

A YEAR OF PROGRESS AND ENTHUSIASM . . .

The past year has been an exciting one for the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC). During this period of time, the SRDC has sought to expand its commitment to serving as a valuable resource to the region's land-grant university system--one that is actively engaged in promoting high quality rural development research and extension education programs. Our *1997-98 Year in Review* is intended to outline the variety of rural development-related activities that we have pursued, in concert with a gifted cadre of faculty located in our region's 29 land-grant universities. We are proud of the progress that has been made in addressing the rural development challenges and opportunities facing the citizens and communities of the rural South.

The Center is gratified by the renewed commitment that our Southern Extension and Research Directors and Administrators have given to rural development efforts within our land-grant universities. Moreover, we are excited by the new and expanding partnerships we have established with a number of public and private sector organizations who have a high level of interest in and commitment to rural development issues in our region. While this report offers a synopsis of the accomplishments realized by the SRDC over the course of the past year, it is in many respects a testimony of the countless people and communities who have been touched by the talents and energies that our land-grant university faculty and their partners have brought to bear on addressing issues of priority

ABOUT THE SRDC . . .

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) is one of four USDA sponsored regional centers in the nation.

SRDC has served the twenty-nine land-grant institutions of the thirteen Southern states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands since 1974.

The Center supports and strengthens individual state efforts in rural areas by drawing upon multi-disciplinary networks of university research and extension faculty in the region.

The Center is co-sponsored by Mississippi State University and Alcorn State University.

The SRDC fosters innovative and creative approaches to sustainable rural development.

States, Territories, Institutions Served by the Southern Rural Development Center

Alabama

Alabama A&M University
Auburn University
Tuskegee University

Arkansas

University of Arkansas
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Florida

**Florida A&M University
University of Florida**

Georgia

**Fort Valley State University
University of Georgia**

Kentucky

**Kentucky State University
University of Kentucky**

Louisiana

**Louisiana State University
Southern University**

Mississippi State University

**Alcorn State University
Mississippi State University**

North Carolina

**North Carolina State University
North Carolina State A&T University**

Oklahoma

**Langston University
Oklahoma State University**

Puerto Rico

University of Puerto Rico

South Carolina

**Clemson University
South Carolina State University**

Tennessee

**Tennessee State University
The University of Tennessee**

Texas

**Prairie View A&M University
Texas A&M University**

The Virgin Islands

University of the Virgin Island

Virginia

Virginia Tech

Virginia State University

GOAL 1 . . .

The land-grant universities of the South represent vital resources that are dedicated to the generation of research and delivery of extension education programs that address the unique needs of our region. The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) operates as a major catalyst in stimulating, facilitating, and promoting rural development research and Extension outreach education programs across the region's land-grant university system. Several activities have been initiated by the SRDC over the past year to further advance the rural development mission of the region's 29 land-grant universities. The SRDC has further sought to promote the capabilities of land-grant faculty with rural development stakeholders and partners.

Major Activities

Enhance Communications With Land-Grant Faculty

The Southern Rural Development Consortium. Southern land-grant faculty were invited by the SRDC to join a consortium of colleagues and while doing so, to identify their expertise in rural development. More than 339 faculty responded. The Consortium provides a strong two-way link for communication between the SRDC and land-grant institutions in the South. In developing this comprehensive listing, the SRDC is better able to respond quickly to extramural funding opportunities and to facilitate multi-state programming and research.

Heighten Land-Grant Faculty Awareness of Rural Development Grant Opportunities

Grant Connections. This electronic newsletter provides information about grant opportunities available to land-grant faculty in the region. The newsletter is disseminated to the Southern Rural Development Consortium and is available to everyone on the Internet through the SRDC website. Thirty-nine opportunities were identified in the first six issues.

rural Development Funding Symposium, 1998 Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists Meeting (SAAS). The SRDC convened a session during SAS, February 1-4, 1998, devoted to funding opportunities for rural development. Past managers of the National Research Initiative (NRI), and the Fund for Rural America (FRA) federal programs, as well as other funding entities, discussed ingredients for making proposals stronger and more likely to be funded.

Produce Newsletters that Offer In-Depth Treatment of Current and Emerging Rural Development Issues in the Region

Southern Perspectives. In a continuing effort to provide timely information on regional issues of importance, the SRDC introduced a new newsletter in December 1997. *Southern Perspectives*, the newly-designed quarterly newsletter is devoted to a theme of regional interest in each issue. The newsletter is distributed to more than 3,000 individuals in hard copy, more than 300 by e-mail, and is available for downloading via the SRDC website in both pdf and html formats. Newsletter themes to date include the following:

Welfare Reform, Volume 1, Number 1, December 1997

The inaugural issue focused attention on welfare reform and more importantly, what welfare reform may mean for the Southern region. The overview piece provided a look at the major provisions associated with welfare reform. Another article outlined the spatial mismatch problem in the rural South, with job openings not occurring in rural areas where the employment needs are the greatest. Also articulated in articles were the challenges to welfare reform in the rural South and a statistical profile of Southern welfare recipients.

Champion Communities, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1998 Champion Communities were the subject of the Spring issue. Articles described the process employed for designating communities as Champion Communities, the location of these communities within the Southern region, some key socioeconomic features of these localities, and a sampling of educational outreach and technical assistance activities being provided by Southern 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities targeted to Champion Communities.

Rural Health, Volume 2, Number 2, Summer 1998

Attention was focused on the significant changes taking place in the health sector, and how these changes may play out in rural areas of the South and nation. Among the topics addressed were managed care, chronic diseases in the South, the child health insurance program (CHIP), cancer control programs, critical access hospitals, and telemedicine. These articles were contributed by members of the Southern Extension and Research Activity--Information Exchange Group (SERA-IEG-19) "Rural Health and Safety," a committee with members from land-grant universities, federal and state rural health agencies, and the medical community.

Home-Based and Micro Businesses, Volume 2, Number 3, Fall 1998

Members of the Home-Based and Micro Business National Design Team of the Communities in Economic Transition Extension Initiative wrote the major thematic articles for this edition. Given central attention in the newsletter was *Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities*, one of the most comprehensive educational curricula ever assembled on this subject. The SRDC worked in partnership with Mississippi State University Extension Service and a national team of Extension specialists in the production of these educational resources.

Provide Comprehensive Community Development Training to Land-Grant Personnel

Southern Region Community Development Institute. With faculty from across the region, the SRDC planned, organized, and sponsored its first Southern Region Community Development Institute, June 22-26, 1998, in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Institute was available to Extension personnel from the Southern region in all areas, including agriculture/natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development. Twenty-three persons representing state, multi-county, and county staff attended. Nine faculty from Southern land-grant institutions and the SRDC director led the training sessions designed to build a stronger conceptual foundation and skills for carrying out community development Extension programming.

Invest in the Production of Educational Resources that Enhance Rural Development Programming in the Region

Public Conflict Mediation. A set of educational materials was written to equip land-grant faculty and county agents with knowledge and skills needed to effectively mediate community conflicts. *Turning*

Lemons into Lemonade is a 15-module curriculum developed as an SRDC-funded project. The modules are slated to be released for purchase in early 1999.

Recruitment, Selection, and Retention of a Culturally Diverse Staff. In cooperation with the National Center for Diversity and the Southern Program and Staff Development Committee, SRDC sponsored and facilitated a training session May 20-22, 1998, in Nashville, Tennessee. Fifty-five individuals with responsibilities for recruiting, hiring or retaining Extension personnel, received training in strategies to strengthen and retain a diverse workforce.

Southern Region Program Leaders Committee (PLC). In 1991, Extension directors and administrators formed the Southern Region Program Leaders Committee with representatives from 1862 and 1890 institutions in each of the four program areas: agriculture and natural resources, community development, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H youth development, as well as communications, middle management, and program and staff development. In addition to surting multi-state, multi-discipline programming, the Center coordinates this annual meeting. Moreover, it facilitates planning and communication among leaders acro all Extension program areas engaged in PLC work.

Invest in Land-Grant Rural Development Research Products that Respond to Priority Policy and Information Needs of Rural Development Partners

Promoting Land-Grant University Research Capacity With State Rural Development Councils in the South. The SRDC, in concert with the Economic Research Service/USDA, provided mini-grants to land-grant researchers whose work has been directed at topics that are of priority concern to the State Rural Development Councils located in the Southern region. These grants are designed to provide support for the preparation of "background papers" that offer the Councils a more comprehensive understanding of these priority issues. These papers include an overview of the current knowledge associated with the topics (drawing from the scientific literature), a discussion of policy options for addressing these issues, and/or an explication of the educational/ technical assistance that rural people and places may need to better position themselves to effectively address these priority matters. A summary of the five reports prepared for our State Rural Development Council partners are presented here.

Urbanization and the Changing Geography of Southern Agriculture Jim Hite, Clemson University

Urbanization of the South in the last half of the present century means there are fewer counties where land prices are conducive to profitable production of agricultural commodities. This project will produce an atlas of maps showing the counties in each of the Southern states where average land prices were favorable to the profitable production of the most significant Southern agricultural commodities in 1960 and 1992. Using crop enterprise budgets of the various state experiment stations and extension services, the project will estimate the return to land, risk, and management in twelve Southern states for 1992, and compare the results to mean county farm real estate prices reported in the 1992 Census of Agriculture. This research will allow each state to evaluate what parts of the state are still attractive for particular types of farming and to obtain a first-cut estimate of the amount of money required to protect farmland by purchase of development rights.

***Welfare Reform in the South: Challenges and Opportunities* Deborah Tootle, Louisiana State University**

The project will produce a detailed literature review of the welfare reform issues and structural conditions in the South, with an emphasis on rural areas, combined with descriptive data analyses of those structural conditions in the South that have the potential to affect implementation of welfare reform legislation. The report will include sections on: 1) an historical perspective of welfare in the U.S., recent concerns leading to efforts to overhaul the system, and current legislation affecting it; 2) descriptive data showing conditions leading to the use of public assistance, and the use of public assistance in the Southern states, identifying persistent poverty and high welfare use areas in the South; 3) specific challenges for the rural South including administration of new programs and the associated fiscal burdens, provision of social support services, problems associated with spatial dispersion, job training and employment opportunities; and 4) a discussion of the implications of the findings for policy in the rural South.

Devolution and Rural Development in Forest-Dependent Communities: An Assessment of Literature, On-Going Practice and Potential for an Integrated, Community-Based Approach
Don Voth, University of Arkansas

This project will review the research literature and the relationship between forest-dependent communities and public lands management and examine the potential for a broader form of collaboration, both within the USDA Forest Service, and among USDA agencies. Included will be a review of the theoretical literature about forest-dependent communities and their alleged "disadvantage;" the literature relating to rural development strategies being pursued in these communities; and most particularly, the literature on and the cases wherein integration of over-all forest planning, decision-making, and management, have been closely linked with local community development efforts. Project personnel will develop recommendations about how the forest planning process can stimulate broad-based strategic community development and planning activities in forest-dependent communities.

Implications of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 for Southern Rural States and Communities
John Allen, University of Nebraska

This project will provide an overview of telecommunications policy as it evolved into the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The project report will 1) outline the basic importance of telecommunications technology to rural citizens and the issues they face in accessing advanced levels of technology; 2) present data examining the relative impact of telecommunications technology; 3) summarize the trends in state telecommunications regulation and examine the linkages to the 1996 Act; 4) examine the innovations within telecommunications technology which may influence state policy decisions; and 5) summarize the new federal telecommunications legislation. Results will provide policy makers with a better understanding of the implications of the 1996 Act and will present decisions points with special attention to state decisions needed to insure equal access at a reasonable cost to citizens.

Workforce Preparation in the Rural South
Melissa Barfield, Mississippi State University

Labor markets have undergone many changes, some affecting the South in consequential ways, such as the switch from industrial production to service employment. Workers in the Southern region, with its particular social and environmental landscape, face many challenges when adapting to the changes. A detailed literature review in this project will facilitate discussion of the issues of workforce preparation in the rural South. Descriptive statistics will be used to detail a history of the workforce in the rural South, describe changes and opportunities in the workforce, describe the demographics of the region,

discuss the education in the rural South, and discuss strategies that policy makers have employed to encourage job growth and readiness in the rural South. The paper will conclude with suggestions, based on a social analysis of workforce preparation issues for policy makers.

GOAL 2 . . .

Enhance the Environmental, Economic, and Social Well-Being of Rural Communities and People

The rural South is a rich haven of natural resources and environmental beauty. At the same time, it is a region that is facing many hardships with regard to its capacity to realize a proper balance in its pursuit of a vibrant economy, social progress, and a sound environment. In some areas of the South, concern is with the expansion of urban areas into rural localities. In other rural places, attention is on the lack of good paying jobs, declining or stagnant economies, and high rates of individual and family poverty.

The SRDC believes that the well-being of the rural South can be further advanced through the active engagement of the Southern land-grant universities, along with its public and private sector partners, in addressing the economic, environmental, and social challenges impacting rural people and communities of the region. Toward this end, the SRDC has pursued the following objectives over the past year.

Major Activities

Expand Research Activities that Shed Light on Current and Future Labor Force Supply/Demand Issues in the Rural South

Regional Workshop on Labor Force Supply and Demand Issues. The SRDC joined with the TVA Rural Studies at the University of Kentucky, the Farm Foundation, and the Economic Research Service/USDA in planning a regional conference to explore the nature of labor markets in the rural South. The conference focused on four key areas: 1) labor force demand issues; 2) worker supply in the rural South; 3) differences in supply/demand across urban and rural areas of the South, and 4) types of institutional responses to supply/demand issues. Papers developed for the meeting will offer one of the most comprehensive examinations of the nature of labor markets in the South.

Rural Labor Markets in the South: Workers, Firms, and Communities in Transition. The SRDC was instrumental in developing a proposal for the creation of a Southern Research Development Committee. The proposal, submitted to the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors, was approved. The Research Development Committee will hold its inaugural meeting in early 1999.

Broaden Economic Development Options Relevant to Rural Communities in the Region

Tourism as an Economic Development Strategy. Mike Woods, Oklahoma State University, and Ernie Hughes, Southern University, represented the SRDC and the Southern region in planning for the National Extension Travel and Tourism Conference held in May 1998. SRDC staff also served on the planning committee. The conference explored strategies for using tourism as a economic development option for rural areas of the nation. One session was held with participants from the Southern region who indicated an interest in tools and educational modules devoted to community tourism assessment, marketing, and business management.



Home-Based and Micro-Business Curriculum. The Center worked closely with the National Home-Based and Micro Business Design Team of the Communities in Transition Extension National Initiative in developing a 22-chapter curriculum titled *Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities: A Guide to Building a Home-Based and Micro Business Program*. The curriculum,

designed for Extension educators, targets people who want to start a home-based or micro business. To date, more than 330 copies have been distributed throughout the nation. The curriculum is currently in its second printing. The Center serves as the repository of the copies and manages their distribution.

Home-Based and Micro-Business Regional Work-shops. Given the high quality of the curriculum, *Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities*, the SRDC was committed to ensuring that Extension educators throughout the region would be accorded the opportunity to take part in in-service training on how these educational resources could be used in state Extension programming. To date, three training programs have been completed. The initial training activity, at Virginia State University, attracted 70 state and county educators. Some 18 agents in Mississippi attended a similar training program there. A tri-state training program involving Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio, was conducted at the Boone County Extension office in Burlington, Kentucky, with more than 40 extension agents and specialists participating. The SRDC has served as a resource in helping facilitate these educational activities.

Initiate and Facilitate Comprehensive Educational Training Opportunities Targeted to the Region's Champion Communities

Four-State Regional Meeting. The SRDC sponsored a workshop in Columbus, Georgia, for more than 150 persons from Champion Communities in the four-state region of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. The meeting, *Keeping the Dream Alive*, was held May 6-8, 1998, and brought together local leaders from the communities with county and state extension personnel to explore opportunities available to the communities. The Center involved a very diverse group to plan the event, including representatives from land-grant faculty (1862 and 1890), State Rural Development Offices, State Rural Development Councils, utility companies, non-governmental organizations (i.e., National Center for Appropriate Technology) and the banking community. Major topics included examples of projects that have "kept the dream alive," and sessions on improving race relations, involving hard-to-reach audiences, building consensus in the community, mapping community assets, leadership training, finding the right economic development strategies, utilizing untapped local resources, marketing Champion Community activities, and identifying funding sources.

Three-State Regional Planning Meeting. SRDC spear-headed a meeting to explore interest in and support for a Champion Community Conference for the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Participants included land-grant faculty (1862 and 1890) and interested individuals representing State Rural Development Offices, State Rural Development Councils, Office of Community Development/USDA, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Champion Communities, Nonprofit Resources, Inc., and Foundation for the Mid-South.

Feedback was positive and a tri-state conference is being planned for early 1999.

GOAL 3 . . .

Strengthen the Human Capital Resources of the Region's Rural Communities

The rural South has made important strides in enhancing the educational status of its population. However, work remains to be done. In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, the road to economic success continues to be linked to educational attainment. Even as late as 1997, the proportion of residents holding a bachelor's degree or more was 46 percent lower in the region's nonmetro areas than was the case in the metro South. While the continued improvement in high school completion rates among nonmetro youth is encouraging, rural youth remain less likely to attend college. As such, the rural South remains home to a sizable number of non-college bound youth--youth who are finding it more difficult to secure stable jobs that pay decent wages. The SRDC is spearheading research to better understand the plight of non-college bound youth in the South, and to delineate strategies that hold promise of promoting the academic success of rural youth.

Major Activities

Explore the Labor Force Experiences of Non-College Bound Youth in the South

Rural Studies Grant on the Influence of Education on Workforce Experiences. Employing the High School and Beyond national survey data, the SRDC has undertaken careful study of the workforce experiences of youth who have not pursued any post-secondary education after graduating from high school. This research, funded in part by a grant from the University of Kentucky's TVA Rural Studies, has determined that the largest share of non-college bound youth in the nation are from the South, and many of these non-college bound Southerners are residents of the region's rural localities (i.e., 41%). As they enter the work force, most secure jobs in the least attractive labor market sector in the community. While some realize improvement in the type of job in which they are employed, few are ever able to gain entrance into the more attractive primary labor market sector positions. This is especially true among those living in rural/farm areas of the region. These findings provide evidence of the need to focus attention on workforce preparation strategies for youth, particularly among those who are not poised to pursue an education beyond high school.

Examine the Role of Family, School, and Community Social Capital in Promoting the Academic Success of Youth

Social Capital and Education Outcomes. The concept of "social capital" has been the focus of much research in recent years. The SRDC, in concert with colleagues at the University of Florida, has been centrally engaged in research that seeks to more fully understand the role that social capital plays in advancing the educational progress of youth. In this context, social capital is defined as the quality and depth of interpersonal interactions (be they of a nurturing or monitoring nature) that occur between

children and their parents, school personnel, and/or community members. Articles prepared over the past year by this team of researchers have revealed that the presence of a nurturing environment for the child, as well as guidance on behaviors that are deemed inappropriate, are powerful inputs that impact positively on their educational performance. Less powerful--but still significant--are the contributions of the school and community. For example, students who have access to quality interactions with teachers, as well as with adults through school-based or community-based organizations, are far more inclined to excel in the classroom.

Strengthen Linkages Among Community Development Educators and Practitioners

Project to Expand Minorities Engaged in Community Development Practice. With support from the Community Development Society and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the SRDC has been awarded a grant to pursue strengthening the minority presence and influence in the community development profession. The Center will lead an intensive training program in 1998-99 that will be targeted to the Mississippi Delta Region.

GOAL 4 . . .

Improve Rural Southerners' Access to vital Community Services

The limited economic and fiscal resources available in many rural communities have presented major challenges to local leaders as they seek to provide important community services to their citizens. While most rural areas seek to expand job and income opportunities for their residents, the capacity to do so is often impeded by the lack of quality local services available to complement the economic development activities of these localities. Quality water and waste management systems, access to decent health care, and the availability of emergency services (such as fire and police protection), constitute vital services that make rural areas attractive places in which to live and work.

Major Activities

Stimulate the Creation of New Partnerships that Enhance the Capacity of Rural Communities to Address Key Health Issues

Building Rural Health Partnerships in the South. Due to significant changes in the health sector, rural community citizens and their leaders face numerous challenges in providing and maintaining health services. These challenges and changes have created a confusing array of health care options. With financial assistance from the K. Kellogg Foundation and the Farm Foundation, the Center sponsored a regional conference to 1) develop partnerships among the land-grant system, the health sector, and local citizens and leaders; 2) share health planning resource tools; and 3) explore strategies to insure that rural areas maintain a viable health sector. As a result of the meeting, teams were organized to address collectively the health-related issues in their respective states. In addition to 1862 and 1890 land-grant personnel, attendees included representatives from state offices of rural health, state departments of health, doctors, hospital administrators, citizens and elected officials.

Rural Health Mini-Grant Program. To add action to ideas generated at the regional conference, *Building Rural Health Partnerships in the South*, the SRDC, the Farm Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided funds for mini-grants to six state rural health teams. At the completion of these projects, the SRDC will report the results as case studies for other communities to emulate. The following projects are underway.

In **Alabama**, the Coosa Action Network was formed, and utilizing an interdisciplinary team approach, initiated a Coosa County-wide festival focusing on family health, parenting, and the particular needs of children. (Randall Weavers, Coosa Action Network)

Arkansas team members participated in an intensive workshop in writing/adapting health-related materials for low literacy individuals and now assist in writing/adapting health-related materials. The team continues to work towards full implementation of an Arkansas Medical Literacy Center. (Mike Hedges, Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service)

A state resource team in **Kentucky** is helping Floyd County implement several health activities including development of a local resource book of health services, addressing cultural awareness issues, and development of a clearinghouse of issues relating to health education. (Steve Fricker, University of Kentucky Center for Rural Health)

A **Mississippi** team is establishing a mentoring program for at-risk teenagers and adolescents in a county with an unusually high incidence of teenage pregnancy. The mentors provide peer educational activities to enhance self-esteem of youth and to educate them on the dangers of teenage sexual activity. (Dorian Rodgers, Mississippi State University Extension Service)

An **Oklahoma** state resource team is guiding one county through a health decision-making process to maintain and improve the health environment in that community. The team will develop a plan of action based on the planning results. (Val Schott, Office of Rural Health)

In **Texas**, a state team helped with an assessment of a county's health issues and educational needs with the idea of addressing these on a priority basis. Institutionalizing the local committee and its task forces will ensure continuation of the effort until all needs are addressed. (Steven Shwiff, Center for Regional and Economic Development Studies)

Southern Extension and Research Activity--Information Exchange Group (SERA-IEG,19). The SRDC collaborates with this regional committee to build public-private coalitions for health education and research. The committee exchanges information on the status of new research findings and extension programs related to rural health and safety issues. It does so in order to help members gain a regional perspective on current rural health problems, and to formulate joint activities of mutual benefit. The Center has facilitated meeting of this group for the past four years and has published three health-related publications, a position paper and an Internet directory of health professionals in the South.

Serve as a Conduit for Informing Individuals and Communities of Critical Environmental Quality Issues

Industrialized Animal Agriculture, Environmental Quality, and Strategies for Collaborative Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution. The trend to a more "industrialized" structure in the U.S. animal agriculture sector, especially in the Southern region, has generated substantial concerns such as the environmental risks, the nuisance impacts on neighbors, and the social impacts on rural communities. The

Southern Region Information Exchange Group-10, Natural Resource Economics, focused their meeting on the role land-grant research, teaching, and extension have in the addressing these concerns. Economic, technical, political, and legal dimensions of the issue were explored as well as general principles and strategies. In support of the work of this regional committee, the SRDC published the proceedings with financial assistance from the Farm Foundation.

GOAL 5 . . .

Enhance the Capacity of rural People and Communities to Carry Out Their Expanded Responsibilities in the Design, Management and Financing of government Programs

The recent passage of welfare reform legislation is but a new phase of an on-going effort by the federal government to give state and local jurisdictions a greater voice in shaping, managing, and assessing federally-supported programs. Many states today find themselves central players in designing programs and setting policies associated with social services, health, telecommunications, infrastructure, and workforce training. Increasingly, states are transferring such responsibilities to local governments, believing that those closest to the people are best positioned to design programs that effectively address local needs and circumstances. The SRDC has sought to be a catalyst in bringing the research and outreach education resources of the land-grant system to bear on the challenges and opportunities that await rural people and communities in this new era of governance in America.

Major Activities

Assess the Impacts of Welfare Reform on Individuals, Families, and Communities in the Rural South

Information Brief. The SRDC, in partnership with the land-grant institutions in the region, has sought to shed light on the host of challenges and opportunities that face governments, communities, and people as a result of "welfare reform" legislation. It has attempted to do so through its initiation of an *Information Brief* series--one which gives attention to the issues associated with welfare reform in the South. The Center is publishing these documents in electronic format (both pdf and html) for downloading and in hard copy. Twenty-four hundred copies each of four briefs have been distributed in the states--through a state land-grant contact person. The contact person sends copies to colleagues, state leaders, policy makers, and other interested individuals. Four briefs have been published, with an additional five currently under development. Partial support for the publication of these reports has been provided by the Farm Foundation. *Information Briefs* published to date include the following:

Welfare Reform: An Overview of Key Provisions--Lionel J. (Bo) Beaulieu, SRDC

The Bottom Line: Welfare Reform, the Cost of Living, and Earnings in the Rural South--Julie N. Zimmerman and Lori Garkovich, University of Kentucky

Building Assets and Economic Independence Through Individual Development Accounts--Carl Rist and Brian Grossman, The Corporation for Enterprise Development

The New Federalism: Confounding Effects of Devolution--Lori Garkovich, University of Kentucky

Forthcoming Issues in the *Information Brief Series*:

The Drive to Work: Transportation Issues and Welfare Reform in Rural Areas

Sarah Dewees, Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI)

Child Care Issues Impacting Welfare Reform in the Rural South

Alisa S. Ghazvini, Ann K. Mullis, Ronald L. Mullis, and Jennifer J. Park, Florida State University

Electronic Benefits Transfer--Katherine Cason, Clemson University

Public Assistance Dependency of Rural Southerners--Mark Nord, Economic Research Service, and Lionel J. (Bo) Beaulieu, SRDC

Business Incentives for Hiring Welfare Recipients--Lynn Reinschmiedt, Mississippi State University

Assessing Impacts of Welfare Reform on Individual, Family, and Community Well-Being: A Focus on the Rural South. The Center spearheaded the preparation of a proposal to establish a Southern Research Development Committee which was approved by the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors as SRDC 98-04. The first meeting of the group is scheduled for October 15-16, 1998, in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Bill Brown, Louisiana State University, has been appointed administrative advisor. The SRDC is coordinating the first meeting of this Development Committee.

National Rural Welfare Reform Initiative. This Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) initiative was inaugurated in early 1998 because of the concern on the part of many state leaders that welfare reform may pose unique challenges for the rural portions of their states. Challenges include lack of transportation options, tight job markets, low wages, and frequently no economy of scale for service provision such as child care and job training. SRDC is an active partner in this national level study. Bo Beaulieu, SRDC Director, is serving as a member of the 16-member panel of researchers working to complete this national study.



Other panel researchers from the Southern region include Ntam Baharanyi, Tuskegee University; Mark Henry, Clemson University; Rogelio Saenz, Texas A&M University; Deborah Tootle, Louisiana State University; and Julie N. Zimmerman, University of Kentucky. Potential states to be included in the initiative include five Southern states: Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas.

Explore the New Governance Challenges Associated with Federal Devolution

Fund for Rural America Planning Grant. The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) provided a \$25,000 planning grant to the SRDC, National Association of Counties (NACo), and Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI). The three agencies joined together to form the *Rural Community Consortium* to work in collaboration with state and local government, and their citizens, in devising and implementing creative and effective strategies for mitigating the risks and

maximizing the potential associated with intergovernmental devolution in rural America. Over the six months of the grant, the thoughts and insights of more than 200 national, regional, state and local leaders were captured through focus groups and mailed surveys. The stakeholders' observations, combined with extensive reading by team members, and the broad policy experience contributed by others, gave shape to a proposal to establish an organized, comprehensive effort to assist governments, people, and communities in adjusting to the challenges associated with devolution policies. While the proposal was strong, funding for the Fund for Rural America Program was discontinued by Congress.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road: New Governance Issues in America's Rural Communities. This report was the culmination of the study undertaken by the *Rural Community Consortium* described in the preceding paragraph. The report written by Lori Garkovich, University of Kentucky, and Jon Irby, CSREES, with assistance from SRDC Director, Bo Beaulieu, attempts to give focus to the most critical devolution issues spotlighted by a panel of national, state, and local leaders. Verbatim comments of various participants were captured to accentuate the "real world" challenges and opportunities associated with devolution for the rural people and communities of America. The Center formatted, printed, and distributed 10,000 copies of this report. A copy has been sent to each county government administrator and county Extension Service office in the U.S.

*Please send me an additional 125 copies of the publication, **Where the Rubber Meets the Road**. This report can be very beneficial to county elected officials including commissioners and council members. The issues brought up in the report will help them look ahead at the issues [of devolution] and begin to think about solutions to the very real challenges they will face.*

County Agent

Examine the Food Assistance Needs of the South's Vulnerable Populations



Economic Research Service Food Assistance Grant. As a catalyst for social sciences research in the rural South, the SRDC is activating social sciences-related research activities associated with food assistance in the region. Working in concert with the Economic Research Service/USDA, the Center has

invested seed funds to support innovative, scholarly activities on this important subject, with special attention on rural people, families, and communities in the South. The Center joins the Joint Center for Poverty Research at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Arizona American Indian Studies Program, and the Nutrition Education Research Group at the Department of Nutrition, University of California at Davis as partners with ERS in carrying out this mini-grant research program. Projects funded through the SRDC mini-grant program are as follows:

From Welfare Reliance to Wage Work: Food Security, Health, and Well-Being Among Louisiana's Rural Welfare Population

Pamela A. Monroe, Louisiana State University

Project personnel will conduct interviews with former and soon-to-be former welfare reliant women in Louisiana as a follow-up to a study of 84 women in 1997 who were participating in training programs preparing them for an exit from welfare reliance. Now one year later, many of the women have exhausted their welfare eligibility and will begin to experience the evaporation of other support services such as food assistance, medical assistance, housing supports, and child care assistance. This study will

determine the early progress, barriers to success, and needs of former welfare reliant women with particular emphasis on nontraditional mechanisms for how women establish food security and make ends meet for their families. A third round, in 2000, will interview the women who have been in the labor force for one year or more. Altogether, these data will constitute a major longitudinal study of women's transition from welfare reliance to wage work.

Assessing the Benefits and Problems Associated with the Use of Electronic Benefits Transfer for Food Stamps in Macon County Alabama

Andrew A. Zekeri, Tuskegee University

This project assesses the benefits and problems associated with the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) for food stamps in a rural community. Through personal interviews, community forums, and sample surveys, this project, working closely with Department of Human Resources' employees, food stamp recipients, food retailers, Point of Service (POS) providers, ATM service providers, authorized representatives and financial institutions, will provide the kind of information and empirical analyses needed to support wise planning and decision making about sustainable food assistance delivery mechanisms and welfare reform in the 21st century. The project provides a contextual perspective on the problems and benefits associated with the use of EBT for food stamp delivery.

Economic Downturns and Welfare Reform: An Exploratory County-Level Analysis

Stephan J. Goetz, University of Kentucky; Fisseha Tegegne, Tennessee State University; Julie N. Zimmerman, University of Kentucky; S.P. Singh, Tennessee State University; David L. Debertin, University of Kentucky

This research team will seek to identify the relationship between local economic conditions and the local demand for food assistance and TANF programs in the rural South. The project will provide basic spatial, descriptive information and will estimate statistically the relationship between local economic conditions and participation in welfare programs. The estimated model will in turn simulate the (independent) effect of an economic downturn on food stamp and TANF programs. Results are expected to be useful to decision makers both in county and state offices for anticipating the effects of an economic downturn on the demand for welfare resources in different counties. State and local officials will also be able to identify areas of their state that are especially vulnerable to economic downturns, and adjust local policies as deemed necessary. The results and the simulation model will be available on the Internet.

Private Food Assistance in East Alabama: Issues of Access and Need

Patricia A. Duffy, Auburn University; L. Conner Bailey, Auburn University; Joseph J. Molnar, Auburn University

Food banks are a relatively recent, private non-profit response to changes in the welfare system, and are demonstrative of a growing recognition that hunger is a real and relatively widespread problem. Little is known about who actually uses and does not use food bank services, nor how use patterns vary in rural and urban locales. This project will survey 240 individuals living in the area served by member agencies of the East Alabama Food Bank, half of whom are current recipients of food assistance through food pantries and half of whom are low-income people who have food needs but do not use the system. Survey questions will be designed to profile the client and non-client populations, to elicit responses on how access to the system might be improved for both rural and non-rural residents, to see the demographic differences between the two groups, and to determine how the two populations can be better served. The study will generate valuable information concerning rural-urban differences in food

security needs. Respondents will also be asked how changes in federal welfare provisions have affected their food needs.

The Impact of Food Stamp Reforms on Elderly in Mississippi
Sheri L. Lokken, Mississippi State University

This project will investigate the impact of Food Stamp reforms on the elderly population in Mississippi. A recent study found that Mississippi had the most households suffering from food insecurity. The project is a combination of academic research and teaching. Through two courses taught at Mississippi State University, the principal investigator, a Nutrition graduate assistant, and approximately 50 Mississippi State University students, will examine the nature and extent of food security/insecurity and nutritional health issues among Mississippi elderly. Interviews will be conducted with elderly food stamp recipients in the Golden Triangle area of Mississippi and a telephone survey will be conducted involving elderly food stamp recipients in the state. Strategies for addressing the food assistance needs of these groups will be outlined.

Understanding Hunger and Food Insecurity in Kentucky: A Guide to Cooperative Extension Service Programming for Limited-Resource Audiences Janet S. Kurzynske, University of Kentucky

This project will examine the nature and extent of hunger and food insecurity in Kentucky households; identify subgroups (by age, income, geographic location) of the Kentucky population most vulnerable to hunger and food insecurity; determine the general availability of food across Kentucky; and determine the availability of emergency food assistance program across Kentucky. Data will be collected through a random sampling process. A random survey of selected Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service home economics agents will measure the general availability of food, and the type and availability of emergency food services across the Commonwealth. Information received from this project should lay the groundwork for future evaluation of the effects of welfare reform on hunger and food insecurity.

Conferences, Workshops

Southern Region Welfare Reform Taskforce Meeting, October 7-8, 1997

Human Capital and Economic Development Taskforce Meeting, October 8-9, 1997

Building Rural Health Partnerships in the South Conference, November 12-14, 1997

SERA-IEG 19, Rural Health and Safety Committee Meeting, March 5-6, 1998

Keeping the Dream Alive Champion Communities Conference, May 6-8, 1998

Recruitment, Selection & Retention of a Culturally Diverse Staff Educational Training, May 20-22, 1998

Community Development Institute, June 22-26, 1998

Southern Program Leaders Conference, August 30, 1998, - September 2, 1998

SRDC Technical Advisory Committee Meeting, August 20-21, 1998

Presentations . . .

Comments offered at the Southern Region Forestry Conference, "Forest-Based Products as an Economic Development Strategy in the Rural South," October 1997

Presentation made at the Arkansas Champion Communities Conference, "What Southern Land-Grant Universities and the SRDC Can Do in Support of Champion Communities," October 1997

Keynote speech at 1998 Tuskegee University Professional Agricultural Workers' meeting titled, "Rural Development Issues in the U.S. South and the Role of the Southern Land-Grant System," December 1997

Presentation made at the Rural Development Funding Symposium, Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists (SAAS) Meeting, February 1998

Contributed paper presented at the 1998 annual SAAS meeting (Little Rock, AR) on the labor force experiences of noncollege bound youth, February 1998

Presentation made at the National Rural Development Partnership Meeting, Washington, DC, "An Overview of Champion Communities in the Rural South," March 1998

Invited paper presented at the Social Capital International Conference held at Michigan State University, "Exploring the Set of Factors within the Home, School, and Community that Serve to Promote or Impede Academic Progress Among U.S. students," April 1998

Presentations at the Southern Region Community Development Institute, "Mapping the Assets of Your Community: A Key Component for Building Local Capacity," and "The Public Policy Education Model: A Framework for Addressing Local Issues," June 1998

Presentation at the Southeast Regional Directors Institute Annual Meeting, "Devolution and Its Impact on Rural America," June 1998

Two contributed papers presented at the 1998 Rural Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon, "The Labor Force Experiences of Young Adults with Differential Educational Endowments" and "The Role of Family and Community Social Capital in Promoting Educational Achievement Among Youth," August 1998

Publications . . .

Southern Perspectives (Newsletter)

Themes: "Welfare Reform"

"Champion Communities in the South"

"Rural Health"

"Home-Based and Micro Businesses"

Grant Connections (Electronic Newsletter)

Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities: A Guide to Building a Home-Based and Micro Business Program (Two volume, 22-chapter curriculum)

Industrialized Animal Agriculture, Environmental Quality, and the Strategies for Collaborative Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution (Proceedings of the SRIEG-10, Natural Resources Economics Regional Committee meeting)

Information Brief (Welfare Reform Series)

Titles published to date:

Welfare Reform: An Overview of Key Provisions (Bo Beaulieu, SRDC)

The Bottom Line: Welfare Reform, the Cost of Living, and Earnings in the Rural South (Julie N. Zimmerman and Lori Garkovich, University of Kentucky)

Building Assets and Economic Independence Through Individual Development Accounts (Carl Rist and Brian Grossman, The Corporation for Enterprise Development)

The New Federalism: Confounding Effects of Devolution (Lori Garkovich)

Where the Rubber Meets the Road: New Governance Issues in America's Rural Communities (Lori Garkovich and Jon Irby, CSREES)

SRDC Partners . . .

Champion Community Representatives (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina)

Community Development Society

Corporation for Enterprise Development, The

Economic Research Service/USDA

Farm Foundation

Foundation for the Mid-South

Heartland Center

Mid-South Delta Consortium

Mid-South Center for Rural Community Colleges

Millsaps College, Mississippi

Mississippi Department of Human Services

Mississippi Universities Community/Economic Development Centers

National Association of Counties (NACo)

National Association of Towns and Townships

National Center for Appropriate Technology

National Rural Development Partnership

Nonprofit Resources, Inc.

Office of the Comptroller of the Currency

Offices of Rural Health (Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma)

President's Council on Sustainable Development

Regional Extension Forestry Unit, University of Georgia

Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI)

[SRDC Staff . . .](#)

[SRDC Board of Directors . . .](#)

SRDC Technical Advisory Committee . . .

