FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Economy Receives Boost with USDA Funding for Rural Co-op Development

MADISON, Wis. (Nov. 26, 2013)—The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of Rural Development has awarded a third year of funding to Cooperative Network and the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives (UWCC) to develop rural economies through cooperatives in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The $200,000 grant will focus on health care, local food systems, energy efficiency, senior housing, cooperative education, conversions to employee-owned businesses, and a transportation fuel purchasing co-op for Wisconsin school districts.

“Much of this work to build local communities is unique and innovative,” said Bill Oemichen, president and CEO of Cooperative Network, which is the statewide association for cooperatives in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. “Cooperative growth depends on new forms of collaboration, communication and cooperation, and our success in the Upper Midwest demonstrates why we here form the heart of our nation’s cooperative community.”

USDA’s Rural Cooperative Development Grants provide funding for nonprofit groups and higher education institutions to create and operate centers that help establish, expand, or operate rural businesses—particularly cooperatives and mutually-owned enterprises. With this new funding, Cooperative Network and UWCC’s Great Lakes Cooperative Center will support seven main areas of rural development:

1) Increasing cooperative health care access and opportunities through national health care CO-OP development, 40 Square Cooperative Solutions in Minnesota and the Farmers’ Health Cooperative of Wisconsin, including development of a captive property and casualty insurance cooperative for rural Wisconsin hospitals;

2) Developing local food systems in both states;

3) Exploring new energy efficiency models, including mutual ownership of local renewable electric generation projects;

4) Enhancing senior housing outreach through the annual Senior Cooperative Housing Conference in the Twin Cities as well as quarterly education programs;

5) Targeting cooperative education outreach to state and local economic development professionals;

6) Developing employee ownership of businesses in transition; and

7) Developing a transportation fuel purchasing cooperative for Wisconsin school districts.

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“We’re very pleased to collaborate with Cooperative Network on this initiative,” said Brent Hueth, Director of the UWCC. The cooperative model is an important tool for bringing farmers, consumers and entire communities together to fill unmet needs, create new jobs and expand opportunities for rural Americans.”

Cooperative Network serves more than 600 Wisconsin and Minnesota member-cooperatives by providing government relations, education, marketing, and technical services for a wide variety of cooperatives including farm supply, health, dairy marketing, consumer, financial, livestock marketing, telecommunications, electric, housing, insurance, worker-owned cooperatives, and more. For more information about Cooperative Network, visit www.cooperativenetwork.coop.

Established in 1962, the UW Center for Cooperatives focuses on education, research and outreach on all aspects of the cooperative business model, including development, finance, structure and governance. The Center’s interdisciplinary programs build on the resources of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Wisconsin Extension, and are implemented through partnerships with UW faculty, staff and extension agents, federal and state agencies, state cooperative councils, cooperative business groups, and others. For more information, please visit www.uwcc.wisc.edu.

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