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New Orleans, LA- marketumbrella.org, sponsor of the popular Crescent City Farmers Market in New Orleans, has been selected to receive a major grant from the National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC). The nonprofit organization will receive \$225,000 each year for the next two years to support an innovative new program of "crop circles" as a public market-based philanthropy and to strengthen market opportunities for farmers of color and their communities. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a partner in the initiative, also will share in the funding.

"The grant from NRFC will help to move our work forward and allow us to expand the support we provide to the diverse group of farmers and fishers in our region seeking to rebuild their livelihoods post-Katrina and -Rita or perhaps take advantage of new market opportunities that now exist for small producers throughout the Gulf Coast and Mid South Delta regions," said Richard McCarthy, executive director of marketumbrella.org, and one of the founders of the Crescent City Farmers Market. "By building relationships between those who produce crops, those who catch fish and seafood, and those who buy and consume them, we strengthen our whole community. A farmers market isn't just about commerce, it's about connections, and it creates a sense of belonging and pride."

The establishment of crop circles provides an alternative, sustainable model of grassroots philanthropy based on the tradition of giving circles. A percentage of each vendor's income from Crescent City Farmers Market sales is pooled to help community members through small grants. An innovative market money system, utilizing wooden tokens called cash crops, eliminates the need for vendors to accept credit cards and incur surcharges. A percentage of cash crop sales also contributes to funding the crop circles program.

Begun 12 years ago, at Loyola University New Orleans' Twomey Center for Peace through Justice, the work of marketumbrella.org began as a single "grow what you sell" farmers market in New Orleans. The Crescent City Farmers Market seeks to increase access to markets and opportunities for urban and rural farmers throughout the Gulf Coast and Mid-South regions. The market is now held weekly in two locations, with an annual economic impact of \$6.8 million. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the market operated in four locations, four

days each week, with an annual impact of \$12 million. It attracts increasing numbers of minority, limited-resource farmers and fishers, and draws vendors from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

"Marketumbrella.org is a unique community-bridging effort and an important new grantee for NRFC," said Jim Richardson, NRFC executive director. "It brings farmers and consumers together in a vibrant, energetic public market that creates opportunities and a sense of community for farmers, fishers and other vendors. In addition, it helps to preserve the local culture while boosting the regional economy."

The organization (www.marketumbrella.org) is one of five regional grantees across the United States to receive funding from NRFC. Other recipients include the Tallulah Conversion Project to convert a private detention facility into a regional college and workforce development center in Louisiana; The Indian Land Tenure Foundation/Native American Community Development Corporation collaborative project to support greater economic sovereignty for tribal communities in Montana and Wyoming; and initiatives in the Salinas and Pájaro Valleys and South Monterey County, California, to support wealth creation and small farm/small business development among farmworkers and immigrants. Each of the new grantees will receive \$150,000 to \$300,000 annually for an initial period of two years, with the possibility of a three-year extension.

NRFC is a collaborative philanthropic initiative of eleven private U.S. foundations and organized to expand resources for families and communities in regions of persistent poverty. NRFC recognizes that poverty is often a factor of race, class, culture, and power dynamics that are linked and concentrated and that the reinvention of rural economies is fundamental to eliminating rural poverty and effecting long-term transformative change in rural America. Therefore, NRFC supports community-based empowerment strategies designed to transform poor rural communities and regions into healthy and viable living environments and seeks to build a movement of support and advocacy for alternative rural economies based on community assets of culture, land and human capital and grounded in relationships and values of equity and justice.

To learn more about marketumbrella.org: www.marketumbrella.org

For more information on NRFC, please visit: www.nrfc.org

<http://www.loyno.edu/newsandcalendars/release.php?id=1243>

Media clips not included in this compilation:

Madison Journal (Louisiana)
Philanthropy News Digest

Forthcoming Coverage:

New Orleans News-Star