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WISCONSIN ADDED TO STATES TO BE BEAUTIFIED

Wisconsin has been added to the list of states to be beautified under the Green Thumb program, Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz announced today.

A new agreement, signed today by Green Thumb, Inc., and the U. S. Department of Labor, will keep 721 elderly men busy in six states. It will be funded under the Nelson Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, called Operation Mainstream, which seeks to put unemployed small-town and rural Americans to work on community betterment projects.

The new agreement represents a major enlargement of the contract signed by the Labor Department last week, its first Nelson Amendment agreement since it took over the program March 14 from the Office of Economic Opportunity.

The initial agreement provided work for 400 men in five states. The new agreement expands total enrollments to 721 -- 91 men in Arkansas, 210 each in Indiana and Minnesota, and 70 each in New Jersey, Oregon and Wisconsin.

Total cost has been budgeted at \$525,910 to keep the expanded project moving along for the next 90 days. Of this, the Labor Department's Bureau of Work Programs is funding \$438,260, and the sponsoring organization, Green Thumb, Inc., \$87,605. This will give both organizations time to work out the next phase of the program.

Green Thumbers last year planted more than 500,000 trees, built 50 new parks, rebuilt 50 older parks, created hundreds of rest areas, reconstructed historical park sites and buildings, and tidied up thousands of miles of highways. Their average age was 67 and two were 89.

Their previous average annual income was \$900 per year per couple. Green Thumb, a creation of the National Farmers Union, pays them up to \$1,500 a year for three days of work a week.

The Nelson Amendment, named for Senator Gaylord Nelson, provides for conservation, beautification and community betterment work for persons with poor employment prospects because of age or other reasons. It was aimed at elderly people, estimated at close to a million, who live at or near the starvation level in small towns and rural areas, but who refuse to accept welfare.

Last year about 80 percent of the funds for Green Thumb was used to employ low income older and retired farmers, according to the National Farmers Union. State and local public and private agencies and groups contributed about \$400,000 for the project and the Federal government, slightly more than \$1 million.

Here are the Counties in which the men will be working:

- Arkansas -- Cleveland, Newton, Madison, Pike, Fulton, Sharp, Perry, Stone and Pulaski.
- Indiana -- Posey, Gibson, Pike, Warrick, Dubois, Orange, Washington, Scott, Jackson, Jennings, Knox, Lawrence, Brown, Bartholomew, Jefferson and Sullivan.
- Minnesota -- Todd, Ottertail, Wadena, Dodge, Douglas, Benton, Waubasha, Crow Wing, Morrison, Pope, Hubbard, Clearwater and Becker.
- New Jersey -- Burlington, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Atlantic, Ocean, Monmouth and Salem.
- Oregon -- Hood River, Linn, Clackamas, Marion and Washington.
- Wisconsin -- Clark, Taylor, Marathon, Jackson and Wood.

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