



**Title:** Drinking Water Education in Under-served Communities

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This proposal applies a new extension education concept for drinking water protection programs addressed to poor, under-served, minority populations in rural and urban areas. It follows a successful CSREES-funded pilot project that used paraprofessionals from the target community to reach the target audience. This proposal will employ additional techniques such as mobilizing volunteers through local community centers, tap minority landowner organizations, and churches, engage small rural communities with Rural Utility Service, establish riparian demonstration projects, promote environmental quality incentive educational programs, and use GIS techniques to explain risk assessment concepts and promote good decision-making.

The target area is composed of two counties; Okfuskee, and, Okmulgee. These counties are among 1006 counties in the 11 Southern states with rural populations having poverty rates as high as 40% and more than 40% of working age persons without high school diplomas. Coupled with an aging demographic and widespread distrust of government, this target audience poses challenges for any extension educational program.

A previous pilot project, conducted in Creek and Okfuskee counties, developed and tested easy-to-read materials and employed a paraprofessional to visit well users, conduct assessments, and take water samples. The pilot showed that 38% of these wells were contaminated by coliform organisms and found numerous risks of contamination. Through appropriate follow up, 60% of contaminated wells were improved by simple practices like shock chlorination. These results and numerous other observations demonstrated the need to expand the program and tailor materials and approaches to this nontraditional audience.

In the proposed project we will hire paraprofessionals and students from the community, coordinate with community based organizations, promote rural utilities services and engage OSU extension to teach citizens and decision makers to test their drinking water and assess the risks of contamination. GIS techniques will be evaluated as a means of communicating information to rural well users and community decision-makers.



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