History of the Dale Bumpers Small Farms Research Center

The research center is located on 2,214 acres where scientific research has been conducted on: beef cattle, sheep, goats, forages, vegetables, forestry and environmental quality. The Agricultural Research Service, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, established the South Central Small Farms Research Center on October 16, 1980. In 1997 the research center was rededicated as the Dale Bumpers Small Farms Research Center. Dale Bumpers was a US Senator and cattle farmer from Charleston Arkansas who was instrumental in the founding of this USDA-ARS research center.

Prior to becoming the USDA-ARS research center, the property was owned and operated by the state of Arkansas as part of the Tuberculosis Sanatorium Facility. The section of current property was used to provide the food for the TB center and included a dairy, swine, beef cattle and vegetable production. After the sanatorium closed in 1973, the property was used by the Arkansas Department of Corrections to grow food for the Arkansas prison system. Selected prisoners were housed and worked on the farm. Changes in the prison system closed the farm operations and the property was evaluated by the state for the best use for the future.

The Booneville Chamber of Commerce organized a committee to evaluate how to utilize the land. The sanatorium complex was converted to the state operated Booneville Human Development Center. The committee determined that the best use for the adjacent lands would be for agriculture research for small farms. The committee later known as the USDA committee worked diligently with local, state and national leaders to get funding approved to establish the USDA-ARS research center.

In the early 1980s, Agricultural Research Service began improving facilities and constructed a new headquarters building. ARS leaders and USDA committee arranged to house an Arkansas State Specialist from Arkansas Extension Service and to bring the Natural Resource Conservation Service to the center. In 1987, NRCS established the Arkansas Booneville Plant Materials Center. The PMC has 282 acres that they use to develop plant and plant science technology to address conservation issues including in erosion and reclamation activities.

Since the opening of the center in 1980, DBSFRC research has focused on the mission to develop scientific principles and technologies to enhance the profitability and sustainability of small-scale farms. This center is the only ARS unit focused on the unique needs of small farmers. This specific research encompasses areas in organic pastured small ruminants, foraging strategies for cattle production, integration of agroforestry systems and innovation in manure management.

Current research focuses on developing innovative strategies and technologies for small and medium size forage/livestock/agroforestry farms. ARS research helps show novel and enhanced solutions to conserve natural resources; improve economic viability and environmental quality.