



Regions Connecting for Rural Innovation



Southern Regional Summit



**Partnership Building and Regional Collaboration
a strategic initiative co-sponsored by
the United States Department of Agriculture and
Partners for Rural America**

Purpose:

In October of 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requested the assistance of Partners for Rural America (PRA) in “establishing partnerships with key institutions at the state and regional level and in encouraging communities to work together at the regional level.” USDA specifically asked that the PRA, the national non-profit organization of the State Rural Development Councils, organize and lead four regional discussions on how partnership building and regional collaboration can be used to help revitalize rural America.

USDA further noted that successful partnerships often begin with a small number of dedicated stakeholders working together on a specific common issue or opportunity. With a strong economy being integral to a community’s success, the USDA indicated that they believe rural communities are “best served by joining together on a multi-county regional basis.”

The PRA convened four regional discussions on how collaboration and partnership building can be used to address USDA priority areas in rural economic development, broadband, energy development and local food systems. Outcomes from each regional convening will be used as a platform from which plans are developed and actions implemented over the next one to two years. Through regional partnerships and collaboration, the ultimate goal of these four convening’s is to connect and leverage resources to effect change immediately in rural communities.





Southern Summit Overview

Convening location & dates:

May 11-12, 2010
Charlotte, North Carolina

**Lead State Rural Development
Council:**

Glen Sink
Council for Rural Virginia, Executive Director

Planning Committee:

Rural Maryland Council
North Carolina Rural Development Council
South Carolina Rural Development Council

Council for Rural Virginia

USDA Rural Development
Southern Rural Development Center

Vanessa Orlando, Executive Director
Mark Roberts, Executive Director
Walter Harris, Executive Director
Stan Perry, Assistant Director
Glen Sink, Executive Director
Thelma Burris, Director Southwest
Oliver McBride, Past Chair
Ellen Mathews Davis, VA RD Director
Lionel “Bo” Beaulieu, Executive Director
Vicki Vaughn, Program Business Manager

States Represented:

Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia,
Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North
Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee,
Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming



Southern Summit Overview (continued)

State Rural Development Directors

Who Attended:

Ronald “Ronnie” Davis	Alabama
Shirley Sherrod	Georgia
Tom Fern	Kentucky
Jack Tarburton	Maryland/Delaware
Trina George	Mississippi
Randall “Randy” Gore	North Carolina
Vernita Dore	South Carolina
Bobby Goode	Tennessee
Ellen Mathews Davis	Virginia

Breakout session topics:

Economic Development
Broadband
Energy
Workforce Development

Number of Registered Attendees:

109

Southern Summit Outcomes

ENERGY

Goal One: Utilizing energy co-ops in completion of energy audits for institutions, utilities, businesses including farms, and other energy users, to increase efficiencies.

Key Steps

1. Rural Electric Co-ops could conduct energy audits.
 - MD/VA/DE electric co-ops already conduct residential energy audits at no charge to their residential members
- Rural towns should conduct energy audits.
 - Towns can look at energy efficiency through their utility services as water and waste water audits;
 - Towns can look at other efficiencies as community transportation from individual police or other vehicles and various town buildings' energy usage;
 - Create partnership opportunities with RCAP, Rural Electric Co-ops and Rural Development;
 - i. Improve energy efficiency by encouraging local food production and distribution.
 - ii. Improve profitability of local food and energy food stock providers by reducing transportation (energy) costs by linking these resources with end users in suburban and urban areas.
 - iii. Improve local rural economies by local food utilization.
- Develop new and expand existing energy audit certification programs.
 - Create partnership opportunities with Rural Development and the various Agriculture Extension Services;
 - Develop pilot programs for energy audits for the top or mega users of energy;
 - Identify opportunities for energy efficiency in small towns.



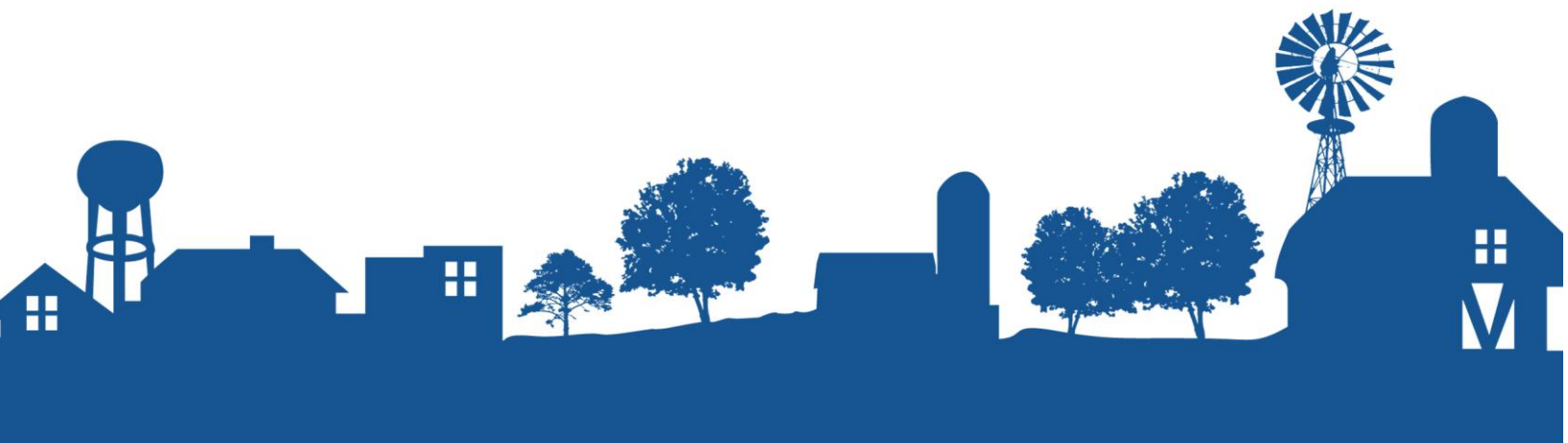
ENERGY (continued)

Goal Two: Develop a one-stop center for energy innovation to provide specific needed skills, such as grant writing, business plan development and marketing plans, for new markets and entrepreneurs;

Key Steps

1. Complete statewide inventory of both physical resources and sources of technical assistance;
 - Expand current available resources on the web* into an energy resource website which can share ideas in a collaborative fashion and map resources;
(*such as the Grantsmanship center; <http://www.tgci.com/>; Southern Region for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education; <http://www.southernsare.uga.edu>)
 - Develop a clearinghouse for research and entrepreneurs (i.e., compile current research and target investments towards entrepreneurs);

Convene a regional working group or council to discuss rural business support related to renewable energy development. This workgroup can act as a clearing house for regional ideas and strategies and, ultimately, develop local strategies.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Goal (long-term): Create a system of excellence in workforce development.

Objective: Engage community members and organizations, including those who are not typically involved, in workforce development conversations.

Action Item: Define the facets of a system of excellence

- Determine the performance measures of a system of excellence – National Assn. of Workforce Boards;
- Initiate PRA’s community assessment process within pilot communities throughout the region – SRDCs
- Facilitate dialogues within communities involving those who are not typically involved – to be identified by SRDCs;
- Develop a collective vision of needed workforce development – to be identified by SRDCs;
- Obtain commitment from organizations who will “own” portions of the process – to be identified by SRDCs;
- Investigate and determine best practices – to be identified by SRDCs;
- Train practitioners, utilizing the best practices – to be identified by SRDCs;
- Mobilize, inform and engage partners – to be identified by SRDCs.

Goal (short-term): Create and influence state and federal policies that support the system of excellence in workforce development.

Objective: Insure that all involved parties are better informed and are involved in making coordinated decisions that affect workforce development

Action Item: Identify federal and state policies directly related to workforce development

- Identify federal and state policies that may have unfavorable consequences for workforce development and suggest alternatives – National Assn of Workforce Boards;
- Establish a baseline of current areas of policy interest affecting workforce development – National Assn of Workforce Boards;
- Identify needed policy changes -- Southern Regional Convening attendees;
- Identify and engage the appropriate advocates at the federal, state and local levels -- SRDCs and Southern Regional Convening attendees.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Goal (short-Term): To increase efficiency through partnerships that leverage available resources to develop and sustain workforce development programs.

Objective: Disseminate information from a pilot project in Virginia that will help other communities assess how to leverage resources to develop and sustain workforce development programs.

- Determine how to align current programmatic needs and revenue streams with new programs and needs -- Dan River Region Collaborative (Virginia);
- Build capacity at the local level for organizations to seek resources effectively -- Dan River Region Collaborative (Virginia);
- Determine how to evaluate the impact of programs on varying scales -- Dan River Region Collaborative (Virginia).

Goal (Short Term): Create a database/clearinghouse of organizations in the South that are addressing systematic workforce development and educational issues for the PRA website.

Objective: Collect and share information and make it accessible for all organizations to utilize.

- Identify organizations that are addressing systematic workforce development and educational issues across the South -- Doug Smith, Western Kentucky University;
- Create the web-based information and post on the PRA website -- Doug Smith, Western Kentucky University.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal 1: Create a Best Management Practices publication for rural communities

- It should be a living web-based document, but more than a database. It should be a one-stop resource that contains:
 - Case studies on community development, business development, infrastructure, e-Commerce, leadership development, etc.
 - Economic development pillars;
 - “How-to” information on asset mapping and community capital;
 - “How-to” manuals, practices;

Participants should include: non-profits, for profit, and all engaged organizations

Action Steps for Goal 1:

- Create a best management practices committee with various disciplines represented;
- The steering committee for the convening should select committee members;
- Committee selection process should include RDC, SRDC, university researchers, economic development, workforce development;
- Establish time frames for the project (Committee should be appointed by July 1, 2010);
- The committee should work to identify existing community development models that work within the region as well as the best practices from beyond the region;
- The web-based Best Management Practices guide to be developed should be on the Web by June 1, 2011;
- Document users include: small community leaders, RDC, non-profits, faith based, USDA, Extension, local government, planning councils (Must obtain buy-in across the board);
- It should be housed at an SRDC in order to access their resources in building and hosting the web site;
- Develop a marketing plan for the site.

Goal 2: Educate and provide resources for the self employed in one place.

- Open a one-stop shop (brick and mortar) for small business formation as a pilot project;
- Its purpose is to provide entrepreneurs with face-to-face assistance, skills and information on the various steps they need to take (i.e., Hands-on skills development);
- Could be faith based related or housed;
- Let users choose method of access;
- Virtual offices or spaces manned on a rotating schedule.

Action Steps For Goal 2 (Pilot Project)

- Appoint a project driver/coordinator to form committee and map a process.
 - Vernita Dore, State Director, USDA-Rural Development for South Carolina, has agreed to act as the project driver.
- Decide what information is needed and deliver as appropriate for each state.



BROADBAND

Goal 1: Review the FCC's national broadband plan and advocate for rural America - especially as programs are created

- Review FCC broadband policy.
 - Get involved and be the voice for rural America.
 - Make recommendations.
 - Get involved in programs.
- PRA should take a lead in advocating for public policies related to rural broadband and shine a rural lens on broadband issues

Goal 2: Review existing programs across agencies for existing templates and information that can go towards a rural community toolkit

- Review federal programs across agencies to define and document infrastructure funds that can be used to support broadband growth and expansion;
- Identify existing resources, best practices, and research that could be pulled together for a tool kit/portal;
- Identify resource gaps and coordinate seed money to address them;
- Identify existing funds across agencies;
- Identify potential collaborators/partners on the national, regional and multi-state level as well as NGOs and public and private organizations.

Goal 3: USDA, PRA and SRDCs should foster regional development of community level educational programs

- Create toolkit and “craft the message” for rural broadband, and then coordinate that message at national, regional & state level;
- Use state program leaders in community development;
- Implement through local extension offices;
- Include training for those involved;
- Use speakers on current broadband technologies to set the vision for PRA.

