



**2021 Bonnie Teater**  
**Community Development**  
**Early Career Achievement**  
**Award Recipient**  
**Dr. Sreedhar Upendram**

The Southern Rural Development Center is proud to honor Dr. Sreedhar Upendram as the 2021 recipient of the *Bonnie Teater Community Development Early Career Achievement Award*. Dr. Upendram is an Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at The University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

Dr. Upendram's tenure in Extension community research development began in 2017. During this time, he has spearheaded many impactful efforts. His academic scholarship has resulted in over nine peer-reviewed journal articles and over 111 peer-reviewed Extension publications exploring state and regional economic development challenges. Additionally, Dr. Upendram has secured over 20 research grants totaling over \$8.6 million.

Dr. Upendram's primary focus areas are broadband access and adoption as well as rural water infrastructure. His broadband work resulted in the development and expansion of a library mobile internet hotspot lending initiative adopted in six Tennessee counties and eleven elementary schools. He also secured funding to support a downtown Wi-Fi program to help improve economic development and entrepreneurial activity. His broadband efforts also include a collaborative effort with Purdue University resulting in the creation of digital divide profiles for all 95 Tennessee counties. His internet adoption efforts also extend to 4-H as he helped develop curriculum and train pilot states on the National 4-H Council's Tech ChangeMakers program which received the 2020 Southern Regional Award for Educational Materials by the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals.

Dr. Upendram's efforts supporting rural water infrastructure have yielded substantial, positive impacts for the community. He assisted the State Revolving Fund for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in creating a tool based on publicly available data and sound business principles to allocate subsidies and track vital trends across the communities over time. Also, he developed a comprehensive database and methodological framework capable of providing critical decision-making tools to key stakeholders. The tool - "Ability to Pay Index", and database fundamentally changed the way that the state of Tennessee identifies and addresses small and disadvantaged communities who need critical help with water infrastructure.

On behalf of Sreedhar Upendram's nomination, Dr. Christopher D. Clark, Professor and Department Head, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Tennessee stated that "Dr. Upendram's applied academic research and statewide Extension education programs are devoted to promoting community and economic development by enhancing the infrastructure communities need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." In addition, Dr. Matthew J. Ulmer of the Community Resource Development, Alabama Cooperative Extension System stated that "the impacts of his work are greatly improving the lives and wellbeing of Tennesseans while also providing great frameworks by which others in the Community Resource Development arena can model after his work."

Overall Dr. Upendram's body of work in the field of community development demonstrates the spirit of this prestigious award. Therefore, it is most fitting that Dr. Sreedhar Upendram be honored as the Southern Rural Development Center 2021 recipient of the *Bonnie Teater Community Development Early Career Achievement Award*.