

Dakota West Resource, Conservation & Development Area, Inc.
Organization and Project Background
Summer Intern – Partners Internship Program

The PIP Summer Intern will develop a long-term, sustainable program through the development of an outreach and marketing plan to reach targeted audiences, including underserved populations and those who are difficult to reach. The outreach effort will include the application of technology, including web-based applications, as well as more traditional methods.

Dakota West Vision: *Safe, sustainable communities*

Dakota West Mission: *To improve the environment, economic activity, and quality of life in the Area*

Dakota West's program services are based on a five year Area (long-range) Plan that was last adopted in 2007. The organization's goals, objectives and strategies are centered under the categories of *land conservation, land management, water management and community development*. Dakota West is a significant provider of technical services to area non-profits, soil conservation districts, water management boards, emergency service providers and farmers/ranchers. Program services include on-going assistance through programs as well as project-based assistance.

One example of on-going program-based assistance is the *Livestock Facilities Assistance Program* (LFAP). Dakota West receives funding through the North Dakota Non-point Pollution Task Force (EPA Section 319 grant program) to provide technical assistance to livestock producers to comply with State non-point source pollution rules. This is accomplished through improved management strategies and feedlot design assistance to reduce run-off of animal waste contaminated water into surface waters of the State. If a livestock producer initiates construction activities, the program also provides construction oversight for quality control and assurance.

An example of a recently completed project-based activity is the File of Life project. Dakota West collaborated with area businesses, law enforcement centers, non-profit organizations and emergency service providers to purchase 5,000 File of Life refrigerator magnet health records. The health records contain critical health information of home occupants, including emergency contacts, medical providers and medications taken. The record, contained in a magnetized pocket intended to be placed on the refrigerator, provides information to first responders in emergency situations. Dakota West is also facilitating the outreach campaign so emergency responders are aware of the File of Life.

Dakota West serves approximately 40,000 people in the counties of Adams, Billings, Bowman, Dunn, Hettinger, Slope and Stark in southwest North Dakota as well as the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara Nation of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Total land base served is over 10,000 square miles and includes the Little Missouri National Grasslands, Theodore Roosevelt National Park and Little Missouri Scenic River, which has carved out the North Dakota Badlands. The area has a rich history of agriculture with a distinct western flavor.

The economic base of the area is agriculture and energy development, more specifically oil extraction. The City of Dickinson serves as a regional hub for retail sales, secondary wholesale distribution, light manufacturing, health care services and higher education. Dickinson State University, a public university located in Dickinson, serves as a cultural, social, recreational and intellectual center for the area. The University has an enrollment of approximately 2,500 students, including several international students.

The project at hand is titled Southwest ND Soil Health Demonstration. Project objectives are to advance sustainable agricultural practices by educating producers, stimulating them to adopt comprehensive crop management practices that advance soil health. Soil health is the capacity of a soil to function, including; regulation of the water cycle, sustaining plant and animal life, filtering and buffering organic and inorganic materials, and cycling nutrients. Adoption of strategies to improve soil health by producers (farmers) will also improve water quality, make more efficient use of naturally occurring moisture, sequester atmospheric carbon and reduce energy intensive inputs.

An improved soil food web will produce and store nutrients for each successive crop cycle. Soil food web technology is based on organisms present in the soil and on the foliage of plants that provide the biodiversity necessary to minimize inputs while maintaining soil fertility.

Project methodology is to establish eight, 18-acre demonstration plots that will follow an intense rotation of cash or forage crops and cover crops. Zero-tillage and residue management will be implemented to increase soil organic carbon, soil organic matter, water infiltration, nutrient retention, and soil cover. Project partners include Dakota West RC&D, Dunn County Soil Conservation District, Western Stark County Soil Conservation District, Central Stark County Soil Conservation District, and Dickinson State University. The partnership provides the financial means and technical expertise necessary to implement the demonstration. While the science and technology of the project are sound, our biggest challenge is to effectively market the project and reach out to producers in the area (and beyond) to effect change. The project will not be considered successful unless we can convince area producers to adopt the technology. Dakota West is proposing to assign a summer intern the task (or perhaps part) of developing a marketing and outreach plan to help us overcome this challenge.

The final product will be a marketing strategy and outreach plan, including technology-based media that will effectively maximize our ability to reach targeted audiences. Producers (farmers) are considered the primary beneficiaries by improving their sustainability. On a larger scale, the environment will benefit through improved water quality, increased biodiversity below and above ground, reduced fossil fuel usage, reduced pesticide use (particularly insecticides), and reduced soil erosion. This project will also improve the sustainability of the land to provide food and fiber to our nation and beyond.

Project organization was initiated in early 2008 and demonstration sites were planned and planted in the spring. One field day event was held in September, 2008. Project collaborators planned a ten year project and eventually hope to secure funding necessary to retain a full-time project coordinator. The project is still in its early stages and planning is not yet complete. This is a ground floor opportunity for an intern to significantly contribute to what we expect to be a long-term project for Dakota West and their collaborators.

We hope to develop a dynamic marketing and outreach strategy, specifically to have the ability to efficiently communicate project progress and outcomes to target audiences as well as effectively convince producers (farmers) to adopt similar strategies. The intern will familiarize themselves with the project goals, objectives and strategies, and then work with project collaborators through a nominal group process to ferret out desired objectives of an outreach plan. The intern will develop a draft outline of objectives, then follow-up with project collaborators to determine strategies for implementation, upon which a draft plan will be developed. Finally, the intern will be given the opportunity to initiate one or two of the strategies on behalf of the project before their internship expires.

The intern will have access to workspace, a computer, software and all supplies necessary to conduct the project. Required qualifications will primarily be based on proficiency in the computer software necessary to complete the project. Preferred qualifications include knowledge and/or experience with similar endeavors as well as exposure to agricultural methodologies.

The intern will be exposed to Dakota West Council meetings, at which all activities of the organization are reviewed and discussed. The intern will have opportunities to view operations, and observe or participate in other program and project activities of Dakota West and their partner organizations, including; educational & outreach activities, public speaking opportunities, event organization and facilitation, group facilitation, nominal group process planning, newsletter development, media outreach, agricultural methodology, scientific research, producer (farmer) consultations, and many more.

Supervision of the intern will be the responsibility of the Dakota West President. Day to day activities will be coordinated through the Dakota West Office Administrator and the Resource, Conservation & Development Coordinator assigned to assist Dakota West with the implementation of their Annual Plan of Work.