

FINAL REPORT
THE MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, ENERGY DIVISION
(MDA-ENERGY DIVISION)
RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

TITLE

PROMOTING ENERGY PROJECTS IN ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED COUNTIES IN MISSISSIPPI- THE DELTA REGION AND THE COASTAL REGION OF MISSISSIPPI

GOAL

A population of 2.9 million, the state of Mississippi is predominately rural and very capable of taking advantage of the changes and advances in renewable energy and energy efficiency. To promote energy projects in rural counties the Energy Division set the following goals:

- I. Development of an outreach strategy to provide technical assistance and present the economic and environmental advantages to investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects to farmers, ranchers, and small businesses in the distressed/severely distressed counties.
- II. Improve energy related infrastructure in two regions—the Delta Region, of which 80% of the counties are considered distressed and severely distressed; and the Coastal Region, which is completely contained within the Gulf Opportunity Zone due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.
- III. Increase collaboration and partnership with Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, the Mississippi Center for Cooperative Development, and the US Department of Agriculture Rural Development. All of these organizations have a presence in all eighty-two counties in the state, and provide services to the small rural farmer of Mississippi.
- IV. Establish a closer relationship with renewable resource working groups, specifically the Biomass Council, the Mississippi Green Group, the Solar Society, the Mississippi Technology Alliance, and the Mississippi Energy Coordinators Association.

VISION

The Mississippi Development Authority-Energy Division (MDA-Energy Division) sought to develop an outreach program delivering a host of information on the values of implementing renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies in rural business while also offering the technical assistance needed to cultivate these ideas.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our target audience consists of agribusiness, aqua business and small business owners in the Delta Region, of which 80% of the counties are considered distressed and severely distressed; and the Coastal Region, which is completely contained within the Gulf Opportunity Zone due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

FINAL SCOPE OF WORK

- Produce 100,000 educational tabloids to small- and medium-sized agricultural and aquacultural farms and agribusinesses. Tabloid will contain information and resources on energy efficient and sustainable farming practices. The tabloid will also address issues, including solar farming applications, solar greenhouses, anaerobic digestion, alternative fuels, biodiesel, and financial incentives.
- Distribute a twenty-page tabloid through direct mail-outs, exhibits, workshops, agency websites and other websites as links.
- Distribute written material including case studies of common energy projects from the areas and the incentives the owners received. Useful resource information on the availability of grant and loan programs through the Mississippi Development Authority and the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development will be included, along with several feature stories on successful applications of renewable energy in the agricultural sector in Mississippi.
- Arrange 5 informational meetings to speak to agribusiness and aquabusiness organizations and community-based business organizations identified as distressed or severely distressed; or that have struggling operations within counties and communities considered distressed or severely distressed.

TIME FRAME

The Energy Division sought to begin this project in January 2007 after paperwork for the grant was finalized. However, the original project managers for this grant resigned causing a delay in progress. In July 2007, Angelica Rawls took on the role of RBOG project manager to complete the final scope of work in September 2008.

PARTNERS

The Energy Division worked in conjunction with several key organizations to successfully complete the project's objectives: Mississippi State University Extension Services, Southwest Mississippi Resource Conservation and Development, Inc. (RC&D), Mississippi Biomass Council, Mississippi Farm Bureau and USDA Rural Business Specialists. These leaders in agriculture, in touch with Mississippi communities offered helpful advice as to how the objectives would best meet the needs of the rural communities. They were also willing to participate in molding the planned tabloids and workshops for the target audience. MSU has extension offices in each of the state's 82 counties providing research-based information, educational programs and

technology transfer on several issues in conjunction with its Agricultural and Forestry division. In August 2007, the Energy Division met in Starkville with MSU Extension Services to learn more about farmers' schedules and annual agricultural conferences. They also shared videos from a biodiesel case study completed by the extension services and volunteered submit an article for the RBOG tabloid. After hearing about the RBOG project, Gary Jones, USDA Rural Business Specialist, and 9006 grant program manager provided the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy 9006 grant fact sheet developed by USDA. Later in February 2008, the Energy Division met with Mississippi's local USDA Rural Development Office Director and Rural Business Specialist Don Thames and Gary Jones. In learning that this group would like to extend its reach to the small business arena, an additional meeting was held with Mississippi's local SBA office. USDA decided that fall is the best time for workshops to promote its grants.

The next step was choosing great stories for the tabloid. The tabloid should tie in renewable energy and energy efficiency with agriculture sector. The tabloid includes case studies for using renewable energy and energy efficiency to save money as well as producing renewable energy to make money. Following the case studies is financing information to help readers seeking to put these ideas into action.

DEVELOPING AND DISTRIBUTING THE TABLOID

Throughout the month of August, the program manager contacted several other partners to round out the tabloid. Some of those committing articles and stories for the tabloid include: Southwest MS RC&D, Inc., Alcorn State University, USDA, Southern SARE, ATTRA, MS Technology Alliance, 25x25, Farm Bureau, BioDimensions, MS Department of Agriculture, Ensave and Waterfurnace. Bennie Hutchins with the RC&D center actively assists chicken farmers piece together grant applications. He provided contact information on recipients of the 9006 grants who were willing to participate in the tabloid.



In August, the program manager visited one of the recipients, Mark Palmer of LaFarms, to talk about the new energy efficient technologies he was able to apply to his farm and how it has affected farm operations. Those who have committed to submitting articles began sending

them in the last two weeks of September 2007.

LIST OF ARTICLES RECEIVED

- Farm Energy Audits: Good for Farmers and the Environment from *Ensave*
- GeoExchange technology produces wave of excitement in aquaculture facility from *Waterfurnace*
- Funds Available to Establish Tree Buffers Around Poultry Houses from *RC&D Center*
- LaFarms 9006 Grant Recipient from *MDA*

- P-2-P Energy Systems from **MS Technology Alliance**
- Biodiesel: Alternative Energy from Mississippi fields from **MSU**
- Regional Strategy for Biobased Products in the Mississippi Delta from **Peter Nelson, BioDimensions**
- Alliance Promotes Renewable Energy Vision **25x25**
- Conserving Fuel on the Farm from **Cathy Svejkovsky, NCAT Energy Specialist**
- Extract from Solar Commercialization Feasibility Study for the State of Mississippi, commissioned by **MDA**
- Introduction and renewable energy key from **MDA**



The articles were submitted to MDA’s communications department in October for thorough grammatical and reader-friendly editing and graphic layout. In December, the edited information went to graphic design for layout and was available as an e-copy by February while the printed version followed in March. As stated in the project description, 100,000, 20-page tabloids were printed and distributed by direct mail, exhibits, workshop and e-mail. After receiving the specs of the tabloid, postage costs were estimated to be approximately \$2/ tabloid. Further research determined that the most cost efficient way to send out the majority of the tabloids was as a newspaper insert.

By March of 2008 the tabloid publication, SEE or Sustainable Energy-Efficient Farming Practices and Incentives was mailed to 7 Mississippi Development Authority Regional Offices, 4 Mississippi State University Regional Extension Offices, 50 county libraries and 5 Mississippi Small Business Development Centers. The tabloid was distributed through the Delta Democrat Times on their biggest day to over 10,000 subscribers and 12,000 non subscribers, Wednesday, March 26.

Mid- April, the SEE tabloid was inserted into 31,656 community papers that include: Brookhaven, Gloster, Leakesville, Macon, Newton, Philadelphia, Tylertown and Waynesboro.

In late May and early June, 42,001 copies of the SEE tabloid were inserted into local community papers in Ackerman, Charleston, Columbus, Olive Branch, Hernando, Senatobia, West Point, and Tunica, Mississippi.

INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

The month of January began the start of several annual agriculture events. Since the final tabloid piece did not print at the top of the year as hoped, financial information and Energy Star tips were distributed in its place. Those interested in receiving the tabloid by mail gave their address.



ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY THE MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The Energy Division Sponsored and Co-Sponsored several conferences and workshops:

- Women in Agriculture Health and Safety Summit—Leland
- Energy Opportunities in Agriculture hosted by MDA—Lucedale
- Planning and Development District—Biloxi
- Mississippi Municipal League—Biloxi
- Hernando Welcome Center
- Lula-Delma Ferniss Welcome Center
- Minority Enterprise Development Week



EVENT DETAILS

In February, the Energy Division co-sponsored the Women in Agriculture's Health and Safety Summit. The Energy Division was one of four exhibitors distributing energy conservation and financing information to over 250 participants. To advertise the upcoming tabloid and sign up subscribers, a poster size version of the tabloid's first page layout was developed.

In preparation of hosting a workshop in Lucedale, MS, March 12 with the local USDA Rural Business Specialist, members of the division attended a USDA workshop promoting its Renewable Energy Efficiency and Value Added Producer Grants.

In March, the Energy Division hosted an *Energy Opportunities in Agriculture* workshop in the project's focus area of counties severely affected by Hurricane Katrina. Attendees learned of the eligibility, project, and process requirements for the Renewable Energy/ Energy Efficiency Grant as well as the Energy Investment Loan program offered by Mississippi Development Authority. To compliment this information, energy audits and their importance when applying for energy specific grants and loans money was also presented at the workshop.

To promote this workshop, the RBOG program manager mailed flyers to agriculture, aquaculture and timber businesses in George County as well as surrounding areas: Perry, Greene, Harrison, Jackson, and Stone counties. Under advisement from the local Mississippi State University Extension Service, a press release was sent to the Mississippi Press where it was placed on its front page, the George County Times, and the Hattiesburg American newspapers as well as WRBE and K99 FM radio stations.

For further coverage, it was also entered into the Sun Herald's *What's Happening* section. The program manager alerted local Mississippi Agriculture Associations. In all, 12 registered while only 5 attended the event. Next, the Energy Division co-sponsored the Planning and Development District's Annual Conference in



Biloxi, attracting community planners from all over the state. They received energy savings and energy financing information for rural businesses in their communities. This event brought over 400 attendees.

MDA/U.S. Department of Agriculture workshop, 9 a.m.-noon, MGCCC-George County Center. Informs rural businesses of grant and loan funds available for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Details: Mississippi Development Authority, (601) 359-6653.



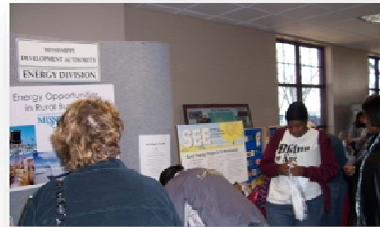
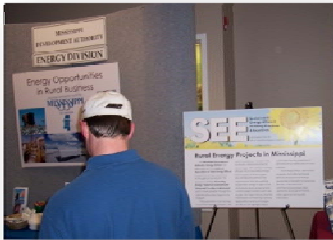
In May, the Energy Division took advantage of an annually celebrated tourism week by visiting MDA's Hernando and Lula North Delta area Welcome Centers. Three hundred copies of the SEE publication were mailed to each of the five Mississippi Welcome Centers along with energy tips to be dispersed to not only Mississippi's rural communities, but travelers visiting from neighboring states as well. Also in June, the Energy Division exhibited and participated in a forum at the Mississippi Municipal League conference in Biloxi. The Mississippi Municipal League is comprised of Mayors, Alderman and economic developers from around the state. Several hundred of them met with Energy Division representatives one on one while over 400 received SEE tabloids.

Final outreach efforts conclude in September where the Mississippi Development Authority participated in **Minority Enterprise Development (MED) Week**, a national celebration. The Energy Division exhibited to attending business owners during the business expo, sharing with them the Energy Star Guide to Small Businesses, the SEE publication and cool summer tips. As a result of building a relationship with SBA, the Energy Division was invited to also participate in a small business forum hosted by the Small Business Administration and Internal Revenue Service well attended by small businesses and government agencies with services to offer the small business sector. There the program manager shared concerns for small businesses' utility costs and explained services offered by the division as part of the solution.

ACTIVITIES THE MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY TOOK PART IN

The Energy Division also took advantage of several annual expositions hosted by other organizations:

- 35th Annual Delta Agricultural Exposition- Cleveland
- Community Bank Poultry Expo—Laurel
- Magnolia Beef and Poultry Expo—Raleigh
- Mississippi Biomass Conference—Philadelphia
- Planning and Development District—Biloxi



EVENT DETAILS

January 15 and 16 the Energy Division exhibited at the 35th Annual Delta Agricultural Exposition in Cleveland, MS. In preparation for the exposition, posters and booklets were developed for display and handouts.

In March and April, the Energy Division also reached out to beef and poultry farmers at specialized expos. Community Bank sponsored a Poultry Expo, March 27, in Laurel, MS. This second year event saw over 200 poultry farmers. It was a great venue to talk to rural community members and distribute the tabloid. The Mississippi State University's Smith County Extension service hosts an annual Magnolia Beef and Poultry Expo in Raleigh, MS where over a hundred SEE tabloids were placed in the hands of beef and poultry farmers. The month of April brought many conferences. One, the Southern BioProducts and Renewable Energy Conference hosted by the Mississippi Biomass Council, attracts investors, institution and state agency leaders in biomass and agriculture. This event held in Philadelphia, MS, an eastern part of the state, was in its seventh year.

FOLLOW UP

The Energy Division anticipated following up with USDA's ideas to host more workshops with small businesses in the fall. However, with the long layover in finalizing the new updates to the Farm Bill local offices had not received all new changes to the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy grants. USDA did not feel comfortable presenting new information on the now 9007 grants without having all information finalized.

Compelled to continue using the resources made available by the RBOG grant The Energy Division instead hosted three Energy Open House events for small businesses in three of MDA, Small and Minority Business Contract Procurement Centers in South

and Central Mississippi and the Delta. Attendees were promised an energy pack comprised of light switch covers, hot winter tips, cool summer tips and two CDs. One is a building codes CD and the other is a special resource CD. The resource CD was developed special for this event. It provides links to the MDA site, the DOE start an awareness program site, the Energy Star for Small Business Guide, Codes College Building Codes site along with direct links to the MDA Energy Investment Loan financing program.

RESULTS

As of September, The Energy Division handed out approximately 98,000 tabloids, sponsored and participated in 10 exhibits and workshops and developed several new partnerships. Several face to face meetings with partners spun more opportunities for the Energy Division to get involved and promote the RBOG program, therefore sealing the success of this project. Eight of the thirteen Energy Efficiency award applications supported by the Energy Division were successful. Projected savings from those successful applications totaled \$124,257 where total savings ranged from 30-38%.

As detailed above, the workshops and tabloid distribution reached the targeted areas in the Mississippi Delta and severely affected Katrina counties in South Mississippi. The Energy Division reached out to counties serviced by 5 of 8 regional offices in North Delta, Northwest, Gulfport, Southeast and Southwest in accordance with the project description. East Mississippi also benefited from some of this outreach.

As a result of this project, many who may have read or heard about renewable energy projects occurring in other states can now see the possibilities as more attainable here in Mississippi after reading of local success stories in the SEE tabloid. By exhibiting low/no cost conservation tips, energy efficient improvements and renewable energy projects at agricultural, municipal and business events around the state, this program has helped to raise energy awareness in rural Mississippi to agricultural and small businesses. This message has reached small business and agribusiness owners who share ideas of using renewable energy to produce energy. Although thousands of readers have been reached, there are others yet to receive this message. With frequent requests to send additional copies of the SEE publication, those knowledgeable of Energy's services are continuing to "pay-it-forward" to fellow entrepreneurs and small farmers.

In all, the division has completed and reached its goals and has built a foundation in the agriculture and rural business sector to grow on.