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### **Commonwealth Outdoor Hydronic Heater Change-Out Program**

The MA Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) and the MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER) will distribute grants of up to \$15,000 (but not to exceed 100% of the equipment and installation costs), to replace problematic and nuisance OHHs.

**Application Deadline:** 3 PM, February 22, 2013. For more information, [please refer to MassCEC website.](#)

Both programs are part of the wider Commonwealth Biomass and Heat Pump Pilot Program, which includes incentives toward pellet stoves, heat pumps and wood boiler replacements. To be notified of program updates, please contact MFEP at [mfep@berkshirepioneercd.org](mailto:mfep@berkshirepioneercd.org).

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### **USDA Finalizes New Microloan Program**

**Microloans up to \$35,000 aim to assist small farmers, veterans, and disadvantaged producers**

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced a new microloan program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) designed to help small and family operations, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers secure loans under \$35,000. The new microloan program is aimed at bolstering the progress of producers through their start-up years by providing needed resources and helping to increase equity so that farmers may eventually graduate to commercial credit and expand their operations. The microloan program will also provide a less burdensome, more simplified application process in comparison to traditional farm loans.

Administered through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) Operating Loan Program, the new microloan program offers credit options and solutions to a variety of producers. FSA has a long history of providing agricultural credit to the nation's farmers and ranchers through its Operating Loan Program. In assessing its programs, FSA evaluated the needs of smaller farm operations and any unintended barriers to obtaining financing. For beginning farmers and ranchers, for instance, the new microloan program offers a simplified loan application process. In addition, for those who want to grow niche crops to sell directly to ethnic markets and farmers markets, the microloan program offers a path to obtain financing. For past FSA Rural Youth Loan recipients, the microloan program provides a bridge to successfully transition to larger-scale operations.

Producers can apply for a maximum of \$35,000 to pay for initial start-up expenses such as hoop houses to extend the growing season, essential tools, irrigation, delivery vehicles, and annual expenses such as seed, fertilizer, utilities, land rents, marketing, and distribution expenses. As their financing needs increase, applicants can apply for an operating loan up to the maximum amount of \$300,000 or obtain financing from a commercial lender under FSA's Guaranteed Loan Program.

USDA farm loans can be used to purchase land, livestock, equipment, feed, seed, and supplies, or be used to construct buildings or make farm improvements. Small farmers often rely on credit cards or personal loans, which carry high interest rates and have less flexible payment schedules, to finance their operations. Expanding access to credit, USDA's microloan will provide a simple and flexible loan process for small operations. Producers interested in applying for a microloan may contact their [MA Farm Service Agency office](#).

Full text of release at

[www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2013/01/0010.xml&contentidonly=true](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2013/01/0010.xml&contentidonly=true)

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## Upcoming Events/Workshops

**January 19 - Ag Commission Forum** - The Northampton Agricultural Commission will host a forum to connect farmers to local agricultural resources. Saturday, Smith Vocational School, Northampton – 80 Locust Street, Northampton, MA, 9 AM - Noon. This event is co-sponsored by Northampton Agricultural Commission, Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC), Mass Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). Farmers from more than 40 local communities with Ag Commissions will be invited. Participant dealers and service providers will have an opportunity to give a short presentation on their products and/or services, provide displays, and hear from local farmers about how they might better serve the farming community. There is no charge, but you need to reserve your spot. Contact John Omasta, Northampton AgCom, [hickorydell@aol.com](mailto:hickorydell@aol.com), to obtain more info and make your reservation. home: 413-586-0031, cell: 978-500-5543.

### **January 19 - Slaughter and Meat Processing in MA: Opportunities, Challenges, and Needs** - 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM, First Baptist Church, Pittsfield

The Berkshires have farms, farmers, livestock and a demand for more meat. Come learn about a major challenge to maximizing access and availability of locally raised meat. Co-sponsored by Berkshire Grown, Berkshire County Farm Bureau, Keep Berkshires Farming & Sustainable Berkshires. [Details here](#). Contact: [Barbara@berkshiregrown.org](mailto:Barbara@berkshiregrown.org). Walk-ins welcomed.

**January 30 - Winter Flower Growers Meeting** - Volante Farms, 292 Forest St., Needham, MA  
All day educational program and tours of Volante Farm including their recently redesigned and constructed farm stand and 16,000 sq. foot gutter connected greenhouse with rainwater collection, heated floor and shade curtains. Sponsored by Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association and University of Massachusetts Extension Greenhouse Crops and Floriculture Program. See: <http://extension.umass.edu/floriculture/> or contact Tina Smith, [tsmith@umext.umass.edu](mailto:tsmith@umext.umass.edu), 413-545-5306 or Bob Luczai, [BLuczai@ballhort.com](mailto:BLuczai@ballhort.com), 781-275-4811.

### **February 6-8 - 2013 NE Grows** - Boston Convention and Exhibitor Center, Boston, MA

One of the largest and most popular horticultural and green industry events in North America. New England

Grows connects 13,000+ green industry professionals with the brightest horticultural ideas, hottest selling plants, latest green industry technology, and best outdoor equipment at its 1,100+ booth horticulture tradeshow. Add to that dozens of ground-breaking green industry seminars led by world-renowned experts, and you'll understand why New England Grows is the ultimate green industry event for you and your business. [www.newenglandgrows.org/](http://www.newenglandgrows.org/).

**February 9 - Urban Farming Conference - “Cultivating Lands, Nourishing Communities, Building Businesses”** - 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM, Roxbury Community College Reggie Lewis Center, Boston, MA. The MDAR is partnering with City Growers and the Urban Farming Institute to bring you the Urban Farming Conference, “Cultivating Lands, Nourishing Communities, Building Businesses”. The annual Massachusetts Urban Farming Conference (UFC) is designed to advance the opportunities and address the barriers involved in cultivating a thriving urban farming sector. The UFC is a forum to share information regarding what is currently happening in Boston and other local urban communities and to map out a vision for urban farming in Massachusetts. Registration \$25. [Register here](#). Limited scholarships are available. For inquiries and sponsorship details, Please contact: Crystal Johnson at [Crystal@isesplanning.com](mailto:Crystal@isesplanning.com), 617-416-4915.

**February 9 & 10 - Organic Bee School** - 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM both days

Saturday class: Nate Smith House, 155 Lamartine Street, Jamaica Plain, MA

Sunday class: The Food Project, 555 Dudley Street, Dorchester, MA

During this two-day Bee School, Jean-Claude Bourrut will go over the basic techniques of organic beekeeping, including materials and equipment, beehive structure, the life cycle of bees, hive development and dynamic, seasonal apiary work, honey and hive products, common pests and diseases, and their organic management. An additional hands-on workshop will happen in the apiary in April (date TBD). For those who are thinking about getting bees or are new to beekeeping, this is a great way to learn the Hows, Whys, and Whens of organic bee management. Pre-registration required. [Register here](#). For more info., contact Drew Love at [drew@nofamass.org](mailto:drew@nofamass.org) or 330-801-0389.

**Many more events/workshops at MDAR calendar, view and bookmark today!**

[www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/events](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/events).



MDAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – MDAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit MDAR's website at [mass.gov/agr](http://mass.gov/agr), and/or follow at [twitter.com/MDARCommish](https://twitter.com/MDARCommish).