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WSU To Lead National Coalition  
For Rural Entrepreneurship

PULLMAN, Wash. -- Washington State University will help coordinate the myriad of rural development efforts underway across the U.S. into a single, nationwide coalition for rural entrepreneurship, which in turn should spur economic growth and create jobs.

Working with counterparts in the Regional Rural Development Centers and the USDA, WSU Professor James Zuiches has been awarded a \$150,000 grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to conduct regional workshops to create a national dialogue about rural entrepreneurship. Northwest Area Foundation is providing an additional \$25,000, and Farm Foundation \$20,000, to the project.

Over 142 organizations in 44 states already have expressed an interest in this network and potential coalition. The workshops will bring together these groups to listen to their ideas and organize the coalition.

“There is an extraordinary level of expressed demand and interest in issues associated with rural entrepreneurial research, education and training,” said Zuiches, “but to this point, the efforts have been decentralized and reflect local needs and possibilities rather than a national perspective. Our goal is to establish a national program to fund, strengthen and support the development of rural entrepreneurs and enterprises in rural areas.”

The workshops also will identify new ideas and ways for universities and other organizations that support entrepreneurs to work with young people in rural communities and with aspiring and current entrepreneurs. The goal is to incorporate these ideas about what works into a new national program to support rural entrepreneurs and small business growth.

Zuiches said the coalition would fill “a much needed niche” and complement the USDA’s current rural development assistance programs. “We’re looking to create jobs in all sectors of the rural economy, from value-added food processing to Internet-based service and technology jobs,” he said.

Listening sessions already are underway in areas throughout the United States.

The Western Rural Development Center in Logan, Utah, has six sessions on tap:

- In Price, Utah, on June 28;
- At Santa Fe, N.M., Billings, Mont., Riverside, Calif., and Vancouver, Wash., in July and August.
- At the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, N.D., on July 12, “Entrepreneurship in Indian Country,” which is co-sponsored with the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

“This data and vision, gathered at the ground level from entrepreneurs across rural America, will present a clear and powerful case to those in government and industry, that there is enormous desire and will to create and support entrepreneurship in rural communities,” said Jim Goodwin, senior program officer at WRDC.

Mary Emery, associate director for the NCRCRD in Iowa, agreed. That center already has conducted a listening session at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet, Minn. They also are planning on conducting sessions in Indiana, Nebraska and Kansas City, Mo., during July and August, as well as several others.

“Our first session went very well; we went beyond the time allotted,” she said. “The whole project is based on learning from each other to stimulate new economic activities.”

Stephan Goetz, director of the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, said four listening sessions are scheduled in his region. “We are very pleased to be a part of this effort,” he said. “As off-shoring accelerates under

globalization, rural communities increasingly have to look to entrepreneurship if they wish to maintain their employment bases. These listening sessions are a critical first step in creating the networks and scale economies that are required for regions to develop dynamic and prosperous local businesses.” Northeastern sessions are scheduled to be held in northern New England, New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland or West Virginia during the months of June and July.

Listening sessions in the southern U.S. are in the planning stage, said Bo Beaulieu, director of the Southern Rural Development Center. He predicted the meetings will have several important impacts.

“Our regional center will be viewed as an important resource to the organizations that have a real interest in entrepreneurship,” he said. “Secondly, the listening sessions provide an avenue for the land-grant system to better understand the needs of the folks on the front line.”

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 “to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.” Its programming activities center around the common vision of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community and societal wellbeing; and has the capacity to be productive and to help creating nurturing families, responsive institutions and healthy communities.

To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation targets its grants toward specific areas. These include: health; food systems and rural development; youth and education; and philanthropy and volunteerism. Within these areas, attention is given to exploring learning opportunities in leadership; information and communication technology; capitalizing on diversity; and social and economic community development. Grants are concentrated in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, the southern Africa

countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and  
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