

Major Program Area • Single Family Housing

## Straw Bale Homes More Than a Dirt-Cheap Option

In Moab, Utah, Community Rebuilds literally takes dirt-cheap sustainable, highly energy-efficient materials to build affordable homes. With assistance from USDA Rural Development's Mutual Self-Help program, individuals can apply to build a natural self-help home.

After a borrower is approved, Community Rebuilds 501(C)(3) non-profit corporation (CR) instructs individuals in building straw bale homes; allowing the borrower to do sweat equity to lower the overall cost.

CR assists people through the application process. They provide financial counseling and help with rebuilding their credit. Sometimes the process takes several years. Seasonal work is the typical demographic for many residents of Moab. Currently, there are approximately 70 people on the waitlist.

Some may ask why someone would choose to build a home with straw bales. The straw is used for insulation. The main benefits of straw bale homes are long-term affordability, reduced utility bills, and training emerging professionals in building natural, sustainable homes.

"The savings in energy bills is remarkable. Homeowners save approximately 85 percent on monthly utility bills for the life of the home," said Rikki Epperson, Executive Director of Community Rebuilds.

Strawburb is the most recent project under construction. It consists of four homes, in two different designs. The Strawburb group represents the Moab community's diverse workforce.

Strawburb broke ground in October and expects to complete the homes by the end of May 2021. Usually, their building projects last four to five months. However, the pandemic has caused many delays for various reasons including getting supplies from manufacturers.

In a few months, the next self-help group will begin building four homes in Arroyo Crossing, provided by the Moab Community Land Trust to aid Moab's housing crisis.

"Now because we are going to be building on the community land trust property for the next few years, we are planning to build 12 homes per year, doubling our impact," said Rikki Epperson.

CR takes pride providing opportunities through USDA RD's Mutual Self-Help Program provide affordable homes through natural innovation.



*Strawburb and Community Rebuilds interns worked with many new exterior siding materials including reclaimed wood, cement board, corrugated metal, and plaster.*

**Obligation Amount:** \$935,860 Grant

**Date of Obligation:** 03/08/2021

**Congressional District:** Representative Curtis, District 3; Senators Lee and Romney

**Partners:** Community Reguilds

**Demographics:** Very-Low & Low Income participants

**Impact:** Provides 24 affordable & sustainable homes to self-help participants in rural areas, where energy costs and demand for affordable housing are extremely high, building throughout a two-year term.