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11 Farmers Receive Disaster Relief from Sow the Seeds Fund

\$50,000 total given, with more to come

MINNEAPOLIS — The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) announced today that the Sow the Seeds Fund has distributed grants totaling \$50,000 to 11 farmers in southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin, and northeast Iowa who have suffered losses due to recent floods. This was the first round of funding to farmers in that region. The Fund is focused on assisting organic and sustainable farmers who market their product directly. Farmers who market directly often have difficulty finding the same fair value crop insurance that is available to conventional farmers.

The Sow the Seeds Fund has raised over \$250,000 since the flooding this fall, a significant portion from small donations made at Midwest food co-ops, restaurants, Whole Foods Market, National Cooperative Grocers Association and on-line at www.sowtheseedsfund.org. One hundred percent of these contributions will go directly to farmers.

“We’ve been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support for our region’s sustainable farmers,” said Mark Muller, director of IATP’s Environment and Agriculture program. “It shows the close connection many consumers have with their food.”

A flood relief steering committee, consisting of agricultural and community leaders, determines how the funds are distributed. The committee is currently accepting farmer applicants for short-term, emergency funding of up to \$5,000 until November 21. After that date, and as funding allows, the committee will review all of the applications received and consider providing larger donations to farmers that have been hit particularly hard.

“A few years ago, I don’t think we would have had this wonderful response from consumers,” says George Boody, chair of the Fund’s Flood Relief Committee and executive director of the Land Stewardship Project. “Conscientious consumers, food retailers, and restaurants now recognize the high quality food, the land stewardship, and the community-building that these farmers are providing.”

Unfortunately, agricultural disasters are increasingly common. Federal and state aid has left out many small, organic farmers. When disasters strike, financial struggles become extreme and government relief funds rarely (if ever) make it to these farmers. “The Sow the Seeds Fund’s private donations are wonderful, but show a need for government support or some sort of insurance that would be available and work for organic growers, just as there is for conventional farms,” commented funding recipient Renee Randall of Sweet Earth Organic Farm. “Over the last seven years, we had very difficult growing seasons. This is not the last disaster that will affect local family farms.”

The Sow the Seeds Fund was initiated by the Wedge Co-op and IATP to support local food systems in the Midwest. In the wake of the August 2007 floods affecting many farmers integral to the region’s food system, the Fund decided to focus on the immediate need for flood relief.

The Sow the Seeds Fund Disaster Relief Committee is administered by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Wedge Food Co-op with a Steering Committee of representatives from Pastureland, Land Stewardship Project, Eastside Food Co-op, Renewing the Countryside, Heartland Food Network, Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, Avalanche Organics, Minnesota Council of Churches, Corner Table Restaurant and Riverbend Farm. For more details, go to: www.sowtheseedsfund.org.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy. <http://www.iatp.org>.