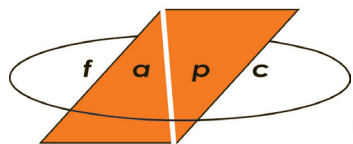


Food & Agricultural Products Center



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OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY™

Dec. 7, 2004

SPARC to Improve Soil, Water and Economy

STILLWATER, Okla.—A new program has been developed to assist in improving soil and water quality and provide economic development for Oklahoma and surrounding states in the southern plains region.

This new program is called Southern Plains Agriculture Resources Coalition or SPARC.

The program's mission is to spark rural sustainability and profitability through no-till practices and conservation systems for producers, consumers and communities by promotion of market-based incentives, education, demonstration, participation and research.

Larry Wright, resource conservation and development coordinator of the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Cordell, Okla. and SPARC advisor, is the founder of the coalition.

“I was looking for something that would have a big impact for producers,” Wright said. “I wanted to create a market-based incentive for producers who produce a product in an environmentally friendly manner.”

SPARC serves an area of Oklahoma west of Interstate-35, but the goal is to expand to neighboring states in the southern plains region.

The program serves producers of agriculture products and consumers, including all communities, policy makers, tribes, landowners and water users throughout the rural and urban areas.

Wright said SPARC will benefit Oklahoma by returning net profit back to producers; hopefully, doubling the price returned back to the producer.

“We hope the program will not just add value to the market, but add value back to the production level,” he said.

The coalition identified three areas of concern with the greatest potential for beneficial results. These concerns include soil quality, economics and water resources.

The SPARC committee hopes to improve these concerns by educating producers, providing producer incentives, purchasing equipment, performing research and demonstrations and sharing expertise.

SPARC was developed through a coalition process of the Great Plains Resource Conservation and Development Area Association, which makes up the governing board for SPARC.

Great Plains Resource Conservation and Development is an association that wants to increase public awareness about environmental concerns. It also wants to accelerate the development and protection of human, financial and natural resources. Its council promotes and encourages the coordination of activities between agencies, organizations and groups.

Approximately 30 individuals are actively involved in SPARC and attend monthly workshops.

Currently, the committee has developed a strategic plan for the coalition and plans to host conferences and field days in the future.

Jim Brooks and Chuck Willoughby, business planning and marketing specialists for the Food & Agricultural Products Center on the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater, Okla., are two members of the committee.

“The entire steering committee of SPARC has made tremendous progress in defining the vision of the coalition and will now focus on very specific goals and objectives to be completed during the next year,” Brooks said.

One of the goals of SPARC is to have producers certified by next spring and the products ready to go to

market in the spring of 2006. Wright hopes this process will become a model for other producers.

“There has also been a huge interest in beef,” Wright said. “We hope to be able to certify beef under the same system and go to market with beef products.”

For more information on SPARC, contact Wright at (580) 832-3661 or Larry.Wright@ok.usda.gov or Brooks at (405) 744-6071 or brookjw@okstate.edu.

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