

# Grants Help Farmers Explore New Ground

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Farmers looking for new ways of doing business because of low commodity prices could be eligible for a grant, said Mike Hogan, agriculture and natural resources agent at the Carroll County office of Ohio State University Extension and Ohio sustainable agriculture co-coordinator.

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has allocated about \$350,000 for the 2001 Producer Grant Program.

The program lets farmers explore new enterprises and practices such as direct marketing of fresh vegetables, organic farming, agritourism, rotational grazing, precision farming, biological weed and pest control, soil conservation, or anything else that would help a farm become more economically viable, environmentally friendly or socially acceptable, Hogan said.

Over the past nine years, the producer grant program has

awarded more than 300 grants to producers in the North Central states who test, evaluate and adapt sustainable agriculture practices for their operations; share information with other producers through educational events, field days or demonstrations; develop new technologies; or create or modify equipment. In 2000, Ohio was awarded more producer grants than any of the 12 states in the North Central Region, which includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Individual farmers can compete for grants of up to \$5,000, and groups of three or more farmers from separate operations can receive grants of up to \$15,000. The individual grants are for one year, and the group grants are for two years. Applicants must identify specific problems and potential solutions to those problems.

"These funds can help reduce

the risk of trying something new," Hogan said. "And, as grants go, these are really simple to put together, but you have to be willing to write a report of your findings and send it to the North Central Region SARE office, which then shares your information with other producers across the 12-state region."

The grants are not always for new enterprises. For example, farmers already involved with farm markets could receive funding for more in-depth consumer studies that help show where their markets should be several years down the road, he said.

In addition, a cooperative effort between North Central Region SARE and the National Agroforestry Center is providing approximately \$11,500 to target producer projects that integrate trees and shrubs into agricultural systems.

"The goal is to encourage farmers to develop innova-

tive marketing practices that increase farm income and contribute to sustainable rural communities," Hogan said. "Marketing strategies for all agricultural products, including produce, livestock, poultry, dairy, agroforestry products and aquaculture are included."

Any agricultural producers living in the North Central Region may apply for the North Central Region SARE Producer Grants.

Previous grant recipients are eligible to apply and should submit a progress report if their application is related to their previous grant, Hogan said.

The deadline for applications to be turned into the North Central Region SARE office is March 30. Grant recipients will be named on June 21, and funding should begin in autumn 2001.

SARE is funded through the USDA Cooperative State Re-

search, Education and Extension Service (CSREES). The purpose of the SARE Program is to generate and share information that is sound and practical about alternative farming systems believed to have the potential to increase the sustainability of agriculture.

To learn more about the SARE Producer Grant Program in Ohio, contact Hogan at (330) 627-4310, Ohio sustainable agriculture co-coordinator Dennis Baker at the Darke County Extension office at (937) 548-5215, or Ohio State University Extension sustainable agriculture team members Alan Sundermeier at the Henry County Extension office at (419) 592-0806 and Phil Rzewnicki at Ohio State University in Columbus at (614) 292-0117.

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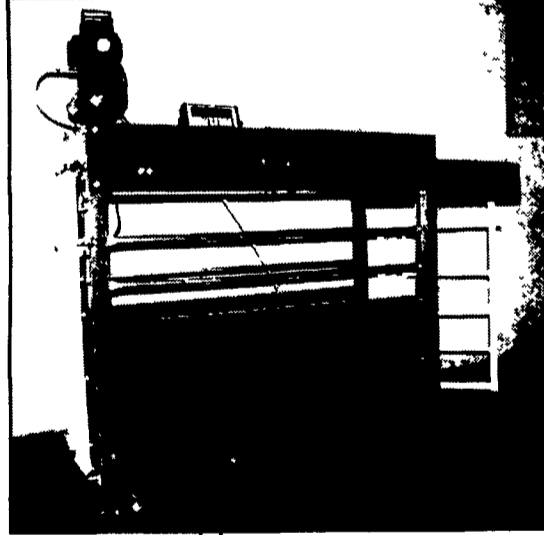
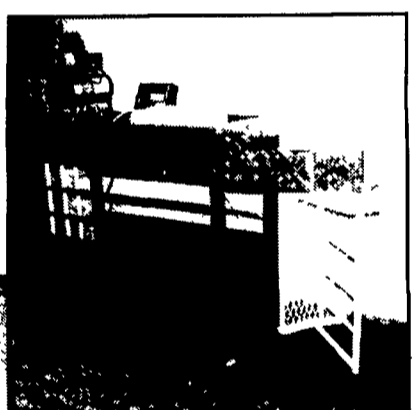
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