

## VIBRANT, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Healthy communities have people and organizations that work together in pursuing equitable, inclusive community improvement strategies. The RRDCs help build strong, vibrant communities through the following activities:

### Food Assistance Needs of Vulnerable Populations

Food insecurity remains a significant issue in the South. Of the 11 states with the highest rates of food insecurity (i.e., limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways), six are located in the South. Moreover, three of the six states experiencing the highest incidences of hunger are southern states. The Southern Center works in partnership with the USDA Economic Research Service to expand investments in food assistance and nutrition research among university faculty. Findings are being published in a series of SRDC-sponsored policy briefs that shed light on the strengths and continuing needs of our nation's food assistance and nutrition activities.



To learn more: [http://srdc.msstate.edu/activities/food\\_specialrpts.htm](http://srdc.msstate.edu/activities/food_specialrpts.htm)

### Bilingual Training Program for Community-Based Monitoring

The North Central Center is participating in an ongoing process of adapting and institutionalizing community-based monitoring with a wide range of holistic development efforts. Working with the USDA Forest Service Rural Community Assistance Program and USDA/NRCS/Resource Conservation and Development, the Center has developed an interactive workbook (in English and Spanish) and training program for community-based monitoring of community success and sustainability.

To learn more: [http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/Community\\_Success/about.html](http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/Community_Success/about.html)

The **REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS (RRDCs)** exist to strengthen the capacity of local citizens to be key players in guiding the future of their rural communities. Each Center links the research and extension capacity of land-grant universities in its region with local decision-makers to address a wide range of rural development issues, including:

- Vibrant, Sustainable Communities
- Promising Digital Futures
- Balanced Use of Natural Resources

## RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE

Rural America is confronted with a number of serious challenges. The economic foundations of many rural areas have been weakened by declining employment opportunities in manufacturing and farming sectors, the increasing proportion of low-wage jobs, and the large numbers of workers who lack the education and skills needed to secure stable, livable wages. The North Central Center and the Southern Center have joined forces with our nation's rural community colleges, tribal colleges, and land-grant institutions to build a coordinated mechanism for assisting distressed communities located in 12 pilot sites across six states. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the Rural Community College Initiative provides a coordinated system for assisting rural communities as they build vibrant economies and expand access to educational opportunities.

To learn more: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/rcci/>

## EMERGING REALITIES OF RURAL EMPLOYMENT

Most rural communities will need to identify new sources of employment if they wish to replace jobs lost in recent decades to globalization and technological change. Nonfarm proprietorships (providing services such as food and lodging, tax advice, hairstyling, childcare and business consulting, or manufactured goods such as local crafts) represent important rural employment opportunities, but little research has been conducted on these firms to date. The Northeast Center is studying why proprietorships are expanding more rapidly in some rural counties than in others. The Center also proposes a new county typology, "Proprietor Employment-Dependent Counties," for use as a policy tool and to focus attention on this growing but neglected component of the rural workforce.

To learn more (see Rural Development Paper 15): <http://www.cas.nercd.psu.edu/Publications/rdppapers.htm>



### Major Goals of the Rural Community College Initiative

- ✓ Economic development activities that benefit all citizens.
- ✓ Expanded educational access to disadvantaged residents.
- ✓ Increased involvement of citizens in community improvement efforts.

## TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

An effective way to resolve complex and controversial community issues is to approach them at the *community level*. Community dialogue requires a simultaneous understanding of the relational history, procedural options, and substantive issues involved in a situation. The Western Center provides workshops on an approach called Collaborative Learning (CL), which is a decision-making process based on identifying commonalities and mutual goals. The approach has primarily been used in the natural resource/environmental arena, but has broad applicability to other issues as well. CL workshops are available nationwide and are scheduled on demand.

## CL Collaborative Learning

- Reframes "Resolution" with Management
  - Reframes "Problem" with Situation
  - Reframes "Solution" with Improvement
  - Reframes "Success" with Progress

For more information or to schedule a workshop: [wrdc@ext.usu.edu](mailto:wrdc@ext.usu.edu). PowerPoint presentation from the 2002 National Public Policy Education Committee (NPPEC) Conference in Reno: <http://extension.usu.edu/wrdc>, Presentations page

Photo by Iowa Tourism Office

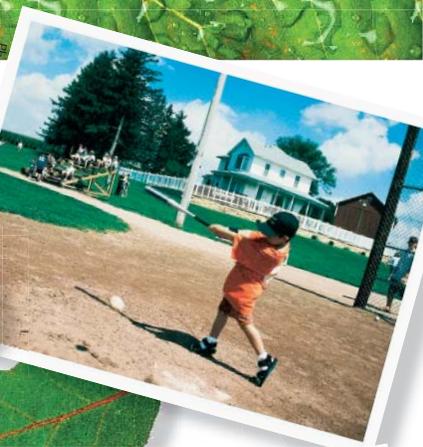


Photo by Iowa State University Extension





## PLACE-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PAYS OFF

The USDA initiative Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) seeks to empower communities to reduce persistent poverty through at least two innovations; linking resources to implement the community's strategic vision, and emphasizing the importance of long-term participation by all community residents. The North Central Center is assessing outcomes of the EZ/EC initiative in 33 designated areas. Systematic monitoring in these designated areas demonstrates that when a diverse group of local residents is brought together and given the skills necessary to work in a coordinated fashion, the community is better able to leverage resources and implement viable economic development strategies. A database of benchmarks and outcomes is available for researchers.

Database of benchmarks and outcomes: <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/activities/ezec/ezec.htm>

### Four Principles Guiding a Holistic Approach to Reduce Poverty

- ✓ Strategic vision for change.
- ✓ Economic opportunity.
- ✓ Sustainable community development.
- ✓ Community-based partnerships.

## COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR EXTENSION AND OTHER RURAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATORS

Challenges facing rural communities are becoming increasingly complex. To meaningfully help communities tackle tough issues, Extension educators must

have strong community development-related skills. The Southern Center has developed a comprehensive series of training programs organized along five themes: civic engagement, community planning tools, economic diversification, service infrastructure, and youth/adult workforce development. Eight training workshops have been organized, with new ones being continually developed. These training activities help strengthen the skills of Extension educators who are positioned to lend assistance and outreach educational activities to rural southern communities.

To learn more: [http://srdc.msstate.edu/cdtraining\\_activities.htm](http://srdc.msstate.edu/cdtraining_activities.htm)

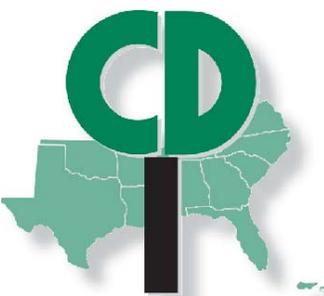
## PUTTING AN EAR TO THE GROUND IN THE WEST

The Western Center is developing a skill-building program to expand community resource development capacity among field personnel patterned after the very successful program developed at the Southern Center. The Western Center designed and administered a needs assessment questionnaire to approximately 70 Extension faculty members from western states. Preliminary data reveal three priority issue clusters. The training design team is using survey data to plan community resource development training that enables western Extension faculty to help communities with the pressing issues of the day.

For complete survey results: [wrdc@ext.usu.edu](mailto:wrdc@ext.usu.edu)

### Priorities Identified by Western Extension Field Personnel

- High:** Economic diversification, economic growth, jobs/workforce, natural resources.
- Medium:** Public lands issues, K-12 education, health care, city/county finance.
- Low:** Land use/sprawl, physical infrastructure, telecommunications, transportation, e-commerce.



## PERSISTENT RURAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES

Historically, the South has lagged the rest of the nation in the educational progress of its adults and youth. Great strides in education have been made over the past two decades, but several southern states continue to experience high dropout rates at the high school level, unacceptable student performance on national educational assessment tests, and the presence of only a limited number of college-educated residents (particularly in rural areas). In light of recent passage of the federal legislation, *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Southern Center has joined forces with the SERVE Southeast Education Laboratory to take a hard look at the educational needs of the southeastern region. The Southern Center continues to compile a comprehensive education data set that will provide school systems with strategies for enhancing the academic progress of students. Such careful analysis will include discussion of the important roles that families and communities play in advancing educational progress.

To learn more: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/serve.pdf>

## PROMISING DIGITAL FUTURES

Electronic technology and connectivity offer hope to rural areas that are left behind by the disadvantages of distance and population dispersion. The RRDCs are linked to the following efforts:

### E-COMMERCE AND NATIVE AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURS

Working with tribes and tribal colleges, the North Central Center initiated learning circles of Native American business owners. The learning circles provided mutual opportunities to learn about the businesses and discover ways in which e-business and networking might contribute to entrepreneurial success. Several challenges were identified and the Center has developed policy recommendations that respond to them. Coalitions of Native American businesses emerged from these learning circles. The diverse goals of these entrepreneurs led to self-generated, culturally-grounded strategies of business development and e-commerce.

To learn more: <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/pubs/contents/185.htm>



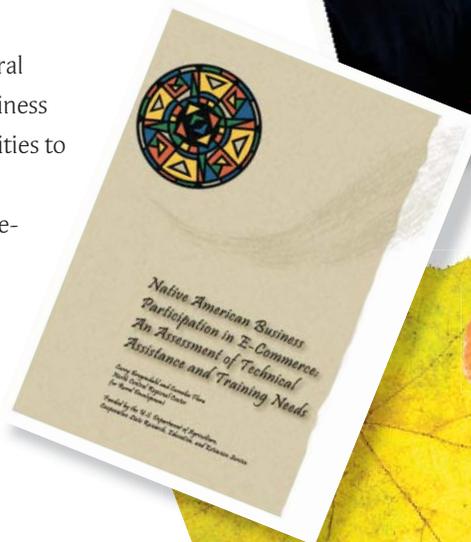
### Build It AND They Will Come?

There is a notable lack of IT infrastructure in rural areas. However, the mere presence of connectivity does not guarantee that rural communities will maximize use of Web resources. A recent U.S. Commerce Department report confirms that "the factor most likely to accelerate broadband demand is the creation and deployment of easily understood, value-adding business and consumer applications." To address this need, the Northeast Center commissioned a tutorial showing rural and small non-profit organizations how to take advantage of Web-based resources. This *e-nonprofits curriculum* complements existing e-business and e-government curricula and completes a suite of e-tutorials for rural residents. The Center also published *The Webbook of IT Innovations in Extension* to showcase IT-based Extension programs and is organizing a train-the-trainer workshop for 2003.

Webbook of IT Innovations in Extension: <http://www.cas.ncrcrd.psu.edu/ITWebbook.htm>



Photo by Scott Bauer, ARS



## BALANCED USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Rural America is endowed with rich natural resources, and promoting sound cultural, economic and ecological uses of these resources is of paramount importance. The RRDCs are engaged in a variety of strategies that enhance the environment, including:

### **Today's Decisions Define Tomorrow's Landscape**

With increasing awareness that land use decisions are often irreversible comes increasing concern that land use decisions are made responsibly. The Northeast Center has leveraged and expanded the science base for making balanced land use decisions by sponsoring two land use research workshops, which generated summary proceedings that are being formatted for lay audiences. These include *GIS and Your Community* and *Ten Things Members of Every Community Need to Know About Land Use*. The Center is also adding value to the output of land-grant institutions by inventorying and classifying land use publications and programs.

Land use workshop summary proceedings (see Rural Development Papers 10 and 11): <http://www.cas.nercrd.psu.edu/Publications/rdppapers.htm>. Inventory of land use resources: [http://www.cas.nercrd.psu.edu/Land\\_use.htm](http://www.cas.nercrd.psu.edu/Land_use.htm)

### **Sustainable Communities and Sustainable Agriculture**

Traditionally, the task of keeping nutrients on the land and not in the water supply has been assigned to land managers. The North Central Center is involved in a multidisciplinary research and extension effort on integrating crops and livestock into farming systems and watersheds. Research shows that good nutrient management requires farming systems supported by community market institutions. Working with a wide range of agricultural scientists, the Center is exploring issues that emerge from the intersection of scientific knowledge (e.g., animal science, agronomy, and environmental engineering), physical processes (e.g., hydrology, nutrient cycling), and social structures (e.g., households and communities).

To learn more: <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/newsletter/Vol25No4-2001/crops.htm>

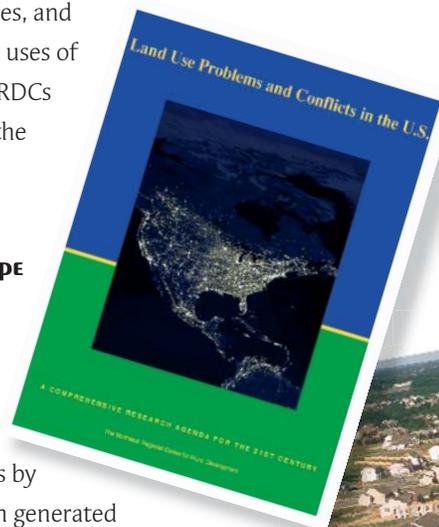
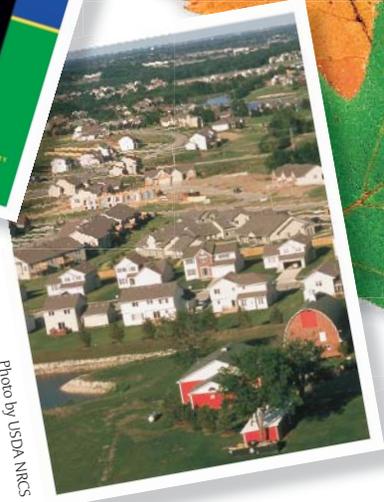


Photo by USDA NRCS



### **Sustainable Communities Innovation Grants**

The success of locally-initiated sustainable development activities often depends on establishing collaborative relationships between stakeholders that have little history of working together. To build important bonds between change agents in the farm and non-farm sectors, the Southern Center and the Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program have collaborated to establish the Sustainable Community Innovation Grants program. This competitive grants program provides up to \$10,000 to support novel community-based projects—projects that seek to build resilient farms, businesses, families, and communities in the South. Eight innovation grants were awarded in 2002, and a new group of awardees will be announced in early 2003. Collectively, these projects provide useful strategies for effectively designing and implementing sustainable agriculture and community development efforts in the rural South.

To learn more: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/activities/sare/>

## Tools for Discussing Local Growth

*Western by Design* is a resource toolkit developed by the Western Center to help small western communities (usually with populations less than 50,000) explore their own unique growth issues. The toolkit provides a basic framework for identifying local concerns so communities can make informed decisions.

This type of dialog and exploration is a fundamental part of sound decision making. The toolkit helps communities help themselves by 1) building AWARENESS of local growth issues, 2) helping them conduct an ASSESSMENT of their current situation, 3) guiding them as they explore multiple ALTERNATIVES and decide which alternative best accomplishes their goals, and 4) helping them develop a plan of ACTION. An evaluation section has also been included to help track progress in meeting goals.

For more information: <http://extension.usu.edu/wrdc>, Publications page



### **NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL CENTER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Cornelia Butler Flora, Director  
Iowa State University  
(515) 294-1329  
[cflora@iastate.edu](mailto:cflora@iastate.edu)  
<http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu>

### **NORTHEAST REGIONAL CENTER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

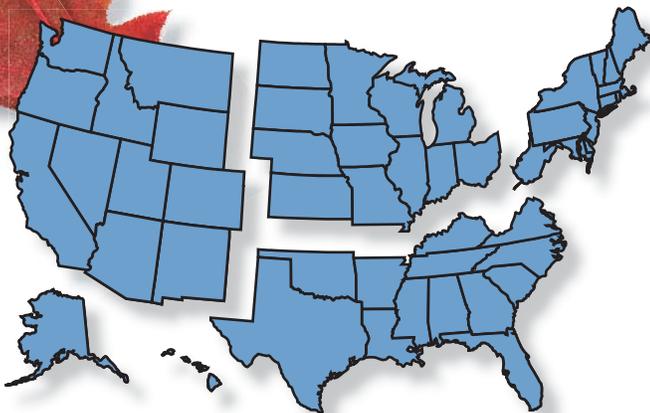
Stephan J. Goetz, Director  
Pennsylvania State University  
(814) 863-4656  
[sgoetz@psu.edu](mailto:sgoetz@psu.edu)  
<http://www.cas.nercrd.psu.edu>

### **SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

Bo Beaulieu, Director  
Mississippi State University  
(662) 325-3207  
[ljb@srdc.msstate.edu](mailto:ljb@srdc.msstate.edu)  
<http://srdc.msstate.edu>

### **WESTERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

Steven E. Daniels, Director  
Utah State University  
(435) 797-9732  
[wrdc@ext.usu.edu](mailto:wrdc@ext.usu.edu)  
<http://extension.usu.edu/wrdc>



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