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# News Release

## **USDA Announces \$97 Million Available to Expand Access to Healthy Food, Support Rural Economies; Grants Will Support Local Food Systems, Specialty Crop Producers and Farm to School Efforts; Expands Risk Protection for Specialty Crop Producers**

### [Audio](#)

WICHITA, Kan., March 16, 2015 - In a speech at the National Farmers Union Convention today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the availability of \$96.8 million in grants to fund innovative projects designed to support specialty crop producers, local food entrepreneurs, and farm to school efforts, which in turn will increase access to healthy, nutritious food for American families and children. The announcement is part of USDA efforts during National Nutrition Month to focus on improving access to fresh, healthy, and nutritious products for millions of Americans.

"Increasing market opportunities for local food producers is a sound investment in America's rural economies, while also increasing access to healthy food for our nation's families," Vilsack said. "Consumer demand for local, healthy food is skyrocketing in schools, hospitals and wholesalers. These grant opportunities allow farmers and ranchers to meet this demand, and feed our nation's kids."

Secretary Vilsack also announced changes in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) to help increase access to the program for beginning, limited-resource and other producers who do not have risk protection available through crop insurance products. Many of these producers grow fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops.

"With these changes, more farmers can enter the specialty crop marketplace with peace of mind that they have risk protection should disaster strike," said Vilsack.

The grant programs administered by the [Agricultural Marketing Service](#) (AMS) include the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP), the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) and the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program which covers two types of grants: the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and the Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP). Also included in the announcement is the USDA's [Food and Nutrition Service](#) (FNS) Farm to School Grant Program, designed to bring local foods into the school cafeteria. USDA's [Farm Service Agency](#) implements the NAP program, which has been expanded to better protect specialty crop and other eligible producers from losses due to natural disasters.

"American farmers and ranchers feed the nation. These grant programs provide vital support to specialty crop producers, whose fruits and vegetables fill over half of the MyPlate recommendations," said Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator Anne Alonzo. "They

also support local and regional food systems that are meeting consumer demand and creating economic opportunities in rural and urban communities around the country."

Over \$63.2 million in SCBGP grants are allocated to U.S. States and territories based on a formula that considers both specialty crop acreage and production value. Interested applicants should apply directly through their State department of agriculture. A listing of state contacts and application due dates can be found at [www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp).

The FSMIP provides \$1 million in matching funds to State departments of agriculture, state colleges and universities, and other appropriate state agencies. Funds will support research projects that address challenges and opportunities in marketing, transporting, and distributing U.S. agricultural products domestically and internationally.

The Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program provides a combined total of \$26.6 million divided equally between its two grant programs. The FMPP provides \$13.3 million to support projects for direct farmer-to-consumer marketing projects such as farmers markets, community-supported agriculture programs, roadside stands, and agritourism. The LFPP offers \$13.3 million in funds for projects that support intermediary supply chain activities for businesses that process, distribute, aggregate, and store locally- or regionally-produced food products.

Grant applications for FSMIP, FMPP and LFPP must be submitted electronically through [www.Grants.gov](http://www.Grants.gov) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on May 14, 2015. Applicants should start the Grants.gov registration process as soon as possible to ensure that they meet the deadline.

AMS will host a webinar on March 25, 2015, to introduce FMPP and LFPP to potential applicants and a teleconference about FSMIP on March 31, 2015. For more information about SCBGP, FSMIP, FMPP, and LFPP, including program background and webinar information, visit the AMS grants website: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSgrants>.

With \$6 million in funding available, four different types of USDA Farm to School grants are available. Planning grants help schools get started, while implementation grants enable schools to expand existing programs. Support service grants allow community partners such as non-profit entities, Indian tribal nations, state and local agencies, and agriculture producers to provide broad reaching support to schools in their efforts to bring local products into the cafeteria. Training grants are used to disseminate best practices and spread strategies known to succeed. Proposals for planning, implementation, and support service grants are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, May 20, 2015. Letters of intent for training grants are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, April 30, 2015.

More information about the Farm to School grant program, upcoming webinars relevant to applicants, and sample grant applications can be found at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program>.

These programs are key elements of the USDA's Know Your Food, Know Your Farmer initiative which coordinates the Department's support for local and regional food systems.

The Secretary has identified local and regional food systems as one of the four pillars of rural economic development.

A recent USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) report indicates that more than 160,000 farmers and ranchers nationwide are tapping into growing consumer demand by selling their products locally. This segment of agriculture is a vibrant growth area that is drawing young people back to rural communities, generating jobs and improving quality of life in rural communities.

In FY13-14, USDA made over 500 infrastructure investments that create new markets for local food- including food hubs, scale-appropriate processing, and distribution networks - that are connecting farmers and ranchers with new sources of revenue and creating jobs.

Since the program began in 2012, USDA's Farm to School program has funded 221 projects in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. According to the USDA's Farm to School Census, schools spent over \$385 million on local food purchases during the 2011-2012 school year.

USDA has expanded access to healthy foods in underserved communities by making EBT available at farmers markets. Over 5,000 farmers markets now accept EBT, and SNAP redemption at farmers markets nationwide rose from \$4 million in 2009 to over \$18 million in 2014.

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