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ENERGY SAVINGS GRANTS AVAILABLE

Recently, a producer near Wilber received a grant to convert an old propane engine, furrow irrigation system to a modern, more efficient, electric drive pivot irrigation system. The energy savings were enough that he was one of 37 grant recipients in Nebraska of energy savings projects through the Nebraska Rural Development Agency. This year's program has a deadline of March 1, 2006.

The grants cover projects that use renewable energy systems or make energy efficiency improvements to rural businesses and farms. Energy efficiency improvements to the business include HVAC systems, insulation, refrigeration, lighting, irrigation systems, pumping systems, air systems, motor systems, etc. Funds cannot be used for agricultural tillage equipment, vehicles, or residential improvements.

Last year, 18 of the 37 funded grants involved irrigation equipment. Over \$23 million is available nationwide under the USDA 9006 Energy program. But you need to know, Nebraska has been quite successful landing dollars from this program in the past three years.

For farmers, this is a tenant or owner/operator type of program. You and/or a sibling needs to be active in the farm to qualify. Small and moderate size farmer operations are great candidates for this program. The funding agency prefers to fund all types of energy projects.

Grants of up to 25 percent of total project costs may be available with a minimum of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$250,000 for energy improvement projects and a maximum of \$500,000 for renewable energy projects.

Yes, some paperwork is involved but if you have always thought about a change in your operation, maybe the grant program will be just what you need to get the project in gear. For now, visit with Cliff Kumm in Beatrice at USDA Rural Development. Cliff can tell you if you qualify and the specifics about the grants. He will mail you a packet of materials for application and assist with questions. Often you will gather information from Norris Public Power for an energy audit on energy efficiency improvements and from your agricultural vendor on the proposed project. The paperwork process has been streamlined somewhat in that financial statements for three years are no longer required.

These grants are a good opportunity for businesses interested in energy efficiency improvements to their facilities or renewable or energy efficiency projects, irrigation system energy improvements, methane digesters for livestock waste, grain handling systems, wind turbines, solar systems, biomass systems, heating/air conditioning improvements, insulation, windows, doors, refrigeration equipment, lighting, pumping systems, motor systems, etc. To date, there is not a farm methane digester in Nebraska but Rural Development has expressed interest in this type of application.



Irrigators may consider the program for more energy efficient irrigation systems which includes switching from furrow to pivot, switching from high pressure to low pressure, and/or down sizing from a larger horsepower motor to a new, smaller one. Even if the energy payback is 30 or 40 years, that is ok, however, 600 years would not look good on the application!

For this program, call Cliff Kumm, Deb Yocum, or Jan Knobel in Beatrice at 223-3125. Cliff also serves as the Nebraska State Energy Coordinator for these types of grants. It is important to note you do not have to borrow money from Rural Development to receive a grant. More information is available at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/farbill/index.html>

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