

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

# Rural Revitalization: EPA's Brownfields Program Working With Small And Rural Communities



Total grant awarded to places not in a metro or micro-politan statistical areas (MSA) or in MSAs with populations of 250,000 or less.\*

- There are 87 communities with a population less than 10,000 receiving 8% of total grant funding
- There are 152 communities with a population less than 25,000 receiving 15% of total grant funding
- There are 209 communities with a population less than 50,000 receiving 21% of total grant funding

\*These numbers were calculated by linking the zip codes of grant recipients to U.S. Census Bureau data for populations in incorporated places and Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) from 2009 data.

## Introduction

EPA's Brownfields Program provides many grants to rural and tribal communities to help them address brownfields cleanup and redevelopment issues. Rural brownfields may present unique characteristics such as pesticide and lime wastes associated with manufacturing activities, wastes from mining operations, old or abandoned mills, abandoned gas stations, manufacturing sites, and vacant and abandoned buildings. Rural communities with brownfields also face unique challenges due to limited planning capacity in rural areas, limited capital funding and investment options, and lack of understanding of brownfields challenges among key stakeholders.

Brownfields are vacant and under used parcels of land, which can be eyesores to communities and may threaten public health. A brownfield is a "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

Since 2009, EPA funded 87 communities with populations under 10,000 (representing 8% of total grant funding) and more than 150 communities with populations under 25,000 (representing 15% of total grant funding).

This fact sheet highlights several examples of how EPA Brownfields grants and funding are assisting rural and tribal areas to assess, clean up and revitalize properties within their communities.

## Assisting Rural Communities in Addressing Brownfields

**Technical Assistance to Colorado's Sugar Beet Factories:** Colorado used to have the largest number of sugar beet factories in the United States. Today, only one of its 22 sugar beet factories (in Fort Morgan) remains open; the rest are closed or have ceased operations based on challenges facing the sugar industry. These challenges range from market conditions, water limitations, labor shortages, and other economic factors. These sites are located in rural to semi-rural areas and tend to be large and contain large piles of lime waste—a by-product of sugar beet processing and now a dust pollutant.

An EPA-funded Technical Assistance Team inventoried the Colorado sugar beet factories, supported development of a business model, and held stakeholder outreach activities for redevelopment activities or reuse opportunities for the communities. Of the 22 identified active and former sugar beet processing facilities, information was collected to support a business redevelopment model (locations with redevelopment advantages) for three rural Colorado towns, Fort Morgan, Ovid and Sterling, who are actively applying for EPA Brownfield Assessment grants. The focus of the model is on reuse opportunities that may have advantages to prospective new business employers, as well as alternatives for the reuse of the existing lime waste.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Fort Morgan population was 11,034; Sterling has a population of 11,360; and Ovid operates as a statutory town, with a 2000 U.S. Census population of 330. Currently, the Colorado Brownfields Foundation, the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, local stakeholders, and other federal and state partners are assembling together to formulate strategies for sugar beet factory redevelopment in these rural settings. While many sites remain abandoned, some have been redeveloped as recreational areas, storage silos, or put to full or partial use for commercial, industrial or public works purposes.

Fort Morgan - Colorado's Last Operational Sugar Beet Factory



**Promoting Sustainable Rural Communities:** EPA Region 7 and the Office of Sustainable Communities, with funding from the Land Revitalization Program, are helping rural communities in Kansas incorporate sustainability and green infrastructure into community redevelopment plans.

In Kansas, EPA performed site reviews locating properties that match local codes and policies for reuse and redevelopment. The search determined that two vacant lots and a former auto dealership in Ellis (population 2,000), and a closed landfill in Kansas City, suited the redevelopment plans and policies for each of the communities.

EPA Region 7 conducted site visits in June 2010, with the audit reports completed shortly thereafter. The audits resulted in recommendations on the potential use of vacant lots, improved streetscaping, anticipated transit-oriented development, and other infrastructure design possibilities in each of the communities.

Assisting rural communities—that might typically have less access to resources—with learning about and incorporating smart growth and sustainability principles into redevelopment plans is one way EPA is working to address brownfields in small and rural communities.

**Supporting Revitalization and Sustainability on Tribal Lands:**

Tribes face many of the same types of challenges found in small or rural communities in the United States. Tribes typically do not have the funding or technical resources that larger communities have, nor the economic drivers associated with more dense populations that might spur cleanup and reuse. Tribes may seek to return contaminated land to a non-economic reuse, such as returning land to a culturally beneficial reuse. To clean up and reuse contaminated lands in Indian country, many tribes create brownfields programs or “Tribal Response Programs.” Since tribal communities often lack funding to sustain

environmental program capacity building, EPA offers technical assistance and expertise to address brownfields in these often rural communities.

In Region 8, the Spirit Lake Nation began assessing, remediating and restoring former brownfields over a decade ago. The tribe, population 6,000, resides in rural Fort Totten, North Dakota. The tribe addresses environmental challenges through EPA technical assistance and funding, such as Assessment, Cleanup, Job Training, and Section 128(a) Tribal Response grants. EPA funding spawned over 18 environmental assessments and cleanups, trained the locals to perform the cleanups, and helped the tribe set its Environmental/Solid Waste Ordinance. Assessment and cleanup projects include rehabilitating former buildings into apartments, community centers and schools, as well as remediating the historic Fort Totten Calvary Square complex.

Spirit Lake Nation also received support to create a tribal leadership team and develop a sustainable recovery plan, the *Spirit Lake Nation Recovery Plan*. It is the first tribe to receive FEMA’s Long-term Community Recovery technical assistance. The recovery plan sets the groundwork for flood impact analysis, sustainable living, smart growth, green infrastructure, and it demonstrates available resources and addresses long-term disaster impacts.

The success of the tribe’s cleanup efforts and revitalization has brought jobs to the rural community and preserved properties of historical significance. The Spirit Lake Nation is a community that realized the benefits of EPA and other federal agency assistance to build a greener and sustainable future for itself.



Auto Dealership in Ellis, Iowa

Spirit Lake Nation in Fort Totten, ND

Former Sugar Beet Factory in Eaton, CO

