

PCFES & Community Garden to receive federal stimulus funds

Written by April Peregoy

A common complaint heard in the rural northeast area of Colorado is that local governments and projects are placed on the bottom of the state's priority list for funding—often losing out to the urban areas along the I-25 corridor.

As such, many people may not be expecting President Barack Obama's economic stimulus package to affect Phillips County much—especially with all the criticism in the media recently about how long it is taking to distribute the funds.

However, there is already some monies that are beginning to trickle into Phillips County. Phillips County Family Education Services and Holyoke Community Garden were recently able to secure stimulus funds through Northeastern Colorado Association of Local Governments (NECALG).

In May, NECALG was designated by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs as the applicant for federal stimulus funds through the community services block grant program. NECALG was given \$179,000 in federal ARRA funds to use from July 1, 2009 through Sept. 15, 2010.

The funds are to go to projects aimed at reducing poverty, revitalizing low-income communities and helping low-income families become self-sufficient. Awarded entities must use the funds to provide services and activities addressing employment, education, housing, nutrition and emergency services to combat the central causes of poverty.

"The goal is to eliminate barriers to employment," said NECALG executive director Larry Worth.

Phillips County Family Education Services and Holyoke Community Garden were the only two entities associated with Phillips County that applied for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).

PCFES was awarded \$8,670 in stimulus funds to expand its evening ESL program. According to executive director Kindra Plumb, PCFES currently offers one evening ESL class, but with the new money will now be able to offer two evening classes.

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The evening class, she explained, has a workplace focus. The majority of students who are taking it are there to learn language and skills that will help them either find work or improve their performances at their current jobs.

PCFES has only been able to offer one course in the past because of the complexities involved with teaching the course, said Plumb. Every student coming in has different levels of ability, and the teacher has to develop individual lessons accordingly. With the new funding, PCFES will now be hiring an additional teacher as well as all the materials and supplies necessary to teach the course.

Another local project benefiting from CSBG is the Holyoke Community Garden. Phillips County Extension Office horticulturist and master gardener Linda Langelo will be using the funds to host a series of workshops called "Growing Your Community From the Ground Up."

Four counties in the Golden Plains Area, including Phillips, Sedgwick, Yuma and Washington, were awarded \$21,728 to divide amongst themselves for the use of offering these workshops at no charge to the public, through their community gardens.

The 2009 Growing Power workshops focus on teaching communities and individuals how to build and sustain their own food systems.

"We're teaching people how to help themselves," said Langelo, adding families can save \$500-\$1,500 a year at the grocery store by growing their own food.

With the recent economic conditions and numerous food scares, the number of first-time gardeners is expected to increase dramatically in the next couple of years. The goal of the classes is to help these gardeners be more successful at their endeavors so they don't give up.