

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

Reinvigorating Rural Communities

Achieving self-sufficiency in rural America.

The lack of affordable housing, jobs and business development, and declines in funding for social welfare programs jeopardize the quality of life and community vitality in rural America. To help bolster and revitalize rural economies, Land-Grant universities and USDA work together to improve housing, community appearance, employment, business development, leadership skills and financial management techniques.

Payoff

- **Strength in leadership.** In Texas, **Prairie View A&M's** Community Voices program taught 1,500 rural residents to develop their leadership skills. The curriculum also helps include Hispanics in the local culture. More than 45 high school girls trained in Community Voices formed the "Latinos for College" club to raise funds for higher education. Their efforts inspired their mothers to learn English, pass the GED and enroll in junior college. In rural Minnesota, many potential young adult leaders have left the area. To help this situation, **Minnesota** Extension taught leadership to more than 2,400 people. Program graduates are enhancing a statewide network for information and assistance in community planning. **New Hampshire** Extension's Community Profiles Program recruited more than 150 volunteer leaders to work on community action committees.
- **First impressions.** Across West Virginia, rural communities are working to improve and expand to become more attractive, desirable places to live and work. **West Virginia** Extension's statewide program, First Impressions, helped residents in 11 communities make their towns more attractive to first-time visitors. In Texas, **Prairie View A&M** county staff conducted community maintenance and safety programs for 20 communities, and 205 people adopted home-maintenance practices. The **Purdue** Extension Master Gardeners Program is offered in 56 sites throughout Indiana. Volunteers in 73 counties have managed landscape beautification projects and improved the appearance of community gardens. Similar Master Gardener programs are being conducted successfully at **Rutgers, Ohio State, Oregon State** and many other Land-Grant universities.

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- **Financial fitness.** High rates of unemployment, consumer debt and an economy in recession are creating financial stress for Missouri families. **Missouri** Extension provided financial management education to more than 28,000 people. A Financial Management for Women program reached 624 mid-life to older women, and 35 percent of them revised spending and savings goals, 14 percent reduced debt and 10 percent started saving on a regular basis. In **Louisiana**, potential entrepreneurs learned the basics of financial management and how to write business plans preparing them for successful entry into their business communities. **Tennessee State, Florida A&M, Nebraska** and several other Land-Grant universities offer similar financial training programs.
- **Securing affordable housing.** To help low-income working families in one county secure affordable, quality housing, **Tennessee** Extension worked with Habitat for Humanity to provide 50 hours of financial management training to seven families chosen to receive homes. These families have kept their homes and stayed current on their payments. **Louisiana State** also collaborates with Habitat for Humanity to assist potential home buyers. In Texas, **Prairie View A&M** Extension helped area residents in two counties secure housing through the First Time Home Buyers Education program. **Minnesota** Extension's Business Retention and Expansion Strategies programs helped residents in rural Springfield complete a four-unit apartment building and build four homes.
- **A powerful resource.** Rural North Dakotans have limited access to Internet resources that could help build their communities and facilitate economic development. **North Dakota State** Extension launched its Master Internet Volunteer program, providing Internet training to 400 people in 42 of North Dakota's 53 counties. **Washington State's** Rural Telework Project helps communities attract telework jobs. Washington Dental Service, the state's largest dental insurance provider, leased and equipped a call center where up to 70 employees can handle customer service, data entry and billing. Learning computer skills in conventional classes was especially challenging for Hispanics in a Nebraska county, so **Nebraska** Extension began offering Bridging the Technology Gap computer classes in Spanish and English.
- **Foundation for success.** **Missouri** Extension developed the Missouri Business Development Network to address small business owners' marketing and economic concerns. In one year, USDA value-added grants to Missouri agricultural producers increased from \$131,000 to \$2.8 million, small businesses received individual counseling in marketing and increased sales by \$73.1 million, and 369 jobs were created. To market existing resources in the northeast Louisiana Delta region, **Louisiana State** Extension collaborated with the Delta Outdoors and Wildlife Association. Thirty businesses have memberships in the association and promote the Delta region on the World Wide Web.
- **"When you work."** **Arizona's** Extension Connection program helps welfare recipients transition into the work force. More than 300 high-risk adults graduated from the program, and more than 150 have been employed more than a year. Extension educators in **Wisconsin** use the "When You Work" curriculum to prepare and educate limited-income families entering the work force—3,219 people have used the lessons, which focus on managing money, time and stress management. Participants use a written spending plan and track expenses. **Nebraska** Extension's Building Nebraska Families program helped former welfare recipients raise their average income from \$452 a month to \$786. **Virginia State** Extension provided child care training to help welfare recipients secure employment. Forty-four people completed the training, 26 are employed in child care and 16 have secured jobs in unrelated disciplines.



**Cooperative State Research, Education,
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