

Training for Sustainable Community Development: Phase III

Final Report for CS07-060

Project Type: Sustainable Community Innovation

Funds awarded in 2007: \$10,000.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2008

Region: Southern

State: Alabama

Principal Investigator:

[Dr. Robert Zabawa](#)

Tuskegee University

Project Information

Abstract:

The project was centered on sustainable development activities for a set of Southern Black agricultural communities that were created during the Great Depression, initially under the direction of the Resettlement Administration and subsequently under the Farm Security Administration. These and related agencies provided an opportunity for landless sharecroppers and tenants to own land. This opportunity allowed the "settlers" to become small independent farmers (a Jeffersonian ideal) and form independent agricultural communities (a Booker T. Washington ideal). Thirteen such all-Black 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 Farms, MS; Mound Farms, LA, Flint River Farms, GA; Allendale Farms, SC; Tillery, NC and Aberdeen Gardens, VA) a sustainable economic development strategy and training meeting was convened. Community participation ensured that this training lead to site-specific community development plans and activities.

Results of the training were based on the activities initiated by the participating communities. Planned activities included submission of grant applications, community meetings, organizing and community-based activities. In addition, results will be presented at professional meetings and symposia and published in local media and professional journals, and further Resettlement Community meetings planned.

The principal cooperators were selected representatives of the participating communities and the George Washington Carver Agricultural Experiment Station at Tuskegee University. The proposed project took approximately one year.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION: Statement of Problem, Rationale and Justification

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 an intensive three-day workshop 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.

Twice since Emancipation, the U.S. Government devised programs to strengthen the land-owning capacities of Black farming communities—once during Reconstruction, and again during the Depression. Although the efforts are viewed as deficient, there are significant remnants of these programs that influence these communities today.

Of particular research interest are a set of communities proposed and established during the Depression by the Resettlement Administration and its successor agencies. The USDA's Resettlement Administration (RA) provided an opportunity for landless sharecroppers and tenants to own farm land. Thus, these landless sharecroppers and farm tenants could become independent farmers (a Jeffersonian ideal). Further, they could form independent agricultural communities, with a strong infrastructure (a Booker T. Washington ideal). Reaching beyond "40 acres and a mule," the members of these communities would have not only land, but also schools, health centers, churches, cooperatives, gin and grist mills, and farm supervision and management training (Oubre 1978). In the end, the RA purchased approximately 1.9 million acres used for 140 to 150 agricultural resettlement projects (Holley, 1971; Salamon 1979 and also see Alexander 1936, Cannon 1992, 1996, Cobb and Namorato 1984, Conklin 1976).

These Resettlement communities were established throughout the United States. In the South, 13 rural resettlement projects were designated for Black farmers alone. These communities encompassed 1,150 families on 92,000 acres. An additional 1,117 Black families were resident in 19 scattered projects on 70,000 to 80,000 acres of land (Salamon 1979). The 13 all-Black communities were important because they were to provide an opportunity to own land and gain economic independence; individual action would be reinforced by community development. The fact that these communities exist or are remembered today emphasizes the small but important effort of the Resettlement Administration and its successor agencies.

Initial reports concerning these projects were positive, both in terms of farm productivity and community development. Gradually, support and guidance from USDA agencies declined. Eventually, Congress called into question many New Deal programs and sponsoring agencies, including the RA. In 1937, the Resettlement Administration was reorganized into the more limited Farm Security Administration (FSA), itself then subsumed into the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) in 1946. As the nation's attention turned increasingly toward war, prejudicial and discriminatory practices began to permeate the very agency that had been empowered to provide agricultural support to the new Black communities and to newly established Black farm landowners (see Baldwin 1968).

Some communities established by the RA are today still visible—although they may be considered 'at risk'. These extant communities provide a field setting within which to investigate seven decades of community cohesion maintained against a variety of institutional and economic threats. Other Black community development projects undertaken by the USDA/RA have faded from view, having succumbed to

land concentration, urbanization and suburbanization, economic failure, and a variety of other pressures.

Rationale

Projects where communities share their successes and challenges are particularly timely. Communities surrounded by limited-resource and small-scale family farmers nationwide have rapidly vanished from the landscape ideal still deeply ingrained in American culture (see Berry, 1977; Vogeler, 1981). The South's Black farm land owners and operators have disappeared at a rate significantly greater than their white counterparts (Wood and Gilbert, 1998; Zabawa, 1991).

Recently analyzed Census data, however, show that, contrary to expectations, certain southern states have experienced a slight rise in both Black farm land and Black farm operators (USDA, 1997; Zabawa 1999). Such increases may result from USDA-funded collaborative programs directed toward Black farmers (such as the 2501 Small Farm Outreach Training and Technical Assistance programs based at the 1890 and 1994 institutions, and at community-based organizations such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and the Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation). These projects have provided the technical assistance necessary for Black farmers to gain access to programs previously denied them. In this regard, they may be interpreted as a return to the proactive development programs of the original Resettlement Administration.

Because of the success of the 2501 and other technical assistance programs, we suggest that additional collaborative and TA programs can be designed to maintain the momentum of the last decade. It will augment, at community, university, and agency levels, our understanding of the factors or "ingredients" that ensure a rural agricultural community's growth and maturation. The primary value of the proposed project is regional, in particular among the southern Black Belt states. Other regions experienced similar community development projects in the 1930s, and there is considerable overlap with ongoing and future research across the U.S.

Project Relevance to Sustainable Development

Communities at risk benefit enormously from establishing a coherent sense of their own history and planning and implementing their own development strategies using local resources. Thus the products of the project benefited a wider community than simply using the resources of an agency or university. The communities involved, such as Tillery, NC, Aberdeen Gardens, Prairie Farms and Flint River Farms already initiated research into their past; others have responded enthusiastically to preliminary investigations (Hargrove and Zabawa 2004, Warren and Zabawa 1998, Zabawa and Warren 1998, Zabawa 1999, pers. comm.). The opportunity for these communities to gather together and share their experiences and strategies towards a common goal of sustainable development is unique.

In December 2004, the 62nd Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference at Tuskegee University hosted a meeting of Southern Resettlement communities. The theme of this meeting was "Pioneering Communities: Revisiting New Deal Resettlement." The goal of this meeting was for leaders in these communities to share their common and unique experiences with each other.

The focus on subsequent meetings was to address specific issues relevant to the sustainable development of the participating communities. Through on-going discussion with community leaders an initial set of workshop activities was developed to address community and agricultural development. Examples included:

Grantsmanship—this topic is critical for local citizens to be able to access funding opportunities from the local to the national levels that deal with individual home repairs to creating community parks and recreation facilities. Participants will be

given a list of potential grant donors, and then they will receive skills training on how to write to submit applications for funding.

Tourism—the creation of these specific communities through New Deal programs is a historical fact that is being lost to subsequent generations. Opportunities to highlight this history through tours, museum displays, WebPages, and popular publications are critical to passing on this knowledge.

Small Business Development—individual participants have opportunities to develop activities from small farm production and marketing to cottage industries such as quilting and bed and breakfast enterprises.

In August 2006, the program “Pioneering Communities: Celebrating New Deal Resettlement II” convened in Macon County, Georgia and hosted by the the Flint River Farms Resettlement Community. This program was supported by USDA SARE/SRDC grant # CS05-039. The objectives of this project were:

Objective One—each community participant will attend 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 will engage 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 will be developed.

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

In September 2007, the program “Pioneering Communities: Celebrating New Deal Resettlement III” convened in Hampton, Virginia and hosted by the Aberdeen Gardens Resettlement Community. This program was supported by USDA SARE/SRDC grant # CS06-046. The objectives of this project were:

Objective One—each community participant will attend a series of workshop sessions that target specific sustainable community development strategies, including: land retention, website development and other forms of communication, grantsmanship, and natural resource development as it applies to conservation, taxation and education.

Objective Two—each community will engage 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 will be developed.

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

Project Objectives:

Based on evaluations from previous workshops, the objectives for the 2009 workshop were as

follows:

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.

Cooperators

- [Sheila Clark](#)

Community Participant
Flint River Farms, GA

- [Glenn Dixon](#)

Community Participant
Mound Farms, LA

- [Robin Garrison](#)

Community Participant
Aberdeen Gardens, VA

- [Jess Gilbert](#)

gilbert@ssc.wisc.edu
University Partner
University of Wisconsin-Madison
340B Agricultural Hall
1450 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 262-9530 (office)

- [Tasha Hargrove](#)

tmhargrove@tuskegee.edu
Co-Cordinator
Tuskegee University
100 Campbell Hall
G.W. Carver Agricultural Experiment Station
Tuskegee University, AL 36088
(334) 724-4524 (office)

- [Calvin Head](#)

Community Participant

Mileston Farms, MS

- [Willie Loftly](#)

Community Participant
Flint River Farms, GA

- [Adrienne Lucas](#)

Community Participant
Prairie Farms, AL

- [Curtis McDonald](#)

Community Participant
Flint River Farms, GA

- [Bob Melvin](#)

Community Participant
Flint River Farms, GA

- [Rennie Miller](#)

Community Participant
Gee's Bend, AL

- [Helen Murray](#)

Community Participant
Sabine Farms, TX

- [Alice Paris](#)

parisa@tuskegee.edu
University Partner
Tuskegee University
100 Campbell Hall
G.W. Carver Agricultural Experiment Station
Tuskegee University, AL 36088
(334) 727-8069 (office)

- [Sarah Sims](#)

Community Participant
Mound Farms, LA

- [Sarah Warren](#)
sarah_warren@ncsu.edu
 University Partner
 North Carolina State University
 Raleigh, NC
 (919) 515-7996 (office)
- [Cleveland Whitehead, Jr.](#)
 Community Participant
 Flint River Farms, GA
- [Lavern Williams](#)
 Community Participant
 Sabine Farms, TX
- [Margaret Wilson](#)
 Community Participant
 Aberdeen Gardens, VA

Research

Materials and methods:

METHODS and APPROACH

The project convened a meeting of leaders from the selected Resettlement Communities in the winter of 2009. The Resettlement Communities of Mound, LA and Mileston, MS, hosted the workshop. This contribution was significant because the Mound Community is engaged with neighboring Tallulah in a museum exhibit and the Mileston Community has a significant civil rights history as well as a developing youth co-op organization.

The potential for success was based on the meeting being community-specific and participatory. A further value of this project was that it was participatory at the community level. The value of this approach was illustrated in a previous workshop where the participants found strength in convening with like-minded communities. As one participant remarked: "All of the history, projects and on-going activities of the other communities have been invaluable. These meetings continue to be a source of inspiration and encouragement in our efforts to get things going at our site."

The Workshop:
 PIONEERING COMMUNITIES IV

January 14 - 17, 2009

AGENDA

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2009

ARRIVE WINGATE HOTEL, Vicksburg, MS

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2009

7:00 a.m. – 7:45 a.m.

Breakfast in Hotel

8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Travel to Madison Parish Board and Technology Center

8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Registration

9:00 a.m.

Welcome:

Sarah Sims and Glenn Dixon: Southern University

Project Roll Call: Tasha Hargrove, Tuskegee University

Purpose of the Meeting: Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University

9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Session 1: Community Updates/Status Reports

Aberdeen Gardens, VA

Allendale Farms, SC

Flint River Farms, GA

Gee's Bend Farms, AL

Mileston Farms, MS

Mound Farms, LA

Prairie Farms, AL

Sabine Farms, TX

Tillery Farms, NC

10:30 a.m. – 10:45 p.m.

BREAK

10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Tour of Hermione House Museum

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Working Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Session 2: Introduction on Online Business, Technology Center, Glenn Dixon, Southern University

2:30 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Travel to Lake Providence

3:15 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Tour Cotton Museum and Henderson Project

6:00 p.m.

Return to Hotel

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 2009

7:00 a.m. – 7:45 a.m.

Breakfast in Hotel

7:45 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.

Board Transportation to Mileston

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Session 3: Mileston: Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, Melbah Smith, FSC and Calvin Head, Mileston Cooperative

Description of Mileston Resettlement Project

Presentation of Mileston Cooperative Structure and Services

Presentation of Cooperative Youth Marketing Project

Tour of Mileston

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Working Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Session 3: continued as needed

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Return to Mound Community

5:00 p.m.

Dinner on the Grounds, St. John Missionary Baptist Church, Mound Project, Louisiana

Session 4: Organic Gardening and Black History Presentation, By Owusu Bandele, Southern University

7:30 p.m.

Return to Hotel

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2009

7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 a.m. – 10:30

Closing Workshop at Hotel

Closing Thoughts: Tuskegee Team and Community Members

Depart according to individual schedules

Research results and discussion:

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS: Community Action: Future Goals, Resources, Actions

Each community was asked to present on the activities, those accomplished and those on-going, from the previous year.

ABERDEEN GARDENS:

Further Development of the community museum: Office space, Meeting rooms, Reception area

Have an intern provided by Hampton University to do historical research

Developing gardening project: In partnership with Cooperative Extension and 4-H, With middle school students and Senior adults

Ultimate goal to have a farmers market to sell produce from gardens

Fund-raising gala

Black History Month program and breakfast for 500+

Book release on the history of Aberdeen Gardens

FLINT RIVER FARMS:

Obtained grant from USDA

Developing organizational structure

Developed webpage: flintriverfarms.org

Special projects at school site: Play ground, storage building, arboretum, eventually offices,

Future plans for a walking trail

Member training: Executive board training, Record keeping

Application for recognition on the National Register

Community awareness days: community heritage day, hog kill

GEE'S BEND:

Grant and renovation of the sewing center: Quilting and Silk screening

MILESTON FARMS:

Cooperative development

Youth initiative and technical skills

Coalition of elected officials, educational institutions to serve the community

MOUND FARMS:

Continued development of area history including the Underground Railroad

SABINE FARMS:

Site clean-up

Development of mineral rights (oil)

Save original buildings

The Communities then participated in groups to focus on major topics for future activities based on the accomplishments of the previous year as reported earlier.

E-Commerce

Local production and seasonal products

Development of a web presence: Webpage, Facebook, etc.

Youth Co-ops and Farmers Markets

Local production and seasonal products

Funding to create and maintain farmers market

Link communities assets: youth groups, education, and political leadership

History and Local Museum Displays

Expand historical background

Communication

Website development

Community Stories: Brochures, Websites, Books, On-line entries

Participation Summary

Educational & Outreach Activities

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:

Education/outreach description:

PUBLICATIONS AND OUTREACH

Each community has developed a Poster that highlights the history of that

community.

There have also been partnerships developed between communities and local universities, including: Aberdeen Gardens and Hampton University; Flint River Farms and Fort Valley State University; Mound Farms and Southern University; Prairie Farms and Tuskegee University.

The Communities have also participated in local community events, history days, and have presented at local schools.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND EVALUATION

At the end of the workshop sessions participants were asked to fill out an evaluation. Summary results are as follows:

PIONEERING COMMUNITIES CELEBRATING NEW DEAL RESETTLEMENT IV
January 14 - 17, 2009

Host Communities: Mound Farms, LA and Mileston Farms, MS

Evaluation Results

Please use the following scale to rank the different parts of the community development workshop:

1 = poor

2 = fair

3 = good

4 = very good

5 = excellent

Please circle the appropriate number to evaluate the following:

Workshops:

Session 1:

Project Updates/Status Reports Total=48; Mean=4.8

Comment: Very informative

Session 2:

On-Line Business Total=47; Mean=4.7

Comment: Reporter had detailed outline of complete package

Session 3.1:

Mileston Cooperative Structure Total=40, Mean=4.9

Session 3.2:

Mileston Youth Marketing Total=47, Mean=4.7

Session 4:

Organic Gardening Total=49, Mean=4.0

Facilities and Fieldtrips:

How would you rank the hotel facilities?

Total=47, Mean=4.7

How would you rank the fieldtrip to the Hermione Museum?

Total=47, Mean=4.7

How would you rank the fieldtrip to the Cotton Museum?

Total=48, Mean=4.8

How would you rank the fieldtrip to Mileston?

Total=48, Mean=4.8

Current and Future Activities:

What is your overall evaluation of the workshop?

Total=48, Mean=4.8

Comment: All of the history, projects and on-going activities of the other communities have been invaluable. These meetings continue to be a source of inspiration and encouragement in our efforts to get things going at our site.

Should another workshop on the New Deal Resettlement Communities be convened?

yes — 9 (90%) no — 1 (10%)

If yes, should the workshop be hosted by (please circle choice)

Another Resettlement Community — 5 (63%)

Tuskegee University — 3 (38%)

Other: _____

If yes, What topics would you like to see covered:

The use and retaining of volunteers

New Projects

Something on organic gardens/farms

ii. _____

Complete projects

An album of all the Resettlement Photos

iii. _____

iv. _____

Any final comments:

I think everything was great and I'm looking forward to next year.

More youth involvement.

Transportation so all can travel together (versus separate vans).

I would like to meet at Tillery Farms next to see and hear what they are doing or have been doing.

Overall, very knowledgeable, very interesting—well planned.

Keep up the good work, thank you.

Recommendations:

Potential Contributions

At least three areas were emphasized in individual community and group sessions:

Community Gardening, Farmers Markets, and Local Seasonal and Specialty Crops and Products.

Youth Involvement, including Merging History and Youth.

Communication via Web pages and Newsletters

These areas could be addressed not only as individual topics but as related activities

as well. For example, web pages can be used to display old photographs, traditional crafts and methods, or advertise produce, or be used in school systems to highlight community history. They are also a good way for the various Resettlement Communities to keep up to date on what their partner communities are doing.

Future Recommendations

FUTURE ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All of the participants were asked for suggested topics for further discussion at a future meeting. These topics included:

Changes since last meeting; updates

The use and retaining of volunteers

Organic farms and gardens

How to develop new projects

The community at Tillery, North Carolina, was suggested as a possible host for a next meeting. It was further suggested that funds be sought to support this meeting.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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