

SERA 49: Heir Property In-person Meeting

Southern Extension and Research Activity (SERA) 49: Heirs' Property – Impacts at Family, Community, and Regional Levels

Heirs' property—real property passed across generations without a probated will—creates clouded title that impedes wealth transfer, access to credit, property improvements, and participation in federal programs. Heirs' property is a rural and urban issue that is magnified in the Southern region and Appalachia, with an estimated 5.3 million acres valued at \$42 billion in 11 states. Fractionated ownership often involves dozens to hundreds of heirs, resulting in decision-making gridlock, diminished local tax bases, involuntary land loss, and entrenched poverty—especially among disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Building from several previous years of activity as an informal network, the SERA 49 network was formalized and expanded in 2023 to: (1) increase multidisciplinary collaboration among 1862 and 1890 Land-Grant Universities and partners; (2) identify emerging regional issues and data-driven research needs; (3) assess federal, state, and local policies and practices affecting heirs' property; and (4) support civil society organizations and heirs' property owners via culturally appropriate education and technical assistance.

The in-person SERA 49 meeting will be held in conjunction with the 2026 Southern Rural Sociological Association (SRSA) annual meeting at the Omni Hotel in Louisville, KY. The SRSA meeting will be on February 1 & 2, 2026, with the SERA 49 meeting rounding out the conference with a full day on February 3, 2026. The meeting is open to stakeholders, researchers, and practitioners involved in heirs' property work. The objectives for this meeting are to strengthen regional capacity, convene stakeholders to increase collaboration, introduce new practices and methodologies, and ultimately reduce involuntary land loss. The cost is \$50 per participant. (This fee is waived for those already paying registration for the SRSA meeting).

(Travel assistance will be available for a limited number of participants. Contact both Kara Woods, kawoods@alcorn.edu and John Green, jjg8@msstate.edu for more information.)