

REQUEST FOR NEW SOUTHERN EXTENSION AND RESEARCH ACTIVITY

June 7, 2016

I. Title: Strengthening the Southern Region Extension and Research System to Support Local & Regional Foods Needs and Priorities

Requested Duration: October 01, 2016 to September 30, 2021

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II. Statement of Issue(s) and Justification: Significant interest in local and regional food system strategies has risen over the past decade, in response to efforts to grow and/or stabilize local economies, address gaps in food access, enhance farm sustainability, and increase viability in rural and urban communities. For many, these efforts constitute new, innovative, and interdisciplinary approaches and collaborations to create more resilient, vibrant, and just food systems and economies. Yet, as these rapidly developing interests emerge, strategic efforts to address food system concerns, issues, and opportunities across the Southern Region are fragmented. While some intra-disciplinary work has begun and some efforts to coordinate within state lines exist, a robust effort to link these existing efforts is needed. The current fragmentation leads to duplication of work, gaps in efforts, and missed opportunities to jointly build capacity to respond to the South's local and regional foods needs.

Simply put, working across political and disciplinary boundaries, as well as research, Extension, and teaching domains is challenging. Varying communications systems, plans of work, and professional organizations tend to generate work silos, displacing opportunities for synergistic and long-lasting outcomes. As noted through the Southern Risk Management (SRMEC) convening, one of the recommendations for addressing the complex issues around foods systems is to think and work in a holistic manner nationally (Lamie, et al.). At the same time, unique challenges in the South call for concentrated efforts in that region. Persistent poverty, high unemployment, lack of access to adequate nutritious food, and high dependence on public assistance, indicate that many Southerners face significant hunger and nutrition challenges. On the other side of the continuum, the number of small and mid-sized farmers in the South participating in LFS is steadily increasing (Reynolds, et al., 2013). However, research and Extension strategies to navigate risks and uncertainties in these markets lack coordination across states in order to share best practices and reduce duplication (Reynolds, et al., 2013). Between the two stakeholder groups (consumers and producers) are a myriad of complex community and private sector business systems that can either help or hinder viable connections between those who produce foods locally and those who most desperately need new avenues of access.

While the breadth and depth of research and Extension expertise within the proposed group has the potential to address many of the priorities related to local and regional foods, the region must first develop capacity internally to develop a robust, dynamic, and seamless team approach. The benefits of this attempt at coordination are many, including:

- Guide strategic investment of resources at a regional level.
- Engage both traditional and new stakeholders in innovative ways.
- Accurately gauge impacts resulting in the ability to articulate public value.
- Promote economic development in both rural and urban settings.
- Strengthen competitiveness in research proposals in high-priority areas.
- Forge stronger relationships between research and Extension.

- Build capacity of field staff to meet community needs.
- Increase efficiencies by reducing duplications and sharing workloads across state lines and across disciplines.
- Enhance or contribute to the growth and development of a resilient food system.

III. Objectives: Assisted by the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (S-SARE), and the SRMEC, Research and Extension Land-Grant faculty seek to establish integrated multi-disciplinary, multi-state working groups in order to holistically address high-priority issues related to local and regional food systems in the South. To accomplish this goal, the initiative will:

1. Identify the top 10 pressing **issues** in food systems work within the region to direct future Extension and Research activities.
2. Create distributed **learning communities** of land grant professionals from at least 15 land grant universities in the South and local, state, and federal partners around high-priority needs in the food system in the next three to five years.
3. Design a user-friendly and robust **repository** of local foods system resources that meet the needs of Extension and Research professionals in the land-grant system by 2020, with measurable increases in use and quantity of resources by 20 percent per year.
4. Strengthen the capacity of research and Extension professionals in the Southern Region for gathering, communicating, and promoting **impact** data and analyzing secondary data through identification and sharing of common measures, resources, and tools by reporting on an annual basis.
5. Identify successful processes, collaborative leadership, networking frameworks, creative staffing, and **organizational structures** of land-grant universities participating in the development of local and regional food systems.

IV. Procedures and Activities: Given these challenges, the team proposes five working groups to guide each of the five objectives noted above. Each team has developed a draft work plan to outline steps they will take to accomplish the goals. These are attached in Appendix II. To ensure seamlessness among the teams, co-chairs (composed of one research and one Extension professional) from each group will meet on conference calls at least quarterly. The entire group will meet in the fall 2016, once this proposal is approved, to finalize the Work Plan and begin implementation. Subsequently, the team will meet face-to-face annually to ensure progress and to chart new paths. Working groups will meet monthly via conference calls to ensure progress. The SRDC's listserv of LGU professionals engaged in local foods work will be used to communicate opportunities and recruit additional participation.

V. Expected Outcomes and Impacts:

Expected outcomes are: (1) Prioritized needs for the South related to local/regional foods, (2) One to five multi-state, multi-discipline working groups formed to address prioritized needs, (3) A system for sharing identified resources in order to reduce duplication, (4) Consistent impact measures with tools aligned to assist in gathering data, and (5) Identification of best practices and models for addressing complex food issues.

Potential long term impacts: While the breadth of research and Extension expertise within the proposed group has the potential to address many issues facing the region, even the few initial steps show clear potential for expanded work on farm efficiency and profitability, rural

communities and entrepreneurship, community food security, human nutrition, and food safety. The ultimate impact of this work could be seen in increased consumption of locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables, enhanced systems for the production and distribution of local foods, increases in food access and security, increased equity in access to food system resources by underserved populations, an increased understanding of the economic and social impacts of local foods, and recognition of the land-grant university system at the forefront of this movement.

VI. Internal and External Linkages: As noted above, the SRDC, S-SARE, and SRMEC have all voiced interest in aiding this group. Additionally, the proposed team has met twice in preliminary meetings supported through an AFRI Planning Grant secured by the SRDC. More than 50 individuals were present at each meeting, including 1862 and 1890 LGU researchers and Extension professionals from all of the South's 13 states, plus West Virginia and Maryland. Participants also included federal agency representation from three USDA agencies: NIFA, Rural Development, and Agricultural Marketing Services.

VII. Educational Plan: As the team makes progress on respective goals, dissemination of findings and resources will be shared through various networks. For instance, the SRDC is committed to hosting a webinar series to showcase each team's work as progress becomes solidified. Additionally, the Center maintains a email list of LGU research/Extension professionals interested in this work. The list will be used to provide regular updates from the various working groups. Finally, a number of national conferences and network communities are well suited for presentations and outreach efforts related to this work, as are professional journals. For example, the eXtension Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Community of Practice serves as a national platform for resource development and sharing and cross-sector collaborations. These and other venues, including university courses which could serve to share findings and also engage students in project work, will be tapped to share impacts and findings as work progresses.

VIII. Governance: Leadership will include a chair, chair-elect, and secretary, each of whom will serve one-year terms, then roll up or off. Each of the five working teams will select co-chairs, one from research and one from Extension to guide the work. These leaders will join the three overarching leaders to form a leadership committee. The committee will meet at least quarterly on conference calls to ensure the work remains on task and seamless among the various groups. Working teams will meet regularly via conference call to sustain progress. An annual face-to-face meeting will be held to track progress and chart new courses as the work continues.

Appendix I. Literature Cited

Goodwin, Jr., H. (2013). Theme Overview: Developing Local Food Systems in the South. *Choices*, 28(4). Available online: http://www.choicesmagazine.org/magazine/pdf/cmstheme_342.pdf.

Goodwin, Jr., H.; Rainey, R.; Marini, S. (2014) Developing Local Food Systems in the South: Peeling Back the Layers. Poster session presented at the meeting of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Lamie, D.; Dunning, R.; Bendfeldt, E.; Lelekacs, J.; Velandia, M.; & Meyer, L. (2013). Local Food Systems in the South: A Call for a Collaborative Approach to Assessment. *Choices*, 28(4). Available online http://www.choicesmagazine.org/magazine/pdf/cmsarticle_348.pdf.

Onozaka, Y., & Thimany, D. (2011). Does Local Labeling Complement or Compete with Other Sustainable Labels? A Conjoint Analysis of Direct and Joint Values for Fresh Produce Claims. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 93(3), 693-706.

Palma, M.; Morgan, K.; Woods, T.; & McCoy, S. (2013). Response of Land Grant Universities to the Increase in Consumer Demand for Local Foods in the South. *Choices*, 28(4). Available online: http://www.choicesmagazine.org/magazine/pdf/cmsarticle_345.pdf.

Reynolds-Allie, K.; Fields, D.; & Rainey, R. (2013). Risk Management Issues for Small Farms within Local Food Systems. *Choices*, 28(4). Available online: http://www.choicesmagazine.org/magazine/pdf/cmsarticle_344.pdf.

Appendix II. Work Group Plans

A. Issues Work Group

| Top 10 Issues Objective: Within 2 years, identify the top 10 pressing issues facing Extension agents in food systems work within the region to direct future Extension and Research activities. | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Resources | Strategies | Audience | Attitudes | Behaviors | Conditions |
| LGU system SSAWG S-SARE USDA NIFA Dept. of Ag Master Gardeners | Conduct a literature review Develop a survey Conduct survey Analyze results | Research & Extension jointly | Increase buy-in in top 10 issues | Get \$\$\$ for targeted issues Do research on the issues Include Extension advisory committees to centers, as consultants on grant proposals | Better focus on researchers Increased competitiveness for fed \$\$\$ Increased innovations Increased collaborations Answers to the issues |
| | Disseminate results | Research & Extension jointly | Increased admin buy-in to top 10 issues Realize benefit and needs Increase value of sharing data | Increase communication between Research and Extension Formation of intentional networks Share results extensively -reports -feedback to granting agencies | Increase multi-disciplinary projects Increase sustainability of food systems Increase dollars available for the issues |
| | | Extension | Know the top 10 issues and their impacts | Get dollars for targeting work Include researchers on advisory committees | Better liaison with community Increase targeted programming Increase impacts /outcomes Increase relevant capacity building Increase competitiveness for all types of dollars |

Procedures/Activities

1. Review existing data, research literature and survey instruments
2. Enlist evaluation specialist
3. Identify resources to conduct and analyze survey results
4. Contact and learn from NC State and their recent survey experience
5. Define target audience; define terminology
6. Conduct the survey
7. Develop and validate survey
8. Get input from other groups in our SERA on draft survey; develop options for respondents without internet access who have limited resources
9. Analyze results
10. Interpretation and dissemination of results

B. Learning Communities Work Group

| Learning Communities Objective: To create learning communities of land grant professionals from at least 15 land grant universities in the south and local, state, and federal partners around high priority needs in the food system in the next three to five years. | | | | | |
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| Resources | Strategies | Audience | Short (attitudes/ learning) | Medium (Behaviors) | Long (Conditions) |
| LGU System eXtension CLRFS CoP USDA – RD, FSA, NCRS | Communicate top 10 issues based on survey Recruit participants to work on various issues Help them identify work | Research & Extension jointly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know who to talk to • Communicate relevance • Being open minded • Team building skills • Listening • Leadership skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved communication • Diversification of priorities • Buy-in from land grant system around local food • Teamwork creating publications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More trained staff involved • Knowledge translated to Extension • More funding/resources because of consortium of 29 land grants. • Stronger USDA partner/support • Better response to stakeholders • Specific needs in the food system are addressed • Improved quality of life for community |

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| | <p>plans</p> <p>Develop communication platform(s)</p> <p>Track progress of teams</p> | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased collaboration within institutions across the south • Teamwork creating curriculum based on research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available & meaningful impact data • More sustainable food system for community • Programs developed and vetted for effectiveness |
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Procedures/Activities

- Identify leadership team and how often it will meet
- Identify venue/platform for meetings
- Reach out to list-serve and land grant schools in the south for group members – invite to initial meeting
- Communicate goals and top 10 issues to potential members
- Set agenda for meeting
- Explain issue/topics
- Determine what is possible
- Set up subgroups around issues
- Assess skills & assign roles in subgroups
- Determine what we are going to do
- Set a timeline/prioritize
- Launch
- Track & report on accomplishments
- Measure progress
- Assess impact
- Communicate results
- Determine what is next

C. Resource Repository Work Group

Resource Repository Objective: Design a user-friendly and robust repository of local foods system resources that meet the needs of Extension and Research professionals in the land-grant system, by 2020, with measurable increases in use and quantity of resources by 20 percent per year.

| Resources | Strategies | Audience | Short (attitudes/learning) | Medium (Behaviors) | Long (Conditions) |
|---|---|-----------|--|--|--|
| LGU system eXtension Master Food Volunteer curriculum group | Inventory existing resources Contact experts to get them to contribute Identify gaps in existing resources Engage people in developing new resources Create web-based repository to house resources Develop webinars, communications package to promote repository and how to use it | Extension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension committed to collaborate with researchers • Recognition of value of regional approach • Willingness to share resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared resources/tools • Curriculum to be shared, customized for state delivery • Guide book for delivering local foods programming at county level • Data to help customize programming for local communities • Shared expertise, connections • Networking • Program models/ideas • Shared evaluation tools, common measures • Increased efficiency, minimize duplication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repository becomes go-to place for tools and resources for Extension personnel and partners. • Increased funding • Communication, marketing, and evaluation effective • Stories to tell of impact • Increased visibility and recognition for Extension as preferred source of valuable education on local foods. |
| | | Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research committed to collaborate with | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers will be able to learn about | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visibility of research projects among |

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| | | | <p>Extension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of value of regional approach • Willingness to share research resources and make connections with other researchers | <p>funding opportunities, likelihood of funding enhanced by multistate, regional work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing data and findings • Sharing authorship, finding partners with similar research interests to collaborate on research projects • Reduced duplication | <p>other researchers will lead to replication and validation of research across region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visibility of research will lead to more citations for individual articles • Increased visibility of researchers' work will lead to more graduate students, post-docs • Researchers will know they are working on high-priority projects |
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Decisions to be made

- Determine where the repository will be housed.
- Determine a method for keeping it current.
- Decide how it will be structured.
- Make it searchable.
- Decide how people will enter information.
- Develop criteria for what deserves inclusion.
- Decide whether there should be an external face for the repository, and what it should look like.
- Decide how to provide access and to whom.
- Plan for sustainability—what happens after five years?
- Decide whether there should be sunset dates for the resources.
- Develop and deliver training/curriculum for researchers and Extension professionals.
- Communicate about the relevance of regional work.
- Determine committee membership, especially from Research!

Priority Actions

1. Develop an information sheet (who we are, what we're doing).
2. Create a slide deck or set of communication tools created by this group and shared out to states to be used as needed to encourage support, contribution of resources, and use of the repository.
3. Engage others at our own institutions to contribute to and use the repository.
4. Identify people in each state who can be sources of materials.
5. Develop communication plan to promote the repository.
6. Every other month, this group has video conference
7. Apply for grant support as appropriate along the way

D. Impact Work Group

| Impact Measures Objective: Strengthen capacity of research and extension professionals in the southern region for gathering, communicating, and marketing impact data and analyzing secondary data through identification and sharing of common measures, resources and tools by reporting on an annual basis. | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|--|---|---|
| Resources | Strategies | Audience | Short (attitudes/learning) | Medium (Behaviors) | Long (Conditions) |
| LGU system USDA Ag Census CDC, NIH, BRFSS data ECOP's Health & | Develop a common set of measures Gain commitment from Extension to gather data Analyze data | Extension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension committed to collaborate with researchers • People understand need to collect data and how to do it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration occurring • Pool information and resources regionally • Prioritizing resources to achieve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery system of choice • \$ flowing • Increased resources • Communication, marketing, and evaluation effective • Stories to tell • Increased visibility |

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|--|-----------------|----------|--|--|--|
| Wellness Framework eXtension CLRFs CoP | Report findings | Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People understand need to collect data and how to do it • Research committed to collaborate with Extension • Need for understanding all relevant data sets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research data collected Establish valid instruments • Prioritizing resources to achieve • Collaboration occurring Effective use of relevant data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good data available Other data sources evaluated • \$ flowing Increased resources Strengthened USDA Ag Census/AMS relationship Communication, marketing, and evaluation effective |
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Procedures/Activities

8. Develop an information sheet (who we are, what we're doing)
9. Create a slide deck or set of communication tools created by this group and shared out to states to be used as needed to demonstrate importance of these efforts
10. Engage others at our own institutions
11. Identify secondary data sources and how to access and when available (state and national)
12. Identify examples of indicators and, if available, data collection instruments and strategies
13. Identify people in each state in charge of data entry system – what are procedures and timelines for getting report system set up
14. Draft proposal of measures (internal performance and external support) we will use and where that info will come from (primary and/or secondary data)
15. Gain input from agents/ partners on viability of measures
16. Finalize common set of measures
17. Develop instruments, obtain IRB approvals
18. Begin collecting at state level
19. Develop mechanism for data aggregation
20. Aggregate data
21. Analyze data

- 22. Write summary reports, journal articles
- 23. Develop communication plan
- 24. Every other month, this group has video conference
- 25. Apply for grant support as appropriate along the way

E. Organizational Structures Work Group

Organizational Structures Objective: Identify processes, collaborative behavior, staffing, and organizational structures of land-grant universities participating in the development of local food systems. Collect data annually from state SERA liaisons and create a regional data bank and series of case studies by 2019.

| | Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills | Behavior | Conditions/Outcomes |
|------------------|---|--|--|
| Extension | Trans-disciplinary/cross-program working skills and abilities | Willingness to embrace change | Increased collaboration, communication, coordination |
| | Okay to engage new audiences | Give up lower priority, traditional audiences | Increased resources available (internal/external); human resources |
| | Willingness to participate/core team in each site | Better collaboration between 1890 and 1862 land-grant institutions | Increased new adaptable structures |
| | | Development with existing stakeholders | Increased collaboration among 1890/1862 institutions |
| | | | Increased stakeholder engagement |
| | | | Increased extension activity |
| | | | Increased land-grant references |
| | | | Increased communication and collaboration between extension and research |
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| Research | Willingness to participate/core team in each site | Increased sharing of research resources (e.g. data) | Increased communication and collaboration between extension and research |
| | Transdisciplinary skills | Increased collection of relevant data and synthesizing into meaningful information | Increased research product |
| | Knowledge/awareness of Pent-up demand for relevant research | | Increased collaboration and/or communication |
| | | | Increased resources available (internal/external) |
| | | | New adaptable structures |

Methods/Procedures

1. Create a timeline of expected deliverables to be completed by 2019.
2. Coordinate with all other core work groups of any interdependent methods/procedures to identify any overlaps.
3. Identify a core metric for assessing resources that are needed or currently held (i.e., committed FTEs, state and federal liaisons) by regional land-grant institutions.
4. Develop an instrument for capturing qualitative/quantitative data to be administered to participating regional land-grant institutions (i.e., state and federal liaisons).
5. Coordinate and analyze data into a useable and deliverable format.
6. Design case study structure and recruit authors.
7. Develop a communication strategy for appropriate audiences (stakeholder consideration), for instance, design case structures, recruit authors and other dissemination activities.