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NEWS RELEASE

USDA Announces Economic Development Technical Assistance For Old Trails Regional Tourism Partnership



USDA Rural Development State Director Janie Dunning announced that Old Trails Regional Tourism Partnership have been chosen as one of the initial two regions in Missouri to participate in the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. The SET program will provide assistance with community and economic development planning on a regional basis.

I'm pleased that out of eight states chosen to participate in the Stronger Economies Together Program, two of Missouri's communities will now have the opportunity to implement a strong economic development strategy plan to help their communities thrive," U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill said. "Through this program, I hope the Lake of the Ozarks Regional Development Council and the Old Trails Regional Tourism Partnership will be able to reassess and reevaluate crucial economic data for the communities."

"Having lived in Lafayette County my entire life, I know first-hand the rich heritage and natural beauty of Lexington and the surrounding areas," said U. S. Representative Ike Skelton. Through this partnership between USDA Rural Development and the University of Missouri, it is my hope that our local economy will grow as more people come here to experience the wonders of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, and Saline counties."

"The program was created to help encourage rural counties to work together to develop and implement a regional economic development strategy or plan," Dunning said. "Within Missouri, the SET program is a joint collaborative initiative between University of Missouri Extension and USDA Rural Development. Missouri is one of only eight states to participate in the pilot SET program nationally. Six regions within Missouri applied for the initial round of SET assistance."

Old Trails Regional Tourism Partnership includes the rural counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette and Saline. The region follows the course of the original Sante Fe Trail. Initial partnering

organizations within the region include: Boonslick Tourism, City of Higginsville, Friends of Arrow Rock, Lafayette County Wineries, Lexington Tourism, Marshall Chamber of Commerce/Saline County Tourism, and the Old Trails Regional Tourism Board.

Lake of the Ozarks Regional Economic Development Council is the other Missouri region selected for the SET program. It consists of a region of Camden, Miller and Morgan counties. Among the initial partnering organizations within this region are: AmerenUE, Camdenton Area Chamber of Commerce, Central Bank of Lake of the Ozarks, City of Camdenton, City of Osage Beach, First National Bank, Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, Lake Regional Health Systems, and State Fair Community College.

It is anticipated that the intensive technical assistance provided by the Missouri SET training team will extend for the next 12 to 18 months. The core training team consists of University of Missouri Extension faculty including Sharon Gulick, Director of Community Economic and Entrepreneurial Development, Dean Larkin, Community Development Specialist and Richard Proffer, Business Development Specialist and John Gulick, Community Planning and Development Specialist with USDA-RD. Other partners, including the North Central Regional Rural Development Center at Michigan State University and the Missouri Department of Economic Development will provide economic data and analysis for the regions. Each region's community leaders will develop comprehensive regional economic development strategies based upon their region's unique assets.

Project leaders anticipate that the SET Program will seek a second round of participating regions in mid-2011.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in home ownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure.

For more information on the SET initiative, contact Sharon Gulick, Director, ExCEED, University of Missouri Extension, 222 Gentry Hall, Columbia, Missouri 65211; phone 573-884-0669 or GulickS@missouri.edu or John R. Gulick, Community Planning and Development Specialist, Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 601 Business Loop 70 West, Suite 235, Columbia, MO 65203, Phone: 573-876-0976 or John.Gulick@mo.usda.gov.

For more information on programs offered by USDA Rural Development, contact the Missouri state office at (573) 876-0976 or visit its website at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mo>

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