The FY2010 Plan of Work
Southern Rural Development Center

**PRIORITY 1: Fostering Civic-Minded Communities**

The Center will continue to make important strides in advancing work designed to facilitate and strengthen the engagement of people in their communities. The following are the key efforts the SRDC will carry out over the next fiscal year:

**A. Strengthen and Expand the “Turning the Tide on Poverty” Initiative**

The “Turning the Tide on Poverty” pilot effort has been launched in 5 states involving 8 communities. The program to date has proven very successful, so as a result, the Center will work with the Farm Foundation and the Kettering Foundation to further ramp this effort in the Southern region. The following are the major activities we plan to accomplish over the coming fiscal year:

1. **Organize a Summit of Pilot States to Identify Lessons Learned:**

   The SRDC will co-host a face-to-face summit with the Farm Foundation that would involve all five pilot states, the research team, and representatives from the Farm Foundation, Kettering Foundation, and Everyday Democracy to discuss the *Turning the Tide on Poverty* program in the pilot sites, especially what worked/did not work, improvements or refinements that may be needed in the study circles guide, insights gathered from the research team, and delineation of next steps. Of special interest to the SRDC will be how to expand the *Turning the Tide on Poverty* effort in partnership with outer land-grant institutions in the South.

2. **Host a Multi-State Train-the-Trainer Series to Expand the Number of Southern States Launching the *Turning the Tide on Poverty* Civic Engagement Effort in the South:**

   The SRDC will co-host with the Farm Foundation a training series that would be open to all Extension educators in the region having an interest in the *Turning the Tide on Poverty* program. The target audience for this training will be Extension educators that have limited experience in this type of civic engagement and those who want to devote greater time to civic expansion activities in their state or county. As such, the training would have the dual purpose of building capacity within the Land Grant System to conduct public deliberative activities and providing them with a well-developed program that can be implemented in key communities in their states upon completion of their training.
3. **Delve Into Key Research Questions on the Tide Project**

The research team the SRDC has assembled to evaluate the Turning the Tide on Poverty effort will build on key questions explored in the first year of the project. The first dimension of the research will be to capture the perspectives of local community participants with respect to the value and contribution that civic discourse may have played in enhancing their involvement in citizen-centered governance. The second set of questions will seek to gain a better understanding of what is happening “on the ground” in the communities in which the Turning the Tide on Poverty program was initiated, while a third series of questions will examine the institutional changes that may be occurring within the CES programs in the target sites as a product of their involvement in this project.

4. **Introduce the Turning the Tide on Poverty in Other Appropriate Settings**

Explore the implementation of this program with the MS School Board Association, for implementation in low performing school districts, and with the Georgia USDA Rural Development Office for possible launching in high poverty counties in this state.

**B. Support and Guide the Work of the eXtension Program Development Community of Practice**

The SRDC is working with the Kettering Foundation and Extension specialists from across the country to help launch the new eXtension Program Development Community of Practice (PDCoP) titled, “Public Talk, Public Action: Advancing Civic Capacity to Tackle Tough Issues.” The SRDC Director will serve as an administrative advisor to the new group and will help recruit Extension educators to be part of this new national team.

In addition, the Center will continue to take part in meetings at the Kettering Foundation for the purpose of advancing the deliberative democracy educational efforts of the Cooperative Extension Service in the Southern region and beyond, an initiative of great interest to the Kettering Foundation.

**C. Define Key Components of Successful Community Leadership Programs**

Extension has had a very active history of delivering Community Leadership Training in places across the South and beyond. To gain greater insight on these important leadership efforts, the SRDC commissioned a “start of the art” paper in 2009 that was authored by Dr. Kenneth Pigg from the University of Missouri. In FY2010, the SRDC will work with Dr. Pigg in the development of two important products from his research, with both to be published by the Center and distributed to Extension educators and researchers throughout the South.

In particular, the SRDC will:

1. Prepare a research report on the state of community leadership development programs and the core factors that have made such programs effective or
ineffective. This will be written in a non-technical manner to ensure its usability to those within and outside academia.

2. A second document will be intended for Extension educators and will highlight the important dimensions of community leadership development programs that have had the greatest impact on program participants. For Extension educators who plan to launch leadership development activities in their counties/communities, this second document will inform them on what components are vital for them to incorporate into their local leadership programs and which elements are likely to prove less effective.

**D. Support and Enhance the Work of the SERA-37 The New Hispanic South Team**

The SERA-37: New Hispanic South Team continues to make important strides in advancing their work in the South. The SRDC Director serves as the Extension administrative advisor to the SERA-37 team. In the next year, the SRDC will:

1. Work with the SERA-37 members in organizing its annual meeting of the team.
2. Work with the domestic immersion team on its efforts to secure grant funding that it hopes to secure in order to launch a strong immersion program in the South. That program will be targeted to Extension educators in the South.
3. Support multi-state training (including webinars) designed to enhance the ability of Extension educators in the region to lend support to those rural communities that seek to respond to the needs of their growing Hispanic population in a positive and strategic manner.
4. Assist the group in its efforts to work collaboratively with Extension colleagues in the North Central Region of the U.S. who have formed to carry out similar efforts as those being pursued by the SERA-37 group. This cross-regional dialogue will allow each regional group to learn from one another.

**PRIORITY 2: Build Economically Vibrant Communities**

The host of vacant factories, mills and industrial parks that dot the landscape of many rural places in the South serve as daily reminders that the rural economy is changing and that the magnets for low-wage employment now rest in a host of overseas developing countries. The question that local leaders and citizens now ponder is this: “What economic development strategies make sense for rural communities today?” In FY2010 the SRDC will be working with its rural development partners (land-grant and non-land grant) on the following efforts designed to foster the development of vibrant rural economies in communities, counties and regions in the South:

**A. Continue to Work on the eXtension Community of Practice “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” Effort**

The SRDC continues to be a key player in the success of the “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” Community of Practice. While much has already been accomplished through the efforts of this dynamic group, there is still so much that the team plans to
contribute. Under the continued coordination of the SRDC Director, the national team seeks to accomplish the following during FY 2009:

1. Strengthen the learning modules component employing the Moodle platform.
2. Expand state policy activities that showcase state investments in entrepreneurship-related activities.
3. Assist in reviewing and updating the FAQs that have been incorporated into the “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” site over the past 3-4 years.
4. Help conduct an audit of the eXtension entrepreneur site to ensure that web links remain active and to determine what components of the site have garnered the greatest interest. Remove items that have not generated interest on the part of Extension educators and stakeholders.
5. Coordinate and facilitate conference calls of the team and assist with the face-to-face meeting of core team members.
6. Continue to work on the “Managing in Tough Times” eXtension site as a representative of the “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” CoP team.

B. Strengthen Existing Firms through Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E)

Building on the economic resources that already exists in rural areas is an important part of the economic portfolio of communities. As such, the SRDC will focus efforts on strengthening the economic assets present in the rural South. It will begin doing so by pursuing the following Business Retention and Expansion activities:

1. Continue to respond to request for face-to-face workshops in the South and beyond.
2. Monitor progress with Business Retention & Expansion International (BREI) on certification and course development.
3. Partner with BREI to develop advanced certification courses to support initial certification training.
4. Work in partnership with the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development to help build a new version of the BR&E workbook that the Northeast Center published several years ago.

C. Expand E-Commerce Strategies for Small Businesses

The SRDC will continue to give national leadership to the promotion and adoption of e-commerce strategies by small businesses, micro enterprises and entrepreneurs. It will do so by supporting the development of educational resources and training of Extension educators who will serve as the conduit for expanding awareness, knowledge and use of e-commerce strategies by these various business enterprises. As part of its base funds, the SRDC will devote attention to the following:

1. Strengthen the SRDC-hosted e-commerce website, including information on current and past e-commerce grant applicants, upcoming training opportunities, resources from past training efforts, new educational curricula, and updated resources available across the nation’s land grant system available via our e-commerce library.
2. Transition newly developed e-commerce curricula to on-line format.
3. Publish the eNews newsletter six times a year and distribute to clientele across the region.
4. Host webinars that showcase new e-commerce curricula developed as part of the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative that the Center coordinates.
5. Coordinate a mini-grants program to foster implementation of newly released e-commerce curricula.
6. Coordinate and host a national training workshop involving teams of Extension specialists from each of the four Rural Development Center regions. The team will work with the SRDC in expanding the delivery of the e-commerce educational curricula to Extension educators and stakeholders across these four regions.

D. Complete Revisions of the “Ca$hing in on Business Opportunities” Curriculum

The Center will continue to update these materials and convert these products into online modules that can be accessed on a 24/7 basis by both Extension educators, local leaders, economic development organizations, and other stakeholders across the Southern region. The SRDC plans to release these modules on our website during FY2010.

E. Invest in the Sustainable Communities Innovations Program

Blending sustainable agriculture practices with new community development strategies that serve to increase and build resilient farms, businesses and communities is a key interest of the SRDC. In the coming year, the Center will carry out the following:

1. Work in concert with the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (S-SARE) in sponsoring the “Sustainable Community Innovations Grant (SCIG) Program” program in 2010 that invests in the application of innovative tools to support sustainable agriculture/community development activities.
2. Join the S-SARE in hosting a meeting of the current SCIG to review progress to date and to help guide the grantees on ways to further strengthen their project activities during the remaining months of their grant.

F. Develop and Implement the “Stronger Economies Together” Initiative in Pilot States

With support from the USDA Rural Development mission area, the SRDC will give leadership to a new effort titled, “Stronger Economies Together.” It will do so in partnership with its three sister Regional Rural Development Centers, USDA RD, and state-based USDA Rural Development offices in target states. In particular, the SRDC will:

1. Assemble a team of Extension specialists across the U.S. to work on the development of the “Stronger Economies Together” (SET) training materials.
2. Work with USDA RD in the selection of 8 pilot states to take part in the SET program.
3. Develop the application form that regions in each of the 8 states will use to apply for selection as one of the two pilot regions in each of the 8 states to be part of the SET effort.
4. Coordinate conference calls with the national team developing the SET materials and keep the USDA RD colleagues informed of ongoing progress on these products.
5. Work with USDA RD in the selection of the 16 pilot sites to be part of the SET program.
6. Organize and conduct a “train-the-trainer” workshop for state training team members from each of the 8 pilot states.
7. Help produce data analyses of the various regional clusters in the 16 regions taking part on the SET program.
8. Provide technical assistance, as needed, to the state teams working on the SET program.
9. Coordinate revisions of the SET training materials and produce a refined product.
10. Develop evaluation metrics for the SET program and work with the state teams in the collection of data/information to determine progress in realizing these metrics.

**PRIORITY 3: Expanding Opportunities for Distressed and Low-Wealth Communities**

The lion’s share of our nation’s persistent high poverty counties is located in the rural South. The challenges local residents face are monumental and across the board – economic, educational, social, historical, cultural, and more. These are complex issues that cannot be overlooked; they are ones for which our land-grant system must accelerate its efforts to better understand and address through appropriate mechanisms and strategies. Thus, the SRDC/Southern land-grant university team will focus their efforts on the following over the next year:

**A. Continue Work on the Delta Rural Revitalization Initiative**

The SRDC will continue to provide leadership and coordination to the MS Delta Rural Revitalization program. This effort is targeted to 18 counties located in the MS Delta Region. Over the coming year, the SRDC will:

1. Oversee the work of the two Extension Associated located at the Delta Data Center and who are part of this important project.
2. Provide support and technical assistance to the two Extension Associates as they seek to strengthen the work of the Delta Data Center that is located in Stoneville, MS. The Date Center helps to assemble and create statistical information needed by local economic development organizations to attract firms to the region.
3. Help to identify the new secondary data that would provide the best information at the finger tips of the Extension Associates to support the information needs of their region.
4. Coordinate applied research activities needed as part of the MS Delta Rural Revitalization project, activities that are intended to address current and emerging community/economic development opportunities and needs in the region.

B. Work with the Walton Family Foundation on the Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative

The following outlines the activities to be carried out by the SRDC in its role as the principal evaluator for the Walton Family Foundation supported Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative:

1. Indicators Monitoring and Analysis: The SRDC will continue to monitor macro and core indicators on the DGCI pilot sites. These analyses will be used to evaluate progress by the intermediaries in reaching their key community and economic development goals.

2. In-Dept Project Assessments: The SRDC research team will undertake qualitative studies of the 1-3 programs funded by the WFF in the pilot sites. These studies will help document the nature and level of impacts associated with these project investments.

3. Development of Issues Reports: The SRDC team will prepare two reports that showcase key research and policy/program strategies associated with tourism and entrepreneurial-based economic development in rural distressed communities.

4. Conduct Baseline Report in Coahoma County, MS: Because one of the DGCI intermediaries will expand to Coahoma County, MS in 2010, the SRDC evaluation team will launch a comprehensive baseline study of that county for use by the intermediary.

5. Key Leader Assessments: Two major assessments will be conducted in FY2010. The objective of these assessments will be to capture what key leaders perceive of the community and potential community-wide impacts (rather than program specific) of the initiatives implemented by the intermediaries in pilot sites.

C. Apply for the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies; Launch This New Project if Funded

The SRDC will develop and submit a proposal to the Economic Research Service for the purpose of establishing “The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies.” The intent of this Center will be to advance research designed to address the social science components of food assistance and nutrition problems and challenges in rural America. In particular, the SRDC proposes to carry out the following activities in FY2010: (1) secure funding for the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies; (2) establish the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies National Advisory Board, composed of national respected land-grant university social scientists, that will help develop the national research priorities and conduct peer reviews of all submitted grants; (3) launch a competitive grants program that will seek to invest funds in support socioeconomic-related food assistance/nutrition research in the Southern region; and (4) launch a variety of communication activities to inform researchers, practitioners, policy/agency staffers, and others of important RIDGE
Center-supported research, namely, the Center’s RIDGE website, RIDGE Information Briefs, webinars, social networking activities, and more.

**D. Work with FEMA on the EPD and Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Planning Effort**

The Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) – through their ties to the nation’s land-grant university system and their federal partner USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) – have a commitment to the design and implementation of innovative strategies for advancing the emergency preparedness capacity of disadvantaged people and communities. It is an effort that the RRDCs seek to launch in partnership with key FEMA Regional Area teams. The SRDC will provide overall coordination to this major initiative.

The SRDC, along with its sister Regional Rural Development Centers, will work in partnership with FEMA to support the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Group Plans (RCPGP) of 3-5 regions in the U.S. They efforts may include the following activities: (1) engage diverse groups of local residents to help in "ground-truthing" of the regional plans developed by the RCPGPs; give special focus to rural residents and disadvantaged populations in these ground-truthing activities; (2) identify ways to further strengthen the regional plans on the basis of the discussions held on item 1; (3) identify ways in which the Cooperative Extension Service in these regions can assist in delivering educational and technical assistance to people and places in these selected regions that can improve their emergency preparedness activities.

Aside from the SRDC’s work on the RCPGP project, the SRDC will complete a final report of its work on the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Project that it undertook in collaboration with NIFA and FEMA. The Center will prepare a comprehensive final report as well as an executive summary.

**E. SERA-19 Rural Health**

Continue to support and help expand the research and Extension activities the SERA-19 team. This includes:

1. Assisting in coordinating the annual meeting of this group.
2. Continue to work with the group in transitioning the Rural Health Institute curricula to an on-line professional development curriculum using the Moodle software platform.
3. Coordinate the various communication activities of the team, including maintaining e-mail listservs, coordinating conference calls, and maintaining up to date information about the SERA-19 work on the project web site.
Capacity-Building and Other Support Activities

There are a variety of activities that the SRDC will continue to undertake to keep its stakeholders (especially our region’s 29 land-grant schools) aware of key rural development opportunities and activities. Collectively, these efforts are designed to help strengthen the capacity of our region’s land-grant schools to focus on high priority rural development research and Extension outreach efforts. The key support activities we will pursue in FY2010 include:

1. Work with the Regional Rural Development Centers in expanding the “Foundations of Practice in Community Development” training program. Help develop a multi-year training plan that will be made available to Extension educators and land-grant university partners across the country.

2. Maintain active communication with land-grant faculty and other clientele in the South. This will be done by the following channels:
   - Provide up-to-date information via the SRDC website.
   - Publish *Around the South* newsletter on a monthly basis, a newsletter that provides information on a host of rural development issues relevant to the South and nation.
   - Publish *Grant Connections* six times a year, an electronic newsletter that offers information on grant funding available to support research and applied activities in the community/rural development area.

3. Coordinate bi-monthly calls of Extension community development program leaders in the Southern region.

4. Coordinate the annual meeting of the community development program leaders carried out as part of the Southern Region Program Leadership Network (PLN) conference, as well as work with the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED) in managing all the logistics associated with the PLN meeting.

5. Meet with the regional leadership of the 1862 and 1890 research and extension leaders in the South to help inform and guide their rural development efforts in their states.

6. Host quarterly calls of the SRDC Board of Directors and the Technical and Operational Advisory Committee, and organize an annual face-to-face meeting of these two groups in the region to ensure that the Center continues to meet the research and Extension outreach needs of its primary audiences.

7. Participate, as needed, in statewide community/rural development efforts of land-grant institutions in the region.

8. Maintain strong working ties and interactions with the SRDC’s sister Regional Rural Development Center staff, with NIFA and with other federal partners who can further advance the work of the SRDC in the Southern region.

9. Continue to provide technical assistance to the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) and the national team of community development program leaders.

10. Maintain, build and/or strengthen working ties with important non-land-grant university partners, including USDA RD, FEMA, nonprofit organizations, regional
agencies, and foundations (such as the Farm Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation and the Kettering Foundation).

11. Continue to work in documenting the impact of its regional activities by continuing an accountability system for the SRDC and generating key success stories that have their roots in the work of the SRDC in the region.

12. Continue to participate in national social science professional associations to maintain knowledge of the latest developments in applied research and Extension/outreach techniques in rural development.