



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development

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Technical Assistance Program Announced for Texas Gulf Coast Communities

Temple, May 5, 2011 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture invites counties and communities near the Texas Gulf Coast to participate in a new regional economic development initiative launched by USDA Rural Development and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

Stronger Economies Together (SET) will help rural communities capitalize on the strengths of the region to create jobs, wealth and economic development. Educational programs and technical assistance included in SET will help communities develop and implement specific actions aligned with regional goals and assets.

As a result of the new economic environment, many rural communities need new methods and strategies to ensure they survive and thrive in the future. Leveraging local resources through regional collaboration is often an effective strategy to increase effectiveness of economic development efforts. It also positions rural communities to take advantage of new opportunities and to manage growth in spite of facing limited resources.

“We’re pleased that Texas was chosen to be a part of this program,” said USDA Rural Development State Director Paco Valentin. “The SET program is designed to help multi-county teams strengthen their knowledge, skills, and resources for collaborating as a region to pursue economic development goals. Participants will learn how to build a strong regional team and create plans and projects for achieving economic success. Program leaders will also provide technical assistance designed to help teams utilize the latest research, demographic and economic data, and regional resources to identify and pursue economic opportunities that will enhance the region’s overall level of income, employment, and quality of life.”

Committed to the future of rural communities.

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The SET program began one year ago in eight states and, due to its success, is now available in an additional eleven states—including Texas. Since it began, 22 multi-county regions have received technical assistance to accomplish their regional projects.

Applications from Gulf Coast rural regions desiring to reap the benefits of working with the Texas SET Team to implement the program are currently being accepted. Completed applications must be submitted electronically to Ronald.Lawrence@tx.usda.gov by May 26, 2011. To qualify, the regional team must have members from a minimum of three counties and at least one of the counties must border the Texas Gulf Coast.

Applications can be obtained by contacting Rebekka Dudensing at rmdudensing@tamu.edu or on the web at http://communities.tamu.edu/set/index_set.php or <http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/phase2.html> (scroll down to the Texas application). There is no application fee, however, selected applicants should be prepared to provide some minor local logistical support for workshop meetings. Two regions will be selected in Texas and announced by June 30, 2011.

A free webinar has been scheduled for 10:00-11:00 a.m. on May 13th to provide an overview of the SET program and to answer questions from those interested in how the program will benefit communities in their region. Email Greg Clary at gclary@ag.tamu.edu for details on how to access the webinar, or visit <http://communities.tamu.edu> for more information.

Regional teams will receive the following: 1) an understanding of the critical drivers of their region and the emerging growth sectors and regional competitive advantages; 2) help in developing innovative approaches to strengthening regional economic development; 3) technical assistance and educational support from USDA Rural Development staff and economic development specialists with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service; 4) opportunities to share information with SET program participants from other states.

If you have questions regarding the application process for the *Stronger Economies Together* program in Texas, please contact one of the following individuals:

Ronnie Lawrence	USDA Rural Development	Ronald.Lawrence@tx.usda.gov
Jake Sheeran	USDA Rural Development	Jake.Sheeran@tx.usda.gov
Greg Clary	Texas AgriLife Extension	gclary@ag.tamu.edu
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USDA Rural Development serves as the lead federal agency for rural development needs by offering financial and technical assistance to individuals, businesses, and communities. For more information on programs offered by USDA Rural Development, contact the Texas State Office at (254) 742-9700 or visit its website at www.rurdev.usda.gov/tx

The Texas AgriLife Extension Service, a state agency within the Texas A&M University System, seeks to improve the lives of people, businesses, and communities across Texas through high quality, relevant education. For specific programs available in the area of community and economic development, please visit its website at <http://communities.tamu.edu>

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