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## **Agriculture Under Secretary Announces Grant to Benefit Ohio Food Hub**

*‘Seed money’ helps Appalachian farmers, businesses connect and flourish*

NELSONVILLE, Ohio, March 20, 2014 – Agriculture Deputy Under Secretary Doug O’Brien visited Athens County, Ohio, today to announce a grant award of more than \$198,000 to help Rural Action and the Southeast Ohio Food Hub Network expand the distribution of locally grown foods.

“Residents in rural communities in Appalachian Ohio have fewer economic and job opportunities compared to other regions,” O’Brien said. “This project is a ‘win-win’ for all involved because it will not only increase the availability of nutritious, locally-produced foods for consumers, but it will also create additional jobs in the food sector for area businesses. USDA is proud to partner with groups in the Appalachian region to help support food hub development and the overall food economy in Ohio and beyond.”

The grant is being awarded to Appalachian Ohio’s Rural Action to provide business support, technical assistance and shared infrastructure resources. It is being made through USDA Rural Development’s Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program, which finances and facilitates development of small and emerging businesses in rural areas. The RBEG program supports a broad array of business activities.

The Southeast Ohio Food Hub Network is comprised of the Chesterhill Produce Auction (Morgan County), the ACENet Nelsonville Business Incubator (Athens County) and the Village of Somerset Farmers’ Market (Perry County). Rural Action estimates the grant investment will help retain more than 275 food sector jobs and could create as many as 65 new jobs and associated businesses. The food hub network also will allow for easier distribution of fresh, local produce to the Southeast Ohio Food bank, enabling area residents at every economic level to have access to local foods.

O’Brien, who made the announcement on behalf of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, noted that the grant also will help facilitate the creation of a centralized cooling space at the Nelsonville Food Hub, allowing it to act as an aggregation point for local food shipments to Columbus and other urban Ohio markets.

Rural Action is a membership-based nonprofit with nearly two decades of work in the local food systems arena. Its leaders say its mission is to “promote social, economic and environmental justice through infrastructure, organizing and education.”

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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