

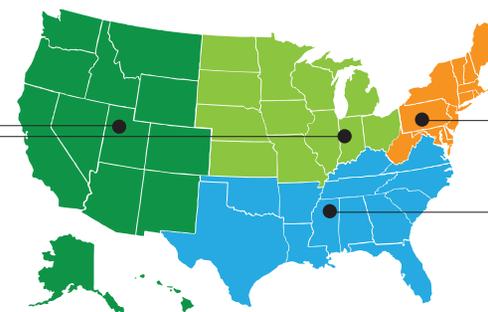
UPCOMING INITIATIVES

The Regional Rural Development Centers, established through the Rural Development Act of 1972, have been building capacity in rural places alongside the nation's Land-Grant University system for 50 years. As rural areas across the nation continue to face economic turmoil, social unrest, climate variability and a great deal of uncertainty about the future, the RRDCs are responding in the following ways.

The RRDC in the Northeast (NERCRD) will continue its data-driven research efforts designed to help regions recover better in the post-COVID-19 era, with reduced regional disparities. This includes providing timely analysis of economic, social and health-related trends in rural communities, the factors driving these trends, and strategies for mitigating their impacts. The NERCRD also will continue research on local economic development drivers, including especially the role of rural innovation, by working with the Federal Research Data Center and colleagues at USDA/Rural Development and NSF. We will conduct research on and support local and regional food systems and supply chains, identifying sources of vulnerability to disruption, including climate change. Together with regional partners we will help rural communities assess their capacity for recovery and growth post-COVID, and we will identify constraints facing underserved populations such as female- or minority-owned businesses and develop recommendations for addressing these barriers. The NERCRD will continue to serve as a regional hub for our land-grant partners, linking research and Extension faculty across state lines. In the upcoming year we will organize and facilitate "affinity groups" around specific emerging priority topics.

The RRDC in the North Central region (NCRCRD) transitioned to Purdue University in September 2020 after 10 years at Michigan State University. The mission of the NCRCRD is to enhance rural communities through cutting-edge research and Extension programs by building innovative partnerships throughout the North Central Region. The NCRCRD's works focuses on three interconnected systems: communities, businesses, and households and three major themes: resilient communities and economies; leadership and civic engagement; community health and wellness. The NCRCRD is dedicating resources and personnel to address issues such as rural health inequities, substance use disorder, community development, workforce development, and rural small business resilience. As a newly transitioned center, the NCRCRD is building integrated regional working groups that cultivate applied research and Extension support of NCRCRD's major themes. In addition, the NCRCRD is leading a region-wide applied research effort focused on data collection, analysis and visualization to aid decision makers from across the region.

(continued)



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UPCOMING INITIATIVES (ctd.)



The RRDC in the South (SRDC) will continue to focus on three priorities that impact the well-being of Southern rural communities, as identified by its guiding bodies made up of Land-Grant professionals and relevant non-profit partners. These priorities are: (1) Develop Pathways to Resilient Communities, (2) Build Strategic Partnerships, and (3) Mobilize Resources around Emerging Issues and Opportunities. In the coming year, the Center will continue to advance the priority to *Develop Pathways to Resilient Communities* through (a) supporting the SERA 47 Local and Regional Foods Initiative, (b) increasing broadband access and adoption in collaboration with the National Digital Education Extension Team, (c) growing research and Extension collaboration around heirs' property issues, (d) expanding civil dialogue efforts around race and ethnicity, and (e) examining opportunities for the Community Resource Development program area to effectively respond to regional needs amplified by COVID-19. Under the second priority, *Building Strategic Partnerships*, the SRDC will (a) continue shepherding CREATE BRIDGES which is designed to explore opportunities to strengthen rural retail sectors which often make up a large portion of rural employment and which are particularly at risk in the current pandemic, (b) expand rural resources to promote prosperity in partnership with the USDA Office of Partnership and Public Engagement, (c) support leadership development efforts in the Southern Region Program Leadership Network, and (d) coordinate development of the annual Southern Region Community Resource Development Indicators report. For the third priority, *Mobilize Resources around Emerging Issues*, the Center will continue to assist with a national scan of priorities for the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) and engage with stakeholder groups on a monthly basis to scan for new issues/concerns that need attention in addition to what has already been noted.

The RRDC in the West (WRDC) continues to address the concerns of the residents of rural America. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the WRDC has coordinated efforts of researchers and Extension specialists throughout the west in helping the residents and communities of the west address the economic consequences resulting from the pandemic. The WRDC has published briefs on understanding and coping with the economic change. Additionally, surveys were conducted of county and city leaders to understand their perspective on how their communities were being impacted.

The WRDC is supporting the National Extension Climate Initiative. This group of more than 100 land-grant university faculty and staff is spearheading multi-state collaboration on climate-related research and extension efforts, and is addressing the need for climate crisis educational materials in the national Extension system. Additionally, the WRDC initiated the National Sustainability Summit, which is conducted every other year.

The WRDC has been heavily engaged in rural economic development. Our Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) is a strategic planning program that has been implemented in over 50 counties in the west from New Mexico to Alaska and from Montana to Hawaii. This process helps communities target industries that are both desirable to residents and compatible with industry needs, and fit in a 21st Century economy. The WRDC has also partnered with Utah's Rural Online Initiative.