



United States Department of Agriculture

# StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity



Rural Americans face many unique challenges every day, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides assistance to help rural communities prosper. Unfortunately, 85 percent of America’s persistent poverty counties are in rural America –and we can’t allow these areas to be left behind.

USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative works to address the unique set of challenges faced by many of America’s rural communities. Through StrikeForce, USDA is leveraging resources and collaborating with partners and stakeholders to improve economic opportunity and quality of life in these areas.

StrikeForce now operates in over 700 rural counties, parishes, boroughs, tribal reservations, and Colonias in 20 states, including Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and West Virginia.

## Encouraging Growth, Creating Opportunity, Increasing Participation

USDA’s StrikeForce aims to increase investment in rural communities through intensive outreach and stronger partnership.

USDA partners with rural communities and regions on locally-supported projects. USDA takes steps, in partnership with the community, to provide technical assistance and explanation as needed to ensure that communities can fully access USDA programs.

Since 2010, through StrikeForce, USDA has partnered with over 400 community organizations, businesses, foundations, universities and other groups to support 80,300 projects and ushered more than \$9.7 billion in investments into rural America.

## Working In Partnership with Communities

- In Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia and Mississippi, StrikeForce is improving access to capital and markets for small minority farmers. Members of farmers’ agricultural cooperatives are now providing locally grown peas, greens

and watermelons to national grocery chains for sale in select stores.

- In Nevada, StrikeForce is improving access to healthy, affordable food in Indian Country. Working with the Tribes, the Nevada Department of Agriculture and local extension services, USDA is promoting access to locally grown foods on Tribal lands in the state.
- In New Mexico, USDA is increasing homeownership opportunities for families living in the Colonias communities of Luna, Hidalgo and Dona Ana Counties along the U.S./ Mexico border. USDA finalized 75 home loans and grants in these StrikeForce county areas in fiscal year 2013, a 30% increase over fiscal year 2012.
- In South Carolina, the StrikeForce team helped over 100 farmers and ranchers understand what USDA services were available to them to bring new opportunities to their communities.
- In South Dakota, the StrikeForce team financed a new administration building for the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Tribe, which will house 28 public service, Tribal and other agencies.

## Achieving Meaningful Results

- The Farm Service Agency (FSA) saw a 14% increase in the total direct farm loan applications received in StrikeForce areas since the beginning of the initiative.
- In fiscal year 2013, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provided nearly \$9.3 million to fund microloans in StrikeForce areas. Approximately 84% of the loans were provided to socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers.
- Last year, the number of landowners applying for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs in StrikeForce areas increased by 82% over the previous year.
- In FY 2013, the Rural Housing Community Facilities (CF) Program obligated a total of \$68 million to fund projects in StrikeForce areas—a 4.5% increase over 2012.
- Between 2012 and 2013, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) doubled the redemption of SNAP benefits at farmers markets from \$2 million to over \$4 million in StrikeForce states—a more than 100% increase.
- In 2012, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) increased the number of children in StrikeForce states receiving free or reduced price school breakfasts by 7.4%.

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