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With the 2012 national, state and local elections now behind us, we thought it would be an opportune time to showcase some of the important work the Southern Rural Development Center has spearheaded over the past year that helps promote citizen engagement. While we know from research that an active citizenry is vital to the long-term vitality of a community, finding avenues to promote citizen involvement is not always easy. That is why the SRDC staff, in close collaboration with its land-grant university (LGU) and non-LGU partners, has devoted so much time and energy trying to broaden the voices of the people who are working together to make life better for their communities and regions. It is fitting that our 2012 annual report is titled, “Investing in Citizen Participation: Building Solutions Together.”

Hopefully, you will take time to peruse the many programs the Center has pursued over the past calendar year. In particular, check out the following three major efforts that align with the theme of this year’s report:

- **Turning the Tide on Poverty:** It never ceases to amaze me how local people have embraced the central tenets of this project and have – with limited resources – launched a diversity of programs intended to improve living conditions for those who are impoverished or facing economic uncertainties. Several of the projects Tide participants have launched are noted in our report. Check out the important findings from our LGU-based research team who has been tracking the “Tide” effort for many months. The results to date offer food for thought on some of the core factors that promote civic engagement.

- **Stronger Economies Together (SET):** With two phases of SET nearly completed, we have been able to document the surge in participation that has been realized as a result of the training and technical assistance provided as part of this initiative. Not only has SET increased overall participation by about 300 percent in both Phases I and II, it has expanded the breadth of people and organizations giving shape to their region’s economic development plan.

- **ReadyCommunity:** Our newest project is in its pilot phase in seven states. By design, ReadyCommunity seeks to mobilize a representative group of local people and organizations to work together in developing and implementing a disaster preparedness plan for their communities. Already, we are receiving feedback from local leaders and residents about the critical steps being taken to create more disaster resilient places as a result of the ReadyCommunity program. We expect this program to be an asset to the countless communities across the nation that are working hard to prepare for, respond to, and rebound from a variety of natural disasters.

Of course, there are many other programs highlighted in this report that reflect the SRDC’s ongoing commitment to engage residents in the life of their communities. As always, the successes of the Center rest on the many talented LGU colleagues across the South and nation who have joined us in pursuing applied research and Extension outreach activities that are of value to local people and places. Furthermore, we cannot say thank you enough for the variety of federal and state government agencies, universities, and key foundations that have provided the financial resources needed to help support the work of the Center. On behalf of the SRDC staff, I want to wish you a happy and prosperous 2013.

Bo Beaulieu
Priority One:

*Fostering Civic-Minded Communities*
Persistent poverty is one of the South’s most challenging issues needing many voices and hands engaged in creative solutions. Millions of dollars and hours have been invested to seek inspired, sustainable paths out of poverty.

While no single strategy or viewpoint will completely eradicate the problem, encouraging progress has been made through the combined insights of citizens engaged in thoughtful dialogue, decision-making, and action. Under the banner of the Turning the Tide on Poverty initiative, residents across 15 counties in the South have taken meaningful steps toward place-based solutions.

Eager to learn from these community experiences, the SRDC, in partnership with the Kettering Foundation, designed a tandem research process to identify key characteristics of successful dialogue-to-action processes, focusing on three levels of the system: 1) individual characteristics, 2) community characteristics, and 3) Cooperative Extension Service (CES) characteristics. These specific layers of analysis provided a wealth of information on what works and what hinders community dialogue progress. Three key conclusions and associated recommendations have surfaced that can provide insights for those interested in involving citizens in meaningful dialogue. Each of these has implications for communities, individuals, and CES.
A diverse population seems willing to join in civic dialogue related to community issues. However, addressing deeply rooted racial divides may be essential in order to foster participation among individuals of varying cultures, experiences and perspectives. At the same time, involvement in Tide has helped strengthen the nature and level of dialogue among those with limited history of speaking with one another in the past. Likewise, many individuals feel intimidated by providing input at formal public settings such as board meetings and large town hall meetings.

What should we do?

Communities:
Offer a wide range of opportunities for community members to talk in non-threatening ways. Keep in mind that small, informal groups tend to be more comfortable settings than the formal public meetings that communities typically use. Seek to intentionally address barriers that may exist among various groups.

Individuals:
Taking time to be involved in community activities, such as civic dialogues, may strengthen the level of connectivity and trust that individuals have with one another in the community. Stronger bonds among individuals that make up the community contribute to a stronger community.

CES:
In light of the CES commitment to reaching a wide array of people, organizations, and communities, committing time, energy, and resources to advancing civic discourse and action can help Extension reach new audiences in ways that align with its mission. While the time commitment may exceed that of a more traditional educational approach, the long-term benefits may well surpass the investment as new partnerships and connections pave the way for new opportunities to reach new audiences.
The presence of a local champion seems vital to the initiation and sustainability of both dialogue and community action. This may also be closely linked to the correlation between civic involvement on the individual level and the presence of leadership training opportunities within the community that was noted during the research phase of this project.

What should we do?

Communities:
Offer community leadership opportunities and make them available to a variety of citizens. Ensure that these opportunities are accessible to all members of the community. Encourage civic participation through community events and other avenues that are likely to appeal to a broad range of citizens.

Individuals:
Be willing to be the champion. While it may seem intimidating, the enthusiasm that you, as a citizen, express may make the difference in the success of the important work in your community. It is citizens that generate enthusiasm in a community. Elected officials cannot work alone. They need you.

CES:
Some communities need someone with vision to show them the possibilities. While helping people understand the value of civic engagement may be challenging at first, the hard work is well worth the results as more people take up the charge to get involved. It is important to invest time in helping citizens catch the vision.

Investments in civic engagement often translate into increases in citizen participation, innovative partnerships, and new collaborations on important local issues. As citizens begin to find their voices and feel valued with local leadership, they become more willing to invest in the work of the community. Likewise, strengthening connections among organization within the community leads to better uses of resources and creative solutions.

What should we do?

Communities:
Communicate and demonstrate a willingness to include citizens as community partners in matters of common concern. Rely less on the formal, traditional “city hall” settings for discussion of challenging local issues, as many see these as intimidating. Rather, create less formal avenues for engaging in civic discourse, ones that allow individuals to feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts. Consider taking informal sessions to people in different segments of the community rather than expecting them to come to you.

Individuals:
Simply put, join in. Invest the time to be a part of an opportunity to address a concern in your community. If you do not know where to start, begin by contacting local leadership and community organizations such as your local government and the CES in your community.

CES:
Investing in civic engagement expands the opportunity for CES to link to new audiences and partnerships, linkages that are vital to the success of CES. While the amount of time invested in promoting civic engagement may be much higher than the more traditional programming roles played by Extension educators, the resulting leveraging of people and resources that occurs may be vital to sustaining CES during these lean economic times. Likewise, learning to tell the success stories in clear, effective terms may also help generate or sustain support for this promising work.

The SRDC is grateful for the many organizations and individuals that have already contributed to Turning the Tide on Poverty. This, in and of itself, is a testimony to the tremendous value in bringing many voices together to seek positive solutions.

Read the full report to the Kettering Foundation: http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/files/turning_the_tide_on_poverty_report_2011_final.pdf

Read more about Turning the Tide on Poverty: http://srdc.msstate.edu/tide/
The topic of climate variability has come to be viewed as highly controversial and subject to considerable polarization of individuals and groups, preventing meaningful discussion and learning from taking place. Much debate and disagreement has resulted in confusion, closed doors, and alienation of groups and individuals. Despite the divisive nature of this subject, finding a way to discuss climate variability in a meaningful and fruitful manner is critical.

Given the SRDC’s interest in fostering civic-minded communities, it welcomed the opportunity to join forces in examining the climate variability issue with the Climate Literacy Partnership of the Southeast (CLiPSE), which included a broad mix of scientists and practitioners spanning a wide range of disciplines and interests.

CLiPSE began to take a hard look at the divergent perspectives on global climate. In brief, the team discovered that concerns on this topic were most pronounced among five stakeholder groups: (1) agriculture, (2) K-16 educators, (3) faith-based organizations, (4) environmentalists, and (5) climate scientists. Given each group’s unique concerns and interests, finding common ground would be an uphill battle.

Over the course of several months, the SRDC met with CLiPSE colleagues and key stakeholder groups in hopes of accurately capturing their concerns with the issue. From those focused group discussions, a plan rose to foster cross-discipline conversations. In a pilot setting, individuals representing each of the stakeholder groups were invited to an evening of dinner and dialogue. The two-hour event explored core issues of how communication was taking place among and between the groups and how progress might be made in the future toward working more closely on common goals. An encouraging note from these participants is that, on average, they reported an increased comfort in sharing their views as the dialogue progressed. In fact, nearly all welcomed the opportunity to take part in future deliberative sessions on this topic.

Did the group find any common ground?

One promising perspective emerging from the discussions is a shared interest in caring for the earth. Whether a farmer dependent on the land for livelihood, a climate scientist concerned about use of fossil fuels, or a faith-based leader viewing the earth as a product of the Creator, all share a mutual interest in preserving and protecting this planet. This common ground may well serve as the platform from which to work as the discussion of this important topic progresses.

Dialogue Goal: To create a safe environment and process in which individuals with strongly held positions within the climate variability debate can safely, respectfully explore the various concerns and views in order to seek common ground.
Priority Two:

Building Economically Vibrant Communities
Over the past three years, the SRDC has worked in partnership with USDA Rural Development, land-grant university colleagues and others to introduce SET, which provides a step-by-step process for multi-county teams to follow in exploring their regional economic advantages, considering regional assets and challenges, and designing a regional economic development plan to serve as a foundation for the region’s future growth. By the end of 2012, the initiative was in place in more than 50 regions in 26 states. Phase III states selected this year include Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Virginia.

Developing strong working ties across the various groups and geographies, however, is essential if SET is to make a meaningful difference. Simply put, a vibrant economy cannot be sustained without a strong social infrastructure – a representative group of people equipped with the capacity and know-how to act on matters of importance to the region’s quality of life. Regional teams are encouraged to actively recruit representatives to help guide planning from a holistic perspective. In many respects, SET operates as a valuable conduit for making regional collaboration and teamwork a reality.

Thanks to data collected as part of the initiative, we now have information on the 39 regions selected in 2010-11 (Phase I) and in 2011-12 (Phase II). Each regional team started with a group of initial partners who agreed to serve, as shown in Figure 1. As expected, nearly three-fourths of the original participants were from either government (31 percent) or economic development organizations (41 percent). However, as they began to reach out to others within the region who have unique perspectives or abilities to help guide the planning process, they effectively recruited participants from business and industry, education, non-profits, health care, and residents with no clear alignment to any specific sector. The total number of team members in these regions swelled from 464 to 1,679 planning partners, a 362 percent increase and an average of 43 participants per region.
Getting a diverse team to work together in positive, productive and sustained ways is no easy task. It requires patience, trust-building, and commitment. Over the past year, the national SET Design and Training Team has fine tuned its educational resources. In most cases, the modifications have been designed to further strengthen the interactions and working plans of the regional teams. Now, at the end of 2012, we see that SET is attracting and engaging a wide-array of people and sectors to actively contribute to their region’s economic development blueprint, as shown in Figure 2.

The strength of the diverse perspectives and assets is already being seen as regions move forward in the planning process. While only one measure of planning success, the amount of funds already secured by these groups toward the implementation of their plans is significant. More than $5.1 million helps these regions carry out key aspects of their regional economic development plans, such as tackling broadband access and expansion, workforce development challenges, and supporting entrepreneurship development focused on strengthening regional industrial clusters.

As SET Phase III and Phase IV (planned for mid-2013) continue to establish their regional plans, time will tell what other important achievements SET teams will realize as a result of their commitment to work together across geographic boundaries.

SET wins NACDEP and NADO recognition

The Stronger Economies Together program received both regional and national recognition at the 2012 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) conference held in Park City, Utah. SET was named the nation’s Best Education Package Produced by a Team, which honors outstanding curricula designed to advance and strengthen community and economic development work. The curriculum qualified for the national recognition by earning the honor on the regional level, as well.

SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu and Program Manager Rachel Welborn are editors of the training curriculum, and contributing authors include the following land-grant university based Extension faculty/educators: Sharon Gulick (Missouri), Marion Bentley (Utah), Neil Linscheid (Minnesota), James Goodwin (Western Rural Development Center), Alison Davis (Kentucky), and Michael Wilcox (Tennessee). Guidance and ongoing input has been provided by two key national USDA Rural Development colleagues, David Sears and Suzette Agans. The SRDC is proud of its national team and their tireless efforts to build and improve the SET educational training resources.

In addition, the Western Nevada Development District (WNDD) received one of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Innovation Awards in the Economic Development category for its SET program in the state. Representing an innovative and strategic approach to strengthen and enhance its region, the WNDD used the SET process to reinforce the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for its eight-county region.

Combined SET/CEDS development includes training focusing on the definition of economic development, the creation of a vision statement, best practices for nearby regions, alignment with the governor’s economic development strategy, and networking opportunities. Coordinating the SET regional blueprint with the CEDS enhances opportunities for regional collaboration and capacity building. The district worked closely with the Nevada Rural Development Council as co-project manager, and the SRDC is proud of this Phase III region.
SRDC and MSU Partners Secure More Than $1 Million Federal Job Creation Grant

The Southern Rural Development Center is one of five Mississippi State University centers collaborating for a $1,065,000 federal Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge grant to spur job creation and economic growth across the state.

MSU’s project will focus on 61 counties that define the combined Delta and Appalachian regions of the state. The program targets the creation and retention of more than 500 jobs, with an accompanying economic development impact of more than $30 million including private investment and cost savings. Strategies will target the growth of Mississippi’s major economic clusters, such as the automotive, furniture and agribusiness industries.

Along with the SRDC, MSU’s Rural Jobs Accelerator Coalition is comprised of key personnel from the Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems Extension, the Franklin Furniture Institute, the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center, and the Office of Entrepreneurship and Technology Transfer. The Department of Agricultural Economics will support the initiative, and the Mississippi Development Authority is an additional partner.

Economic development partnerships and initiatives in 12 states are receiving awards from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Delta Regional Authority, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.

To accomplish the goals, the program has four priorities: strengthening communities, expanding clusters, growing companies and developing entrepreneurs. SRDC activities will focus on strengthening communities’ strategic planning processes, enhancing leadership skills, and promoting a robust entrepreneurial environment through its SET program. The SRDC also will help leverage an initiative to increase broadband penetration in rural areas.

“The Center is proud to be a part of this MSU coalition as we work to strengthen our state’s economy,” said SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu. “Our SET program, which is now in place in more than 26 states, will continue to enable Mississippi communities and counties to work together on a regional basis to develop an economic development blueprint that strategically builds on their current and emerging economic strengths.”
The Extension Broadband Education and Adoption Team, called e-BEAT, has been listening and working to respond to the broadband education and information needs of households, local governments, small businesses, public libraries, schools, and others since July 2011. Through September 2012, the team has held 389 events, reaching more than 5,050 people.

In order to assess the current status of broadband adoption and use, e-BEAT has employed a number of strategies. First, a statewide telephone survey of more than 2,400 households provided information for the Mississippi Broadband Quick Facts series. The team has also collected feedback from more than 500 citizens on the Mississippi Broadband Connect Coalition’s “Mapping Mississippi’s Digital Future” report through 22 roundtables held across the state and an online survey. Ninety small businesses and entrepreneurs completed a survey specific to their needs. In addition, faced by the unique challenges and opportunities of communities located in different parts of the state, each Regional Extension

Broadband Coordinator also formed a citizen advisory board in the six e-BEAT regions across the state to help develop and implement a broadband education and information plan best suited for that region.
In an environment where fiscal resources are limited but needs great, the idea of going solo is untenable. The broadband team is well aware that expanded adoption and use of high speed Internet will only be achieved if it is willing to work in partnership with other appropriate groups across the state. With the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, e-BEAT provides basic computer and Internet skills to WIN Job Center users, as well as introduces job seekers to WINGS, a Mississippi online job searching system. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Mississippi Library Commission allows e-BEAT to conduct digital training to both library staff and the public. Partnering with the Mississippi Information Technology Services helps municipalities set up websites.

Emerging partnerships include East Mississippi Community College, the Social Security Administration and the Mississippi Development Authority’s entrepreneurship center. Supported by a grant from the Office of the Governor and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, these state and regionally-based Extension broadband educators have also mapped the broadband speeds of nearly 240 community anchor institutions and located more than 115 Wi-Fi hotspots across the state.

The initiative also focuses on developing and adapting education programs tailored to its constituents’ needs. Because digital literacy ranked as the highest need by Mississippians, e-BEAT has a variety of programs designed to introduce Internet applications to multiple audiences, including local government and community organizations, small businesses and the general public. Whether taught face-to-face or accessed online, these tutorials are teaching people why broadband is important and how they can implement technology to better their lives. The e-BEAT program serves as a model for other states trying to enhance broadband adoption as well.

Activities from the past year:

- Extension Regional Broadband Coordinators: 6
- MSU Extension personnel engaged in e-BEAT efforts: 7
- Regional Advisory Committee members: 81
- Households participating in statewide broadband survey: 2,420
- Municipalities completing broadband assessment survey: 151
- Broadband survey report highlights released: 9
- Events conducted/supported: 389
- e-BEAT program participants: 5,051
- Educational resources developed/adapted: 18
- Municipal websites developed by MSI, MS ITS and e-BEAT partnership: 12

Woods Receives 2012 Bonnie Teater Award

The SRDC proudly honored Dr. Mike Woods as the 2012 recipient of the Bonnie Teater Community Development Educator Lifetime Achievement Award. With more than 31 years of exemplary rural economic development experience, Woods serves as Oklahoma State University interim dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and Vice President.

Woods previously served as professor and head of the OSU Department of Agricultural Economics since 2007. From 1981 until 2006, Woods was a state Extension specialist at both Texas A&M and OSU, with concurrent teaching and research appointments for many of those years. His positive impacts on community development are evident at the local, state, regional and national levels. Woods has more than 100 publications and 600 Extension working papers, and he has served in leadership positions in numerous professional organizations. Woods was also involved in organizing the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals, and he later served as the organization’s president.

For Woods’ long, distinguished career spent making a difference in the economies of rural communities and in the lives of those he has taught and worked alongside, it is most fitting that he is honored as the Teater Award recipient.
Improving Transparency: e-Strategies for Local Government

For a number of years, the SRDC has provided leadership to improve the quality of resources available to support the broadband and e-commerce efforts of Extension educators across the nation. The SRDC was pleased to announce the release of a new product in 2012 authored by Dave Shidelers and Brian E. Whitacre (Oklahoma State University), Connie K. Hancock (University of Nebraska) and Michael D. Wilcox Jr. (formerly at the University of Tennessee). This valuable educational resource titled “eStrategies for Local Governments” is designed to advance the online presence and capability of municipal and county governments.

In light of the vital role that the Internet is playing in advancing opportunities in the areas of education, economic development and health, promoting the effective use of the Internet by local governments is essential. Studies have shown, however, that few rural municipalities or county governments are actively embracing the Internet as a vehicle for promoting citizen input and engagement on issues being weighed by public officials. Thanks to the work of the SRDC-funded team, guidelines on how local governments can develop quality websites that improve the public’s access to information and resources, and strategies for inviting residents to share their insights on issues being considered by local government leaders are now available. In the end, implementation of the strategies outlined in this valuable web-based resource can go a long way in promoting greater access by citizens to the important activities and services being carried out by municipal and county-based government officials.

Entrepreneurs and Their Communities Webinar Series

The SRDC continued to work closely with the eXtension entrepreneurship team to help organize the national webinar series sponsored by the National eXtension Entrepreneurs and Their Communities Community of Practice 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 2012 include:

- **JANUARY**
  - Maps, Apps and Mobile Media Marketing!
- **FEBRUARY**
  - Expanding Your Markets! Going Online
- **MARCH**
  - Security and Organizational Risk Planning
- **APRIL**
  - Direct Marketing - Displaying Your Products
- **MAY**
  - The Art and Science of Customer Service
- **JUNE**
  - Cooperative Extension and Latino Business Development
- **SEPTEMBER**
  - Retail Layout and Design Principles and Practices for Horticultural Businesses
- **OCTOBER**
  - Establishing a Microenterprise Lending Program
- **NOVEMBER**
  - How Social Networking Can Promote Local Economies
- **DECEMBER**
  - Best Practices in Food Safety for Processors
Some key findings:

- More than 73 percent of the nearly 200 eNews recipients responding to a survey administered by the evaluation team reported being satisfied or very satisfied with e-News, the bi-monthly electronic newsletter produced by the SRDC.

- Overall 52.7 percent of respondents reported using the e-News material in some way, such as improving their personal knowledge or sharing it with others.

- About 22 percent of respondents (n=179) received training in the use of the educational resources developed through the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative. Just under 26 percent used the e-commerce educational resources to train others.

- Of the 45 respondents who have conducted training using the e-commerce curriculum, nearly 58 percent reported using “A Beginner’s Guide to e-Commerce,” while 53.3 percent employed the “Connecting Communities” educational resources.
Priority Three:

Enhancing Distressed Communities
The Federal Emergency Management Administration’s “Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans: Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101” promotes the development and implementation of sound, community-based emergency operation plans. The guide, released in November 2010, seeks to promote a common understanding of the fundamentals of risk-informed planning and decision-making. In addition, it assists planners in developing and maintaining viable all-hazards and all-threats emergency plans drawing on a broad base of community participants.

Yet even with this guidance in place, rural places often need help in identifying, connecting, and coordinating the people and resources that can be vital in disaster response and recovery. To facilitate this challenge, ReadyCommunity resource materials were developed to complement and add greater depth to the six steps delineated in FEMA’s Comprehensive Preparedness Guide. Led by a neutral ReadyCommunity coach, rural places are guided through a complete, collaborative planning process that aligns with state and federal guidelines, while preserving the uniqueness of each individual community.

During 2012 and continuing into 2013, seven pilot locations are testing these materials, providing vital feedback on the process and tools. These rural places face a broad range of natural hazards including severe winter storms, floods, tornadoes, wildfires, and hurricanes.

One pilot location, Anaconda, Deer Lodge County, Montana, is near completion of the pilot process.

“The entire community committee of 40-plus is very interested in helping the county be ready and more than willing to help with each step we identified. Attaining their goals will help create a ReadyCommunity here in Anaconda, Deer Lodge County,” said local ReadyCommunity coach Barbara Adrozzi. “We’ve already achieved so many of the first steps that I know we will continue in achieving the ultimate goal, a safe and ready county for any disaster, leaving no one behind.”

An SRDC-organized training session held in Memphis, Tenn., prepped the local ReadyCommunity coaches, and the Center looks forward to sharing progress from all seven current pilot sites during the upcoming year.

Citizens Across the Nation: Creating ReadyCommunity Emergency Plans

Franklin, Frankfort County, Kentucky
Bolivar County, Mississippi
Maysville, DeKalb County, Missouri
Anaconda, Deer Lodge County, Montana
Montrail County, North Dakota
Cass and Marion counties, Texas
Whitman County, Washington
The SRDC’s Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Center for Targeted Studies again invested in innovative social sciences-based research that explores the food and nutrition assistance challenges facing Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and other racial/ethnic minorities, as well as children and low-wealth households in rural America. Established in 2010, the RIDGE Center has funded 18 proposals from outstanding higher education faculty and doctoral students. The SRDC also hosted a mid-year meeting with 2011 grantees and took part in the National RIDGE Conference, hosted by the Economic Research Service in Washington, D.C., in October.

Doctoral Dissertation Research Grants Program

In its second year, the dissertation research competitive grants program again invests in doctoral students in the United States who are pursuing research in areas that align with the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies priorities. Grants of up to $17,500 support the dissertation research of these recipients:

Emily Heberlein, University of South Carolina

Comparative Effectiveness of Group Prenatal Care on Women’s Food Insecurity and Psychosocial Health

This research will compare the effectiveness of group prenatal care to individual prenatal care in reducing food insecurity, which increases the risk for poor mental health during pregnancy, poor birth outcomes, and worse maternal and infant well-being postpartum, and its psychosocial correlates, including depression, stress, affect, coping, and maternal functioning.

Julia Ferrara Waity, Indiana University

Is There a Persistent Rural-Urban Divide? Spatial Inequalities in Food Insecurity and the Impact of the Great Recession

This project focuses on spatial inequality in rural and urban food security and the impacts of the Great Recession, which has dramatically increased food insecurity in the U.S. since 2008. The author also develops the concept of a food assistance desert by mapping distance to hunger relief agencies.

Amber Haroldson, University of North Carolina - Greensboro

Food Choices: Socio-Economic Determinants and Consequences

It is hypothesized that in Hispanic households, children may have more influence over family dietary decisions than in non-Hispanic households. This study aims to 1) describe the types of foods most often requested for mothers to purchase, prepare or acquire, and the types of child food requests with which mothers are most likely to comply, 2) examine the relationship between child food requests and maternal compliance to those requests, 3) examine the moderating effect of ethnicity on the previous association, and 4) examine the relationship between maternal compliance to children’s food requests and child overweight/obesity.
RIDGECOMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM

As in past years, the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies Grant Program announced its regular competitive grants program in February 2012 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 awarded RIDGE Center grants of approximately $35,000:

Maryah Fram, Edward Fongillo, Jr. and Lorrence Ritchie, University of South Carolina

Understanding the Relationship Among Child Food Insecurity, Diet Quality, and Physical Activity in Non-Metropolitan Versus Metropolitan Households

Using newly collected data that includes detailed information on children's experiences of multiple domains of food insecurity and rigorously collected data on dietary intake and physical activity of more than 4,000 8-12-year-olds from high-poverty schools, this research will assess how child food insecurity as reported by children relates to child diet quality and physical activity, two key pathways affecting child health.

Tracey Burke and Susannah Morgan, University of Alaska - Anchorage

The Experience of Food Insecurity and Nutrition Assistance in Rural Alaska

The proposed qualitative research seeks to understand the day-to-day experience of hunger and the hunger-response system in the lives of rural, native Alaskans, who are faced with poverty and the inaccessibility of many services across often-roadless spaces.

Colleen Heflin, University of Missouri

Participation in the National School Lunch Program and Food Security: A Regression Discontinuity Design Analysis of Transitions in Kindergarten

This paper contributes to the prior literature on food insecurity by exploring the cliff effect of nutritional policy on household and child food insecurity as children enter kindergarten and are able to access the National School Lunch Program and the National School Breakfast program.

Neil Bania and Laura Leete, University of Oregon

How Does Short-Term Household Income Volatility Affect Food Assistance Recipiency?

This study investigates how monthly household income volatility and income shocks affect food assistance receipt among low-income U.S. households since 1990, with a particular focus on possible differences by geographic region, urban/rural residence, race, and ethnicity.
Although the NARDeP Center has been in place just a few short months, a number of activities are already underway. First, two advisory committees have been created. The Research Advisory Council is made up of faculty whose public policy research is aligned with the core subject matter efforts of the NARDeP Center, while the Policy Review Council is comprised of policy stakeholders whose role is to keep the Center staff apprised of current and emerging policy-relevant issues that could benefit from the insights of the university research community. Second, the Center has begun to train the next generation of policy analysts by establishing two post-doctoral positions whose work will advance its priority research and policy activities. Third, the NARDeP Center recently funded the development of two major policy pieces on natural gas extraction (fracking) and rural broadband. Both projects were awarded on a competitive basis, and the final policy products are slated to be published in early 2013. Fourth, a call for the development of agriculture and rural policy briefs was announced, and a handful of such briefs are now in the pipeline. Finally, a new NARDeP website is under development and will be fully operational at the beginning of 2013.

While the NARDeP Center is still in its infancy, important steps are being made to mobilize the research community to play a more active role in guiding the agriculture and rural policy work of federal and state legislative bodies. No doubt, access to high quality research-based input will likely translate into better policy decisions that will result in a stronger and more vibrant rural America.
SRDC Supports Regional and National Trainings in 2012

Southern Rural Sociological Association/Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists Conference
Feb. 4-7 – Birmingham, Alabama

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board
March 28-29 – College Station, Texas

National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals
May 20-23 – Park City, Utah

National Broadband Extension and Partners Team
May 23-24 – Park City, Utah

Kentucky-Tennessee Institute for Sustainable Development
June 4-6 – Nashville, Tennessee

Stronger Economies Together, Phase Three Training Workshop
June 11-13 – Charlotte, North Carolina

Community Development Society
July 21-25 – Cincinnati, Ohio

Rural Sociological Society
July 26-29 – Chicago, Illinois

ReadyCommunity, Phase Two Training Workshop
Aug. 6-8 – Memphis, Tennessee

Joint Meeting Program Leadership Network, AEA and ASRED
Aug. 20-24 – Orlando, Florida

Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Conference
Oct. 4 – Washington, D.C.
FYI Base & Extramural Funding

From July 1, 2011, to June 30, 2012, the SRDC brought in $2,139,927.85, following the record setting FY11. The Center thanks the various organizations, agencies and foundations that invest in its work.

A TOTAL OF $2,139,927.85

$237,524 BASE

11.1%

$1,902,403.85 EXTRAMURAL

88.9%

Trends in Extramural Funding from FY2000-2012

Showcasing the extramural funding amounts from 2000-2012, this chart highlights the funds the SRDC has garnered over the past 12 years.

*Funds secured between July - September 2008 ($480,778) 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).

2012 Participants for Meetings, Conferences, Webinars and Technical Trainings

Total: 517
DATE IS FROM JANUARY THROUGH DECEMBER 2012. SRDC STAFF VISITS ARE FILTERED.

TOTAL VISITORS TO THE SITE

37,976
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.

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.
**SRDC Staff Publications & Presentations**

**Presentations**

SRDC Director Bo Beaulieu made 19 presentations in 2012 at a variety of regional and national conferences, meetings, webinars and trainings. These include the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association annual meeting; the National AgOutlook Forum; the National Telecommunications and Information Administration; the USDA National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board meeting; the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals conference; the Kentucky Tennessee Institute for Sustainable Development; the Association of Extension Administrators conference; the Community Development Society annual meeting; the Rural Sociological Society conference; the National Food Service Management Institute; and the joint annual meeting of the Association of Southern Regional Extension Directors and the Association of Extension Administrators.

Program Manager Rachel Welborn delivered 14 presentations and trainings last year with topics including Turning the Tide on Poverty, ReadyCommunity, Stronger Economies Together, civic engagement, and community grant writing.

**Selected Publications**

Roberto Gallardo published an article, “A Political Caring Index,” in the *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*. In addition, he has three other peer-reviewed articles that have been accepted and are awaiting publication by both the *Economic Development Quarterly Journal* and the *Review of Regional Studies*.

In 2012, Gallardo also published 11 data-driven articles in the *Daily Yonder*, a popular rural news website. His articles focus on the life expectancy of rural people, education levels, child poverty and rural incomes.

Bo Beaulieu and Gallardo together produced five information briefs in the *Mississippi Broadband Quick Facts* series, which capture key findings from a recent statewide household Internet survey. The briefs explore topics such as differences in Internet usage by urban/rural location, age, and number of children living in the home. Additionally, one brief highlights how Mississippi households compare to the nation when looking at the specific reasons for avoiding Internet use.

The SRDC also continued distributing three electronic newsletters focusing on our partners’ interests and needs. The monthly *Around the South* provides timely news on SRDC activities and relevant economic and community development information from across the region and nation. eNews, which supports the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative and broadband adoption projects, and Grant Connections, which promotes funding opportunities that align with our constituents’ work, are both delivered bimonthly.
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IMPORTANT WEBSITES

COMMUNITY DATA CENTER

srdc.msstate.edu/data-center/

THE DAILY YONDER

www.dailyyonder.com/

EXTENSION BROADBAND EDUCATION & ADOPTION TEAM

ebeat.ms

SERA-37: THE NEW HISPANIC SOUTH

srdc.msstate.edu/sera37/

SRDC SOCIAL SECURITY STUDY

srdc.msstate.edu/socialsecurity/

SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

srdc.msstate.edu/
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FOUNDATIONS OF PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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NATIONAL E-COMMERCE EXTENSION INITIATIVE
srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce/

RIDGE CENTER FOR TARGETED STUDIES @ THE SRDC
http://srdc.msstate.edu/ridge/

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

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

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

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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.