



Items of Interest



A Message from the Director

Holiday Wishes from the Southern Rural Development Center

On behalf of the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), I want to send best wishes to you during this holiday season. It is a busy time of year for all of us, both in our personal and professional lives. As a result, it is easy to get lost in the details of our schedules and forget what is special to us. However, if we pause and make the time to look around and reflect, it is readily apparent that we have much to be thankful for, individually and collectively. Acknowledging the diverse traditions of faith in our wonderfully eclectic network, I hope that you can spend time this season with family, friends, and colleagues, actively nurturing the strong sense of community that has brought us together in this life.

John J. Green, Director

South Carolina State University CED Program Turns Business Plans into Jobs



Business plan workshop series class participant

South Carolina State University 1890 Research & Extension's Community Economic Development (CED) Program implemented a five-week Rural Business Plan & Competition workshop designed to strengthen small rural and emerging entrepreneurs. The series blended systematic instruction, individualized coaching, and hands-on assignments that enabled participants to complete full, investment-ready business plans tailored to their ventures.

Each weekly session explored market research, operations design, financial projections, customer acquisition, and implementation strategies. Participants progressively refined their concepts and received feedback from CED faculty, business service partners, and peer entrepreneurs.

The culminating pitch competition translated learning into action. Three businesses were awarded a total of \$25,000 to advance their operations. This included a grand prize of \$10,000, along with two additional prizes of \$7,500 for second and third place. Distinctively, awards carried a workforce development outcome: recipients were required to hire a part-time employee and develop a hiring and sustainability plan demonstrating how employment investments would strengthen productivity, expand services, and contribute to local job growth.

Special congratulations to the winners:

- \$10,000: Kimberly Jennings, Distinctive Learning with Kids in Mind LLC.
- \$7,500: Chandlar Glover, Coiffure Collection LLC.
- \$7,500: Erica Smith, Rural Roots Collective Cooperative Inc



Completed business plans from series participants.



\$10,000 Award Winner: Kimberly Jennings (Center), Distinctive Learning with Kids in Mind LLC.; Chris Green (left), Midlands Region Regional Director; and Monique Hubbard (right), Midlands Region CED Agent.

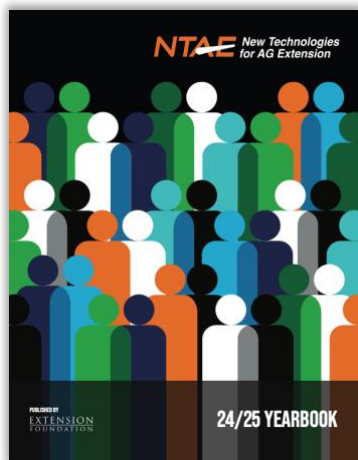


Participant, Mr. Julian Ramsue, 704 Farms

This strategic design reflects the CED Program's mission to build entrepreneurial capacity while strengthening community wealth. Rather than supporting business planning, the series intentionally linked capital infusion to tangible workforce improvements—reinforcing entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic mobility. Participants reported enhanced confidence, stronger execution skills, and new access to partners, mentors, and support systems. Many established networks with local resource providers and discovered future collaboration opportunities. [SC State Community and Economic Development Program Highlight Video](#)

The next event is scheduled for April 2026. For more information, please contact Dr. Alfred McIntosh, State Program Leader at acorbit2@scsu.edu.

Driving Digital Transformation Through Extension



The [National Digital Education Extension Team](#) (NDEET) is a collaborative network of Extension professionals and partners committed to advancing digital knowledge, skills, and innovation. Recognizing Extension's unique role in educating communities about the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, NDEET compiles educational and planning resources to increase broadband awareness, access, and adoption. Through initiatives such as Advancing Digital Access, Digital Skill Building, and the Digital Volunteer Initiative, NDEET empowers communities to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. With broadband infrastructure expanding nationwide, these efforts ensure that individuals not only gain connectivity but also the skills necessary to leverage technology effectively. Last month, [the Extension Foundation's New Technologies for Ag Extension](#) (NTAE) released the [2024–2025 Yearbook](#), highlighting how NDEET and its partners are leveraging their national network to provide tools and resources that have engaged and educated more than 20,000 community members.

In July, NDEET and the ECOP Broadband & Digital Access Program Action Team convened in Denver, Colorado, to chart the future of digital engagement in [Cooperative Extension](#). This strategic meeting identified three priority areas for research and content development: Economic Development, Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology, and Cybersecurity. Each area includes actionable goals, from mapping AI tech hubs and building workforce capacity to creating cybersecurity education programs and digital ecosystem assessments. These initiatives position Extension as a leader in fostering digital resilience and innovation.

For more information or to get involved, contact Dr. Roseanne Scammahorn (r.scammahorn@msstate.edu) or Dr. Kristopher Elliott (kristopher.elliott@oregonstate.edu). Together, we are building a stronger, more connected future for all communities.

Complete 2024 Well-Being Data Now Available from All Four RRDCs

As of November, all four [Regional Rural Development Centers](#) (RRDC)—the [North Central Regional Rural Development Center](#) (NCRCRD), [Southern Rural Development Center](#) (SRDC), [Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development](#) (NERCRD), and the [Western Rural Development Center](#) (WRDC)—have released open-access data from their groundbreaking, [multi-region Baseline Survey 2024](#). This comprehensive dataset establishes an essential national baseline to support future research, policy development, community planning, and targeted interventions.

Originally developed by NCRCRD, SRDC, and Auburn University, the survey examines key dimensions of household, business, and community well-being across multiple U.S. regions. [WRDC has now completed and published its data](#), making nationwide coverage possible.

The 2024 effort builds on NCRCRD's 2022 North Central survey (NCR-Stat: Baseline 2022), expanding earlier topics and adding new areas, including the recreation economy, perceptions and impacts of extreme weather, and residents' intentions to move or remain in their communities.



Call for Papers: Special Issue on Rural Livability



The Review of Regional Studies

The Official Journal of the Southern Regional Science Association



Submission Deadline: March 15, 2026

The Review of Regional Studies invites submissions for a **Special Issue on Rural Livability**, guest edited by Steven Deller (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Tessa Conroy (University of Wisconsin-Madison).

Across the United States and beyond, rural communities are shifting from a narrow focus on growth to a more holistic framework of place-making: strengthening the assets, institutions, and relationships that enhance quality of life and foster resilience. This special issue explores research, policy, and practice concerning all aspects of rural livability. We welcome both theoretical and empirical contributions examining how rural livability manifests across diverse regions and contexts. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- The role of community capitals (social, human, natural, physical, financial, and cultural) in shaping livability
- Individual participation, civic engagement, and social innovation as drivers of rural vitality
- Policy changes at the state or federal levels and their impact on rural well-being and development
- Migration, demographic change, and workforce dynamics in rural communities
- The intersection of livability, sustainability, and resilience in rural economies
- Place-based policies for housing, infrastructure, broadband, and health care
- Measurement and evaluation of rural livability across spatial and temporal scales
- Extension, outreach, and community partnerships supporting local prosperity and inclusion
- The impact of AI on rural communities

Submissions should be made through the Scholastic RRS portal under "Special Issue on Rural Livability". Manuscripts should follow the Review of Regional Studies author guidelines available on our Author Instructions page. All papers will undergo a double-blind peer review process.

Submission Deadline: March 15, 2026.

First-Round Decisions: Expected no later than May 31, 2026.

For questions regarding this special issue, please contact Guest Editor, Dr. Steven Deller, at scdeller@wisc.edu. For questions regarding the Review of Regional Studies, please contact journal editor, Dr. Yong Chen, at Yong.Chen@oregonstate.edu.

About RRS: The Review of Regional Studies (ISSN 0048-749X) publishes high-quality theoretical and empirical social science research in which the spatial dimension plays a fundamental role. The journal is the official publication of the Southern Regional Science Association and provides an open-access platform for interdisciplinary scholarship that informs regional policy and practice.

[For further information and submit a manuscript](#)

2026 Southern Rural Sociological Society (SRSA) Conference: Providing Opportunities to Explore, Present, and Collaborate on Rural Change in the New South

The Southern Rural Sociological Association (SRSA) is pleased to announce that registration and the Call for Abstracts are now open for its 2026 Annual Conference, themed “Distilling Change: Rural Roots & River Currents in the New South”.



Accommodations & Registration

The conference will be held at the Omni Louisville, 400 S 2nd St., Louisville, KY 40202. Attendees are encouraged to book early as space is limited.

Call for Awards Submissions

SRSA invites nominations for annual awards in Teaching, Research, Extension, and Public Service, as well as Outstanding Student and Professional Paper Awards, all **due January 5, 2026**.

Questions regarding abstracts or awards can be directed to **Kara Woods, President-Elect**, at kawoods@alcorn.edu.

Post-Conference Opportunity: SERA 49

On February 3, 2026, in conjunction with the annual meeting, SRSA will host the in-person Southern Extension and Research Activity (SERA) 49: Heirs' Property – Impacts at Family, Community, and Regional Levels meeting at the Omni Louisville. Open to researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders, this session aims to strengthen regional capacity, foster collaboration, and introduce new practices and methodologies to reduce involuntary land loss. The participation fee is \$50, waived for those already registered for the SRSA conference.

[Access the one-pager for more information about the SERA 49 meeting](#). Questions regarding this meeting, contact **Kara Woods**, kawoods@alcorn.edu and **John Green**, jig8@msstate.edu for more information.

Program Questions & Information

For questions regarding the conference program, contact Ryan Thomson, SRSA 2026 Program Chair, at southernruralsocassn@gmail.com. Learn more and register at the [SRSA 2026 Conference Landing Page](#).

Conferences, Workshops, Trainings

2026 Southern Rural Sociological Association (SRSA) Conference

In-person: February 1-2, 2026, Omni Louisville Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky

[VIEW ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION](#)

2026 Extension Leadership Conference (ELC)

In-Person: February 3-5, 2026, The DeSoto Savannah, Savannah, Georgia

[ACCESS CONFERENCE INFORMATION](#)

NeighborWorks Training Institute

In-person: February 23-27, 2026, Chicago, Illinois

[ACCESS TRAINING REGISTRATION INFORMATION](#)

2026 Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) Conference

In-person: April 20-21, 2026, in Bethesda, Maryland

[CONFERENCE INFORMATION COMING SOON](#)

2026 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Conference

In-person: June 15-18, 2026, in Wichita, Kansas

[ACCESS CONFERENCE INFORMATION](#)

2026 Community Development Society (CDS) Annual Conference

In-person: July 19-22, 2026, Georgia Southern University, Savannah, Georgia

[ACCESS CONFERENCE INFORMATION](#)

2026 Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) Summit East

In-person: September 15-16, 2026, IALR Conference Center, Danville, VA

[ACCESS SUMMIT INFORMATION](#)

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