BACKGROUND...

The Southern Rural Development Center is one of four regional centers coordinating rural development research and Extension education programs cooperatively with land-grant institutions regionally and nationally. The Centers are supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the Center and its authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

MISSION...

The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region’s 29 land-grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the rural South.

GOALS...

- Stimulate the formation of multi-state research teams
- Coordinate the development and revision of educational materials and maintain a centralized repository of educational resources
- Organize and deliver high priority rural development research and educational workshops/conferences
- Provide leadership for the preparation of science-based rural development policy reports
- Build partnerships that link the South’s land-grant university system with other key entities committed to rural development activities in the region

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<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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A Word From the Director...

Most of us have been involved in some type of communication training over the course of our professional careers. A message that is frequently conveyed in such trainings is the importance of developing good listening skills. Great communication requires a capacity to talk less and to listen more. That is precisely what the Southern Rural Development Center decided to do in 2006. We strive to be a valued source of information on rural development issues in the South, and our capacity to pursue activities that are timely and effective rests on our ability to capture the perspectives of our land-grant university colleagues, our community development partners and the people of the South. With important financial support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and with the active engagement of community development colleagues across a host of land-grant schools in the South, we took the time to garner the insights of people across the region on the current and emerging challenges impacting the rural South. Fourteen state rural development roundtables held during 2006 have provided a new plan for the next three to five years. That plan will be announced in early 2007.

In retrospect, 2006 was another banner year for the Center. Our investment in the research efforts of our land-grant colleagues has remained strong. Our Extension efforts have moved into new arenas, including an expanded effort in rural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, we have remained steadfast in our efforts to provide our land-grant faculty and leaders with information and tools that can be used to strengthen community development work in their own states. A case in point is the recent release of the Southern Region Information Toolkit, a Web-based resource that offers our colleagues an impressive array of data on all counties in the South.

While we take pride in our past activities – efforts that would not have been possible without the full support of our land-grant university Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service leaders, our CSREES partners and a host of funding agencies and foundations – we are anxious to implement our new strategic blueprint. We look forward to sharing our new priorities and working in tandem with our land-grant colleagues and other rural development partners to make great things happen in the South in these new priority areas.

Bo Beaulieu
Director
Table of Contents...

6 Listening…
   To the people of the rural south

9 Investing…
   In research relevant to the needs of rural people and communities

10 Discovering…
   New knowledge through applied research activities

11 Building…
   New tools and applications

13 Responding…
   To emerging issues in the region

14 Strengthening…
   The knowledge, skills and activities of land-grant faculty and partners

16 Informing…
   The region of current issues, resources, opportunities and impacts

18 Funding…
   We received in 2006

19 Partners…
   In advancing the well-being of the rural south
Maintaining relevance requires listening to the individuals and organizations that care deeply about the well-being of people and communities in the rural South. Over the past year, we took this message to heart, pausing to listen to the insights offered by hundreds of people across the region.

**A New Strategic Blueprint for the SRDC: Partnering with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation**

The Southern region is being bombarded with rapid change, be it economic, demographic, educational or environmental in nature. Understanding and responding to these changes is vital to the effectiveness and vitality of the Center and our land-grant university partners. To better anticipate what lies ahead in the rural South, we launched a comprehensive strategic planning activity this past fiscal year. Supported with funds provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the effort began in 2006 and continues to help mold the new “five year action plan” we will unveil in 2007.

A few core activities undertaken over the past year have laid the foundation for our new strategic plan. These activities include:

- **State Rural Development Roundtables:** We provided seed funding from the Kellogg Foundation to teams of land-grant faculty in each Southern state to organize and host a rural development roundtable. By September 2006, roundtable sessions were planned or completed in 14 states. Close to 600 people, representing a variety of constituencies, offered their perspectives on the most significant rural development issues facing their states. The roundtables included their insights on the research, information, technical assistance and outreach education efforts they believed their states’ land-grant institutions should tackle in the next three to five years.

- **Land-Grant Faculty Input on our Center’s Priorities and Activities:** We developed and distributed a Web-based survey to land-grant research and Extension faculty and educators to collect their thoughts on the top rural development priorities in the South. The survey also showed their assessment of our current work and their recommendations on the direction we should take as part of our new strategic plan.

- **Regional Rural Development Roundtable:** More than 20 individuals will take part in a roundtable in Atlanta, Ga., in late October 2006. State roundtable coordinators and non land-grant partners will be in attendance to analyze the information captured in the 14 state roundtables and from the Web-based survey. The result of this regional roundtable will be a working draft of the new strategic priorities for our Center.
As rural communities and their residents search for ways to move beyond the traditional industrial recruitment model, they need information and guidance on the type of entrepreneurship development strategies that best align with their areas’ values, assets, needs and possibilities. This need prompted us, along with the National Coalition for Rural Entrepreneurship, to launch a series of entrepreneurship listening sessions over the past year. Nine sessions were organized in the South and co-hosted by our land-grant university partners. Nearly 300 individuals representing a host of organizations took part in these sessions. The participants provided the raw data we needed to build a relevant, dynamic and responsive entrepreneurship initiative in the South. Their input is being carefully analyzed as part of our new strategic plan.
The goals of these entrepreneurship listening sessions were:

- To identify the resources and capabilities currently existing within and outside the South’s land-grant universities to support a well integrated entrepreneurial development system in rural America.

- To determine the type of education, information and technical assistance needs that exist but are not being addressed effectively by existing agencies, organizations or institutions of higher education (with particular focus on the Cooperative Extension Service system).

- To help establish and maintain a network of relationships among individuals, organizations and land-grant universities for sharing promising practices and for maintaining important lines of communication after listening sessions are completed.

**USDA Rural Development and Cooperative Extension Service Survey**

USDA Rural Development and the nation’s land-grant institutions represent two important entities whose work has a positive impact on rural people and places. What is not well known, however, is the extent to which Rural Development and the land-grant universities’ Cooperative Extension Service have worked hand-in-hand in addressing the important community development challenges facing our nation’s rural areas. In an effort to better understand the nature and strength of the RD/CES partnership, our Center, along with representatives from USDA RD and USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, designed and administered a brief survey to State USDA directors and Extension Community Development Program Leaders across the United States. Conducted in Spring 2006, the three-page electronic survey was completed by more than 40 individuals. The input gleaned from this survey has helped identify areas where partnerships are strong, as well as areas where opportunities for coordinated activities might be launched in the future.

**Citizens Health Care Working Group Listening Sessions**

The Citizens Health Care Working Group is a non-partisan committee comprised of individuals from all walks of life who have an interest in correcting the state of healthcare in today’s society. The Working Group’s goal is to collect input from U.S. residents in order to determine the major problems and concerns with our healthcare system. The Working Group partnered with our Center and the Mississippi State University Extension Service to host 11 initial listening sessions during which interim recommendations for improving healthcare were developed. In addition, the Working Group, our Center and the MSU Extension Service partnered to host three additional feedback sessions to capture input from healthcare professionals regarding these interim recommendations. The final product of these listening sessions will be a report of findings and recommendations that will be submitted to Congress and the President.
INVESTING...
IN RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE NEEDS OF RURAL PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

We play an important role in capturing resources and re-investing those funds in innovative research and Extension activities that advance the quality and relevance of rural development work in the region. We continue to manage a sizable portfolio of grants awarded to land-grant faculty throughout the South and beyond.

Sustainable Community Innovation Grants
Our Center enjoys a strong working relationship with the Southern SARE program. Together, we sponsor the competitive Sustainable Community Innovation Grants program, whose aim is to blend sustainable agriculture practices with new community development strategies that help promote resilient farms, businesses, families and communities in the South. A valuable new partner, the Appalachian Regional Commission, has now joined forces with the SRDC and Southern SARE to further advance our work in the region over the coming year. The program is focused on promoting collaborative problem solving across the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors of the community. Seven of the approximately 50 grant applications were funded last year.

Addressing the Food Assistance Needs of the South’s Vulnerable Populations
We remain an active partner with the Economic Research Service in sponsoring the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics Program, formerly known as the Small Grants Program. The number of social scientists actively involved in food assistance-related research in the South and beyond has steadily increased since the program started in the late ‘90s. At this time, the SRDC/ERS partnership has invested more than $1 million in over 100 researchers and graduate research assistants employed in nearly 30 public universities. This expanding pool of social scientists is capturing more extramural funds to continue their research, a greater number of their articles are being published that are advancing our knowledge in this research arena and more of their master’s theses and doctoral dissertations are being devoted to food assistance-related issues.

The initiatives that were undertaken as part of our investments in food assistance-related research include:

- **Competitive Grants Program**: We awarded four new grants in 2006. These projects explore a variety of important topics including childhood obesity, food insecurity and hunger, food stamp participation and the link between health literacy and adoption of food dietary guidelines.
• **Food Assistance Small Grants Program**: Our Center helped coordinate a report that highlights the major achievements associated with the program over the past eight years. This special report, being prepared in concert with the Frameworks Institute, is intended to provide policymakers and federal agency leaders a snapshot of the important research findings that have emerged from the small grants program since its birth in 1998.

• **Food Assistance Policy Series**: We continue to sponsor the food assistance research policy series as a way to share important grant-supported studies with researchers, agency representatives, Congressional staffers and other interested parties. One report, titled “Food Availability and Food Deserts in the Nonmetropolitan South,” was published in April 2006 as part of this series. The report, written by Troy Blanchard of Mississippi State University and Thomas Lyson of Cornell University, is Number 12 in the series.

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**Discovering...**

**NEW KNOWLEDGE THROUGH APPLIED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

As an active part of the South’s land-grant university system, we embrace the opportunity to enhance knowledge by generating creative activities that are relevant to the region’s important rural development priorities. Our desire to enhance the region’s knowledge led to a number of major research endeavors over the past year.

**The Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative: Assessing Community Intervention Strategies**

In partnership with the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, our Center is serving as an external evaluator for a major initiative in the Mississippi Delta region funded by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation. The Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative is designed to document efforts by two Walton Family Foundation-funded intermediaries in building and strengthening community capacity in a targeted group of Delta counties. The ultimate goal of the Initiative is to understand the various ways to mobilize a diversity of local people to work collaboratively in developing and implementing a long-term strategic plan for their counties. From our perspective, the work of the evaluation team will provide important insights and strategies that can be applied to future community and economic development efforts in low-wealth rural Delta counties.

**The Delta Rural Revitalization Project**

The Mid South Delta Region and the subset of 18 counties that constitute the northwest region of the Mississippi Delta area remain critical areas of research for our Center. Over the past year, we have continued to launch applied research activities in this important area of the South. These activities include:
• **Southern Region Information Toolkit:** This comprehensive database covers a variety of items including current and historical data on population, education and economic conditions. It is explained in detail in the “Building” section below.

• **“Working Differently with the Delta” Report:** Supported by a grant from the National Rural Funders Collaborative, this report outlined the key emerging policy challenges facing the Mid South Delta Region. We identified seven major themes, including such things as education and workforce development and healthcare improvements, as critical to the long-term vitality of the region. The themes were designed to provide a roadmap for the philanthropic and policy communities on what areas should be considered in their quest to bring about comprehensive improvement in the well-being of the Mid South Delta region.

• **Consolidated Federal Funding Report:** The federal government remains a large investor in rural America. Many rural residents, however, are not fully aware of the level of resources that flow to rural areas through various federal agencies. For example, the federal government invested more than $5.9 billion in the 18 counties served by the Delta Council in 2004 alone. To facilitate a greater understanding of the level and nature of such investments, our Center developed a database of how federal funds have been expended in the cities and counties of the Delta region. This database covers 1993-2004 and delineates expenditures by program, agency, department and use. We will be exploring the possibility of including this information in the Southern Region Information Toolkit for all counties in the region.

**BUILDING... NEW TOOLS AND APPLICATIONS**

Technology has given people ready access to a wide variety of information. Even with the wealth of information available through the Internet and other mediums, the challenge persists to develop information and educational resources that customers can understand and implement. We succeeded in tackling that challenge this year as we produced information tools and curricula that are user-friendly and relevant to the needs of our rural development family.

**Southern Region Information Toolkit: Data at Your Fingertips**

We launched a comprehensive database in 2006 that covers a variety of items including current and historical data on population, education and economic conditions. This important data resource, called the Southern Region Information Toolkit, also showcases complex data products such as location quotients and shift-share analysis in a manner that proves very informative and helpful to local community and economic development leaders.
To maximize its utility to a variety of audiences, the information presented in the toolkit is available at the county, state and Southern region geographic levels. Users also have the option of exploring the metropolitan, micropolitan and nonmetro/noncore status of counties in each of the Southern states. We plan to expand this valuable tool in the coming year with the addition of data on migration, renewable energy resources and poverty.

**The 24/7 Web-Based Information Resource on Entrepreneurship: The eXtension Initiative**

Creating a Web-based resource that offers customers access to vital information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is the underlying premise of the new eXtension effort being launched by our nation's Cooperative Extension Service. In collaboration with our sister Regional Rural Development Centers, we are leading a national effort to create an eXtension Web-based portal that centralizes sound, science-based information and educational resources on rural entrepreneurship. Over 25 Extension educators and RRDC staff across the country are participating in this important initiative. The portal will focus on current and emerging entrepreneurs, the entrepreneur network, entrepreneur-friendly communities, and local, state and federal policy options that support entrepreneurs and their communities. The eXtension entrepreneurship team will continue to carry out its work over the next several months and plans to release their portion of the eXtension national Web site to the public in summer 2007.

**E-Commerce Use in Rural America: An SRDC-Led National Demonstration Project**

Introducing rural communities and small businesses to e-commerce is the goal of the National E-Commerce Extension Initiative that our Center has spearheaded over the last three years. This year, we invested in the development of an entirely new crop of e-commerce educational curricula and worked to expand the capacity of Extension educators to deliver e-commerce-related programming.

- **Investments in New E-Commerce Extension Curricula:** Our e-commerce competitive grants program has funded seven projects over the past two years. Six of these educational resources, which include Connecting Rural Communities and Electronic Retailing, are complete and will be released to Extension educators in 2007.

- **Training for Extension Educators:** We provided support for the “Connecting Rural Communities: Cooperative Extension as a Catalyst” training program held in June 2006 in Philadelphia, Pa. The program was hosted by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.

- **Timely Information on E-Commerce Resources:** We continued to produce and distribute the eNews electronic newsletter. This bimonthly newsletter provides timely information on various e-commerce topics, including helpful tools and resources, recent research studies, success stories, e-library sources and upcoming events. There are currently more than 800 recipients.
An important attribute of a vibrant organization is having the ability to respond effectively to the unanticipated challenges that arise during the course of a year. Our ability to respond to such challenges is something we constantly strive to improve. Two important issues that emerged in the South during the past year gave us further opportunity to respond effectively.

**Latino/Hispanic Growth in the Region: Building Extension Capacity**
The accelerated growth of new migrants has created many opportunities and challenges for rural communities in the South. The land-grant system’s Cooperative Extension Service has created an important resource for helping local leaders, citizens and communities address the needs of an expanding Latino/Hispanic population. Along with Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center, we assisted in the organization of a new Latino/Hispanic Task Force in February 2006. Approximately 15 individuals took part in the task force’s inaugural meeting in San Antonio, Texas. Since that meeting, the membership of the task force has expanded to nearly 40 representatives from across the country. The task force is currently working on a number of activities, including the creation of a research and Extension exchange group and the development of a Web-based repository that will provide research and educational products addressing Latino/Hispanic-related issues. The task force will also share educational curricula to support outreach efforts targeting Latino/Hispanic audiences.

**Hurricane Response: Dealing with Natural Disasters**
In response to the catastrophic damage suffered by countless rural communities during 2005’s Hurricane Katrina, we partnered with the Rural Sociological Society, the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service and the Farm Foundation to organize a meeting addressing the long-term rural development challenges facing these impacted areas. The meeting engaged some of the nation’s leading land-grant social scientists in helping formulate a response to the needs of rural areas impacted by these natural disasters.

- “Rebuilding Hurricane Impacted Rural Communities: A Land-Grant System Summit” was held Dec. 12-13, 2005, in Nashville, Tenn. Attracting more than 40 individuals, the workshop provided an ideal setting for sharing perspectives and outlining plans to strengthen the research and educational/training materials that might be available to support comprehensive community rebuilding efforts in hurricane-impacted rural areas.
• As a result of the summit, we initiated discussions with the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) and the Southern Region Community Development Program Leaders on the development of educational resources to support rebuilding efforts. We also collaborated with the Rural Sociological Society, the Community Development Society and the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals to discuss the development of resources to support long-term rebuilding efforts.

• In addition, we sponsored the “Triumph Over Tragedy” workshop at the 2006 meeting of NACDEP that showcased a curriculum for Extension professionals responding to disasters and terrorism. The curriculum, developed by the National Rural Behavioral Health Center at the University of Florida, provides tools that Extension professionals can use to provide supportive education and services to communities impacted by disasters.

**Rural Community College Initiative**

Advancing the partnership between rural community colleges and land-grant universities remains a core part of the Rural Community College Initiative. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the relationship between these two important higher education entities has strengthened and matured over the course of the last four years. More importantly, the Initiative has improved the capacity of rural community colleges to more effectively target their resources toward community improvement efforts.

The following highlights some of the major successes that have been realized as a product of the community college/land-grant collaboration that our Center helped nurture as part of the RCCI effort.

• **CarteretCatch**: A locally harvested seafood branding program in North Carolina that is the culmination of partnerships between Carteret Community College, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and the North Carolina Sea Grant Program.
• **The Rural Entrepreneurship Support Network**: An entrepreneurship curriculum and guide jointly developed by Coastal Bend College, the Texas Rural Community College Network and Texas Cooperative Extension that is designed to not only assist entrepreneurs in beginning and expanding businesses but also to assist rural communities in developing an atmosphere conducive to entrepreneurial development.

• **Qualla-T**: A culturally sensitive customer service program developed by the Western Carolina Partnership (Haywood Community College, Southwestern Community College and Tri County Community College) and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service that targets Native American owned/managed businesses in the western region of North Carolina.

Our Center continues to be an instrumental force in incorporating the RCCI process into the regular activities of the region’s land-grant schools and rural community colleges. Efforts are currently underway to launch the RCCI program in rural community colleges in Louisiana, North Carolina and Texas.

**Master Farmer Tri-State Initiative**

Our Center helped expand and refine the Master Farmer Program that has been launched by the Louisiana State University AgCenter. In concert with the Cooperative Extension Service leadership in the Mid South Delta Region, we invested in the delivery of this important educational initiative to new counties and parishes in the three-state area. The program targets farmers, ranchers and others who are directly engaged in agriculture/forestry production activities. Program enrollees participate in classroom instruction on water quality and conservation practices, visit farms that have implemented various conservation practices and develop farm-specific conservation plans for their own farm/forestry operations. Those completing all three phases receive environmental stewardship certification.

**SEERA-19 Rural Health**

Healthcare services play a vital role not only in the health of the rural South’s residents but also in the health of local economies. We have played a major role in revitalizing and supporting the Southern Extension and Research Activity (SEERA) project 19, a partnership of Extension and research faculty who have an interest in addressing issues related to the healthcare sector. With our assistance, a strategic plan for future SEERA-19 activities has been developed that includes research and Extension activities such as coordinating the rural health tract of the National Priester Health Conference.
Conferences
We hosted a total of 818 participants at the following conferences over the past year:

- Southern Institute for Rural Development April 24-26, 2006, in West Monroe, La.
- SERA-19 Rural Health August 3-4, 2006, in Memphis, Tenn.
- Joint Meeting of PLN, AEA and ASRED August 28-31, 2006, in San Juan, Puerto Rico

Informing...
The region of current issues, resources, opportunities and impacts

We firmly believe in the importance of keeping land-grant professionals and key partners informed of recent research reports, new educational resources, current policy discussions and debates and funding opportunities. Equally important is our commitment to showcase success stories that help demonstrate the impact of our work on the Southern region.

Publications
We produced and distributed the following publications over the past year:

- Grant Connections
  Grant Connections is compiled bimonthly for the faculty of land-grant colleges and universities in the South to provide funding information in support of activities in agricultural economics, education, human sciences, rural sociology, youth development and other related disciplines.
• **Around the South**

*Around the South* is distributed electronically each month and communicates timely information to SRDC readers regarding new reports, funding opportunities, conferences and job opportunities.

• **Measuring Rural Diversity Policy Series**

Sponsored by the Economic Research Service in partnership with our Center, this series featured the current work of researchers on rural conditions such as demographic changes, business trends and local distress. The final two issues in the policy series were published this year:

  “Creating Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas”
  Michael R. Ratcliffe, United States Census Bureau
  Volume 3, Issue No. 1, March 2006

  “Measuring Economic Distress: A Comparison of Designations and Measures”
  Amy Glasmeier, Pennsylvania State University; Larry Wood, Ohio University; and Kurt Fuellhart, Shippensburg University
  Volume 3, Issue No. 2, April 2006

**Web Sites**

We continued maintenance and upkeep of our Web site and our affiliate sites, which include the Rural Community College Initiative, the Southern Region Program Leadership Network and the Rural E-Commerce Extension Initiative.

**State Success Stories**

We continued working to document the impact of our regional activities by collaborating with a team of evaluation experts in the region. Our goal is to develop an accountability system and to generate key success stories that have their roots in the work of our Center. This year, eight success stories have been identified and will be published and distributed in the coming year.

**Presentations**

On behalf of our Center, Director Bo Beaulieu presented 17 times across 11 states. In addition to our traditional audiences, he also presented to the National Rural Funders Collaborative, the American Association of Community Colleges Workforce Development Institute, the Association of Enterprise Opportunity and the Council of State Community Development Agencies. Alan Barefield, associate director, presented nine times across five states.
Funding... we received in 2006

FY06 Funding
We enjoyed another year with sizable levels of funding. In 2006, extramural funding exceeded $1 million. We are grateful to the agencies and organizations that have made a financial investment in the important work of our Center.

Trends in Extramural Funding, FY98-06
The following chart highlights the level of extramural resources that we have been able to secure over the past nine years. Total extramural funds generated by our Center over this nine-year period have now exceeded $6.7 million.
The following are organizations and agencies, outside of our land-grant schools in the region, with whom we have worked over the past year. They share our commitment to advancing the well-being of people and communities in the rural South.

Association of Extension Administrators
Association of Research Directors
Appalachian Regional Commission
Association of Southern Region Extension Directors
Center for Rural Affairs
Citizens Health Care Working Group
Community Development Society
Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, USDA
Delta Council
Economic Research Service, USDA
Farm Foundation
Ford Foundation
Foundation for the Mid South
Frameworks Institute
Mid-South Community College Fellowship Program
Montgomery Institute
National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals
National eXtension Initiative Leadership
National Rural Behavioral Health Center, University of Florida
National Rural Funders Collaborative
RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship
Rural Community College Alliance
Rural Community College Initiative Colleges
Rural Sociological Society
Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors
Southern Good Faith Fund
Southern Growth Policies Board
Southern Rural Development Initiative
Southern Rural Sociological Association
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program
Social Science Research Center’s Workforce, Economic and Community Development Unit
Texas Rural Community College Network
USDA Forest Service
USDA Rural Development
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
The Southern Rural Development Center is one of four regional centers coordinating rural development research and Extension education programs cooperatively with land-grant institutions regionally and nationally. The Centers are supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the Center and its authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.