

BRAC Regional Task Force, Inc.
Tobacco Trust Fund Proposal (TTF)
Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program

Project and Applicant Description

Executive Summary

Background. The eleven-county region surrounded by Fort Bragg is undergoing monumental change. The mandates of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions of 2005 will result in substantial population growth - estimated to range from 30,000 to 40,000 new residents by 2012. The relocation of the Army Forces Command Headquarters to Fort Bragg will significantly alter the demographic composition of the area, as Fort Bragg becomes the 'intellectual capital of the Army and the largest Army installation in the U.S. BRAC will also foster unprecedented economic expansion and opportunity, while presenting formidable challenges to growth, development, and conservation of the region's natural and cultural resources.

This dynamic of 'challenge and opportunity' will enable the agricultural economy of the region to position itself for future sustainability as it transitions from tobacco and other traditional commodities into a new realm of agricultural economic development, where more specialized and direct-market or value-added enterprises are predominant.

Goals and Objectives. The Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program (RASP) will spearhead the transition of the agricultural economy by identifying the opportunities emanating from the BRAC-related population growth. The program will be directed by a Regional Sustainable Agriculture Agent, and is comprised of six major goals:

- (1) conduct inventories of agricultural capacities and markets, with an emphasis on tobacco-related and transitional farms;
- (2) develop processes to link capacities to markets;
- (3) establish the agency-to-agency liaisons necessary to implement the procedural changes required for the capacity-to-market linkage process to occur;
- (4) ensure the region's agricultural interests are fully integrated into newly-established Workforce Innovation Center, created to transform the workforce and the economy of southeastern NC;
- (5) link the region's agricultural capacity to existing and anticipated research in agricultural bio-technology and agro-terrorism protection; and
- (6) provide an information and educational source and point-of-contact for the region's farmers, farm-related businesses, and farm service agencies on agricultural sustainability and economic development.

Partner Organizations. The following organizations will jointly develop the program:

- (1) BRAC Regional Task Force, Inc. (BRAC RTF)
- (2) Cooperative Extension Service, Moore County Center
- (3) Sustainable Sandhills

Intended Beneficiaries. The Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program will benefit the farmers, agriculture services industry, and agriculture-related organizations of eleven counties in central-southeastern North Carolina.

Positive Impact on the Economy and Natural Resources. The Program will result in the creation of new jobs and new opportunities in agriculture, agricultural technology, and their related services. It will enable farmers to transition from tobacco to other commodities to serve the imminent population growth at Fort Bragg by linking the food, fuel, and fiber needs of America's largest Army installation to the agricultural capacity of the region. In addition, the Program will leverage newly-established initiatives, such as the Workforce Innovation Center and efforts by the BRAC Regional Task Force, Inc. and the NC Military Foundation to establish research partnerships with the UNC system, to link this capacity with research in agricultural bio-technology and homeland security-related fields.

Farmland preservation and its many benefits are best served by maintaining the viability of the family farm. The Program will aid in the preservation of the region's natural, cultural, and historic resources by strengthening the agricultural economy. For example, the Program will create new markets dedicated specifically to the needs of Fort Bragg. The changing demographics of the region, particularly in the region's urban core of the city of Fayetteville, will provide new opportunities in specialty or 'niche' farms, community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives, and the burgeoning agritourism sector. A strong rural economy, supported by effective regional land planning, will slow the loss of farms to development, and will enable greater compatibility of land uses, even to the extent of combining farms and new residential communities into 'eco-conscious' developments – an emerging trend. Ensuring the permanence of farmland complements the deeply ingrained conservation ethic of the region, and RASP would leverage existing initiatives in land conservation and resource preservation – such as the Sandhills Conservation Partnership – to enable working farms to continue their efforts at preserving longleaf pine forests, wetlands, historic sites, and cultural mores.

The continued viability of farms and farmland in this region will have another intended consequence – to help maintain the operational readiness of Fort Bragg, home of the 82nd Airborne Division and America's "911" Rapid Response Capability. Farms are the ideal 'compatible use' surrounding a military installation, and their continued presence will ensure that Fort Bragg can continue to perform its mission, lessening the problems posed by suburban encroachments and other land uses that are incompatible with the Army's training and operational objectives. In summary, the Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program will be an important element in preserving Fort Bragg's viability. This positively impacts the National Defense, as well as Fort Bragg's status as the economic engine of southeastern North Carolina.

Amount Requested from the Commission. \$200,000. This amount would fund a Program Manager (Sustainable Agricultural Agent) for a period of three years, including salary, benefits, travel expenses, and promotional/educational materials.

Timeline. The Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program would run for three years, with a goal of becoming self-sustaining after that period.

Method of Evaluating Effectiveness. The Program will be measured by its success in linking new and existing agricultural enterprises to the opportunities presented by the BRAC population growth, the Workforce Innovation Center, and aforementioned research initiatives. Measures would include, for example, the number of farms signed to agreements to serve Fort Bragg markets, acres converted to research-related or

conservation-related endeavors, opening or expansion of agriculture-related businesses with the resultant revenues generated and new jobs created, the number of farms signed on to existing or new agritourism programs (such as Sandhills Agriculture or NC Agritourism Networking Association).

Other Pertinent Facts. Amplifying information is provided in the following attachments (See Application, Section IV):

- (1) *BRAC Regional Task Force Focus Area.* Map showing the eleven counties comprising the BRAC Regional Task Force and the area of responsibility for the Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program.
- (2) *What is Sustainability?* A definition of this oft-used term and how it applies to agriculture, the economy, and society.
- (3) *Position Description: Program Manager (Sustainable Agriculture Agent), Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program.* Describes the duties, responsibilities, and educational and experience requirements of the Program Manager.
- (4) *Meeting the Needs of America's First Responders through the All-American Center for Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development.* This is the proposal submitted to the US Department of Labor that was recently awarded a \$5 million grant. The proposal is extensive, but it describes the depth and breadth of the existing regional partnership that would be leveraged by the Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program.
- (5) *U.S. Department of Labor awards \$5 million to North Carolina for Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Regional Task Force.* News Release from the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, announcing the grant for the Workforce Innovation Center.
- (6) *Scope of Work: Comprehensive Regional Growth Plan (CRGP).* This document, prepared by BRAC RTF's selected consultant team, Training and Development Associates of Laurinburg, NC, describes the development of the CRGP. This project is the top priority of the BRAC Regional Task Force. The Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program would be fully integrated into the implementation of the CRGP through the collaboration of the Program Manager, BRAC RTF staff, and its partners.
- (7) *Letters of Support.* Letters of Support from Partners and other supporting organizations are forthcoming.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Regional Agriculture Sustainability Program is to transform agriculture in southeastern NC by linking the agricultural community to the opportunities emanating from the BRAC-related population growth. The Program will partner with existing BRAC initiatives intended to guide the region toward sustainable growth and development, and will ensure that Agriculture is fully integrated into the regional plan for sustainability. The Program will be directed by a Regional Sustainable Agriculture Agent, and is comprised of six major goals:

- (1) conduct inventories of agricultural capacities and markets, with an emphasis on tobacco-related and transitional farms;
- (2) develop processes to link capacities to markets;
- (3) establish the agency-to-agency liaisons necessary to implement the procedural changes required for the capacity-to-market linkage process to occur;
- (4) ensure the region's agricultural interests are fully integrated into newly-established Workforce Innovation Center, created to transform the workforce and the economy of southeastern NC;
- (5) link the region's agricultural capacity to existing and anticipated research in agricultural bio-technology and agro-terrorism protection; and
- (6) provide an information and educational source and point-of-contact for the region's farmers, farm-related businesses, and farm service agencies on agricultural sustainability and economic development.

The Regional Sustainable Agriculture Agent will conduct a 'field-level' program that will assist the agricultural community, local governments, and state and federal agencies to achieve these objectives:

- Link the food, fiber, and fuel needs of Fort Bragg to the agricultural capacity of the region to provide a single-source, premier local market for area farmers;
- Link the regional agricultural capacity to homeland security and defense-related research efforts at Research Triangle Park and the UNC system, specifically in the realms of agricultural biotechnology; bio-fuels, invasive pest control, crop safety, and agro-terrorism protection;
- Identify new markets and target programs to serve the changing demographic structure of the Region's urban centers;
- Foster growth in the agricultural services sector;
- Align with current initiatives such as the newly-funded Center for Workforce Innovation in Regional Development (WIRED);
- Partner with the WIRED Center to develop entrepreneurial training and opportunities for the region's farmers through alternative crops for bio-fuels and biotechnology;
- Connect farmers to new markets generated by the burgeoning 'buy local' movement.
- Align directly with the Sustainability goals of Fort Bragg, U.S. Army, and Department of Defense;
- Align with military and community joint land-use goals by facilitating 'compatible land use' buffers surrounding the installation; thereby ensuring operational capability for Fort Bragg and mitigating land-use conflicts;
- Align with regional land use goals of preserving farmland, open space, and natural resources.

Expected Outcomes:

Farmers in transition from tobacco or other traditional commodities will be apprised of, and encouraged to take advantage of, emerging markets that will result from the growth impacts of BRAC, and the changing demographics of the region, particularly in the urban center of Fayetteville.

More farms will participate in the emerging Agritourism sector, and benefit from their association with a newly-created Regional Tourism Initiative by the BRAC Regional Task Force. This will include a multi-county effort to promote the tourism assets of the I-95 corridor through eastern North Carolina.

Farms will be selected to participate in defense and homeland security-related research by the UNC system and other entities. BRAC RTF is working with the NC Military Foundation to foster these cooperative research agreements between the Department of Defense, the University system, and defense contractors allied with the military installations of eastern NC. Participation could entail technical assistance to farmers or land leases for crop experimentation.

More farms will enroll in existing conservation and environmental programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) and the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Significant for farming operations adjacent and near to the Fort Bragg reservation boundary, NRCS will prioritize program funding that can be leveraged with funds from the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI). It is expected that the Farm Bill will have an increased emphasis on conservation programs, particularly for cooperative efforts with the Army. The RASP Manager, in partnership with regional NRCS, Farm Services Agency (FSA), and County Extension offices, will promote these programs and help farmers integrate them into their operations.

More acres will be preserved through Conservation easements and other agreements, including County-level programs such as Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) and Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD). Farm operations that are working collaboratively with our partnering organizations, and in turn, leveraging those relationships with the university system, defense contractors, the educational institutions of the region, and others, will have a strong incentive to participate in these programs. County VAD programs will benefit publicity-wise from the connection to regional sustainability initiatives and their association with national defense.

Selected farms will profit directly from urban growth in the City of Fayetteville and other cities in the region. The changing urban demographic composition of the Fayetteville and Southern Pines, for example will provide additional opportunities for 'niche' agricultural endeavors that serve urban dwellers, such as pick-your-own farms and agritourism outlets, ranging from equestrian opportunities, bed-and-breakfast, and other 'recreational agriculture' activities that will attract an highly-educated, higher-income workforce. Emerging farm trends in the 'rural fringe' of urban areas, such as Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and specialty farms integrated with 'eco-conscious' residential subdivision developments, will also take hold as a result of growth in the region's urban locales.