

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

EMPOWERING PARTNERSHIPS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER



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ABOUT SRDC & CONTACT

Mission

The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region's 30 Land-Grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the wellbeing of people and communities in the rural South.

Background

The Southern Rural Development Center is one of four Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) coordinating rural development and Extension education programs cooperatively with Land-Grant institutions regionally and nationally. The RRDCs are supported by the United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Mailing & Physical Address

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Websites

Southern Rural Development Center | srdc.msstate.edu & Regional Rural Development Centers | rrdc.info



A letter...



The 2023 Annual Report from the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) focuses attention on the important work of “Empowering Partnerships for Community Development.” While partnerships have always been core to the SRDC’s work, we gave them concentrated attention over the course of the past year. In the following pages you will find numerous examples of the SRDC and partners’ efforts to build capacity for addressing issues of concern for the wellbeing of rural people and their communities.



You will notice that the featured initiatives transcend the institutional and territorial boundaries that often divide us. With the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and areas of expertise found in the Land-Grant System, coupled with support resources from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and several other agencies and foundations, we have made collective contributions to community development efforts. Month-by-month summaries highlight initiatives that not only have produced substantive benefits but have also contributed to the depth, breadth, and strength of partnerships for years to come.

I hope you will learn and gain inspiration from the work reported here. Building from another successful year, SRDC staff look forward to working with the Board of Directors and Technical & Operational Advisory Committee, NIFA, partners in the Land-Grant University System, and our collaborators with other colleges/universities, nonprofits, and foundations to build the capacity in the Southern Region and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John J. Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

...from the Director

Find us on social media



Southern Rural
Development Center



Southern Rural
Development Center



@so_dev_center



Southern Rural
Development Center

This material is based upon work 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 author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Special thanks to our host institution



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY

NEW WEBSITE LAUNCH AND INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORY

Website Updates:

In June, the Southern Rural Development Center unveiled its revamped website, aiming to deliver an improved digital experience for users. Key sections of the site include programs, articles, news, and curriculum, which are depicted here. The programs page includes current projects. Special topics showcases research briefs and publications regarding critical issues in the South. The news page reflects current stories and events, and the curriculum page provides relevant training materials. Check out these and other pages on the updated site.

The screenshot shows the 'Programs' section of the website, featuring a grid of seven program cards. Each card includes a logo, a title, and a brief description of the program's focus and goals.

The screenshot displays the 'Special Topics' page, which is organized into four main categories: 'Heirs' Property', 'Coming Together for Racial Understanding', 'Digital Access', and 'Policy'. Each category lists several research briefs and publications with their respective titles and authors.

Institutional Repository:

In addition to updating and launching a new site, the SRDC has partnered with the Mississippi State University Libraries System, through Scholars Junction, to host an archival system. Through this site, viewers can locate, download, and share annual reports and articles from the special topics series. The system also includes a dashboard that tracks viewed and downloaded content.

Visit the new site: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/>

Repository: <https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/srdc/>



JANUARY 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	New Year's Day					
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	Martin Luther King Jr. Day					
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



Building Capacity to Address Heirs' Property Issues

Extension/Outreach

Understanding Heirs' Property at the Community Level is a train-the-trainer workshop designed to build capacity among Extension/outreach professionals to help families take initial steps into preventing or resolving heirs' property issues.

The achievements since training commenced in November 2022 are as follows:

- 6** Train-the-trainer workshops conducted
- 156** Extension/outreach professionals trained
- 32** States sending team members to training

Based on 156 participants' evaluation of the train-the-trainer workshops:

- 97%** Have new knowledge concerning heirs' property
- 98%** Know where to find resources to help with heirs' property
- 98%** Feel knowledgeable enough to take this information back to help communities

Top 5 topic areas where participants reported the highest knowledge gained:

Why heirs' property exists

The importance of working with family members

Impacts of heirs' property

Identifying heirs' property

How tax sales and partition sales can lead to land loss

Research Accomplishments include:

- Provide leadership on the USDA AFRI-funded project entitled, "The Racial Wealth Gap, Persistent Poverty, and Heirs' Property" with research to inform Extension programming.
- Partnered with the Southern Rural Sociological Association for a special issue of the Journal of Rural Social Sciences focused on heirs' property and an associated Issue Brief.
- Research Brief link: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/HP-brief-Bailey-Dobbs-Gaither-Thomson-6.2023-final.pdf>



To learn more, visit: https://srdc.msstate.edu/programs/heir_property

Heirs' Property Receives SERA 49 Designation

Building from the previous working group, Southern Extension and Research Activity (SERA) 49 was officially approved in 2023.



To learn more, visit:
<https://srdc.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/2024-01/SERA-49-app-doc.pdf>



Partners:



Alcorn.

SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS AND RANCHERS POLICY RESEARCH CENTER



SOUTHERN
EXTENSION
RISK MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION



SRSA

SOUTHERN RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



FEBRUARY 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
			Valentine's Day			
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	Presidents' Day					
25	26	27	28	29		



COLLABORATIONS THAT WORK

Over the late spring and summer months of 2023, the Southern Rural Development Center worked with Cooperative Extension Service leaders across the region to gain insights from collaborations that work among the South's 1862 and 1890 Land Grant Universities (LGU). Using a mixed methods approach, insights were gained from Extension leaders as well as from project leaders that had successfully collaborated across institution on an Extension effort. Below are the key highlights.

Big Themes: Lessons Learned



Set shared goals, expectations, and accountability from beginning to end



Keep the purpose of serving people better at the center point



Engage in ongoing open, respectful, frequent communication



Focus on the relationship building with trust and respect as core component



Understand and match capacity and strengths to the workload; leverage, not compete



For Extension leaders: encourage, support, and model collaboration

Funding provided by: **Walmart** 



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/special-topics/collaborations-that-work>

MARCH 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Daylight Savings Begins						
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Saint Patrick's Day						
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						
Easter Sunday					Good Friday	



Delta Scholars and Delta Regional Forum

Delta Scholars



17

Number of students participating in the 2023 Delta Scholars Program who attend colleges and universities from across the multi-state Delta Region, South, and nation.

Scholars participate in:

- Delta Regional Forum hosted by the Delta Directions Consortium and partners
- 2 weeks of summer session in Mississippi combining university and community experiences
- Boston Conference educational and professional development experiences, including Harvard University and Brandeis University

Since the Delta Scholars Program started in 2018, there have been 93 student leaders participate, including 26 from Land-Grant Institutions.

Delta Regional Forum

Provided an avenue for sharing diverse perspectives on development issues

Explored topics including community resilience, local food systems, maternal health, education, public data, and the future of the Delta

Featured project pitch presentations by Delta Scholars

About the Delta Directions Consortium

The DDC is an interdisciplinary network of individuals, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and foundations working to create positive social change in the multi-state Mississippi Delta Region.



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
JUDY AND BOBBY SHACKOULS
HONORS COLLEGE



DELTA DIRECTIONS
Health & Economic Renewal in the Mississippi Delta



THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

CREW

Community First Research Center
for Wellbeing and Creative Achievement



To learn more, visit: <https://www.honors.msstate.edu/delta-scholars/> & <https://cfnm.org/programs/delta-directions/>

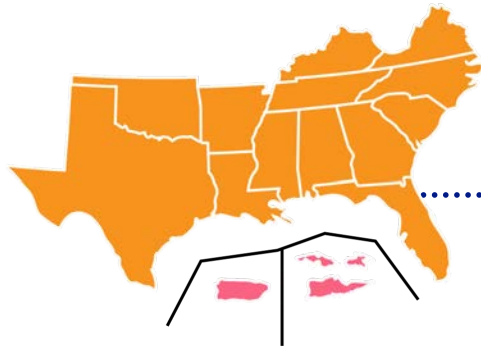


APRIL 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				



Southern Region Community Development Extension Impacts



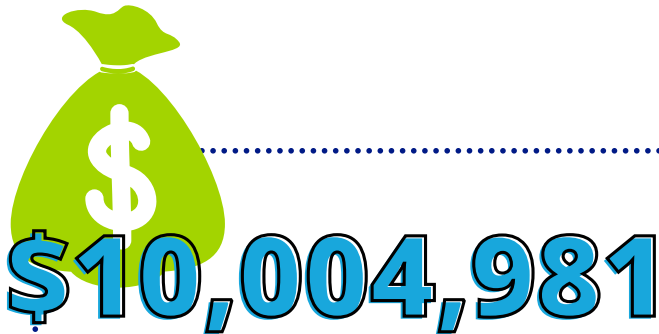
Jobs created/retained



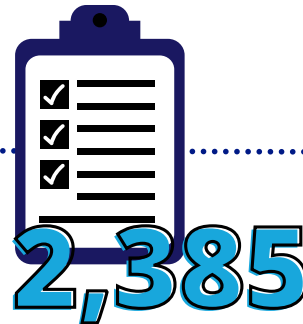
New alliances/networks formed through formal agreements



Businesses created, retained, or expanded



In-kind resources contributed by organizations/communities



Plans adopted and implemented in communities, agencies, local government, businesses, or disaster



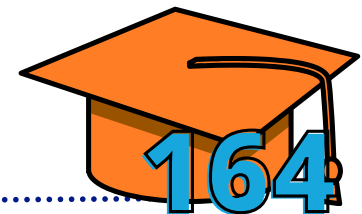
Participants who reported new leadership roles & opportunities undertaken



Grants acquired by organizations/communities



Universities reporting



Full Time Equivalents



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/impacts/southern-region-impacts>

MAY 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Mother's Day						
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
	Memorial Day					



Southern Community Development Impact Stories



ENTREPRENEURSHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Land-Grant Universities are collaborating with national, state, and local resources to foster rural entrepreneurial activities with a focus on growing and sustaining workforce development through educational opportunities.

Examples from:

Alabama A&M, Auburn University, University of Arkansas System, University of Florida Extension, Southern University Agricultural Research and Education Center, Mississippi State University Extension Service, Langston University Cooperative Extension, Clemson University Cooperative Extension, West Virginia State University Extension Service.



COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Creating healthy communities, Land-Grant Universities are addressing food system insecurity, rural mental health, and active communities to improve quality of life across the lifespan.

Examples from:

University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Virginia Cooperative Extension, University of Puerto Rico.



DIGITAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Prioritizing access and adoption of technology to strengthen communities, Land-Grant Universities are emphasizing broadband solutions to enhance work, health, and overall quality of life. This strategic approach aims to foster development in leadership, workforce, and address the unique needs of historically marginalized populations.

Examples from:

Kentucky State University Cooperative Extension Program, University of Tennessee Knoxville, North Carolina State University, South Carolina State University.



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/impacts/southern-region-impacts>

JUNE 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Father's Day						
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						



Building Digital Skill Capacity

Over Spring 2023, the Southern Rural Development Center worked alongside the National Digital Education Extension Team/ECOP Broadband and Digital Access Program Action Team, to conduct a national survey to determine which digital skills are most needed by community members from the perspectives of Extension professionals across all program areas. With 659 total responses collected online via a Qualtrics questionnaire, this survey sets a foundation for developing materials to address the digital skills needs of the populations Extension reaches. The Digital Volunteer Initiative is in direct response to these needs, with lessons addressing each of these topics. The top three categories of skills needed along with the specific competencies within each are listed below.



Safe and Effective Internet Use

- Cyber security, attacks, and scams
- Digital media literacy: accessing, evaluating, using & distributing information credibly, safely, and ethically
- Internet privacy and security, passwords, and sharing information online
- Accessing and navigating the Internet



Computer/Digital Device Basics

- Hardware and software basics
- Using a smartphone
- Saving and recovering data: file movement and management
- Downloading and installing applications



Interacting with Others Online

- Social media savvy
- Video conferencing
- Sharing files, folders, and attachments



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/digital-literacy>

Collaborating Partners



JULY 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4 Independence Day	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



Dialogue-to-Change Process for New Pathways to Work Together

In late 2022, Coming Together State Training Teams convened to explore things which were helping propel the work forward within the state and things that were pushing back on progress. These were mapped across four levels of change: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. (Institutional and cultural were combined given overlapping aspects.)

WHAT ARE THE FORCES PUSHING US FORWARD?

WHAT ARE THE FORCES PUSHING US BACK?

Creation of space, structure, and tools
Seeing growth in self and others
Personal values, hopes, and passions



PERSONAL

Little or no support
(i.e. admin. support; time/space to work)
Fear; lack of confidence
Negative responses from peers and communities

Network of like-minded colleagues
Training, support, and tools



INTERPERSONAL

Polarized political climate
Lack of resources (personnel, time, funding)

Supportive leadership
DEI emphasis by Extension, on Plans of Work
Changing perception of DEI discussions
in the workplace; now considered relevant
Support of partners and other organizations



CULTURAL/INSTITUTIONAL

Not seen as relevant
History of harm and mistrust



AUGUST 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Southern Region Program Leadership Network, Association of Extension Administrators & Association of Southern Region Extension Directors Joint Meeting						
25	26	27	28	29	30	31





Celebrating Retail Accommodations, Tourism, and Entertainment by Building Rural Innovations and Developing Growth Economies

Curriculum set to launch Spring 2024

Evaluation Results

The Regional Steering Committee identified key successes in the following areas:

- Networking and increasing communication
- Capacity building
- Educational and training opportunities for business and workforce

Employees identified key successes in the following areas:

- 100% of growth in knowledge or skill as a result of the workforce trainings
- 93% of respondents would recommend the training to others

Evaluation Key Numbers

2093 Training participants	626 Business owners involved
7 Plans for sustainable support	59+ Partnerships formed or strengthened

Strategies Implemented: Implemented by Phase I and II this year:



8
Micro-projects or placemaking projects (OK, IL)



11
Workforce trainings (OK, AR, NC, KY, NM, IL)



8
Regional marketing strategies (AR, NM, IL)



4
Business trainings (AR, NC)



3
Small business support strategies (AR, KY, NM)



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/programs/create-bridges>

Funding provided by: **Walmart**

SEPTEMBER 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2 Labor Day	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					



The Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging

Funded by the National Institute on Aging (grant R24-AG065159)

Year Four Pilot Projects



Effects of Job Loss during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Protective Effects of Medicaid



Precision Medicine and Frailty

Relationships between Social Vulnerability and Working-Age Mortality from Drug Poisoning, Suicide, and Alcohol-Induced Causes



Four Year Impacts

16

Pilot projects funded, primarily with early and mid-career scholars from across 13 universities

9

Projects enhanced towards additional funding through the National Institutes of Health

Developed new data resources to facilitate research on rural population health and aging - a contextual data library and survey data library - and informed the National Wellbeing Survey

Disseminated research information, expanding scholarly, policymaker, and practitioner knowledge, including support that contributed to 35 publications



PennState



University of Colorado Boulder



Syracuse University



To learn more, visit: <https://sites.psu.edu/inrpha/>

OCTOBER 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	Columbus Day					
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		
				Halloween		



Bonnie Teater Early Career Achievement Award

For 30 years, Bonnie Teater provided valuable support to the Center as a member of its staff. She served as an inspiration through her dedication to her work and her passion for the rural development research and Extension outreach mission of the region's Land Grant Universities. She is currently enjoying retirement in Kentucky.

This award honors the work of a "rising star" who has already achieved great things in his/her early career in community development. Below is the 2023 recipient.

2023 Bonnie Teater Award Recipient: Matthew J. Ulmer



Dr. Ulmer's tenure in Extension community research development began in 2015 as a Family Resource Management and Workforce Development Specialist. In 2018, Dr. Ulmer's responsibilities shifted to Community Resource Development to work collaboratively with the 67 Extension Coordinators to address the most pressing challenges facing the state. As the lead for the Alabama Extension Community Development Priority Team, Dr. Ulmer develops strategies to implement new and existing Extension programs, provides training to County Extension Coordinators, and secures and manages extramural funding opportunities. Dr. Ulmer's professional contributions have generated numerous impacts at the local, regional, and state levels. His grantsmanship has yielded over \$1.5 million.

His focus areas in Extension and outreach activities are on workforce development, tourism, leadership, civic engagement, and youth career development where he works with other Extension personnel to develop curricula in agritourism, job success, and financial literacy.

Outside of extramurally funded initiatives, Dr. Ulmer's applied policy research informed changes to Alabama's workforce development system and provided significant insights to many chamber and economic development authorities through needs assessment and strategic planning efforts.

Overall Dr. Ulmer's body of work in the field of community development demonstrates the spirit of this prestigious award. Therefore, it is most fitting that Dr. Matthew Ulmer be honored as the Southern Rural Development Center 2023 recipient of the Bonnie Teater Community Development Early Career Achievement Award.



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu/bonnie-teater-award>



Southern Extension & Research Activity (SERA) 47: Local and Regional Food Systems

5-Year Objectives (2021-2026)

- Increase interdisciplinary efforts among Extension and research food system professionals
- Identify current and emerging issues specific to food system development
- Assess local food system policy, environmental change, and economic development and identify best practices

Meetings

The 2023 virtual annual meeting was held in December, allowing Extension and research colleagues to share their work and explore collaborative opportunities.

Webinars

Associated webinars showcasing what members are doing in and between their own states included:

- Building local and regional food systems to advance farm-to-institution efforts
- Management practices for limited resource farmers
- Marketing strategies to help food businesses grow
- Creating more equitable food systems for all



To learn more, visit: <https://sera-47.extension.org/covid-19-resources/>

NOVEMBER 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Daylight Savings Ends						
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	Veterans Day					
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
				Thanksgiving Day		



Southern Region Program Leadership Network

In August 2023, **262** participants representing Extension Service state program leaders from eight committees, the Association of Extension Administrators (AEA), and the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED) convened for the annual joint regional meeting for planning and collaboration.



The number of participants in each group are depicted below.

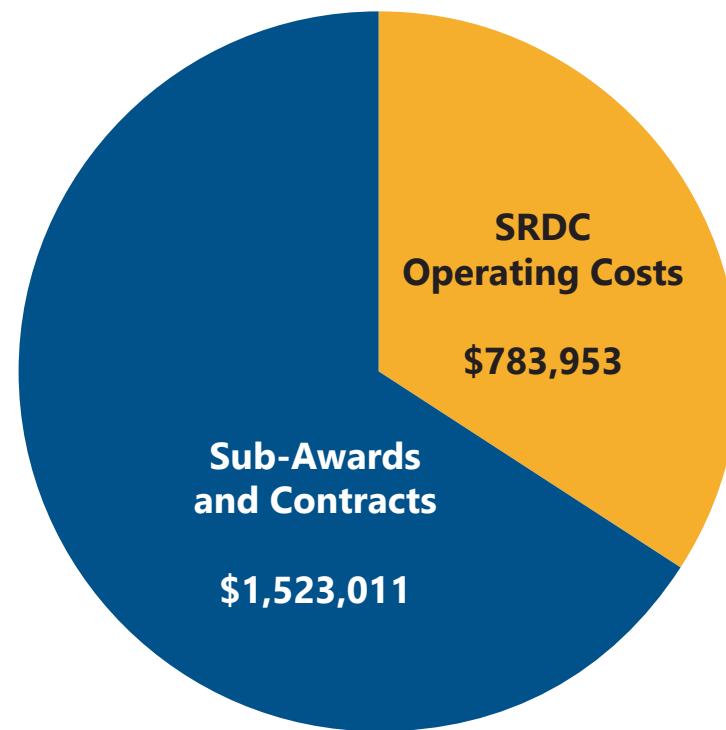


The mission of this group is to foster and strengthen Extension education programming throughout the southern region by promoting multiple state cooperation, anticipating emerging program issues and needs, and implementing action processes to address them in a timely manner.



To learn more, visit: <http://srpln.msstate.edu/>

SRDC 2023 Expenditures



By funding received from the Southern Rural Development Center in 2023, **66%** went to contracts and subcontracts with partners to:

- Form relevant multi-state research teams
- Coordinate the development of educational materials
- Organize and deliver high priority rural development research and educational workshops/conferences
- Provide science based research to inform rural development policy
- Build partnerships that link the South's Land-Grant University system with other key entities committed to rural development activities in the region



To learn more, visit: <https://srdc.msstate.edu>

DECEMBER 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	Christmas Day			
		New Year's Eve				



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Association of Research Directors
Association of Southern Region Extension Directors
Center for Heirs' Property Preservation
Community Development Society
Delta Directions Consortium
Economic Research Service, USDA
Everyday Democracy
Extension Committee on Organization and Policy
Extension Foundation
Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic
Heartland Forward

Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging
Joint Council of Extension Professionals
Journal of Rural Social Sciences/Southern Rural
Sociological Association
LiKEN Knowledge
Local and Regional Food Systems Extension and Research
Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems
National 4-H Council
National Association of Community Development
Extension Professionals
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA
National Institute on Aging
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss
Prevention Project
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
Purdue Center for Regional Development
Rural Coalition
Rural Sociological Society
Shackouls Honors College, Mississippi State University
Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy
Research Center
Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment
Station Directors
Southern Extension Risk Management Education
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