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ROJ NO: ARKW-2009-03816 **AGENCY:** NIFA ARKW

ROJ TYPE: OTHER GRANTS **PROJ STATUS:** TERMINATED

CONTRACT/GRANT/AGREEMENT NO: 2009-49400-05875 **PROPOSAL NO:** 2009-03816

START DATE: 01 SEP 2009 **TERM:** 31 AUG 2011

GRANT AMT: \$313,278 **GRANT YR:** 2009

WARD TOTAL: \$313,278

INITIAL AWARD YEAR: 2009

INVESTIGATOR: King, C.

PERFORMING INSTITUTION:

ARKANSAS LAND AND FARM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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ASSISTING BEGINNING ARKANSAS FARMERS

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY: Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC) designed the Beginning Arkansas Farmer Development program to provide continuing training, mentoring and technical assistance to a minimum of 80 beginning, Black and limited resource farmers in 42 counties in Arkansas. Participants will receive regular developmental assistance for up to two years from staff and mentor farmers. Each of four ALFDC offices will be expected to have a caseload of 20-25 beginning farmers. The project will also establish the Arkansas FarmLand Registry, a tool to match beginning farmers with landowners. This standard BFRDP project will provide comprehensive, individualized development assistance to participants using a case management model in which individual needs assessments and development plans guide the provision of subsequent services. The program will focus on developing diversified farms with a special emphasis on livestock, fresh produce, and bioenergy enterprises. By the end of their enrollment, participants are expected to have: (1) learned sufficient knowledge and skills to operate basic farm tools and equipment in a safe and effective manner; (2) obtained the use of farm land; (3) developed a farm plan using a sustainable set of enterprises; (4) strengthened their knowledge and understanding of management practices and cultural requirements; (5) developed a marketing strategy and plan for the intended crops and livestock; (6) developed a feasible plan for farm financing and established access to credit; (7) learned recommended land and water conservation and sustainable farming practices; (8) begun participating in appropriate farmer collaboration and co-op efforts. While the achievement of these individual outcome objectives is central to program success, the ultimate goal of the program is to address five strategic needs of the agricultural sector in east and south Arkansas: (1) Reverse the decline in the number of African Americans whose primary occupation is farming; (2) Increase the number of farm operators under the age of 40; (3) Strengthen the economic viability of small, diversified farms in Arkansas, especially those operated by socially disadvantaged farmers; (4) Provide a mechanism, a FarmLand Registry, that facilitates access to land for new producers as well as retention of African American owned land; and (5) increase African American and limited resource farmer utilization of existing USDA agency services.

OBJECTIVES: The goals of the Beginning Arkansas Farmer Development Program are: 1. Reverse the decline in the number of African Americans whose primary occupation is farming. 2. Increase the number of farmer operators under the age of 40. 3. Strengthen the economic viability of small, diversified farms in Arkansas, especially those operated by socially disadvantaged farmers. 4. Provide a mechanism, a FarmLand Registry, that facilitates access to land for new producers as well as retention of African American owned land. 5. Increase African American and limited resource farmer utilization of existing USDA agency services. The specific objectives are that by the end of the cohort's two year training cycle each participant will have: 1. learned sufficient knowledge and skills to operate basic farm tools and equipment in a safe and effective manner. 2. located and bought or leased farm land that is appropriate for his or her intended operation. 3. developed a farm plan using a diverse and sustainable set of enterprises, with a special emphasis on livestock, fresh

roduce, and emerging bio-energy crops. 4. strengthened their knowledge and understanding of recommended management practices and cultural requirements for each planned enterprise. 5. developed a marketing strategy and plan that is adequate and appropriate for the intended crops and livestock 6. developed a feasible plan for farm financing and established adequate access to credit to sustain operations. 7. learned recommended land and water conservation and sustainable farming practices 8. begun participating in appropriate farmer collaboration and co-op efforts Critical process milestone events include the recruitment and staff of the field offices within the first 60 days of program operations, the successful recruitment of a minimum of 40 beginning farmers within the first 5 months of each program year, the development of an individualized development plan within 45 days of each participant's enrollment, and the completion of case reviews by the end of the 6th and 12 month of program operation each year.

APPROACH: The findings from a number of researchers support what ALFDC has learned in more than 30 years of work with limited resources farmers in Arkansas: Successful farm and farmer development is most likely to be achieved in the context of a continuing supporting relationship through a mix of training, technical assistance, advocacy, and mentoring. Beginning and limited resource farmers prefer to receive direct, experiential training delivered in either small groups or one-on-one in a local setting. These lessons shaped the program that will use a case management strategy to provide individualized comprehensive development services to 80 participating beginning farmers. In addition, ALFDC will establish an Arkansas FarmLand Registry to assist new farmers to locate land to lease or purchase. ALFDC will establish three regional offices, each staffed with a Field Agent, to complement its current staff at its central office in eastern Arkansas in order to ensure that the program is accessible to beginning farmers throughout the 42 county target area The proposed case management strategy employs a cycle of activities beginning with outreach and recruitment, followed by intake and assessment, and the preparation of individualized development plans. Once the initial development plan is adopted, it guides the provision of subsequent development activities, including training, technical assistance, advocacy and mentoring services. Monitoring and continuing assessment of implementation activities take place by staff case managers who regularly visit with each beginning farmer. The project will monitor participant changes and achievements using a number of specific performance indicators including such measures as: participation in training and development opportunities, achievement of training and development objectives in the development plan, participant reported confidence in farm management skill, participant self-reported confidence about his future in farming, development of a substantive and viable marketing plan, number of acres acquired by purchase or lease and actively farmed, participation in SDA agency programs, crop and herd yields, and farm financial performance The individual case records are the means by which increases in operator skills, knowledge, and practice will be collected and retained. This data will be routinely and contemporaneously entered into the case record throughout each participant's enrollment in the program. The case file, though highly flexible, is constructed with a set of defined program forms that ensures that consistent data is collected and retained for analysis. By maintaining a centralized file on each client, ALFDC's staff can conveniently review each participant's case history and current operating and development plans. This record also serves as the basic tool for project quality assurance and quality improvement efforts. It will allow project staff, evaluators, and USDA reviewers to get a consolidated summary of all activities on a case by case basis and to easily track changes in farm management, production SDA program participation, and farm income.

PROGRESS: 2009/09 TO 2011/08

OUTPUTS: The primary method of disseminating the results of this project has been through meetings. These meetings have included our annual fall and winter farm conferences, four regional workshops, and various impromptu meetings necessitated by special needs such as preparing or reviewing financing applications, selecting alternate crops, marketing plans and strategies. Flyers for church dissemination and the news media were utilized for both recruiting and promotional activities. A data management system was developed is Access to allow for participant tracking and to serve as a farm land registry hosting characteristics and pertinent attributes of each participant's farming operation. By the conclusion of this reporting period 22 new and/or beginning farmers were receiving information regularly via newsletters, email, telephone,

letters, and copies of farming articles of particular applicability, were receiving training and technical assistance through workshops and individual farm visits. An informal network emerged by which beneficial information were shared as peer to peer sharing. As successes such as getting financed, finding available land, were obtained, the word spread rapidly serving as inspiration to those already and encouragement to those anticipating farming. PARTICIPANTS: Nothing significant to report during this reporting period. TARGET AUDIENCES: The target audiences were: - Black Farmers - Limited Resources Farmers PROJECT MODIFICATIONS: Nothing significant to report during this reporting period.

IMPACT: 2009/09 TO 2011/08

Recruitment of the 22 new and beginning farmers for this project and their successes have served to create interest in others. It has also served to change, in a positive sense, the community's perception of the USDA. The land farmed by this group is Black owned. By maintaining successful farming operations, the land tends to remain Black owned. Also as these young farmers proved their farming abilities, their changes of leasing and/or buying White owned land increases. This emerging outcome will tend to increase Black land ownership while obviously retaining Black owned land. The open mind set of these young farmers together with their being more educated than the average older farmer, seems more receptive to environmentally friendly operations, better use and understanding of applicable technology which collectively support sustainably agriculture - socially, economically, culturally and environmentally.

PUBLICATIONS (not previously reported): 2009/09 TO 2011/08

various newsletters and pamphlets, ALFDC Staff, 2010

PROGRESS: 2009/09/01 TO 2010/08/31

OUTPUTS: Field agents were identified and recruited to establish regional offices. Areas served include south central, central and east central Arkansas. Special effort was extended during staff meetings to assure staff awareness of and training on out to recruit and provide training and technical assistance to beginning farmers. Workshops addressing topics applicable for beginning farmers including risk management, financial management, availability of financial resources, alternate crop production, and resolution of heir property issues and land retention. Special effort was extended to assure good attendance by beginning farmers and ranchers. PARTICIPANTS: Individuals who worked on the project during this period included Calvin King who directed the project startup, orientation and supported project implementation. He also supported the conduct of workshops. James Davis supported project implementation, participant recruitment, workshops and other training and technical assistance. Olly Neal and James Stevens supported regional field activities. ALFDC collaborated with Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, National Resource Services, Legal Services and Seven Harvest. Training and professional development opportunities were provided through workshops, seminars, and one on one meetings. TARGET AUDIENCES: African American and limited refarmers in 42 counties of East Central Arkansas will receive developmental assistance for two years from staff and mentor farmers. The focused attention is on preserving existing African American and limited resource farms and strengthening their economic viability. PROJECT MODIFICATIONS: There were no major changes during this period.

IMPACT: 2009/09/01 TO 2010/08/31

Efforts to recruit beginning farmers revealed exposed a serious reluctance to engage in farming activities by young people. The prevailing notion that farming produced insufficient income, was risky business and did not work for Black. It was also revealed that the Black Farmers Law Suite verified the extermination of Black farmers. Existing beginning farmers, as few as there were, were struggling to hang on. They were also deficient in business management and in some cases farming technology. These findings served to add fidelity to our training material, it verified our initial hypothesis and served to shape training materials and approaches. Farming candidate have to be shown farm models with positive cash flows, the importance and profitability of the local food industry, and other benefits of farming. Existing farmers have to learn better overall business management practices, especially risk management.

PUBLICATIONS: 2009/09/01 TO 2010/08/31

Publications included quarterly newsletters, workshop materials and pamphlets, and distribution of various government

materials - 2010.