

NIFA Recognizes Outstanding Contributions on Annual Day of Appreciation

WASHINGTON, Oct. 22, 2015 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) today announced NIFA Partnership Award recipients and Hall of Fame inductees, honoring those whose exemplary work has helped the agency fulfill its mission of investing in and advancing agricultural research, education, and extension.

“We place high value on the teams of researchers and other individuals who have enacted positive change on the future of agriculture and science through their work,” said Sonny Ramaswamy, NIFA Director. “They, and dedicated NIFA employees, have made contributions to this agency and its mission that will have long-standing impacts on the work we do to help address our nation’s most pressing challenges.”

NIFA’s Partnership Award for Multistate Efforts is granted to awardees whose projects are responding to critical needs important to each project leader’s state.

The Stronger Economies Together (SET) Initiative, a project run cooperatively between USDA Rural Development the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) in partnership with Purdue University, aims to help rural counties overcome the economic challenges that they face. SET guides collaborations within multi-county regions, helping them to develop regional economic plans based on self-assessments of strengths and assets. Over 1,500 organizations across 54 regions in 38 states are currently engaged in plans to address needs and strengthen assets such as rural healthcare, agritourism, and entrepreneurship.

SET Primary Partners

National Organizational Team

Lionel (Bo) Beaulieu- As former SRDC Director, Dr. Beaulieu was instrumental in forming and contributing to the *curriculum team*, guiding the initial planning stages, and providing oversight to the project. In his new role at Purdue University, he continues to provide national leadership, serves on the curriculum team and manages the data requirements for the program.

Rachel Welborn- Program Manager for the SRDC, Ms. Welborn has served on the national leadership team with responsibilities for managing the evaluation process, coordinating the peer SET plan reviews, and has served as an author on the *curriculum team*. She now serves as Principle Investigator for the project at SRDC. As such she is also *regional lead* for the Southern Region.

Dave Sears -Recently retired from USDA Rural Development, Dr. Sears was instrumental in forging the partnership from the RD side initially. He helped to shape the plan for the SET process, has co-lead the peer SET plan reviews, and guided the partnership forward as RD’s lead.

Suzette Agans- Serving alongside Dr. Sears, Ms. Agans has served on the national organization team from SET’s beginnings. As Dr. Sears retired, Ms. Agans has stepped into the lead RD position for the SET program. Her continued guidance includes facilitating communications among RD staff and stakeholders, managing financial oversight, and guiding the SET planning process moving forward

Brent Elrod -National Program Leader for NIFA and Liaison to the RRDCs, Mr. Elrod has been instrumental in increasing awareness of the SET initiative and in sharing relevant resources to strengthen SET impacts. (Elrod assumed responsibility for the role upon Sally Maggard’s retirement - under whose tenure SET was successfully launched.)

Regional Leads (South noted above):

Don Albrecht- as Director of the RRDC's western center, Dr. Albrecht has facilitated communication among the states he serves about the opportunities related to SET. Additionally, he has served on the *curriculum team* and has assisted with evaluations.

Stephan Goetz- as Director of the RRDC's northeast center, Dr. Goetz has facilitated communication among states he serves in his region. He has also provided input on curricula, resources, and data needs specific to the regions.

Scott Loveridge- as Director of the RRDC's north central center, Dr. Loveridge has facilitated communication among states he serves in his region. He has also worked with RD to provide a national professional development program for their staff to help them be better prepared to align with on-the-ground economic development work.

Curriculum Team: In addition to those above, each of the team members below provided significant contributions to the SET curriculum. Over the five phases of SET, the team has weighed through evaluations and strengthened the material by adapting to new ideas or feedback that surfaced. While the entire team worked interactively in the development of the material, each person's particular area of expertise from which they contributed the most is noted below.

- Marion Bentley- Utah State University, Economic Development
- Alison Davis- University of Kentucky, Regional Industry Cluster Analysis
- Sharon Gulick- University of Missouri, Community & Economic Development
- Indraneel Kumar- Purdue University, Data Analysis
- Neil Linscheid- University of Minnesota, Regional Partnerships
- Chance McDavid- Southern Rural Development Center, Civic Engagement; Tourism
- Michael Patrick- New Mexico State University, Local & Regional Foods Systems
- Kenneth Sherin- South Dakota State University, Grant Writing
- Dave Shideler- Oklahoma State Univ., Entrepreneurship; Business Retention & Expansion
- Jamie Rae Walker- Texas A&M University, Readiness Assessments; Asset Mapping
- Martha Walker- Virginia Tech University, Facilitation; Community Vitality
- Michael Wilcox- Purdue University, Entrepreneurship; Business Retention & Expansion