Turning Challenges into Opportunities

2009 Annual Report

Southern Rural Development Center
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Welcome

A Letter from the Director

With job losses mounting, poverty rates accelerating, cutbacks being made in local government services, and food insecurity/hunger spiraling upward, many would conclude that 2009 was a pretty challenging time for countless people and communities across the rural South. But, it’s during these difficult times that we hope the value of the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) and its land-grant partners can be best demonstrated to our stakeholders.

Working with many of our land-grant colleagues and external partners, the SRDC pursued a number of initiatives that were designed to attend to the economic uncertainties facing our region. For example, we created and launched a new “Strengthening Communities and Economies” Web site and played a major role in building the “community” component of the National eXtension’s Managing in Tough Times initiative. With poverty on the rise, the Center reached out to the Kettering Foundation, the Farm Foundation, and Everyday Democracy to join with us in developing the “Turning the Tide on Poverty” program. The pilot testing of this initiative, which will commence in early 2010, will guide high poverty areas through a series of deliberative dialogues that will mobilize these communities to develop and act on a blueprint for building a more prosperous future for their low-wealth residents.

In an effort to explore new economic avenues, the Center joined forces with its sister regional rural development centers in introducing communities to economic strategies that build on regional competitive advantages. At the same time, we continued to invest in our core programs, including entrepreneurship development, e-commerce strategies for small businesses, and food assistance research (with the Economic Research Service/USDA), programs having added significance during these difficult economic times.

While our 2009 Annual Report seeks to capture the variety of activities we’ve pursued with our partners over the past year, the underlying theme of our joint work has been to translate the South’s rural development challenges into opportunities. While we are far from finished, we hope you agree that the SRDC has taken some positive steps in uncovering and building on these many possibilities over the past year. We look forward to working with many of you in 2010.

Sincerely,

Bo Beaulieu
January 2010
Improving Disaster Awareness: The Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Initiative

The Challenge: The South has long been impacted by natural disasters – most notably, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, wildfires, and floods. While these calamities have had devastating impacts, the most disadvantaged people and communities have been the least able to prepare for, respond to, and rebound from these disasters.

SRDC Activities: With support from the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (formerly CSREES) and the FEMA/Department of Homeland Security, the SRDC partnered with the University of Arkansas Extension Service and Extension educators in five states (Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Missouri) to examine strategies to enhance the emergency preparedness activities of urban and rural disadvantaged populations. Adapting the “Emergency Preparedness Demonstration (EPD) Process” developed by MDC, Inc. and University of North Carolina’s Center for Sustainable Community Design, the SRDC-led team successfully completed the following activities in FY09: (1) Mapped key areas with high numbers of presidentially declared disasters and socially vulnerable populations over the past decade; (2) Selected five states and two counties/parishes within each of these states judged to be highly vulnerable to disasters and having large numbers of disadvantaged people; (3) Conducted 30 roundtable sessions with emergency management personnel and community members to gather insights and recommendations on strengthening and implementing the EPD process; (4) Prepared a preliminary report to NIFA and FEMA on promoting the effective use of the EPD process; and (5) Shared field work results with Extension leaders and EDEN (Extension Disaster Education Network) colleagues nationally.

The Opportunity: How can the SRDC and its land-grant partners help advance the emergency preparedness efforts of disadvantaged communities and individuals? From the perspective of community residents and local emergency management personnel, some of the key activities that Cooperative Extension Service educators can pursue are outlined below. Simply put, disaster preparedness requires sound and sustained investments in community development work. It means offering all people an effective avenue for sharing their perspectives on the core elements of the community’s emergency management plan. It also means taking stock of the diversity of individuals, households, and neighborhoods that have special needs that must be addressed prior to, during, and after various disasters strike. These represent some the important opportunities that the SRDC will address in concert with its land-grant university colleagues in the months ahead.

How Extension Educators Can Strengthen Emergency Preparedness Plans

Facilitate dialogue between emergency management officials and residents to ensure the insights of citizens and disadvantaged groups are incorporated into emergency preparedness plans;

Deliver educational programs that strengthen the capacity of disadvantaged communities to develop and act on emergency preparedness plans;

Assist communities in assessing the talents and resources of individuals, organizations, and neighborhoods that can be tapped to support emergency awareness and preparedness efforts;

Draw on the specialized mapping (GIS) capabilities of land-grant universities to help identify neighborhoods, communities, and populations at an elevated risk of being negatively impacted;

Serve as a “coach” for communities, an unbiased source of information, guidance and support for spurring the development of emergency preparedness strategies that are sensitive to the needs of local disadvantaged populations.

What Do We Mean by Disadvantaged Populations?

They represent individuals or communities with key social, demographic, and economic attributes that intensify their risk of being negatively impacted by major hazards. They include persons living in poverty, those with limited levels of education, non-English speaking individuals, racial/ethnic minorities, the elderly, female-headed households with young children, those who are disabled (i.e. due to physical or mental challenges), persons who are homebound, homeless, or living in remote or isolated areas of their community or county/parish.
The Sustainable Community Innovation Grants Program Funds Eight Projects

The Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SSARE) and the SRDC sponsored a new round of competitive grants program in 2009. This initiative is designed to invest in projects that link sound farm and nonfarm economic development with agricultural and natural resource management. The “request for proposals” was released in July of 2009 with proposals due in October. Of the 78 proposals received, the following eight projects were funded:

- The Alabama Blackbelt Community Food System Project, The United Christian Community Association, Alabama
- Building Sustainable Agriculture and Community Development along the Coastal Plain Regions of Georgia and South Carolina, McIntosh Sustainable Environment and Economic Development, Georgia
- Growing Food & Community: 2009 Initiatives, Growing Food & Community, Virginia
- Growing the Manning Farmer’s Market, City of Manning, South Carolina
- Marshview Community Organic Farms - Young Farmers of the Lowcountry, Marshview Community Organic Farms, South Carolina
- Mentoring Today for Tomorrow, Indian Springs Farmers Association, Mississippi
- SNAP! A Sustainable Network at Polk From Farm to Fork and back to Farm again, EarthSong Rising LLC, North Carolina
- Training for Sustainable Community Development: Phase Illb, Tuskegee University, Alabama

The eXtension Entrepreneurs and Their Communities Still Going Strong

Under the leadership of the SRDC and the University of Vermont, the national eXtension entrepreneurship team continued to be a highly productive “community of practice” (CoP). Over the past year, the team formally established a youth entrepreneurship subcommittee whose focus is to enhance the number of FAQs, information briefs, and educational resources that are available on its eXtension Web site addressing the subject of youth entrepreneurship. The CoP’s evaluation team completed a second survey of our Web site users and helped identify areas of strength and items needing further improvement on the entrepreneurship Web site. One of the active components of the team’s work has been its sponsorship of monthly Webinars addressing a variety of entrepreneurship and e-commerce topics. The SRDC took a lead role in the compilation of entrepreneurship-friendly policies that a select number of states have enacted in recent years. This information will be showcased on the CoP’s eXtension Web site in early 2010. Among the 46 CoPs currently in place in the eXtension network, the “Entrepreneurs and Their Communities” continues to have the largest number of Extension educators who are members of its CoP.

SRDC Helps Launch the New eXtension Professional Development Community of Practice (PDCoP) on Public Deliberation

The SRDC teamed up with five land-grant universities and the Kettering Foundation to pursue the establishment of an eXtension PDCoP titled “Public Talk, Public Action: Advancing Civic Capacity to Tackle Tough Issues.” The application to create the PDCoP was formally approved by the national eXtension leadership in the fall of 2009. The main focus of this effort is to help Extension professionals gain the set of skills, competencies, and experiences they need to effectively employ citizen-centered approaches as a core part of their Extension engagement activities. Furthermore, it is designed to build a network of Extension educators across the nation who can share their experiences and challenges in pursuing university-community engagement activities.
SRDC Proposes Distress Indicators for the Appalachian Regional Commission

SRDC staff joined forces with researchers from Ohio State University and Penn State University to conduct an in-depth assessment of viable new distress indicators that could replace or strengthen the existing index being used by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The intent was to identify a strong core set of factors that could better predict ARC counties that are currently experiencing major economic hardships, or that are at risk of suffering from economic distress at some point in the near future. The research team, in its final report submitted to the ARC, outlined three potential indices that it felt could serve as an accurate set of benchmarks for charting the future socioeconomic progress of the Appalachian Region.

Delta Initiative Seeks to Improve Socioeconomic Health

The Mississippi Delta Rural Revitalization Program represents a proactive effort by the Center to strengthen the long-term socioeconomic health of the Mississippi Delta Region. The major work of the SRDC in the past year has been threefold: (1) invested in two Extension educators to spearhead innovative community and economic development activities in the region in partnership with the Delta Council and regional/local economic development entities; (2) expanded the data resources available to the Delta Data Center, a facility housed in the Delta Council office that is providing local governments and economic development organizations with timely and up-to-date information that can guide and strengthen their local decision-making activities; and (3) funded a series of economic impact analyses that showcase the value and importance of agricultural production and processing to the 18-counties that constitute the Mississippi Delta Region. Reports showcasing the results of these assessments, completed by faculty in the MSU Agricultural Economics Department, were developed by the SRDC and are being distributed to leaders across the Delta region and to appropriate state agency representatives.

Key County-Level Data to Guide Local Planning

In many rural counties, gaining access to relevant demographic, education, social, and economic data is not easy to come by, or, at a minimum, difficult to locate in one centralized site. As a way of making key data readily available to local leaders, agencies, and organizations, the SRDC has created a Data Center that provides information on more than three dozen variables for every county in the region. Moreover, state level data – overall and by metro and nonmetro areas of the state – are provided as well. In many cases, data are presented over 2-3 points in time (for example, for the years 1990, 2000, and 2008).
**e-Commerce**

**Promoting Broadband Adoption in Rural America: The National e-Commerce Extension Initiative**

**The Challenge:** As a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, including the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), the deployment of broadband in underserved areas of rural America has emerged as a priority of Congressional and federal agency leaders. While the goal of BTOP is to expand broadband infrastructure across U.S., broadband access will not, in and of itself, close the urban/rural digital divide. Rather, local businesses, farmers, governments, community institutions and local residents will need access to trusted sources of information, education and technical assistance to guide them in their broadband and e-commerce adoption decisions.

**SRDC Activities:** Over the past five years, the SRDC has served as a leader in the development of educational products designed to support broadband and e-commerce applications by small businesses, entrepreneurs, farmers, local governments, and others. Among the key activities achieved to date include the following:

- Invested nearly $600,000 in land-grant universities across the nation as part of the Center’s rural e-commerce competitive grants program;
- Ten educational curricula dealing with broadband and e-commerce applications by small businesses, farmers, artisans, food retailers, entrepreneurs, and local government have been completed, and eight are now available on the SRDC Web site.
- Improvements have been made to the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative Web site, making it a state-of-the-art site offering Extension educators and consumers high quality broadband/e-commerce information on a 24/7/365 basis.
- The eNews electronic newsletter, produced six times a year, has been distributed to hundreds of Extension educators and clientele.
- Eight Webinars have been broadcast, offering effective strategies for using newly released e-commerce curricula.
- Mini-grants have been awarded to teams of Extension educators to pilot test six of the newly released e-commerce materials. These efforts are being undertaken in Alabama, Oklahoma, Michigan, Missouri, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

**The Opportunity:** As investments in broadband expand, an important question needing to be debated is, “How can we spur the growth in broadband demand by local businesses, governments, and organizations?” Research makes clear that the key ingredient for expansion adoption is education. One of the best and most trusted providers of community-based education and technical assistance is the states’ land-grant based Cooperative Extension Service. With the accelerated deployment of broadband that will be occurring in many parts of rural America over the next few years, the SRDC-led National e-Commerce Extension Initiative can continue to play a vital role in strengthening the capacity of local and state Extension educators to work hand in hand with businesses, community leaders, and others on broadband and e-commerce applications that make the most sense for them.
Cashing in on Business Opportunities
Curriculum Updated and Enhanced

This comprehensive home-based and micro-business curriculum has enjoyed substantial success over the past fifteen years. However, the curriculum’s 23 chapters were in dire need of updating in light of changing business activities and practices. Over the last two years, a national team organized and coordinated by the SRDC has undertaken an ambitious effort of reviewing, updating, modifying, enhancing and, in some cases, deleting materials so as to produce a more cutting-edge set of resources – products that are attuned to today’s small business environment.

For the first time ever, Cashing will be made available online to educators at no cost. Future roll-out plans include developing Webinars, incorporating sections into the Entrepreneurs and Their Communities eXtension Community of Practice, and developing an online, interactive version of the curriculum that can be used to support a new eXtension Professional Development Community of Practice.

Mississippi Women in Agriculture Program Adds New Dimensions Across State

Mississippi Women in Agriculture unveiled new components throughout 2009 beginning with a three-day introductory seminar held in the Mississippi Delta region and followed by its first annual state conference in Jackson in April.

Funded by grants from the Southern Region Risk Management Education Center and NIFA, USDA, this unique educational program, which empowers women involved in production agricultural operations to become more integrally invested in the management and operation of their businesses, continues to grow under the coordination of the SRDC.

The summer saw three new Quickbooks software trainings taught throughout the state while the third installment of the introductory program launched in October 2009. Two new advanced sessions will debut in November 2009 and January 2010 and will be followed by nine “NxLevel for Entrepreneurs” training classes – offered both in person and via Distance Education – covering topics such as management, marketing, financing, and managing growth.

Scope and Reach of BRE Program Expanded

The SRDC’s efforts to work with the region’s land-grant universities and their partners in expanding the scope of Business Retention and Expansion programming made some important headway in 2009, due in part to a strong and dynamic relationship with Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI). Over the past year, SRDC and other Extension faculty worked with BREI to prepare materials for the basic BRE course offering. The Center also contributed to the development of new BRE course content on such topics as Understanding and Utilizing Secondary Data in a BRE Program, Survey Design and Analysis, and Operating a BRE Visitation Program. These additional resources are enabling BREI members to pursue and achieve advanced BRE certification.
SC&E and MiTTNet

Responding to Today’s Economic Uncertainties: Resources to Help Communities Manage in Tough Times

The Challenge: The economic and financial difficulties facing our nation have translated into some tough times for individuals, families, businesses, and communities in the rural South. Rural communities are seeking innovative, viable strategies that can place them on the path to social and economic vitality in the years ahead.

SRDC Activities: The SRDC provided support and leadership to two complementary efforts that offer local leaders, citizens, and community-based organizations easy access to Web-based products that can guide their economic development activities during this period of major economic uncertainty. In particular, the SRDC:

Created and launched the Strengthening Communities and Economies Web site:

The site serves as a one-stop shop for valuable information on five major topics: (1) In the News highlights articles recently appearing in the media that address current rural economic issues and strategies; (2) About the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 details the core elements of this major federal legislation; (3) Grant Opportunities showcases funding opportunities for communities dealing with economic/financial turmoil; (4) Educational Resources offers valuable guidance on innovative community/economic development strategies that localities may wish to pursue; and (5) Reports and Statistics provides insights on major trends on the financial, housing, employment, economic, broadband, and other related topics of relevance to communities in the South.

Spearheaded the development of the “Community” component of the National Managing in Tough Times Network (MiTTNet) eXtension Web site:

The SRDC worked in close partnership with University of Arkansas Extension Service administrators and Extension Community Development leaders across the nation in the creation of the Managing in Tough Times (MiTT) Web site. The five person Extension CD team – recruited by the SRDC and NIFA – selected the best Extension Web-based educational resources available on the following “MiTTNet Community” topics: (1) Expanding Civic Engagement; (2) Helping Local Government Cope with Change; (3) Improving Local Economies; (4) Strengthening Community Organizations and Services; and (5) Understanding Your Community Today.

The Opportunity: Challenges facing rural people and places in these times of economic distress can serve as an important stimulus for exploring ways to build stronger communities and economies in the rural South. The new SRDC-supported Web sites offer a valuable mechanism for showcasing information and educational products that can guide the development of resilient communities–communities that align with 21st century economic realities and opportunities. Over the next several months, the SRDC will continue to populate the two sites with new information that might prove of value to rural communities in our region.
SERA-37 Supports Extension Efforts to Address the Needs of the Region’s Expanding Latino/Hispanic Population

In spite of a slow economy and tight travel budgets, 86 Extension educators from across the South celebrated the first anniversary of the “SERA-37 The New Hispanic South” team by joining together via interactive video for a day of learning and strategic planning. Among the group’s accomplishments in 2009 was the development of a dedicated Web site, the creation of a resource database, and the piloting of an introductory workshop for Extension educators wishing to enhance their outreach activities to Hispanic/Latino audiences. A SERA-37 committee has worked on the development of an in-country immersion experience designed to simulate the experiences and challenges that immigrants from Central and South America face in the U.S. Targeting Extension educators, this training will be designed to help educators “stand in the shoes” of these immigrants in order to help provide a more empathetic foundation from which to serve this growing population. The SRDC provided administrative, logistical, technical and financial assistance to the SERA-37 group since its inception.

SRDC Prepares Gulf Coast Socioeconomic Dataset and Industrial Clusters for CURIS

In today’s fast-paced world, economic developers, city planners and industry executives must be able to evaluate the socioeconomic characteristics of their counties in a timely fashion. The Center for Urban Rural Interface Studies (CURIS) engaged the SRDC to assess the impact of growth from coastal counties into adjacent rural communities. The SRDC pursued two important initiatives as part of its study. The first was the development of a comprehensive socioeconomic dataset on 52 coastal and adjacent counties and parishes across four Gulf States. Two-page community profiles were designed, generated, and distributed from these data resources. The second effort was a quantitative cluster analysis and the development of maps depicting industrial clusters. Clusters mapped included selected agricultural crops, food processing, ship building, and tourism. The maps provided a valuable way to visualize the placement of industrial clusters within the coastal and adjacent rural counties/parishes. The completed quantitative cluster analysis report highlighted the existence of particular industrial clusters with both horizontal and vertical relationships. CURIS has supplied additional funding for an in-depth cluster study on ship building and its impacts on adjacent rural communities. It is scheduled for completion by summer 2010.

Report to Showcase Best Community Leadership for the 21st Century Practices

Southern land-grant schools have a long history of pursuing community and agricultural leadership development programs whose intent is to spur the growth of the new generation of local, state and national leaders. But, do these Extension-supported leadership efforts work, and do they contribute to the emergence of strong and visionary community leaders over the long term? In FY2009, the SRDC commissioned the preparation of a state-of-the-art report by Dr. Ken Pigg of the University of Missouri. Pigg’s charge was to examine the contemporary literature on community leadership and to delineate the core components that are vital to the delivery of successful and sustainable Extension community leadership development programs. He also was asked to outline the specific strategies that the SRDC should launch to support the community leadership development activities of land-grant institutions in the South. The final report will be released in early 2010.
New Turning the Tide Program Tackles Poverty through Community Action

Most people across America want to live in a community that is vibrant and where their important goals in life can be realized. However, one problem communities often note as holding their community back is poverty. No matter where you live, there is one thing that rings true – the challenges associated with poverty cut across all types of communities. The question is what can we do to turn the tide on poverty in our community?

Over the past year, the SRDC devoted its attention to the development a resource guide to launch the “Turning the Tide on Poverty” initiative. Furthermore, the Center organized a talented team of social scientists to help develop the research protocol and instrumentation that would be critical for tracking and documenting the impact of the program in the target communities. During the Fall of 2009, the SRDC recruited Extension educators in five states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Mississippi) to pilot test the program. These educators worked on recruiting community-based planning teams that will be responsible for organizing and launching a five-week, community-wide dialogue beginning in early 2010. These study circles will devote specific attention to why poverty exists and solutions that are tailored to localities. The study circle process will culminate in a Community Action Forum, a meeting where communities will begin to enact realistic and achievable plans to help families, neighborhoods and individuals move from poverty to prosperity. This important initiative is being supported by a cadre of national partners: Everyday-Democracy, the Farm Foundation, and the Kettering Foundation.

Foundations of Practice Advances Community Development Training of Extension Educators

“How do I find reliable data to guide community decision-making?” “Who in my community is managing the use of resources?” “What strategies are useful in addressing different community development challenges?” These and other questions brought 44 Extension agents from 17 states together for a seven-part series dedicated to strengthening their abilities to examine and respond to community development challenges. With some of the nation’s most experienced community development Extension Specialists at the helm, the series’ participants joined together to pool ideas, discuss challenges and grow together in their understanding and practice of community development. The series – presented through the use of Web-based distance education technology – was designed to provide an introductory understanding of core community development principles and strategies having relevance to Extension educators across all program areas. The hope is that the information, knowledge, and skills that Extension gain will advance their capacity to build and deliver programs that align with the needs of both their clientele and the communities of which they are a part.
Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative Evaluates Local Capacity

The SRDC continues its evaluation research of the Walton Family Foundation’s Delta Geographic Concentration Initiative. Over the past year, Center staff added new variables to its Mid South Delta Data Library, a central source of secondary data on counties and parishes in the Delta region. In addition, they conducted in-depth qualitative studies in key DGCI counties for the purpose of assessing the impacts of community and economic development investments made by groups receiving Walton Family Foundation grants. Finally, countywide surveys in three counties in the Delta were administered for the purpose of capturing public sentiments on a variety of topics, including the current state of the local economy, the quality of local educational systems, and the vitality of the community’s local leadership. Collectively, these evaluation activities were intended to gauge the degree to which the capacity of local residents to act on important local needs and projects is being enhanced.

Know Your Region Training Delivered in Pilot Sites in the South

For many small communities, the ability to create and sustain a thriving economy is getting tougher all the time. Many places are looking at new ways to create and maintain jobs that can offer local residents decent salaries and wages. What they are discovering is that regional economic activities – ones that link local communities and counties together – might make sense for several communities. To help rural community leaders, economic development organizations, and government agency representatives get a better handle on regionalism and industry clusters, the SRDC worked with Extension colleagues in Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee in the sponsoring of three introductory sessions and five workshops on the “Know Your Region” program, a resource developed by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Immigration Reform Conference: Implications for Farmers, Farm Workers and Communities

The SRDC helped support a May 2009 national conference held in Washington D.C. that explored the impacts of immigration on farmers, farm workers, and communities, and the effects of proposed immigration reforms. Conference participants highlighted the spread of legal and unauthorized workers in rural and agricultural areas, the impacts of a growing share of immigrants on the competitiveness of industries, and prospects for immigrants and their children in communities. At least 50 percent of U.S. crop workers have been unauthorized for the past decade, and unauthorized workers are spreading from seasonal jobs on crop farms to year-round jobs in livestock operations, farm-related meat and poultry processing, and nonfarm jobs, especially construction and services.

The consensus was that immigration is the major human resource issue facing many rural and agricultural communities, and there is a spectrum of outcomes, from local communities embracing the diversity and change that accompany newcomers seeking opportunity to rejection of migrants by many local residents. One key to successful integration is the involvement of employers in coordinated efforts to promote migrant integration.
The Challenge: As a result of support from the Economic Research Service/USDA, the SRDC has coordinated important research over the past decade that has been designed to advance our understanding of the role that key socioeconomic forces play in shaping the South’s domestic food and nutrition challenges. Despite these sustained research investments, a number of geographic pockets in the region continue to experience significant difficulties that are likely to have long-term implications for the food and nutritional health of their residents. These include the growing income disparity between wealthy and low-income residents, the accelerated growth of child and adult obesity, and the persistent number of high poverty counties in the region.

SRDC Activities: Over the 1998-2009 period, the SRDC awarded 53 competitive grants to university and center-based researchers across the Southern region and beyond, totaling over $1.3 million. These activities have resulted in a number of scholarly products that have strengthened the scientific literature on food assistance and nutrition issues. Specifically, some 50 journal articles and book chapters have been published and dozens of papers have been presented at professional social sciences-related meetings. Moreover, an expanded cadre of over 100 researchers and graduate students with an active interest in food assistance-related topics has now been created in the region. These individuals have been able to prepare over $11 million in grant applications over the past decade, and have successfully captured about $3.1 million to continue the work seeded through the SRDC/ERS grant program (known as the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics, or RIDGE, program).

Aside from these major achievements since 1998, the Center completed some important activities in 2009, including a revamping of the SRDC RIDGE program Web site that offers users a simpler way to access the rich set of research reports generated by its past grantees and by the Center. Also added to the site was the ERS searchable database that showcases all grants funded by the five university-based centers/ departments that have been part of the ERS RIDGE program since its inception in 1998. Moreover, a new electronic RIDGE Food Assistance and Nutrition Information Series was launched to inform policy, research, and Extension communities of important findings generated from recent SRDC-supported RIDGE projects.

The Opportunity: The challenges facing rural areas today – high adult and child poverty, low household income, economic turmoil, low educational status, geographic remoteness/isolation – have implications on the need for food assistance and nutrition policies and programs that effectively target rural America. In an effort to better understand and respond to these needs, the SRDC will propose to the ERS the creation of the RIDGE Center for Rural Studies, one that will position the SRDC to support innovative research that explores the socioeconomic components of food assistance and nutrition issues as they apply to rural people, households, and/or communities in America.
Cothran Honored as 2009 Bonnie Teater Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

The Southern Rural Development Center was proud to honor Mr. Hank Cothran as the 2009 recipient of the Bonnie Teater Community Development Educator Lifetime Achievement Award. Now retired, Cothran served as Extension Community Resource Development Specialist with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. As a member of the Food and Resource Economics Department at the University of Florida, Cothran has dedicated his career to public policy education, community leadership development, and business retention and expansion. He gained considerable respect as an Extension educator, working at local, regional, national and international levels in advancing community and economic development Extension programming.

LSU AgCenter Extension agents Kay Lynn Tettleton and Cynthia F. Plicher explained that Cothran “personifies the values, enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment that is community development.” From coast to coast, Cothran has reached diverse audiences through his enthusiasm and professionalism. Throughout his years, Cothran has given unselfishly of his time and talents to a variety of professional organizations, serving in key leadership roles from treasurer to president. For his professional investment and commitment to Extension community development work in the Southern region and beyond, it was most fitting to honor Mr. Hank Cothran.

SRDC Reaches Stakeholders and Partners with Newsletters and Social Networking

As technology and communication evolves, the SRDC continues to broaden its communication strategies with its existing newsletters and the addition of social networking.

Newsletters
Each month, the SRDC sends timely information to over 3000 subscribers to its newsletters. Releasing 12 issues a year, Around the South showcases news and opportunities offered by the SRDC, as well as regional and national community and economic development materials relevant to land-grant university faculty and other important partners. Focusing solely on funding opportunities, Grant Connections, published six times over the past year. Collectively, highlighted 34 separate grant opportunities of possible interest to land-grant educators and community development professionals. Targeting e-commerce news and research, eNews boasted six issues, featuring such themes as broadband access, security, and customer service.

Social Networking
A new dimension of the Center’s communications activities in 2009 was joining the millions of micro-bloggers on Twitter and Facebook. Using Twitter to share quick notes about the newsletters, new reports, and upcoming trainings, SRDC tweets enjoy a growing number of followers. During the year, the SRDC has used Facebook to promote upcoming events and initiatives such as The National e-Commerce Extension Initiative and the Foundations of Practice in Community Development.

SR-PLN Convenes in Orlando under the Coordination of the SRDC

In order to further the concept of multi-state and regional Extension programming efforts, the SRDC continues to organize the Southern Region Program Leadership Network’s (SR-PLN) annual conference. Comprised of State Program Leaders from eight different programmatic and professional staff functions, the SR-PLN focuses on collaboration between states within the various disciplines and between the individual Program Committees to address various issues that are common to the region. Other support functions that the SRDC provides for SR-PLN include Web site hosting for reports, plans of work and individual committee rosters; coordination of liaison activities between the SR-PLN and the Administrators/Directors associations; and publishing of various reports developed by the SR-PLN.

Over 25 Presentations by Director and Associate Director

Throughout 2009, the SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu made 12 presentations to groups such as the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors and the Southern Association of Agriculture Experiment Station Directors Joint Meeting, 1890 Land-Grant Entrepreneurial Information Exchange Workshop, and the Rural Communities Initiative Economic Development Roundtable. While Associate Director Alan Barefield made 15 presentations to organizations such as Mississippi Women in Agriculture, EDA Know Your Region, and Business Retention and Expansion.
Web site Stats

Data is for FY2009 (October 1st, 2008 to September 30th, 2009), SRDC staff visits filtered

TOTAL VISITORS TO THE WEB SITE
24,213

TOTAL VISITORS BY MONTH

OCTOBER 10
NOVEMBER 11
DECEMBER 12
JANUARY 01
FEBRUARY 02
MARCH 03
APRIL 04
MAY 05
JUNE 06
JULY 07
AUGUST 08
SEPTEMBER 09

2,017

AVERAGE TIME ON WEB SITE
THREE MINUTES AND FORTY-FIVE SECONDS
00:03:45

PERCENT OF DIRECT TRAFFIC
THIRTY-EIGHT PERCENT
38%

PERCENT OF TOTAL U.S. VISITORS
EIGHTY-SEVEN PERCENT
87%

PERCENT OF TOTAL MISSISSIPPI VISITORS
TWENTY-THREE PERCENT
23%

PERCENT OF TOTAL VISITS TO ONE PAGE
FIFTY-FOUR PERCENT
54%

MOST VISITED SECTION
OTHER THAN THE HOME PAGE
The National e-Commerce Extension Initiative

MOST USED KEYWORD SEARCH
LOWERCASE S, R, D, AND C
srdc
The SRDC enjoyed an increase in funding in FY2009 with a total of $1,501,625 in base and extramural funding (July 2008 thru June 2009). The SRDC wishes to offer its deepest appreciation to the agencies and organizations that invested in the work of the Center over the past year.

**FY09 Base and Extramural Funding Exceeds $1.5 Million**

*extramural*\* $1,189,418  
base $312,197

73.8%\*  
26.2%

The above chart showcases the variety of outreach activities – meetings, conferences, Webinars, and technical trainings – hosted by the SRDC over the past calendar year. Increasing regional and national participation in SRDC sponsored activities the Center presented one Webinar with the SERA-37: The New Hispanic South, four Webinars as part of the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative and nine Webinars as part of the eXtension Entrepreneurs and Their Communities Webinar Series.

**2009 Participants by Region for Meetings, Conferences, Webinars, and Technical Trainings**

- Southern Region: 49.4%
- Western Region: 2.3%
- Northeast Region: 4.1%
- North Central Region: 13.1%
- Unidentified: 31.1%

With extramural funding amounts from 1999-2009, the above chart showcases the funds the SRDC has captured over the past 11 years.

*Fund secured between July - September 2008 ($480,778) are reported as part of last year’s as well as this year’s fiscal year in order to reflect a 12-month reporting period. The SRDC is in the process of changing its fiscal reporting period from the federal (October-September) to the Mississippi State University fiscal year (July-June).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Board of Directors</th>
<th>Technical and Operational Advisory Committee</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lawrence Carter</td>
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SRDC Partners

Association of Extension Administrators
Association of Research Directors
Appalachian Regional Commission
Association of Southern Region Extension Directors
Cherokee Preservation Foundation
Coastal Bend College
Community Development Society
Delta Council
Delta Health Alliance
East Central Mississippi Health Network
Economic Development Administration
Economic Research Service, USDA
Everyday Democracy
Farm Services Agency, USDA
Farm Foundation
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City
   (Oklahoma City Branch)
Foundation for the Mid South
Hired Pen, Inc.
Kettering Foundation
Louisiana Poverty Initiative Team
Louisiana Association of NonProfit Organizations
MDC, Incorporated
Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
   (Mississippi Farm Bureau)
Montgomery Institute
National Association of Community Development
   Extension Professionals
National eXtension Initiative Leadership Team
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship
Rural Development, USDA
Rural Sociological Society
Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment
   Station Directors
Southern Financial Partners
Southern Growth Policies Board
Southern Region Risk Management Education Center,
   Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Southern Rural Sociological Association
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and
   Education Program
Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship
University of Idaho
University of Nebraska-Lincoln (eXtension Initiative)
USDA Rural Development
Walton Family Foundation
West Arete Computing, Inc.
Western Rural Development Center

SRDC 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.

SRDC 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 National Institute of Food and Agriculture, United States
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 United States Department of Agriculture.
Important Web sites

Community Data Center
http://srdc.msstate.edu/datacenter

Entrepreneurs and Their Communities
http://www.extension.org/entrepreneurship

Managing in Tough Times
http://mittnet.extension.org/

The National e-Commerce Extension Initiative
http://srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce

The New Hispanic South (SERA-37)
http://srdc.msstate.edu/opportunities/hispanic_south.html
http://sera37.wordpress.com/

Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE)
http://srdc.msstate.edu/opportunities/ridge/

Southern Rural Development Center Newsletters
http://srdc.msstate.edu/newsletters

Strengthening Communities and Economies
http://srdc.msstate.edu/crisis
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 National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 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.

http://srdc.msstate.edu/