

Market promotion grants proposals due April 15.

On March 1 the USDA announced in the Federal Register the availability of \$5 million for Farmers Market Promotion Program grants.

Applications for Farmers Market Promotion grants must be mailed to the USDA in Washington, D.C. with a postmark no later than April 15. Late applications will not be considered.

“At the Center for Rural Affairs we always encourage and assist rural communities with this application process because farmers markets are good for rural communities,” said Kathie Starkweather, Rural Opportunities and Stewardship Director at the Center for Rural Affairs. “They bring farmers and consumers together to create a stronger local economy, opportunities for farmers and ranchers and they provide consumers with fresh, nutritious, affordable local food.”

Farmers Market Promotion grants are available for farmers markets, market associations or other groups of producers to help cover the costs of starting up a farmers market or expanding and promoting an existing farmers market.

Other direct farmer-to-consumer marketing projects are also eligible, and grants may vary in size from \$2,500 to \$100,000 and do not require matching funds. The program is designed to increase direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities and has funded more than 200 projects since 2006.

According to Starkweather, this year's Farmers Market Promotion application emphasizes several priorities including bringing new farmers into direct marketing venues and improving access to local food in under-served rural communities.

These priorities harmonize with USDA's Know Your Farmer Know Your Food effort that uses existing programs to strengthen regional food systems, local economies and relationships

between producers and consumers.

The 2008 Farm Bill also added a provision to this program that at least 10 percent of Farmers Market Promotion funds be spent each year to increase low-income consumers' access to farmers markets by equipping markets with electronic benefit transfer machines (EBT) that can accommodate Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly food stamp) sales.

“The Farmers Market Promotion Program is a great opportunity to help producers and communities cover some of the start-up costs of establishing a local farmers market or other form of direct marketing from agricultural products from producers to consumers,” added Starkweather.

According to Starkweather, the flexibility of the grants, absence of matching fund requirements and the additional funding provided by Congress should allow the Farmers Market Promotion Program to reach a lot more communities, especially rural communities, with markets that are smaller or just starting up.

Competition for the funds may be intense, so the Center for Rural Affairs encourages all interested parties to take advantage of two new tools available this year—the FMPP Pre-Application Guide for 2010 and the How to Apply for an FMPP Grant resource guide—both of which can be downloaded at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FMPP> along with other application materials.

For more information on Farmers Market Promotion Program Grants and other rural resources go to <http://www.cfra.org/renewrural> or contact Kathie Starkweather at the Center for Rural Affairs at 402-438-8496 or kathies@cfra.org for assistance.