



Rural Development • Rural Business Service • Value Added Producer Grant Program

With Value Added Production & Professional Marketing, Small Family Farm Achieves National Brand Recognition

Mike and Candy Seely, third generation mint farmers in northwestern Oregon, saw their revenue begin to dry up when gum, toothpaste, candy, and breath mint manufacturers turned to synthetic flavoring. As this small family operation searched for new markets, they discovered the popularity of the confections made from their essential mint oils. They began selling the confections at the local farmers’ market and small retail stores, but struggled to break into larger markets.



Mike and Candy Seely standing in one of their mint fields.

Through the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) Program, USDA Rural Development provided Seely Family Farm with a grant to market and expand manufacturing of their high-quality specialty mint confections. The VAPG funds were used to develop a logo and brand recognition through revamped labelling, an upgraded website and social media capabilities, a video for the web, promotion demos, and product sampling at retail locations. The grant also helped this small producer of sustainably grown, organic heirloom mint make bulk ingredient purchases to meet increasing demand for their confections. In addition, they purchased an accounting system to better track project costs and deliverables.

Developing value added products allowed this family operation to increase its cash flow and diversify its income sources. Since the VAPG award, Seely Family Farm has increased its sales, received national media exposure, and hired 20 employees from the local unemployment rolls to help meet increasing demand. They were featured in *O*, the Oprah Magazine, and in June 2014, Seely Family Farm reached an agreement with Whole Foods Market to stock Seely Mints peppermint patties in all of its 360 stores nationwide. A select number of stores in the Pacific Northwest will also carry Seely Mint peppermint bark, mint melts, and ivory melts.

“We would not be here today without the grant from USDA Rural Development,” said Mike Seely. “If not for them, we would not have been able to find the working capital to realize our dream.” Now they are passing on that dream to their children, the fourth generation of Seely mint farmers, who are helping tend the farm using the same agricultural practices their family has used for decades while demand for Seely Mints continues to increase.

Obligation Amount: \$163,013 grant

Date of Obligation: 2011

Congressional District: Bonamici-1; Senators Wyden and Merkley

Demographics: Rural Columbia County outside Clatskanie, Oregon

Impact: Preserved a small family farm, helping them achieve national brand recognition and dramatically increase production; created 20 new jobs.