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Commissioners Partner with Local Businesses to Spur Economic Development

Franklin County Commissions recently approved the use of \$100,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding for the Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) to implement the Growing Entrepreneurs Initiative business incubation program. This investment will support small business starts ups, creating new business and jobs in Franklin County.

The first stage of the Growing Entrepreneurs Initiative will focus on developing the capacities of food-related enterprises in Franklin County. Participants will receive food industry specific training and technical assistance and will be eligible for micro-loans for their businesses. ECDI will also work with participants to bring their product to market, through training with the Kroger Company and other distributors.

“Jobs come in many different packages, and food in all of its respective forms is our largest employer in Franklin County,” said Commissioner Paula Brooks. “This funding from the ARRA ensures good jobs continue to grow in this critical industry.”

This project demonstrates a strong public-private partnership, with Franklin County’s investment leveraging support from the Kroger Company, Huntington National Bank, the U.S. Bank Central Ohio Foundation and the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Program for Investment in Microentrepreneurs. Participants will be referred to The Ohio State University’s Food Industries Center and the Columbus Health Department will provide food safety classes.

“Investing in small businesses is incredibly important during difficult economic times,” said Commissioner Marilyn Brown. “Innovative programs, like the Growing Entrepreneurs Initiative, will help move our economy forward and put residents to work.”

The Growing Entrepreneurs Initiative anticipates providing loans to 17 food-related entrepreneurs, resulting in the creation or retention of at least 20 jobs. This project will build on Ohio’s strong agriculture industry.

“This is a wonderful way to build on the agriculture industry, one of Ohio’s top industries,” said Commissioner John O’Grady. “This will allow our residents to use their creativity and innovation to bring new food products to the marketplace.”

“We see the new incubation program as an evolution of the traditional economic development model and a vision for our community for job creation and entrepreneurship," said Inna Kinney, ECDI's Founder and CEO.