



United States Department of Agriculture

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# News Release

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## **USDA Announces Grant to Help Farms and Rural Small Businesses Protect the Environment with Clean Energy**

*Funding supports Energy Audits in Rural Nebraska to assist agricultural producers and rural small businesses in evaluating the energy efficiency of their operations and considering alternative equipment, machinery and systems.*

**July 2, 2015, Lincoln, Nebraska-**As the world focuses on cleaner energy and renewable energy, the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NE MEP) based at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln is turning its focus to helping agricultural producers and rural small businesses reduce energy costs and consumption and meet the critical energy needs within Nebraska.

The assistance is made possible by funding of \$71,363 to the Board of Regents, University of Nebraska, University of Nebraska-Lincoln through the USDA Rural Development Rural Energy for America Program, in addition to \$52,974 in other funding.

Through this project, NE MEP has established an energy auditing program to assist agricultural producers and rural small businesses with evaluating the energy efficiency of their operations and the potential for incorporating renewable energy technology into their operations. With NE MEP's connections to Nebraska's manufacturing sector, industrial and/or business audits are expected to comprise the largest percentage of completed audits. The focus of these audits will be areas not currently being adequately served by other organizations.

Dr. Curtis Weller, Director of the NE MEP said, "We welcome the opportunity to help Nebraska businesses and agricultural producers achieve greater efficiency in their operations. USDA approached NE MEP and made us aware of a service gap in rural areas of the state for qualified as well as affordable energy auditors. With the support of this grant, NE MEP will be able provide this valuable service. It is a winning proposition for everyone." For more information, contact NE MEP at (402) 472-5993 or [ne.mep@unl.edu](mailto:ne.mep@unl.edu).

These audits are made possible by USDA Rural Development's Energy Audits – Renewable Energy Development Assistance (EA-REDA) grant program. NE MEP is one of 25 organizations selected for EA-REDA grants through USDA Rural Development's popular Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). For more information on EA-REDA

or REAP, please visit [www.rd.usda.gov/ne](http://www.rd.usda.gov/ne) or contact USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinator Jeff Carpenter at 402-437-5554 or [jeff.carpenter@ne.usda.gov](mailto:jeff.carpenter@ne.usda.gov).

“We only get one environment to live in and the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership will help us to protect it. Also as energy needs grow, the audits will identify opportunities for energy efficiency and help to reduce costs and the energy demand,” said Nebraska State Director Maxine Moul, USDA Rural Development.

The Nebraska MEP is part of the National Institute of Standards and Technology’s Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program. Residing within the U.S. Department of Commerce, MEP was created in 1988 with the intent of enhancing the productivity and technological performance of U.S. manufacturers. Today, the MEP program consists of 60 centers in every state and Puerto Rico, with more than 400 service locations and 1,300 technical experts working together to advance and strengthen U.S. manufacturing.

USDA Rural Development achieves its mission by helping rural individuals, communities and businesses obtain the financial and technical assistance needed to address their diverse and unique needs. EA-REDA grants support programs to help agricultural producers and rural small businesses evaluate energy efficiency systems and determine the feasibility of incorporating renewable energy technologies into their operations. USDA Rural Development also 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 through its Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).

President Obama’s plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President’s leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America’s economy, small towns and rural communities. USDA’s investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of our American values.

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