

News Release

Contact:
Matthew Jorgensen, (308) 293-5884
mjorgensen@unl.edu

Nebraska MEP continues to help ag producers and small businesses by conducting energy audits needed for USDA energy programs; March 31 is next deadline to apply

A grant will reduce the cost of energy audits required of agricultural producers and rural small businesses when they apply for grants or loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for energy efficiency improvements.

The reduced-cost energy audits apply to both grants and loans obtained from the USDA Rural Development (USDA RD).

The audit service is offered by the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which received an Energy Audit Assistance Grant from USDA RD. Qualifying businesses pay only 25 percent of the audit cost. The remainder is covered by the grant.

The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), administered through USDA RD, provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase or install renewable energy systems or make energy efficiency improvements.

Improvements may include high-efficiency heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems; insulation; lighting; cooling or refrigeration units; doors and windows; electric, solar or gravity powered pumps for sprinkler pivots; switching from a diesel to electric irrigation motor; and replacing energy-inefficient equipment.

USDA RD requires REAP applicants to have an energy audit completed by a third party prior to applying for these funds. “For the applicant, this involves an introductory meeting and a review of existing systems to determine where improvements are needed or desired by the client,” according to Matthew Jorgensen, Project Specialist at the Nebraska MEP.

Jorgensen also noted that, in order for a project to be eligible for the program, no work can have already started; the producer or business cannot be reimbursed by USDA after the fact.

The deadline for the next round of REAP grant projects is March 31, 2017.

Jorgensen said Nebraska MEP is targeting areas of the state for audit assistance where applicants cannot get a free audit from their local electric utility provider. In the western half of Nebraska, those areas include parts or all of these counties: Arthur, Box Butte, Chase, Cheyenne, Custer, Deuel, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Keith, Kimball, Morrill, Perkins, and Scotts Bluff.

To get started, contact Jorgensen at the Buffalo County Extension Office in Kearney, 308-293-5884, or mjorgensen@unl.edu. Additional information is available at the Nebraska MEP website at <http://nemep.unl.edu>. Or contact Marla Marx, Business Programs Specialist, USDA Rural Development, at the Scottsbluff Office, 818 Ferdinand Plaza, Suite B, 308-632-2195 ext. 132. The agency's website is <http://rd.usda.gov/ne>

Jorgensen said ag producers and small businesses can reap a number of benefits by undertaking energy efficiency projects supported through REAP. “An estimated half of the energy produced in the United States is wasted somewhere in the process of production, distribution and consumption, mainly due to equipment inefficiency and mechanical and thermal limitations,” he said. In 2012, U.S. manufacturing was responsible for 25 percent of U.S. energy use.

“Clearly, there are opportunities out there to save energy – and money,” he said. “Understanding how energy is used and wasted can help your operation pinpoint areas of energy intensity and ways to improve efficiency.”

Even small improvements in efficiency can yield large energy savings. Plus, there are opportunities to save energy and money running and maintaining computer systems, servers, and associated high-performance components.

Nebraska MEP is the state's lead resource for manufacturing support and assistance aimed at enhancing the productivity and technological performance of small- and mid-sized manufacturing enterprises. MEP offers an assortment of services to help manufacturers grow, compete, and excel in the global marketplace, by leveraging relationships with technical specialists at UNL and a network of external providers.

Nebraska MEP offers services in the areas of continuous improvement, quality management, marketing and growth, sustainability, and workforce development.

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