



## Southern Rural Development Center FY2012 Plan of Work

### INTRODUCTION

The SRDC's 15-member Technical and Operational Advisory Committee (TOAC) met in October 2011 to review its priorities and the Research/Extension activities. TOAC membership includes six Research faculty and six Extension specialists from 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.

TOAC continues to believe that SRDC's three overarching priorities remain relevant to the key needs and issues in the rural South. TOAC provided the SRDC staff with its recommendations on fine tuning its proposed FY12 activities at the fall meeting. On behalf of TOAC, the chair of this advisory group formally presented the proposed FY12 plan of work to the SRDC Board of Directors. The Board voted unanimously in support of the FY12 plan as developed by the TOAC in partnership with the SRDC staff. The following outlines the efforts that will be pursued in FY12 by the SRDC.

### 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. Key efforts the SRDC will carry out over the next fiscal year include:

#### 1. Turning the Tide on Poverty

The Turning the Tide on Poverty pilot effort was launched in five states involving eight communities over the 2009-10 period. During the second phase in 2011, seven new state teams were trained to launch the initiative. To date, five of the states have formally launched, and the other two are continuing to build in that direction. Additionally, four counties in Mississippi launched Tide through a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. During 2012, the SRDC plans the following activities to continue support of this work.

- *Work with the states added in 2011 to complete the research phase of Tide:* Through a grant from the Kettering Foundation, the SRDC coordinated a multi-state team to develop a comprehensive research protocol to explore the Tide initiative's effectiveness. Closure on this process involves returning to each phase two site one year after Tide's launch to conduct post-event key informant interviews, focus groups, and administer surveys to participants. This work will be taking place late spring and summer 2012. During the fall, the research team will be actively analyzing the data from both phase one and phase two.
- *Provide on-going support to the existing Tide sites:* The SRDC coordinates monthly conference calls with participating states, enabling them to learn from one another and provide support. Additionally, the SRDC has committed to assisting these sites with finding needed technical assistance and training to help them meet their goals.

- *Develop a series of impact reports for phase two sites:* At the close of the phase one projects, the SRDC and its partners visited each of the initial sites to learn about how Tide has impacted the communities it touched. As a result, a series of phase one impact reports were developed and posted to the website. This process will be repeated for phase two sites during the summer and early fall 2012.

## **2. Exploring Poverty Reduction Initiatives**

Turning the Tide on Poverty has proven itself to be well received in communities that are seeking ways to overcome the challenges of persistent poverty. While its progress is encouraging as citizens begin taking charge of their futures, the SRDC is eager to explore additional avenues to help strengthen poverty reduction efforts in the South. To that end, a team of researchers will be working with the SRDC to identify and evaluate other promising approaches to broaden the base of SRDC-supported, research-based approaches.

## **3. Community Circles/National Issues Forum Activities**

The Center will cooperate with the National Issues Forum (NIF) to help recruit Extension educators across the South to host community forums that explore a variety of key issues. One issue the SRDC will help coordinate across the region is the forum on A Nation in Debt, a topic that serves as the centerpiece of the NIF effort in 2012. Results of this forum will be showcased in a national meeting set for April in Washington, D.C., with a final report released this summer.

As part of his graduate level course on community and economic development, the SRDC director will guide students in the hosting of forums in approximately 18 communities in Alabama and Mississippi. The forums will focus on one of four topics: A Nation in Debt, Success in School, Weighing the Options, and Youth and Violence. Working with Joe Sumner at Auburn University, the SRDC will explore the possibility of releasing a modified version of the template that Sumner has prepared to help communities learn how to frame their own challenging issues – a process that can improve the capacity of communities to discuss, deliberate, and act on difficult and controversial topics in a fair and respectful manner.

## **4. Kettering Foundation Engaging in Citizenry at Work: The Cooperative Extension Service**

The SRDC will continue to partner with the Kettering Foundation and others to strengthen the deliberative democracy educational efforts of the Cooperative Extension Service in the Southern region. Furthermore, the Center will work with the Kettering Foundation to help strengthen research that improves our understanding of the way democracy works in different communities in the South with the Cooperative Extension Service system. Lastly, the SRDC Director will remain an active member of the Board of Directors for the National Issues Forum Institute in FY12.

## **5. Climate Literacy Partnership of the Southeast (CLiPSE)**

Concerns related to climate variability are growing across the nation. Yet, in the Southeast, in particular, the discussions are often polarized and heated. The SRDC will work with CLiPSE during 2012 to design a series of civic dialogue sessions to provide a safe space for individuals to explore various perspectives and concerns to seek common ground and direction for moving forward.

## **6. e-Government: Improving the Web Presence of Local Governments/Communities**

Many smaller municipal and rural county governments are doing little in terms of having an active web presence that allows them to communicate important information to current and potential residents.

Furthermore, only a fraction has the capacity for residents to sign up for government services or to weigh in on important items being voted on by these decision-makers.

The SRDC plans to release a new e-government curriculum in spring 2012 that will help local government leaders and agency staff learn how to set up and manage a community website that can serve as a vital information and marketing tool for communities and municipalities. Moreover, the Center will seek to assess the extent to which this new product is being adopted by Extension educators and others across the nation.

## **7. SERA 37: The New Hispanic South**

The SRDC will continue to serve as a conduit for advancing the work of the SERA-37 team in FY12. There are four specific efforts the Center will undertake to support the team's activities. First, the SRDC web manager will provide guidance to the group as it seeks to strengthen its SERA-37 website. Second, the Center will guide the team in the possible preparation of a proposal to secure formal renewal of the SERA effort by the Extension and Experiment Station leadership in the South. Third, continue to help 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. Finally, the SRDC Director will continue to serve as the Extension administrative advisor for this regional team.

## **8. Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Research & Practice**

The Center has contracted with Dr. Ken Pigg, University of Missouri emeritus professor, to produce a series of research briefs on the topic of community leadership. The SRDC will publish the series in 2012. Prior to the publication of any of the briefs, the Center will appoint a subcommittee to review and offer critical feedback on each of the leadership briefs. The committee will work with Pigg and the SRDC to ensure that each leadership brief highlights the implications of the research for practitioners. Moreover, every effort will be made to incorporate on the ground stories that add value to the core topic addressed in a given leadership brief.

# **PRIORITY 2: BUILD ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT COMMUNITIES**

The Center, in partnership with its land-grant university colleagues and other key external partners, will continue to carry out the variety of efforts intended to advance the economic health of rural places in the region.

## **1. CARE and Cashing in on Business Opportunities Curricula**

The SRDC in FY11 completed the final updating of two important curricula products designed to offer rural communities a viable mix of strategies to diversify and strengthen their economies. The CARE program focuses on Creation, Attraction, Retention and Expansion efforts, while the Cashing in on Business Opportunities curriculum helps to improve the vitality and sustainability of home-based, micro- and entrepreneurial businesses. The SRDC will work to market these valuable products (through webinars, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking channels) to a host of new audiences in FY12, including the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), National Association of Counties (NACo), Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), the Southern Growth Policies Board, and other appropriate organizations. In addition, the Center will explore the possibility of presenting Cashing in on Business Opportunities as part of the Foundations of Practice in Community Development training series sponsored by the Regional Rural Development Centers.

## 2. National e-Commerce Extension Initiative

The SRDC will continue to coordinate this national initiative, strategically using the limited resources that Center has to improve the quality of resources available to support the broadband and e-commerce efforts of Extension educators across the nation. In the coming year, the Center will pursue the following:

- *Build an Integrated Taxonomy of e-Commerce Resources:* The SRDC has produced more than a dozen educational curricula on a host of e-commerce topics. The Center will work with Rae Montgomery and a team of TOAC members to synthesize these resources into an integrated taxonomy, one that will allow users to more easily access the best information on a wide array of e-commerce/broadband topics.
- *Update Most Frequently Used Curriculum Products:* Some popular e-commerce products are in need of updating, and the Center will target resources to have some of these updated.
- *Produce New Curricula e-Commerce Products:* The Center will release new educational products on Search Engine Optimization, Social Networking Strategies, and/or Youth Entrepreneurship in FY12.
- *Complete & Release Evaluation of the Initiative by External Evaluators:* The University of Florida External Evaluation team will complete its assessment of the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative and produce a final report in 2012. The Center will release a copy of the report and seek to follow through on the recommendation outlined by the evaluation team.
- *Work with the Southern e-Commerce Team to Host National Workshop:* The SRDC, in partnership with the Southern Region e-commerce team established nearly two years ago, will organize and host a one-day training workshop as part of a pre-conference session to be held at the 2012 NACDEP conference. The workshop will introduce community/economic development Extension educators to several e-commerce curriculum products these individuals can launch in their states.
- *Work with the University of Wisconsin to Establish the Virtual Inventors and Entrepreneur Network:* The SRDC will play a vital role in convening Extension educators across the country to help build a virtual inventors and entrepreneur network platform. This project will help create a vehicle that will allow entrepreneurs to talk to other entrepreneurs, educators, and economic development professionals across the country.

## 3. Organize/Support National Broadband Extension/Research Team

Given the significant investments being made by key federal and state agencies to expand broadband access to underserved areas of the United States, a number of Extension programs across the nation are working hand-in-hand with many of their state/federal agencies to strengthen the adoption and application of broadband. In an effort to share promising practices and to build a more integrated set of resources to support these Extension activities, the SRDC hosted an inaugural meeting of the National Broadband Extension and Partners Team in December 2011, in Nashville, Tenn. States represented on the national broadband team include Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. Representatives of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration/U.S. Department of Commerce are also participating.

The team will meet in May in concert with the NACDEP annual meeting. The group will work on the integration and development of broadband education resources addressing digital literacy and broadband issues of relevance to small businesses, workforce development agencies, and municipal governments. In

addition, the group will build a common core of evaluation metrics and explore the preparation of a multi-state applied research proposal that focuses on broadband penetration and adoption in rural America, along with the implication of these adoption activities on rural households, community anchor institutions, businesses and/or communities in select states.

#### **4. Expand the Stronger Economies Together (SET) Initiative to New Regional Sites/Guide SET in Phase I and II Regions**

The SRDC will continue, in partnership with USDA RD, to provide overall coordination for the SET initiative in states that launched SET in 2010 and 2011. In addition, SRDC/USDA RD personnel will work to expand SET to new states in 2012. As such, the Center will carry a diversity of activities in FY12 in support of this key, including the following:

- *Communications*: Maintain conference calls and email communications with all states that are part of the SET program.
- *Internal Evaluation of SET Resources*: Continue to revise and administer pre- and post-assessment surveys to regional team members involved in Phase II of SET.
- *Revision of SET Materials*: Secure feedback from state training team members regarding needed refinements to SET modules and revise them as needed to enhance effectiveness.
- *New SET modules*: Complete the addition of five new SET modules that supplement the initiative's core modules.
- *Webinars*: Conduct webinars on timely topics that can help strengthen the work of the regional teams and/or training teams.
- *Communications with the External Evaluation Team (University of Cincinnati)*: Maintain on-going interactions with the evaluation team to help facilitate its timely communications activities with SET states and select regions.
- *Expansion of SET to new states/regions (Phase III)*: Pursue the expansion of SET into more states as part of Phase III. This includes: (a) the preparation of a pre-application form for interested states; (b) the evaluation of the pre-applications and selection of states; (c) the development of a revised application form for use by Phase III states to distribute to counties in their states; (d) the hosting of a webinar to inform Phase III states of the key activities they need to complete over the next several months; (e) the review of completed applications from Phase III states and the submission of recommendations to USDA RD as to which regions to approve for engagement in SET; (f) the organizing and hosting of a national train-the-trainer workshop for Phase III state training team members; and (g) the launching of SET training activities in the Phase III regions.
- *Specialized data reports*: Complete and provide to all SET regions the socio-demographic and cluster analysis needed to support their SET efforts.
- *Presentations*: Presenting highlights of SET at various national and regional meetings.

#### **5. eXtension Community of Practice “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” Effort**

SRDC will continue to provide fiscal responsibility to the Entrepreneurs and their Communities CoP as part of the National eXtension system. Moreover, appropriate staff will participate in conference calls and

face-to face-meetings of the CoP leadership. Finally, we will help identify and recruit individuals to present the monthly webinar series sponsored by this Community of Practice.

## **6. Extension Broadband Education and Adoption Team Initiative (e-BEAT)**

The SRDC will work in partnership with Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU ES) and the Office of the Governor, State of Mississippi, to guide and expand the work of the Extension Broadband Education and Adoption Team (e-BEAT) in the state. This includes:

- *Coordinate the MSU ES Broadband Education Team:* The SRDC, in collaboration with state broadband Extension team, will continue to provide coordination to the work of the e-BEAT team.
- *Publish MS Broadband Quick Facts:* The SRDC will publish a series of Quick Facts reports that showcase the results of the statewide broadband survey administered to a sample of over 2,400 Mississippi households in 2011.
- *Develop Website and Showcase Broadband Resources:* The Center will launch the e-BEAT website and populate it with key training resources for use by households, businesses, governments and public anchor institutions.
- *Build Working Relationship with MDES, Public Library Commission and other Appropriate Agencies:* SRDC will work to deliver digital literacy and Internet-based workforce development training in collaboration with the MS Department of Employment Securities Workforce Investment Network, public libraries, community colleges, and others.
- *Launch Statewide Webinar Series:* The SRDC and the e-BEAT team will sponsor a series of statewide webinars to introduce a variety of important topics to key target groups in the state. Individuals/firms will then have the opportunity to sign up for more in-depth broadband or e-commerce training via the regional broadband coordinators.
- *Conduct Survey of Businesses to Assess Broadband Adoption Patterns:* In an effort to develop a more accurate picture of the current broadband/e-commerce activities of small businesses in Mississippi, the SRDC will develop and administer a survey to a sample of small businesses in the state, in collaboration with the MS Development Authority and the MS Main Street Association.
- *Help Coordinate the Delivery of Broadband/e-Commerce Programs in the Six e-BEAT Regions:* The SRDC and MSU ES will work in tandem to help identify and facilitate the delivery of broadband educational programs that align with the needs of the various regions.

## **7. Sustainable Communities Innovation Grant 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:

- Work in concert with the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (S-SARE) in sponsoring the Sustainable Community Innovations Grant (SCIG) program in 2012 to invest in the application of innovative tools to support sustainable agriculture/community development activities.

- Join the S-SARE in hosting a meeting of the current SCIG grantees to review progress to date and to help guide them on ways to further strengthen their project activities during the remaining months of their grant.
- Work with the S-SARE director to produce an edited volume on sustainable development.

## **PRIORITY 3: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISTRESSED AND LOW-WEALTH COMMUNITIES**

The majority 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 complex issues 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 maintain a focus on the following over the next year:

### **1. RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies**

The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies @ the SRDC will work in partnership with USDA Economic Research Service to carry out two competitive grant programs in FY12 – the Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant Program and the Food Assistance and Nutrition Challenges in Rural America Research Grant Program. The Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant Program will support research in the United States by graduate students pursuing doctoral research in areas that closely align with the priorities of the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies. The Food Assistance and Nutrition Challenges in Rural America Grant Program will seek to invest in innovative research that explores the social science-based dimensions of the food and nutrition issues impacting residents or communities in rural America. Moreover, it will produce and publish two to four RIDGE Center Research Briefs over the course of the fiscal year as well.

### **2. ReadyCommunity: Building Disaster Resilient Places**

In partnership with FEMA and the University of Arkansas Extension Service, the SRDC will work to produce a six-step training resource that guides communities in the development of a disaster management operational plan. In FY12, the Center will: (a) develop a working draft of the materials; (b) recruit and conduct a train-the-trainer workshop of Extension educators and other appropriate individuals on the ReadyCommunity disaster planning process; (c) pilot test the program in communities located in three or four states; (d) refine the training materials based on the pilot efforts; and (e) present information about this program at appropriate national and regional meetings/conferences.

### **3. Delta Rural Revitalization Initiative**

The SRDC will provide leadership and coordination to the MS Delta Rural Revitalization program during the last year in which funds will remain available for this effort. The initiative is targeted to 18 counties located in the MS Delta Region. Over the coming year, the SRDC will: (a) oversee the work of the MSU ES staff person located at the Delta Data Center in Stoneville, Miss.; (b) provide support and technical assistance to the Extension associate as he seeks to strengthen the work of the Delta Data Center; (c) assemble and create statistical information needed by local economic development organizations to attract firms to the region; and (d) coordinate applied research activities, as needed, to address current and emerging community/economic development opportunities and needs in the region.

#### 4. Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative (DGCI)

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

- *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.
- *Key Leader Assessments:* Work will be undertaken to capture what key leaders perceive of the community and potential community-wide impacts of the initiative in the two target sites located in Arkansas and Mississippi.
- *Maintain/Expand the Mid-South Data Library:* The Center will continue to strengthen and expand the type of secondary data needed to support the work of the Walton Family Foundation and that of other intermediary organizations with whom the Foundations is working on the DGCI.

### 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.

- Work with the Regional Rural Development Centers in sponsoring Foundations of Practice in Community Development training.
- Maintain active communication with land-grant faculty and other clientele in the South.
  - (a) Provide timely information on a variety of rural development-relevant matters via the SRDC website;
  - (b) 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;
  - (c) 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;
  - (d) Coordinate bi-monthly calls of Extension community development program leaders in the Southern region;
  - (e) 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;
  - (f) 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;



- (g) 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;
- (h) Participate, as needed, in statewide community/rural development efforts of land-grant institutions in the region;
- (i) 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;
- (j) 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.