

## **Southwest REAP Annual Narrative Report 2002**

**To: USDA Office of Community Development**

**Compiled by:** Shirley Brentrup, 701-483-1241

Roosevelt-Custer Regional Council

Pulver Hall

Dickinson, ND 58601

[brentrup@rooseveltcuster.com](mailto:brentrup@rooseveltcuster.com)

### **Executive Summary – 2002**

The SW REAP Zone expresses their thanks to the USDA Rural Development and their state office personnel who have diligently worked with us throughout the year. This program is truly a partnership with our most valuable partners being the USDA Rural Development and their staff and North Dakota Senator Byron Dorgan and his staff.

**Funding** - Senator Dorgan was successful in acquiring nearly \$500,000 in funding for the two North Dakota REAP Zones through the FY 2001 Community Development Block Grant Economic Development Initiative. This funding was routed to the zones in FY 2002 through the REAP Investment Fund. SW REAP and its sister REAP Zone, the Center of North America Coalition, have been in partnership for five years through their non-profit 501-©3 organization, the **REAP Investment Fund Inc.** This group has been the recipient of CDBG EDI grants for and within the two zones and continues to provide necessary grant administration and facilitation. The Fund has several programs benefiting both zones including a Revolving Loan Fund and a Research & Development Fund in partnership with USDA Rural Development grants. There is not a specific benchmark for this activity as this type of assistance shows up most often as a funding source in the benchmarking system.

**Community Fund** - SW REAP has developed another fund category, their Community Fund. This money was directed to new partnerships within their zone and has served a wide variety of purposes. The following Community Fund project isn't a big project but I like to talk about this project because it did a lot to build community and preserve community, and it shows how sharing risk makes things happen.

In 2002, SW REAP provided a \$2,500 loan to the Prairie Rose Art Guild to preserve the songs of the Sons of the Wagoneers. The Wagoneers are a group that performs and sings cowboy folk music in the Bowman area and have done so for about 40 years. The tape was recorded in Bismarck and is of very good quality. Since its release last summer, the recording has sold over 10,000 copies. The songs can be heard on western radio stations and several rodeos have picked up one song written by a Wagoneer to play during their opening ceremonies. Prairie Rose paid their loans back to all their partners in no time at all. So, not only did these folks preserve an important piece of their heritage and

hopefully break even on the deal, they had a success beyond anything they had imagined. Success that will encourage more risk taking in the future.

Other Community Fund partnerships included loans or grants from SW REAP for attendees to the recent Cuba Trade Mission, Southwest Feeders (a study on backgrounding cattle and sheep), office building renovations for business retention and technology, wind monitoring, nurse recruitment (see full report - Problems & Obstacles, Solutions), Business Challenge, Halliday Indian Lodge/Tourism Center, the Cowboy Hall of Fame, Dodge RV Park and strategic community planning.

**Strategic Community Planning** - SW REAP has supported two communities each year to do community strategic plans (Benchmark 68). This practice has been significant in that community residents have taken action. Most importantly, the planning process gives permission to residents to do something they want to see accomplished in their community. In return, the planning process helps to create new leaders and teaches work group and problem solving skills to residents. All communities have included residents in the immediate rural area in their planning groups. This year, planning and implementation efforts were supported in the cities of Beach, Dodge, and Taylor. The full report details the remarkable accomplishments of these communities in 2002.

**Annual Meeting** - In April, 70 people from across the state attended the Champion REAP Annual meeting held in conjunction with the three day Great Plains Population Symposium held in the SW REAP community of Dickinson. Approximately, 425 people from throughout the United States attended this event. The Great Plains Population Symposium Project was made possible by a special appropriation from Congress to investigate out migration and population losses in the plains states (<http://gppop.dsu.nodak.edu>).

**Outsourcing Government Jobs** - This project made headway in the North Dakota Legislature in 2001 with a program to have department heads justify centralization of all new jobs created in North Dakota government and incentives for job placements outside Bismarck. Unfortunately, the program was treated as more paperwork by department heads and no jobs were placed. In addition, it was a low blow to find out our state IT program discontinued contracts in rural areas and then hired people in Bismarck. How can we get companies to outsource jobs to North Dakota when our own state government can't set an example? And it was unbelievable that our Information Technology department that proclaims our superiority in technology throughout the state couldn't do business outside Bismarck. These events in 2002 were truly frustrating and have clearly shown a disconnection with the business of government and the role it could play in rural areas. The project will continue to find ways to avoid more centralization. The project will set up additional guidelines to assist those who feel their existing state jobs can be outsourced to rural areas within the zone. A new partner in this project is the ND Association of Counties.

## **Most Significant Accomplishments**

**Strategic Planning** - SW REAP has supported two communities each year to do community strategic plans (Benchmark 68). This practice has been significant in that community residents have taken action. Most importantly, the planning process gives permission to residents to do something they want to see accomplished in their community. In return, the planning process helps to create new leaders and teaches work group and problem solving skills to residents. All communities have included residents in the immediate rural area in their planning groups.

The **city of Beach** community plan chose to work on community theatre productions, creating family and community activities, finding a use for their former hospital building, creating a pharmacy, increasing tourism dollars through their "Spirit of the West" brand, insuring good fire protection, creating a Chamber of Commerce, and working towards a cleaner community.

In 2002, Beach residents accomplished wonderful things under their new community plan. A new tele-pharmacy is in place that utilizes the pharmacist from the city of Killdeer. He electronically oversees a pharmacy technician in Beach. (From this project, the pharmacist added another tele-pharmacy in the city of New England). Beach held a community theatre production to support Dollars for Scholars. They were successful in getting grant assistance in the purchase of self-contained breathing apparatus for the fire district. They held a Pumpkin Festival, a spring cleanup day, and established Kixs for Kids, a national dance organization started by two volunteer mothers. What an impressive year for this community of 1,116 people!

The **city of Dodge** community plan chose to work on opening a convenience store, getting better cell phone service, economic development and renewing community pride.

During 2002, the community partnered with Farmers Elevator to open their convenience store and SW REAP assisted them with a business loan. Dodge received grants and loans to improve their city park and add RV parking. The actual work on the RV Park is slated for 2003. Their investigation into cell phone service resulted in the reluctant acceptance that the cost of improving the service was too high given the low number of people it served. However, it appears their existing cell phone service has improved quite a bit. Nobody seems to know why but they think that asking the questions, getting publicity, and pointing out how bad the service was had something to do with it. The community also completed major renovations to their community center.

The city of Dodge was chosen the North Dakota City of the Year in 2002. The mayor attributes this award directly to their community plan. Dodge has a population of 125 people.

The **city of Taylor**, population 150, completed their community plan in 2002 and began its implementation. They planned to establish a heritage museum, increase tourism dollars spent here, offer more adult education classes, create a development site for their successful Horse Fest annual event, and establish a community library.

The Taylor museum committee of seven meets weekly and has hired a half time museum coordinator. The Horse Fest development group has created an 1880's design for their complex and the whole community as well. They have addressed zoning, installed water & sewer to the complex site, built a barn, acquired other buildings - one of which shall be a blacksmith shop. Three new Horse Fest event signs have been put up.

For the library, an older schoolhouse has been donated and will be moved into the town site when the foundation is ready. The adult education committee held four four-hour computer classes in partnership with the Stark-Billings Extension Service. These classes use the mobile computer lab purchased by SW REAP in 2001 for Stark County.

## **Community Participation**

It is important to note that the SW REAP Zone is an eight county area, roughly 10,000 square miles and approximately 38,000 people. Therefore, the definition of community in this section of the report encompasses 27 small towns and many rural residents.

The SW REAP board meets each month in a different location to allow residents throughout the region to attend. Usually interested people, regional development corporations, the county newspaper, county commissioners, and some city officials attend. The meetings are coordinated to be in the communities making requests or reports to the board.

Community participation is at an all time high with the many successful community strategic plans being implemented. People have participated by being committee members, class participants, instructors, and just plain people with ideas and resources. Newspapers provide excellent coverage for SW REAP activities.

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possible by a special appropriation from Congress to investigate out migration and population losses in the plains states (<http://gppop.dsu.nodak.edu>).

## **Partnerships and Alliances**

(1) The two North Dakota REAP Zones and eight Champion Communities continue to work together in a group called the Champion **REAP Alliance**. Together, these 10 entities have constructed a shared web site located at [www.ndalliancelink.com](http://www.ndalliancelink.com) and will work to maintain their USDA Champion or REAP status. They will work on common problems and shared opportunities. The group is funded by the state legislature through the Department of Commerce and the REAP Investment Fund, Inc. (2) **Benchmark 61, Task D.** SW Economic Developers partnered with SW REAP and the ND Department of Commerce to hold the first **Energy Expo**. The Expo worked to bring outside companies working in the energy industry to southwestern North Dakota to enjoy the amenities of the area for a few days and explore business options. Forty-five people attended the Expo. (3) **Benchmark 57.** The **wind energy partners**, a nine county consortium, have erected two anemometers to measure wind speeds in the region and SW REAP applied for and received a 20 meter anemometer through a state sponsored program and the Department of Energy. Wind speeds are recorded daily and this information is shared towards attracting wind developers to the area. This information will soon be available at <http://www.state.nd.us/dcs/Energy/ndwinddata.html> (4) SW REAP and its sister REAP Zone, the Center of North America Coalition, have been in partnership for five years through their non-profit 501-©3 organization, the **REAP Investment Fund Inc.** This group has been the recipient of grants for and within the two zones and continues to provide grant administration and facilitation. The Fund has several programs benefiting both zones including a Revolving Loan Fund and a Research and Development Fund in partnership with USDA Rural Development grants. There is not a specific benchmark for this activity as this type of assistance shows up most often as a funding source in the benchmarking system. (5) **Benchmark 59. SPICE Consortium** – This past fall, six rural communities and Dickinson State University began use of the new interactive video conferencing system, Southwest Pipeline of Information for Communities and Education. SW REAP choose to support this project with a \$10,000 ITV equipment donation to each school participating given that the beneficiaries (the schools) must be willing to allow the community, the university system, and businesses to reasonably access the video conferencing equipment. (6) **Benchmark 41. USDA RBOG Information Technology Grant** – In 2002, this grant assisted SW REAP to provide for an IT Coordinator for Adams and Bowman Counties, the SPICE project mentioned above, education grants for low-income people to received technology training, and one computer lab for each county in the region. SW REAP also completed a Regional Information Technology Strategic Plan under this grant program. The IT Coordinator delivered consulting, trouble shooting, and training to individuals, organizations

and businesses. IT Education Fund provided class fees to low income individuals.

## **Problems/Obstacles**

There is a nursing shortage in rural North Dakota. Southwest Healthcare Services, located in Bowman County, has been trying to find solutions to this problem for several years. They provide comparable wages. They offer sign on bonuses, relocation assistance and recruitment fees to existing employees for finding nurses. They encourage high school students to become nurses and offer scholarships. In 2000, they and other regional health facilities worked to offer nursing degrees through the regional ITV system and Dickinson State University allowing people to work on their nursing degrees from Bowman and other rural locations. This effort found only 9 students in the four counties attending the classes.

The medical facilities in Bowman County alone needed at least five more nurses or they would have to consider dramatic actions such as not admitting residents to their long term care facility or be forced to reduce the number of licensed beds. They currently have a 98% occupancy average.

## **Solutions**

**Benchmark 25.** Southwest Healthcare Services had heard about a North Dakota company called Healthcare Recruitment Initiative of Harvey. This company organized in early 2000 to recruit nurses from the Philippines for nursing homes and hospitals in North Dakota and neighboring states. There is an abundance of nurses in the Philippines with bachelor's degrees. The average salary there is \$150 per month compared to \$33,000 in North Dakota. North Dakota towns such as Harvey, Oakes, Steel and Cando have and are participating in the program. The results have been very positive. The nurses are fluent in English and have at least two years experience in the Philippines, including a year in direct patient care. Recruited nurses can bring their families. Costs per nurse recruited are \$9,110 for recruitment fees, INS processing, and premium processing fees. The Bowman group will provide a graduated sign on bonus plus they arranged for six months housing for them and provided host families.

This past fall, two male nurses (Manuel and Erwin) and three female Philippine nurses (Mayflor, Sarah, and Cheryl) arrived in Bowman. Before coming to the United States, they underwent a rigorous screening process that takes many months. Once they were approved and arrived here, they are required to take a test to earn the American nursing license. Mayflor and Sarah intend to bring their families to Bowman this spring. Since their spouses cannot work due to H1B visa requirements, the community hopes to enlist them as volunteers for their ambulance and fire districts. According to Darrold Bertsch, healthcare

administrator, the project was a learning process that took a great amount of hard work from many people but has helped the nursing shortage immensely and was well worth the wait and perseverance. Bertsch appreciated SW REAP assistance and stated the project would not have been successful without REAP's collaboration. Funding partners in this project included SW REAP, Energy Impact Funding, and Southwest Healthcare Services. The total project cost was \$56,650. Southwest REAP provided a grant of \$14,000.

## **Best Practices**

(1) **Benchmarks.** The benchmark system has provided accountability and uniformity to the development process. (2) Meeting in locations throughout our region has allowed community participation. (3) Mandating project match on loans and grants has required local buy-in. (4) Creating partnerships has strengthened our position on issues and increased knowledge that has enabled us to create and implement solutions. Partners this year include universities, job development authorities, development corporations, local and state extension services, health care providers, other non-profit organizations, rural development staff, financial institutions, county and city officials, and state agencies.

## **Plans/Prospects for the Future**

(1) **Benchmark 3, Task D. Outsourcing Government Jobs** - This project made headway in the North Dakota Legislature in 2001 with a program to have department heads justify centralization of all new jobs created in North Dakota government and incentives for job placements outside Bismarck. The project will continue to find ways to avoid more urban centralization in state and federal jobs. The project will set up additional guidelines to assist those who feel their existing state jobs can be outsourced to rural areas within the zone. A new partner in this project is the ND Association of Counties. (2) **Benchmark 70. Talent Hunter** - It is ironic but that there are jobs available in our rural areas that aren't being filled. These jobs are in the trades and professional areas – jobs that require education or expertise. It is even more ironic that the eleven North Dakota universities and several trade schools churn out people with these skills. This project will work with existing Job Service employees to fill job positions with persons outside the area, primarily those from high unemployment coastal areas. This project needs additional funding before it can be implemented. (3) **Benchmark 68. Strategic Planning** - For 2003, SW REAP has again partnered with the Forest Service and the communities of South Heart and Scranton for community strategic plans. SW REAP will also be completing a new strategic plan with assistance through a USDA RBOG grant.