



Rural Development Priorities

REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS



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Building New Economic Opportunities

The Regional Rural Development Centers are a trusted source on the economic and community development activities in our nation's rural communities.

The Centers have a nation-wide network of researchers, educators, and practitioners that provides sound information and hands-on, community-level training that helps rural communities make smart decisions about their community/economic development investments.

The Regional Rural Development Centers and their network have identified five areas of greatest priority for our nation's rural communities, and recommend policy makers consider expanding the level of resources available to advance these important initiatives.

Regional Rural Development Centers' Rural Development Priorities:

1. Strengthening Regional Economic Development
2. Balancing the Use of Our Nation's Natural Resources
3. Building Disaster-Resilient Communities
4. Increasing Rural Broadband Adoption and Education
5. Supporting Local and Regional Food Systems

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REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS Supporting Local and Regional Food Systems


It is widely known that Americans have ready access to fast and convenient foods. However, many Americans live in regions designated as “food deserts”—urban, suburban, and rural areas lacking access to healthy food. Couple that with a community’s limited supply chain and concerns about food security increase. Local and regional food systems offer significant potential for improving food access for vulnerable communities while strengthening local economies.

To assist rural communities with understanding their local food systems, the Regional Rural Development Centers have:

- Coordinated the AFRI Global Food Security Project: Enhancing Food Security in the Northeast with Regional Food Systems.
- Co-hosted the National Value-Added Agriculture Extension Conference
- Collaborated on the development of a Local and Regional Food Systems Community of Practice via eXtension.org.
- Collaborated with the USDA Economic Research Service and universities to calculate detailed agriculture production, distribution, and consumption estimates for all 3,000 U.S. counties.
- Invested seed funds to support food security and food assistance research via the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies (in partnership with ERS/USDA).
- Produced and added the “Direct Marketing Food Specialty Products” learning module to the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative Learning Center.
- Solicited articles for an issue of *Rural Connections* focused on “Local and Regional Food Hubs Boost Rural Economies” that showcases research, case studies, and success stories.



Nearly 200 million blog entries include the phrase “local food”.



Weather-related losses topped \$35 billion in 2011.

REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS Building Disaster-Resilient Communities

Many of America's rural communities do not have well-developed emergency or disaster plans, and in communities with a plan, most residents have had little input in guiding and shaping such a plan. As a result, communities are poorly positioned to respond in a timely and effective manner when disasters do in fact strike.

Working in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Administration/DHS and the land-grant university-based EDEN (Extension Disaster and Education Network) leadership, the Regional Rural Development Centers have taken important steps to engage local people and groups in building a disaster management plan that is tailored to meet the unique needs of their community.

To assist rural communities with their disaster planning, the Regional Rural Development Centers have:

- Worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and EDEN to create ReadyCommunity—a community-based planning tool that complements and adds value to FEMA's Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101.
- Launched pilot testing of the ReadyCommunity program to communities located in five states.