

**FY2011 Plan of Work
of the
Southern Rural Development Center**

INTRODUCTION

The SRDC's 15-member Technical and Operational Advisory Committee (TOAC) met in Fall 2010 to review the priorities of the Center. TOAC membership is constituted of six Research and six Extension faculty from various 1862 and 1890 land-grant schools in the region, as well as three non-land-grant representatives. It provides programmatic guidance to the SRDC, ensuring that the work of the Center is aligned with the needs of people and communities in the rural South. After considerable discussion, TOAC recommended that the SRDC maintain its focus on the three priorities that emerged from its strategic plan published in July 2007. In the view of TOAC, these priorities remain relevant and vital to the sustainability of rural communities in the region. TOAC's recommendation was subsequently approved by the SRDC Board of Directors. In light of the recommendations of TOAC and the endorsement by the Center's Board of Directors, the SRDC proposes to continue its work along the lines of the three key priorities under which it has operated over the past 4 years. The FY11 plan of work, however, does incorporate new programs and activities as part of the three strategic priorities of the Center.

PRIORITY ONE: 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 was launched in 5 states involving 8 communities over the 2009-10 period. The program to date has proven very successful, so as a result, the Center is working with the Farm Foundation, the Kettering Foundation and Everyday Democracy to broaden this effort in the Southern region. The following are the major activities we plan to accomplish over the coming fiscal year:

1. *Apply for a New Round of Funding from the Farm Foundation and the Kettering Foundation:* The SRDC will prepare and submit proposals for a second year of funding from the Farm Foundation and the Kettering Foundation to further advance the Extension and Research work being carried out in the five original pilot states and to carry out baseline research in the new sites that will be selected to be part of Tide in FY11. In particular, new funding from the Kettering Foundation will allow follow-up "on ground" qualitative research to be completed in the five pilot states and provide the resources to launch pre-assessment studies in the new states and sites selected to be part of this program in FY11. Moreover, securing a second year of funding from the Farm Foundation will allow the SRDC to produce the educational resources needed to expand the program to new states.

2. *Revise the Turning the Tide on Poverty Guidebook:* On the basis of input and guidance offered from the five pilot states, the SRDC will revise the Tide document and share it with the three organizations that have played critical roles in supporting the Center's work on this project, namely, Everyday Democracy, Farm Foundation, and Kettering Foundation representatives. Once their feedback has been provided, the SRDC will complete final revisions and publish a 2nd edition of the Turning the Tide on Poverty community circles guidebook.
3. *Expand the Turning the Tide on Poverty Project to New States in the South:* The SRDC released a request for proposals in FY10 targeted to land-grant institutions in the South that may wish to apply for inclusion in the next round of states to be selected for the Turning the Tide on Poverty project. Decisions on states that will be selected to be part of the Tide program will be completed in early FY11. The intent is to expand the program to a minimum of five states over the 2011 fiscal year.
4. *Host a Multi-State Train-the-Trainer of New States Selected to be Part of the Turning the Tide on Poverty Initiative:* The SRDC will host, in partnership with the Farm Foundation and Everyday Democracy, a face-to-face training workshop in Atlanta, GA in December 2010. The workshop will introduce new states selected to be part of the Tide program in FY11 with the key elements associated with implementing an effective and successful Tide program in their target communities. Furthermore, the training will serve as an important step in advancing the capacity of participating Extension educators to strengthen and expand their public deliberative activities in their states and communities.
5. *Introduce and Expand the Turning the Tide on Poverty Program to Other Appropriate Venues.* The SRDC will work with the MS School Board Association, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and other organizations to introduce the Tide program to new audiences in FY11.

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

The SRDC partnered with the Kettering Foundation and Extension specialists from across the country to launch the eXtension Program Development Community of Practice (PDCoP) titled, "*Public Talk, Public Action: Advancing Civic Capacity to Tackle Tough Issues*" in FY10. The SRDC Director will continue to serve as an advisor to this group and will help recruit Extension educators to be part of this new national team.

In addition, the SRDC Director 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. This includes the SRDC Director serving on the Board of the National Issues Forum Institute beginning in May 2011.

C. Community Leadership for the 21st Century Information Briefs

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 “state of the art” paper in 2009 that was authored by Dr. Kenneth Pigg from the University of Missouri. In FY2010, Dr. Pigg prepared a final version of a research report that provided an assessment of key community leadership development programs across the nation.

As a follow-up to this report, the SRDC will work in partnership with Dr. Pigg on the development of a series of information briefs that will address some of the core topics associated with community leadership, such as “Thinking about Leadership” and “Community Leadership is about Empowerment.” The leadership series will be approximately 4 pages in length and will be written for non-technical audiences. The SRDC intends to publish 4-6 leadership briefs in FY11.

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

The SERA-37: New Hispanic South Team continues to expand its important work in the South. The SRDC Director serves as the Extension administrative advisor to the SERA-37 team and SRDC staff members play active roles on this committee. In the next year, the SRDC will:

1. *Assist the SERA-37 members in organizing its annual meeting* of the team.
2. *Work with the domestic immersion team* on its efforts to secure participation by Extension educators in the South to be part of the valuable immersion program being scheduled for Spring 2011.
3. *Support multi-state training* (including webinars) designed to enhance the ability of Extension educators to proactively respond to the diverse needs of the Hispanic/Latino population in their states.
4. *Provide secondary data* on the growing Hispanic/Latino population in the Southern region as part of the Center’s data center; help coordinate the evaluation activities of the SERA-37 team.
5. *Assist the SERA-37 group in its efforts to work collaboratively* with Extension colleagues in the North Central Region of the U.S. who have organized a companion regional Extension/Research team to address the needs of Latinos in their region of the U.S.

PRIORITY TWO: Build Economically Vibrant Communities

The SRDC has introduced a host of innovative programs that are designed to diversify the economic development opportunities in rural areas of the South. The Center will continue to introduce exciting programs and activities as part of its efforts to advance the economic health of rural places in the region. In FY11, the SRDC will work with its rural development partners (land-grant and non-land grant) on the following efforts:

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

The SRDC serves as a key player in the success of the “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” Community of Practice. The following activities will be undertaken or coordinated by the SRDC in the coming year:

1. *Prepare a proposal to secure funding of the eXtension team by the National eXtension Foundation for 2011.*
2. *Assist in organizing a working meeting of the eXtension team to be held June 2011 in Louisville, KY.*
3. *Complete a comprehensive assessment of state policy activities that showcase state investments in entrepreneurship-related activities and incorporate this information into the eXtension entrepreneurship website.*
4. *Identify and prepare abstracts of recent research articles written on entrepreneurship-related topics and make these accessible on our eXension website.*
5. *Coordinate and facilitate conference calls of the eXtension team.*

B. Expand E-Commerce Strategies for Small Businesses, Entrepreneurs and Others

The SRDC will continue to give national leadership to the promotion and adoption of e-commerce strategies by small businesses, micro enterprises, entrepreneurs and local government. It will do so by supporting the development of educational resources and training of Extension educators who will serve as the conduits 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. *Continue to 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.* Update 1-2 existing curricula products over the coming year.
3. *Publish the eNews newsletter* six times a year and distribute to clientele across the region/nation.
4. *Host webinars that showcase new e-commerce curricula* developed as part of the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative.
5. *Seek mini-grant applications* from interested land-grant universities on a quarterly basis in 2011. These mini-grant programs are intended to help support implementation of newly released e-commerce curricula by Extension educators.
6. *Launch a new round of competitive grants* to fund innovative e-commerce and broadband applications relevant to the needs of rural America.
7. *Provide financial and/or educational support to the four regional e-commerce teams* that were established by the SRDC (in collaboration with its sister Regional Rural Development Centers) in FY10. Work with these regional e-commerce teams to expand the delivery of the e-commerce educational curricula/programs to Extension educators and stakeholders across these regions.

C. Launch Broadband Education and Adoption Extension/Research Initiative

Working in partnership with Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU ES) and the Office of the Governor, State of Mississippi, the SRDC took the lead role in the preparation of a proposal to advance broadband education and adoption in unserved and underserved areas of the state. As a member of the MSU Extension Broadband Education Team, SRDC will carry out that the following activities in FY11:

1. *Coordinate the MSU ES Broadband Education Team:* The SRDC, in collaboration with Extension Computer Applications Office, will coordinate the work of the MSU ES broadband team. This team will be charged with the responsibilities of carrying out the education components of the state of Mississippi's Broadband Data and Development Plan.
2. *Develop and Administer a Statewide Broadband Access and Use Survey:* The SRDC will develop and help administer a telephone survey targeted to households in the state of Mississippi in order to gather baseline data on broadband access and use.
3. *Help Create and Facilitate Local/Regional Planning Teams:* The Center will work with MSU ES colleagues in selecting and housing six Regional Coordinators across the state. These coordinators will work with local stakeholders to devise broadband adoption and use plans that are tailored to meet the needs of their regions/local areas.

4. *Assist in the Delivery of Education/Technical Assistance:* SRDC and MSU-ES will work with the local/regional planning teams to help advance broadband adoption and applications. SRDC and MSU-ES will provide training materials and online curricula that focus on digital literacy, e-government strategies, and e-commerce applications by small businesses, artisans, farmers, nascent entrepreneurs, and others. Programs will be provided statewide as well as tailored to meet the outreach education and technical assistance needs of targeted regions.
5. *Assist in the Development of an Evaluation Plan:* MSU ES evaluation specialists will develop and help implement a plan to measure progress, outputs and outcomes associated with the ES's outreach education and technical assistance activities. The SRDC will provide input into this plan.

In addition, the SRDC will organize and work with a team of research scholars to prepare and submit a seed funding proposal to the 2011 Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) program. The seed funding will allow the team to develop a more extensive proposal that will explore (1) the effectiveness of the federal government's Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) in accelerating the adoption of broadband in unserved and underserved areas of rural America; (2) the key factors serving as barriers to the adoption and application of broadband strategies by individuals, households, institutions and communities located in unserved/underserved rural areas; and (3) specific program and/or policy refinements that may be needed to strengthen the uptake in broadband use by people, households, institutions and places situated in rural America's unserved/underserved areas. If funding is secured, the SRDC will organize and host the initial meeting of the research team along with Extension representatives from states receiving funds to deliver broadband education and adoption programs, in the latter part of FY11.

D. Expand the Delivery of the Revised "Cashing in on Business Opportunities" Curriculum

The Center completed revisions to the Cashing in on Business Opportunities Curriculum in FY10 and this valuable product (which includes 20 modules) is now available on the SRDC website (<http://srdc.msstate.edu/cashing>). The Center will work with key authors who revised these materials to showcase this revised product at key meetings, including the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) conference to be held in March 2011 and the Community Development Society Annual Meeting that will take place in July 2011. In addition, the Center will mobilize a core group of Cashing authors to coordinate and deliver a new Foundations of Practice in Community Development Level III on the Cashing materials. Foundations of Practice is a national web-based training program coordinated by the four Regional Rural Development Centers and is made available to Extension educators and relevant partners across the county. The Level III training is targeted primarily to Extension educators with a strong background and expertise in community/economic development.

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 continue to 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 2011 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 recipients 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. Strengthen and Expand the “Stronger Economies Together” Initiative in the U.S.

With support from the USDA Rural Development mission area, the SRDC gave leadership to the launching of the “Stronger Economies Together” program in 9 states and 23 regions in FY10. In the coming fiscal year, the SRDC, in partnership with its Regional Rural Development Centers colleagues, federal USDA RD personnel, and state land-grant university and USDA Rural Development staff, will undertake the following:

1. Provide technical assistance and data support to the current set of states and regions that are involved in the Phase I of the “Stronger Economies Together” (SET) program (i.e., those located in the 9 states and 23 regions). Data support will include demographic, economic, and economic cluster analyses.
2. Prepare a proposal to USDA RD to secure additional funds to expand the SET program to new states and regions in FY11.
3. Revise the 9 SET modules and add at least 3-4 new modules to the SET training materials.
4. Work with federal USDA RD colleagues and the Regional Rural Development Centers in the selection of 12 new states to be part of the Phase II SET program.
5. Develop a new application form that regions in each of the 12 Phase II states will use to invite regional groups in their states to apply for formal participation in the SET program.
6. Work with USDA RD in the final selection of regions in the 12 Phase II states that will take part in the SET program.
7. Organize and host a national training workshop for Phase II SET state training team members.

8. Coordinate conference calls with Phase I and II teams to ensure progress is being made in the delivery/completion of the SET training.
9. Help provide preliminary cluster analyses for select Phase II states/regions.
10. Provide technical assistance to Phase II state teams working on the SET program.
11. Work with the Phase II SET state teams to administer pre- and post-SET assessments as a way of documenting outputs and outcomes associated with this program.
12. Develop and secure proposals from land-grant universities to serve as the external evaluator of the SET program. Award the grant to the university submitting the strongest proposal. Provide appropriate information/data to the external evaluator as needed.

PRIORITY THREE: 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 MSU ES staff* person located at the Delta Data Center and who is part of this important project.
2. *Provide support and technical assistance to the Extension associate* as he seeks to strengthen the work of the Delta Data Center that is located in Stoneville, MS. The Data Center helps to assemble and create statistical information needed by local economic development organizations to attract firms to the region.
3. *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. *Key Leader Assessments:* 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.
4. *Expand the Mid-South Data Library:* The Center will continue to expand access to key secondary data that are needed to support the work of the Walton Family Foundation and the intermediaries with whom they are working. A new web-based data system will be launched in FY11 to support the work of the Foundation in the Delta region.

C. Provide Leadership for the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies

The SRDC will continue to manage the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies. Among the RIDGE activities to be carried in FY11 are the following:

1. *Coordinate and maintain the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies National Advisory Board,* a committee charged with the responsibility of guiding the work of the RIDGE Center.
2. *Launch a competitive grants program* that will seek to invest funds in support socioeconomic-related food assistance/nutrition research in the South, West, and North Central regions of the U.S.
3. *Implement a new doctoral dissertation research program* that is designed to provide seed funds to students wishing to explore the social science aspects of food assistance and nutrition challenges in rural America.
4. *Continue to pursue 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, and social networking activities.

D. Work with FEMA on the Development of Emergency Preparedness Curriculum for Disadvantaged People and Places

The Center will help develop and pilot test a new educational materials that are intended to help community groups (e.g. community leaders, non-profits, emergency management professionals) improve the capacity of disadvantaged communities and populations to effectively prepare and respond to disasters. The intent is to help people work together to build resilient communities and neighborhoods. Over the coming year, the Center will carry out the following:

1. *Establish National Curriculum Development Team:* Identify and organize a national curriculum development team. These will be Extension educators, researchers and others with strong backgrounds in community development and/or disaster management.
2. *Organize and Host Meeting of the National Curriculum Team:* The curriculum development team will meet in March 2011 to begin developing a comprehensive outline and identify authors for key modules (6 to 8 modules in all).
3. *Develop Modules:* Work with the curriculum development team to develop the core set of modules to be included as part of this important effort to create resilient communities. The intent is to have working drafts of most of the modules by the end of FY11.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: 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 and other activities of collective importance to the work of the four centers.
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, the Kettering Foundation, and Everyday Democracy).
11. Continue to work in documenting the impact of the SRDC's regional activities by continuing an accountability system 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.