

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
**SESSION 2007**

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**D**

**HOUSE DRH10188-LB-349 (4/17)**

Short Title: Robeson County Appropriations Bill.

(Public)

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Sponsors: Representative Pierce.

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Referred to:

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A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO ROBESON COUNTY FOR THE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUND OF ROBESON COUNTY, TO ESTABLISH THE ROBESON COUNTY FOOD PLANNING ASSOCIATION AND COMPLETE A COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT, AND FOR ASSET-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** The General Assembly makes the following findings:

- (1) In August 2006, the U.S. Census released its report "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage: 2005." The report indicates that Robeson County, North Carolina, has the third highest poverty rate in the United States (p. 29) and with the third lowest median household income (p. 25) among all counties with a population between 65,000 and 250,000 (Source: <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2006/Webcast.pdf>).
- (2) Between 2000-2005, poverty in Robeson County grew at an alarming rate of forty-four percent (44%) rising from twenty-two and eight-tenths percent (22.8%) to thirty-two and nine-tenths percent (32.9%). This ten and one-tenth percent (10.1%) increase in the poverty population is more than the combined increase of the four other poorest counties in the country of similar population.
- (3) The significant rise in poverty in Robeson County is directly related to the massive job loss in its manufacturing sector from 1993-2003. During these 10 years, Robeson County lost 8,708 jobs, more than any other rural county in North Carolina and perhaps the nation. The ripple effect of the loss of these manufacturing jobs in the region was over four billion seven hundred eighty million dollars (\$4,780,000,000).

1 (4) Robeson County is the third poorest county among midsize counties in  
2 the United States. The appropriations made by this act provide support  
3 for strategies needed to develop small businesses, small farms, and  
4 local markets which are the backbone of Robeson County's and North  
5 Carolina's rural economies. Many rural and urban counties throughout  
6 North Carolina are experiencing major losses in manufacturing  
7 employment. This bill includes model programs that, once  
8 implemented and evaluated, can be replicated in both rural and urban  
9 counties that are plagued by job loss and are seeking effective  
10 strategies to grow their small business, agricultural, and/or tourism  
11 sectors.

12 **SECTION 2.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the County  
13 of Robeson the sum of six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal  
14 year and the sum of six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for the 2008-2009 fiscal  
15 year to be used for the Small Business Development Fund of Robeson County as  
16 provided in this section. Of these funds, five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in  
17 each fiscal year may be used only for early-stage, start-up funding for small businesses  
18 and farms.

19 **SECTION 2.(b)** The Small Business Development Fund of Robeson County  
20 will provide business counseling and coaching with businesses that receive funds. The  
21 fund will provide seed monies for early stage, start-up funding, and expansion funding  
22 of small businesses and small farms.

23 The Small Business Development Fund will be investment funds in new and  
24 expanding enterprises of a small business and agriculture nature that are locally owned  
25 and operate in Robeson County. Competitive grants up to ten thousand dollars  
26 (\$10,000) will be awarded on a fifty percent (50%) matching basis of cash or in-kind  
27 services. For example, if an individual receives a ten thousand dollar (\$10,000)  
28 development grant, that individual must match it with five thousand dollars (\$5,000) in  
29 cash, in-kind services, or a combination of both. All applicants will be required to  
30 complete a small business certification program approved by the Robeson County  
31 Board of Commissioners.

32 The Small Business Development Fund will encourage development in  
33 business and agricultural sectors that build on the region's heritage, natural resources,  
34 and cultural assets, as well as help stabilize or strengthen downtown retail business  
35 environments, and/or do not jeopardize the character of our communities. This fund will  
36 not provide funds for any business within the following sectors: adult entertainment,  
37 gambling, payday lending, or check cashing. The fifty percent (50%) match funding  
38 requirement ensures that grants are not given to projects that businesses do not invest in  
39 with their own money.

40 Decisions regarding grants will be made by an Advisory Board that will have  
41 representation from government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors and diverse  
42 geographic areas across Robeson County. The Advisory Board will be appointed by the  
43 Robeson County Board of Commissioners based on criteria developed prior to  
44 appointments. All grants will receive final approval by the Robeson County Board of

1 Commissioners. This program will be closely monitored and evaluated in order that it  
2 may serve as a model program in small business and farm development for other  
3 counties and the State as a whole.

4 **SECTION 3.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the County  
5 of Robeson the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal  
6 year and the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2008-2009 fiscal  
7 year to: (i) establish the Robeson County Food Planning Association and complete a  
8 Community Food Assessment (CFA); and (ii) plan and design the development of a  
9 local food system and the sustainability of the Southeastern North Carolina Farmers  
10 Market.

11 **SECTION 3.(b)** Both Food Planning Associations and CFAs are  
12 collaborative processes, utilized by U.S. Department of Agriculture funded programs.  
13 These two initiatives systematically examine a broad range of community food needs,  
14 issues, and assets and design plans to develop local food markets and systems. The Food  
15 Planning Association will conduct short- and long-term planning activities related to  
16 local food, nutrition, and agriculture needs and markets. The Association will perform a  
17 Community Food Assessment and plan strategies to increase and strengthen locally  
18 produced food and markets. Membership of the Association will include farmers, food  
19 suppliers, institutional buyers, public and private service providers, community leaders,  
20 educators, and business representatives.

21 The Community Food Assessment will:

- 22 (1) Engage a broad and multisector group of people in the assessment  
23 process through participatory methods including community meetings,  
24 focus groups, surveys, and the mapping of food resources.
- 25 (2) Research and analyze existing data and information on local food  
26 needs and assets.
- 27 (3) Recommend programs, policies, and market strategies to develop a  
28 locally integrated food system.

29 **SECTION 3.(c)** During fiscal year 2007-2008, the funds appropriated by  
30 this section shall be used to establish the Robeson County Food Planning Association  
31 and complete a community food assessment, as well as (i) recruit diverse members, (ii)  
32 meet on a monthly basis, (iii) provide education and training, and (iv) complete a  
33 community food assessment of Robeson County.

34 **SECTION 3.(d)** During fiscal year 2008-2009, the funds appropriated by  
35 this section shall be used to develop a plan for establishing a local food system and  
36 sustaining the Southeastern North Carolina Farmers Market, as well as to: (i) identify  
37 and recruit additional members based on fiscal year 2007-2008 food assessment, and (ii)  
38 develop a plan for establishing and implementing a local food system in Robeson  
39 County that includes developing and sustaining the Southeastern North Carolina  
40 Farmers Market.

41 **SECTION 4.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the County  
42 of Robeson the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal  
43 year and the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2008-2009 fiscal  
44 year for Asset-Based Economic Development Planning.

1           **SECTION 4.(b)** The funds appropriated by this section shall be used to  
2 assess, design, and plan the development of an asset-based economy in Robeson County  
3 that builds on existing resources – natural, historical, cultural, agricultural, and  
4 structural-to create valued products and services that can be sustained for local benefit.  
5 Robeson County's assets and resources are a beacon for its future economic growth. The  
6 region's natural, historical, cultural, and structural assets are its unique calling cards that  
7 need to be preserved and promoted for its enduring prosperity. As the region shifts from  
8 manufacturing to a more service-based economy, communities and businesses must  
9 offer value-added benefits for customers while guarding against overuse of assets and  
10 outside ownership. Keeping the tangible and intangible benefits local is important.  
11 Asset-based economic development is measured in the traditional ways: job creation,  
12 job retention, per capita income, and tax revenues. There are also many indirect benefits  
13 of asset-based economic development: increased community pride, spruced-up  
14 downtowns, traditions continued, former residents returning to the region, and new  
15 activities or public services for citizens. Asset-based – also called place-based –  
16 development is the foundation for growth in the recreation and tourism sectors and  
17 small businesses in the local economy. The creation of a countywide asset-based  
18 development plan will identify present and emerging small businesses and new  
19 opportunities for small business development in Robeson County over the next 10  
20 years.

21           **SECTION 4.(c)** During fiscal year 2007-2008, the funds appropriated by  
22 this section shall be used to complete an asset-based assessment of Robeson County's  
23 natural, historical, cultural, agricultural, and structural assets and resources, and to:

- 24           (1) Recruit diverse members to the Asset-Based Development Committee.
- 25           (2) Meet on a monthly basis.
- 26           (3) Provide education and training.
- 27           (4) Complete an asset-based assessment and map of Robeson County's  
28 diverse resources.

29           **SECTION 4.(d)** During fiscal year 2008-2009, the funds appropriated by  
30 this section shall be used to design and develop an Asset-Based Economic Development  
31 Plan based on the fiscal year 2007-2008 resource assessment, and to:

- 32           (1) Identify and recruit additional members to the Asset-Based  
33 Development Committee based on the Year 1 resource assessment.
- 34           (2) Develop a design and 10-year vision and extensive plan for  
35 countywide, Asset-Based Economic Development.

36           **SECTION 5.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2007.