tools for Wisconsin grazers.
- Heifer International for its Immigrant Farmer Program to assist immigrants become farmers and make informed risk management decisions.
- The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services for training of Wisconsin farmers in organic production and marketing.
- The New England Small Farm Institute for crop insurance information and education to Massachusetts producers.
- Rodale Institute to expand their organic price index nationwide and a second grant to develop an Organic Transition Simulation Model for farmers considering a transition to organic production.
- The Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group for internet-based tools for traditionally underserved southern producers and a second grant for sustainable agriculture enterprise development training networks.