

# REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

Advancing the Economic Health of Rural America



# STRENGTHENING RURAL ECONOMIES

Vibrant, resilient rural economies support a productive, competitive agricultural sector and help position the U.S. as a global economic leader. **The Regional Rural Development Centers conduct research to identify successful development strategies and deliver innovative programs.**

For example, the Centers:

- Coordinate the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program, which has engaged more than 100 multi-county regions in a process to develop a regional economic development plan. To date, these regions have secured over \$776 million in funding to promote regional tourism, infrastructure, workforce development, and more.
- Launched the Agricultural Marketing Service Technical Assistance (AMSTA) project in 52 states and U.S. territories, which has provided grant-writing training to more than 3,000 potential applicants of USDA grants related to promoting local foods and farmers' markets.
- Are partnering with the National Extension Tourism Network, supporting their work of promoting outdoor recreation and tourism research and programming throughout the Cooperative Extension Service and are co-sponsoring the group's biennial conference.
- Provide ongoing leadership to the annual National Sustainability Summit (NSS) (April 2019, Tampa, FL). The NSS will bring leading sustainability educators, practitioners, and researchers together to showcase program successes, share challenges, and identify opportunities around Climate/Air, Land, Food, Water, and Energy



# PROMOTING QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is foundational to thriving, prosperous rural communities. **The Regional Rural Development Centers' work is grounded in rural quality of life issues**, including housing, health, infrastructure, economic development, and community resilience. For example, the Centers:

- Are leading a national effort to explore interrelationships between health and community economic development including a workshop, where participants identified knowledge gaps, shared programming efforts, developed partnerships, and explored collaborations in health and community economic development areas.
- Are leading a national initiative to explore new ways to provide early warning of emerging community-level behavioral health issues, such as opioid use. Visit [healthbench.info](http://healthbench.info) for more information.
- Commissioned a set of papers, titled *Rural Housing and Economic Development*, by Land-Grant University experts to examine the relationships between housing and rural economic development.
- Are conducting research exploring linkages among behavioral health issues and declining farm income, extreme weather, local economic conditions, and the availability of treatment facilities.



# SUPPORTING A RURAL WORKFORCE

Rural workers and entrepreneurs need ongoing training to meet the evolving needs of rural communities, organizations, and businesses. **The Regional Rural Development Centers seek to directly enhance the capacity of rural communities to support the needs of their workforce.** Examples of the Centers' efforts include:

- Supporting a national team in assessing the current workforce development resources and capacity of the Cooperative Extension Service nationwide, identifying programmatic and research gaps to help communities better address workforce skill issues, and enhancing existing resources.
- Piloting an initiative exploring opportunities to build on a foundation of rural retail business and associated workforce (often composing 20% or more of local jobs in rural settings) to build capacity for workforce development in other rural industries.
- Examining the potential impacts of pension reductions in rural communities in light of the rising risk of public and private pension fund insolvency. The statuses of private and public pension funds were reviewed and analyzed to relate changes to larger regional impacts. The report is available here: [bit.ly/2LqSqLK](https://bit.ly/2LqSqLK)
- Assembling a team to explore potential paths rural communities can take to provide employment opportunities for residents, with a focus on the potential of utilizing modern information and communication technology.



# HARNESSING TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

A longstanding tradition of innovation has positioned the U.S. as a world leader in agricultural production. At the same time, new research shows that rural innovation is also widespread in non-agricultural industries. **The Regional Rural Development Centers are working to identify and harness innovative capacity of rural areas.** The Centers' efforts include:

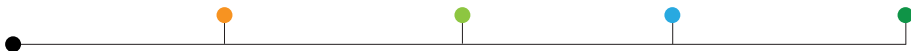
- Partnering with the USDA's Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and a private firm to provide outreach, training, and technical assistance to potential SBIR grant applicants. The project is designed to increase awareness and understanding of the SBIR program and application process, increase participation by underserved populations, and help successful applicants manage their awards.



- Leading Innovations in Agriculture, a multi-state project to create systems for transferring innovation from universities into the field, and to help connect rural and agricultural businesses to research and development funding. The team is also partnering with USDA's Economic Research Service to analyze a national

survey exploring innovation practices and the impact of SBIR funding.

- Examining the role of innovation in supporting entrepreneurship and small business competitiveness in rural areas. A new measure of latent innovation developed through the Centers' research suggests higher levels of such activity in many rural areas than was previously recognized.



# PROMOTING E-CONNECTIVITY FOR RURAL AMERICA

The Internet is critical to community economic development in the 21st Century. But for communities to benefit, they must have access to broadband, be able to afford it, and know how to use it. **The Regional Rural Development Centers are working collaboratively with multi-state Cooperative Extension Service and research teams to strengthen joint efforts to expand broadband access and usage to underserved areas.** For example, the Centers:

- Are exploring potential partnerships among federal, state and local entities that can help advance e-Connectivity in rural places.
- Are leading a national team of Cooperative Extension Service and research professionals to identify existing resources to support communities seeking to expand access; explore impacts of infrastructure investments; expand curriculum to promote digital literacy among individuals, businesses, and local government; and build capacity within the Cooperative Extension Service on a national level to help support local efforts to advance connectivity.
- Supported the USDA Economic Research Service and Farm Foundation, LLC in organizing a workshop that examined the return on investment from infrastructure improvements including broadband. The information will be useful to policy makers in future investment decision making.



# REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

The Regional Rural Development Centers are a trusted source of economic and community development data, decision tools, education, and guidance for our nation's rural communities.

Collectively, the Centers form a one-stop-shop connection to the nationwide network of Land-Grant Universities and the Cooperative Extension Service. Each Center serves a U.S. region and taps its Land-Grant University network to form innovative research and Extension partnerships in the area of rural development.

Together, they help rural communities make science-based decisions about their community and economic development investments.

## ● THE REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

### **Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development**

Hosted by Pennsylvania State University

### **North Central Regional Center for Rural Development**

Hosted by Michigan State University

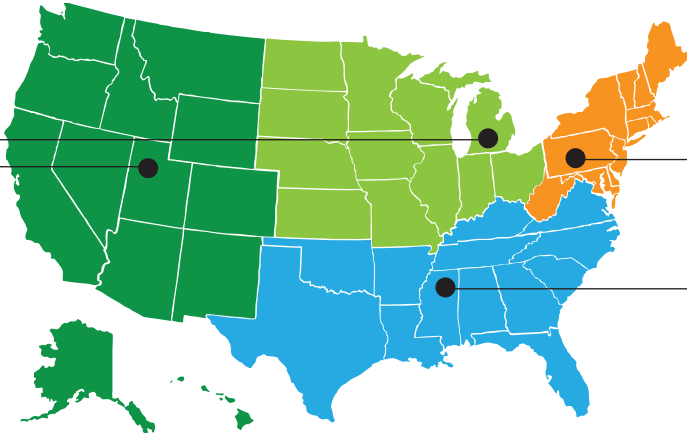
### **Southern Rural Development Center**

Hosted by Mississippi State University

### **Western Rural Development Center**

Hosted by Utah State University

# REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS



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The Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDC) are regionally focused centers funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to strengthen the capacity of local citizens to guide the future of their rural communities. Each Center links the research and extension capacity of regional Land-Grant Universities with local decision-makers to address a wide range of rural development issues. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or their host institutions. The RRDC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability or veteran status.



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