Sandhills Region SET Initiative

In 2012 USDA Rural Development partnered with NC Cooperative Extension to deliver the Stronger Economies Together (SET) Initiative to two 3-county regions in North Carolina: the “Sandhills Region” and the “Eastern Triangle.” The Sandhills Sustainable Agriculture Working Group’s proposal brings together partners and stakeholders in Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties. The basis for the Sandhills proposal was to develop an economic development plan based on agriculture.

Over 10 months, the team held facilitated trainings with representatives of groups and institutions from the three counties, including Agricultral Advisory Board members, Community College representatives, community stakeholders, Economic Development partners and others. A core writing team has taken the information and developed a Strategic Economic Development Plan for the Sandhills based on sustainable agriculture, called the Green Fields Initiative. The Green Fields Initiative is a three-pronged plan to support the economic viability of agriculture for the benefit of the Sandhills region.

Key Points of the Green Fields Initiative

* A vibrant agricultural sector is a critical component of a sustainable and self-reliant community.
* When more locally grown and produced food is available, consumers benefit from healthier options, fresher taste and more connection with local producers, creating strong community networks.
* Supporting local agriculture encourages and supports both food and non-food businesses including entrepreneurial agribusiness.
* Community support for local agriculture improves the profitability of farming, which in turn encourages more and younger people to enter agriculture, resulting in greater viability of rural lands and lifestyles over the longer term.

Click here to read the plan.