



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

## Texas NRCS 2014 Annual Report

### StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity



# 2014 TEXAS NRCS ANNUAL REPORT

## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### A Message from the Texas State Conservationist

#### *Salvador Salinas*

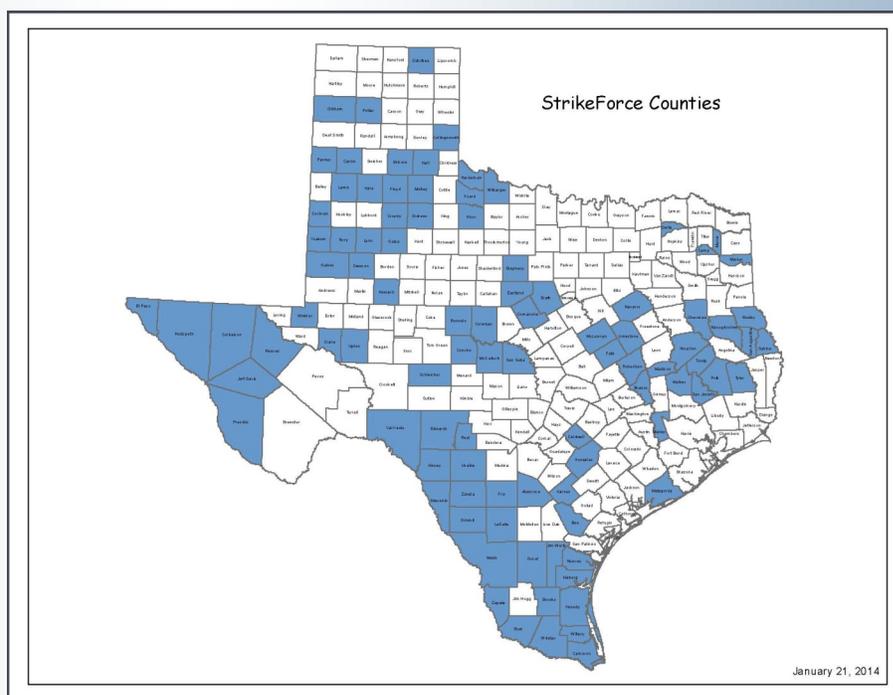


**T**exas is one of 20 states participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity initiative. In 2014, the initiative expanded from nine counties in 2013 to 96 counties which blanket the entire state. This area also includes three Federally recognized Tribes: the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas and the Tigua Tribe of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. Texas has 254 counties and this expansion, although challenging due to the size of the state, has proven successful for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Texas and sister agencies such as the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Rural Development (RD).

Working alongside USDA agencies and partners, NRCS in Texas continues to amplify awareness and accelerate delivery of USDA program assistance to farmers, ranchers and communities in these 96 counties. These efforts also increase opportunities for NRCS to work hand-in-hand with private landowners to assist them in determining how to best utilize available technical and financial assistance to address their land's natural resource concerns. In turn, communities are benefiting and economic opportunities are being created which can help provide relief in persistent rural poverty counties.

In 2014, Texas NRCS obligated more than **\$2.3 million** through the agency's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to farmers and ranchers throughout the 96 designated StrikeForce counties. These contracted monies will address resource concerns, such as water quantity and quality, on more than **37,000 additional acres**.

This annual report highlights some success stories, outreach efforts and funding accomplishments in 2014 by NRCS, USDA agencies, partners, CBOs and community stakeholders.





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USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

## Snapshot of StrikeForce Successes Across Texas



StrikeForce in Texas expanded its footprint from nine to 96 counties in 2014. NRCS has five Zones, or regions, and all five include StrikeForce counties. In Zone 1, 23 counties in Texas' High Plains and South Plains regions were rolled into the national initiative. As of Sept. 30, 2014, the initiative has impacted almost 1,000 acres for a total of \$170,335 in Zone 1.

Marcus Martinez of Castro County was one of the first producers to benefit from financial assistance through the initiative. Martinez has worked with NRCS over the years, however, targeted funding through the initiative made it possible for him to replace an inefficient 29-year-old center pivot sprinkler system on his farm. His outdated center pivot had leaks which caused water waste and increased evaporation rates. In a team effort, the NRCS and FSA helped Martinez apply for StrikeForce funding through EQIP to upgrade his farm's irrigation system. Through technical assistance, Martinez also continued incorporating additional irrigation water management practices on his farm.

Martinez depends on the Ogallala Aquifer for irrigation on more than 440 acres and appreciates how critical it is to efficiently use irrigation water in an area that frequently experiences drought.



**"We are benefitting the soil,  
plants and water better  
because we don't have leaks  
anymore."**

***Marcus Martinez,  
Castro County***





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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity



Outreach efforts that reach new and existing customers, while increasing education and awareness about available USDA Farm Bill Programs are the backbone of the spirit of StrikeForce. NRCS continued its commitment to working with local, state and national partners, CBOs and sister USDA agencies in 2014 through outreach events and meetings. Outreach efforts in Zone 2 exemplify the efforts taking place across the entire state in StrikeForce counties.

The University of Texas-Pan American (UTEP) in El Paso is a vital partner with NRCS in directly reaching traditionally underserved customers to increase their knowledge, understanding and participation in USDA programs. A snapshot of the type of meeting and field days held in 2014 include the Upper Valley Agribusiness Program and the Transformational Journey-Battleground to Breaking Ground. During a Resources for Small Producers event, speakers represented the National Immigrant Farmers Initiative (NIFI), Texas/Mexico Border Coalition CBO, Texas AgriLife Extension, and USDA. La Mujer Obrera, a nonprofit organization, also helped with this event.



Two of Texas' three Federally recognized Tribes have reservation lands in Zone 2 - The Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas and the Tigua Tribe of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. NRCS employees have worked closely with the Tribes in the areas of preservation and cultural resources, along with providing technical and financial assistance on a Seasonal High Tunnel and grant money for a community garden.

In Zone 2, StrikeForce EQIP funds totaling \$179,486 will impact 1,919 acres.





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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity



In Zone 3, six of the nine original StrikeForce counties lie in deep South Texas. Today, the Zone has 22 counties within the initiative and has obligated \$1,677,899 in financial assistance through 104 contracts, or 82 percent of all Strikeforce contracts in the state. These producers will be receiving financial assistance in return for addressing their natural resource concerns by installing conservation practices on 33,883 acres in 13 StrikeForce counties.

This is a testament to the impact that boots on the ground and consistent face-to-face interaction can have over multiple years. There is no doubt that the state's four other Zones will also achieve this success as they begin work in their second calendar year of StrikeForce.

Zone 3 ranchers who have benefited from the initiative include Jim Wells County ranchers, Arnold and Ida Trejo. Working alongside NRCS, they have been able to meet their natural resource goals through conservation planning and funding through Farm Bill programs such as EQIP's StrikeForce initiative funds. Practices have included cross fencing for rotational grazing of cattle and water distribution systems designed to facilitate cattle movement and distribution across pastures. Today, driving through the Trejo's ranch visitors are met with the sight of lush, green forages.

"I grew up loving the work, it grew in my heart and I always knew one day I wanted to have my own ranch, cows and tractors."

*Arnold Trejo,*

*Jim Wells County*

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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity



Zone 4 had 18 counties rolled into StrikeForce with the 2014 expansion. Within these counties lies three strong Community Based Organizations (CBOs) who work closely with USDA agencies throughout the year on outreach to their members. The StrikeForce initiative is a perfect fit for these groups which include the Texas Small Farmers & Ranchers CBO, 100 Ranchers organization and the Landowners Association of Texas. The Zone obligated more than \$215,867 on 1,103 acres in StrikeForce counties during its first year.

One success story is Henry Day of Brazos County who is a Texas Small Farmers & Ranchers member. Beginning in 2014, Day also began partnering on a cover crop demonstration agreement with NRCS. Day has set aside land on his ranch to work on this project which is focused on soil health, forage management and the benefits of multi-species cover crops. The project’s goal is to encourage small farmers to assess and adopt multi-species cover crops on pastures, improve soil health, while also providing Day and NRCS with results that link soil health’s impact on forage productivity. NRCS continues to work alongside Day providing technical assistance. Thanks to this project, Day is also able to share with CBO members his journey and what land management conservation practices are learned from this effort.



“That information from NRCS was the best information that any farmer or rancher can get anywhere in the state of Texas.”

*Henry Day, Brazos County*





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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity



In 2014, NRCS staff in Zone 5 provided conservation technical and financial assistance to historically underserved producers in its 11 newly designated StrikeForce counties in Central and North Texas.

Staff was able to obligate \$86,120 in financial assistance through two contracts. These two producers are located in Limestone and McLennan counties. Both of these producers came into the NRCS office with the goal of increasing forage production on their land. Financial assistance through StrikeForce funding will help them implement conservation practices such as brush management, pasture planting and installing fences. In the long run, this investment in conservation will improve grasses and soil health while helping decrease production input costs at the same time.

Rickie Roddy of McClennan County is one producer that has benefitted from StrikeForce initiative funding. From 13 acres, he has slowly grown his cattle ranch to encompass 300 acres. Roddy recently visited his local NRCS office in McLennan to discuss options for improving his land. Staff helped him develop a conservation plan to serve as a road map toward accomplishing his conservation goals. When Roddy walked into the NRCS office he was thinking they might look at doing some brush clearing and grass planting. A couple site visits later, Roddy and NRCS had developed a plan that added developing water sources and installing cross fencing to help restore and enhance his natural resources.

***“My dream is becoming a reality and that’s a pretty neat thing. It makes me feel good to think this is a legacy I can leave for my kids someday.”***

***Rickie Roddy***



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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### Impacting Land and Lives Through Outreach

In 2014, USDA agencies in Texas took on the challenge of increasing its StrikeForce footprint from nine to 96 counties. Vital to success were NRCS, FSA, RD and FNS working under the umbrella of one USDA in more than **380 outreach events** across StrikeForce counties. **NRCS took the lead in 73 of these** outreach efforts. Continued collaborations with established partners and new partnerships were another critical component to reaching private landowners and communities with information on USDA agencies and available technical and financial assistance through Farm Bill programs. Partners such as the University of Texas-Pan American, Texas Mexico Border Coalition and the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers CBO worked at the grass roots level to enhance our outreach efforts to historically underserved, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, limited resource producers and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. NRCS also continued to rely on its strong relationships with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Texas Agrilife Extension, the Texas Department of Agriculture and other state and local governments and nonprofit organizations.

#### Outreach efforts met NRCS goals through:

- ◆ Identifying underserved and non-traditional customers in each of the StrikeForce counties
- ◆ Amplifying partnerships with CBOs and stakeholders to identify customer groups and their specific needs
- ◆ Developing education and awareness materials to meet the needs of identified customer groups
- ◆ Working with CBOs and stakeholders to host outreach meetings to explain services offered through USDA agencies and Farm Bill programs
- ◆ Gathering contact information at these outreach events on individuals interested in working with USDA agencies
- ◆ Scheduling one-on-one assistance for landowners to begin the conservation planning process.



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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Funding By-the-Numbers

COUNTY	CONTRACTS OBLIGATED	AMOUNTS	ACRES
Atascosa	5	\$146,321	1,167
Brazos	1	\$4,031	2
Cameron	8	\$273,468	851
Camp	1	\$34,972	198
Castro	2	\$170,336	954
Delta	1	\$33,125	235
Duval	16	\$251,513	3,478
Frio	2	\$58,136	3,760
Hidalgo	16	\$277,533	3,196
Jim Wells	7	\$118,369	3,456
Kleberg	1	\$13,261	42
La Salle	2	\$25,255	73
Limestone	1	\$37,965	84
Marion	1	\$1,015	6
McLennan	1	\$48,155	40
Nacogdoches	3	\$29,502	188
Robertson	3	\$93,040	261
Runnels	2	\$51,714	213
Scheicher	1	\$20,413	113
Shelby	3	\$14,364	196
Starr	29	\$262,607	7,026
Upton	1	\$100,102	1,553
Val Verde	1	\$7,259	40
Waller	1	\$6,623	17
Webb	8	\$131,219	5,871
Willacy	5	\$43,082	168
Zapata	4	\$28,793	4,121
Zavala	1	\$46,024	675
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>\$2,328,197</b>	<b>37,984</b>

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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Demographics

COUNTY	POPULATION 2013	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 2013	MEDIAN INCOME (2012)	% POVERTY (2012)
State of Texas	26,448,193	6.3	\$50,747	17.9
Atascosa	47,093	6.2	\$44,828	17.8
Bee	32,799	6.5	\$39,070	27.6
Brazos	203,164	4.9	\$40,064	27.2
Briscoe	1,537	6.5	\$35,983	16.3
Brooks	7,237	7.0	\$26,857	32.1
Caldwell	39,232	6.7	\$42,963	20
Cameron	417,276	10.1	\$31,080	35.5
Camp	12,413	7.1	\$37,232	22.1
Castro	8,030	5.5	\$40,710	20.1
Cherokee	50,878	7.5	\$35,202	26.7
Cochran	3,016	7.0	\$35,652	20.7
Coleman	8,543	6.0	\$32,231	22
Collingsworth	3,099	4.9	\$35,484	21.2
Comanche	13,623	5.3	\$36,522	21.4
Concho	4,043	6.6	\$37,147	33.7
Crane	4,773	4.9	\$55,599	10.1
Crosby	5,991	5.9	\$36,492	24.3
Culberson	2,277	3.1	\$31,430	23.2
Dawson	13,810	7.0	\$36,312	22.3
Delta	5,238	7.2	\$37,515	19
Dickens	2,291	8.5	\$32,829	24.2
Dimmit	10,897	4.5	\$33,342	25.7
Duval	11,640	6.1	\$33,223	25.3
Eastland	18,245	5.7	\$37,916	21.4
Edwards	1,884	6.6	\$34,388	22.2
El Paso	827,718	8.8	\$40,092	24
Erath	39,658	5.7	\$38,636	22.2
Falls	17,493	8.3	\$34,388	24.9
Floyd	6,230	9.4	\$34,503	24.5
Foard	1,277	5.1	\$32,041	18.4
Frio	18,065	5.4	\$32,276	32

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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Demographics Continued

COUNTY	POPULATION 2013	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 2013	MEDIAN INCOME (2012)	% POVERTY (2012)
Gaines	18,921	4.6	\$46,659	15.9
Garza	6,317	5.6	\$39,988	30.6
Gonzales	20,312	4.7	\$36,006	20.7
Hale	35,764	12.4	\$40,118	22
Hall	3,239	7.4	\$28,656	24.3
Hardeman	4,016	4.9	\$34,601	18.3
Hidalgo	815,996	10.8	\$33,393	34.2
Houston	22,911	8.8	\$33,650	25.5
Howard	36,147	5.7	\$42,256	20.9
Hudspeth	3,318	5.5	\$30,043	29.7
Jeff Davis	2,253	4.9	\$43,065	13.2
Jim Wells	41,680	5.0	\$43,696	20.1
Karnes	15,081	5.8	\$37,292	27.1
Kenedy	412	3.3	\$36,236	16.4
Kinney	3,586	7.8	\$38,870	22.9
Kleberg	32,101	5.5	\$39,237	24.3
Knox	3,767	5.7	\$33,182	21.1
Lamb	13,775	6.8	\$34,505	20.3
La Salle	7,369	3.6	\$32,001	34.4
Limestone	23,326	6.0	\$36,496	21.9
Lynn	5,723	5.8	\$34,852	20.2
McCulloch	8,330	5.1	\$36,483	21.3
McLennan	241,481	6.1	\$40,855	19.8
Madison	13,781	6.3	\$36,579	23.9
Marion	10,235	6.9	\$33,330	24
Matagorda	36,592	9.6	\$40,860	19.7
Maverick	55,932	12.6	\$31,313	28.4
Morris	12,834	8.8	\$35,294	22.7
Motley	1,196	5.4	\$36,772	17.5
Nacogdoches	65,330	6.3	\$35,183	24.3
Navarro	48,038	7.1	\$40,624	20.3
Nueces	352,107	5.8	\$48,066	17.5

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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Demographics Continued

COUNTY	POPULATION 2013	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 2013	MEDIAN INCOME (2012)	% POVERTY (2012)
Ochiltree	10,806	3.3	\$55,700	11.3
Parmer	9,965	4.6	\$44,256	14.4
Polk	45,790	7.9	\$40,254	17.8
Potter	121,661	5.2	\$35,754	23.4
Presidio	7,201	11.9	\$32,861	21.7
Real	3,350	5.7	\$33,598	21.5
Red River	12,470	9.8	\$33,153	20.8
Reeves	13,965	8.5	\$34,431	28.2
Robertson	16,486	6.6	\$39,771	17.9
Runnels	10,309	5.8	\$35,593	20
Sabine	10,361	13.4	\$35,805	20.7
San Augustine	8,769	10.1	\$31,714	23.9
San Jacinto	26,856	7.3	\$42,160	19.6
San Saba	6,012	7.3	\$37,107	21.1
Schleicher	3,206	3.9	\$47,322	15.7
Shelby	25,792	6.8	\$37,122	19.2
Starr	61,963	15.4	\$23,358	43.6
Stephens	9,247	5.1	\$40,805	20.2
Terry	12,743	6.1	\$34,928	23.3
Trinity	14,393	7.0	\$33,771	19.7
Tyler	21,464	9.7	\$39,255	21.1
Upton	3,372	3.3	\$49,846	16
Uvalde	26,926	7.1	\$32,920	26.2
Val Verde	48,623	7.3	\$39,864	21.3
Walker	68,817	6.4	\$38,024	23.9
Waller	45,213	6.4	\$47,015	19.7
Webb	262,495	6.7	\$35,974	31.3
Wilbarger	13,131	4.4	\$37,304	17.1
Willacy	21,921	13.8	\$29,225	38.6
Winkler	7,606	4.4	\$48,727	14.2
Yoakum	8,184	3.5	\$55,063	11.1
Zapata	14,390	6.2	\$33,462	29
Zavala	12,156	14.7	\$25,157	34



# 2014 TEXAS ANNUAL REPORT

## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Farm and Acreage Demographics

COUNTY	LAND IN FARMS (ACRES)	NUMBER OF FARMS	AVERAGE FARM SIZE (ACRES)
Atascosa	665,287	335	1,987
Bee	538,807	553	974
Brazos	299,108	212	1,412
Briscoe	524,239	1,859	282
Brooks	572,917	1,532	374
Caldwell	310,433	191	1,623
Cameron	309,700	237	1,305
Camp	78,238	161	487
Castro	548,142	1,030	532
Cherokee	301,338	191	1,574
Cochran	448,719	1,558	288
Coleman	725,738	801	906
Collingsworth	494,805	1,292	383
Comanche	517,135	360	1,435
Concho	501,597	1,251	401
Crane	239,159	8,858	27
Crosby	558,372	1,296	431
Culberson	1,618,007	21,013	77
Dawson	558,085	936	596
Delta	131,212	248	529
Dickens	572,617	1,310	437
Dimmit	677,023	1,845	367
Duval	959,630	668	1,436
Eastland	503,633	429	1,174
Edwards	969,873	2,315	419
El Paso	209,393	319	657
Erath	607,550	281	2,161
Falls	382,651	303	1,263
Floyd	581,997	988	589
Foard	368,143	1,898	194
Frio	713,262	1,096	651
Gaines	774,822	1,203	644
Garza	455,569	1,645	277

# 2014 TEXAS ANNUAL REPORT

## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Farm and Acreage Demographics Continued

COUNTY	LAND IN FARMS (ACRES)	NUMBER OF FARMS	AVERAGE FARM SIZE (ACRES)
Gonzales	609,790	364	1,674
Hale	640,609	713	899
Hall	509,050	1,305	390
Hardeman	354,648	993	357
Hidalgo	795,180	368	2,161
Houston	467,883	311	1,505
Howard	498,472	1,049	475
Hudspeth	2,251,109	13,480	167
Jeff Davis	1,255,005	14,941	84
Jim Wells	503,754	481	1,047
Karnes	464,641	361	1,288
Kenedy	916,390	32,728	28
Kinney	576,745	2,943	196
Kleberg	484,137	1,207	401
Knox	450,631	1,976	228
Lamb	616,260	661	933
La Salle	634,847	1,423	446
Limestone	486,787	319	1,526
Lynn	472,170	1,038	455
McCulloch	614,353	992	619
McLennan	553,517	169	3,278
Madison	291,350	300	970
Marion	40,124	162	247
Matagorda	568,055	664	856
Maverick	540,869	1,840	294
Morris	91,874	223	412
Motley	595,487	2,658	224
Nacogdoches	264,818	221	1,196
Navarro	558,096	217	2,573
Nueces	523,933	695	754
Ochiltree	544,623	1,565	348
Oldham	830,427	5,223	159
Parmer	553,724	971	570
Polk	139,199	189	738
Potter	568,641	14	2,204

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## USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

### StrikeForce Farm and Acreage Demographics Continued

COUNTY	LAND IN FARMS (ACRES)	NUMBER OF FARMS	AVERAGE FARM SIZE (ACRES)
Presidio	1,655,540	10,219	162
Real	320,572	1,330	241
Reeves	1,235,728	5,149	240
Robertson	467,568	308	1,520
Runnels	665,905	720	925
Sabine	29,035	144	201
San Augustine	72,890	239	305
San Jacinto	111,900	141	791
San Saba	671,092	902	744
Scheicher	833,569	2,689	310
Shelby	197,189	188	1,048
Starr	668,724	574	1,165
Stephens	516,748	1,143	452
Terry	442,100	702	630
Trinity	111,262	184	604
Tyler	90,670	125	727
Upton	686,231	6,794	101
Uvalde	977,281	1,527	640
Val Verde	1,497,074	3,556	421
Walker	280,512	180	1,560
Waller	314,981	163	1,927
Webb	2,098,378	3,015	696
Wilbarger	587,173	1,385	424
Willacy	336,075	1,047	321
Winkler	533,464	12,406	43
Yoakum	488,493	1,441	339
Zapata	563,146	1,254	449
Zavala	692,850	2,414	287

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