

USDA grant assists with Sparta Aquifer, rural health care

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RUSTON — Louisiana Tech's Center for Rural Development has received a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture totaling \$104,637, which will be used to develop service learning courses related to the Sparta Aquifer, work force development and rural health issues.

Kenneth Rea, vice president for academic affairs, served as the principal investigator on the project, and Gary Kennedy, head of the department of agricultural sciences, and Aaron Lusby, an assistant professor of agriculture

business, were co-principal investigators.

"We want to develop service learning courses related to the Sparta Aquifer and concentrated conservation education," Kennedy said. "We want to get the word out to the public and work with the media to (raise awareness)."

Kennedy said some western states, such as Texas and Arizona, had canvassed their state with stickers, public service announcements and such to generate funding for water conversation and inform the public about the situation.

The other two objectives, Lusby said, work hand in hand.

"We want to analyze the Work Force

Investment Act passed by Congress and see how the policy is working and if it is linking people to jobs," Lusby said.

"The rural health issues objective falls under work force development as well. We want to address the rural health-care shortage of doctors, nurses and technicians. Pretty much anyone in the healthcare field you can think of, there are not enough of them. We want to see what attracts (health care professionals) to rural areas."

The grant is a special research grant from the USDA Tech has received before, and Kennedy said **U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, was an asset in helping Tech.**

"Rodney Alexander was instrumental in helping us get this grant," Kennedy said. "We contacted his office, and he and his staff worked with the USDA."

Rea added that he appreciated Alexander's efforts and assistance with the grant.

"The Center for Rural Development has been at Tech for a number of years, and funding is necessary for the center to continue to operate," Rea said.

"The center has been instrumental with a number of activities, such as promoting e-commerce in the state and elsewhere, and we look forward to continuing those activities."