



NATIONAL GRANGE

Elevating rural interests since 1867

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Rural Life Initiative: A Year of Impact

by Philip J Vonada, National Grange Communications Director

The National Grange's Rural Life Initiative (RLI) continues to prove what's possible when local communities are empowered to lead. Building on its successful 2024 pilot and the holiday mini-grant cycle, the 2025 RLI summer grants expanded both reach and impact, supporting dozens of Granges as they transformed creative ideas into real, measurable change in their communities.

In 2025, 45 Granges submitted 60 applications, with 32 Granges in 14 states ultimately receiving grant funding. These projects quickly translated into action: between July and September, participating Granges hosted nearly 50 community events and formed partnerships with over 110 other organizations, including schools, nonprofits, churches, and other community organizations. Collectively, these efforts generated more than 350 new members – and even more people interested or engaged, reflecting renewed awareness of the Grange's relevance and value in today's communities.

This year, RLI ran two funding tracks designed to support both short-term impact and long-term strategy. Thirty \$1,000 Summer Grants enabled local Granges to rapidly implement community-based events and services, while two \$5,000 Larger Grants supported more complex, scalable initiatives. The larger grants were awarded to Dry Creek Grange #646 (Washington) and Little Lake Grange #670 (California), supporting projects with extended timelines and deeper community engagement; their programs wrap up soon.

Projects funded through RLI addressed a wide range of community needs while advancing the Grange's mission of service and leadership. In Pennsylvania, Eagle Grange #1 hosted "Prep for Success," distributing school supplies, hygiene items, shelf-stable food, and providing complimentary haircuts to help students begin the academic year prepared and confident. In New Jersey, Meyersville Grange #188 hosted a community screening of *Saving the Great Swamp*, fostering dialogue around environmental stewardship. In Oregon, Little Deschutes Grange #939 and Rockford Grange #501 created hands-on youth and family programs focused on gardening and food preservation. Idaho's Mica Flats Grange #436 launched a senior-focused wellness initiative designed to reduce fall risk and improve mobility, while Washington's Whelan-Ewartsville Grange #114 revived traditional community dances to restore its role as a central gathering place.

From mental health workshops in New York to quilt raffles and community 5K races in Kansas that helped reduce student lunch debt, each project reflected a deep understanding of local needs and a commitment to service.

“The Rural Life Initiative has strengthened local Granges and communities in a way that hasn’t been seen before,” said healthcare advocate and fundraiser Nona Bear, who has hosted several RLI webinars and serves on the review panel. “The way the grants function allows Granges to dream bigger, dig deeper, and make a stronger impact than they’ve ever imagined. And the results speak for themselves, with growth and renewed interest in all corners of the country.”

National Grange President Christine Hamp emphasized that the true success of RLI lies in its long-term community-building impact.

“The Rural Life Initiative is more than a grant program. It is an investment in people, leadership, and the future of rural America. These projects show what happens when local Granges are equipped and empowered to lead. The impact goes far beyond a single event; it strengthens relationships, builds resilience, and secures the Grange’s role in our communities for generations to come,” said Hamp.

As the program moves forward, RLI continues to serve as a proven model for grassroots innovation, positioning local Granges as visible, active, and trusted leaders in community development. The Rural Life Initiative proves that when local leaders are given real support, rural communities don’t just survive – they thrive.

Stay tuned to the next few issues of *Grange Today!* and *Good Day!* for success stories from some of the Granges who received grants, and sneak peeks at what’s to come for the Rural Life Initiative.

It is recommended that all those interested in future opportunities to help bridge gaps in their hometowns should tune in to the National Grange’s new *Strategies to Strengthen Our Communities* webinar series. These three webinars, “From Idea to Impact” on January 13, 2026, “Lessons Learned: Success Stories from 2025” on February 10, 2026, and “Engaging New Energy” on March 10, 2026, will focus on the RLI program. Register for the first webinar at <https://grange.biz/RLIwebinar>. Registered attendees who stay through the end of the webinar will receive a special gift following the event.

There are big things on the horizon - be sure that you and your Grange are part of the story and action.

Founded in 1867, the Grange is a fraternal, nonpartisan organization with about 140,000 members across the nation in 1,400 local chapters. Open to anyone age 14 and older interested in agriculture, rural concerns, or bettering their community, the Grange never endorses candidates but works on issues made policy of the organization through a grassroots vetting process.

Grange members provide millions of hours of service and dollars in donations annually based on the needs identified in their local communities. From providing dictionaries to third-grade students often unserved or underserved by broadband internet, to hosting candidate forums, to providing handmade caps for newborns, Grange members find ways to improve the lives of their neighbors both in service and through advocacy efforts.

Learn more about the Grange and our grassroots policy and priority issues, the service of members across the nation to improve the quality of life in their communities, and where you can find a Grange local to you by visiting www.nationalgrange.org.