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**AGRICULTURE SECRETARY VILSACK AWARDS \$1.4 MILLION IN GRANTS TO HELP SMALL AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS AND COOPERATIVES**

WASHINGTON, Sept. 28, 2009 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA has selected 10 organizations in eight states to receive \$1.4 million in grants to assist small, socially disadvantaged agricultural producers and cooperatives in rural areas.

“These grants will help owners of family farms, cooperative members and small business owners to better market their products and services to add profit and efficiency to their operations,” Vilsack said. “President Obama and I believe in providing the stability and support these small-scale producers need to furnish fresh, locally produced goods to their customers, and these investments will help make that possible.”

This funding is being awarded through USDA Rural Development’s Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant Program, which is part of the Department’s ongoing effort to expand outreach to rural residents to ensure that all communities have equal access to USDA programs and services. Funding is being awarded to cooperatives or associations of cooperatives where at least 75 percent of the governing board or membership has annual gross agricultural product sales of \$250,000 or less in the last three years. Grants can be used for product improvements, business plan development or economic development activities.

For example, in Rapid City, S.D., the Intertribal Bison Cooperative will use a \$175,000 grant to help Native American tribes develop farm market stores to give local residents improved access to fresh, locally grown foods. The stores will provide economic stability to cooperative members and create jobs in Native American communities.

These grants are authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill and are not funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

USDA Rural Development’s mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural residents. Rural Development fosters growth in homeownership, finances business development, and supports the creation of critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA Rural Development’s web site at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/csdir.htm](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/csdir.htm).

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