

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Gary Peterson, ALBA  
Phone: 831-758-1469

## **Salinas and Pájaro Valleys Initiative Selected for Major Funding from National Rural Funders Collaborative**

SALINAS, CA—(April 4, 2007)—The Salinas and Pájaro Valleys Small and Micro-Business Initiative has been selected to receive a major grant from the National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC). The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA), El Pájaro Community Development Corporation (CDC) and Salinas United Business Association (SUBA) will receive \$150,000 per year for two years to increase ownership and wealth creation opportunities among area farmworkers and other low-income residents through small business development and education, increased homeownership opportunities, and better access to capital.

ALBA and El Pájaro leverage local residents' entrepreneurship with bi-lingual business, marketing, and agricultural education to help create both farm-based and urban businesses. ALBA operates two farms, with a total of 305 acres, where student farmers participate in a six-month Small Farmer Education Program before entering a farm incubator to grow their own crops for several years. During this experience, ALBA helps them to establish their own farms, through purchase or lease, with the support of numerous partner organizations. In 2006, 24 farmers were operating at ALBA, growing more than 40 crops. ALBA also has a produce distribution company, ALBA Organics, which accounts for 25 percent of fresh produce sales by those who participate in ALBA's programs.

El Pájaro CDC provides services and support to small- and micro businesses on the Central Coast and manages the Plaza Vigil business incubator complex in downtown Watsonville. It works closely with ALBA and the Salinas United Business Association (SUBA) and its business improvement district, the New Alisal of Salinas, which is a major economic center for the region's farmworker population.

"The funding from NRFC will add a much greater depth and breadth to our work," says Gary Peterson, communications and development director for ALBA. "Our goal is to help farmworkers develop successful businesses that increase their financial stability, improve their lives and also meet the needs of the local population. In partnership with SUBA and El Pájaro CDC we will reach out to existing small businesses like taquerias, mobile vendors, and small grocery stores, to help them be a stronger part of the local economy. The grant from NRFC will enable us to increase our one-on-one business education, and also help new farmers transition to

--more--

land of their own. Right now we are focused primarily on production, but we'd like to establish a commercial kitchen incubator and other value-added strategies.”

“We are pleased to announce the selection of the Salinas and Pájaro Valleys Small and Micro-Business Initiative as one of our new grantees,” said NRFC Executive Director Jim Richardson. “The Initiative is reaching out to agricultural workers who struggle to make ends meet in low-wage, seasonal farm jobs and supporting them in establishing their own entrepreneurial businesses. ALBA, El Pájaro CDC and SUBA have helped hundreds of micro- and small business owners and new farmers to join the mainstream economy and begin to invest in themselves and their community.”

The ALBA, El Pájaro CDC and SUBA initiative is one of five regional initiatives across the country to receive funding from NRFC. Other recipients include Rai\$ing Change, an initiative focused in South Monterey County to also create wealth-building opportunities and small business/small farm development among area farmworkers and immigrants; marketumbrella.org in New Orleans to increase access to markets and opportunities for urban and rural farmers throughout the Gulf Coast and Mid South Delta regions; 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 and Native American Community Development Corporation Initiative to help reservations in Montana and Wyoming move toward greater economic sovereignty. 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: [www.albafarmers.org](http://www.albafarmers.org)

For more information on NRFC, please visit: [www.nrfc.org](http://www.nrfc.org)