



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**



StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity

WEST VIRGINIA

www.usda.gov/strikeforce

West Virginia Fast Facts - 2014

State's Child Poverty Rate:	25.5%
State's Overall Poverty Rate:	17.4%
StrikeForce State Since:	2014
Number of StrikeForce Counties:	29
Total Outreach Events:	12
Number of Community Partners:	30
Total USDA Projects:	1,165
Total USDA Investments:	\$99.8 million

Contacts

Contact us to be a partner, or to learn more about StrikeForce opportunities:

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Some of Our StrikeForce Community Partners

American Federation of Teachers

GROW Appalachia

Hatfield-McCoy Trail Association

Reconnecting McDowell

West Virginia Development Office

West Virginia Community Development
HUB

West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition

Regional Planning & Development
Councils (11 in WV)

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

West Virginia Department of Education –
Office of Child Nutrition

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 earn half as much money in their adult lives.

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.

These efforts have invested more than \$16.5 billion to create jobs, build homes, feed kids, assist farmers and conserve 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.

StrikeForce At Work

Philippi, once a booming coal and railroad town, has suffered several economic challenges. The town's 3,000 residents do not even have their own grocery store. The USDA StrikeForce team in West Virginia partnered with the nonprofit Heart & Hand House in Philippi to improve access to fresh, healthy foods at their Community Garden Market. "We have 156 local producers that are selling through the market," said Executive Director Brenda Hunt. "In 2014, gross sales exceeded \$67,000 and of that, nearly \$54,000 was returned to local growers."

USDA Rural Development provided a \$50,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant to upgrade their market and aggregation facilities. In addition, Rural Development provided a \$23,700 Community Facilities grant to support HVAC upgrades, install flooring, and add a new sign.

Of the 160 producers who work with the Heart & Hand House, many receive technical expertise and financial assistance for their farming operations. Among them are new farmers Jeff and Lisa Sickler, who received financial technical assistance from the USDA Farm Service Agency. They also recently finished the construction of a seasonal high tunnel funded by USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service.

"We grow flowers and produce – lettuce, tomatoes, peppers," said Sickler. "The newest seasonal high tunnel will help us with rotating crops. It's also larger than the other two. It truly does extend the growing season, as we have items earlier and later than normal."



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