



Items of Interest

Southern Rural Development Center Staff Participate in Delta Regional Forum

The Delta Directions Consortium (DDC) comprises a dynamic network of scholars and practitioners from universities, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic foundations, continuously evolving to address regional challenges. The Delta Regional Forum (DRF), coordinated by the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) and the Delta Legal Fellow (affiliated with the University of Mississippi Community First Research Center for Wellbeing and Creative Achievement) is an annual event held at Coahoma County Higher Education Center in Clarksdale, Mississippi. It serves as a platform for exchanging diverse perspectives and experiences related to regional development issues, while also enhancing the capacity for applied research and community development action. Held in June, diverse participants engaged in presentations, panels, and workshops. The Forum encourages knowledge sharing and networking across community and university boundaries. This year's sessions covered a range of topics including public policy, food security, public health, and community development. Additionally, sixteen undergraduates from eight different universities were participants in the Delta Scholars Program, an initiative affiliated with DDC and led by the Mississippi State University Shackouls Honors College, shared their insights gained during the Forum as part of their immersive two-week summer program experience. The Delta Scholars Program also involves Harvard University (Harvard College, Harvard Law School, and the T.H. Chan School of Public Health), University of Mississippi Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, Rutgers University, and Brandeis University. Along with attending and participating in sessions throughout the Forum, the students also presented their capstone project proposals.



Students participating in the "World Café" at the Delta Regional Forum.



Forum participants engaged in discussion.

Webinars:

Southern Rural Development Center Repository: June 2024 Readership

In June, the top three full-text downloads and the number of downloads, were as follows:

- **96 various SRDC Annual Reports,**
- **30 CREATE BRIDGES extended publications or briefs, and**
- **29 Heirs' Property publications.**

These publications and others are hosted by the Southern Rural Development Center's archival system, Scholars Junction. This platform allows users to explore a dashboard that shows the number of views and downloads for the published content. To access these topic areas and others, visit the SRDC archival system at <https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/srdc/>

Rural Development in the Digital Age: Exploring Information and Communication Technology through Social Inclusion, Journal of Rural Sociology

This Rural Sociological Society Presidential Address, [Exploring Information and Communication Technology through Social Inclusion, written by SRDC Director, Dr. John J. Green](#); considers how information and communication technologies (ICTs) influence our capabilities to choose and navigate where to go and how to get there. Access along with the literacy and skills needed for effective and safe use of ICTs are increasingly influential factors for livelihoods in the so-called digital age, impacting wellbeing and resilience.

Rural-focused social scientists can help to inform livelihood journeys, especially by asking questions about the interplay between ICTs and social inclusion to involve often-overlooked spatial dimensions at the local and regional levels. Doing so will require dialogue, discernment, and active engagement on the topics we explore, the research methods we employ, and incorporation of the experiences, needs, and desires of rural people and places in policies and programs. As a professional association built on diverse scholarly traditions yet rooted in a shared interest for practical application for the benefit of often excluded people and places, the Rural Sociological Society has important roles to play in the digital age.

Regional Spotlight

Oklahoma State Extension Puts Telehealth Booths in Rural Libraries



A program from Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension is trying to address the lack of health care access in rural communities in an innovative way: by installing soundproof telehealth “booths” in local libraries.

“The idea for this program came from collaborating with librarians, educators and people in rural communities who have trouble finding health care when they need it,” said Brian Whitacre, OSU Extension specialist for rural economic development.

Funding for the project came via state-level American Recovery Plan Act funds awarded to the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Whitacre partnered with the state Department of Libraries to find 3 rural locations willing to host a pilot site. The \$120,000 grant paid for three “booths” (~7’ x 7’ rooms, which cost about \$20,000 each) along with telehealth equipment and salary for the libraries

to hire digital navigators to help patrons get set up in the booth. Equipment includes both traditional vital signs monitoring (scales, thermometer, blood pressure cuffs) and more advanced technology that can be directly monitored by physicians (electronic otoscopes or stethoscopes).

Use of the telehealth booth is free (and scheduled through the library); however, patients set up and pay for the appointment via their insurance companies. The project is working on ways to help uninsured individuals use the booth.

The doctor that a patient connects with is typically selected by their insurance provider. Oklahoma State University also has a College of Osteopathic Medicine, and the project is exploring making these physicians available as well. After each patient appointment, the entire booth and equipment are sterilized through UV-light and other cleaning supplies.

The soundproof telehealth booths allow private, one-on-one connections between the doctors and the patients. The digital navigator helps the patient get set up, but typically steps out of the booth once they are connected with the doctor. The booths are large enough to accommodate wheelchairs and an additional family member if the patient desires.

Three libraries had grand opening ceremonies in early 2024: Atoka (pop. 3,200), Hinton (pop. 4,900) and Broken Bow (pop. 4,200). Each library worked with their local physicians and health care centers to help residents connect to specialists that are not available in their area.

For each of these communities, an in-person appointment with a specialist would require at least a 90-minute drive and significant time away from home. The project is attempting to improve local quality of life by removing these barriers to care and providing both a trusted location (library) and knowledgeable helper (digital navigator).

Whitacre also serves as chair for the Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Council, which advises the state’s Broadband Office. The Office has expressed interest in replicating these booths in other rural locations across the state. Forthcoming funding from the Digital Equity Act could be used for this purpose. Anyone interested in learning more about this project can email Whitacre at brian.whitacre@okstate.edu.

Job Opportunities

Associate Director, Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC)

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) seeks applications for an Associate Director position. The individual will lead the Center's outreach-oriented activities in consultation with the Director by:

1. Identifying and coordinating multi-state teams on emerging topics by identifying topics from stakeholders, scanning the region for research and extension collaborators and other rural development partners; convening and facilitating exploration of the topic and related next steps.
2. Working directly with community development stakeholders in the south to address training needs.
3. Garnering extramural funding to support southern region initiatives.
4. Strengthening rural development research efforts in the region.
5. Providing content leadership on SRDC communications and oversee supervision of personnel
6. Facilitating collaboration among the region's 30 land grant university Extension Service State Program Leaders to promote multi-state engagement and efforts.

The mission of the Southern Rural Development Center is to strengthen the capacity of the region's 30 Land-Grant Universities to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the South.

Questions can be directed to John Green, SRDC Director, at john.green@msstate.edu.

[LEARN MORE AND APPLY](#)

Interdisciplinary Scientist (Postdoctoral Research Associate), USDA-ARS National Sedimentation Laboratory

The USDA-ARS National Sedimentation Laboratory seeks an Interdisciplinary Scientist (Postdoctoral Research Associate) to study agroecological and economic impacts of a novel edible cover crop system in a food insecure region of the southeast USA. The scientist will participate in a plot study evaluating edible and non-edible cover crop varieties, in addition to ongoing field-scale research projects as part of the Lower Mississippi River Basin (LMRB) Long-term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network.

The scientist will assist with collecting and analyzing several types of environmental, agronomic, and economic data to assess agroecosystem dynamics and conduct a tradeoff analysis. Modeling tools may be utilized to extrapolate or evaluate results and may be applied to broader regional studies as part of the LMRB LTAR project. Collaboration in community and producer focus groups is also possible in this project.

Research will primarily

- 1) improve understanding of management strategies to improve soil health, water quality, and agronomic outputs,
- 2) provide actionable guidance in cover crop management for Mississippi farmers, and
- 3) result in peer-reviewed manuscripts and presentations at local and national conferences.

The Research Associate is funded through USDA-ARS Headquarters Postdoctoral funding and therefore is required to be a US Citizen. A PhD is required; appropriate fields include Environmental Science, Environmental Engineering, Agronomy, Applied Economics, Ecology, Soil Science, or equivalent. The position is in Oxford, MS. Please send a CV and cover letter to Dr. Lindsey Witthaus, Lindsey.Witthaus@usda.gov. Applications will be evaluated on a rolling basis with the intent to hire in 2024 - early 2025.

Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist in Tourism Economic Development, Auburn University

Auburn University is seeking a 12-month tenure track assistant professor and Extension specialist to provide statewide leadership in tourism economic development. This position is housed within the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management at Auburn University in the College of Human Sciences. This position is designed to assist the College of Human Sciences and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in developing the state's full economic tourism potential. The selected applicant will provide strategic and inclusive leadership in tourism economic development in the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Required qualifications include an earned doctorate in Hospitality and Tourism Management, Tourism Economics, Sustainable Tourism Development, Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resources, Economic Development, or a related field when employment begins.

Applicants should also have evidence of, or strong promise in, building a record or scholarship, grantsmanship, and multi-disciplinary collaborations. The candidate selected for this position must also be able to meet eligibility requirements to work in the United States when the appointment is scheduled to begin and continue working legally for the proposed term of employment.

Apply online using the link: <https://www.auemployment.com/postings/40771>. Provide application letter, complete CV, transcripts from all universities attended, research and educational interests, and three (3) professional references (names, email addresses, and phone numbers). For more information about the position, contact Dr. Alecia Douglas, Ph.D., Chair- Search Committee, at acd0011@auburn.edu.

Assistant Administrator, Community Development and Outreach, Fort Valley State University

The assistant Administrator for Community Development and Outreach will develop, coordinate, and facilitate programming through the Cooperative Extension Program designed to assist communities to realize their long-term goals; through provision of education, technical assistance, and opportunities to secure grants that support strategic planning and community visioning to provide a foundation for economic development. Coordinate or assist in the coordination of programs through outreach efforts with USDA Agencies, State, private and public and nonprofit entities. Master's degree in Agricultural Economics, economics, business administration or other business disciplines is required. Preference will be given to applicants with extension and strong community development experiences. Applicants with degrees in closely related disciplines with community development experiences may also apply. To learn more and apply, visit <https://fvsu.applicantpro.com/jobs/2568591>.

Conferences, Workshops, Trainings

2024 Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP) – The Extension Professional’s Organization National Conference

In-Person: October 27-31, 2024, Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront Resort, Virginia Beach, Virginia

The mission of Epsilon Sigma Phi is to foster standards of excellence in the Extension System and to develop the Extension profession and professional.

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2024 Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC)

In-Person: November 17-19, 2024, Renaissance Montgomery Hotel and Spa, Montgomery, Alabama

“Global Stewardship: Addressing Climate and Sustainability Challenges for Food Security”

The Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC) is a forum committed to a world that values and promotes equal opportunity equitable access to information and technology for sustainable development of communities and natural resources.

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2025 Southern Rural Sociological Association (SRSA) Conference

In-Person: February 2-3, 2025, Irving, Texas

Save the date and location for the 2025 SRSA conference. More details to come.

2025 Extension Leadership Conference (ELC)

In-Person: February 19-20, 2025, Savannah, Georgia

Save the date and location for the 2025 ELC Conference. More details to come.

2025 Public Issues Leadership Development Conference (PILD)

In-Person: April 7-8, 2025, Arlington, Virginia

Save the date for the location of the 2025 PILD Conference. More details to come.

2025 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Conference

In-Person: June 9-12, 2025, Charleston, West Virginia

Join the West Virginia State University Extension Service and West Virginia Extension Service in Charleston for the 2025 NACDEP Conference: Country Roads, Connecting the Farm to the Country.

More details to come.

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