



## Agriculture Economic Development Initiative “Accelerating Growth through Agriculture”

### A Natural Partnership: Agriculture and Economic Development

*“Revitalizing Indiana’s economy is a cornerstone of our administration, and it must start at the grassroots level.”*

*Lt. Governor Becky Skillman,  
Secretary of Agriculture and  
Rural Development*

At first they might seem like an unlikely pair, but agriculture and economic development are natural partners. Food and agriculture’s \$25 billion impact and 573,874 employees are key to Indiana’s financial well-being. The administration recognizes this sector’s importance, and when the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) was formed in 2005, the department quickly identified the strategic areas for economic development.

The state believes that the food, farm, and forestry business will be a significant component to Indiana’s economic comeback. The administration also values the role of local authority and understands that much of what drives economic development are the policies, strategies and actions that take place at the regional and local level. As a result, the Agriculture Economic Development Initiative (AEDI) was developed to assist local communities and regions to capitalize on agriculture as a natural asset to grow their economies.

AEDI was piloted in nine southwestern Indiana counties during the winter of 2005. The more than 200 participants in this successful pilot agreed economic development is not only a priority for the state of Indiana, but also a vital issue for local communities. AEDI is designed to allow counties and regions to determine how agriculture will be incorporated into their own economic development plans. ISDA’s goal is to take the initiative to all 92 counties by the end of 2008.

*“During the pilot project in southwestern Indiana, we discovered when you put local leaders in the same room with the same goal of improving their local economy, great things start happening.”*

*Andy Miller, Director of Agriculture*

### Impact on Indiana

Thought leaders in each county with experience in economic development, community development and agriculture are critical to defining issues and proactively planning how to leverage agricultural assets. AEDI’s potential impact is far-reaching.

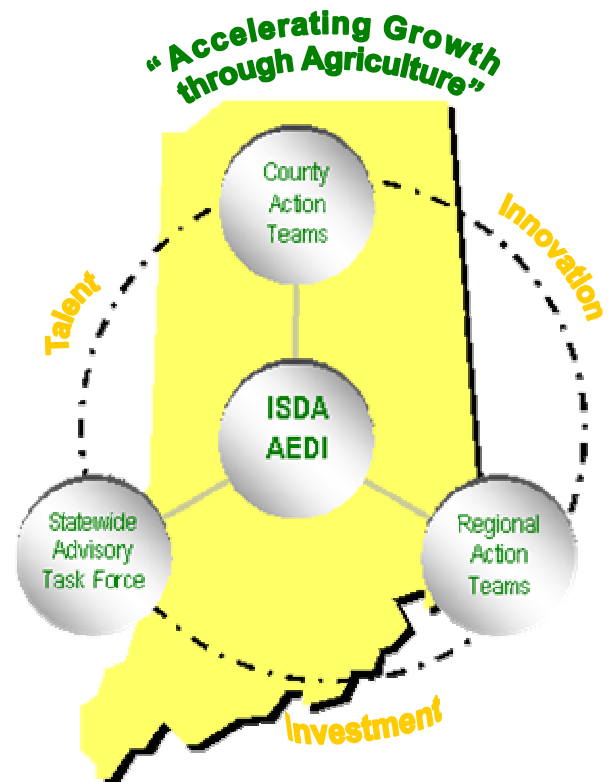
- AEDI fosters non-traditional partnerships between Local Economic Development Offices and agricultural leaders.
- AEDI provides professional assistance to regions and counties to tailor-make their own strategies.
- AEDI capitalizes on agriculture’s \$10 billion multiplier effect on local economies.
- AEDI fosters regional relationships among counties.
- AEDI gives a framework for counties to identify and define food and agriculture issues proactively, such as developing land-use policies.
- AEDI helps leverage the power of local authority in developing strategic economic development plans.

- AEDI offers a toolkit of technical resources to empower local stakeholders.
- AEDI positions the state to be on the cutting edge of non-traditional economic partnerships.

### Innovative Collaboration

AEDI provides the framework across Indiana for three types of partners to collaborate and engages stakeholders in both economic development and agriculture. Each meeting is professionally facilitated by a consulting team to capture input and ensure consistency.

1. **County Action Teams:** Teams are selected by local economic development officials and key agriculture leaders and meet three times. The county teams identify priorities for agriculture within a community, develop strategies to address those priorities and integrate strategic plans into overall economic development efforts. County action teams are critical to creating synergy and momentum.
2. **Regional Action Teams:** Regions are based on Indiana Workforce Regions. Regional priorities are developed from those identified in the county strategic plans. Selected key county leaders from each region discuss issues and develop regional planning in the AEDI process. Regional collaboration is essential to funding and supporting new initiatives.
3. **Statewide Advisory Task Force:** Composed of more than 30 statewide organizations, this task force helps build stakeholder support, provides feedback on county/regional progress and communicates to constituents about AEDI's work. The taskforce also helps identify resources for the toolkit.



The collective efforts of Hoosiers across the state will help leverage the assets highlighted in *Accelerating Growth - Indiana's Economic Development Plan*. Stakeholder discussions will include the key themes of innovation, talent and investment of *Accelerating Growth*.

### Growing the Economy through Agriculture

AEDI brings together non-traditional partners at the local, regional and state levels to benefit Indiana's economy – one community at a time. This initiative is a key ingredient in ISDA's strategic plan to grow Indiana's food and agricultural sector, focusing on bioenergy, diversity of production, hardwoods, livestock integration, pork production and regulatory coordination. More importantly, AEDI allows stakeholders to grow Indiana's local economies by aligning agricultural and economic priorities.

*The fact that economic development representatives from each county are engaged in this process and keep participating should be seen as a sign of success for the ISDA that economic developers are committed and feel strongly about this initiative."*

*Pilot Region Participant - Paul Lake,  
Executive Director of the Pike County Economic Growth and Development Council Inc.*