

STAKEHOLDER ANNOUNCEMENT

USDA Invites Comments on Improvements to Expand Access to Funding for Farmers and Rural Entrepreneurs

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26, 2024 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development is accepting public comments on changes that will make it easier for farmers, rural entrepreneurs and other organizations to apply for funding under three key business programs.

The agency is simplifying and streamlining processes for the [Value-Added Producer Grant](#) (VAPG), [Agriculture Innovation Center](#) (AIC) and [Rural Cooperative Development Grant](#) (RCDG) programs. The changes will reduce applicant burden in documenting application and eligibility requirements, modernize scoring criteria, and standardize application periods for all the programs.

The VAPG program provides post-harvest grants to assist producers with planning and working capital activities associated with processing or marketing value-added products from agricultural commodities. Each year under the program, USDA typically funds more than 150 projects totaling approximately \$30 million.

The AIC program helps local and state governments, federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits and commercial organizations establish and operate centers that provide technical and business development assistance to producers developing and marketing value-added agricultural products.

The RCDG program provides grants to nonprofits and institutions of higher education to help individuals and businesses start, expand or improve rural cooperatives and other mutually owned businesses through Cooperative Development Centers.

The changes will take effect Nov. 15, 2024. Comments must be submitted at [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) by Oct. 16, 2024.

For more information on all the program updates, visit page 75762 of the Sept. 16 [Federal Register](#).

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