



For Immediate Release

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**USDA AWARDS RUTGERS/NJAES
FOOD INNOVATION RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
\$1 MILLION GRANT**

New Brunswick, N.J. - Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced \$10 million in grants to establish agricultural innovation centers in 10 states, including New Jersey. The centers are part of the Bush Administration's ongoing effort to assist rural businesses, farmers and ranchers in developing value-added businesses through greater utilization of production agriculture commodities.

The recipient of the \$1 million in New Jersey is Rutgers' Food Innovation Research and Extension Center (FIRE), an off-campus center of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. The grants were awarded after a nationwide competition. Rutgers/NJAES Food Innovation Center was selected due to its demonstrated track record of achieving value-added successes through its use of highly qualified and experienced personnel, a well developed work plan with an emphasis on economic development and a commitment to community partnerships. FIRE's clients, which include farmers, start up and small to mid size food companies, are provided with a full range of services that include business development, market development, product and process development, workforce development and training, regulations and manufacturing support and quality assurance and food safety systems. The Center is based in Bridgeton, New Jersey.

"The innovation centers will help farmers, ranchers and rural businesses develop and expand value-added ventures," said Veneman. "These investments will create jobs and improve economic opportunities for rural families."

"These centers will give rural businesses, farmers and ranchers a new resource to help them create new markets for their commodities," said Agricultural Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas C. Dorr.

"The FIRE Center's services are invaluable to New Jersey's farmers and the larger food industry, both of which must continuously adapt to meet the demands of a changing marketplace," said New Jersey Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus. "Providing farmers with the tools they need to be successful is a key element of the Department's smart growth plan for a viable and sustainable agriculture industry. We appreciate Rural Development's support, which will further our efforts to save our farms and ensure that all New Jerseyans continue to have access to the locally grown products and green open spaces they enjoy."

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Add One

Andrew M. G. Law, the New Jersey Rural Development State Director, also stated “that this grant award demonstrates the commitment of USDA Rural Development to the agriculture community here in New Jersey. Vital programs such as this assist in improving the economic viability with positive development strategies while preserving our rural landscape.”

"The Food Innovation Center acts as a bridge to the intellectual and technical resources at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Cook College, and all of the campuses at Rutgers University”, said Keith Cooper, acting executive dean of Cook College and acting executive director of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. "To create jobs in this region, a strong, viable industry sector is needed, and this Center offers a one-stop approach to the agricultural and food community, which will impact economic growth and prosperity in New Jersey.”

"Partnerships between the federal government, state agencies and universities are critical to the success of economic development strategies for agriculture” added Margaret Brennan, associate director of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station at Rutgers and co author of the grant proposal. “The Food Innovation Center is built on this principle and it is through our partnerships with the City of Bridgeton, the Cumberland Empowerment Zone, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and the USDA – Rural Development that will enable us to fully realize our impact to the economy of Southern Jersey,” she added.

Lou Cooperhouse, director of the Food Innovation Center and co author of the grant proposal, indicated “We are extremely appreciative that the USDA has awarded this grant to our program. Although still in our infancy, we have been able to quickly demonstrate impact to the agricultural and food processing industry in New Jersey. This funding will act as the catalyst for us to further develop our Center, and provide benefits to the community. Once additional funding has been secured, we plan to build a permanent facility in Bridgeton that will house state-of-the-art food processing and laboratory space, analytical laboratories, an auditorium with distance learning and teleconferencing capabilities, and administrative space for our staff as well as our clients. Construction of this facility will allow the Food Innovation Center to fully realize the impact it can make to the Southern New Jersey region,” Cooperhouse indicated.

The Food Innovation Center was initially established in 2001, as a result of Cook College research conducted by Adesoji Adelaja, who recognized the need for farmers to develop value-added products, and markets for off-grade raw materials, in order to maintain viability and preserve farmland in New Jersey. This research identified obstacles to growth, and the expertise and infrastructure that would be needed to result in solutions and long-term prosperity to the agriculture and food industry of New Jersey.

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The Food Innovation Center was subsequently located within a Federal Empowerment Zone in Bridgeton, which is in Cumberland County and the hub of New Jersey's agricultural and food processing industries. As this area has the highest unemployment rate and the lowest per capita income in the state, it is critical that the needs of the agricultural and food industries are addressed. The economic impacts can be far-reaching, as the \$60+ billion food and agricultural complex is New Jersey's second largest industry.

The web site address for the Food Innovation Center is <http://www.fire.rutgers.edu>.

Law further indicated that working with the Food Innovation Center, and the Office of the New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture over the past two years has resulted in a number of grant and low interest loan awards in support of our agriculture community. The Rural Development web site is www.rurdev.usda.gov/nj . También está disponible en Español.

Since 2001, the Bush Administration has invested nearly \$100 million toward expanding value-added ventures, including the establishing in 2001 of a \$5 million agricultural marketing resource center. The center serves as an electronic resource center and clearinghouse for value-added related information. The center's website is <http://www.agmrc.org/>

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