SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

REGIONAL INNOVATIONS

NATIONAL APPLICATIONS

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR
LIONEL J. (BO) BEAULIEU, Director & Professor

When the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) were established in the early 1970s as a result of U.S. Congressional action, the intent was to ensure that each of the four regional centers would promote research and Extension activities that aligned with the unique rural development challenges facing people, institutions and communities in their respective regions. The SRDC has tried to live up to its important regional mission by designing and launching a series of rural development programs over the past 37 years in concert with its Southern land-grant university colleagues and other key partners.

Now at the end of 2011, the SRDC finds itself in a unique position. While continuing to pursue its regional priorities, several recent efforts are now moving up to the national stage in terms of their value to rural America. Our 2011 annual report highlights some of these national efforts. They include:

- The Stronger Economies Together (SET) program, a major project coordinated by the SRDC in partnership with USDA Rural Development and the Center’s three sister RRDCs. SET builds strong working ties among a cluster of contiguous counties (largely rural) for the purpose of discovering and building on the economic comparative advantages of the region. SET is in place in 19 states and 39 regions across the U.S., including sites in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. SET is expected to expand to another five to 10 states in 2012.

- The SRDC’s National e-Commerce Extension Initiative has produced a number of high quality educational resources now being tapped by several land-grant universities engaged in broadband and e-commerce education/adoption activities. States include Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and South Carolina in the South, and a number of other states outside the region, including Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

- While the SRDC’s initial food assistance and nutrition research activities were focused exclusively on the South, thanks to a multi-year award by the Economic Research Service/USDA, the Center has established the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies, a competitive grants program investing in innovative social sciences-based research that explores the food and nutrition assistance challenges facing residents and communities in rural America.

- A report prepared by two SRDC colleagues, Dr. Roberto Gallardo and Dr. Al Myles, examines the economic impact of Social Security in the United States. Their research, funded by the National Academy of Social Insurance and conducted in partnership with the Center for Rural Strategies, offers sound information about the key benefits of Social Security transfer payments to the economic health of many rural counties across the nation. Their report has garnered positive responses on the part of state and federal agency representatives and policymakers.

We encourage you to take a look at our annual report and find out more about these four Extension and research efforts, as well as other key activities in which we have been engaged over the last year. Once you have reviewed the full report, we hope you will agree this year’s theme – Regional Innovations, National Applications – is most apropos.
RIDGE CENTER FOR TARGETED STUDIES @ THE SRDC

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS AND PROGRAM ACTIVITIES UNDERGO EXPANSION

The SRDC’s RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies expanded its geographic focus and added a new funding opportunity over the past year. While historically focused on rural areas of the South, the RIDGE program added the North Central and Western regions as target areas for securing grant proposals from higher education faculty engaged in food assistance-related research. Moreover, a new grant program designed to fund innovative doctoral dissertation research was unveiled in 2011. The SRDC grant program, designed to fund innovative doctoral dissertation research, welcomed proposals from higher education faculty engaged in Western regions as target areas for securing grant funding opportunity over the past year. As in past years, the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies hosted its regular competitive grants program in February 2011 with completed applications due in May. Grant proposals were sought from researchers from land-grant or non-land-grant universities, colleges, research centers/ institutes, or other appropriate research entities located in the North Central, West, and Southern regions of the country. After careful review by a national panel of scholars, the following individuals were each awarded RIDGE Center grants of approximately $15,000:

1. Principal Investigator: Allison DeMarco, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Employment instability and food insecurity of rural North Carolinians during the recession: The goal of this study is to use secondary data from the longitudinal Family Life Project to examine how the economic downturn has impacted parents’ work characteristics in the rural South and how those conditions are related to economic strain, food insecurity and public assistant program participation.

2. Principal Investigator/Co-Principal Investigators: Sonya Jones, Holly Harring and Karen Pendleton, University of South Carolina South Carolina farm-to-school program and children’s and parents’ food choices: This study is evaluating the effects of the farm-to-school program on children’s diets in South Carolina schools and on their interest in consuming fruits and vegetables when at home.

3. Principal Investigator/Co-Principal Investigators: Angela Liese, Sarah Batterby and Bethany Bell, University of South Carolina Identifying food deserts in the rural South: A comparison of food access measures: The overarching aim of this proposal is to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and validity of key measures of access used for the identification of food deserts.

4. Principal Investigator/Co-Principal Investigator: Gayaneh Kyureghian and Rodolfo M. Nayga, Jr., University of Nebraska – Lincoln The food desert: Economic and space remedies: This research relates food choices, the types and amounts of food purchased and consumed, to food access factors and to economic, socio-demographic, and other market factors.

New Doctoral Dissertation Research Grants Program Launched

One new dimension of the RIDGE Center’s activities is the establishment of the doctoral dissertation research competitive grants program, which seeks to invest in doctoral students (in the U.S.) pursuing research in areas that align with the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies priorities. Grants of up to $17,500 are available to support the dissertation research of the successful applicants. The SRDC announced the following as the inaugural recipients of the doctoral dissertation research grants:

1. Michael Burke, University of South Carolina Examining the relationship between the social contexts of meals, diet-quality and eating patterns in food insecure African American households with children: This study aims to investigate the association between the social context of meals in food-insecure African American households and child dietary quality and eating patterns.

2. Kristen Capogrossi, Virginia Tech University An analysis of the relationship between school meal programs, childhood health and academic performance: This research will explore a causal investigation of the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program on the weight of rural and low-income children, as well as the spillover effects of these programs on academic performance of these children.

3. Anthony G. Murray, Virginia Tech University The ‘heat or eat’ dilemma: Energy and food consumption patterns of low-income households: Recent research finds many low-income households face a “heat or eat” dilemma, making the difficult choice between providing sufficient food for their family to eat or paying utility bills to meet their heating and cooling needs. This paper will use an Almost Ideal Demand System to generate own-price, cross-price, and income elasticities for household utilities and food to determine how energy price shocks affect household food insecurity levels.

SRDC RELEASES NEW RIDGE CENTER WEBSITE

Giving the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies a separate presence from the main SRDC web site was a key goal over the past year. After months of work, the SRDC unveiled its new RIDGE site in September. The new web site provides:

• Timely articles and research reports on food assistance and nutrition-related topics
• Grant opportunities available through the RIDGE Center and other agencies, organizations, and institutions
• Information on current and past RIDGE projects funded by the SRDC
• Brief biographical sketches of current RIDGE Center grantees
• A library of reports produced by the RIDGE Center as part of its Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Series

Check out the new RIDGE Center web site at:
http://srdc.msstate.edu/ridge/
The SRDC continued to provide national leadership for Stronger Economies Together (SET), a program that enables communities and counties in rural America to work together on a regional basis to develop an economic development blueprint that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of their region. Eleven new states joined this year in addition to the eight states that participated during its 2010 launch. Some 39 regions will now benefit from the specialized training and technical assistance offered as part of SET.

The second phase of the collaboration involving USDA Rural Development, the nation’s four Regional Rural Development Centers and their land-grant university partners launched in July at a national train-the-trainers workshop in Detroit, Mich.

These new trainers returned to Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire/Vermont, New York, Texas and Washington to deliver the nearly 35 hours of instruction to key regions in their states and guide the development and implementation of practical and viable regional economic development strategies.

The SET training resources include hands-on sessions on building strong regional teams, examining regional demographics, uncovering regional assets and barriers, developing regional vision and goals, drafting a plan of action, and employing tools for monitoring impacts.

Each region receives tailored economic analyses describing its current and emerging economic clusters and its comparative economic advantages. Targeted technical assistance provided by state Extension educators and Rural Development staff helps the teams successfully launch their plans.

In addition to launching Phase II of the SET initiative, the SRDC continues to provide leadership to the support of Phase I regional teams in Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Each of these states has now completed the SET training modules and is working toward finalizing regional plans. The SRDC supplies monthly communication, ongoing support for State Training Teams, regional data and specialized assistance to these teams.

SET, which gives rural areas the chance to compete in the global job market by pooling their resources across county boundaries, also released a new application for Phase III regional teams that will be selected in 2012.

In late 2011, the SRDC, in conjunction with USDA Rural Development, documented its initial successes in the Phase I regions in a first-year accomplishment report. Benchmarks of success fall within these themes:

- **Training:** SET has developed a high quality, highly interactive training program and delivery system to guide the formation and effective functioning of regional teams.
- **Regional teams:** SET has guided the establishment of inclusive regional teams, facilitating the transition from local competition to collaboration.
- **Economic strengths:** SET has empowered teams to discover and plan for investment in their regional economic assets.
- **Vision and goals:** SET has fostered the development of a thoughtful regional vision and sound goals.
- **Regional strategies:** SET has guided the development of regional strategies, generating early successes.
- **RD-CES partnerships:** SET has strengthened the relationship between USDA Rural Development and the Cooperative Extension Service at the state level.
- **Staff capacity:** SET has enhanced the economic development knowledge and capacity of Rural Development and Cooperative Extension Service staff at the state level.
- **Outside attention:** SET has attracted attention and investments by federal and state agencies, foundations, land-grant universities, and others.

The full Year 1 report is available at: http://srdc.msstate.edu/set
In early 2011, citizens from all across the Southern Region added their voices to a national initiative exploring “Economic Security: How Should We Take Charge of Our Future?” In partnership with the National Issues Forum, Extension agents across 10 states within the SRDC’s region hosted 26 forums with more than 300 participants. During these three-hour forums, citizens from all walks of life gathered to explore potential approaches to economic security as framed in the NIF issue guide. By the end of March, the Southern participants composed almost 40 percent of the citizens engaged across the nation in this important discussion. Three potential approaches were explored through these sessions:

- Act more responsibly with our money
- Look out for others
- Grow our way out

As citizens engaged in thoughtful discussion on the potential benefits and tradeoffs to these three approaches, a number of themes surfaced. During a jointly hosted webinar with NIF representative Larkin Dudley and SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu, several highlights from these discussions were presented. More than 86 percent of the nation’s responses and 91 percent in the South indicated even stronger support for the concept of “buy American” was believed to be very important to 57 percent of participants across the nation, with the South indicating even stronger support at 67 percent.

The South looks forward to blending its voices with those of other Americans in 2012 as the NIF facilitates a national discussion on “A Nation in Debt: How Can We Pay the Bills?”

SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu was appointed to a three-year term on the National Issues Forums Institute Board of Directors. The nonpartisan organization promotes the National Issues Forums, an effort supporting the development and use of issue books and other materials that spur serious public deliberation on major issues that Americans face nationally and locally. Beaulieu’s selection to the NIFI board was announced by Dr. David Mathews, Kettering Foundation president and NIFI Chair.

One of four research reports guiding the new plan, “Embracing Our Strengths: A Report of the Blueprint Mississippi 2011 Community Life Research Team,” is a 123-page report that carefully analyzes the various dimensions that contribute to the vitality of Mississippi communities. Rather than focusing on the longstanding socioeconomic challenges facing the state, the report presents a framework, a set of procedures, and findings that focus on the assets and strengths of communities across the state. As such, the approach provides a more fruitful way to determine the types of smart investments that Mississippi communities must make to help place themselves on the path to long term sustainability.

SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu, appointed by research leaders of Mississippi’s four major universities to serve as chair of the Community Life Research Team, coordinated the work of a five-member team from Mississippi State University, the University of Mississippi, Jackson State University and the University of Southern Mississippi. The state’s blueprint effort aims to create a new economic development strategic plan that provides an opportunity for continuous and significant improvements in the standard of living across all regions of Mississippi.

SERA-37 (Southern Extension Research Activity), which focuses on the New Hispanic South, completed a domestic immersion Latino cultural competency program consisting of three phases: distance education, eight-day immersion experience in the North Carolina Latino community and an applied project in the home state. SERA-37 secretary Roberto Gallardo, SRDC research associate, reported participants from 10 southern states, as well as 22 community partners, participated in this domestic immersion project. As a result of the immersion, preliminary project plans developed:

- Mississippi Extension agents will conduct a needs assessment of farm workers and farmers.

Georgia Extension agents are establishing community gardens with Latino families through connections with a local faith community.

North Carolina Extension agents are involving Latino youth in 4-H, as well as engaging the Latino community as vendors and customers in the local farmers market through a multi-cultural day. They are also providing energy savings/personal budgeting classes for Latino families and are developing a safety and health promotion program.

Alabama Extension agents will offer a work readiness and health fair with Latino audiences.

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- Georgia Extension agents are establishing community gardens with Latino families through connections with a local faith community.

- North Carolina Extension agents are involving Latino youth in 4-H, as well as engaging the Latino community as vendors and customers in the local farmers market through a multi-cultural day. They are also providing energy savings/personal budgeting classes for Latino families and are developing a safety and health promotion program.

ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR THE FUTURE

ENCOURAGES EXTENSION PROJECTS

BLUEPRINT MISSISSIPPI 2011
Updated Curriculum Products

A pair of new learning modules is now available through the National E-Commerce Extension Initiative, with plans to release an additional three new or revised modules in the coming months. The national e-commerce effort has served as a core part of the SRDC’s educational outreach investments since 2003.

“Connecting Communities”

This curriculum resource is intended to help rural communities connect with the world through the Internet, an infrastructure resource that is vital to rural community prosperity. Initially developed by William Shafferstall, Sheila Sager, Rae Montgomery and Dana Noonan, this guide is designed to enhance the use and adoption of information technology tools and infrastructure in rural communities.

The curriculum was recently updated by Shafferstall (Penn State University), Monica Babine (Washington State University), and Andrew Lewis (University of Wisconsin). Cooperative Extension educators and community leaders can use this guide to improve:

- The availability of access to broadband connectivity across the community.
- The ability of organizations in the community to use digital technology to achieve their mission and goals; and
- The capacity of individuals in the community to use digital technology to improve their social and economic well-being.

Andrew Lewis, community and economic development manager for the University of Wisconsin Extension Office of Broadband Sustainability, recently delivered the “Connecting Communities” module in five broadband adoption demonstration communities and 14 learning sites. In addition, numerous people have watched the archived version of Lewis’ live webinar.

“Direct Marketing Food Specialty Products”

An updated, dynamic version of the “Direct Marketing Food Specialty Products” learning module was also added to the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative Learning Center.

The curriculum, revised by Connie Hancock, Jay Jenkins, and Jennifer Nixon, University of Nebraska Extension; and Glenes Muske, North Dakota State University Extension, hopes to increase the number of food producers implementing one or more online marketing strategies. The new ZMag format engages shop owners who would like to sell directly to the consumer, with interactive content such as videos, interesting links and a host of additional resources.

MINI-GRANTS

The SRDC, in partnership with the National e-Commerce Advisory Committee, awarded three e-commerce mini-grants and one full-fledged grant in 2011.

Dr. Carol Centrello from Auburn University received a mini-grant to implement the curricula “Electronic Retailing: Selling on the Internet” within small businesses in Alabama’s Black Belt region.

Judy Chambers from Pennsylvania State University Extension Service received mini-grant funds to implement the “Connecting Communities” curricula in an effort to launch a broadband initiative in Adams County, Penn.

Dr. Paul Lachapelle was funded to implement both “A Beginner’s Guide to e-Commerce: Easy Tools for Profit” and “Electronic Retailing: Selling on the Internet” in three remote Montana counties. The counties, as part of their economic development strategic plans, determined that integration of e-commerce and utilization of broadband will help increase job creation and business retention activities in these regions.

Debra Kuntor, University of Maine Extension educator, was awarded a curriculum development grant to create and implement a “Connecting Kids to e-Commerce” resource product. When completed, her web-based curriculum will include seven chapters focusing on entrepreneurship and marketing.

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

During the more than eight years the SRDC has provided leadership to the National E-Commerce Extension Initiative, several educational resources designed to support the e-commerce efforts of Extension educators across the nation have been produced. To take stock of the initiative’s impact, the Center awarded a competitive grant to evaluation experts from the University of Florida to launch an independent assessment. Headed by Dr. Glenn Israel and Dr. Alexa Lamm, the evaluation team is reaching out to the readership of e-News (the bi-monthly newsletter published by the Center addressing e-commerce/broadband topics), e-commerce grant recipients, and individuals who have adopted one or more of the programs’ training resources. Findings from the external evaluation team will be released in 2012.

NEW RESOURCES ADDED TO THE NATIONAL EXTENSION WEBSITE

Thanks to the work of two of its graduate research assistants, Stephanie Pink and Roseanne Scammahorn, the SRDC compiled an impressive list of policies and programs designed to support entrepreneurial activities in all 50 states. The information, which is being incorporated as part of the National eXtension Entrepreneurs and Their Communities website, offers information on starting a business in the specific state, available tax incentives and tax credits, loans and financial assistance programs (including venture capital and angel investment options), entrepreneurship and incubator services, microenterprise development programs, green business assistance programs, support for certified minority and women-owned business enterprises, youth entrepreneurship training programs, entrepreneur friendly communities initiatives, and more.

In addition, the SRDC worked closely with the eXtension entrepreneurship team to help organize the national webinar series sponsored by Entrepreneurs and Their Communities over the past year. The webinar series continues to be one of the most visible and effective strategies employed by the eXtension team to deliver timely educational programs to stakeholders and Extension educators across the nation on promising entrepreneurship-related programs and strategies. Topics presented in 2011 include:

- January: Creating Valuable Content that Converts

- February: Getting Down to Business with Social Media

- March: You are Here!

- April: Targeting Regional Economic Development in a World of Clusters

- May: Community Business Matching

- June: Economic Development by the Numbers: Selected Tools and Databases for Economic Development

- September: Building the Case for Entrepreneurship in a Jobless Recovery

- October: Being Prepared: Is Your Business Prepared to Survive a Disaster?

- November: The 1099 Economy

- December: Preparing to Transfer Your Family Enterprise: How, Why, When and to Whom?
E-BEAT INITIATIVE LAUNCHED TO ENCOURAGE BROADBAND ADOPTION

A new broadband initiative launched by the SRDC and Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU ES) is designed to promote broadband adoption and applications on the part of Mississippians. The initiative is part of a recent effort by the Governor of Mississippi to make broadband connectivity a priority for the state. He has done so via the creation of the Mississippi Broadband Connect Coalition (MBCC). The MBCC recently unveiled its comprehensive statewide plan, a series of strategies intended to accelerate the availability of broadband and improve digital literacy among Mississippians.

Given a central role in the MBCC plan is the work of the MSU ES and the SRDC, a partnership that has helped create the Extension Broadband Education and Adoption Team, called e-BEAT. The e-BEAT, which officially launched in July 2011, is made up of state and regionally-based Extension broadband educators that are now targeting educational programs and planning assistance activities to underserved municipalities, small businesses, entrepreneurs, and households in the state.

In an effort to develop a more comprehensive understanding of broadband use in Mississippi, the SRDC designed and implemented, with the help of the MSU-based Social Sciences Research Center, a statewide broadband survey of more than 2,400 Mississippi households. The study was intended to develop a profile of broadband users and non-users in the state and to identify factors impeding the adoption of broadband by households, local governments, businesses, and others across the state. The SRDC has now launched the Mississippi Broadband Quick Facts information series to showcase major findings from the broadband study. Three issues of the series were published in 2011.

The MSU ES/SRDC project is supported by a grant from the Office of the Governor and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. The three-and-a-half-years grant was made possible by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

MISSISSIPPI’S BROADBAND DATA AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

SRDC ORGANIZES NATIONAL BROADBAND EXTENSION & PARTNERS TEAM

As a result of 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 organized and hosted the inaugural meeting of the national Broadband Extension and Partners Team on Dec. 12-14, 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.

As a result of the meeting, the broadband team is working 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 is building a common core of evaluation metrics and plans to pursue multi-state applied research activities on broadband penetration and adoption in rural America.
Catastrophic weather in recent years has brought to light the unique challenges rural places face in the wake of a disaster. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita began to surface this concern, and spring 2011 storms continued to raise awareness of just how difficult disaster planning and responses can be in rural communities.

Working in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the SRDC is coordinating a national initiative to enhance the capacity of rural communities to develop sound operational plans. Based on FEMA’s Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101, the Center has coordinated the development of the companion ReadyCommunity Guide, which offers a step-by-step process for involving residents in the preparation and implementation of a locally-vetted emergency plan. In particular, ReadyCommunity:

- Provides a process to guide the work of local communities
- Is facilitated by a neutral coach
- Fosters broad civic participation to ensure buy-in from local residents and organizations
- Creates links to needed assets and resources within the community
- Supplies current data to help guide the planning process

Following a three-day training session organized and hosted by the SRDC in Nashville, Tenn., communities in Montana, Oklahoma and Texas plan to test the new materials in 2012.

The SRDC’s Roberto Gallardo and Al Myles, in partnership with the Mississippi Delta Developers Association, implemented a survey in 18 counties in the state’s Delta region to provide updated information to both regional economic developers and industries regarding the wages and benefits of specific occupations in its industries. Human resources managers in manufacturing and food processing industries were the main targets for collecting this crucial information to help in recruiting new industries. The survey is ongoing, and preliminary results should be available spring of 2012.

The Southern Rural Development Center in May 2011 coordinated a multi-state disaster recovery workshop to help ready Extension agents to meet the emotional needs of regional residents hard hit by spring tornadoes and flooding.

The Triumph Over Tragedy workshop brought together agents from Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Missouri under the guidance of Dr. Brenda A. Wiens, University of Florida clinical assistant professor and licensed psychologist and major architect of the Triumph Over Tragedy resources.

The training was part of the SRDC’s rapid response to local disaster situations that happened in our region throughout the spring. The goals included reducing stress in the wake of recent weather, while encouraging readiness in the region before another disaster strikes.

Wiens, who led a similar workshop at Mississippi State University following Hurricane Katrina, noted that some of the same states were represented this time, while new states also participated.

“No area of the country can avoid disasters, whether tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, blizzards or other tragedies that result in the loss of life and property. This training is applicable to everyone as we seek to address people’s emotional needs in addition to their physical needs,” Wiens said.

Many participants said the most important skill they took away from the interactive workshop was how to implement supportive communication strategies, especially with adults, children, and first responders dealing with the stress caused by natural disasters. The training will help these participants guide other Extension personnel in working with residents dealing with stress issues that result from a variety of disaster situations.
TuRNiNG ThE TiDE ON pOvERTy TO impROvE ThEiR COmmuNiTiES

Thanks to the Southern Rural Development Center’s Turning the Tide on Poverty initiative, rural counties across the South have opened the lines of communication engaged residents who had not previously been involved in the community, and achieved community and economic development goals in 2011.

Tide seeks to involve a wide range of community members in seeking a “place-based” solution to poverty, grounded in local talents and concerns and led by local voices. In the summer of 2011, the SRDC and Tide partners returned to the seven communities that piloted Tide to explore how the initiative had changed the local landscape. The discoveries are encouraging.

ALABAMA
Dallas County is giving new life to an abandoned football field. Concerned that local low-income residents lack a safe, accessible place to exercise, the Tide Action Team is working with the local school board to convert the old football field into a community walking track. An added bonus is the new farmers’ market taking shape in the former concession stand. In neighboring Perry County, Uniontown residents have enhanced community pride by transforming the downtown area with inviting flowers and bright community banners. Finally, learning from their neighbors, citizens in nearby Selma are adopting the Tide process to address concerns for youth violence. As the discussion phase of this process ends, seeing the action steps that follow is sure to be rewarding. For these adjacent counties in the state’s rural, underserved Black Belt region, engaged citizens are making a difference working with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

MISSISSIPPI
Lauderdale County residents are working to tackle the multi-faceted problem of poverty from a number of directions. One project, “Plant a Tree and Curb Poverty,” addresses the need for low-cost, healthy food, while fostering civic involvement among youth. School age children are working throughout the community to plant fruit and nut bearing trees that will help provide nourishment in the years to come. While the trees set in roots for the future, so also are the children providing nourishment in the years to come. While the trees set in roots for the future, so also are the children working together to improve local public education.

Residents in Neshoba County, one of the most active pilot sites, have proposed and followed through at the community and county levels with projects related to community outreach, education, food provisions, public policy and more. Area Extension Agent Karen Benson, who has watched Neshoba County’s numerous Tide projects transform from ideas on a chart to clothes on people’s backs and food on their tables, said, “Tide allows us to bring people together and better utilize our community resources to fight poverty in our own backyard.”

LOUISIANA
Tensas Parish has the distinction of being the only youth-led pilot site. While only teenagers, these young citizens embraced leadership roles and spurred civic cooperation in their community. These bold young people are learning early the importance of recognizing community problems and working together to make positive changes in their hometown. Across the state in St. Landry Parish, residents are capitalizing on a developing tourism niche to foster job growth. Work is well underway to develop a community-owned and operated nursery specializing in native plants. This approach richly complements the parish’s other efforts to promote tourism, bringing in outside income and visitors to support local economic growth.

OKLAHOMA
Focusing the Tide initiative in Okfuskee County, one of Oklahoma’s poorest, allowed residents not only to achieve individual goals for their communities but also to work for the good of the county as a whole. The town of Clearview, for example, sought and received a Wichita OnLine Grant that will soon provide the community with wireless broadband access, more public access computers and new jobs. Neighboring Wilbertha used Tide as a catalyst for community healing following the tragic deaths of two young girls through violence and six residents by fire. With a new town slogan, “Tide pride – We’ll thrive,” in place, the town inaugurated Pride Day to promote tourism, generate a venue for crafts vendors and bring the community closer. These first steps will lead to even greater successes in the future.

With each of these first year sites, the SRDC is pleased Tide has proven to be more than a one-time project, but instead, it has become a vehicle through which these communities continue to grow. Bringing people together in the community seems to generate a renewed sense of unity to drive future efforts.

Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina and Virginia launched Tide sites during 2011 through a grant from the Farm Foundation and with the ongoing support of Everyday Democracy. Plans are also in place to launch Tide in four new counties in Mississippi during the early months of 2012, thanks to a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. In addition, 2012 will see a culmination of a two-year research project, pursued as a collaborative learning agreement with the Kettering Foundation. The research is intended to develop a deeper understanding of whether citizens’ engagement in dialogue and deliberation activities spurs a growth in their civic activeness, and whether involvement in the Tide project ultimately serves to improve conditions for those in the community who are poor.

TIDE RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARDS FROM EXTENSION ORGANIZATIONS

The SRDC’s Turning the Tide on Poverty initiative was recognized at the 2011 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals conference held in Charleston, S.C., for its success in improving poverty issues for economically-distressed rural communities.

The team of Research and Extension agents from Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and South Carolina who spearheaded the Tide project received the “Excellence in Community Development Work Team Award” for the Southern Region. This award-winning initiative is made possible by the support and involvement of key national partners, including Everyday Democracy, the Farm Foundation and the Kettering Foundation.

Turning the Tide on Poverty was also honored as a recipient of the “Diversity Certificate” for the Southern Region at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences conference, held September 2011, in Albuquerque, N.M. Mississippi State University Extension Service team members Susan Cosgrove, Karen Benson and Bobbie Shaffett joined the SRDC’s Rachel Welborn in showcasing how Tide helps foster diversity in its targeted communities.
The SRDC in fall 2011 published the “Economic Impact of Social Security in the United States” technical report, prepared by Roberto Gallardo and Al Myles. This explanatory study focuses on the role Social Security, particularly Old Age Survivor Disability Insurance (OASDI), benefits play in the national economy. They found that Social Security benefits provide a stable source of income for communities in which the recipients live and spend their benefit checks.

To better understand the impact of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic impact analysis, utilizing data from the Social Security Administration and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Both of these items are explained in detail within the report.

This project, funded by the National Academy of Social Insurance, was conducted in partnership with the Center for Rural Strategies in Whitesburg, Ky. Results of the study produced county-level news releases that were provided to every local media outlet in the nation. Full results for all counties and states are available on a newly created data page on the SRDC site at http://srdc.msstate.edu/socialsecurity.

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MSU LEADER HONORED WITH EXTENSION AWARD

Bo Beaulieu received the 2011 Excellence in Extension award for his significant accomplishments as the director of the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University. The award from the Southern Rural Sociological Association serves to recognize the contributions of members in extending the work of rural sociology in the southern United States.

“A fundamental interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South,” said Tom Gray of OASDI, the team calculated a social security dependency index and conducted a nationwide economic interest of the SRSA is social justice, as seen through various disciplinary lenses and approaches, with a focus on the South.”

“We believe this focus to be particularly appropriate and poingnant, given the socioeconomic context of the region and the various legacies left in a history of oppression. Dr. Beaulieu’s dedicated work at the Southern Rural Development Center and Mississippi State exemplifies these commitments.” Beaulieu, who has served a SRDC director since 1997, earned his master’s and doctoral degrees from Purdue University. He has received several awards, including the RIDGE Summit Award for Outstanding Leadership and Contribution from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service.

The SRDC honored Alison Davis, University of Kentucky, and Brian Whitacre, Oklahoma State University, with the 2011 Bonnie Teater Community Development Early Career Achievement Award.

Davis, professor and Extension specialist for UK’s Department of Agricultural Economics, was recognized for her impressive array of Extension-related programs and publications. As director of Community and Economic Development Initiative for Kentucky (CEDIK), Davis launched the National Issues Forum on economic security and the SET initiative in Kentucky.

In an effort to respond to the needs of Oklahomans, Whitacre, an OSU Extension faculty member in the Department of Agricultural Economics, has developed innovative Extension programs that focus on strengthening broadband and e-commerce strategies and advancing community health care.

With less than 10 years in the Extension Community Development area, both Davis and Whitacre have demonstrated exemplary service and leadership. They have achieved significant success in designing and implementing cutting-edge community and economic development programs in their states and beyond. As such, both are worthy recipients of the Teater Award.

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The SRDC, from July 1, 2010, to June 30, 2011, brought in a record amount of funding at $2,988,797.65, including the largest amount of extramural funding in the Center’s 37-year history. The SRDC thanks the various organizations, agencies and foundations that invest in the Center’s work.

Showcasing the extramural funding amounts from 2000-2011, the above chart highlights the funds the SRDC has garnered over the past 12 years.

*Funds secured between July - September 2008 ($480,779) are reported as part of 2008 as well as part of 2009 in order to reflect a 12-month reporting period. During FY09, the SRDC was in the process of changing its fiscal reporting year from the federal (October - September) to the Mississippi State University fiscal year (July-June).
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 PRIORITIES

FOSTERING CIVIC-MINDED COMMUNITIES

Southerners want to have a meaningful voice in shaping the direction of their communities, but many have a tough time finding the right avenue for weighing in on important local matters. In response, the SRDC builds a stronger knowledge base and designs innovative programs that seek to strengthen the civic health of communities across the region.

BUILDING ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Global forces have brought major economic changes to the rural South. As a result, the traditional drivers of many rural economies are in flux. To survive, rural economies must be diversified. The SRDC helps with long-term sustainability by finding the right mix of strategies to build on the important strengths and assets of rural communities.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISTRESSED AND LOW-WEALTH COMMUNITIES

The rural South faces a variety of economic and social challenges including high poverty rates, obesity and low educational attainment. Moreover, the South continues to experience a variety of natural disasters. The SRDC works to create a better tomorrow for these vulnerable communities and people.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Bo Beaulieu and Rachel Welborn together edited the SRDC’s Stronger Economies Together: Strategies for Building New Economic Opportunities curriculum. This publication, which will be used across the nation, is the product of two Cooperative Agreements with USDA Rural Development. In addition, the pair prepared SET’s first year Report of Accomplishments: October 2010 - September 2011.

Roberto Gallardo and Al Myles authored The Economic Impact of Social Security in the United States: Technical Report, in partnership with the Center for Rural Strategies and funded by the National Academy of Social Sciences. Targeted data from their study was released to every county in the nation.

Beaulieu and Welborn also authored the Phase II accomplishment report for the Turning the Tide on Poverty Extension Initiative: Helping Communities in the Rural South Tackle Poverty Using Deliberative Democracy Strategies.

Beaulieu also served as chairman of the committee that produced Embracing Our Strengths: A Report of the Blueprint Mississippi 2011 Community Life Research Team, which will help shape the state’s economic development strategies.

Roberto Gallardo in 2011 contributed 12 articles to the rural news website the Daily Yonder. His data-driven articles focus on rural unemployment, rural counties’ dependence on Social Security and rural broadband adoption.

The SRDC also continued publication of three electronic newsletters tailored to our partners’ needs. Around the South! distributed monthly, provides timely information on Center activities and relevant regional and national economic and community development news. eNews, which supports the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative, and Grant Connections, which provides funding opportunities aligning with the work of our constituents, are both delivered bimonthly.

PRESENTATIONS

SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu made 26 presentations in 2011 at numerous meetings, conferences, trainings and webinars, including the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals, the Farm Foundation National Press Club-Workshop, the Rural Education Summit, the Joint Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society and Community Development Society, the Economic Research Service Annual RIDGE Conference, the Mississippi Broadband Connect Coalition, the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, the Joint Meeting of the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors and the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors, and the Wealth Creation and Rural Livelihoods Conference.

Roberto Gallardo, research associate, made three presentations at the Delta Bridge Project steering committee meeting, Miss-Lou Tourism Summit and the Southeast Conference on Public Administration.

Interim Associate Director Al Myles presented at six meetings with topics including Stronger Economies Together, National Issues Forum on economic security, community development, tourism and special events spending, and Mississippi’s farmers markets.

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COMMUNITY DATA CENTER
srdc.msstate.edu/data/center/

SRERA-37: THE NEW HISPANIC SOUTH
srdc.msstate.edu/sera37/

THE DAILY YONDER
www.dailyyonder.com/

SRDC SOCIAL SECURITY STUDY
srdc.msstate.edu/socialsecurity/

EXTENSION BROADBAND EDUCATION & ADOPTION TEAM
srdc.msstate.edu/ebeat/

SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER
srdc.msstate.edu/

FOUNDATIONS OF PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
srdc.msstate.edu/fop/

SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER NEWSLETTERS
srdc.msstate.edu/newsletters/ats/

NATIONAL E-COMMERCE EXTENSION INITIATIVE
srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce/

STRONGER ECONOMIES TOGETHER (SET)
srdc.msstate.edu/set/

RIDGE CENTER FOR TARGETED STUDIES & THE SRDC
srdc.msstate.edu/ridge/

TURNING THE TIDE ON POVERTY
srdc.msstate.edu/tide/
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.