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Civic Capacity Research Expands
The past year has been a time of transition for the Southern Rural Development Center, as we have said good-bye to a longtime director and adjusted our sights on new visions and vehicles for service to our constituents.

In April, SRDC director Lionel “Bo” Beaulieu assumed duties at Purdue’s Center for Regional Development. We are all appreciative of the dedicated service of Dr. Beaulieu during his 15 years with the Center. A search for a permanent director is underway, with advertisements already published and applications being reviewed.

During the transition, the SRDC staff continues to advance the Center’s strategic priorities of fostering civic-minded communities, building economically vibrant communities, bolstered with opportunities for involving and enriching populations with unmet and, in some cases, difficult to quantify needs. The Center’s community and economic development initiatives remained on pace during the year, and staff members are to be highly commended for driving the SRDC’s efforts to help communities in the Southeast.

The SRDC Board of Directors and the Center’s 15-member Technical
and Operational Advisory Committee (TOAC) support the staff in ensuring that the work of the Center remains aligned with the needs of our uniquely-challenged, rural communities.

The Center has been a valued and cohesive partner with Mississippi State University since the SRDC began operation on the campus under the joint sponsorship of MSU and Alcorn State University in 1974. The MSU administration, especially the leadership of the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station and Mississippi State University Extension Service, remains firmly committed to providing solid support for the SRDC mission and MSU’s role as Center host.

Finally, I would like to thank the various federal and state government agencies, universities, and foundations that provide the financial resources and programmatic guidance that are the base from which the SRDC continues its mission in support of our clientele.

Sincerely, Sumner Davis
Dr. Lionel J. “Bo” Beaulieu helped shape the priorities, accomplishments, extramural funding and partnerships of the Southern Rural Development Center for nearly 16 years. With his departure in April 2013 for a new position as director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development/Assistant Vice President for Engagement at Purdue University, the SRDC remembers his leadership, while maintaining Beaulieu’s momentum.

Beaulieu joined the SRDC in August 1997, following the retirement of his predecessor Dr. H. Doss Brodnax. After many years at the University of Florida, the rural sociologist brought his fresh ideas, fierce determination and friendly disposition to Starkville.

“To say this was a tough decision is putting it mildly,” Beaulieu wrote in a farewell letter. “I have really enjoyed my 15½ years as SRDC director and have grown both professionally and personally. The administrative leaders at Mississippi State have been outstanding, and I can’t thank them enough for the support they have provided to the Center and to me over the course of my career at this fine institution. Of course, many of you have touched my life in so many ways and I want to say thank you for believing in the work of the SRDC.”

Bonnie Teater, who spent 30 years at the SRDC, said it was exciting to be part of Beaulieu’s team.

“With Bo’s love of research and his excitement for publishing quality and practical educational materials, he advanced the SRDC’s mission at the state, regional and national levels,” Teater said.

Under his leadership, the SRDC spearheaded a number of land-grant rural development research products responding to priority policy and information needs of rural development partners. The Center invested in educational resources, such as “Ca$hing in On Business Opportunities: A Guide to...
Building a Home-Based and Micro-Business Program” and “C.A.R.E” that enhanced rural development programming in the region and the nation. Beaulieu was instrumental in securing the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies at the SRDC to fund social sciences-based food assistance research. The annual Southern Region Program Leadership Network joint meeting, in place now for a decade, increases cooperation among Extension program leaders across the South. In addition, the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative, Stronger Economies Together, Rural Community Colleges Initiative, and National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals became a reality.

“Dr. Beaulieu provided programs that strengthened all parts of Extension programs in the region for agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, as well as community resource development,” said Dr. Ronald A. Brown, Association of Southern Region Extension Directors executive director.

Beaulieu also placed importance on entrepreneurship, disaster preparedness, civic engagement, health care, and broadband adoption in the rural South. The SRDC increased its partnerships through Beaulieu’s networking and governmental relations skills, with groups including the USDA Economic Research Service, Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, Appalachian Regional Commission, Walton Family Foundation, Kettering Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and numerous others.

“My plan is to maintain a strong partnership with the SRDC as part of my work at the Purdue Center for Regional Development,” Beaulieu added.

A national search is now underway for the next SRDC director, who will lead the ongoing commitment to support the rural communities and residents of the Southern region.
Priority One:

Fostering Civic-Minded Communities
Civic Capacity Research Expands

A growing number of rural residents express a desire to have a meaningful voice in matters of local importance, yet few seem to see an avenue for accomplishing this goal. This often leads to frustration and disengagement of those who have the most at stake in advancing the well being of their communities. In response to this concern, the SRDC is continuing its focus on strengthening civic engagement in rural communities across the South.

In cooperation with researchers from South Dakota’s Horizons project, Turning the Tide on Poverty’s sister initiative in the Northwest, a new study in partnership with the Kettering Foundation will build upon more than five years of research on the role that civic engagement plays in tackling the tough issues impacting communities.

Throughout 2014, the research initiative will develop comparative case studies in multiple Tide communities, with historical comparisons to Horizons communities. Three questions will help researchers gain a better understanding of what happens when civic engagement and civic capacity-building are seeded in communities with the facilitation of research and Extension professionals, then allowed to evolve and adapt within the particular context of each location.

• Community Champions: To what extent does the success of the project require the identification of a local champion?
• Community Coaches: To what extent does the success of the project require on-going, formal community coaching by research and Extension professionals?
• Sustainability: What does civic engagement look like in communities over time, after the community adopts, adapts, and takes ownership of its increased civic capacity?

Collecting information on these key questions can help the SRDC contribute to the body of knowledge relating to civic engagement. At the same time, it can provide important input on how to create an environment where local people and organizations can work in mutually supportive ways to make a difference in their communities.
Priority Two: Building Economically Vibrant Communities

Stronger Economies Together Continues to Enhance Regional Development

Now in its fourth year, the Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative has expanded to assist nearly 60 rural regions in 28 states to develop regional economic development blueprints that strategically build on their current and emerging economic strengths.

Launched in 2010 by USDA Rural Development and the nation’s four Regional Rural Development Centers and their land-grant university partners, SET has provided the specialized training and technical assistance to help rural areas compete in the global job market by pooling their resources across county boundaries. Four states previously involved in SET (New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Texas) will expand to additional regions in 2013. Two new states, Nebraska and Illinois, also joined the initiative as part of Phase IV.

Rural communities face some major challenges in creating or expanding local job opportunities, especially if these places have small populations or limited economic activities. In tough economic times, it makes sense for neighboring counties to cooperate, instead of compete. SET does not urge communities to come together without cause, but the program encourages collaboration for the purpose of finding the distinct comparative advantages they have as a region – economic activities that can position the region to effectively compete in multi-state, national and/or international markets.

The SET process includes interactive sessions on building strong regional teams; examining regional demographics, assets, and barriers; developing...
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Regions continue to develop high quality regional economic development plans, with a new peer-review process for assessing these plans. The plans are evidence-based, practical, broadly supported, aligned with visions and goals, and focused on regional economic development. In addition, $5,000 seed funding incentives are available to regional teams who develop and implement the high quality plans.

SET developers have used data collected as part of the initiative to address challenging areas for some teams, including regionalism, participation and final outcomes. The fourth phase of SET applies lessons learned to adapt the process to meet the participants’ needs and wants. Additionally, new and lasting relationships are forming throughout the SET regions and between USDA Rural Development and Extension Service employees nationwide. Another significant measure of the initiative’s success is the approximately $6.2 million in funds captured by SET regions to carry out key aspects of their regional economic development plans.
National e-Commerce Extension Initiative

The economic foundation of rural America has experienced dramatic changes over the past two decades, making it increasingly important for rural businesses to implement e-commerce strategies to strengthen their economic health and stability. In response to these changes the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative was launched in 2003. Funding for the program came through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA. The Southern Rural Development is pleased to be joined by the Mississippi Extension Service Center for Technology Outreach to help facilitate the work in 2013.

The e-Commerce Initiative provides funding opportunities for innovative educators throughout the Extension system to develop e-commerce educational curricula, trainings, workshops, conferences, and online resources targeting rural businesses and local communities. The following are examples of Initiative funded projects and outcomes since the work began:

- Mississippi and Montana developed and implemented workshops that focused on small business electronic retailing. The workshops were conducted in 16 rural locations, training more than 750 small business owners. Products: Electronic Retailing: Selling on the Internet, Distance Education & E-Commerce, and Security Squad: Keeping Equipment and Information Safe

- Nebraska, Oklahoma and Idaho developed e-commerce training materials that addressed the specific needs of Hispanic businesses and communities. Products: Comercio Electronica, ¡El Tiempo Ahora Esta!, E-Commerce and Online Tools for the Latina Entrepreneur

- Vermont developed workshops and online e-commerce educational resources for farmers in direct sales and agritourism. Products: Google Analytics for Farms and Search Engine Optimization

- Pennsylvania facilitated the developmental process of broadband adoption in communities to increase the economic and social well-being of local businesses
Shideler Honored for Early Career Achievements

The SRDC proudly honored Dr. David Shideler as the 2013 recipient of the Bonnie Teater Community Development Early Career Achievement Award. Shideler is a member of the Department of Agricultural Economics at Oklahoma State University.

Shideler joined OSU in 2008 and quickly developed strong Extension programs and research in economic development. His accomplishments include more than 125 reports on retail analysis, economic impact analysis and sustainable community/strategic planning. Additionally, Shideler developed curriculum for the SRDC’s National e-Commerce Extension Initiative. He also serves as Chair of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association’s Community Economics Network.

Shideler’s impressive portfolio of contributions in economic development, including publications, presentations, community analyses, and collaborative networks, both in-state and nationally, position him as very deserving of this award.

Mississippi, Nebraska, and Ohio developed a Social Media Marketing series of informational pieces that address 10 specific social media topics for small businesses. Product: Social Media Marketing for Blogs, Facebook, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Mobile Apps, Mobile Marketing, Pinterest, Twitter, and Websites

Competitive Grants Program “Building Quality e-Commerce Educational Resources to Support Extension Programming” will be awarded by year’s end. The four projects should be completed by June 30, 2014.

Mississippi provided the leadership for redesigning the national e-Commerce Extension Initiative website and eNews electronic newsletter. Products:

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  - [srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce/rebuild/index.html](http://srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce/rebuild/index.html) (website)
  - [srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce/rebuild/latest_issue.html](http://srdc.msstate.edu/ecommerce/rebuild/latest_issue.html) (newsletter)

Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin contributed to the educational development of e-commerce resources for entrepreneurs, small business owners, Extension educators, and community development professionals. Product: Virtual E-Commerce Learning Center (containing 13 interactive learning modules)

Maine developed an interactive entrepreneurial curriculum targeting middle and high school aged youth. Product: Connecting Kids to e-Commerce

Alabama conducted e-commerce trainings and workshops for small businesses located in the impoverished Black Belt region of the state. Product: E-commerce Training for Small Businesses in Alabama’s Black Belt Program

and community organizations. Product: Connecting Communities
Priority Three:
Enhancing Distressed Communities
ReadyCommunity Fosters Resilience in Rural Places: Montana’s Story

The ReadyCommunity program, coordinated by the USDA-NIFA’s Regional Rural Development Centers with leadership from the SRDC, empowers Cooperative Extension personnel and their partners with the know-how to assist communities with disaster-preparedness planning using FEMA’s Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101. This guide promotes a common understanding of the fundamentals of risk-informed planning and decision-making. In addition, it assists planners at all levels of government to develop and maintain viable all-hazards and all-threats emergency plans.

The ReadyCommunity resource materials, funded by FEMA, USDA NIFA and Extension Disaster Education Network, complement and add greater depth to the six steps delineated in the Comprehensive Preparedness Guide. Seven rural places, including Anaconda Deer-Lodge County, Montana, recently piloted the complete, collaborative planning process.

Montana State University Extension Agent Barbara Andreozzi assembled a small, local team from Anaconda Deer-Lodge County, Montana to apply for the first round of ReadyCommunity pilot projects in fall 2011. She secured the support and commitment for involvement from the Anaconda-Deer Lodge County CEO, Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) coordinator and assistant coordinator, fire chief, and police chief. Local DES leadership assisted in the application, and once awarded the pilot project, also served on the planning committee.

Andreozzi served as the facilitator and community coach for the project, attending the SRDC-organized ReadyCommunity facilitator training along with the fire chief and assistant emergency services coordinator. Post-training, they outlined the process, developed a workable local timeline, and created a leadership team who then worked to identify partners to attend the first community planning committee meeting.

A Community Comes Together

The first community planning session was held March 2013 with more than 60 partners in attendance. Partners continued to carry out assignments from each subsequent planning session, owning the process, understanding their roles, and bringing resources to each session as needed. The group enjoyed sharing their own assets and those of the community, expanding the list at each of the following sessions.

The partners easily focused on the community’s most critical needs, forming subcommittees to handle a number of issues: developing of a community shelter; including of “at risk” groups in all planning stages; developing and refinement of communications plans; raising awareness that the first 72 hours after a disaster is up to us – as a community, as an individual, as a family – to be prepared to care for, feed, and shelter ourselves; and establishing a Task Force to organize the community-wide education forum set for fall 2013.

More than 250 residents attended the forum, surpassing expectations. In addition to providing the community with information on preparing for the first three days following a disaster, the forum also included reports from each sub-committee describing action steps being taken to improve community readiness.

The ripple effect continues today as the ReadyCommunity planning partners implement the community’s goals. Businesses are seeing an uptick in activity as a direct result of the community forum. Specifically, local electricians continue to receive calls to evaluate homes for backup generator needs. Public officials and local leaders continue to receive praise and thanks for the information shared at the community forum.
In 2013, the NARDeP Center focused on three key areas: Energy and the Environment, Food Systems Development, and Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship.

Relating to these focus areas, the Center released two major policy pieces on rural broadband availability and adoption and on natural gas extraction (fracking). In addition, the Center supports research that cuts across policy issues related to the farm and agricultural sectors; the environment; rural families; households and economies; and consumers, food, and nutrition.

Numerous timely and unbiased data briefs, policy briefs, webinars and working papers were also released to policy makers, legislative staffers, and the general public.

In the coming year, NARDeP’s continuing objectives are to:

- Provide timely and cutting-edge research on current and emerging public policy priorities and regulations in a quantitative format
- Contribute to the development of theoretical and research methods
- Create and disseminate new data sets from secondary and other sources to policy makers, analysts, and other interested individuals
- Serve as a clearinghouse for technology diffusion and educational resources and to disseminate impartial information through web-based training and other publications
- Help train the next generation of policy analysts
NARDeP Broadband Policy Study Featured in Farm Foundation Forum

The NARDeP sponsored work “Broadband Services in Rural America” was showcased during the September 2013 Farm Foundation Forum featuring a panel representing five distinct perspectives. Among these was Dr. Sharon Strover (University of Texas), one of three researchers authoring “Rural Broadband Availability and Adoption: Evidence, Policy Challenges and Options” one of NARDEP’s most recent contributions.

Based on this work of Dr. Stover and her co-authors, Dr. Roberto Gallardo (Mississippi State University) and Dr. Brian Whitacre (Oklahoma State University), she presented a brief overview of the findings of the paper during the September event. On the right is a link to the full webcast as well as the materials shared by each of the panelists.

September 2013 Farm Foundation Forum

Listen to the forum (MP3) from this link:

farmfoundation.org/news/articlefiles/1866-2013-09-11_farm_foundation_forum.mp3

To access the research and policy briefs:

nardep.info/Broadband_2.html
RIDGE Center Continues Funding Food Assistance Research

The SRDC’s Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Center for Targeted Studies again funded innovative social sciences-based research that explores the food and nutrition assistance challenges facing children, racial/ethnic minorities, and low-wealth households in rural America.

RIDGE Competitive Grants Program

After careful review by a national panel of scholars, four projects received RIDGE Center grants of approximately $35,000.

Jinhee Kim, University of Maryland; Yunhee Chang, University of Mississippi; and Swam Chatterjee, University of Georgia
Health, Economic Instability and Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Ning Zhang, University of Massachusetts
Food Prices, Time Values, and Time Spent on Food Shopping and Meal Preparation: RuralUrban Disparities

Ariun Ishdorj, Texas A&M University
Rural vs. Urban Texas WIC Children Food Choices and Intakes Before and After Changes in the Food Benefits

Lloyd D. Grieger, Yale University
New Versus Return Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program During the Great Recession

Doctoral Dissertation Research Grants Program

In its third year, the dissertation research competitive grants program again invested in doctoral students who are pursuing research in areas that align with the RIDGE Center priorities. Two individuals were awarded grants of up to $17,500.

Amanda C. McClain, Cornell University
Contextual Influences on Household and Child Food Security Among Recent Mexican-origin Immigrant Families

Mary Zaki, Northwestern University
Credit Access and Supermarket Consumption Amongst the Liquidity Constrained

Established in 2010, the RIDGE Center has funded 24 proposals from outstanding higher education faculty and doctoral students. The center will transition to a joint partnership with the Purdue Center for Regional
2013 Funding Sources

- **BASE FUNDING** $237,444.00
- **EXTRAMURAL FUNDING** $710,410.00

2013 Trainings Investments

**Number of Direct Participants Reached through SRDC Training Opportunities**

- Southern Region Program Leadership Network (1 event)
- Community Development Basic Training (5 events)
- Stronger Economies Together Trainings (5 events)
- Climate Variability Dialogue/Training (3 events)
- Broadband Expansion Training (2 events)
- ReadyCommunity Disaster Preparedness (1 event)

Other Events Sponsored

- National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals
- Community Development Society
SRDC Mission

The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region’s 29 land-grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the rural South.

SRDC Priorities

Fostering Civic-Minded Communities

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

Building Economically Vibrant Communities

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

Expanding Opportunities for Distressed and Low-Wealth Communities

The rural South faces a variety of economic and social challenges including high poverty rates, obesity, and low educational attainment. Moreover, the South continues to experience a variety of natural disasters. The SRDC works to create a better tomorrow for these vulnerable communities and people.
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Delta Regional Authority
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Economic Research Service USDA
Everyday Democracy
Farm Services Agency, USDA
Farm Foundation
Federal Emergency Management Agency/Department of Homeland Security
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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.