

Agenda Brief: SERA 47, Strengthening the Southern Region Extension and Research System to Support Local & Regional Foods Needs and Priorities

Presenter: Ed Jones

Background:

SERA 47 had their first annual meeting as an approved project on Nov 29-30, 2016 in Atlanta. They have organized into five Work Groups and the following is a description of planned activities of each group.

The Top 10 Issues Work Group plans to conduct a Delphi study of Extension and Research professionals within the Southern Region to collect data about their top challenges/issues related to local foods. The intent of the work is to establish a plan to meet the needs of stakeholders through measurable objectives and to use the Delphi study results to guide future Research needs and Extension programs. This study is important because it will provide research that is relevant to Extension and community needs. We expect the impacts will enable us to address issues in several areas including food insecurity, community viability, farm production and market needs, climate variability, race and social justice/access, equity, and opportunity.

The Learning Communities Work Group has the goal of creating communities of Southern Region land-grant professionals around high-priority needs in the local foods system. These communities will be created with the objectives of improving communication between Extension and Research and among institutions; developing teamwork in developing publications, curricula, and research projects; and improving both the translation of Research into Extension education and the Research base for Extension education. The learning communities will be created to carry forward the ideals of multidisciplinary, diverse approaches which are central to the organization of SERA-47. In the short term, the work group will be developing a glossary of terms relevant to local foods work across multiple disciplines.

The Resource Bank Work Group plans a system-wide survey of land-grant Research and Extension employees to gather input on desired attributes and perceptions of usefulness for an online resource. In addition, the group plans to develop regional resources, including a guide targeting Extension agents/educators for planning and developing local foods programming in their communities and an omnibus curriculum for a local foods volunteer program, which would combine elements of foods and nutrition, agriculture production and marketing, and community development and would allow customization to fit local needs. Our goal is to develop a one-stop online destination to provide access for Research and Extension personnel to potential partners, potential funders, evaluation tools, educational materials, and sources of data and research that will support excellence in local foods work in the Southern Region.

The Impact Measurement Work Group requests other SERA-47 states' help in identifying information on objective measures of local food systems. These objective

measures are sought for health, economics, social, environmental, and justice dimensions. Not all sets of objective measures will include all dimensions, but measures for all dimensions are sought. More specifically, we seek annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, or original studies on objective measures; tools or data collection methods; and details regarding operationalization of objective measures. The purpose of this request is to enable the Workgroup to create a common set of objective measures and data collection tools and methods for these measures that will be appropriate for use by SERA-47 members and in longitudinal research projects.

The Successful Models Work Group will be conducting interviews of directors/administrators and other key informants to identify processes, collaborative behavior, and staffing and organizational structures of land-grant institutions that are particularly successful in supporting and promoting the development of local foods systems. These interviews will be developed to create case studies and other sources of data which will be promoted as potential models to increase communication and collaboration between Extension and Research and among the various disciplines that touch on local foods and to propagate these successes across the region.