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USDA OKs over \$15 million in renewable energy loans & grants

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Monday that 365 recipients have been selected to receive more than \$15 million in loans and grants to install renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements. Dallas Tonsager, Under Secretary for Rural Development, made the public announcement on behalf of Vilsack during a speech August 10th at the Midwest Rural Assembly in Sioux Falls, S.D.

“It is imperative that we secure more self-sufficient energy resources for our country, and these grants will help enable the long-term sustainability that the Obama administration is committed to developing,” Vilsack said. “This funding will also help farmers and rural businesses become more efficient and competitive.”

The Midwest Rural Assembly focuses on rural economic and community development issues and opportunities, and gives rural residents a chance to speak directly with policymakers about rural policy priorities. Tonsager said the loans and grants are authorized under the Rural Energy for America Program which was established in the 2008 Farm Bill and is administered by USDA Rural Development. The funds are not part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The new USDA grants and loans are going out to projects in 15 states and the Western Pacific Islands to help farmers and rural businesses become more efficient. One of the recipients, Eugene Bartz, of Sisseton, SD has been selected to receive a \$62,400 grant and \$60,470 loan to replace an outdated grain dryer with a more energy efficient model. He will retire several large-volume, low-temperature drying bins and convert them into storage bins. The new system will use 64.9 percent less energy per bushel in the drying process. The increased drying capacity will allow Bartz to balance harvesting and drying rates while avoiding condensation inside the bins.

Damien Branon of Fairfield, VT was selected to receive a \$12,300 grant to replace an evaporator on his maple syrup cooker. He plans to purchase and install a new system that will increase syrup production efficiency and reduce annual fuel consumption by 56 percent.

USDA energy efficiency programs often yield double-digit energy savings. The Glen Coble & Sons, Inc. ranch in Mullen, NE reduced its electricity draw from the local utility by 30 percent after it received a \$14,725 USDA Rural Development grant in 2008 to install five wind turbines. The project has been so successful that Glen Coble & Sons is considering constructing additional turbines for the ranch headquarters.

Additional information on the Rural Energy for America Program may be found at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/busp/bprogs.htm

To read USDA's complete list of the renewable energy loan and grant recipients, go to: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7.0.A/7.0.1OB?contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/08/0374.xml>

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