**StrikeForce Initiative**
for Rural Growth and Opportunity

Currently, 85 percent of our country’s persistent poverty counties are in rural America. More than one third of rural Americans, and one in four rural children live in poverty. Kids growing up in families earning twice the poverty threshold are nearly three times as likely as other children to have poor health, are more likely to finish two fewer years of school, and are more likely to learn earn half as much money in their adult life.

Growing the economy by investing in rural communities and increasing opportunities for families is key to our Nation’s future. In 2010, Secretary Vilsack established USDA’s StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity to address the specific challenges associated with rural poverty. Since then, StrikeForce teams have collaborated with more than 500 community partners and public entities to bring targeted assistance to rural areas experiencing chronic poverty.

Since 2010, these efforts have invested over $16.5 billion to create jobs, build homes, feed kids, assist farmers, and conserve the natural resources across twenty states. In 2015, StrikeForce expanded to include Oklahoma and Puerto Rico. Now, USDA StrikeForce teams will operate in 880 counties in 21 states and Puerto Rico. Each StrikeForce project is a commitment to America’s economic future.

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**StrikeForce At Work Around the Nation**

Nearly one-third of Arkansas’ Lee County residents live below the poverty line with limited access to capital to support their businesses and livelihoods. StrikeForce teams worked with the area’s farmers like Roger Smith to build economic opportunity. With StrikeForce guidance, Smith has obtained a fixed-rate, low-interest farm loan from USDA’s Farm Service Agency and land management and irrigation support from USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. “I’ve got friends I tell all the time about what USDA will do for them; they just need to go to the offices and talk to them,” Smith said. “There are so many USDA programs that can help farmers accomplish everything they want to do.”

In Virginia, increasing food security and addressing childhood hunger is a StrikeForce priority. StrikeForce teams are partnering with the Virginia Department of Social Services, the Virginia Department of Agriculture, Virginia State University (VSU) and Virginia Tech to develop community based strategies to reduce hunger. In 2014 alone, the number of Virginia’s farmers markets accepting SNAP rose 42 percent and SNAP redemptions at farmers markets went up over 7 percent. StrikeForce teams have also identified 40 USDA Rural Development supported housing complexes interested in becoming summer food service locations and are working with churches and libraries to increase healthy food access for Virginia’s most vulnerable families.

Over 36 percent of families, including 43 percent of the children, living on New Mexico’s Santa Domingo Pueblo subsist below the poverty line. StrikeForce teams worked with the tribal leadership to leverage USDA resources and install efficient irrigation systems, finance new homes and increase healthy food access on the Pueblo. Additionally, a USDA-funded partnership with Johns Hopkins University's Center for American Indian Health has improved access to nutrition information and tips to stretch grocery budgets. "With [regard to] the USDA investment, we couldn’t have done it without them,” said tribal official Jonathan Garcia.
StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity
www.usda.gov/strikeforce

53,576 Projects in 2014 = $6.53 Billion Invested in StrikeForce Areas

- 5,144 Jobs Created or Saved
- 69.2 Million Summer Meals for Kids
- 8,002 Farmers Assisted
- 125,687 Home Investments
- 11,864 Conservation Efforts

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