

Agriculture and Energy Resource Center

The citizens of Northwest Wisconsin request:

- **That the State, DATCP, DNR, OEI, and the University of Wisconsin System assist AERC in revitalizing the Ashland Agricultural Research Station.**

We are requesting support the ongoing efforts of the Agriculture and Energy Resource Center, Inc. to revitalize the Ashland Agricultural Research Station as a community asset supporting research into regionally viable agricultural and renewable energy opportunities; providing public outreach and education regarding local food and energy security; and, supporting private entrepreneurial endeavors related to regional agriculture and renewable energy initiatives.

Background

In 1911, the county boards of Ashland and Bayfield Counties donated 160 acres to the University of Wisconsin for the establishment of the Ashland Agricultural Research Station (AARS). The University operated AARS until 2006, when the station was closed and returned to the counties. The Agriculture and Energy Resource Center, Inc. (AERC) arose out of a grass roots response to the counties' requests for proposals for the future operation and development of AARS facilities. AERC focuses on issues pertaining to agriculture and renewable energy and its mission is to revitalize AARS as a community asset by encouraging and promoting regionally relevant research, public outreach and education, and promotion of private business opportunities relating to the organization's areas of focus. AERC is a Wisconsin non-stock corporation that currently operates and manages AARS pursuant to a five year lease with Ashland and Bayfield Counties.

Under AERC's leadership, AARS currently hosts the following projects:

- Green Thumb Community Gardens
- UW Extension No-Till Pasture Renovation Demonstration Trial
- Northland College Permaculture Education and Demonstration Gardens
- Short Rotation Woody Biomass Crop Trials (in association with Bayfield County UW Extension and Xcel Energy)

We request that the State, DATCP, DNR, OEI, and the University of Wisconsin System assist AERC in revitalizing the Ashland Agricultural Research Station by:

- Identifying and funding academic research opportunities with potential to develop or add value to production, processing, or distribution of agricultural and renewable energy resources best suited to the climate and growing conditions of northern Wisconsin.
- Assisting with funding and promotion of public outreach and educational programs related to local food and energy production, distribution, and security.
- Promoting the development of private enterprises in the Chequamegon Bay area related to the production, distribution and/or value enhancement of local food and energy resources.

Reason for Request: Under current Recovery Act programs, federal funding is available for a wide range of issues and projects relating to renewable energy production, advancement of sustainable agricultural practices, and promotion of regional food and energy security. Eligibility for most of these funds, however, is restricted either to governmental units or to agricultural "producers". Because AERC does not generally meet the definition of a "producer", the organization is not eligible to apply for many funding opportunities. Further, AERC is presently staffed entirely by volunteers and lacks the resources to aggressively pursue funding opportunities. Proactive partnership by state agencies and the university system would enable AERC to participate in opportunities to fund and develop projects that would convey substantial economic benefits to regional communities and help develop a resource model for food and energy security that could be replicated in counties throughout Wisconsin.

For more information contact:

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