

## Farmers can apply for grants

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KANNAPOLIS — Farmers who grow value-added crops have several opportunities for financial help.

A new program based at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis is accepting applications for grants that will help value-added growers pay for equipment.

Dubbed "N.C. Value-Added Cost Share," the program is administered by N.C. MarketReady at the Research Campus in Kannapolis. N.C. MarketReady is an agricultural outreach effort by N.C. State University, one of eight universities with a presence at the biotech campus.

The cost share program, a \$1.2 million project funded by the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, is designed to boost rural economic development and strengthen farm families. The program supports the development of value-added agricultural operations, an emerging sector of North Carolina agriculture.

A value-added agricultural product is a raw commodity that has been changed in some manner so it no longer can be returned to its original state, such as chopped lettuce.

Value-added crops are so named because they usually have a higher market value than the original commodity.

And the cost share program has broadened the definition of value-added, said Brittany Whitmire, program coordinator.

Guidelines include farmers who use non-standard production methods, such as organic, as well as those who segregate their products, like keeping genetically modified corn separate from non-genetically modified corn, Whitmire said.

The program also considers generating farm-based renewable energy and some locally produced food as value-added, she said.

Value-added producers can apply for equipment cost share funding.

Applicants can request to purchase new or used equipment. Awards will vary from 25 to 50 percent of the total cost of the equipment, up to \$25,000.

"There are very few places where farmers can find financial assistance to purchase the specialized equipment they need to add a value-added enterprise," said Dr. Blake Brown, former director of N.C. MarketReady in Kannapolis.

Applications for the spring funding cycle are available at [www.ncmarketready.org](http://www.ncmarketready.org). Applications are due March 30.

The Web site includes guidelines and frequently asked questions.

N.C. MarketReady will host two regional meetings and a "webinar" to help farmers understand the funding opportunities. Meetings are set for March 9 at Mountain Horticultural Crops Research & Extension Center in Mills River and March 10 at the N.C. Cooperative Extension Center in Wilson.

From 6 to 7:30 p.m. March 11, the cost share program will conduct a live Web seminar, accessible from any location using a personal computer and the Internet. Find the link at [www.ncmarketready.org](http://www.ncmarketready.org).

These meetings will answer questions about eligibility, use of funds, application process and definition of value-added.