

USDA Rural Development Announces Partnership with Great Southwest to benefit Rural Michigan Communities

EAST LANSING, Sept. 13, 2011 – U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Rural Development State Director for Michigan James J. Turner [today](#) announced the selection of Michigan's Great Southwest for training under the Stronger Economies Together initiative.

“USDA Rural Development has developed a series of excellent partnerships to help revitalize rural Michigan's economy,” said Turner. “The Stronger Economies Together initiative builds upon those networks and helps communities take an integrated and cooperative approach to restoring prosperity.”

SET is designed to help regional teams develop new approaches to strengthen and enhance regional economic development activities. The SET program is an opportunity for current or newly formed multi-county teams to receive the latest tools, training, and technical assistance to help their region move forward and take advantage of positive growth and quality of life opportunities.

Michigan's Great Southwest includes Cass, Van Buren and Berrien counties. The Great Southwest was one of two teams selected from all applications received by the [May 13, 2011](#) deadline.

“The USDA SET program will provide a proven platform to enhance our regional competitiveness toward job creation and retention at a time when it is foremost among our priorities,” said Wendy Dant Chesser, the organization's chief executive officer. “We are dedicated to building our community through partnerships and cooperation, and we see SET as a timely and indispensable aid in the advancement of our regional economic growth.”

The selected applicants will receive:

- Valuable intensive strategic planning training for their regional team, including the newly developed “Stronger Economies Together” program, a program designed to help each regional team develop new approaches to strengthen and enhance regional economic development activities;
- Database tools specifically designed to help the regional teams examine the critical drivers of their region and identify emerging growth sectors and regional competitive advantages;
- Technical assistance and educational support from the North Central Regional Rural Development Center, Rural Development staff, and Michigan State University Extension staff; and
- Other educational and information-sharing opportunities with other SET program participants around the country.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of nearly \$150 billion in loans and loan guarantees. Visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov> for additional information about the agency's programs or to locate the USDA Rural Development office nearest you.

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