

**STATE OF ALABAMA
DELTA DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2003**

I. Introduction

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) was established by Congress to promote economic growth and improve the quality of life in eight states, 240 counties and parishes. It is a unique partnership of federal, state, and local governments. Within the partnership, the Governor represents the State of Alabama. The responsibility for administration of the DRA program within Delta counties in Alabama lies with the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). The Director of ADECA serves as the Governor's Alternate Representative to the Commission.

There are twenty counties located in the Delta Region in Alabama. The counties are: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Escambia, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Perry, Pickens, Russell, Sumter, Washington and Wilcox. Local governments are represented by multi-county development agencies called Local Development Districts (LDD's). The twenty counties of the Delta Regional Authority in Alabama are served by six LDD's. See appendix 1 for a list of counties and county data.

On December 27, 2000, the Commission adopted a new strategic plan, which would guide its investments in the years ahead. The plan provided a foundation for development in four major goal areas. These are education, infrastructure, transportation and business development with an emphasis on entrepreneurship.

The Delta Regional Authority requires each state to submit a Delta Regional Authority Development State Plan describing the Governor's goals and objectives for the Delta region for his or her state. This plan is designed to set forth the development priorities for the 2002 term of Governor Don Siegelman. The policies for Delta Alabama are generated by the needs of the people in the region.

ADECA works closely with the six Local Development Districts (LDDs) in Delta Alabama in the development of eligible projects and the preparation of applications that are consistent with the DRA Code and guidelines. Each LDD operates under a Board of Directors composed of representatives from the various local governments. Each LDD helps DRA target and meet the needs of local communities and build community unity and leadership. The LDDs are an active and essential part of the DRA partnership. Citizen participation is achieved through public hearings held by the LDDs. In addition, a Delta Regional Authority workshop is held annually and allows for public participation.

The Governor has expressed his concern for the development of the state's economically distressed counties. He has established a task force and commissioned a study with recommendations to be carried out by a statewide economic development commission. The Commerce Commission is comprised of representatives and/or heads of all of the economic development entities in the State of Alabama and is charged with establishing a long-range statewide strategic plan. There are a number of committees involved, including a committee for the Blackbelt, Infrastructure, Incentives, Education, and so forth. See Appendix for Economic Development Matrix of those involved with the Commerce Commission. The mission of the Alabama Commerce Commission is to help the Great State of Alabama become more competitive in economic development, which in turn will create a more productive and satisfying life for her citizens. One of the observations coming from the Alabama Commerce Commission is that if incomes in the twenty poorest counties of the state were to rise to the level of the state average, then Alabama (as a state) would rise in personal income to the national average.

For the 21st Century, we envision the following for the Delta counties:

- Growth will be in all business sectors, allowing both new and existing businesses to prosper.
- Citizens can achieve economic independence by working in jobs that pay livable wages, are safe, and that provide opportunities for advancement.
- Delta communities will have a higher quality of life, access to excellent public schools and lifelong educational opportunities, quality health care, affordable, decent housing, and a clean environment.
- There is full integration into the global economy through an extensive network of transportation and telecommunications.
- The development of strong local leaders and an active citizenry will chart their own future and implement sustainable, local strategies for economic development.

There are many issues facing Alabama, including dramatic structural shifts in the various economic sectors, the quality of the workforce, the increasing importance of entrepreneurship, the strong influence of information technology, and the need for environmental protection as well as long-term issues, such as the consequences of inadequate education, poverty, transportation, and infrastructure needs. Public and private sectors will join with the citizens of the Delta to:

- Ensure that all students receive a strong, basic education regardless of where they live.
- Establish an integrated, accountable workforce development system.
- Provide resources to low income workers to remove barriers to work and economic stability.

- Establish a jobs strategy to grow and capture high wage jobs and high quality businesses.
- Equip communities with cutting-edge technology to connect them with the global economy.
- Protect the natural resource base to ensure long-term, shared prosperity.
- Provide access to healthcare.

II. Economic Conditions

For both rural and metropolitan areas, the effectiveness of the traditional approach to economic development has begun to decline. Most communities (especially the rural communities) are missing opportunities which could be utilized to help increase job creation. Economic development agencies should expand their focus to include the development of an environment, which would foster growth from within the community, rural or urban, and be an integral and complementary part of the economic development process. Efforts will be made to develop an economic system, which will bring together a cohesive multifaceted system of orientation, training, and assistance. Objectives of the concept are to: lessen traditional economic development dependency on recruiting and importing jobs and industry from outside the community; diversify local/rural economies; promote economic development through small business creation, incubation, and assistance; attract and train innovative entrepreneurs; better use existing resources; and assist existing small and medium size businesses. A quality economic foundation for all regions of the state must exist in terms of physical infrastructure, transportation, and information infrastructures and human resources.

One of the primary factors that determine the potential and rate of growth within a county or region is access to basic infrastructure, such as public water, sewer, and transportation. While public and private water systems usually provide service beyond municipal and sometimes county boundaries, sewer service is mostly confined to the larger cities and the surrounding areas. Those areas, which lack access to basic infrastructure, experience the lowest overall growth and the lowest general standard of living (Alabama Rural Development Strategy 1998).

Another factor that affects growth and development is employment. Historically most employment has been in the manufacturing and government sectors; however, there is a trend towards transitioning into more diversified economies. Most rural counties still have a higher percentage of manufacturing and government jobs and less service, professional and retail jobs than urban areas. Rural communities often lack the income levels and customer bases that are essential to support large retail and service sector businesses. As the number and percentage of manufacturing jobs in rural areas decline, workers will need to develop new job skills, accept lower paying local service and retail jobs, or commute greater distances to job opportunities in the larger cities. Since adults in rural areas are less likely to have graduated from high school, intensive workforce training programs will be needed to teach the necessary skills to adapt to new or first time job opportunities.

Low income and poor access to health care facilities and services continue to be a defining characteristic of rural Delta Alabama. Although many of the rural Delta counties have made strong gains in median family incomes in recent years, most of the increases may be attributed to an influx of suburban residents who commute to larger urban centers, rather than any real increase in local wages.

III. DRA Challenges and Development Opportunities

Challenges are long standing problem-transition to new economy, low wages, increasing education attainment to meet future growth and development. There is a fervent need to provide infrastructure, improve education, health care accessibility, access to capital and technical assistance for entrepreneurs, provide assistance to communities for leadership development, develop telecommunications infrastructure, and increase markets for small and medium-sized businesses through increased trade.

- Increase the supply of employable workers by placing emphasis on upgrading skills among adults who lack a high school diploma.
- Reduce the number of young people who enter the work place in the future without a high school education.
- Develop a comprehensive, cooperative model for infrastructure development, which will promote economic growth along corridors and create jobs for Alabamians.
- Provide accessible, affordable health care to Delta Region residents.
- Penetration of overseas markets – provide access to global markets for small and medium-sized companies.

Goals

Five goals were established by the Delta Regional Authority to guide the activities undertaken by the Authority. The State of Alabama will direct efforts to implement these goals in the following way:

Goal 1: Delta Region residents will have the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the world economy in the 21st century.

- To develop a workforce that is educated and well trained for employment.
- Strengthen programs that provide basic skills and workforce training to increase
- Provide access to educational opportunities to gain skills and knowledge required for the workforce to participate in a global economy.

- Strengthen basic skills programs in the public school system and establish specific competency requirements.
- Provide access to programs that will promote education excellence and promote lifelong learning.
- Increase adult literacy.
- Provide children with skills needed to be successful in school.
- Utilize telecommunications, computers and other technological capabilities to deliver education and training programs.
- Reduce the school dropout rate in our Delta counties.
- Support programs that will expand the use of telecommunications in education, especially K-12.
- Assist communities in developing programs and services for families and caregivers of young children that will ensure that children are healthy and prepared to succeed in school.
- Ensure that students attain the skills and knowledge they will need in the workplace and for continued learning.
- Anticipate and respond quickly to changes in the workplace.
- Support training in the public, private, and non-profit sectors in Delta Alabama in the use of new technologies and applications.

Goal 2: DRA communities will have the physical infrastructure necessary for self-sustaining economic development and improved quality of life.

- Work with public and private partners to identify and develop intermodal transportation facilities and corridors in Delta Alabama.
- Support efforts to bring adequate telecommunications to Delta counties, and support efforts to link new and existing telecommunications networks.
- Support special innovative service telecommunications applications and programs.
- Provide Delta Region counties access to safe drinking water and wastewater facilities.
- Provide water, sewer and physical infrastructure needed to serve new and expanding industries and commercial development.

- Support development of new industrial sites.
- Provide capital funding for the development of small business incubators.
- Develop “small parks” with telecommunications infrastructure, which will meet the needs of information industries.

Goal 3: The people and organizations of the Delta Region will have the vision and capacity to mobilize and work together for sustained economic progress and improvements of their communities.

- Increase economic progress and local capacity through strategic planning, technology and leadership development.
- Increase the number of people participating in leadership development programs, and support efforts to establish ongoing local leadership training programs for both adults and youth.
- Assist local communities to institute strategic planning and direction for future progress and improvement, including innovative, cost-effective delivery of services.
- Encourage the use of telecommunications technology at all levels to assist community and economic development.

Goal 4: DRA residents will have access to financial and technical resources to help build dynamic and self-sustaining local economies.

- Assist counties in restructuring their local economies in order to provide more opportunities for high-value, high wage employment.
- Support infrastructure development to increase tourism based on economic impact.
- Support training programs in economic planning and development and in export development, and increase the number of small and medium-sized businesses engaged in international trade.
- Support programs that increase participation of DRA companies in trade events.
- Assist existing firms in marketing their products and services in international markets.
- Support planning efforts, including inventories of available resources to provide information and knowledge for growth and development.
- Increase entrepreneurship in Delta Alabama.

Goal 5: DRA residents will have access to affordable, quality healthcare.

- Increase the availability of primary health care in Health Professional Shortage areas.
- Support initiatives for planning, technical assistance and support to improve health care access to residents of the Delta.
- Reduce the infant mortality rate in the Delta counties.
- Strengthen prenatal and neonatal health care and provide education programs to reduce the infant mortality rates.
- Increase programs to prevent teen pregnancy.
- Support projects that will increase access to health care, information and economic opportunities through telemedicine.

