



## **Underserved Producer Grantwriting Assistance Project**

**September 17, 2007**

**Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI)** is a nonprofit educational institute in East Troy, Wisconsin advancing our vision of an environmentally, economically socially sustainable agriculture through our work in education, research, policy, and market development.

**We announce** a new project, funded by USDA's Risk Management Agency that pays experienced grantwriters to assist producers in submitting proposals to federal agencies to support their work. **The project places priority on serving socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers**, whom RMA describes as belonging to "a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as a member of the group without regard to their individual qualities. SDA groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders."

**Background** –MFAI's staff has long conducted workshops nationwide to help train farmers, ranchers, non-profit groups and others in the field of sustainable agriculture to successfully apply to federal programs offering grants and other resources. Despite excellent evaluations of our grantwriting workshops, it is clear that they are inadequate to overcome the language, cultural, educational, and institutional barriers that impede underserved producers and producer groups from applying to USDA programs.

**Goals:** We seek to increase the number of successful applications to RMA and other USDA programs from immigrant and other underserved farmers and ranchers; assure that language and culture are not a barrier to successful application; build ties between communities of underserved producers and local institutions; and engage other USDA programs in coordinating with RMA to build the capacity to provide such assistance. Our project has received a one-year RMA Partnership grant that began September 10, 2007.

**Due to limited funding, the first year of our project will operate only in three regions of the nation – the South, West, and Midwest.** In each region, our regional coordinator will inform underserved producers and producer groups about the project's assistance; offer regional grantwriting trainings for producers; and train a cadre of experienced grantwriting advisors to assist underserved producers. The project will offer interpreter services if needed. Advisors will not write complete grant proposals for producers single-handedly, but rather **work with local partners** (agency staff, NGOs, or local volunteers with experience in grantwriting and project administration) to create a **collaboration plan**. **That plan will outline the following:**

- 1) Suggest the USDA program most suited to a producer's needs, including explaining program requirements, limitations on funding uses and applicant eligibility.
- 2) Along with local partners, help producers frame their project, identify project partners, and develop a project timeline, plan of work, goals, measurable objectives, budget, evaluation and communications strategies, and a plan for ensuring the project's sustainability after the grant is completed.
- 3) With local partners, assist in preparing the proposal, including helping write and review drafts, and ensure timely submission with necessary forms, attachments and letters of support.
- 4) With local partners, assure that the project, if it should be funded, has the capacity to administer the project according to the agency's specifications.

**For more information** about how this project can help underserved producers, or if you are an experienced grantwriter interested in helping producers through this project, please contact the Midwest Regional Coordinator serving the states of IA, MN, WI, ND, SD, KS, MO, NE, IL, IN, MI, and OH:

**Midwest Regional Coordinator:** Deirdre Birmingham, [deirdreb@mindspring.com](mailto:deirdreb@mindspring.com) (608) 967-2362

The **Project Director** is: Margaret Krome, [mkrome@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mkrome@sbcglobal.net) (608) 238-1440