



**Rural Development**

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# News Release

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## **Technical Assistance Program Announced for South Plains Communities**

**Temple, Texas, December 13, 2013** – USDA Rural Development has selected a group of South Plains counties to participate in the “Stronger Economies Together” (SET) program. The SET program facilitates regional collaboration and is designed to help multi-county teams strengthen their knowledge, skills, and resources for collaborating as a region to pursue economic development goals. The newest region selected for the program includes Hale, Swisher, Castro, and Floyd counties.

The award is a result of an application submitted by regional leaders following a workshop in September. The meeting and application demonstrated a willingness to bring ideas, assets, and barriers to the table and consider a variety of approaches including life skills, small business development and continuing adult education.

“Rural Development is pleased to partner with several federal, state and local organizations to provide SET resources throughout the South Plains of Texas,” said Rural Development State Director Paco Valentin. “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.”

“Our rural communities and counties need to work together to leverage local assets. SET provides a framework and tools for that cooperation,” said Gary Cross, AgriLife Extension Agent – Hale County.

“SET provides facilitation and coaching for local community stakeholders to work together to develop a regional economic development plan,” said Dr. Jamie Rae Walker, AgriLife Extension specialist. “This community-based approach uses evidence-based planning and goal-setting to empower local action.”

The Texas SET program is a partnership between USDA Rural Development and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service with cooperation from the Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Farm Bureau, and Texas Sea Grant Program. At the National level, SET key partners include the Regional Rural Development Centers, Economic Development Administration, and National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

SET will help rural communities capitalize on the strengths of the region to create jobs, wealth and economic development. Facilitated planning meetings and technical assistance included in SET will help communities develop and implement specific actions aligned with regional goals and assets. The SET program began in 2010 in eight states and, due to its success, is now available in 19 states—including Texas. Since it began, nearly 40 multi-county regions have received technical assistance to accomplish their regional projects.

Regional team members will receive the following: 1) Intensive facilitated strategic planning for their regional team; 2) 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; 3) Technical assistance and educational support from the Rural Development and AgriLife Extension staff; and 4) Other educational and information-sharing opportunities with other SET program participants around the country.

Residents from participating counties are encouraged to become involved in the program. If you have questions regarding the application process for the *Stronger Economies Together* program in Texas, please contact one of the following individuals: Gary Cross at the Hale County Extension Office at [Gary.Cross@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:Gary.Cross@ag.tamu.edu) or (806) 291-5267, or Clyde Jenkins, USDA Rural Development [clyde.jenkins@tx.usda.gov](mailto:clyde.jenkins@tx.usda.gov) or 806-468-8600 ext 4. More information on the SET program is available at <http://communities.tamu.edu/stronger-economies-together-set/>.

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](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/tx). The Texas A&M 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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