USDA Rural Development invites applications for Rural Business Opportunity Grants. As announced in the Federal Register Thursday, June 7, applications must be received by 4 p.m. local time Aug. 6.

Eligible applicants for fiscal year 2012 are public bodies, nonprofit corporations, institutions of higher education, Indian tribes on federal or state reservations and other federally recognized Native American tribes or tribal groups and rural cooperatives with members that are primarily rural residents.

The primary objective of the program is to improve the economic conditions of rural areas. Assistance provided to rural areas includes the following: rural business incubators, (excluding cost of real estate acquisition, development or building construction, planning a facility, engineering work, or revolving loan funds) technology-based economic development, feasibility studies and business plans, long-term business strategic planning, and leadership and entrepreneurship training.

Applications that will support regional economic development are encouraged.

Last fiscal year Nebraska Ethanol Industry Coalition (NEIC) received $100,000 to educate the public on flex fuels in a six state region of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Georgia, Maryland and Florida. Outreach and marketing tools will be provided to E85 retailers, flex fuel vehicle manufacturers and dealers, local stakeholders, state governments and policy makers. For fiscal year 2012 applications are capped at $50,000 unless the project benefits Native Americans.

An application checklist is available for use in complying with the requirements outlined in the Federal Register. For more information on this program, to discuss a proposed project or request an application checklist, please contact one of the following Nebraska USDA Rural Development Business Program Specialists:

- Marla Marx, marla.marx@ne.usda.gov or 308-632-2195 extension 1132 – panhandle including northwest and southwest counties
- Kelley Messenger, kelley.messenger@ne.usda.gov or 308-237-3118 extension 1120 – north and south central counties
- Bill Sheppard, bill.sheppard@ne.usda.gov or 402-371-5350 extension 1004 – northeast and southeast counties