

## Southern Rural Development Center Participates in Delta Scholars Program and Delta Regional Forum

Reflections from SRDC Director, John J. Green



Pictured from the left **Mr. Russ Garner** (SRDC Extension/Research Associate 2), **Ms. Melanie Balducci** (USDA Rural Development, MS Office), and **Dr. Corey Wiggins** (Federal Co-Chair with the Delta Regional Authority)

I have long been involved in the [Delta Directions Consortium](#) (DDC), a diverse and ever-evolving network of scholars and practitioners associated with universities, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic foundations. The DDC is an interdisciplinary group of people working together to create positive social change in the multi-state Mississippi Delta Region. Among other endeavors, DDC partners put on the [Delta Scholars Program](#) and the [Delta Regional Forum](#). The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) has been involved in these programs this year with culminating activities in June.



The Delta Scholars Program (DSP) brings together diverse students from the Southern Region and beyond to learn about social change, community development, and cultivating public service. Engaging with the experiences of people working in the Delta, Scholars explore innovative approaches to problem solving that can be applied to their professional lives. Over a two-week period, they spend time in Delta communities (Mississippi and Arkansas) and on the Mississippi State University (MSU) campus. Scholars develop a capstone project informed by what they learned from Delta leaders. Their projects are intended to make contributions to improve the quality of life and wellbeing in the communities where they are from, are going to school, or care about in general; thus, this impacts a range of communities across the region and nation. Cohorts are selected through a competitive application process, and this year's group included 18 representatives from across ten colleges/universities and six states.

Delta Scholars is a collaborative effort led through the MSU Shackouls Honors College, working with the SRDC. Other partners from the DDC are involved, including the University of Mississippi Center for Population Studies (CPS), Harvard School of Public Health, Harvard Law School, Phillips Brooks House Center for Public Service and Engaged Scholarship at Harvard College, Brandeis University, Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, and the Winokur Family Foundation.

An important part of the DSP includes the students participating in the Delta Regional Forum (DRF), organized by the SRDC and the CPS (through the latter's Delta Fellows Program). The Forum is an annual event intended to provide time and space for sharing diverse perspectives and experiences on development issues and strengthen capacity for applied research and community development action. With activities including presentations, panels, workshops, and even a film screening, diverse participants gain information and expand their networks across community and university lines. This year's Forum including reflections from leaders within the Delta Regional Authority and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Office in Mississippi.