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## Well-known farm family awarded grant

Submitted by Anonymous on Wed, 12/10/2008 - 05:38  
By: Hannah Disch

O'Brien Farms in Brooklyn has been awarded a \$300,000 grant for working capital to market a hybrid form of corn and soybean seeds as part of the USDA's Value-Added Producer Grant Program. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer explained the purpose of the program. "These grants will improve financial returns and help create jobs for agricultural producers, businesses and families across rural America. With these grants USDA is investing in farmers and ranchers and the economic integrity of rural America."

Altogether 17 Wisconsin agricultural producers were selected to receive more than \$3.1 million in USDA Rural Development assistance under the Value-Added Producer Grant program. This is the second year in a row that Wisconsin has led the nation in both number of grants awarded and dollars received. In total the USDA awarded more than \$19 million to 144 recipients in 37 states and the territory of Puerto Rico through this program.

Value-Added Producer Grants may be used for feasibility studies or business plans, working capital for marketing value-added agricultural products and for farm-based renewable energy projects. Eligible applicants include independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives, and agricultural producer groups.

Hybrid seed like the O'Briens produce is considered a value-added product because it is inbred for increased yield. Instead of yielding 30 to 40 bushels per acre their seed might yield 200 to 250 bushels per acre. One of the farm's test plots showed a hybrid seed with a potential yield of 350 bushels per acre. Grant funds can pay for quality control, research and test plots, as well as for a sales force to market seeds. "We're striving for increased yield and better agronomics for the farmer", said Dan O'Brien.

The O'Brien family has owned land in the area since 1865, and has added acres over the years. They began producing hybrid seeds in 1970. O'Brien Farms is currently about 1,000 acres, most of which is in hybrid corn and soybean production. They produce the general run of seeds that farmers plant including hybrid seed corn, soybeans, oats, and winter wheat.

The O'Briens found out about the grant program from a gentleman who was interested in the mobile oil press they built to

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squeeze canola oil so they could burn it in their diesel tractors. They applied last spring and were notified that they were grant recipients in early September.

The grant O'Brien Farms received is a matching funds grant, which means that they have to spend an equal amount of money to get the grant funds. "But that's good," noted O'Brien. "That means we're committed to the business as well."

Money from the grant may not be used to purchase equipment or assets. O'Brien's plan is to obtain bulk seed handling equipment using farm funds and to use grant money to help promote sales. Handling seeds as bulk rather than bagging them, which is very labor intensive, should increase the farm's sales capacity and help the farm continue to grow.

"We're very gratified and thankful for this program," O'Brien said. "We want these dollars to be spent locally, to stay in the community. We want to help local businesses with these funds and to help grow the local economy. We work with a lot of local businesses and hope that will continue to be the case."

Community (articles/community)

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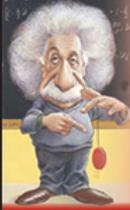
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