



Southern Rural Development Center FY2016 Plan of Work

The SRDC's 14-member Technical and Operational Advisory Committee (TOAC) met in October 2015 to review the priorities and the Research/Extension activities of the Center. TOAC membership, composed of six Research faculty and six Extension specialists from the 1862 and 1890 land-grant schools in the region, as well as two non-land-grant representatives, 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. TOAC recommended that the SRDC conduct a survey of CRD priorities across the region during the 2016 year as this has not been done since 2007. While this survey is in process, TOAC recommended focusing on three specific areas in the rural South in FY16. On behalf of the TOAC, the chair of this advisory group formally presented the proposed FY16 plan of work to the SRDC Board of Directors. The Board voted unanimously in support of the plan as developed by the TOAC in partnership with the SRDC staff. The following outlines the specific areas that will be pursued in FY16 by the SRDC.

PRIORITY 1: Building Sustainable Communities

The Center will continue supporting and promoting multifaceted programs and initiatives designed to address previously identified priorities. This includes statewide capacity-building of state specialists and opportunities to build other professionals. The following are the key efforts the SRDC will carry out over the next fiscal year:

- **Stronger Economies Together (SET) Initiative:** The SRDC continues, in partnership with USDA RD and the Purdue Center for Regional Development, to provide overall coordination for the SET initiative as the program enters its sixth year. As such, the Center will carry out a number of activities in FY16 in support of this key initiative, including the following:
 - *Communications:* Maintain conference calls and email communications with all states that are part of the SET program
 - *Coordination of Evaluation of SET:* Continue to evaluate data related to the effectiveness of SET
 - *Revision of SET Materials:* Guide the refinement of SET materials based on the FY15 evaluation
 - *Launch SET VI Regions:* Coordinate application period, training, and technical support to facilitate selection and launching of new SET regions
 - *Specialized Data Reports:* Coordinate the development of socio-demographic and industry cluster analysis data needed to support the SET efforts in cooperation with Purdue Center for Regional Development
 - *Presentations:* Present highlights of SET at various national and regional meetings

- **Leaders in Economic Alliance Development (LEAD):** Beginning in 2015 in partnership with USDA Rural Development and the Purdue Center for Regional Development, LEAD is designed to build capacity through a partnership and planning process that enables local residents to accomplish a specific economic goal. As such, the Center will carry out a number of activities in FY16:
 - *Communications:* Maintain conference calls and email communications with all states that are part of the LEAD program

- *Coordinate Evaluation of LEAD*: Continue to evaluate data related to the effectiveness of LEAD
- *Launch LEAD Regions*: Coordinate application period, training, and technical support to facilitate selection and launching of new LEAD regions
- *Presentations*: Present highlights of LEAD at various national and regional meetings
- **Local Food Systems**: Collaborated with partners to initiate research and Extension programming to build and support local food systems across the region.
 - Align new initiatives with existing work on local food systems, including the eXtension Community of Practice on Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems; the AFRI Community Foods Projects program (submitted and received support on an AFRI grant); the Southern Region Program leadership Committee; Southern SARE; and others.
 - Explore opportunities to generate cross-discipline, multi-state working teams with the help of a listserv.
- **Turning the Tide on Poverty**: Over the course of several years' work, a rich collection of associated data has been gathered in order to better understand how to foster civic engagement in the context of this program. These data are being translated into a special issue of the Community Development Society journal, slated for release during FY2016
- **Local Food Works with Ag Marketing Services**: Collaborate with partners to explore specific assets and needs for advancing local foods efforts in six pilot states.
- **Rural Child Poverty Center**: In partnership with University of Kentucky, the SRDC will help conduct workshops for community sub grantees in order to strengthen their understanding and actions related to the community context around child hunger.
- **Hired'nAg**: In partnership with the University of Vermont, the SRDC will assist in linking health care reform and economic development in the Agricultural sector. Specifically, SRDC will:
 - Announce, host and/or facilitate webinars to support the effort.
 - Assist with data interpretation as needed
 - Identify and facilitate linkages to relevant stakeholders in the South.

PRIORITY 2: Strengthening Foundational Level CRD Skills for County-based Land Grant University Staff to Serve Communities

The Center will continue to carry out the variety of efforts that are intended to advance the foundational level CRD skills in the region. It will do so in partnership with its land-grant university colleagues and other key external partners. The goals of these efforts are to:

- Expand county staff training and involvement
- Prepare county staff to facilitate local needs and fulfill liaison roles
- Strengthen community participation, leadership transition, and youth engagement

In order to accomplish these goals, SRDC will

- Conduct a regional survey to identify prioritized regional rural issues (last completed in 2007)
- Create a flexible toolbox of non-“program”, generalized pieces based on the survey results.
- Identify CRD contacts for each of the 29 Land-Grants in the region in order to increase SRDC engagement/participation

PRIORITY 3: Advancing High Priority Rural Research/Extension Collaboration in the Region

While the priority title has changed from “Strengthening Capacity of Communities” to “Advancing High Priority Rural Research/Extension Collaboration in the Region”, continued emphasis will be placed on the region and its needs under this priority. The SRDC will maintain a focus in the following year on these issues:

- Facilitate the launch of the proposal SERA addressing local foods systems. Local Food Systems are defined as follows: “local and regional food systems refers to place-specific clusters of agricultural producers of all kinds—farmers, ranchers, fishers—along with the consumers and institutions engaged in producing, processing, distributing, and selling foods.”*
- Using the local foods as a model of integrated regional work, explore a similar model of Research/Extension collaboration on one or more of the following topics in rural settings:
 - Topics: Health, Finance, Education, Housing
 - Targets: Veterans, Youth, Small Business
- Advance the research and Extension working groups emerging from the Tide and Horizons initiatives.

Capacity-Building and Other Support Activities

The SRDC will continue to undertake a variety of activities 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.

Among these activities are to:

- *Provide assistance to the National Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Center (NARDeP) initiative along with the three other Regional Rural Development Centers*
- *Provide leadership to the southern CRD State Program Leaders in establishing regional CRD indicators.*
- *Collaborate with the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) to provide capacity building opportunities across the land-grant system in community development.*
- *Expand the research partnerships within the Southern Region by expanding the database of Southern research professionals exploring key rural development issues, examining current*

multi-state research teams around rural development issues and seeking new opportunities to expand capacity.

- *Maintain active communication* with land-grant faculty and other clientele in the South. This will be done by the following channels:
 - Provide timely information on a variety of rural development-relevant matters 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;
 - Coordinate bi-monthly calls of Extension community development program leaders in the Southern region;
 - 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) and Association of Extension Administrators (AEA) in managing all the logistics associated with the PLN meeting;
 - 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;
 - 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;
 - Participate, as needed, in community/rural development efforts of land-grant institutions in the region;
 - 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

*Definition taken from: Low, Sarah A., Aaron Adalja, Elizabeth Beaulieu, Nigel Key, Steve Martinez, Alex Melton, Agnes Perez, Katherine Ralston, Hayden Stewart, Shellye Suttles, Stephen Vogel, and Becca B.R. Jablonski. *Trends in U.S. Local and Regional Food Systems*, AP068, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, January 2015.