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HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE USE

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Value-Added Farm Producer Grants Now Available

Do you have an idea for a value-added agricultural product and need funding to get the project off the ground? The Hillsborough County Agriculture Industry Development Program is encouraging local farmers to take advantage of approximately \$18 million in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funding to help farmers enter into value-added activities.

The Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) are available to farmers, cooperatives, agricultural producer groups, or producer-based business ventures. Value-added farm products are those that expand the customer base for the product or commodity, and result in increasing farm revenues.

Grants may be used for business planning activities, such as conducting a market analysis or developing a marketing plan to establish a value-added marketing opportunity for an agricultural product; for working capital to establish or improve a value-added agricultural product; and for working capital for farm-based renewable energy projects.

The maximum award for a planning grant is \$100,000 and \$300,000 for working capital grants, and matching funds are required. Past grants have been awarded to develop a marketing plan to process canola oil into bio-diesel products; for working capital to market bio-diesel from soybeans; for a feasibility study on providing home-grown fruits and vegetables to local schools throughout the year; and to fund operating and marketing expenses for hydroponic crops.

The deadline to apply for a grant is July 6. Application guides and materials for a VAPG are available at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs, then click on Cooperative Programs on the left side, and then click on Funding Opportunities on the right.

Applications are also available by contacting Joe Mueller, USDA Rural Development, 4440 N.W. 25th Place, Gainesville, FL, 32606, (352)338-3482, or emailing joe.mueller@fl.usda.gov.

For information, contact Stephen Gran, Manager-Hillsborough County Agriculture Industry Development, at (813)272-5506.

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