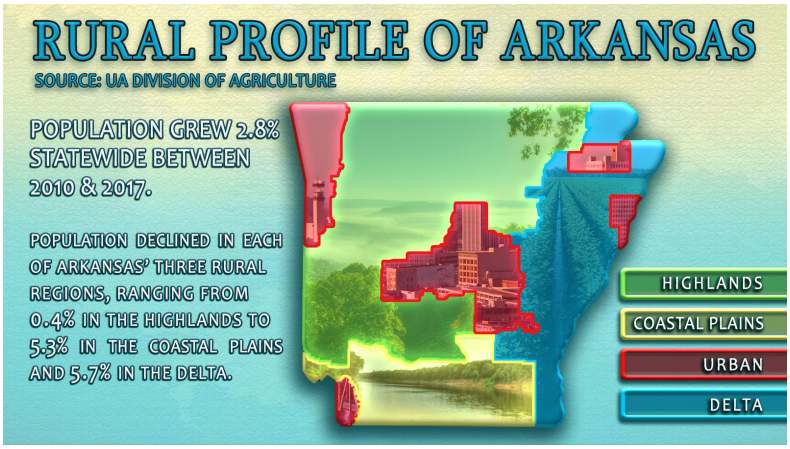
STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Arkansas House Newsletter

May 17, 2019

Rural Development in Arkansas



In Arkansas, 41% of the population live in rural counties. In contrast, only 14% of the United States population as a whole live in nonmetropolitan counties. Our state is a very rural one, so when we work to expand our economy we must always recognize the challenges that our rural communities face.

That is why many of us and many of your city and county leaders gathered at the Arkansas Rural Development Conference this week.

This conference is organized by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission and is designed for anyone interested in improving the quality of life in Arkansas' rural communities.

The objective of the annual event is to provide participants with the opportunity to gain a working knowledge about a variety of programs and services that are available to assist communities and their leaders with development, planning and revitalization efforts.

The House and Senate Committees for Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development convened at the conference this week to hear updates on the Big River Steel plant in Osceola and CZ-USA, a firearms manufacturer which recently chose Little Rock as its headquarters.

The House and Senate Committees on City, County, and Local Affairs also convened at the conference. Those committees were given a review of the programs and grants offered by the AEDC Division of Rural Services. At the conference, Gov. Asa Hutchinson presented grants totaling $586,633.14 to 49 cities and counties throughout Arkansas. Rural Services grants fall into one of three programs: the Rural Community Grant Program, the County Fair Building Grant Program, and the Arkansas Unpaved Roads Grant Program. All require a 50 percent matching grant to be eligible for the programs.

The conference also presented information from several women and minority business owners who have benefitted from the Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Division. This division promotes the growth and sustainability minority and women-owned businesses by providing them with real-world technical and professional assistance, certification, networking, capital and contracting opportunities while utilizing AEDC partners in state and federal government, higher education, lending institutions, and the private sector. Only about 25 percent of small businesses in the state are owned by women, while the number of minority-owned businesses is even lower at around 14.7 percent.

Workforce development is another focus of the conference. AEDC has the ability to assist new and existing industry with the growth of their workforce through training programs. One such program is the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). The CRD is a portable credential that confirms to employers that an individual possesses basic workplace skills in reading for information, applied mathematics, and locating information. To date, the Arkansas Career Readiness Certificate program has qualified more than 59,000 high-skilled positions.

Rural communities are important to all of us as they are a primary source for food, energy, clean drinking water and accessible outdoor recreation. You can find out more on how we invest in these communities by visiting www.arkansasedc.com