

# What rural Arkansas needs...

## 1. Rural Arkansas needs economic development.

The average per capita income for rural residents in 2006 was \$24,371. Compared to the state's urban per capita income of \$31,304, rural income was 22.2% lower (up from 14% lower in 2003). 20.2% of rural Arkansas families lived in poverty in 2005, up from 18.1% three years before; 51.8% of rural school children are eligible for free or reduced meals. Rural Arkansans are falling behind in income.

## 2. Rural Arkansas needs jobs.

The rural unemployment rate is 6.4%, up from 6.2% in 2002. The state's urban unemployment rate is much less at 4.8%. People in rural areas receive about \$9,338 less per job than people in urban areas in Arkansas. This is a change of -36% since 2002. Rural Arkansas lost 11,500 jobs in 2000-2002. Rural Arkansans are falling behind in jobs.

## 3. Rural Arkansas needs assistance for families and communities.

According to the Office of Management and Budget, 55 Arkansas counties are rural. The Economic Research Service classifies all or most of 63 counties as rural. Half of Arkansas counties lost population from 2000-2003. 26 of Arkansas' 75 counties are projected to lose school-age population by 2030. Rural areas as a whole are showing net out-migration. 27 counties had more deaths than births in 2002-2003. High gas prices have hit rural residents especially hard.

## 4. Rural Arkansas needs local schools.

The school is the backbone of the rural community, the local meeting place, the largest employer. Due to recent consolidations, some students are traveling as much as *100 miles per day* on a school bus. Consolidation of rural schools is harming communities, families, and students.