



USDA Strike Force Initiative

**A pilot in:
Arkansas,
Georgia,
Mississippi**



2011 Annual Report



A Message from the Administrator

Bruce Nelson, FSA

This has been a difficult year for producers. Flooding in the Midwest and drought in the southern part of the U.S. has left many farmers and ranchers looking to FSA for help. As we embark on an era of transformation at the Department of Agriculture, and in our own agency, I'm pleased to update you on the successes the Farm Service Agency have had in implementing the Secretary's Strike Force Initiative pilot in the Southeast. FSA, along with sister agencies Natural Resources for Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development have partnered through the StrikeForce Initiative to provide relief to persistent high-poverty counties through a team concept. To implement the StrikeForce Initiative, our agencies work in partnership with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and other USDA agencies, to improve outreach methods and provide assistance to persistent poverty communities and farmers. Ultimately we want to increase awareness of and participation in USDA's programs, as well as provide additional economic benefits to these areas in order to create sustainability in these distressed areas. USDA is currently piloting this initiative in 137 counties in Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi.

We exist because of our producers and we are excited about new initiatives on crop reporting and microloans to better serve all, especially socially disadvantaged producers and Beginning Farmers. Additionally, we are improving communication through the use of social media and other electronic methods. These initiatives, along with a number of other activities specifically for StrikeForce pilot counties, are geared towards improving participation and making our programs and services more accessible. We have made an increased effort to expand program participation particularly amongst socially disadvantaged groups. To achieve our goal we have devoted staff resources to reinforce ongoing outreach efforts to help producers understand the assistance we provide and prepare them to participate in our programs. In FY 2011 alone, FSA has invested 1.3 billion in financial assistance through farm loan and farm programs.

As we enter into the next year of this important initiative, we look forward to working more collaboratively with our other USDA Agencies to leverage resources and build capacity to more effectively serve rural America.

The following pages highlight success stories from FSA's StrikeForce Initiative and concurrent efforts to bring programs to socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers and landowners in each pilot state. These stories are only a snapshot of the benefits Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi farmers receive from the dedicated employees and partners of FSA.

Bruce Nelson

Arkansas

StrikeForce Counties: *Arkansas, Bradley, Chicot, Clark, Columbia, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Monroe, Nevada, Newton, Ouachita, Phillips, Randolph, Searcy, Sevier, St. Francis, and Woodruff*

USDA Team Collaborations: Held several meetings with RD, NRCS and Community Based partners in the Strike Force counties.

Chicot County Direct Youth Operating Loan

Tyler Garza is 13 years of age. His parents operate a cattle farm in south Chicot County in Eudora, AR. He participates & is sponsored by Hope Ranch (a non-profit organization for at-risk youth in Southeast Arkansas which works with kids & exposes them to various farm related opportunities working with horses, cattle & other livestock). Tyler received a youth loan to purchase cows and honey bee hives.



Tyler Garza, youth borrower, and Grayland Fredericks, FLO.

Jackson County Direct Youth Operating Loans

Colby Thomas, Hailey Wallace, and Lee Thomas, sisters and brother, have each obtained USDA Farm Service Agency Rural Youth Loans to purchase cattle. Colby and Lee Thomas were the first of the siblings to receive youth loans in 2010 and Hailey received her \$5,000 youth loan on April 12, 2011. The three youth borrowers are working diligently to raise a quality beef animal and build their cattle herds. Their cattle are located on their family farm in Jackson County, Arkansas.



Colby Thomas, Hailey Wallace, and Lee Thomas with their beef cattle herd in Jackson County, Arkansas.

Newton County Direct Operating Loan

Grayson Woods is a Beginning Farmer located in Newton County. Grayson began his relationship with FSA in 2007 with a Youth Loan of \$4000 to purchase steers. He was a high student at the time and was a member of the local FFA chapter. He paid that loan off ahead of schedule. In 2008 he received another youth loan of \$4000 and purchased 5 cow/calf pairs. Also in 2008 Grayson was chosen as one of Newton county's Young Farmers of the Year. He purchased another 5 cow/calf pairs with a \$5000 Youth Loan in 2009. After graduating from High School in 2009, Grayson began his college career. In 2011 Grayson received a \$26,000 Operating Loan to purchase a tractor. Grayson is now pursuing a degree in Agriculture and continuing his cattle operation.



Grayson Woods



Mark Shepherd

Clark County Direct Operating Loan

Mark Shepherd received an FSA Operating Loan for \$55,000 to pay finance the 2011 crop year. Mr. Shepherd farms soybeans and wheat in Clark County, Arkansas. Shepherd had farming with his father since 2005. When his father retired, Shepherd took over the family operation that has been in place for years.

His operation consists of 482 acres of soybeans and 42 acres of wheat. He also. He also purchased his father's equipment which consists of tractors planter, combine, field cultivator, grain cart, etc.

Clark County Farm Loan Manager advised "There are not many row crop farming operations left in Southwest Arkansas due to the economy and other factors. FSA was able to provide assistance for Mr. Shepherd to continue the tradition of living off the family farm."



Jarrod Earnest

Desha County Farm Operating Loan

Jarrod Earnest is a row crop producer who grows soybeans. He has been in business for three years. Before venturing out on his own he managed his father's farm and worked part time at the University of Arkansas Research Center in Rowher. Jarrod decide that farming was the only way of life he knew and he came to FSA to help him start his 700 acre operation. Not only does Jarrod farm his own operation but in 2010 his father became very ill and could not farm his 3,600 acres and Jarrod took over his operation with very little seasonal help. Farming is what he loves to do and FSA is grateful for the opportunity to help him achieve his dream.



Shawn Smith

St. Francis County Farm Operating Loan

Shawn Smith is a beginning farmer. He was raised in a farm family and began his own operation in 2009 with financing from Farm Service Agency. He has a row crop operation consisting of 399.9 acres of soybeans. In 2011, FSA provided financial assistance with a fixed rate, low interest loan to purchase a field cultivator. In 2010, Mr. Smith purchased a tractor, combine and header with FSA direct loan assistance. Mr. Smith is gradually building his farming operation to enhance the success of his operation.

Direct Crop Payments enable Mr. Smith to successfully meet his goals in his farming operation. Mr. Smith received a CAP (Crop Assistance Program), in the amount of \$1,861.00 to help farmers assist him during a stressful time with the economy and excessive rainfall. Mr. Smith has been approved and will receive Direct and Counter Cyclical Payments in the amount of \$4,651.00.

**Hempstead County
Livestock Indemnity Program**

George Alvarado is a contract poultry producer. He has been in the business for several years. On April 4, 2011, a tornado destroyed four poultry houses. The houses contained 50,131 layers at the time of the storm. The houses were completely destroyed. On April 7, 2011, Mr. Alvarado applied for LIP assistance and received a payment of \$12,134 on April 22, 2011. Mr. Alvarado is now in the process of cleaning up and preparing to rebuild.



George Alvarado standing in front of destroyed poultry houses

**Lowndes County
Direct Farm Operating Loan**

Ms. Kara Short began farming in 2006 and received her first FSA Beginning Farmer loan in 2010. Her farming operation located in Wabash, Arkansas, consists of 991 acres of soybeans that she raises with the assistance of her husband and one farm laborer. On June 8, 2011, Ms. Short applied for and received an annual operating loan in the amount of \$218,120 to grow soybeans. Even with the obstacle of replanting, due to the severe flooding that occurred in Arkansas, Ms. Short's soybean fields are beginning to bloom and she is on track to produce an excellent crop.



Ms. Karah Short, Farm Loan Borrower and Ms. Hendra Woodfork, Farm Loan Manager, in one of Ms. Short's soybean field.

**Arkansas County
Direct Farm Operating Loan**

In 2010 "Sugar Ray" Wofford obtained an Operating Loan and was able to pay it back in full. This was not the case in many instances since 2010 was not a good crop year due to weather conditions. Beginning in February 2011, Mr. Wofford obtained three operating loans totaling \$97,800 for production expenses associated with his rice and soybean crops. A recent farm visit by FSA personnel revealed the crops to be in good condition with the aid of irrigation and weed/grass control measures being applied. Some crop damage had been done by deer seeking higher ground from flooding in the area.



"Sugar Ray" Wofford

Georgia

StrikeForce Counties: *Appling, Atkinson, Baker, Baldwin, Ben Hill, Berrien, Bulloch, Calhoun, Candler, Charlton, Clay, Clinch, Coffee, Colquitt, Cook, Crisp, Decatur, Dodge, Dooley, Early, Emanuel, Evans, Grady, Hancock, Irwin, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Laurens, Macon, Miller, Mitchell, Montgomery, Peach, Pulaski, Quitman, Randolph, Screven, Seminole, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taliaferro, Tattnall, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Toombs, Treutlen, Turner, Ware, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wheeler, Wilcox, and Wilkes*

USDA Team Collaborations: Held workshops and seminars in over 26 counties with NRCS, RD and Community based partners with a total estimated 8,595 people attending.



Hancock County Farm Ownership Loan & Farm Operating Loan

The Mayfield Fish Farm was originally constructed in 1971 and when in full production was named by Time Magazine as one of the largest and most scientific catfish farms in the world.

After years of several non-productive owners, Johnny Thornton wants to bring that title back to this Hancock county farm.

With the support and assistance of the University of Georgia at Tifton and USDA's Farm Service Agency, Thornton is well on his way of doing just that.

Through FSA's Direct Farm Ownership loan program Thornton received \$300,000 to purchase 358.5 acre Loan Manager Lori-Ann Branch, Thornton also received an additional \$300,000 in FSA Direct Farm Operating Loan funds for equipment and annual operating costs.

"Mr. Thornton has the support and enthusiasm of the Mayfield community! He is also working with Dr. Gary Burtle at The University of Georgia at Tifton, who have obtained a research grant which will allow the University to grow fish in numerous raceways on Mr. Thornton's farm. Having Dr. Burtle there gives Mr. Thornton hands on assistance from an expert for his operation."

With this funding Mr. Thornton will be able not only to return this farm to production, but has goals of starting a processing plant to employ a large number of people in the area.

FSA District Director John Rudowske commented, "Getting this farm back into production full swing will be a real asset to the economy of Hancock County; not only from a fish production standpoint but from the potential jobs and leadership toward fish farming that it will create."

Sumter County Conservation Reserve Program

In 1938 Otis and Azzie Lee Floyd purchased a 200 acre farm in Sumter County Georgia.

Farming with dedication and hard work the Floyds were able to pay for their farm and build a house where they raised 8 children and 18 grandchildren including Joann Floyd. Joann recounts memories of her grandmother, "She earned money from selling butter, milk and eggs by milking a cow and raising chickens. My grandfather worked hard in the fields growing corn, cotton and peanuts."

Otis Floyd died in 1979 and Azzie Lee passed away ten years later in 1989. After their deaths two sons tried farming the family farm, but they were not as successful as Otis Sr. After years of struggling to pay property taxes and maintain the farm and family home, Joann and a fellow grandchild raised on the farm, Otis Floyd, III decided they needed to find a way for the farm to generate income to pay for taxes and maintenance. "We knew we didn't want to sell the farm because our grandparents had worked too hard and invested too much for a place their children and descendants could call home," Joann recalled.

Joann and her cousin Otis attended an event sponsored by Fort Valley State University in March 2011 at Friendship Baptist Church in Americus, Georgia. At the meeting they listened to FSA Sumter County Executive Director, Phil Howell talk about various FSA programs available to landowners. One program in particular, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), peaked their interest. The two spoke with Phil after the meeting in greater detail about the program. They learned the CRP offers landowners an annual rental payment for devoting farmland to conservation uses. Also, the CRP pays up to 50% of the cost to establish practices on the land that conserve the land's resources and provide benefits to wildlife.

Together Joann and Otis determined the CRP offered their family the best opportunity to save Otis and Azzie Lee's farm for all descendants. They could receive cost shares to plant cropland to pine trees for a long term investment and receive rental payments for 10 years which would provide income while the trees were growing on the 37 acres offered.

Joann was delighted to learn the offer was accepted four months later and looks forward to making arrangements for preparing the acreage to be planted to trees and hopefully securing her grandparents dream of leaving a farm legacy for their children and grandchildren. Joann fondly remembers family celebrations on the farm such as July 4th when BBQ was cooked over an open fire and all family members enjoyed socializing; "Hopefully now, my children, nieces and nephews will all benefit from this and have the same opportunity I had to experience family fellowship."



Joann Floyd



Terrance Moon benefited from the LFP

**Terrell County
Livestock Forage Program**

With the extreme drought conditions that livestock producers continue to endure throughout Georgia especially in South Georgia, the LFP program helped livestock producers tremendously. The funding prevented producers from having to liquidate herds and also helped to supply the additional feed needed during these difficult times.

Terrance Moon of Terrell County Georgia stated FSA's program helped offset his out of pocket feed costs for his livestock.

Terrell County was declared a D4 County in mid-summer. Through concentrated outreach methods, news of the program was provided to all local organizations and targeted outreach groups. Without the targeted outreach efforts made, SDA producers who do not normally conduct business with the Agency would not have known about this program. That's the beauty of outreach—reaching the non-traditionally served customers.



Johnnie Mae and Ethel Abrams

**Thomas County
Conservation Reserve Program**

The Abrams Farm was established in early 1900's by Jordan Abrams Sr. and Jordon Abrams Jr., African American farmers, who were able to secure ownership over 500 acres almost 100 years ago. This major accomplishment was a testament to their belief in personal and financial sustainability and land ownership.

Lenoris Abrams Sr. continued the legacy and progress by graduating from Fort Valley State University with a BS degree in Agriculture education and MS in Agriculture education from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). He coordinated the Future Farmers of America program (FFA) and taught adult farming classes. Glenn Abrams Sr., Lenoris Abrams' brother, was a lifetime farmer, stock market guru and true expert on farming trends and operational matters. He was the glue that held the Abrams farm together. Their partnership and focus on family allowed the Abrams to keep so much acreage while other farms sold their family properties.

In 2010, the offspring of both families began to take part in the overall operation and management of the farms. As co-managers Johnnie Mae Abrams and Ethel Abrams, two sister-in-laws, are benefiting from the CRP program by sustaining the natural resources of the farm and at the same time generating income that will allow for needed restoration such as the pecan orchard. The CRP program is helping the family insure that the farm is viable and productive for future generations. Today the Abrams' farms produce pine trees, pecans, and will soon offer hunting licenses for quail and other game. The future plans for the farm will entail family and corporate opportunities to fish and hunt as well as a gourmet pecan line that will be shopped in high end lines of grocery and retail stores.

Thanks to the Abrams legacy builders, the farming future of the family looks bright.

Wilcox County Conservation Reserve Program

In 1865, a freed slave by the name of "Lemon" moved from North Florida to Turner County, Georgia. As an ex-slave, he was given a mule and 40 acres of land in Turner County. He later moved his family, including 10 children nearby Wilcox County and raised 10 children. By the end of Lemon's life, the original 40 acres had become 1,000 acres, thus making him the largest black landowner in Wilcox County.

Ollie Turner, one of his many sons, continued the farming operation after Lemon's death. Ollie Turner had two sons, O.Z. and Raleigh, who continued the farming operation. O.Z. Turner moved to Washington, D.C. and upon his death left Raleigh his part of the farm. Mr. Raleigh Turner, a long-time leader in Wilcox County, died in 2011 at the age of 90, leaving control of the farm to his two sons, Ollie and Nelson Turner.

Ollie has been overseeing the day-to-day activities of the farm for the past 20 years. His brother Nelson, a minister for the past 30 years, assists in running the farm. The farming operation has been growing timber and cattle since its inception. In the past few years, Ollie and Nelson have ventured into leasing their land to hunters and found it to be another source of income to assist in maintaining the farm.

Ollie and Nelson became aware of the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program through the local Farm Service Agency and made a commitment to convert their cattle operation to the CP-36 practice "Longleaf Pine" establishment. This practice assists producers in re-establishing longleaf pine stands at densities that benefit wildlife species and protect water quality. This practice will assist them in expanding their wildlife leases and re-establishing the Longleaf Pines and Wildlife populations that once prevailed on the farm. Hopefully, this decision will assist in continuing the "Turner Farm" for future generations of "Lemon Turner's" descendants.



*O.Z. and Raleigh Turner with Wilcox County
FSA Staff*

Mississippi

StrikeForce Counties: Adams, Amite, Attala, Benton, Bolivar, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Claiborne, Clarke, Clay, Coahoma, Covington, Franklin, Greene, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Jasper, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Kemper, Lafayette, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Leake, Leflore, Lincoln, Lowndes, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Panola, Pike, Quitman, Scott, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Walthall, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wilkinson, Winston, Yalobusha, and Yazoo

USDA Team Collaborations: Conducted Strike Force Outreach Workshops with NRCS, RD and Community Based Organizations in all 52 Strike Force counties.

Oktibbeha County Direct Farm Operating Loan

R.W. Tucker has been farming in Oktibbeha County all his life, working with his family as well as other local farmers. In 1991 Mr. Tucker started his own cattle farm while he continued to work for one of the local cattle producers. Mr. Tucker received an FSA operating loan in the amount of \$10,000.00 in June to purchase 11 more brood cows for his herd.

Tucker looks forward to passing along his knowledge of cattle farming to his 15 year old grandson Quinton Carter who helps him on his farm.

Oktibbeha County Farm Loan Manger Doug Naron said "Helping small producers like Mr. Tucker succeed in the ever changing world of agriculture is what FSA is all about." Naron said he looks forward to making Quinton a youth loan to get him started in the cattle business.



Loan Manager Doug Naron pictured with RW Tucker and grandson Quiton Carter.

Noxubee County Youth Operating Loan

Jalen Brooks is an 11 year old who wants to own a cattle ranch someday. He took the first step in making that dream a reality when he visited Noxubee County Farm Loan Officer Mark Dillard and applied for an FSA Youth Loan.

“Mr. Coleman, my 4-H Advisor asked me if I had heard about FSA,” Jalen commented. He explained that I could borrow money on my own from the government to get started and suggested I consider giving FSA a call. I did and now I have 7 cows of my own.”

The Noxubee County 4-H Advisor, Clayton Coleman, works closely with local 4-H youth in managing Agricultural projects and businesses. From cattle to produce, he is their mentor for all things Agriculture. His technical guidance and FSA’s youth loans are the perfect marriage for young beginning farmers in Noxubee County.

Jalen will use proceeds from the sale of calves to pay his annual installments to FSA.

“We have seen several kids who are able to pay the loan off early, depending on the type of operation and income received. It’s a great investment, as it keeps providing a source of income for the youth even after the loan has been paid in full. Most kids are able to save money for college expenses and some expand their herd or operation.

MS State Executive Director Mike Sullivan says youth loans are the key to creating more future farmers in America. “It all starts with our youth. To establish more farmers we have to educate our youth in the different aspects of Agriculture. Agriculture has come a long way and not what the average teenager thinks it’s all about. FSA youth loans not only provides the means to explore the area of Agriculture, but also give kids business and record keeping experience that’s needed for any area they venture into later in life. It’s a win-win opportunity for rural youth.”

“If Mr. Coleman hadn’t told me about FSA I would still be helping my granddad with his cows. Now I get up in the morning and take care of MY cows,” he grinned.



Jalen Brooks and Farm Loan Officer Mark Dillard



Claude Phillips

Greene County Livestock Forage Program

Claude Phillips has been farming in Greene County all his life except 1943 through 1946 when he was in the U.S. Army during World War 2 and served in England, France, and Germany with the 7th Army. He has been working with his family as well as other local farmers. I

In 1946 Mr. Phillips started his own cattle farm while he was also working in the timber industry and a Pastor for the local United Methodist Church. Mr. Phillips received Livestock Forage Disaster Program Benefits in August that will help him purchase cattle feed and hay which was lost due to drought. Mr. Phillips looks forward to passing along his knowledge of cattle farming to his grandson Tyler Ash Phillips who helps him on his farm.

County Executive Director Scott Porter and Program Technician Regina Graham from the Greene County FSA Office assisted Mr. Phillips with the LFP Application and said that helping small producers like Mr. Phillips succeed in the ever changing world of agriculture is what FSA is all about.

Winston County Farm Operating Loan

Louise Hamilton and her late husband Terry began cattle farming in Winston County in 1970 shortly after they were married. To start a farm and a marriage at the same time is difficult enough, but to make things tougher, Terry had lost both legs in Vietnam a few years earlier. Terry used his GI benefits to get the training he needed to become a farmer and also to modify his Ford 3000 tractor so he could operate it without the use of his legs. Louise still has the tractor today.

Louise would spend her days helping Terry feed the cows, fix fences, clearing land, or anything else that needed to be done on the farm, and at night she would sew clothes for her 6 children to wear to school.

Even to this day Louise said she never sleeps more than 4 hours a night. Their hard work and sacrifice paid off as their operation began to grow from 40 acres to over 400 acres of pasture that Louise now runs her cattle.

Terry got his first FSA loan in 1999 to purchase some pasture land that joined their operation so they could expand. In 2001 Terry won Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the Year from the Winston County Soil and Water District. Louise said that they have always been conscientious when it comes to protecting the land and have worked closely with NRCS and FSA to achieve this.

In 2002 Terry passed away leaving Louise to run the farm with the help of their children and grandchildren. In 2005 Louise sold her cattle and paid off Terry's FSA loan. She said he always wanted her to be debt free. A few weeks later Louise came to see me at the FSA office and said she wanted a FSA loan of her own so she could buy some more cattle. I made Louise an OL loan and she was back in the cattle business. Louise completed the required borrower training a few months later, and has gone on to be one of the most successful cattle farmers in Winston County. In fact Louise won Winston Cattle Farmer of the Year in 2008, awarded by the Winston County Economic Development Partnership.

Some of Louise's family has also used FSA loans to establish their farming operations. One of her sons Jimmy used a FSA guaranteed loan to start a poultry operation a few miles from Louise. Four of her grandchildren have had FSA youth loans, and two of them now have FSA operating loans that they used to start their own cattle operation on some of Louise's land. Louise said it is important to get her grandchildren involved in farming so someone can carry on what her and her late husband started.



Louise Hamilton and Loan Manager Doug Naron

Farm Service Agency Farm Loan Programs - FY 2011

Arkansas - Total Program Funding in Strike Force Counties (All Programs)							
		2011 Applications Funded	2011 Funds Obligated	2010 Applications Funded	2010 Funds Obligated	2009 Applications Funded	2009 Funds Obligated
Farm Loan Programs Direct	Non-SDA	143	\$13,987,430	141	\$15,308,645	135	\$13,984,860
	SDA	72	\$6,434,295	61	\$6,102,251	69	\$6,757,933
Farm Loan Programs Guaranteed	Non-SDA	93	\$29,029,186	106	\$27,718,479	77	\$19,038,747
	SDA	32	\$10,681,891	48	\$13,444,012	38	\$14,734,917
05-07 Crop Disaster Assistance		5	\$4,788	15	\$268,353	197	\$908,217
05-07 Livestock Indemnity Program		8	\$475,747	11	\$657,440	0	0
Auto CRP-Cost Shares		430	\$1,784,364	382	\$1,235,768	386	\$1,465,849
Average Crop Revenue Election Program		1	\$26,556	1	\$5,840		
Biomass Crop Assistance		1	\$3,252	57	\$4,582,980		
Crop Assistance Program		9,502	\$72,320,652	0	0	0	0
CRP Annual Rental		3,612	\$13,394,197	3,530	\$12,661,109	3,404	\$11,768,077
CRP Incentives		314	\$1,987,502	383	\$2,265,763	364	\$1,978,590
Dairy Economic Loss Assistance		155	\$33,764	155	\$55,720	0	0
Direct and Counter Cyclical Program		21,177	\$253,118,314	21,991	\$356,833,945	21,481	\$253,315,762
Emergency Assistance Program		5	\$172,394	2	\$123,208	0	0
Emergency Conservation Program		306	\$2,472,664	2,131	\$10,283,738	682	\$3,348,823
Grasslands Reserve Program		25	\$54,306	43	\$130,624	37	\$148,073
Livestock Forage Program		25	\$168,169	0	0	0	0
Livestock Indemnity Program		177	\$715,138	136	\$843,516	2	\$4,985
Loan Deficiency		1	\$381	85	\$168,200	598	\$9,555,302
Milk Income Loss II		1	\$752	142	\$334,983	156	\$1,545,540
Noninsured Assistance Program		1,696	\$8,730,658	56	\$1,500,300	48	\$595,811
Supplemental Assistance Program		182	\$3,491,036	205	\$3,787,527	0	0
Trade Adjustment Assistance		136	\$1,267,482	0	0	0	0
Tree Assistance Program		5	\$20,216	4	\$61,233	0	0

Farm Service Agency Farm Loan Programs - FY 2011

Georgia - Total Program Funding in Strike Force Counties (All Programs)							
		2011 Applications Funded	2011 Funds Obligated	2010 Applications Funded	2010 Funds Obligated	2009 Applications Funded	2009 Funds Obligated
Farm Loan Programs Direct	Non-SDA	216	\$23,795,165	248	\$25,604,991	226	\$22,135,318
	SDA	90	\$7,635,474	95	\$10,417,447	65	\$5,000,604
Farm Loan Programs Guaranteed	Non-SDA	130	\$36,867,799	119	\$29,801,935	95	\$29,534,282
	SDA	28	\$8,344,460	24	\$7,449,452	28	\$9,302,847
Auto CRP-Cost Shares		584	\$3,247,365	585	\$3,448,058	860	\$5,295,934
Biomass Crop Assistance		1	\$22,396	164	\$22,147,898	0	0
Crop Assistance Program		2,365	\$9,578,323	0	0	0	0
CRP Annual Rental		6,449	\$13,704,775	6,691	\$13,780,400	6,552	\$12,879,884
CRP Incentives		487	\$3,421,923	527	\$3,434,635	737	\$4,864,136
Dairy Economic Loss Assistance		262	\$146,667	262	\$2,474,465	0	0
Direct and Counter Cyclical Program		17,026	\$124,356,091	17,733	\$203,368,070	18,554	\$151,567,450
Emergency Assistance Program		9	\$56,030	25	\$366,741	0	0
Emergency Conservation Program		155	\$1,693,270	613	\$4,616,526	545	\$3,421,198
Grasslands Reserve Program		40	\$42,574	172	\$207,330	164	\$188,402
Livestock Indemnity Program		43	\$220,791	53	\$209,759	3	\$27,837
Loan Deficiency		4	545	288	\$1,326,954	1,485	\$42,214,586
Milk Income Loss II		6	\$18,458	259	\$1,691,792	257	\$6,307,810
Noninsured Assistance Program		752	\$3,142,497	501	\$2,552,622	613	\$2,056,599
Supplemental Assistance Program		624	\$7,342,438	776	\$5,054,020	0	0
Trade Adjustment Assistance		165	\$1,005,527	0	0	0	0
Tree Assistance Program		11	\$212,799	3	\$6,624	0	0
TTPP Tobacco Producer		766	\$11,689,204	775	\$11,898,506	812	\$12,529,651

Farm Service Agency Farm Loan Programs - FY 2011

Mississippi - Total Program Funding in Strike Force Counties (All Programs)							
		2011 Applications Funded	2011 Funds Obligated	2010 Applications Funded	2010 Funds Obligated	2009 Applications Funded	2009 Funds Obligated
Farm Loan Programs Direct	Non-SDA	125	\$7,010,480	136	\$8,819,135	147	\$7,869,250
	SDA	84	\$2,118,500	94	\$3,342,003	102	\$2,329,984
Farm Loan Programs Guaranteed	Non-SDA	35	\$15,023,202	56	\$17,228,288	37	\$11,784,617
	SDA	10	\$5,714,448	11	\$5,978,124	5	\$2,863,500
Auto CRP-Cost Shares		409	\$2,125,409	269	\$1,085,792	339	\$810,730
Biomass Crop Assistance		1	\$38,907	97	\$6,188,127	0	0
Crop Assistance Program		4,097	\$40,989,427	0	0	0	0
CRP Annual Rental		13,236	\$38,731,148	13,430	\$38,798,554	13,407	\$38,030,811
CRP Incentives		310	\$2,071,699	280	\$71,742,999	231	\$1,111,023
Dairy Economic Loss Assistance		148	\$43,827	148	\$721,347	0	0
Dairy Indemnity		4	\$65,993	0	0	0	0
Direct and Counter Cyclical Program		13,107	\$134,936,539	14,162	\$245,077,133	15,278	\$188,923,437
Emergency Assistance Program		106	\$235,871	12	\$62,157	0	0
Emergency Conservation Program		127	\$659,659	101	\$644,243	106	\$845,880
Emergency Forest Restoration		8	\$39,106	0	0	0	0
Forest Conservation Reserve		1,100	\$5,099,545	1,097	\$5,853,354	936	\$7,305,990
Grasslands Reserve Program		9	\$10,413	46	\$62,666	47	\$81,731
Livestock Forage Program		56	\$109,135	0	0	0	0
Livestock Indemnity Program		34	\$178,923	43	\$186,763	2	\$5,066
Milk Income Loss II		4	\$1,492	131	\$351,073	150	\$2,004,036
Noninsured Assistance Program		55	\$441,899	90	\$4,474,593	53	\$277,744
Supplemental Assistance Program		383	\$10,576,283	139	\$2,433,599	0	0
Trade Adjustment Assistance		790	\$6,295,108	0	0	0	0
Tree Assistance Program		1	\$4,200	0	0	0	0



Message from the Chief

Dave White, NRCS

Dear Conservation Partners:

Today, one in six Americans lives in poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau—and 90 percent of counties with the highest poverty rates are in rural America. These are also communities with high numbers of Historically Underserved groups, like African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans.

Last year, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack launched the StrikeForce Initiative, a cross-agency effort to accelerate assistance to Historically Underserved groups. Through this initiative, USDA is working to ensure all producers have access to programs that can help them thrive, including proven conservation programs.

In partnership with local community-based organizations, three USDA agencies—Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency and Rural Development—are working to improve USDA's outreach to these communities in order to increase their access to—and participation in—our valuable programs. We're currently piloting the StrikeForce Initiative in 137 counties in Arkansas, Georgia and Mississippi.

NRCS is working in **three key areas** to propel this initiative:

1. **We're expediting our service**, placing a high priority on enrolling producers in StrikeForce counties quickly, so they can start implementing conservation and seeing the benefits. We have also placed a premium on providing fast service to these communities in the wake of recent natural disasters.
2. **We're expanding outreach and participation**, devoting staff resources to outreach and local education seminars in the pilot states to let producers know that assistance is available and help them understand what's needed to take advantage of these programs.
3. **We're removing barriers**, identifying regulatory roadblocks to getting service to the StrikeForce counties and getting assistance to Historically Underserved and Limited Resource producers.

In fulfilling its commitment to the StrikeForce Initiative, NRCS augmented its allocations in these three states by providing \$6 million in additional financial and technical assistance to Historically Underserved and Limited Resource producers.

Since we began this initiative a year ago, we've helped hundreds of producers make conservation work on their lands—increasing productivity while also improving their bottom lines. The following pages highlight just a few of our successes.

We're committed to ensuring all producers across the nation have access to conservation programs. By working together, we can support a productive agricultural industry while also preserving the health of our environment and the sustainability of our natural resources.

Yours in Conservation,

Dave White, NRCS Chief

Arkansas

StrikeForce Counties: Arkansas, Bradley, Chicot, Clark, Columbia, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Monroe, Nevada, Newton, Ouachita, Phillips, Randolph, Searcy, Sevier, St. Francis and Woodruff

Newton County

Although raging waters had subsided at Deanna Young’s home in Ponca, Ark., a flood of emotions hit her when she found out USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would pay 100 percent of the cost of protecting her home from falling into Adds Creek.

After the creek flooded her property, washing away the stream bank next to the house where she lives with her three children, Young qualified for NRCS assistance. But Young couldn’t afford the required cost-share, and the bank turned down her loan request.

The cost-share waiver was approved, and work began on the Youngs’ property. It was completed within two months.

Sevier County

Lee Pauley, an 84-year-old farmer from Mineral Springs, Ark., plants and harvests a variety of produce to sell at county farmer’s markets. Pauley was introduced to NRCS by the Silas Hunt Community Development Corporation and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, one of NRCS’ conservation partners.

And now, thanks to financial and technical assistance from NRCS, Pauley was able to install an irrigation project on his property. He no longer uses a bucket to irrigate his peas, watermelon, potatoes, cabbage and other crops.

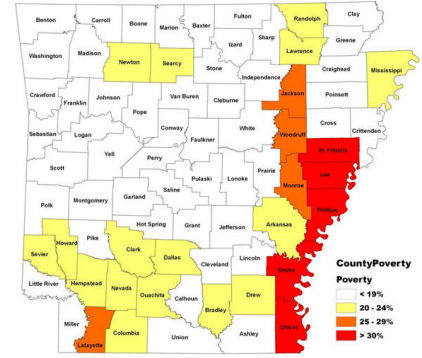
Pauley was also able to install an irrigation well. The well is equipped with a submersible pump that pumps 40 gallons of water a minute, allowing Pauley to use drip lines for irrigation. In addition, NRCS helped fund the installation of 4,620 feet of PVC irrigation pipeline underground. This pipeline connects to 86 sprinklers that water about 10 acres from the well.

Lawrence County

Heavy rains severely eroded the streambank adjacent to a sewer pumping station, water main and city street in Lynn, Ark. But thanks to a 90 percent cost-share from NRCS, the town of just over 300 inhabitants was able to get the damage repaired.

The work consisted of grading and shaping the existing channel and placing rip rap on each side for 150 feet to stabilize the banks.

“We could not have done the repair without NRCS funds and technical expertise,” says Mayor Van Doyle. “The whole project went off without a hitch. Myself and the citizens of our small city are very grateful.”



Margaret Lonadier (right), Newton County district conservationist, meets with Deanna Young to discuss how NRCS can protect her home.



Lee Pauley (right) discusses his farming operation with NRCS employees Abe Hester and Burthel Thomas.



A contractor completes work on a streambank stabilization project in Lynn, Ark.



Adam Eades, district conservationist in Pocahontas, Ark. (left), and Stuart Davis, farmer in Warm Springs, Ark., meet to follow up on progress made in his operation.

Randolph County

Stuart Davis, a farmer from Warm Springs, Ark., has a diverse five-acre operation. Not only does he produce squash, okra, beans, tomatoes, peppers and pumpkins, but also truffles and ginseng.

But the well on his property, which irrigated the vegetables he sells locally and supplied water to his house, had almost dried up.

Davis went to the bank for a loan to install a new water system, but was turned down. Luckily, 90 percent cost-share assistance from NRCS helped him dig a new well and install an irrigation pipeline. The new system has increased water efficiency and production, and has improved his family's quality of life.

"This is my livelihood," Davis says. "I used to go to the back door of restaurants and other local vendors to sell my produce. Now, I'm establishing an expanded local produce stand where I can more effectively market my produce."



Left to right: Burthel Thomas, assistant state conservationist for South, Ark.; Todd Sewell, district conservationist for Hope, Ark.; and Sandra Martin discuss Martin's organic farm.

Hempstead County

Sandra (Sandy) Martin has a passion to help people in need—and a 108-acre farm in Patmos, Ark., which has been in her family for more than 150 years. Martin wants to use her farm to train at-risk youths and adults how to farm, package and market produce.

She received a 90 percent cost-share from NRCS to build a high tunnel, which will extend her growing season by at least two months a year. This will enable Martin to get her produce to market before most of her competitors and also increase her profits by producing more than one crop per year.

Martin plans to plant a wide variety of vegetables such as tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, peppers, earlier okra and greens. She is also working with NRCS to implement a number of other conservation practices on her farm.



Brian Gawf (right), NRCS construction inspector, looks at a trench created to hold rocks on the levee around a sewage treatment facility lagoon.

St. Francis County

This spring, when water from excessive rains damaged the sewage treatment facility in Hughes, Ark., and the lagoon ponds began to breach, Mayor Larry Owens contacted NRCS to help prevent total failure of the surrounding embankment.

"Raw sewage was flowing into a creek," says NRCS state engineer Walt Delp. "Without quick action, the contamination would have spread downstream, impacting the entire community."

The sewage leak and potential wastewater contamination of groundwater resources could have caused serious health threats to the community, in addition to environmental problems in the area's lakes and streams.

Mayor Owens says that he and Hughes as a community appreciate NRCS and its assistance. "[NRCS'] speedy reaction led to successfully averting what could have been a huge problem for our community," he says. "It's good to have programs like this to help take care of us in these types of emergency situations."

Georgia

StrikeForce Counties: *Appling, Atkinson, Baker, Baldwin, Ben Hill, Berrien, Bulloch, Calhoun, Candler, Charlton, Clay, Clinch, Coffee, Colquitt, Cook, Crisp, Decatur, Dodge, Dooley, Early, Emanuel, Evans, Grady, Hancock, Irwin, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Laurens, Macon, Miller, Mitchell, Montgomery, Peach, Pulaski, Quitman, Randolph, Screven, Seminole, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taliaferro, Tattnall, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Toombs, Treutlen, Turner, Ware, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wheeler, Wilcox and Wilkes*

Baldwin County

Jere Leverett always made it a priority to take care of the land on his picturesque, 110-acre Oconee Sands Farm, just outside Milledgeville, Ga. But operating a cattle breeding operation on the Oconee River made Leverett's attempts at conservation difficult.

To help protect the Oconee River, Leverett was awarded cost-share funds, which he used to install 2,622 feet of fence to prevent his 25 cattle from getting into the water. The fence protects the river from bacteria and helps prevent soil erosion along its banks.

Leverett was also able to build a heavy-use area on the farm with an alternative water source in the form of water troughs. As a result, Leverett says, not only is the river protected, but in addition, "animal health has improved and the survival rate of calves has increased."

Terrell County

John and Julia Canty moved to Dawson, Ga. less than five years ago, but in that short time the couple has grown a small garden into a half-acre operation in their backyard. They produce a variety of fruits and vegetables, including collards, okra, peas, tomatoes, squash, watermelon and zucchini.

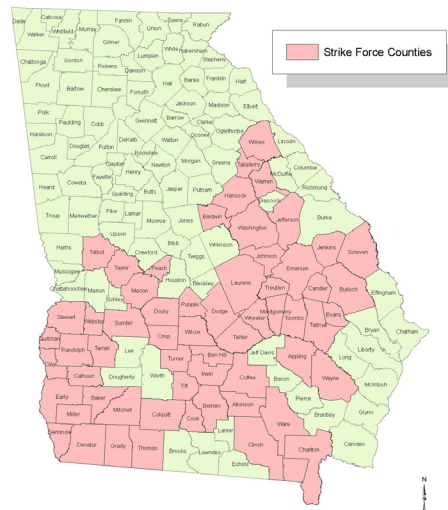
At times, it has been a tough job, especially for the years they used a hose to water their plots. But with technical and financial assistance from NRCS, the Cantys have been able to dig a well and install a solid-set irrigation system. Now the couple, married 42 years, has a steady supply of water to help them grow their farm.

Hancock County

When they retired, Bedell and Geneva Finley bought a 23-acre farm outside of Sparta, Ga. The farm had 131 pecan trees and a large pasture. To keep from having to bush-hog the pasture twice a year, the Finleys acquired cows. But that caused wear on the land, especially through overgrazing.

To minimize the impact of the livestock, the Finleys implemented rotational grazing and installed watering facilities in their newly divided pastures. With funding from NRCS, they put in cross fencing for grazing, installed heavy use areas for feeding and watering, drilled a well that delivers water to different areas, planted longleaf pines for wildlife habitat and planted clover in their pastures to help control soil erosion.

Bedell Finley says that this way of farming is more efficient and less labor-intensive. Both the land and the cows have benefited.



NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Corey New (left) and Jere Leverett (right) stand in front of a heavy-use area on Oconee Sands Farm.



NRCS helped John and Julia Canty develop a water source on their fruit and vegetable farm.



Bedell and Geneva Finley own several cows so they don't have to bush-hog their pasture.



John Lowe no longer relies on a five-gallon bucket to water his pecan orchard.

Macon County

In 2005, John Lowe planted 95 pecan trees on a small piece of land near Montezuma, Ga. He filled up a 300-gallon water tank and drove to the field, where he used an old five-gallon bucket to hand-water the trees. He spent four to five hours watering the trees every day, three days each week.

NRCS was able to offer a 90 percent cost-share for Lowe to install an irrigation system. Thanks to his new whole-farm irrigation plan, he now spends just five minutes a day watering the trees.

Lowe has a system better than he ever dreamed of. And now other local farmers, inspired by his example, are seeking out NRCS.

Screven County

Relinda Walker convinced her father to let her transition the family farm in Sylvania, Ga. to an organic operation growing peanuts, peas and onion seedlings.

Through NRCS, she was able to install a six-acre sprinkler system on her farm.

“It’s expanded my ability to do intensive management of my vegetable crops and to grow things with less water,” she says.

Walker Farms is among the first to successfully grow an organic onion seedbed and now sells organic onion seedlings to other farmers. The farm also harvested the first Georgia crop of certified organic peanuts to go to market.

Since then, Walker has installed a high tunnel to extend the growing season and a five-acre sprinkler system.



NRCS Engineer David Drewry and Relinda Walker with her organic vegetables.

Irwin County

Jerome Powell, a third-generation fruit and vegetable farmer outside Fitzgerald, Ga., believes in conserving water wherever possible. After he learned about NRCS from reading newsletters and seeing a presentation by a soil conservationist, he applied for assistance.

He completed his first irrigation project on 14 acres of watermelon and other crops. He is now installing, with the help of NRCS irrigation engineer Andrew Swain, an irrigation well, a micro-irrigation system and irrigation water management on an additional 28.7 acres.

This work has helped Powell make significant changes to his operation. "Where I was using three gallons of water, I now use one, for example," he says.

The irrigation system has helped him get his crops to market faster and save on his expenses.

Quitman County

For several years, George Cathrall watched helplessly as he lost irreplaceable top soil on his property, Sunnyview Farms. Gullies carried the precious resource away during heavy rains.

He tried every possible solution he could think of to correct the problem. But it persisted until Cathrall partnered with NRCS.

NRCS assisted Cathrall in installing terraces to control soil erosion and a grassed waterway to provide a safe outlet for water. Livestock were fenced out of a stream, an alternative water supply was put in place and heavy use areas with water troughs were created.

In addition, Cathrall improved forest stands by using pest management and prescribed burning in order to control the undergrowth and participates in a multi-state effort to restore the native longleaf pine ecosystem.

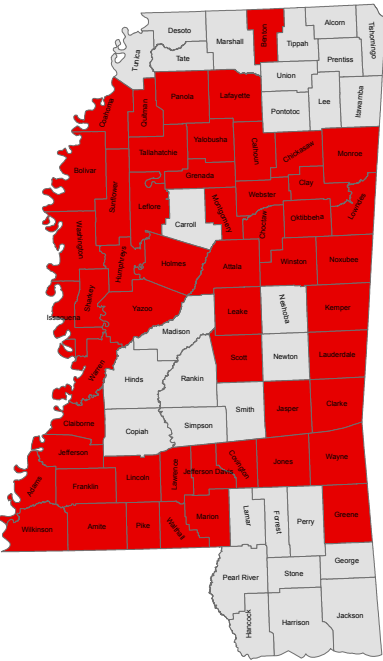


Jerome Powell forms a planting bed and lays down the irrigation system under the plastic cover.



George Cathrall worked with NRCS to install conservation practices that greatly reduced soil erosion on his farm.

Mississippi's 52 Strike Force Counties



Mississippi

StrikeForce Counties: Adams, Amite, Attala, Benton, Bolivar, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Claiborne, Clarke, Clay, Coahoma, Covington, Franklin, Greene, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Jasper, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Kemper, Lafayette, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Leake, Leflore, Lincoln, Lowndes, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Panola, Pike, Quitman, Scott, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Walthall, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wilkinson, Winston, Yalobusha and Yazoo

Mississippi StrikeForce Outreach

As in the other two StrikeForce pilot states, NRCS Mississippi contracted with local community-based organizations to hold dozens of outreach meetings. These meetings, held between April 2010 and September 2011, were targeted to Historically Underserved and Limited Resource producers in the 52 StrikeForce counties across the state.

Total meetings:	77
Total attendees:	3,039
Total program applications resulting from these meetings (to date):	117

Clarke County

Barbara Robinson, a lifelong resident of Clarke County, is known as one of the local “blueberry ladies.” The small farmer owns and operates B&W Orchards near Clarkedale, Miss.

Her 20 acres of farmland is mostly gardens, fruit trees and blueberry orchards. Five acres are dedicated to blueberries and muscadine grapes, which she grades and packages on the farm and then sells to local markets.

After learning about high tunnel houses, Robinson contacted NRCS and applied for assistance. She received funding last fall to install a high tunnel, which is already producing okra, tomatoes, carrots, broccoli, radishes and spinach. The high tunnel extended her normal growing season by eight weeks, adding that much more to her harvest—and income. She liked the first high tunnel so much, she built another one!

Robinson is now receiving NRCS assistance to install a well and an irrigation system.



Barbara Robinson looks at tomato plants, which will be planted in her new high tunnel.

Warren County

Robert Short has used organic practices on his farm in Flowers, Miss., for years, long before he knew what “organic” meant.

“Organic—we never heard of it,” he says. “This is what my grandfather did 60 years ago. We couldn’t afford to buy fertilizer, so we cleaned out the chicken houses and spread it across the fields each year.”

Now Short uses horse manure and crop rotation to keep his four acres of okra, beans, watermelon, squash and other crops productive. He also uses many other environmentally friendly practices recommended by NRCS, and is now transitioning his operation to organic production under USDA’s National Organic Program.

NRCS has also provided Short with assistance in building a well and a game fence.



Robert Short and his granddaughter, Camiren, pick okra on Short's four-acre farm.

Claiborne County

Arthur Phelps is a small cattle farmer who lives on the same farm he was born and raised on 76 years ago. Before coming back home to farm, Phelps worked 19 years with Letourneau Technologies, in Vicksburg, Miss., helping to build oil rigs and spending a lot of time offshore. He was part of the maintenance crew responsible for painting and sandblasting.

After word-of-mouth led him to seek assistance from NRCS, Phelps has been successful in completing at least 20 different conservation projects on his farm, including two ponds, fencing, nutrient management, critical area stabilization, streambank stabilization and, most recently, grade stabilization and diversion. Phelps has completed just about every conservation practice you can think of except for tree planting.



Arthur Phelps (left) and Patrick Smith, NRCS soil conservation technician in Port Gibson, Miss., monitor a grade stabilization that was installed to stop two severe erosion sites and also serves as a watering source for the cattle.



Carl Brown on his 22-acre beef farm.

Lincoln County

Carl Brown has been raising cattle since he was 15, when he bought his first cow for \$400. Today, Brown owns a 22-acre beef farm south of Brookhaven, Miss., where he has 23 cows.

The retired Mississippi State Police officer has worked in the cattle business for more than 30 years. NRCS has played a crucial role in Brown's success, helping him implement pasture best management practices like prescribed grazing, cross fencing and a grade stabilization structure.

Quitman County

Conservation has run through Frank Wilbourn's veins since he was a youngster working alongside his father. Now he has bought his family's place in Lambert, Miss., where he earns a living growing herbs, fruits and vegetables.

NRCS helped the 71-year-old construct a high tunnel and irrigation system. Wilbourn grows potatoes, greens, tomatoes, eggplant, squash, okra, watermelons and herbs, among other Delta favorites. He sells his goods at a farmer's market and out of his pickup truck.

The high tunnel has allowed him to lengthen his growing season, and the irrigation system has equipped him with a well, a pump and an efficient underground delivery system.



Frank Wilbourn (left) shows cabbage growing in his new high tunnel to Soil Conservation Technician Larry Pride.

StrikeForce Outreach Meetings

Each StrikeForce state has held numerous public outreach meetings to reach Historically Underserved and Limited Resource producers. These meetings reflect NRCS' commitment to both increasing funding and addressing disparities in knowledge about and access to conservation assistance in persistent poverty counties. NRCS contracted with local community-based organizations to hold these meetings.

State	Attendees
Mississippi	3,039
Arkansas	932
Georgia	1,922

Targeted Financial Assistance in StrikeForce Counties

This table reflects NRCS conservation investment in Limited Resource and Historically Underserved farmers and ranchers in 137 StrikeForce counties. 2010 funding figures are shown for comparison. This table shows only financial assistance dollars; many of the StrikeForce funds were allocated to conservation technical assistance.

Historically Underserved*	2010			2011			Percent Change between 2010 & 2011 (due to StrikeForce)		
	Number of Contracts	Dollars Obligated	Acres Enrolled	Number of Contracts	Dollars Obligated	Acres Enrolled	Number of Contracts	Dollars Obligated	Acres Enrolled
Arkansas	13	189,448	365	62	796,916	57,840	377%	321%	15734%
Georgia	29	450,621	1,807	52	1,151,130	35,628	79%	155%	1872%
Mississippi	129	1,196,225	3,951	392	3,235,375	160,643	204%	170%	3966%
Total	171	1,836,294	6,123	506	5,183,421	254,111	196%	182%	4050%

Limited Resource**	2010			2011			Percent Change between 2010 & 2011 (due to StrikeForce)		
	Number of Contracts	Dollars Obligated	Acres Enrolled	Number of Contracts	Dollars Obligated	Acres Enrolled	Number of Contracts	Dollars Obligated	Acres Enrolled
Arkansas	9	41,888	277	32	518,015	2,973	256%	1137%	974%
Georgia	8	190,023	712	11	248,724	446	38%	31%	-37% ***
Mississippi	31	211,571	872	71	588,990	2,065	129%	178%	137%
Total	48	443,482	1,861	114	1,355,729	5,484	138%	206%	195%

*Historically Underserved producers include Asians, African Americans, Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans.

**A Limited Resource producer is defined as:

1. A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$163,200 (adjusted for 2012) in each of the previous two years, and
2. A person with a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.

***The negative change is because, while the number of enrollees increased between 2010 and 2011, the average acreage per producer shrank, which is consistent with the Limited Resource producer population. NRCS Georgia also provided \$141,748 to small farmers in 2011, resulting in 9 contracts on more than 315 acres.

Message from Rural Development Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager



At USDA Rural Development, one of the most important tasks we face is to help rural Americans lift themselves out of poverty.

President Obama and Secretary Vilsack feel strongly that no American should be limited based on where he or she chooses to live; that opportunities for advancement should be open to all. In order to provide support for the poorest and most challenged areas of the Nation, USDA Rural Development, along with our sister agencies have pioneered the "Strike Force" concept as a pilot program. While the job is daunting because of its scope, our goal is simple: Get scarce program dollars into the hands of those who need it most. Leverage those dollars to get the very most from them. Drop the barriers that have kept struggling towns, villages and counties from providing a better life for those who live there.

We're doing it by devoting staff and resources to select areas in three states struggling against the challenges of persistent need, to make a big difference in a short period of time. Working in concert with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Rural Development staff is mounting an intense effort to reach out to community leaders and service agencies in the most poverty-plagued areas of Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi. We are working to cut red tape, assist in preparation of applications and help community leaders make their case for funding support to achieve economic, job creation, education and health improvement goals.

Because the people we want to help really don't care whether a Rural Development program or another government initiative got them a job, helped them start a business, or get a farm loan, we are working across agency lines to simply do the right thing. Together, in partnership with Community Based Organizations, USDA is leveraging government funds with other public and private resources. Rural Development is committed to promoting Secretary Vilsack's vision to cut through barriers, seamlessly coordinate programs, and deliver funds and technical support efficiently to those who need it and can use it most effectively.

Following is a report that demonstrates some of the successes we have documented as we've worked through the pilot year of the Strike Force process. Providing opportunity for residents of the most challenged communities in rural America: It's what we do. That is the Strike Force.

Dallas Tonsager

ARKANSAS

StrikeForce Counties: *Arkansas, Bradley, Chicot, Columbia, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Monroe, Nevada, Newton, Ouachita, Phillips, Randolph, Searcy, Sevier, St. Francis and Woodruff*

Arkansas County Lennox St. Pump Station, Stuttgart

The existing pump stations had been in operation for 60 years and needed an upgrade. With USDA support, new pumps are being installed to increase the flow and new control systems. A small amount of force main will also be installed. All of these improvements will allow the City to better serve their users. Four of the existing pump stations will be replaced and additional improvements will be made to the system. The project will reduce maintenance costs to the city. An estimated 23 jobs will be created or saved. Also, \$1 million in USDA funds will leverage a local contribution to rehabilitate the city's wastewater system.

Lawrence County Northeast Arkansas Public Water Authority

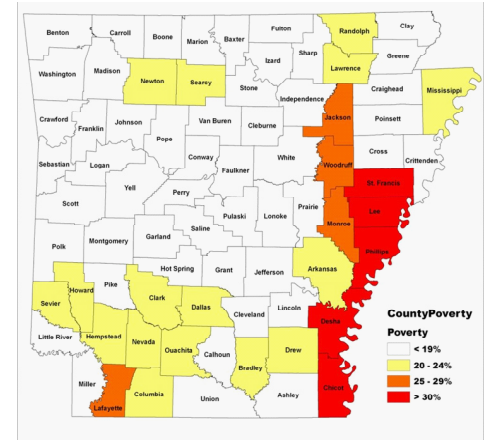
Residents of Lawrence County, Ark., feel more secure now that they don't rely on water wells. The wells often went dry and the groundwater supply was subject to contamination.

Thanks to the Northeast Arkansas Public Water Authority, the water treatment plant is being expanded and residents will receive treated water from the Spring River, (pictured here). This project, which will provide up to 10 million gallons of treated drinking water per day, was made possible by \$11.5 million in low-interest loan funds from Rural Development and the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission plus grant funds from Rural Development and the Delta Regional Authority.

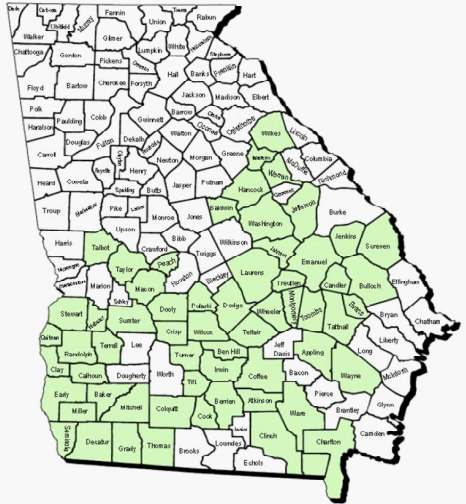
Newton and Searcy Counties FORGE, Inc.

Almost \$200,000 in Federal funds, leveraging additional funding through the Intermediary Relending Program, will be used to create a revolving loan fund to small and emerging business that will provide employment opportunities in 11 counties in Northwest Arkansas including the two strike force counties of Newton and Searcy. This project will create an estimated 33 jobs.

Arkansas StrikeForce Emphasis Counties



Georgia StrikeForce Emphasis Counties



Georgia

StrikeForce Counties: *Appling, Atkinson, Baker, Baldwin, Ben Hill, Berrien, Bulloch, Calhoun, Candler, Charlton, Clay, Clinch, Coffee, Colquitt, Cook, Crisp, Decatur, Dodge, Dooley, Early, Emanuel, Evans, Grady, Hancock, Irwin, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Laurens, Macon, Miller, Mitchell, Montgomery, Peach, Pulaski, Quitman, Randolph, Screven, Seminole, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taliaferro, Tattnall, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Toombs, Treutlen, Turner, Ware, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wheeler, Wilcox, and Wilkes*

**Bulloch County
The Islands**

The Islands Phase III, LLC is a newly established company that is providing student housing at Georgia Southern University. USDA funds will be used to pay-off interim acquisition and development loan to construct two double-story apartments consisting of 16 two-bedroom apartments.

Georgia Southern is a public, Carnegie Doctoral/Research university devoted to academic distinction in teaching, scholarship, and service.

**Miller County
Hospital Improvements**

The Miller County Hospital Authority secured over \$7.6 million in USDA funds to refinance a portion of existing debt and make improvements and additions to the hospital and nursing home facilities. Practically all jobs at the hospital were saved. Furthermore, a critical care hospital was able to keep its doors open in order to serve not only Miller County residents but several surrounding counties.

Miller County is a medically underserved area and also serves the surrounding counties of Early, Baker, Calhoun, Seminole and Decatur. Miller County has a population of 6,383 with about 2,500 living in Colquitt. Twenty-six percent of the population lives in poverty.

**Telfair County
Farmers Market**

Bret Manning contacted his local USDA Rural Development office to help fund a farmers market for Telfair county. USDA provided a Rural Business Enterprise Grant totaling almost \$100,000 and another \$25,000 was leveraged from other sources to finance construction.

The farmers market will allow local residents to buy directly from the farmers. The County created five jobs and gave local farmers a place to sell their goods. NRCS also assisted farmers with equip funds to assist with irrigation issues.

**Baker County
Commercial Kitchen**

Rural Development, in cooperation with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), has entered into a cooperative agreement to provide technical support and financial assistance to the East Baker Commercial Kitchen to create jobs. The kitchen operators intend to make the facility a full service business incubator to support the growth of self sufficient food businesses, produce its own food product line, and create a community garden and commercial kitchen greenhouse to help support the surrounding communities and its clients.



Bulloch County student housing

Mississippi

StrikeForce Counties: Adams, Amite, Attala, Benton, Bolivar, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Claiborne, Clarke, Clay, Coahoma, Covington, Franklin, Greene, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Jasper, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Kemper, Lafayette, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Leake, Leflore, Lincoln, Lowndes, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Panola, Pike, Quitman, Scott, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Walthall, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wilkinson, Winston, Yalobusha and Yazoo

Lauderdale County Clean, Safe, Dependable Water

Through the Strike Force Initiative, USDA Rural Development invested \$3.7 million dollars in loan and grant funds to provide sewer treatment upgrades for residents of rural Lauderdale County. USDA funds will be used to install approximately 14 miles of sewer lines and three lift stations for sewer treatment at reasonable rates and terms.

Grenada County Business Development

Through a Rural Business Enterprise Grant provided to the County Board, Irene Henson, owner of Ole Corner Store, in Grenada County, Miss., will be able to buy new convenience/restaurant equipment to expand her business services and hire additional employees. Rural Development funded a Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) for the Grenada County Board of Supervisors to help a small and emerging, female owned business.

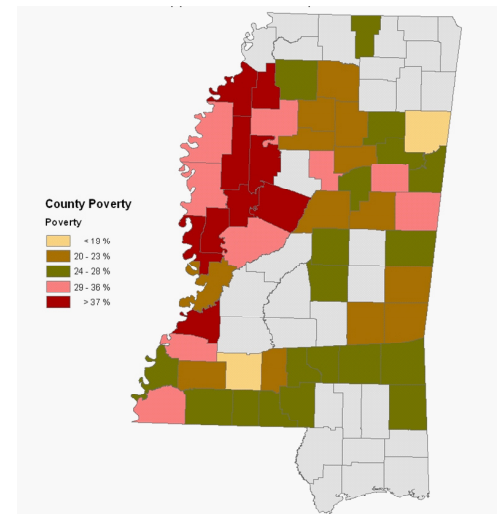
Sharkey County Multi Family Housing and Community Facilities North Gate Apartments in Rolling Fork, Mississippi

North Gate Apartments is a 24-unit Family Complex that was constructed in Rolling Fork, Mississippi. The complex was completed in June 2011. Rural Development provided a loan of \$925,076 and the property was leveraged with tax credit funds from the Mississippi Home Corporation. The facility provides affordable housing in this limited income community.

Pearl River Valley Opportunity, Inc. Head Start Center

Pearl River Valley Opportunity, Inc. (PRVO) received a \$ 3 million loan through the Community Facilities Program to construct a Head Start Center. This center will provide jobs and educational opportunities.

Mississippi StrikeForce Emphasis Counties



Northgate Apartments

Total Program Funding in Strike Force Counties

Arkansas

Fund Category	2011 Application Funded	2011 Funds Obligated	2010 Applications Funded	2010 Regular Funds Obligated
Water & Environmental Programs/CF	24	\$32,386,200	87	\$14,725,400
Business & Cooperative Programs	29	\$17,201,278	24	\$12,701,877
Single Family Housing Programs	573	\$39,423,791	666	\$40,069,11
Multi-Family Housing Programs	2680	\$11,774,403	2486	\$11,554,918
RUS Electric Loans	5	\$58,302,570	4	\$20,983,539
RUS Broadband/ Telecom Loans/Grants	9	\$1,510,850	2	\$11,209,000

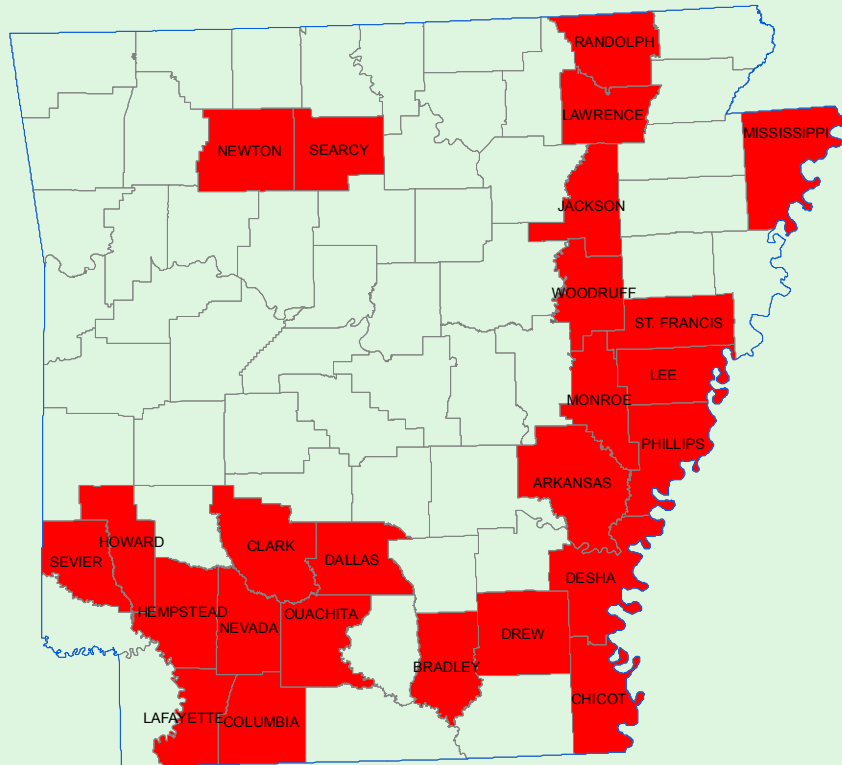
Georgia

Fund Category	2011 Application Funded	2011 Funds Obligated	2010 Applications Funded	2010 Regular Funds Obligated
Water & Environmental Programs/CF	25	\$15,457,756	37	\$13,119,084
Business & Cooperative Programs	79	\$29,330,975	60	\$21,939,997
Single Family Housing Programs	769	\$72,561,902	978	\$73,9922,704
Multi-Family Housing Programs	1706	\$16,719,756	3625	\$12,733,539.60
RUS Electric Loans	5	\$714,608,000	12	\$527,095,000
RUS Broadband/ Telecom Loans/Grants	1	\$5,977,000	0	0

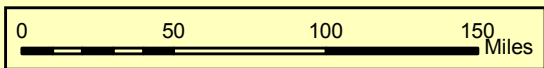
Mississippi




Fund Category	2011 Application Funded	2011 Funds Obligated	2010 Applications Funded	2010 Regular Funds Obligated
Water & Environmental Programs/CF	19	\$41,601,612	21	\$38,004,386
Business & Cooperative Programs	49	\$27,872,788	39	\$14,126,071
Single Family Housing Program	1,816	\$155,737,759	1,175	\$108,654,677
Multi-Family Housing Programs/CF	10	\$25,839,822	0	\$21,900,868
RUS Electric Programs	3	\$329,081,000	0	0
RUS Broadband/ Telecom Loans/Grants	1	\$33,766	36	\$3,913,586

Persistent Poverty, 1980, 1990, 2000 CENSUS.



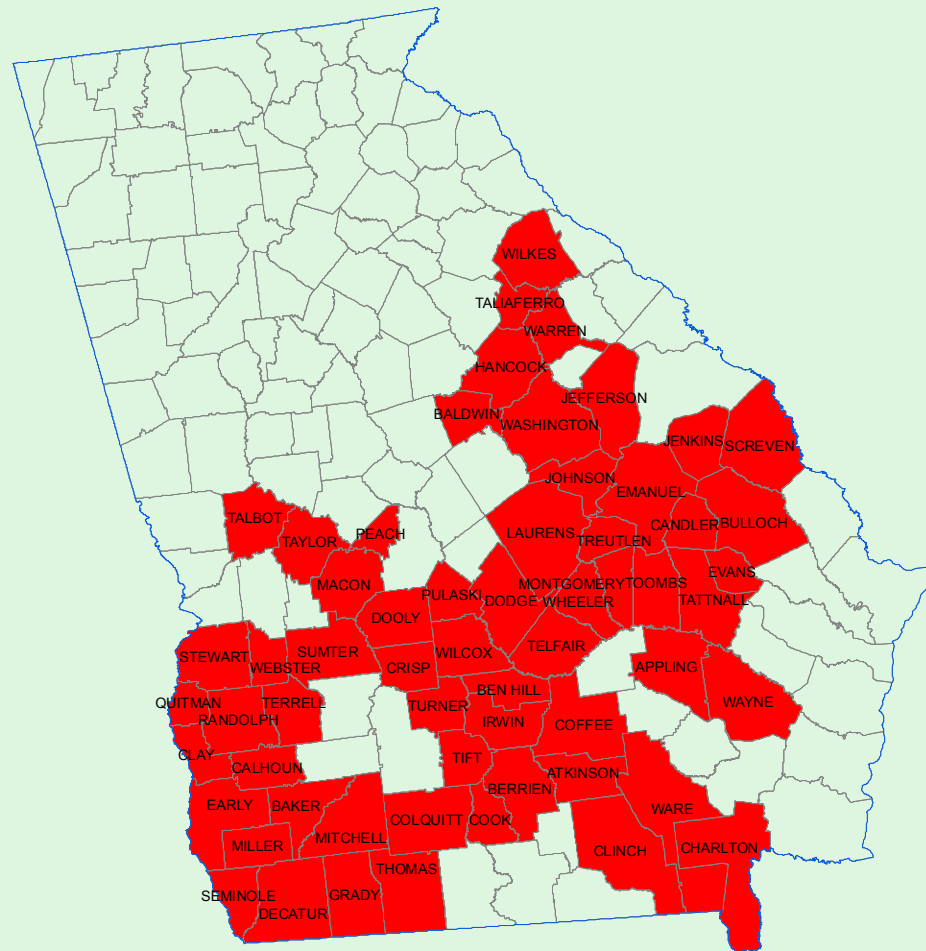
Projection: Albers Equal Area, meters, NAD 83 Datum:
Map by Keith M Mitchell, Rural Development,
Water and Environmental Programs.
6/21/2011



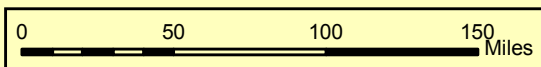
Legend	
	States
	Counties
	Persistent poverty counties



Persistent Poverty, 1980, 1990, 2000 CENSUS.



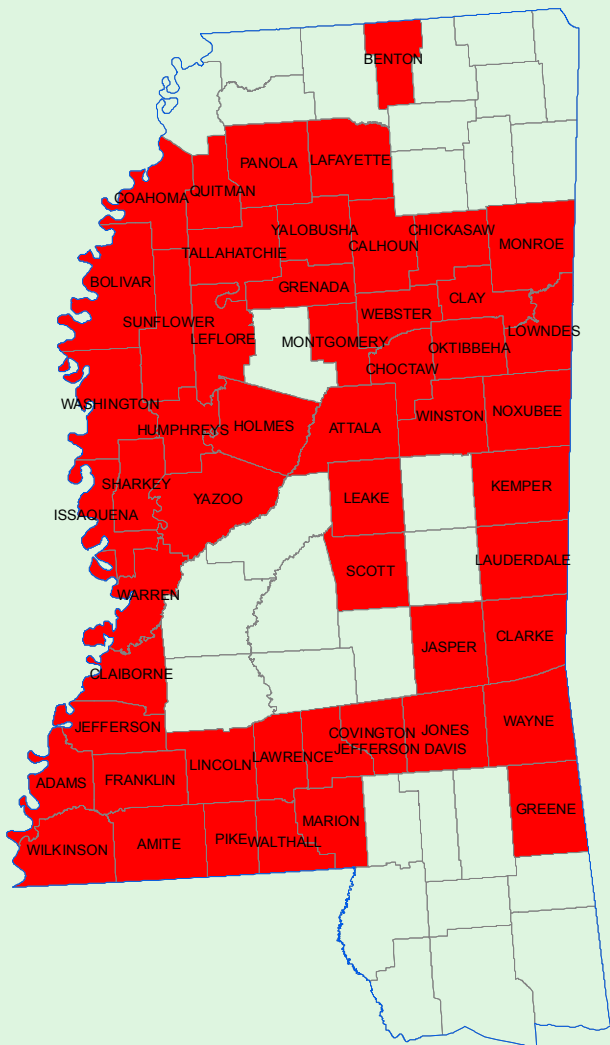
Projection: Albers Equal Area, meters, NAD 83 Datum:
Map by Keith M Mitchell, Rural Development,
Water and Environmental Programs.
6/21/2011



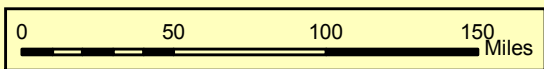
Legend	
	States
	Counties
	Persistent poverty counties



Persistent Poverty, 1980, 1990, 2000 CENSUS.



Projection: Albers Equal Area, meters, NAD 83 Datum:
 Map by Keith M Mitchell, Rural Development,
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 6/21/2011



Legend

- States
- Counties
- Persistent poverty counties

