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## **Rabobank Grant Awarded to Help Create Improved Data Collection System for Microenterprise Industry**

**Washington, DC, December 11, 2008** – Researchers at the Aspen Institute working to develop a more advanced method of collecting data on the domestic microenterprise industry have gotten a boost from a \$75,000 grant from Rabobank, N.A., part of the Rabobank Group, a full-range financial services provider.

The researchers are building on their previous work, which resulted in a tool used by many microenterprise development programs to gauge their performance, and the progress of clients who have received training and support to build businesses. The tool, known as MicroTest, has become the industry standard for data collection in the U.S. microenterprise development industry.

Microenterprises are defined as very small businesses capitalized with \$35,000 or less and employing five or fewer people. It is estimated that there are 20 million microenterprises in the U.S. and 500 development organizations nationwide assisting micro business owners with capital and/or training.

Aspen Institute researchers are now seeking to improve on their earlier tool, by adding features that will allow for additional data to be collected, resulting in a more complete picture of the industry.

MicroTest was developed by FIELD, the Microenterprise Fund for Innovation, Effectiveness, Learning and Dissemination, the leading producer of research on the domestic microenterprise industry. FIELD is a project of the Aspen Institute.

The new data collection project appealed to the bank, according to Fred Mendez, Rabobank's senior vice president for community development, because "our extensive partnerships with microfinance organizations throughout the world have shown us the importance of accurate and comprehensive data in order to define success, tailor our investments, and gain sufficient confidence to make longer term commitments.

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“Rabobank recognizes that microfinance comprises much more than microcredit alone,” he added. “Broadly speaking, it involves building sustainable financial institutions and offering products and services that people need, such as savings, insurance, leasing and venture capital services. With our recent entry into the United States, we welcome the opportunity to work with Aspen to bring our experience and their skills together in the hope that we can achieve a transformative result for the U.S. microfinance industry.”

FIELD Director Elaine Edgcomb explained the importance of MicroTest to the field: “For more than 10 years, MicroTest has been *the* performance measurement tool for the U.S. microenterprise industry – helping to demonstrate the industry’s value to donors and the policy community, while also helping practitioners improve organizational effectiveness.

“We’re thrilled that Rabobank understands the important role MicroTest plays in supporting high-quality performance in microenterprise development, and we’re grateful for their support,” she said.

**Rabobank, N.A.** ([www.rabobank.com](http://www.rabobank.com)) is a California-based community bank and part of the Rabobank Group, a AAA rated, 110-year-old global financial services leader with assets of more than \$800 billion and operations in more than 35 countries around the world.

**FIELD** ([www.fieldus.org](http://www.fieldus.org)), which is part of the Aspen Institute, has been engaged in domestic microenterprise research for nearly a decade. For more information about FIELD, visit [www.fieldus.org](http://www.fieldus.org).

**The Aspen Institute** mission is twofold: to foster values-based leadership, encouraging individuals to reflect on the ideals and ideas that define a good society, and to provide a neutral and balanced venue for discussing and acting on critical issues. The Aspen Institute does this primarily in four ways: seminars, young-leader fellowships around the globe, policy programs and public conferences and events. The Institute is based in Washington, DC, Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore and has an international network of partners. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).

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