

Partnerships for Sustainable Communities

Robert Zabawa and Tasha Hargrove

G.W. Carver Ag Experiment Station, Tuskegee University, AL

Southern SARE Sustainable Community Grant Nos. CS05-039 and CS06-046

Background

This project was centered on sustainable development activities for a set of Southern African American agricultural communities that were created during the Great Depression, initially under the direction of the Resettlement Administration. This provided landless sharecroppers and tenants the opportunity to own land and become small independent farmers (a Jeffersonian ideal) and form independent agricultural communities (a Booker T. Washington ideal). Thirteen such all-African American communities were established, about half of which remain as viable communities—although they are “at risk.” The others have faded, although both archival records and original residents remain to tell their story.

Using nine of these communities: Sabine Farms, TX; Prairie Farms, AL; Gee’s Bend, AL; Mileston, MS; Flint River Farms, GA; Allendale Farms, SC; Mound, LA; Tillery, NC and Aberdeen Gardens, VA, sustainable economic development strategy and training meetings were convened. Community participation ensured that this training led to site-specific community development plans and activities.

Training and Technical Assistance



Tuskegee University



Flint River Farms



Emancipation Oak, Hampton University

Goal and Objectives

The purpose of this project was to provide community directed, participatory training and technical assistance to increase the potential for sustainable economic development in selected African American agricultural communities. This was accomplished through intensive two-day workshops that focused on critical hands-on community development issues and strategies such as: grantsmanship, tourism (community/historical and agricultural), natural resource development and small business development.

The objectives of this project were:

- To provide sustainable economic and community development skills to selected African American communities created during the New Deal Era.
- To provide these communities with strategies so that they can best utilize the resources (natural, social/cultural and economic) inherent in their communities.
- To provide these communities with strategies to access resources (local, regional and national) to address issues critical to sustainable development.

Intended Outcome

Cooperative, Self-Directed, Participatory, Community Development

Methods

This project convened workshops of leaders from the selected Resettlement Communities in the summers of 2006 and 2007. The objectives of the workshops were as follows:

Objective One—each community participant attended a series of workshop sessions that target specific sustainable community development strategies, including: grantsmanship, tourism (community/historical and agricultural), natural resource development and small business development.

Objective Two—each community engaged in an extensive assessment process to: (a) identify local resources or endowments (social/cultural, economic, natural); (b) identify resources available at the local, regional and national levels that support local agricultural and community development. An inventory of these resources was developed.

Objective Three—upon identification of resources, participants worked with experts to develop a plan of action for accessing these resources. The plan of action was individualized and catered to the needs of each community.

Goals

To bring community together. To re-establish the community and its organization. To recognize the historical significance of the Resettlement Communities. To identify ways and means of generating youth participation. To restore the Resettlement School including football, soccer and basketball fields and courts. To provide a civic center for different activities. To provide a library, museum, a small business incubator, and a place for tutoring programs. Obtain 501c3 exemption for community group.

Resources

Physical assets: land and buildings. Human assets: community members, both young and old. Experience. The desire and commitment to move forward



History and Community Working Together



Before and After Resettlement: Land, Home and School



Some Communities Today



Flint River farms



Aberdeen Gardens



Allendale



Sharing



Listening



Mentoring



Collaborating

Significant Findings

As part of the concluding section of the workshops, the community representatives envisioned **goals** for their communities, what **resources** they had to apply to the goals and what **actions** would be needed to achieve the goals.

Actions and Results

Communities were organized through town meetings and church cookouts. Plans made to do what was best for the community. Tasks assigned at meetings.

Example one: Development of community history. Search for significant residents; search the archives in state, regional and federal offices. Inventory houses and other buildings that still exist. Place a historical marker at the school site.

Example two: Creation of non-profit organization for community. Complete and submit application for 501c3 exemption.

Example three: Plan for economic development. Open farmers market; show farmers potential profit. Schedule dates for start to community-wide efforts. Submit grant applications to (a) city government, (b) the State and General Assembly, (c) the Federal Government, and (d) corporations and foundations.