

## **RURAL OPPORTUNITY ZONE**

In 2011, Scott County was designated a Rural Opportunity Zone (ROZ) by the Kansas Department of Commerce. The Scott County Commission signed on for the Student Loan Repayment Program, whereby the State of Kansas matches county funds to provide up to \$15,000 to student loan debt payback assistance. The program is meant to counter population decline in rural areas and assist rural businesses in recruitment of any college or technically-educated workforce. Providing student loan assistance can make the difference in a new graduate being able to afford to move to Scott County. Also, this program allows Kansas Students to return to their roots. The unique program helps lift the financial burden that often prevents graduates from coming home.

Scott County Commission obligated \$9,000 in the first year of ROZ and another \$18,000 in 2012 to allow for a second round of applicants. The appeal for these highly educated people to move back or move into Scott County has been overwhelmingly positive. Due to budget constraints, the County decided that limiting the annual investment in the ROZ program to \$18,000 was in the best interest of the taxpayers for 2013 and 2014.

The ROZ program has successfully funded 24 applicants. Meanwhile, Scott County continues to appeal to applicants. Ideally, we seek to secure funding so ALL ROZ applicants choosing to live in Scott County can benefit.

Recently, new program standards allow private companies to sponsor ROZ participants. Employer sponsorships allow participating businesses to help employees reduce student loan debt. To find out how to sponsor a Rural Opportunity Zone participant in Scott County, contact Katie Eisenhour.

## **GRAIN FOR GRADUATES**

Every year, harvest is a huge part of the Scott County dynamic. Here at Scott County Development Committee, we are happy to announce the beginning of the "Grain for Graduates" program. SCDC has collaborated with the Scott Community Foundation, Scott Coop Association and Kirk Grain Company to accept grain donations for the Scott County ROZ fund.

Grain donations, of any amount, accepted at Scott Coop Association and Kirk Grain Company will go directly toward the Scott County ROZ fund. One could consider the "Grain for Graduates" program a reverse-scholarship that supports young educated residents moving into Scott County and contributing immediately to our economy. Over time, families grow, children attend Scott County Schools and Scott County is insuring itself against the dreaded "brain drain".

Please consider making a one-time donation of grain or donations after harvest every year. Scott County's economy is stronger as people with secondary education join our community.

For more information on the ROZ program or "Grain for Graduates", please contact the Scott County Development director, Katie Eisenhour at 620-872-3525 ext. 2, or by email at [scdcdirector@wbsnet.org](mailto:scdcdirector@wbsnet.org). You may also direct inquiries to the program manager at [roz@kansascommerce.com](mailto:roz@kansascommerce.com).