

Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University

Extension and Research Priorities, 2021

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- **Regional and National Listening Session on Economic Viability:** The four Regional Rural Development Centers received funding from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to support listening sessions to inform both regional and national priorities. These will include a broad national survey, four regional listening sessions, and four focused conversations on high priority topics as informed by the survey.
- **Broadband Access and Adoption:** National Digital Education Extension Team (NDEET) is building capacity within the Land-Grant system to support:
 - Community organization to connect to broadband
 - Adoption of broadband through digital literacy skill development
 - Research on high priority issues such as digital ag, broadband adoption benefits, reaching underserved communities
- **Heirs' Property:** Five working groups are meeting monthly to address concerns related to heirs' property.
 - Partnership development – Seeking to identify stakeholders in this arena to better align efforts
 - Research – Examining vital gaps in data and learning to enhance and inform practices for prevention and resolution
 - Education and outreach – Building capacity among Extension and other professionals working with families and farmers to prevent/resolve heirs' property issues
 - Legal-Policy-Funding – Examining/informing best practices in policy development and implementation
- **Community Conversations on Race – Coming Together for Racial Understanding:** The purpose of this effort is to build capacity within the LGU Extension System to facilitate community dialogues on issues of race/ethnicity. To date, 29 states have sent teams, and new funding for this year will allow for additional training and capacity building for these and new states. The Southern leaders (ASRED and AEA) have also used this process to develop action ideas for expanding DEI across the region through joint partnerships.
- **Rural Population Health and Aging:** The Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging facilitates innovative research on the multilevel and multidimensional exposures shaping and being shaped by health and aging trends among different rural populations and regions in the United States.
- **Local & Regional Food Systems – SERA 47:** Southern Region Extension & Research Activity is addressing food insecurity and access issues through local and regional food systems.
- **Rural Retail Economies – CREATE BRIDGES:** Teams in six states are piloting efforts to enhance retail, tourism, and entertainment economic sectors can thrive in rural places given that typically 25%+ of rural economies are based within these sectors, which is much higher than most urban settings. Thus, this is a key rural economic opportunity.
- **COVID-19 Impact on CRD Efforts:** SRDC is exploring how COVID emphasized the need for Community Resource Development (CRD) support to address rural resilience and equitable access to resources for underserved communities.

