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US Federation of Worker Cooperatives Receives Rural Cooperative Development Grant

October 25, 2012
San Francisco, California

The US Department of Agriculture has awarded the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives a Rural Cooperative Development Grant for the period October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013. The grant, for \$175,000, will help USFWC establish a cooperative development center to support the growth of worker cooperatives in rural areas.

Activities to be funded by the grant include the expansion of the USFWC's innovative DAWN peer advisor training program to include rural cooperators, provision of technical assistance to rural worker cooperatives and startups, and work with several key organizational partners to develop resources and expand the reach of worker cooperatives in rural parts of the United States. These partners include the Center for Race Poverty and the Environment in California's Central Valley, the Farmers Market Coalition, the Southern Grassroots Economy Project, Cooperative Development Foundation, The Cooperative Foundation, and several other cooperative development centers in California, the Northwest, the South and Appalachia.

"The Rural Cooperative Development Grant is part of a very intentional capacity-building plan for the US Federation, which is still a young organization. The funding takes us to the next level," said USFWC Executive Director Melissa Hoover, "and builds on our very real strength, our members, to expand our support and advocacy on behalf of all worker cooperatives." The USFWC envisions a powerful structure in which member commitments and grant funding work together to directly increase both the scale of the organization's membership and the worker co-op economy.

The **RCDG** award comes at a time when interest in the worker cooperative model is on the rise throughout the country. As the country's demographics shift, the USFWC says the inquiries it receives from rural areas come primarily from people who are struggling to make ends meet in tough rural economies. These include recent immigrants, small scale food producers, caregivers, and people seeking to build an alternative to often dangerous, low-paid industrial food production work. According to Hoover, "Communities – and increasingly rural communities – are seeing worker cooperatives as a viable and powerful tool for community-led economic development."

The US Federation of Worker Cooperatives is a grassroots membership organization founded in 2004 by worker cooperators from around the country. In eight short years, the USFWC has built a broad membership base, committed leadership and strong networks, along with a reputation for creating effective, innovative programs that amplify the strengths of its membership to support growth in the worker cooperative sector. "As part of the global cooperative movement, worker cooperative enterprises do not exist in isolation," said Rebecca Kemble, USFWC President. "The USFWC provides the organizational base for the regional, national and international networks that are so essential for the health of each worker coop and the movement as a whole. The establishment of this national center greatly increases the Federation's ability to mobilize the power of these networks in supporting the creation of more worker coop enterprises in areas of the country where they are most needed," she added.

More detailed information about the US Federation's **RCDG**-funded activities is available to its members on request, and general information about USFWC is available online at www.usworker.coop.