

## News Briefs

### Funding Available for Home Repair

If you're already a rural homeowner, and your house needs repairs or improvements, and you can't get a loan elsewhere, we may be able to offer you home improvement or repair assistance.

Also known as the Section 504 Home Repair program, this provides loans to very-low-income homeowners to repair, improve or modernize their homes or grants to senior very-low-income homeowners to remove health and safety hazards.

To qualify, you must be the homeowner and occupy the house; be unable to obtain affordable credit elsewhere, and have a family income that is below 50 percent of the area median income.

You must be age 62 or older and not be able to repay a repair loan in order to qualify for a grant.

Maximum loan is \$20,000; maximum grant is \$7,500. Loans and grants can be combined for up to \$27,500 in assistance. Loans can be repaid over 20 years with a fixed interest rate at 1 percent.

For more information visit the web at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/wa>.

### Washington State

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by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at  
[program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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## USDA Focus on Local & Regional Food Systems

While buying direct from the farm is not a new idea, local foods are becoming more of what our restaurants and stores are offering. For example, I was just at Jeremy's Farm to Table in Chehalis and the Westport Winery in Westport and they both tout local foods --- and it is Spring!



State Director  
Mario Villanueva

Those supporting an increased role for local food systems within U.S. farm policy cite the increasing popularity of local foods and a general belief that purchasing local foods helps support local farm economies and/or farmers that use certain production practices that may be considered more environmentally sustainable. In fact, a number of existing federal programs benefiting all U.S. agricultural producers also provide support and assistance for local food systems. These and other USDA programs were authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.

Local and regional food systems generally refer to agricultural production and marketing that occurs within a certain geographic proximity between the farmer and consumer. Farmers can include a small family farm, urban garden, or farms using sustainable agriculture practices. These operations can qualify for funding from programs such as [USDA Rural Development's Business and Industry \(B&I\) Guaranteed Loan Program](#) or

the Agriculture Marketing Service's (AMS) [Local Food Promotion Program \(LFPP\)](#).

A wide range of farm businesses may be considered to be engaged in local foods. These include direct-to-consumer marketing, farmers' markets, farm-to-school programs, community-supported agriculture, community gardens, school gardens, food hubs and the like. Other types of operations include on-farm sales/stores, Internet marketing, food cooperatives and buying clubs.

USDA launched the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative in 2009 to highlight existing USDA programs that could support the growing demand for local and regional food systems. Today, more than 160,000 farmers and ranchers nationwide are selling into local markets, from farmers markets to local restaurants, grocery stores and institutions, generating huge returns for local communities.

U.S. small family farms have a hard time competing in the food marketplace. Buying directly from farmers gives them a better return for their produce and gives them a fighting chance to be successful in today's globalized economy.

Sincerely,

Mario Villanueva  
Washington State Director

## USDA Resource Helps Food Hubs Improve Financial Performance

Food hubs, which are a businesses or organizations that manage the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of locally-produced food, play a key role in creating opportunities for small and mid-sized producers while also satisfying growing consumer demand for local products.

USDA's new report, "Running a Food Hub: Assessing Financial Viability," provides modules and best practices for food hubs to maximize profits and control costs. Part of a multi-volume series published by USDA Rural Development, the report provides technical assistance for food hubs at different stages of development. For example, it gives beginning food hubs advice on writing sound business plans,

and it includes guidance on how established food hubs can expand into financially viable long-term businesses.

The number of food hubs in the U.S. has more than doubled over the course of this Administration, with more than 350 now operational around the country thanks in part to support from USDA. Food hubs aggregate products from small and midsize farms and distribute them to large-volume buyers, such as grocery stores, in the local region. According to a comprehensive survey by Michigan State University, on average, each food hub supports 20 jobs and generates nearly \$4 million in annual sales.

See FOOD HUBS next page

## Rural Broadband Access Loans & Loan Guarantees

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is accepting applications for the Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee program.

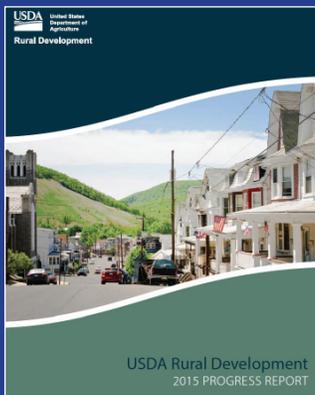
All applications must be submitted through the Agency's online application system located at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rd-apply>. Paper applications will not be accepted.

Applications must be submitted no later than July 7, 2016. Loans under this authority will not be made for less than \$100,000. The maximum loan amount is \$10 million. \$10,000,000.

Approved loans will be made available for the construction, improvement, and acquisition of facilities and equipment to provide service at the broadband lending speed for eligible rural areas.

To be eligible for a broadband loan, an applicant may be either a non-profit or for-profit organization, a state or local unit of government, or Indian tribe or tribal organization. Individuals and Partnerships are not Eligible.

For more information, please contact the Loan Origination and Approval Division at (202) 720-0800. To learn more about the program, please visit the web at <http://www.rd.usda.gov>.



## USDA Seeks Applications For Value Added Producer Grant Program

USDA Rural Development is making up to \$44 million available to farmers, ranchers and agriculture cooperatives to develop new bio-based products and expand markets through the Value-Added Producer Grant program.

Value-Added Producer Grants may be used to develop new products and create additional uses for existing ones. Priority for these grants is given to veterans, members of socially disadvantaged groups, beginning farmers and ranchers, and operators of small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches.

Additional priority is given to applicants who seek funding for projects that will create or increase marketing opportunities for these types of operators. More information on how to apply is on page 20607 of the [April 8, 2016 Federal Register](#). The deadline to submit paper

applications is July 1, 2016. Electronic applications submitted through [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) are due June 24, 2016. Additional information and assistance is available through the USDA Rural Development Office serving your county.

Since 2009, USDA Rural Development has awarded 1,126 Value-Added Producer Grants totaling \$144.7 million (205 grants were to beginning farmers and ranchers).

Value-Added Producer Grants are a key element of USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative, which coordinates the Department's work to develop local and regional food systems. USDA considers the cultivation of local and regional food systems as one of the four pillars of rural economic development that impacts farm family income and strengthens local economies.



USDA has supported providing consumers a stronger connection to their food with more than \$1 billion in investments to over 40,000 local and regional food businesses and infrastructure projects since between 2009. Industry data estimates that U.S. local food sales totaled at least \$12 billion in 2014, up from \$5 billion in 2008.

For more information about this program, please contact Greg York at [gregory.york@wa.usda.gov](mailto:gregory.york@wa.usda.gov) or Roni Baer at [veronica.baer@wa.usda.gov](mailto:veronica.baer@wa.usda.gov).

## USDA Seeks Applications for Broadband Community Connect Program

USDA is soliciting applications for grants to establish broadband in unserved rural communities through its Community Connect program. Community Connect is administered by USDA's Rural Utilities Service and helps to fund broadband deployment into rural communities where it is not economically viable for private sector providers to provide service.

The grants fund broadband infrastructure to help foster

economic growth by delivering connectivity to the global marketplace. The grants also fund broadband for community centers and public institutions.

The minimum grant is \$100,000 for FY 2016. The maximum award is \$3 million. USDA announced new rules in 2013 to better target Community Connect grants to areas where they are needed the most. To view the rules, go to

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-04-18/pdf/2016-08931.pdf>

Prior Community Connect grants cannot be renewed; however, existing Community Connect awardees may submit applications for new projects, which USDA will evaluate as new applications

For more information on how to apply for grants, see page 22567 of the [April 18, 2016 Federal Register](#).

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Rural Development's efforts to support food hubs and other regional food enterprises are part of USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative (KYF) which coordinates the Department's work to develop strong local and regional food systems.

USDA is committed to helping farmers, ranchers, and businesses access the growing market for local and regional foods,

which was valued at \$12 billion in 2014 according to estimates. Under this Administration, USDA has invested more than \$1 billion in more than 40,000 local and regional food businesses and infrastructure projects. More information on how USDA investments are connecting producers with consumers and expanding rural economic opportunities is [available in Chapter IV of USDA Results on Medium](#).



Visit us on the web at [www.rd.usda.gov/wa](http://www.rd.usda.gov/wa)