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**National Rural Funders Collaborative Announces  
Major Investment in Regional Initiatives**  
*Grantees Innovate to Address Persistent Rural Poverty and  
Disparities of Race, Class, Power*

Dallas, TX—(April 4, 2007)—Five regional initiatives in the United States will receive major funding from the National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC), to build or enhance their regional economies, foster long-term community change, and address the disparities of race, class and power that cause and reinforce persistent rural poverty. NRFC has announced that initiatives in New Orleans and Tallulah, Louisiana; a project in Montana and Wyoming, and initiatives in the Salinas and Pájaro Valleys and South Monterey County, California, have been selected to each receive \$150,000 to \$300,000 annually for two years, with the possibility of funding for an additional three years.

“We are pleased to announce the selection of five new grantees taking a regional approach to transforming their rural economies and lifting families out of poverty,” said NRFC Executive Director Jim Richardson. “All of these initiatives are demonstrating innovative ways to build or strengthen new economic sectors, expand philanthropic or public sector investment, and connect to other strategic efforts in their region. Our goal in funding these demonstration projects is to highlight and support their work and advance the development of approaches and best practices that can be replicated in rural regions across the country.”

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. Consequently, 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.

The new grantees are located in regions that NRFC is specifically targeting in its work: the Rural South, where poverty is concentrated among African American families and communities; California and the West, particularly where poverty is concentrated among Latino and immigrant families and communities; and the Northern Great Plains, in areas where poverty is concentrated among Native American families and communities. The new grantees are:

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- The *Tallulah Conversion Project*, an initiative of the Louisiana Delta Coalition for Education and Economic Development. The project is working to strengthen regional healthcare, education and economic opportunities through converting a former juvenile prison in Tallulah into a Success Center. The residential learning center will provide adult education and job training, and will serve as a one-stop regional hub for workforce development, small business development and entrepreneurial training. A prefabricated housing manufacturing plant will be developed to provide jobs to Success Center trainees as well as to help meet the need for affordable housing in the Delta and Southern Louisiana region. A community-based foundation also is planned to increase charitable giving to local nonprofits and social justice programs.
- A nonprofit organization in New Orleans, *marketumbrella.org*, which seeks to increase access to markets and opportunities for urban and rural farmers throughout the Gulf Coast and Mid South regions. Begun 12 years ago, the work of *marketumbrella.org* began as a single “grow what you sell” farmers market in New Orleans, the Crescent City Farmers Market (CCFM), which now is held weekly in two locations, providing 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. An important new part of the initiative is the establishment of crop circles, an alternative, sustainable model of grassroots philanthropy based on the tradition of giving circles. A percentage of each vendor’s income from CCFM 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 contributes to funding the crop circles program.
- The *Indian Land Tenure Foundation* and the *Native American Community Development Corporation*, which are working to move Native American reservations in Montana and Wyoming toward economic sovereignty and self-determination through facilitated community meetings and the creation and implementation of action plans to achieve community goals. This process includes education and mentoring around financial education, land acquisition, homeownership and small business development. Financial literacy and development training and mentoring will help tribal members to implement and build on their action-plan strategies, and sustain their efforts into the future. A goal of the initiative is to assist the tribes in creating alternative rural economies that are built on cultural and land assets, and then connect them to mainstream economies outside of the reservations. By regaining the control and productive use of land, financial and cultural assets, tribes can overcome their historic isolation from other non-Indian communities in their region, and begin to participate in, and benefit from, the larger economy.
- The *Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)* and the *El Pájaro Community Development Corporation (El Pájaro CDC)*, which are working in northern Monterey County and southern Santa Cruz County, California, to encourage and support small and micro-businesses as an alternative or adjunct to seasonal farm work. Agriculture is the dominant industry in the region, employing approximately 20 percent of the working-age population. The local farm worker population is largely Hispanic and poor, with a low level of education. ALBA is spurring the establishment of small farm enterprises and entrepreneur-based community development by providing business, marketing and agronomic education to local residents. El Pájaro CDC brings bilingual education to small and micro-businesses in the Hispanic communities of the Central Coast and supports the Plaza Vigil business incubator complex in downtown Watsonville. They also work with micro-entrepreneurs across the region. ALBA, El Pájaro CDC and the Salinas United Business Association (SUBA) are seeking to create a rural economy with opportunities for wealth creation through small business development, peer-based learning and broad civic participation.

- *Rai\$ing Change* is a public-private initiative in South Monterey County, CA. It seeks to restructure the rural economy through employment and business ownership opportunities that provide a living wage and upward mobility, affordable housing and homeownership, youth education and job training for the indigenous, non-Spanish-speaking farm worker population who tend to be very poor and isolated from the larger community. Monthly community meetings, homebuyer and financial literacy education, credit counseling, GED and job training, affordable housing assistance, business assistance and micro-loans are all included in their strategies to build a strong and inclusive regional economy.

“Our five new grantees have already achieved impressive successes in moving their work forward,” said Richardson. “They are focused on lifting up portions of their rural populations that are often left behind, and are committed to creating connections and opportunities where none have existed before. Their approaches are practical, bold, and comprehensive, and tailored to the specific needs and assets of their community. We are looking forward to working with them, supporting them, and learning from them as they build on the foundations they already have in place. Initiatives like these provide invaluable models and lessons for other areas as we work together to create a strong and vibrant economy throughout rural America.”

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To learn more about NRFC, please visit: [www.nrfc.org](http://www.nrfc.org)