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Arkansas Rural Enterprise Center

### Arkansas Rural Enterprise Center

Cooperative development is an important part of rural development. From agricultural producers to rural hospitals, cooperatives provide access to otherwise unreachable services.

The Arkansas Rural Enterprise Center (AREC) was established in 1993 and assists cooperatives in all stages of development. Whether in the beginning stages of establishment or the later stages of access to markets, AREC is available to support important cooperative activities.

Primarily funded by the US Department of Agriculture Rural Cooperative Development Program, AREC has worked with agricultural producers to help them reach new markets and build better businesses.

### 2008-2009 Activities

AREC 2008-2009 activities focused on working with Poultry Partners, Inc., which is made up of more than 400 poultry producers in rural areas of northwest Arkansas, northeast Oklahoma, and southwest Missouri. Many of these producers employ minorities, and approximately 15-20 percent of Poultry Partners producers are Hmong.

Other 2008-2009 project activities included providing support to minority and limited income farmers who grow sweet potatoes in eastern Arkansas. The 25-member Arkansas Delta Produce Marketing

Association, with farms located in St. Francis, Monroe and Lee Counties, is 100% minority. This area of rural Arkansas is among the most impoverished in the state, with consistent high unemployment and low per capita income rates.

### Program Outcomes

During the course of the past 16 years, AREC has assisted hundreds of agricultural producers across Arkansas. AREC has utilized the cooperative business model to create and preserve jobs while increasing income in rural areas.

AREC has helped immigrant poultry producers organize a purchasing cooperative, provided essential assistance to the Arkansas Farmers' Market Association during its infancy, and increased the profitability of African-American landowners in the Delta.

Cooperative development doesn't stop with traditional agricultural producers. AREC projects have ranged from a soybean oil extrusion project to catfish farming to sustainable forestry.

AREC staff has recruited and placed volunteers to assist farmers in a variety of areas, and facilitated loan applications for farmers and businesspeople needing credit.

**For more information about the Arkansas Rural Enterprise Center, please contact Donna Uptagrafft at (501) 280-3078 or [duptagrafft@winrock.org](mailto:duptagrafft@winrock.org).**

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.



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