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PRESS RELEASE
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GRANT TO ASSIST MAINE'S VALUE-ADDED FOOD PRODUCERS

PORTLAND, MAINE – Over 100 of Maine's value-added food producers stand to benefit from a \$200,000 Maine Micro Enterprise Initiative grant awarded this month to three partnering organizations. Grant recipients, including Maine Centers for Women, Work, and Community (WWC), The Maine Small Business Development Centers (Maine SBDC), and the Maine Gourmet and Specialty Food Producers Association, will use the funds to launch a 15-month statewide initiative to provide targeted training and business support services.

“The grant's targeted services will boost the productivity of this already growing Maine industry,” according to Eloise Vitelli, WWC Director of Program and Policy Development. Citing a recent University of Maine study, Vitelli said “most value-added food producers are rural micro enterprises, employing less than ten full time employees.” They include producers of over 200 different products including baked goods, beverages, condiments, jams and jellies, seafood and meats, pickles and other vegetables. In the University of Maine study, almost half of the businesses surveyed indicated an interest in expanding their product line. They also cited access to technical assistance as an important need.

“The goal of this project is to increase success for Maine's small and micro enterprises engaged in food production,” said John Massaua, Maine SBDC state director. A stronger industry association, a virtual learning community, and expanded one-on-one business counseling are keys to that success, he said.

The statewide project will create local networks in four to six rural regions, reach as many as 120 new and existing micro businesses through a statewide learning conference, provide intensive counseling to 50 existing businesses, and establish a peer to peer networking and training initiative using state-of-the art on-line technologies. The project will also build capacity within the Maine Gourmet and Specialty Food Producers Association, expanding membership and improving member services including increased opportunities for participation in the annual New England Products Trade Show.

September 7, 2004

PRESS RELEASE Page 2

**Maine Small Business Development Centers
Maine Centers for Women, Work, and Community**

Maine SBDC and WCC have 20-years experience collaborating together and both are statewide organizations serving micro entrepreneurs from a network of community-based sites. The association is a 17 year old organization with a statewide membership of over 60 value-added food producers. The Maine Micro Enterprise Fund is administered by the state Department of Economic and Community Development. ###

About Maine Small Business Development Centers: *Maine Small Business Development Centers (Maine SBDC) and its tech-focus group, Maine Small Business & Technology Development Centers (Maine SBTDC) provide comprehensive business management assistance, training, resource and information services to Maine's micro, small and technology-based business communities. Business assistance is provided at no cost to business owners by professional certified business counselors who meet rigorous education and business experience standards.*

Maine SBDC/SBTDC is a partnership program of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in association with the SBA/SBDC, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development (Maine DECD), the University of Southern Maine (USM), and leading economic and/or community development hosting organizations, including the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG), Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC), and the Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC); with support from the Maine Technology Institute (MTI), the University of Maine (UMaine), and other contractors, allies and stakeholders.

Accredited by the Association of Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC) and administered by USM's School of Business, Maine SBDC/SBTDC operates a network of 11 service centers and 25 outreach offices located conveniently throughout the state. Maine SBDC/SBTDC provides comprehensive business management assistance, training, resource and information services to Maine's micro, small, and technology-based business communities.

Maine SBDC/SBTDC's mission is to engage itself and others in development activities that contribute to the improvement of the economic climate for and the success of micro, small, and technology-based businesses in the State of Maine. Its focus is to assist in the creation, growth and maintenance of viable small businesses and the jobs these businesses provide. Maine SBDC/SBTDC serves those seeking assistance who are willing and able to build, sustain, and/or expand their business. More information about the Maine SBDC/SBTDC can be found at www.mainesbdc.org.

About Women, Work, and Community: *Women, Work, and Community's mission is to improve the economic lives of Maine women and their families by increasing the income, assets, earning potential and improving the quality of life for displaced homemakers, single parents, welfare recipients, and other disadvantaged workers. WWC works with*

women “where they are” and provides them with support, guidance, and the tools they need to take the next steps toward a more promising future.

WWC has been active in supporting entrepreneurship for twenty years through such programs as New VenturesTM, a hands-on training class that leads to the development of a business plan. WWC provides start-up support and coaching, access to credit through a micro-loan fund, and linkages to on-going technical assistance. WWC is one of a core group of national microenterprise programs working to establish common performance measures for the microenterprise industry. WWC has been instrumental in promoting self-employment as an option within the state welfare and unemployment assistance programs, giving low-income and unemployed workers the option to create their own job through business activity.

In addition to its work in microenterprise development, WWC provides training, advocacy and assistance in three other program areas: workforce development (including career planning, employment, retention and advancement in jobs that pay a living wage; and access to education and skills training), asset development through a matched saving program, training in money management, and car and computer donations; and leadership development through a curriculum that explores the workings of the local economy, women's roles in building community, and opportunities to practice leadership

WWC is administered by the University of Maine at Augusta, University of Maine System, and recently celebrated its 25th anniversary serving Maine women and their families. More information is available at www.womenworkandcommunity.org.

About Maine Gourmet and Specialty Food Producers of Maine: *Maine Gourmet and Specialty Food Producers of Maine was founded in 1987 to promote Maine's value-added food producers. It has four goals: to foster a spirit of cooperation, stability and economic well being among its members; to provide a framework for networking and cooperative activities including marketing and advertising; to provide an advocacy role in the legislature; and to promote a positive image of foods produced and processed in Maine. MGSFP members participate in the Maine Department of Agriculture Trade Show and the Annual Maine Gourmet Food Festival. It currently has a roster of over 60 members. Contact Michael Hallundbaek, MGSFP President, at mhallundbaek@thebetterchoice.com.*