



USDA-CSREES 2006 National Water Quality Conference

[Drinking Water Education in Under-served Communities](#)

Oklahoma is one of the 11 states with non-metro counties having more than 40% of working-age persons lacking a high school diploma, more than 25% of the population in poverty, and high proportion of minorities (Rowley and Freshwater, 1999). The 1990 Census shows that 63% of the population in the Okfuskee and Okmulgee Counties consist of communities with more than 10% minorities, largely African American and American Indian. The area includes pockets with low economic structure, weak educational systems, and declining water resources.

In addition, there is widespread distrust of government programs and government workers in these areas. Overcoming these obstacles will require specific educational materials and programs, as well as involvement of people from the community. This leaves open many targets for educational strategies to protect drinking water and protect and improve the resource base.

The objective of this project is to educate rural minority communities to test and protect their drinking water supplies. Oklahoma State University (OSU), The Oklahoma Landowners and Tenants Association (TOLTA), and Retired Educators for Youth Agricultural Programs (REYAP) have been working together to encourage the participation of these communities.

We utilized Home*A*Syst program, GIS technology, and other visual maps to study and better understand the environment. During the first year of this project, a total of 31 private well owners participated to have their water tested. This year (the second year of the project), approximately 120 private well owners participated in having their water tested for nitrate and bacteria, and completed Home*A*Syst program. This number is increasing as their neighbors become aware of our educational program.

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