

Newspaper Article written for Furnas/Harlan Partnership

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The Furnas/Harlan Partnership hosted a public meeting at Southern Valley Schools on Thursday, May 19, 2005. This was a Nebraska Affordable Housing Program Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Information Meeting. A pre-proposal grant has been submitted and accepted. This public informational meeting was the next step in the process. Now the Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska will be submitting the full proposal for a grant for the residents of Furnas and Harlan Counties. This is a separate funding source than the program that was presented to Furnas County residents a few months ago. The grant – if received – would provide assistance money to renovate and rehabilitate homes for low-to-moderate income families in Furnas and Harlan counties.

How does this program work? If the Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska in conjunction with the Furnas/Harlan Partnership is awarded the grant, a certified administrator will oversee daily implementation of the program. Local homeowners will be invited to submit an "Indication of Interest" form if they wish to participate in the program. The grant administrator will evaluate the application and a Housing Technician will inspect the home. Based on the information gathered, an anonymous project portfolio will be presented to the Housing Rehabilitation Committee. If the home meets the guidelines of the project, the homeowners will be notified and asked if they want to commit to the needed repairs. The work on individual homes will include repairs needed to bring the house up to electrical, safety, and construction codes within Federal Regulations. Repairs such as roofing, siding, windows, painting, heating, electrical, insulation, and some interior remodeling are all within the guidelines of the program.

How much will this cost the homeowner? This program is based on direct loans and forgivable loans. To be eligible, participants must have an annual income of no more than 80% of the median income. To be eligible for a fully forgivable loan your income must be no more than 70% of the median income.

No home will receive more than \$18,125 of grant funding; however, other sources of financial support may be pulled together to help each project. For example, homeowners may qualify for assistance from the Department of Energy's Low Income Weatherization Assistance Program. Costs to the homeowners will be the time invested in successful completion of the rehabilitation. Homeowners will be allowed to select an approved contractor of their choice and will take part in approving the project work write-ups.

So the Partnership eagerly looks forward to hearing the results of this grant application so that a minimum of 12 homes can be rehabilitated. The Partnership will release information for homeowners as soon as it is available.

The second part of the evening meeting was an information presentation by Mark Hutchison and Brad Zumwalt with the Food Processing Center at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. The presentation was about the Nebraska Food Cooperative. This

is a program that is being considered for Nebraska producers based on a program that has been working in Oklahoma for the last 18 months.

This is a web-based system with products being delivered to central sorting locations by producers and then the products will be distributed to the consumer. The exciting thing about this is that it would give Nebraska producers access to over one million consumers from a large geographic area within the state of Nebraska. It would reduce the time and cost of marketing and distributing products directly to the consumer. In the past it has been difficult for producers to make connections with consumers in urban areas. In addition it has been difficult for consumers in urban areas to make connections with producers in rural areas, giving them the opportunity to have access to reasonably priced, variety of safe, fresh, frozen and processed food and non-food products grown and/or produced in Nebraska.

This was just an informational meeting giving those in attendance an insight of the possibilities this program could provide for Nebraska producers. As additional information becomes available the Furnas/Harlan Partnership will release updates as soon as they become available.