

***Southern Rural Sociological Association***

***57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting***



***“Distilling Change: Rural Roots &  
River Currents in the New South”***

***February 1-2, 2026***

***Louisville, KY***

[Louisville Meeting Space | Omni Louisville Hotel](#)

***Concurrent with the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists (SAAS)***

## **Welcome from the Southern Rural Sociological Association 2025-2026 President**

### **Southern Rural Sociological Association 2026 - 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

February 2, 2026

SRSA Members, Guests, and SAAS Colleagues:

#### ***Distilling Change: Rural Roots & River Currents in the New South***

Our theme this year—Distilling Change: Rural Roots & River Currents in the New South—invites us to pause, reflect, and refine. Like the rivers that have long shaped the Southern landscape, change continues to flow through rural America—sometimes gently, sometimes with force. The past year reminded us that these currents are real and consequential, reshaping economies, institutions, and everyday life in rural places.

Yet distillation is not about reacting to every shift in the current. It is about deciding what endures.

As rural scholars, practitioners, and partners, we know that resilience is not imported. It is cultivated. It lives in relationships that outlast funding cycles, in collaborations that cross disciplines and sectors, and in community knowledge passed hand to hand and generation to generation. In a time when external conditions feel increasingly volatile, this moment calls us to look inward—to our partnerships, our shared commitments, and the connective tissue that binds rural places together.

The New South has always been shaped by both roots and movement: by deep histories and evolving pathways, by local knowledge and regional flows. This meeting challenges us to distill what truly strengthens rural communities and to ask hard, hopeful questions: How do we build resilience that is durable, inclusive, and locally grounded? How do our research, teaching, and engagement practices deepen connection rather than dependency?

Over the coming days, we will explore these questions together—across disciplines, across geographies, and across lived experience. May this gathering sharpen our thinking, strengthen our relationships, and reaffirm the power of rural communities to adapt, endure, and lead.

Welcome to SRSA 2026.

Russ Garner, MPPA, PCED.

SRSA President 2025-2026

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## PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

### Abbreviations

Rooms: Olmsted 5 (O5), Olmsted 6 (O6), Commonwealth 2 (C2), Commonwealth 8 (C8).

### Organizations

[Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists: SAAS](#)

[Southern Rural Sociological Association: SRSA](#)

Note: All SRSA members are invited to attend SAAS sessions.

### Sunday, February 1, 2026

Day and Time	Location	Session Title
7:30am-8:00am	Olmsted 5	SRSA Executive Committee
8:00am-3:00pm	Second Street Pre-function	Registration
8:15am-9:30am	Olmsted 5	Session 1: Cultural Landscapes & Rural Narratives
	Olmsted 6	Panel 1: Resilient Local & Regional Food Systems: Lessons & Opportunities Post-COVID
	Commonwealth 2	Session 2: Climate Perceptions & Weather Impacts
9:30am-9:45am		Break
9:45am-11:00am	Olmsted 5	Session 3: Place Attachment, Belonging, & Change
	Olmsted 6	Session 4: Climate-Smart Practices & Adaptation
	Commonwealth 2	Session 5: Land-Grant & Extension Public Value
11:00am-11:30am	Olmsted 5	SRSA Introductions and Rapid Exchange
11:30am-1:00pm		Lunch (on your own)
1:00pm-2:15pm	Olmsted 5	Panel 2: Land, Lineage, & Learning: Reclaiming Clarity in Kentucky's Heirs' Property
	Olmsted 6	Session 6: Food Access, Consumption, & Inequality
	Commonwealth 2	Session 7: Wellbeing Metrics & Community Priorities
2:15pm-2:30pm		Break

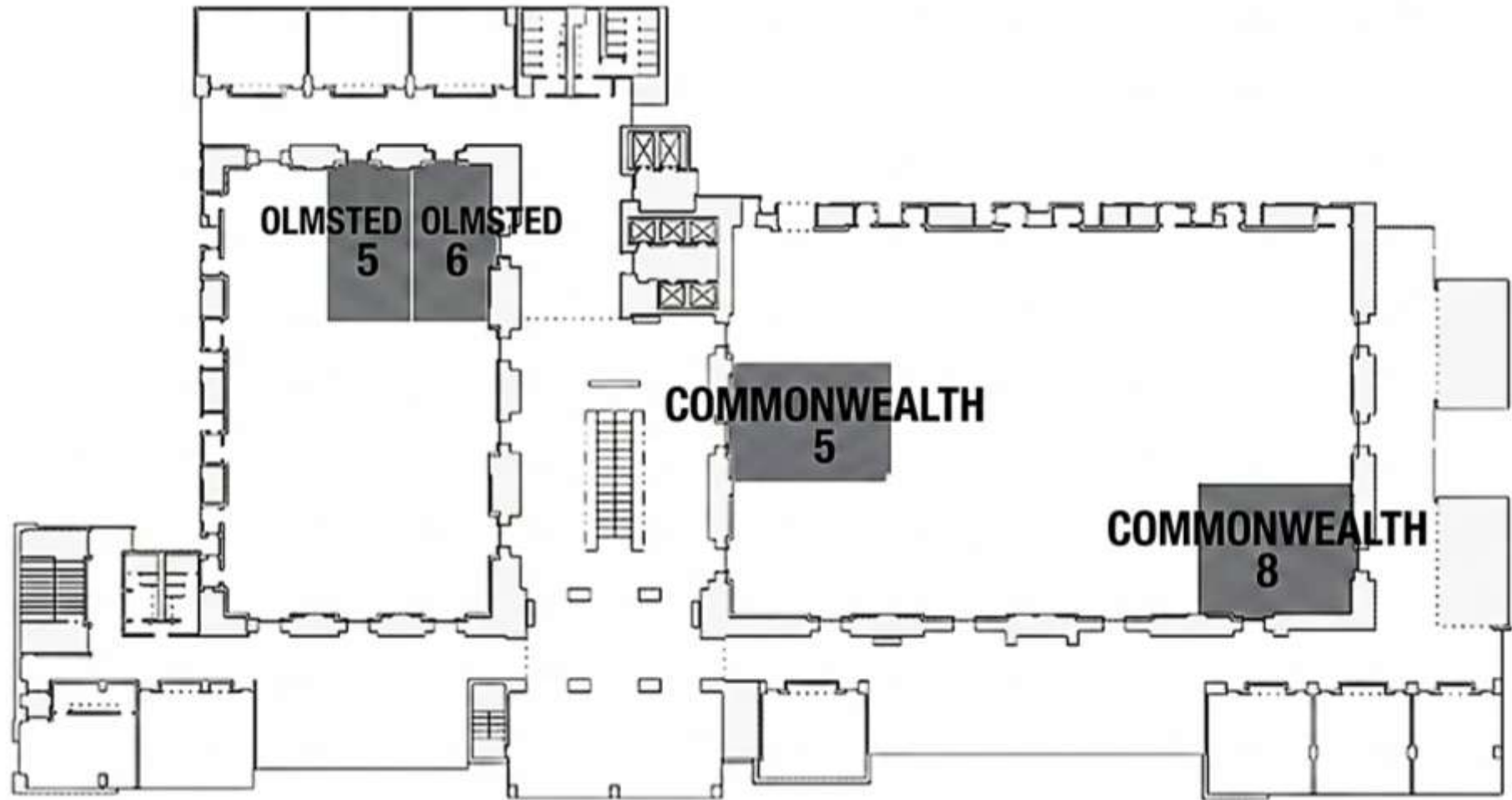
2:30pm–3:45pm	Olmsted 5	Session 8: Resilience Theory & Extension Practice
	Olmsted 6	Session 9: Rural Health Disparities & Prevention
	Commonwealth 2	Session 10: Teaching, Training, & Knowledge Translation
	Commonwealth 3	SAAS Board Meeting
3:45pm–4:00pm		Break
4:00pm–5:00pm	Commonwealth 3	SAAS General Business Meeting All SRSA members are encouraged to attend
6:00pm–9:00pm	Tavern on Fourth – 427 S. 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	SAAS Opening Network Social All SRSA members are encouraged to attend

### **Monday, February 2, 2024**

<b>Day and Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Session Title</b>
8:00am–3:00pm	Second Street Pre-function	Registration
8:00am–9:15am	Olmsted 5	Panel 3: Rural Sociology in the Rapidly Changing Academic Landscape
	Olmsted 6	Session 11: Small-Scale Farming & Diversification
9:15am–9:30am		Break
9:30am–10:15am	Olmsted 6	SRSA Business Meeting: All invited and encouraged to attend
10:15am–10:30am		Break (poster set-up)
10:30am–11:15am	Pre-function Area	Poster Session: All encouraged to attend
11:15am–11:30am		Break, transition to luncheon location
11:30am–12:45pm	Commonwealth 8	Presidential Luncheon
12:45pm–1:00pm		Break, transition from luncheon location
1:00pm–2:10pm	Olmsted 5	Session 12: Building Local Food Enterprises

	Olmsted 6	Panel 4: It's All in the Family: Case Studies in Housing on Family-Owned Land
2:10pm-2:15pm	Pre-function Area	Break (poster take-down)
2:15pm-3:30pm	Olmsted 5	Session 13: Environmental Hazards & Risk Governance
	Olmsted 6	Session 14: Digital Infrastructure & Extension Innovation
3:30pm-3:45pm		Break
3:45pm-5:00pm	Olmsted 5	Session 15: Heirs' Property & Land Tenure
	Olmsted 6	Session 16: Methods, Visuality, & Reflexivity

## Omni Hotel – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor



## DETAILED PROGRAM

### Sunday, February 1, 2026

**7:30 am–8:00 am, Olmsted 5: SRSA Executive Committee**

**8:00 am–3:00 pm, Pre-function Area: Registration**

**8:15 am–9:30 am, Olmsted 5: Session 1 – Cultural Landscapes and Rural Narratives**

Moderator:

Stories & Storytelling Cultivating Agriculture: An Analysis of Agriculturalists' Autobiographies.  
*Jo Smeby, Auburn University.*

Preaching: Sermons as Windows into Rural Southern Adaptation.  
*Colin Caso, Oklahoma State University.*

Music Tourism Impacts on Rural Economies.  
*Rachael Carter, Mississippi State University; Sreedhar Upendram, University of Tennessee Knoxville*

Sacred Landscapes and Rural Change: A Textual and Visual Analysis of Religious Space in the New South. *Colin Caso, Oklahoma State University.*

**8:15 am–9:30 am, Olmsted 6: Panel 1 –**

**Resilient Local and Regional Food Systems: Lessons and Opportunities Post-COVID.**

*Kenrett Jefferson-Moore, North Carolina A&T State University; Kaylee Sunouth, Virginia Tech; Courtney Brown, Oklahoma State University; John Green, Mississippi State University; Grace Langford, Mississippi State University.*

**Session 2 – 8:15 am–9:30 am, Commonwealth 2: Climate Perceptions and Weather Impacts**

Moderator:

Assessing the Influence of Farming Experience on Farmers' Resilience to Weather-Induced Damages in the Caribbean. *Sienna Stewart, Kentucky State University; Shristi Adhikari, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

Perceptions of Adverse Weather Events and Changing Weather Patterns in Kentucky.  
*Shristi Adhikari, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

Understanding Climate Change as Adverse Weather Events. *Cynthia Rice; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

Farmer Perspectives Informing Future-Oriented Extension Models in Irrigation. *Elizabeth Abati, University of Georgia; Abigail Borron, University of Georgia; Drew Gholson, Mississippi State University; Nicolas Ashwell, Mississippi State University; Dillon Russell, Mississippi State University.*

**9:30 am–9:45 am, Break**

**9:45–11:00 am, Olmsted 5: Session 3 – Place Attachment, Belonging, and Change**

Moderator: Kelli Russell

Belonging in the Latinx Community of Central Alabama.

*Antonio Martinez, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University.*

High Planes in the Heart of the Great Plains: An Exploration of Community Resilience and Place Attachment in an Agrarian and Military Rural Community. *Laney Reasner; Audrey King; Bradley Coleman; Amy Brown.*

Small Business Perspectives in Rural Alabama: Business Succession and Community Resilience. *Amelia Pugh, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University.*

Where Rural Roots Meet New Currents: Growing Change in Appalachian Kentucky. Marcus.

*Bernard, Kentucky State University; Tyrell Kahan, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University; and Laura Rogers, Kentucky State University.*

**9:45–11:00 am, Olmsted 6: Session 4 – Climate-Smart Practices and Adaptation**

Moderator:

Distilling Resilience: Equipment Sharing and Climate-Smart Agriculture in the Rural South.

*Nicole Nunoo, University of Georgia; Samantha Olvey, University of Georgia; Jennifer Thompson, University of Georgia.*

Adoption Intensity of Conservation Management Practices among Kentucky Farmers.

*Ife Familusi, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University; Suraj Upadhaya, Kentucky State University; Dipesh Oli, Kentucky State University; Shreesha Pandeya, Kentucky State University; Kabita Paudel, Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University.*

Exploring the Impact of Regenerative Agricultural Practices on Soil Health and Crop Performance in Rural Kentucky: A Farmer-Engaged Approach. *Richard Ojo, Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Suraj Upadhaya, Kentucky State University; Theoneste Nzaramyimana, Kentucky State University.*

Understanding Conservation Practices Stacking Behavior and Influencing Factors Among Kentucky Farmers.

*Ibidapo Bolaji, Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Theoneste Nzaramyimana, Kentucky State University.*

**9:45–11:00 am, Commonwealth 2: Session 5 – Digital Infrastructure and Extension Innovations**

Moderator: Robert Zabawa

Building Technology Confidence in Older Adults Through Cooperative Extension Programs.

*Yolanda McFerrin, Fort Valley State University; Terrence Wolfork, Fort Valley State University.*

Connecting Communities: Innovation in Entrepreneurship Education.

*Terence Norwood, Alabama A&M University; Trish Kalbas-Schmidt, Santa Clara University.*

The Effect of Access to Broadband on Rural Development Efforts in Alabama’s Blackbelt.  
*Adriana Cornie, Tuskegee University; Raymon Shange, Tuskegee University; Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University; Souleymane Fall, Tuskegee University; Aaron McCall, South Central Alabama Broadband Cooperative District.*

Enhancing Rural Food Accessibility: The Role of Augmented Reality in Online Grocery Shopping for Traditional Consumers. *Emmanuel Obielodan, Kentucky State University; Etumnu Chinonso, Kentucky State University; Theoneste Nzaramyimana, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University.*

**11:00 am–11:30 am, Olmsted 5: SRSA Introductions, Networking, and Rapid Exchange**

Facilitator: Eleanor Green

*This short networking session is designed for conference attendees to make quick connections. During this facilitated session, participants can introduce themselves to one another, share stories, and exchange knowledge. After the session, carry the conversations and storytelling further at lunch with your new pals.*

**11:30 am–1:00 pm: Lunch (on your own with your SRSA friends)**

**1:00 pm–2:15 pm, Olmsted 5: Panel 2 –**

**Land, Lineage, and Learning: Reclaiming Clarity in Kentucky’s Heirs’ Property.**

*Casey Townsend, Kentucky State University; Alethea Bernard, Kentucky State University; Kevin Slovinsky, LiKen Knowledge; Kendal Bowman, Southern Regional Development Center.*

**1:00 pm–2:15 pm, Olmsted 6: Session 6 – Food Access, Consumption, and Inequality**

Moderator:

Raw Milk: Local Stakeholder Perspectives.

*Alyssa Garcia, East Texas A&M University; Bob Williams, East Texas A&M University; Jose Lopez, East Texas A&M University; Katharine Halfacre, East Texas A&M University.*

Shifting Currents in Local Food Engagement: Evidence from Kentucky Before and After COVID-19.

*Timothy Woods, University of Kentucky; Mahla Zare Mehrjerdi, Nova Southeastern University; Jairus Rossi, University of Kentucky.*

“On Our Own” or “Together”: Disability, Race, & Local Food Access in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta. *Ellie Crane, University of Mississippi; Ryan Parsons, University of Mississippi.*

Cicada Consumption in the Rural South and Beyond.

*Cat Lamb, University of Kentucky.*

**1:00 pm–2:15 pm, Commonwealth 2: Session 7 – Wellbeing Metrics & Community Priorities**

Moderator:

Insights from the 2025 Our State, Our Lives: Alabama Wellbeing Survey.

*Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Jean Francois, Auburn University; Mykel Taylor, Auburn University.*

National Policy Research Center Research Analyst Update.

*Kara Woods, The Alcorn State National Policy Research Center.*

Rurality and the Spatial Distribution of Priorities from a Statewide Community Needs Assessment.  
*Omolola Adedokun, University of Kentucky; Julie Zimmerman, University of Kentucky.*

Engaging Men in Gender Studies: Understanding the Experiences and Challenges of Male Students  
Studying Women and Gender Studies at the University of Dhaka. *Subata Zannat Riya, Florida Atlantic  
University, Florida, United States; Abdul Halim, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

## **2:15 pm–2:30 pm Break**

### **2:30 pm–3:45 pm, Olmsted 5: Session 8 – Land-Grant and the Public Value of Extension**

Moderator: Doug Constance

Understanding Public Value of Land-Grant Institutions: A Conceptual Framework.  
*Erica Odera, University of Florida; Lauri M. Baker, University of Florida; Ricky W. Telg, University of  
Florida*

Social Science Grant Opportunities from Southern SARE.  
*Douglas Constance, Sam Houston State University; Jeffrey Jordan, University of Georgia Griffin.*

Participant Perspectives on Broader Impact of Collaborative Sustainable Agricultural Research.  
*Mark Schafer, LSU AgCenter; Claire Thomas, Louisiana State University; Xiaoxu Yang, Louisiana State  
University; Megan Brooker, University of Alabama Birmingham, Ranju Acharya, LSU AgCenter; Carine  
Villasante, Louisiana State University; Marine Harutyunyan, Louisiana State University.*

Rural Response: An Examination of Extension's Crisis Communication to New World Screwworm  
Threats in the Southwest. *Kenna Sandberg, Oklahoma State University; Carrie Baker, Oklahoma State  
University; Audrey King, Oklahoma State University.*

### **2:30 pm–3:45 pm, Olmsted 6: Session 9 – Rural Health Disparities and Prevention**

Moderator: Shari Coleman Moxley

Interaction of Household Wealth Quintile and Region of Residence on Children Under Five's Wasting in  
Nigeria. *Aramide Kazeem, University of West Georgia; John Musalia, Western Kentucky University.*

Sun Exposure, Risk Perception, and Prevention Among Rural Kentucky Farmers.  
*Ebenezer Akinola, Kentucky State University; S. Fakolade, Kentucky State University; G. Besona,  
Kentucky State University; and F. N. Bebe, Kentucky State University.*

Understanding Disparities Between Skin Cancer Awareness and Sun Protective Behavior Through the  
Health Belief Model. *S. Fakolade, Kentucky State University; E. Akinola, Kentucky State University; F.  
Bebe, Kentucky State University; G. Besona, Kentucky State University.*

### **2:30 pm–3:45 pm, Commonwealth 2: Session 10 – Teaching, Training, and Knowledge Translation**

Moderator: Brooklynn Wynveen

An Evaluation of a Climate Science Teacher Institute for Rural Educators.

*Katharine Honeyman, Oklahoma State University; J. Shane Robinson, Oklahoma State University; Shelby Hunt, Kansas State University; Ian Cummings, Kansas State University; Mukesh Bhattarai, Kansas State University.*

Teaching Rural Sociology - the importance of empathy for critical thinking.  
*Alissa Rossi, University of Kentucky.*

Toward an Inclusive Framework of Course Core Values in Higher Education.  
*Brooklynn Wynveen, Sam Houston State University.*

Understanding the Land and the Science Behind: Today's Scientist Farmer.  
*Cynthia Rice; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

**2:30 pm–3:30 pm, Commonwealth 3: SAAS Board Meeting (Two SRSA leaders required to attend)**

**3:45 pm–4:00 pm, Break**

**4:00 pm–5:00 pm, Commonwealth 3, SAAS General Business Meeting, all invited and encouraged.**

**6:00 pm – SAAS Opening Network Social, all invited and encouraged.**

Location: Tavern on Fourth – 4th Street.

**Monday, February 2, 2026**

**8:00 am–11:30 am, Pre-function Area: Registration**

**8:00 am–9:15 am, Olmsted 5: Panel 3 –**

Opportunities and Challenges for Rural Sociologists in the Rapidly Changing Academic Landscape  
*Keiko Tanaka, University of Kentucky; Anne Cafer, University of Mississippi; Doug Constance, Sam Houston State University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Diego Thompson, Mississippi State University.*

**8:00 am- 9:15 am, Olmsted 6: Session 11 – Small-Scale Farming and Diversification**

Moderator: Marcus Bernard

Climate-smart Agritourism: An Alternative Livelihood Strategy for Small and Minority Farmers  
*Lila B. Karki, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Dipendra Gurung, University of Florida, Gainesville; Prem B. Bhandari, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Enrique N. Escobar, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Moses T. Kairo, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; and Kingsley U. Ejiogu, University of Maryland Eastern Shore.*

From Culture to Market: Resilience Pathways and Barriers in Small-Scale Texas Agriculture  
*Ervin Leiva, Angelo State University; Barituka Bekee, University of Vermont; Corinne Valdivia, University of Missouri; Daniel Parisian, University of North Carolina at Pembroke.*

Evaluating Small-Scale Micro-Livestock: Comparative Sustainability of Rabbits, Chickens, Quail, and Pigeons for Diversified Protein Production. *Millie Murphree, Auburn University Extension.*

The Economic Feasibility of Dairy Production for Small-scale Farmers in Kentucky  
*Martha Ibans, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University; Marcus Bernard, Kentucky State University.*

**9:15 am–9:30 am Break**

**9:30 am–10:15 am, Olmsted 5: SRSA Business Meeting – All are invited and encouraged to attend**

**10:15 am–10:30am Break (Poster Set-Up)**

**10:30 am–11:15 am Poster Session: All encouraged to attend on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Irving Convention Center.**

**11:15 am–11:30 am Break and transition to luncheon location**

**11:30 am–12:45 pm Commonwealth 8: Presidential Luncheon and Speaker**

**12:45 pm–1:00pm Break and transition from luncheon location**

**1:00pm–2:00pm Olmsted 5: Session 12 – Building Local Food Enterprises**

Moderator: Robert Zabawa

Accessing Capital for Sustainable Local Food Production and Access Initiatives in Kentucky  
*Maryam Adeniyi, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University.*

Creating a Food Business Model: Case Study of Plant-based Beverages Made from Hibiscus, Millet, and Corn. *Josephine Nyame, Tuskegee University; Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University; Eunice Bonsi, Tuskegee University; Desmond Mortley, Tuskegee University; Lucy Asare-Baah, Tuskegee University; Youssouf Diabate, Tuskegee University.*

Exploring The Potential Impacts of Small Space Farming for Sustainable Local Food Production in Kentucky. *Oluwafunmisho Ibiloro, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University; Siddhartha Dasgupta, Kentucky State University; Kirk Pomper, Kentucky State University; Milon Chowdhury, Kentucky State University.*

Supply Chain Demands and Challenges at Farmers Markets and Local Grocery Stores in Kentucky. *Ganiyat Shittu, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University; Siddhartha Dasgupta, Kentucky State University; Suraj Upadhaya, Kentucky State University.*

**1:00pm–2:00pm Olmsted 6: Panel 4 – All in the Family: Case Studies in Housing on Family-Owned Land.**

*Christian Ayala-Lopez, Auburn University; Jennifer Pindyck, Auburn University; Rusty Smith, Auburn University; Ryan Thomson, Auburn University; Jacy Fisher, Varner and Associates.*

**2:00pm–2:15pm Break and Poster Takedown**

**2:15pm–3:30pm Olmsted 5: Session 13 – Environmental Hazards and Risk Governance**

Moderator: Matthew Zinsli

Land Tenure and Wildfire Risk in New Mexico's Enchanted Circle.

*Cassandra Johnson Gaither, USDA Forest Service; Anya Bonanno, ORISE; Carman Melendrez, Melendrez Consulting; James Biggs, Environmental Consultant; Juan ""Buck"" Sanchez, Radical Hope; Nathan Gill, Texas Tech University; Laura Fischer, Texas Tech University; Tomek Falkowski, University of New Mexico; Gabe Sanchez, University of New Mexico; David Lopez Amaya, University of New Mexico; Autumn Strother, University of New Mexico; Amanda D Aragón, University of Georgia.*

Resolving the ‘jobs versus the environment’s dilemma in natural resource sectors: How Alabama’s forest products industry aligns extraction, livelihoods, and ecosystems. *Matthew Zinsli, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Mykel Taylor, Auburn University; Garrett Antonio Martinez, Auburn University; Amelia Pugh, Auburn University; Madison Harris, Auburn University.*

Analyzing Risk Heat Exposure and Socioeconomic Disparities in Alabama Black Belt.

*Adelina Rwabilimbo, Tuskegee University; Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University; and Souleiman Fall, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee.*

Commitment through Constraints.

*Jean Francois, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Mykel Taylor, Auburn University.*

**2:15pm–3:30pm Olmsted 6: Session 14 – Resilience Theory & Extension Practice**

Moderator:

Uneven Safety Nets: Cyclone Insurance Disparities and Structural Inequality Among Small Rural Food and Nonfood Businesses in Coastal Areas. *Omowunmi Odeyomi, North Carolina A&T State University; Godfrey C. Ejimakor, North Carolina A&T State University.*

Distilling Community Resilience: Can a Problem-solving Theory Help?

*Curtis Friedel, Virginia Tech; Thomas Awuni, Virginia Tech.*

Building a National Model of Extension in Romania- A Community Diagnostic Assessment.

*Aishat Aina, University of Georgia; Abigail Borron, University of Georgia; Peng Lu, University of Georgia; Brandy Walker, Gary Hawkins, University of Georgia.*

Cooperative Organization as an Intervention to Address some of the Complexity of Multi-Generational Legacy Property

*Thomas Gray, Rural Business-Cooperative Service USDA.*

### **3:30pm–3:45pm: Break**

### **3:45pm–5:00 pm: Session 15, Olmsted 5– Heirs’ Property and Land Tenure**

Moderator: Ryan Thomson

Rooted in Legacy: Strengthening Families Through Heirs’ Property Education.

*Casey Townsend, Kentucky State University; Alethea Bernard, Kentucky State University; Kevin Slovinsky, LiKen Knowledge; Kendal Bowman, Southern Regional Development Center.*

FWD’D: Heirs’ Property, Displacement, and the Geography of Land Loss.

*Abosede Onifade, Auburn University; Ryan Thomson, Auburn University.*

Heirs' Property: A Comparison of Vermont & Alabama.

*Francine Miller, Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law; Jacy Fisher, Varner and Associates.*

Enhancing Knowledge and Changing Action in Minimizing Heirs’ Property Issues through Community Education. *Raksha Khadka, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Lila Karki, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Prem Bhandari, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Nicole Cook, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Samantha Capaldo, University of Maryland Eastern Shore.*

### **3:45pm–5:00pm: Session 16, Olmsted 6– Methods, Visuality, and Reflexivity**

Moderator:

Rebuilding the Past to Create a Different Future: Collective Memory, Exclusion and Disciplinary History. *Julie N. Zimmerman, University of Kentucky.*

Black Farmers and Agricultural Organizations: Insights from a Q Methodology Study.

*Cari Cearley, Oklahoma State University; Courtney Brown, Oklahoma State University; Tania Peebles, Tuskegee University; Angel Riggs, Oklahoma State University.*

Behind the Keyboard and the Camera: Critically Assessing Photography for Studying Rural Gun Ownership. *Abe Neis-Eldridge, Middle Tennessee State University.*

### **5:00pm–6:00 pm: Meeting Room 3–SRSA Executive Council Meeting**

## **ABSTRACTS – PANELS & PRESENTATIONS**

*(Listed in the Appearance Order Found in the Program)*

### **Stories & Storytelling Cultivating Agriculture: An Analysis of Agriculturalists' Autobiographies.**

*Jo Smeby, Auburn University.*

The agricultural industry is in dire need of new voices and devoted growers. To answer this call, I recommend looking towards the marginalized populations historically barred from the industry. An analysis of the stories and storytelling in their autobiographies sheds light on the impact of underrepresented experiences. These stories transform the field by transforming who is represented. I will use grounded theory and empirical generalizations from first-person accounts to identify patterns. This approach allows me to illustrate how their identities have impacted their stories and storytelling. It is clear from the data that the identities and experiences of the storytellers, as well as the artistic conventions of autobiographical writing, are deeply interconnected. We must cultivate a space for the stories and storytellers that have historically been invisible. Only then can we illustrate the identity of the agricultural industry in a way that represents us all.

### **Preaching: Sermons as Windows into Rural Southern Adaptation.**

*Colin Caso, Oklahoma State University.*

Religious sermons from rural churches often reveal more about a community than what is visible to the eye. Sermons frequently address local concerns through the lens of the Christian tradition, which makes them especially valuable sources of insight in rural settings where communal life is tightly knit and outside influences are limited. Thus, this study will analyze publicly archived sermons from rural Southern congregations to explore how faith leaders in rural communities interpret and narrate economic transitions, climate concerns, migration patterns, and shifting community identities. Using qualitative content analysis of sermon transcripts and recordings, the project will examine recurring metaphors, scriptural frames, and rhetorical strategies that help congregants make sense of local and regional change. Guided by narrative theory and symbolic interactionism, the study aims to identify how sermons construct shared meanings and shape collective responses to transformation.

### **Music Tourism Impacts on Rural Economies**

*Rachael Carter, Mississippi State University; Sreedhar Upendram, University of Tennessee Knoxville*

The B.B. King Museum and Interpretive Center anchors efforts to preserve the Mississippi Delta's musical heritage while supporting economic diversification in a rural community. B.B. King, known globally as the King of the Blues is part of a musical legacy in the region that draws visitors from around the world. However, like many cultural attractions, its broader regional impact can be difficult to measure. This study applies a mixed-methods approach to estimate the museum's contributions by analyzing visitor demographics, motivations, spending patterns, and trip characteristics using a digital survey and GIS mapping. Findings will demonstrate how musical tourism shapes local spending, influences regional travel behavior, and reinforces community identity. The presentation will address the challenges of using tourism as a rural development strategy. Results highlight the museum's role within the Mississippi Blues Trail and offer considerations for effectively leveraging cultural assets to strengthen rural economies while preserving heritage.

### **Sacred Landscapes and Rural Change: A Textual and Visual Analysis of Religious Space in the New South.**

*Colin Caso, Oklahoma State University.*

In rural Southern communities, religious landscapes, such as churches, cemeteries, and roadside markers, often serve as attributes of continuity amid social and environmental change. Examining these spaces illuminates how communities sustain their identities and adapt to shifting social and economic conditions in rural America. Using publicly available photographs, county archives, and regional publications, this project will trace how sacred spaces evolve alongside demographic shifts, economic restructuring, and climate pressures. Through textual and visual analysis, the study aims to identify patterns of

“religious resilience in rural places,” in which material religious expressions help rural communities maintain identity while adapting to new realities. By focusing on publicly accessible sources, this research offers a non-human-subjects approach to understanding how rural places negotiate religious roots and currents through their shared geographies. The findings are expected to provide insight into how religious landscapes reflect both continuity and adaptation in the New South.

### **Resilient Local and Regional Food Systems: Lessons and Opportunities Post-COVID.**

*Kenrett Jefferson-Moore, North Carolina A&T State University; Kaylee South, Virginia Tech; Courtney Brown, Oklahoma State University; John Green, Mississippi State University; Grace Langford, Mississippi State University.*

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, sparking renewed interest in strengthening local and regional food systems. Concurrently, extreme weather events and persistent challenges to farm community vitality underscore the urgency of building resilience. This session explores innovative strategies and collaborative research emerging from the SERA-47 multistate project to address these interconnected issues. Topics include adaptive supply chain models, climate-smart practices, and community-based approaches that enhance economic viability and food security. Panelists will share insights from recent studies and outreach initiatives, highlighting opportunities for policy alignment and stakeholder engagement. By fostering dialogue among researchers, Extension professionals, and policymakers, this session aims to advance actionable solutions that support sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems in the face of ongoing disruptions and future uncertainties. In the latter part of the session, the SERA-47 leadership team will include discussions and planning for the coming year.

### **Assessing the Influence of Farming Experience on Farmers’ Resilience to Weather-Induced Damages in the Caribbean.**

*Sienna Stewart, Kentucky State University; Shristi Adhikari, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

The repercussions of extreme weather events have caused considerable damage to farmers in the Caribbean region. The agricultural sector is significantly affected, with drought becoming the most common disaster, followed by hurricanes and floods. To better understand the need for weather-resilience systems, a survey was conducted in 2025 in the Caribbean region. This research aims to understand the relationship between farmers' years of experience and their ability to recover from weather-related crop damage. The analysis indicates that farmers with more years of experience tend to adopt more sustainable practices that reduce the impact of disasters. Thus, the findings suggest that increased institutional support is needed to improve farmers’ disaster preparedness and strengthen agricultural practices in the Caribbean.

### **Perceptions of Adverse Weather Events and Changing Weather Patterns in Kentucky.**

*Shristi Adhikari, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

Extreme weather occurrences are one of the key emerging challenges for humankind in the 21st century. Kentucky serves as a critical case study due to its increasing encounters with severe weather events that have significantly impacted daily life. Despite evidence of the impacts of such changes, some people still do not believe in it and are unaware of the consequences for themselves. This study was conducted in 2025 in Kentucky to explore how individuals respond to changes in weather events and their willingness to act on it. Preliminary findings suggest that the majority of the respondents have noticed shifts in weather patterns over the years and believe human activities as the major cause of such changes. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to support extension services by generating evidence that enables them to understand what people believe and the support they need.

### **Understanding Climate Change as Adverse Weather Events.**

*Cynthia Rice; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

With environmental factors affecting everything from financial “bottom” lines, farmers have to cope with changing impacts on food, fiber, forage and feed. From heat to cold and drought to flooding, there is no longer “typical” weather patterns.

Mitigation and adaptation plans are constantly being revised while labor management, animal and plant cycles and new or additional financial considerations are brought into play. Shade, wind “alleyways”, humidity and temperature at critical times in agricultural production makes successful and sustainable farm operations a “crap” shoot for a successful farm production year or a failure where farmers are literally “betting” the farm. New financial considerations makes profitable farm production riskier than the stock market with less reliable income. Yet, small scale farmers and family farms are proving to be the only reliable way for food production for a hungry planet as large industrial farms are proving to be problematic for a sustainable future.

### **Belonging in the Latinx Community of Central Alabama.**

*Antonio Martinez, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University.*

The US South has long been a transnational space. Few studies seek to understand how the Latinx community constructs belonging and community in Central Alabama. In this research, we ask: what practices contribute to feelings of belonging for Latinx peoples in Central Alabama? This research is guided by grounded theory for data generation and analysis, and data for this paper come from interviews and ethnographic fieldnotes. At the time of writing, we have completed 8 interviews (of a planned ~30 interviews) and 40 hours of participant observation. In this paper, we will discuss preliminary findings regarding the gendered dynamics of belonging and applying *la frontera* to Latinx parents’ experiences in raising children.

### **High Planes in the Heart of the Great Plains: An Exploration of Community Resilience and Place Attachment in an Agrarian and Military Rural Community.**

*Laney Reasner; Audrey King; Bradley Coleman; Amy Brown.*

Community resilience, or the ability to adapt in the face of challenge or uncertainty, is largely dependent on the context, culture, and operations of a community. [City, state] faces extreme weather events like drought, compounded by climate change effects; resilience capacity is vital to [city]. Guided by the Community Capitals framework, this single holistic case study sought to capture a complete understanding of community resilience in [city] by exploring how residents viewed and understood resilience in their community. Data were collected from June to August 2025 through narrative interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. Results revealed participants viewed their community as resilient, largely due to social cohesion and collaborations. Place attachments and belongingness also enforced positive understandings of resilience in [city], as all participants felt connected to [city] despite varied times of residency. Findings suggest a multifaceted review of a community best captures a holistic understanding of community resilience.

### **Small Business Perspectives in Rural Alabama: Business Succession and Community Resilience.**

*Amelia Pugh, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University.*

A resilient local economy is dependent on all types of businesses, especially small businesses. In Alabama, there is limited information available on how small business owners make their succession planning decisions and how they portray these decisions in relation to the local community. To address this gap, we are conducting semi-structured interviews with small, locally owned and operated business owners in rural communities across the state. Preliminary data analysis reveals that owners tend to explain their business management decisions through the lens of social factors rather than financial factors, indicating a need to prioritize outreach and succession planning education on the importance of protecting the social and economic well-being.

### **Where Rural Roots Meet New Currents: Growing Change in Appalachian Kentucky.**

*Marcus Bernard, Kentucky State University; Tyrell Kahan, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University; and Laura Rogers, Kentucky State University.*

In Eastern Kentucky, change doesn’t arrive by accident—it grows from deep rural roots. Through small farm education, bilingual outreach, youth technology programs, environmental justice work, and value-added agriculture, new opportunities

are taking shape across Appalachian communities. This presentation shares real experiences from working with farmers, Hispanic families, seniors, and youth as tradition meets modern tools like drones, mobile photography, and hands-on land stewardship. From beekeeping and soil health to food access and career exploration, these efforts show how rural culture and innovation can move together instead of in opposition. The story of the New South is not only about movement forward—it is also about honoring place, people, and the steady work of growing possibility where it is most needed.

### **Distilling Resilience: Equipment Sharing and Climate-Smart Agriculture in the Rural South.**

*Nicole Nunoo, University of Georgia; Samantha Olvey, University of Georgia; Jennifer Thompson, University of Georgia.*

Rural communities across the U.S. South are navigating profound environmental and economic change while remaining deeply rooted in land, labor, and place. Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) offers pathways for building resilience, particularly through cover cropping, which improves soil health, reduces erosion, and strengthens farm stability. Yet adoption remains uneven, especially among limited-resource farmers facing barriers related to equipment costs, labor, and institutional access. This study examines an equipment-sharing model for cover crop adoption in the Southern Piedmont as a lens into how rural communities balance deep-seated traditions of mutual aid with emerging pressures of climate variability and market change. Drawing on interviews with organic and conventional farmers, the research highlights how shared equipment is understood as both a revival of collective problem-solving and a site of tension shaped by trust, coordination, and power. The findings show how community-driven, culturally grounded innovations can help distill new forms of resilience in the changing rural South.

### **Adoption Intensity of Conservation Management Practices among Kentucky Farmers.**

*Ife Familusi, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University; Suraj Upadhaya, Kentucky State University; Dipesh Oli, Kentucky State University; Shreesha Pandeya, Kentucky State University; Kabita Paudel, Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University.*

Farmers often adopt a combination of conservation management practices (CMPs) implemented either in-field or at the edge-of-field to achieve synergistic agronomic, economic, and environmental benefits. However, most studies focus on assessing factors influencing the adoption of individual practices, with little known about drivers of multiple practices adoption (i.e., intensity). We surveyed 101 farmers in Kentucky, of whom 46.5% were CMP adopters and 65.96% adopted more than one practice. Common practices included crop rotation, cover crops, nutrient management, and tillage. A zero-truncated Poisson model showed that adoption intensity increased among farmers with higher education, greater information access, use of precision agriculture, and those farming on steeper slopes or on rented land. Intensity was lower among older farmers, males, larger households, off-farm income-dependent households, and those in the mid-income range. Farmers' socio-economic characteristics and county-level environmental conditions drive CMP intensity, suggesting that targeted outreach and structural incentives could enhance multiple adoption.

### **Farmer Perspectives Informing Future-Oriented Extension Models in Irrigation.**

*Elizabeth Abati, University of Georgia; Abigail Borron, University of Georgia; Drew Gholson, Mississippi State University; Nicolas Ashwell, Mississippi State University; Dillon Russell, Mississippi State University.*

Rapid shifts in agricultural production and irrigation practices pose pressing challenges for farmers and Extension systems. This study analyzes qualitative data from the 2025 [STATE] Master Irrigator Program, focusing on a final-day Q&A session among farmers and agricultural professionals. Thematic analysis identified interest in improving irrigation efficiency and integrating data-driven technologies. However, participants expressed concerns about technological complexity, labor shortages, time constraints, and limited technical knowledge. Respondents valued hands-on guidance, accessible decision-support tools, and training that translates technology into practical, field-tested strategies. Participants also anticipated long-term shifts toward automation and consolidation, heightening uncertainty about the future of agriculture. These findings indicate that successful Extension programming must prioritize experiential learning, contextualized technical support, and flexible delivery systems that meet producers where they are. Strengthening collaborative learning networks and on-farm demonstrations can boost adoption and capacity in a rapidly evolving agricultural landscape.

## **Exploring the Impact of Regenerative Agricultural Practices on Soil Health and Crop Performance in Rural Kentucky: A Farmer-Engaged Approach.**

*Richard Ojo, Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Suraj Upadhaya, Kentucky State University; Theoneste Nzaramyimana, Kentucky State University.*

Soil degradation caused by intensive tillage, monoculture, and agrochemical use threatens productivity and ecological resilience in Kentucky, especially for small-scale farmers on marginal land. This three-year, farmer-engaged trial uses on-farm demonstrations to evaluate biochar incorporation, cover cropping, and reduced tillage at five on-farm sites representing key agroecological zones. Corn grain yield was recorded for each plot. Preliminary results show that biochar plots had the highest Soil Organic Matter (SOM) at (2.88%), followed by the control (2.69%), while winter cover crop and nitrogen treatments were at (2.67%). Across the site, SOM averaged 2.82% under conventional tillage and 2.65% under reduced tillage, reflecting prior management history, as reduced tillage was introduced recently. Corn yield has not yet differed significantly among treatments across sites or tillage systems. Continuing field demonstrations and upcoming research years will further clarify how regenerative practices influence soil carbon, nutrient availability, crop resilience, and farmer interest in conservation-focused management.

## **Understanding Conservation Practices Stacking Behavior and Influencing Factors Among Kentucky Farmers**

*Ibidapo Bolaji, Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Theoneste Nzaramyimana, Kentucky State University*

This study will explore Kentucky farmers' understanding and adoption of stacked soil conservation practices, addressing the limited research on how and why farmers adopt multiple practices. Focusing on a diverse agricultural landscape, the study will use a mixed-methods design combining a cross-sectional survey of 400 farmers with semi-structured interviews to uncover both broad patterns and nuanced insights. The research will be guided by a farmer typology framework that incorporates observable dimensions (e.g., enterprise type, income) and latent dimensions (e.g., stewardship values, perceived risks). Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, Latent Class Analysis, and logistic regression, while qualitative interviews will provide deeper insights into motivations, barriers, and contextual factors. By integrating these data sources, the study aims to advance understanding of stacked conservation practice adoption. The findings will inform targeted outreach and policy development, contributing to more effective conservation strategies in Kentucky's dynamic agricultural environment.

## **Building Technology Confidence in Older Adults Through Cooperative Extension Programs.**

*Yolanda McFerrin, Fort Valley State University; Terrence Wolfork, Fort Valley State University.*

Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension advances digital equity across Middle and South Georgia by expanding access to broadband, technology, and digital literacy. Leveraging strategic partnerships with state agencies, peer institutions, and community organizations, the Extension delivers customized programs and infrastructure solutions that empower underserved rural and urban populations.

As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into daily life, older adults often face unique challenges in adoption due to technology anxiety and digital literacy. This presentation examines how these factors influence adoption rates among older populations, drawing insights from our bridging the digital divide efforts and strategic partnerships. We will highlight strategies to reduce anxiety and improve confidence, including personalized training and community-based support. By understanding the psychological and practical barriers, we aim to promote more inclusive technology practices that empower older adults and enhance their quality of life.

## **Connecting Communities: Innovation in Entrepreneurship Education.**

*Terence Norwood, Alabama A&M University; Trish Kalbas-Schmidt, Santa Clara University.*

Alabama A&M University Extension has partnered with the My Own Business Institute (MOBI) at Santa Clara University to expand access to entrepreneurship education for underserved communities. This collaboration leverages MOBI's free, online

business courses and Extension's local outreach to remove traditional barriers such as cost, geography, and limited digital literacy. By combining practical, self-paced learning with community-based support, the partnership empowers aspiring entrepreneurs in rural and economically challenged areas to develop essential business skills. Through workshops, mentorship, and technology assistance, participants gain confidence and resources to start and sustain successful ventures. This initiative exemplifies how academic institutions can work together to democratize entrepreneurship education, fostering economic resilience and innovation in communities that need it most.

### **The Effect of Access to Broadband on Rural Development Efforts in Alabama's Blackbelt.**

*Adriana Cornie, Tuskegee University; Raymon Shange, Tuskegee University; Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University; Souleymane Fall, Tuskegee University; Aaron McCall, South Central Alabama Broadband Cooperative District.*

While broadband is widely perceived as an important instrument for accessing vital resources, such as jobs, education, health care, food, and information, this is not the case for every community in the United States. Alabama's Blackbelt lags behind the rest of the states when it comes to internet access. This is a challenge for most people living in rural areas, where internet access and connectivity are limited or nonexistent. The purpose of this study is to assess the effect of broadband access on rural development in Alabama's Blackbelt and its potential to improve the life prospects and economic opportunities of the rural people. This study will use a mixed-method approach including surveys, focus group discussions, and secondary data analysis to evaluate broadband access and its effects. Additionally, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping will be used to further reveal the spatial extent and patterns of broadband access in the region.

### **Enhancing Rural Food Accessibility: The Role of Augmented Reality in Online Grocery Shopping for Traditional Consumers.**

*Emmanuel Obielodan, Kentucky State University; Etumnu Chinonso, Kentucky State University; Theoneste Nzaramyimana, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University.*

E-commerce has emerged as a critical lifeline for rural food access while creating more than 220,000 jobs across rural America. However, the inability to physically inspect products remains a major barrier for consumers rooted in traditional purchasing habits. Using consumer choice theory and a survey of rural populations in the United States, this study aims to investigate whether Augmented Reality (AR) can bridge this gap by mitigating product uncertainty, thereby increasing the utility of online grocery channels for rural communities. It is expected that experienced online shoppers, particularly those in regions with limited physical store access, will derive greater utilitarian value from AR's ability to visualize products than from its hedonic appeal. By exploring how immersive technology can overcome physical distance, this study also offers a novel perspective on how we can distill technological change to build more resilient and trustworthy rural food systems.

### **Land, Lineage, and Learning: Reclaiming Clarity in Kentucky's Heirs' Property.**

*Casey Townsend, Kentucky State University; Alethea Bernard, Kentucky State University; Kevin Slovinsky, LiKen Knowledge; Kendal Bowman, Southern Regional Development Center.*

Across Kentucky, families hold land woven with history, yet heirs' property continues to blur ownership and weaken generational stability. Through a statewide workshop series reaching community members across multiple counties, 44 survey respondents revealed clear shifts in understanding—gaining confidence in identifying co-heirs, interpreting land records, preparing essential documents, and engaging attorneys. Many committed to building family trees, collecting contact information, and beginning the conversations that secure family land for future generations. What began as education grew into action. As participants sought guidance, volunteer attorneys ultimately drafted 122 wills across seven counties—living proof that knowledge can anchor a community's legacy. This work stands in contrast to national trends where only 51% of Americans over 50 and roughly 32% of adults overall have wills. A follow-up session at the 2025 Small Farmers' Conference affirmed continued demand for estate planning resources, trusted attorney referrals, and strategies to preserve land and lineage.

### **Raw Milk: Local Stakeholder Perspectives.**

*Alyssa Garcia, East Texas A&M University; Bob Williams, East Texas A&M University; Jose Lopez, East Texas A&M University; Katharine Halfacre, East Texas A&M University.*

This qualitative study examined producers', consumers' and veterinarians' perspectives about raw milk consumption in north Texas, as well as perceived benefits and risks associated with consuming raw milk. Interviews were used to collect data. The objectives of this study will be to identify local north Texas producers of raw milk for retail, as well as one or more of their customers, the primary care veterinarian for each producer selected for this study, and identify the motivations, concerns, and assurances associated with the production and consumption of raw milk for retail. There was a total of ten participants in this study. There were four producers, four consumers, and two veterinarians. This study has revealed the importance producers place on the health and maintenance of their herd, how consumers emphasize the importance of having a relationship with their producers, and how veterinarians emphasize the importance of testing and vaccinating cows used to produce raw milk for retail.

### **Shifting Currents in Local Food Engagement: Evidence from Kentucky Before and After COVID-19.**

*Timothy Woods, University of Kentucky; Mahla Zare Mehrjerdi; Nova Southeastern University; Jairus Rossi, University of Kentucky.*

Local food systems have long supported rural Southern livelihoods, but the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped food access and consumer behavior across the region. Using two statewide surveys from Kentucky (2019 and 2023; n=3,068), this study examines how local food interest shifted during a period of supply chain disruption and economic uncertainty. Two-sample t-tests show a broad increase in interest across gender, income, age, and most education groups, with the strongest gains among suburban and urban residents. Only respondents reporting "some college" showed no significant change. These results point to the emergence of new consumer segments whose engagement with local foods intensified post-COVID. For rural communities, this shift presents an economic opportunity and highlights the growing relevance of state branding programs and provenance-focused marketing strategies that help consumers identify and trust locally sourced products. Overall, the findings illustrate how longstanding rural food traditions intersect with evolving consumer preferences in the New South.

### **"On Our Own" or "Together": Disability, Race, & Local Food Access in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta.**

*Ellie Crane, University of Mississippi; Ryan Parsons, University of Mississippi.*

Communities in the rural South have some of the highest concentrations of Social Security disability (SSI and SSDI) recipients in the United States, and many face persistent food insecurity. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 40 beneficiaries in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta, this study documents regional and racial variation in how households navigate food access constraints. Despite relatively stronger healthcare infrastructure, white Appalachian participants primarily relied on individualized coping strategies. By contrast, Black Mississippians were more likely to draw on dense social networks among family, neighbors, and friends to secure food. We argue that these divergent strategies reflect racialized histories of social infrastructure and uneven local food systems development. The findings contribute to rural food systems scholarship and show how disability, race, and place shape food access and highlight the limitations of initiatives that overlook care-based and informal systems. Our findings have implications for community-based work within imperfect policy environments.

### **Cicada Consumption in the Rural South and Beyond.**

*Cat Lamb, University of Kentucky.*

Edible insects remain of academic intrigue in the United States as a potentially sustainable and nutritious protein source, however, the average American consumer is commonly assumed to be completely averse to the concept of entomophagy (eating insects). This assumption is complicated by two major sources of evidence focused on periodical cicadas: a type of flying insect prevalent in the United States. First, archival records alongside oral histories demonstrate the continuation of cicada consumption in the United States over the course of multiple centuries. Second, the author's firsthand participant observations at several events involving the preparation and consumption of periodical cicadas during their emergence in the

Spring of 2025 illustrates ongoing contemporary engagement with this specific insect as food in the rural South and beyond. Together, these sources indicate that while a distinctive stigma toward insects as food persists in the United States, Americans continue to find opportunities to seek out, prepare, and enjoy insects (and in particular, cicadas) as food.

### **Insights from the 2025 Our State, Our Lives: Alabama Wellbeing Survey.**

*Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Jean Francois, Auburn University; Mykel Taylor, Auburn University.*

The Our State, Our Lives: Alabama Wellbeing Survey is a statewide survey (n = 1,947) that explores topics related to workforce development and community well-being. The survey was conducted online using the Qualtrics XM platform. The aim of the survey was to learn more about the challenges facing rural, urban, and suburban Alabamians and how wellbeing differed across geographic groups. In this paper, we discuss the challenges of implementing a new biennial statewide survey and present notable findings.

### **National Policy Research Center Research Analyst Update.**

*Kara Woods, The Alcorn State National Policy Research Center*

The presentation will provide an update on ongoing research project topics, including crop insurance and risk management programs, youth in agriculture programs, and upcoming research studies. These topics are crucial to farming and its connection to rural life. Extreme weather, an aging farmer population, current and past discrepancies, and lack of access affect the future and viability of farming and its impact. The discussion will provide impactful data highlighting the effects and barriers of crop insurance government programs and youth in agriculture programming, while including policy recommendations for improvement.

### **Rurality and the Spatial Distribution of Priorities from a Statewide Community Needs Assessment.**

*Omolola Adedokun, University of Kentucky; Julie Zimmerman, University of Kentucky.*

From poverty rates to determinants of health, residents in rural areas often face different circumstances and different challenges compared with their urban counterparts. But does this spatial inequality and resultant differences in material conditions also translate into residents holding different priorities? This analysis examines if there was a relationship between rurality and resident priorities identified in a statewide assessment of priorities for Cooperative Extension. Examining local differences in the top 10 issues identified for the state as a whole, the results indicated that rural resident views varied not only from those in urban parts of the state, but the results also indicated statistically significant differences when rural counties were differentiated from one another.

### **Engaging Men in Gender Studies: Understanding the Experiences and Challenges of Male Students Studying Women and Gender Studies at the University of Dhaka.**

*Subata Zannat Riya, Florida Atlantic University, Florida, United States; Abdul Halim, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary field that serves as a powerful analytical framework to examine gender power dynamics, advocate for women's rights, and challenge structural inequalities. The discipline is pivotal for achieving societal change, yet it remains underexplored by male students who often perceive it as solely catering to women's issues. This paper explores the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of male students studying at the Department of Women and Gender Studies (DWGS) at the University of Dhaka. By adopting a qualitative research approach and employing stratified purposive sampling, twelve male students were identified and interviewed in-depth. The study uncovers the nuanced ways patriarchal norms and societal expectations shape the experiences of male students within this academic field. The research emphasizes that men's participation in Gender Studies is crucial for breaking the cycle of patriarchal thinking.

## **Understanding Public Value of Land-Grant Institutions: A Conceptual Framework.**

*Erica Odera, University of Florida; Lauri M. Baker, University of Florida; Ricky W. Telg, University of Florida*

While historically focused on agriculture and rural life, today's Land-Grant Institutions (LGIs) must grapple with serving increasingly urbanized areas, shifting demographics, political polarization, changing funding structures, and external environmental threats. How can LGIs ensure the voices of rural residents are still heard and prioritized today? One solution is to track changes in rural and urban perspectives on the public value of LGIs in their states. This paper showcases a conceptual framework of the perceived public value of LGIs. A literature review across eight academic journals was conducted to select articles published in the past decade addressing issues of public perception, value, engagement, and evaluation of LGIs and related programming. Themes from literature were aligned with the four components of public value described from the field of public administration and propositional statements created to guide future research on the changing nature of public value in the LGI context.

## **Social Science Grant Opportunities from Southern SARE.**

*Douglas Constance, Sam Houston State University; Jeffrey Jordan, University of Georgia Griffin.*

SARE is USDA grant and outreach program for farmers, ranchers, researchers and educators who want to develop innovations that improve farm profitability, protect water and land, and revitalize communities. Southern SARE hosts several grants opportunities for social scientists located at engaged in these areas of research and education in the Southern Region. This presentation will provide an overview of both the Southern SARE grants opportunities, as well as examples of successfully funded grants in the social sciences for each of the appropriate grant programs, including Graduate Student, Research and Education, Education, Professional Development, and conference/outreach support.

## **Participant Perspectives on Broader Impact of Collaborative Sustainable Agricultural Research.**

*Mark Schafer, LSU AgCenter; Claire Thomas, Louisiana State University; Xiaoxu Yang, Louisiana State University; Megan Brooker, University of Alabama Birmingham, Ranju Acharya, LSU AgCenter; Carine Villasante, Louisiana State University; Marine Harutyunyan, Louisiana State University.*

As part of an effort to assess the broader impacts of a large NSF-funded, multistate, multi-institutional, and multidisciplinary grant program, a team of social scientists interviewed all the PIs and co-PIs at all the participating institutions, all Research 1 universities in the southern United States. This paper highlights participant perspectives on (a) the collaboration's impact on their research, teaching, extension/outreach, and career trajectories, (b) factors that facilitate or hinder successful multidisciplinary collaborations; (c) the project's impact on the development of a future wave of agricultural scholars including postdocs, graduate students, undergraduate student interns, and high science teachers and their students. Participating scientists also shared their perspectives on the extent to which AI and related, emerging data science technologies (i.e., machine learning, deep learning, etc.) feature in their research trajectories and enhance the broader project impacts. This paper contributes to the collaboration literature.

## **Rural Response: An Examination of Extension's Crisis Communication to New World Screwworm Threats in the Southwest.**

*Kenna Sandberg, Oklahoma State University; Carrie Baker, Oklahoma State University; Audrey King, Oklahoma State University.*

Rural communities rely on Cooperative Extension Systems (CES) for timely communication during crises (Narine & Meier, 2020) and zoonotic disease outbreaks (Bello-Bravo et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020). The New World screwworm (NWS) poses significant animal and public health risks in Southern rural areas. Using situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 1995, 2007), we analyzed CES responses to NWS across five southwestern states through content analysis of Extension websites. Responses varied: most states used landing pages to centralize updates, share research, and repurpose USDA content. Messaging through webinars, podcasts, and factsheets emphasized local risks, prevention, and case reporting. Communication from New Mexico, Louisiana, and Arkansas was less prominent. Findings highlight CES as a critical liaison

but reveal gaps in cross-agency communication. Strengthening zoonotic disease response is essential for sustaining resilient food systems and rural health. Future research should examine effects of crisis communication on preventive behaviors of livestock owners.

### **Interaction of Household Wealth Quintile and Region of Residence on Children Under Five's Wasting in Nigeria.**

*Aramide Kazeem, University of West Georgia; John Musalia, Western Kentucky University.*

The intersection of household wealth/income matters in children's nutrition; some children are more susceptible than others to inadequate nutrition during the under five years if they belong to low or middle (compared to rich) income households and if they reside in regions of their countries that are liable to food insecurities, droughts, limited rainfalls, and little or no access to health care institutions and programs that are vital for curbing poor nutrition and health.

Using economic and socio-cultural explanations, what is the interaction effect of categories of household wealth with different regions of residence on the probability of wasting, measured through the weight-for-height z-score, among under-five children? In what household wealth-region of residence interactions do children face a lower risk of wasting, measured by weight-for-height z-score?

### **Sun Exposure, Risk Perception, and Prevention Among Rural Kentucky Farmers.**

*Ebenezer Akinola, Kentucky State University; S. Fakolade, Kentucky State University; G. Besona, Kentucky State University; and F. N. Bebe, Kentucky State University.*

Kentucky's communities are shaped by deep agricultural roots and shifting environmental and economic pressures. Rural and small-scale farmers in Kentucky work daily under prolonged sun exposure, placing them at heightened risk for skin cancer, yet prevention behaviors remain low. This study examines how farmers perceive their risk and the severity of skin cancer, and how cultural norms, occupational identity, and community networks influence sun-safety practices. Guided by an integrated Health Belief Model and the social Cognitive Theory framework, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combines regional survey data with interviews and focus groups to frame behavioral patterns. Early insights show that cultural, economic, and climate pressures shape farmers' risk and how they adapt. By identifying barriers and motivators for sun protection, this research contributes to understanding how rural communities navigate change and supports the development of culturally grounded strategies to promote resilience in the New South.

### **Understanding Disparities Between Skin Cancer Awareness and Sun Protective Behavior Through the Health Belief Model.**

*S. Fakolade, Kentucky State University; E. Akinola, Kentucky State University; F. Bebe, Kentucky State University; G. Besona, Kentucky State University.*

Despite the growing awareness of ultraviolet radiation (UV) risks, gaps remain between individuals' knowledge and their consistent adoption of sun protective behaviors. Using the Health Belief Model (HBM) as a guiding framework, this study examines how key constructs perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, and self-efficacy shape sunscreen use, shade seeking, and protective clothing practices. Findings show that even when awareness and perceived risk are high, perceived barriers such as inconvenience, cost, and time strongly inhibit consistent behavior. Social norms, including positive attitudes toward tanning and optimism bias, further widen the awareness behavior gap. Individuals with fewer perceived barriers and higher self-efficacy were significantly more likely to engage in protection. In addition, awareness through education alone is insufficient. Effective interventions must combine HBM based risk communication with community level strategies, such as accessible shade and free sunscreen dispensers, to reduce structural barriers and promote sustainable behavior change.

### **An Evaluation of a Climate Science Teacher Institute for Rural Educators.**

*Katharine Honeyman, Oklahoma State University; J. Shane Robinson, Oklahoma State University; Shelby Hunt, Kansas State University; Ian Cummings, Kansas State University; Mukesh Bhattarai, Kansas State University.*

Effective professional development is essential for equipping educators to teach climate science; yet, rural teachers face barriers in teaching this content due to limited internet access and geographic isolation. We delivered and evaluated a Climate Science Teacher Institute for rural educators in summer 2025. The three-day institute was funded by a Rural Confluence EPSCoR grant and engaged elementary, STEM, and agricultural education teachers in enhancing their efficacy related to teaching climate science. Teachers learned about climate science through guest speakers and workshop activities and developed and shared place-based, grade-appropriate curriculum for their students in a community of practice approach. We used a validated teacher efficacy scale before and after the institute. Results indicated teachers increased their confidence for teaching climate science and supported place-based curriculum development. We will describe the institute's structure, share evaluation findings, and offer recommendations for professional development of rural teachers regarding initiatives addressing climate science education.

### **Teaching Rural Sociology - the importance of empathy for critical thinking.**

*Alissa Rossi, University of Kentucky.*

In this presentation, I share findings from teaching Rural Sociology at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A Rural Sociological approach encourages critical thinking about the Sociological Imagination as it applies to rural issues, allows students to begin to examine structural reasons for political positions and for entrenched regional poverty, and it allows them to envision community-based solutions to rural problems. Most importantly, it can spark a critical empathy that facilitates a sense of compassion for and interest in rural issues and the experiences of rural residents. To conclude, this presentation will share recommendations developed by my students for teaching Rural Sociology effectively and impactfully.

### **Understanding the Land and the Science Behind: Today's Scientist Farmer.**

*Cynthia Rice; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University.*

Farmers are becoming more educated. They are understanding that they must know the science behind soil fertility and health. They need to understand the state of their soil and how to unlock that fertility and increase the health of the soil biome. The various biological functions occurring in the soil, the network of soil transport of nutrients, how to take degraded soil and turn it back into the rich, fertile farmland and how to unlock the mineral components needed for crop production and health livestock. The biodiversity of the surrounding land, the circular economy of a farm and the continued sustainability of farm operations must be viewed and weighed with long term goals and consideration for the wildlife which surrounds the farm. The farm does not exist in a vacuum but is instead part of the whole environment. Maximum yields are no longer the only driving force.

### **Toward an Inclusive Framework of Course Core Values in Higher Education.**

*Brooklynn Wynveen, Sam Houston State University.*

Educators in university classrooms have a wide variety of students facing an even wider range of circumstances and challenges. Our challenge is to create a classroom environment that is mindful of those circumstances and challenges, while not compromising the mission of students' learning. I propose a set of core values that would guide classroom activity, including: mindfulness of learning preferences; adoption and promotion of a growth mindset; emphasis on resilience; commitment to active learning; priority on career readiness; incorporation of student-centered elements; and mindfulness of trauma-informed and inclusion-minded practices. In this presentation, I will define and elaborate on each of these core values, providing practical application strategies for the higher education classroom, in particular, as well as education more broadly.

### **Opportunities and Challenges for Rural Sociologists in the Rapidly Changing Academic Landscape**

*Keiko Tanaka, University of Kentucky; Anne Cafer, University of Mississippi; Doug Constance, Sam Houston State University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Diego Thompson, Mississippi State University.*

With recent federal and state laws and legislation, the academic landscape has begun to change dramatically. In this panel session, we will share some of the challenges we have faced through instructional, research, outreach, and service activities. We will discuss strategies for maintaining and strengthening the critical contributions that rural sociological scholarship makes in society. We will also explore potential new opportunities under the new academic landscape.

### **Climate-smart Agritourism: An Alternative Livelihood Strategy for Small and Minority Farmers**

*Lila B. Karki, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Dipendra Gurung, University of Florida, Gainesville; Prem B. Bhandari, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Enrique N. Escobar, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Moses T. Kairo, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; and Kingsley U. Ejiogu, University of Maryland Eastern Shore.*

The UMES Extension hosted an Agritourism Conference that discussed the current situation, challenges, and future opportunities. Responses highlighted the socioeconomic and environmental benefits of agritourism. Of the total, 31.1% were future agritourism farmers, and 11.1% were current operators. Similarly, 86.7% said they would apply the knowledge, 85.7% emphasized the importance of adding value to agricultural products to diversify farms, 85.2% were eager to implement what they learned, 70.2% were willing to start an agritourism farm, and 85.1% saw agritourism as a promising alternative livelihood for historically underserved minority farmers and ranchers. Notably, 44.7% showed interest in developing climate-smart, agroforestry-based agritourism farms.

### **From Culture to Market: Resilience Pathways and Barriers in Small-Scale Texas Agriculture**

*Ervin Leiva, Angelo State University; Barituka Bekee, University of Vermont; Corinne Valdivia, University of Missouri; Daniel Parisian, University of North Carolina at Pembroke*

This qualitative study examines how farming culture shapes resilience strategies among small-scale farmers and ranchers in Texas facing barriers to market access, sales stability, and institutional support. Drawing on eleven focus groups and interviews across South, Central, and West Texas, data were analyzed using Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of field and habitus, Valdivia et al.'s (2012) asset accumulation framework, and Bekee and Valdivia's (2023) resilience typology. Findings show that White farmers rely on heritage and established networks, Hispanic producers draw on perseverance, family labor, and reciprocity, and Black farmers emphasize cooperative organizing and land retention as resistance to exclusion. Risk aversion is universal but culturally distinct, while land access, infrastructure gaps, and administrative complexity remain major constraints. Social networks, cultural identity, and adaptive marketing—such as ethnic food channels and direct-to-consumer models—emerge as key sources of resilience. Resilience is thus culturally embedded, relational, and essential for equitable small-farm viability.

### **Evaluating Small-Scale Micro-Livestock: Comparative Sustainability of Rabbits, Chickens, Quail, and Pigeons for Diversified Protein Production**

*Millie Murphree, Auburn University Extension.*

Backyard micro-livestock systems offer a promising pathway toward diversified, sustainable protein production. This review evaluates four small-bodied species—rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*), quail (*Coturnix japonica*), and domestic pigeons/squab (*Columba livia domestica*)—for their suitability in low-input urban and peri-urban settings. Rabbits and chickens remain the most common due to rapid growth, high feed conversion efficiency, and well-established husbandry knowledge. Quail provide exceptionally fast turnover, minimal space requirements, and dual-purpose value through meat and eggs. Pigeons, once a major American protein source, demonstrate unique advantages: high resilience, minimal housing demands, and the ability to forage over wide areas, thereby reducing purchased feed inputs. Although squab production is limited by pigeons' slower reproductive biology, the meat is nutrient-dense and culturally valued. Collectively, these species can diversify household food systems, reduce reliance on industrial poultry, and enhance resilience to supply disruptions when managed with appropriate biosecurity and welfare standards.

### **The Economic Feasibility of Dairy Production for Small-scale Farmers in Kentucky**

*Martha Ibans, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University; Marcus Bernard, Kentucky State University.*

Small-scale dairy farms play an essential role in Kentucky's economy, yet their numbers have steadily declined in recent years due to rising input costs, volatile milk prices, and increased competition from larger, capital-intensive dairy operations. Using a mixed-methods research design, including both quantitative and qualitative data, this study will assess the economic feasibility of dairy production for small-scale farmers in Kentucky by evaluating farm-level profitability, major cost drivers, and the structural challenges that affect the long-term viability of the Kentucky dairy industry. Survey questionnaires will measure and highlight production costs, revenue streams, market access, financial performance, perceived barriers, institutional support, and adaptive strategies. Anticipated results will identify key factors influencing profitability, including feed costs, labor, herd size, price volatility, cooperative participation, and competitiveness. Findings will also help guide targeted support programs, market interventions, and policy strategies aimed at strengthening the sustainability and economic resilience of small-scale dairy farms in Kentucky.

### **Accessing Capital for Sustainable Local Food Production and Access Initiatives in Kentucky**

*Maryam Adeniyi, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University.*

Promoting sustainable local food production can provide several short and long-term benefits for creating sustainable, resilient communities, by providing food security, employment, fostering social cohesion, and community empowerment and development. However, for many small-scale producers in Kentucky, lack of access to capital is a major challenge that requires the attention of stakeholders, including policymakers, planners, farm service agencies, and community leaders. With a mixed-method approach, inclusive of a survey of over 200 local farmers and consumers, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders with knowledge and experience about financial barriers and opportunities for local food production and access in Louisville, KY. This research aims to provide a basis for policy recommendations for the development of mechanisms and innovations that will enhance the ability of small-scale producers in Kentucky to have better access to capital and investment schemes to expand operations and remain sustainable.

### **Creating a Food Business Model: Case Study of Plant-based Beverages Made from Hibiscus, Millet, and Corn.**

*Josephine Nyame, Tuskegee University; Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University; Eunice Bonsi, Tuskegee University; Desmond Mortley, Tuskegee University; Lucy Asare-Baah, Tuskegee University; Youssouf Diabate, Tuskegee University.*

The food and beverage industry (F&B) is a crucial segment of every economy. Despite its importance, small and medium-sized businesses in this sector face significant challenges, leading to higher failure rates. This study aimed to develop a business model for starting a small food business focused on plant-based drinks. A detailed process was designed to create the three drinks. The drinks were evaluated using a sensory test for appearance, taste, flavor, aroma, and overall acceptability involving 113 participants on a seven-point hedonic scale. Data analysis was performed using STATA. A cost-based pricing strategy with a 25% markup was used to set the selling price, and a cost-benefit analysis assessed economic feasibility. Results showed the millet drink had the highest overall acceptability (5.75). The pricing analysis indicated a competitive price of \$2.73 for a 350ml bottle, demonstrating financial sustainability with a 25% return on investment.

### **Exploring The Potential Impacts of Small Space Farming for Sustainable Local Food Production in Kentucky.**

*Oluwafunmisho Ibiloro, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University; Siddhartha Dasgupta, Kentucky State University; Kirk Pomper, Kentucky State University; Milon Chowdhury, Kentucky State University.*

This study explores the agronomic, economic, and sustainability effects of Square Foot Gardening (SFG) compared to traditional row gardening for local food production in Kentucky. While SFG is often promoted as a space- and resource-efficient method, its adoption in Kentucky is limited largely due to the lack of local empirical data. The research employs a two-factor factorial experiment in a randomized complete block design to compare two production methods (SFG and traditional rows) and three fertilization strategies (control, full pre-plant nutrients, and weekly calcium nitrate). Conducted at the Kentucky State University's Harold R. Benson Research Farm, the study will evaluate crop yields, plant health, soil quality, resource use, and profitability. Results will offer insights into the productivity, cost-efficiency, and sustainability of SFG, aiding Kentucky's local farmers (especially beginners) and policymakers in making informed decisions.

### **Supply Chain Demands and Challenges at Farmers Markets and Local Grocery Stores in Kentucky.**

*Ganiyat Shittu, Kentucky State University; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University; Siddhartha Dasgupta, Kentucky State University; Suraj Upadhaya, Kentucky State University.*

Farmers markets and local grocery stores play an essential role in supporting community sustainability by providing income for farmers, increasing access to fresh and healthy locally grown produce, and promoting environmentally-responsible farming practices. Despite these benefits, both farmers markets and grocery stores face challenges that directly affect farmers and consumers. These include limited capital, high competition, operational costs, seasonality, and transportation barriers. This study uses a mixed methods approach to evaluate these challenges by examining demand patterns and transaction costs in rural and urban farmers markets across Kentucky. As urban markets become increasingly saturated with vegetable suppliers, many farmers are turning to rural markets and small grocery stores as alternative outlets. This study will identify key barriers and opportunities within Kentucky's local food system, and will also guide beginning farmers in choosing whether to target rural or urban markets, or small grocery stores, based on pricing, demand, accessibility, and transaction costs

### **It's All in the Family: Case Studies in Housing on Family-Owned Land.**

*Christian Ayala-Lopez, Auburn University; Jennifer Pindyck, Auburn University; Rusty Smith, Auburn University; Ryan Thomson, Auburn University; Jacy Fisher, Varner and Associates.*

In Alabama's Black Belt, limited access to financing and infrastructure has led families to rely on manufactured homes and improvised structures, resulting in settlements that often fall short of basic safety and comfort standards. Through a series of design-build case studies that respond to these conditions, this session will illustrate how collaborative efforts between families, students, designers, professionals, researchers and institutions have evolved into housing research and development that prioritize affordability, familial continuity, and adaptability. These projects do more than provide shelter, they serve as a catalyst for institutions to engage with the lived realities of rural communities, bridging the gap between abstract policy and tangible solutions. By focusing on the house, and the family settlement, as a site of resilience and equity, this work exposes institutional breakdowns and informs future strategies. Though rooted in the south, these approaches offer insights for rural housing innovation beyond the local.

### **Land Tenure and Wildfire Risk in New Mexico's Enchanted Circle.**

*Cassandra Johnson Gaither, USDA Forest Service; Anya Bonanno, ORISE; Carman Melendrez, Melendrez Consulting; James Biggs, Environmental Consultant; Juan ""Buck"" Sanchez, Radical Hope; Nathan Gill, Texas Tech University; Laura Fischer, Texas Tech University; Tomek Falkowski, University of New Mexico; Gabe Sanchez, University of New Mexico; David Lopez Amaya, University of New Mexico; Autumn Strother, University of New Mexico; Amanda D Aragón, University of Georgia.*

Wildfires have increased in frequency and intensity across North America, especially in the Western U.S. Such changes are attributed to decades of wildfire suppression and a warming climate. The USDA Forest Service identified the Enchanted Circle Region of northern New Mexico as a high priority "fireshed" (area where wildfire threatens communities, water supplies, and infrastructure) because of the potential of wildfire occurrence and the danger this poses to watersheds and human communities. Much effort has been made by public land management agencies to mitigate wildfire risk across the West, but little research has examined private landowner response to wildfire risk in northern New Mexico's Enchanted Circle--a place with a unique socioeconomic context, and a rich and layered history of settlement by Pueblo, Hispano, and Anglo peoples. This research examines the history of Enchanted Circle landownership and the implications of that possession for wildfire risk reduction by private landowners.

### **Analyzing Risk Heat Exposure and Socioeconomic Disparities in Alabama Black Belt.**

*Adelina Rwabilimbo, Tuskegee University; Robert Zabawa, Tuskegee University; and Souleiman Fall, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee.*

Extreme weather events such as extreme heat, heat waves and fluctuation of temperature are among the aspects of climate variability, which disproportionately affect the Black Belt communities in Alabama. The Alabama Black Belt is facing challenges such as poverty, low income, housing segregation, redlining, and limited access to infrastructure. Therefore, extreme climatic events worsen the situation, threatening the livelihood of the community. This study examines the relationship between heat exposure and socioeconomic disparities across the most affected Black Belt counties in Alabama. Using the Spatial analysis, Descriptive statistics, Regression and correlation methods the research will analyze secondary data from NOAA, the U.S Census Bureau, GIS-based heat maps, and Environmental exposure indicators to identify the geographical patterns of vulnerability. We anticipate that black belt counties with higher rate of poverty, lower household income, face extreme heat risks while having lower adaptive capacity. The results will provide policy implications of allocation of resources to reduce disparities and improve the lives of the black communities.

### **Commitment through Constraints.**

*Jean Francois, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Mykel Taylor, Auburn University.*

This study examines how farmers in Alabama sustain their commitment to farming amid changing conditions that restrict their livelihood choices. Using 2025 pilot data from the Alabama Farm Poll, we assess how structural constraints – experienced as economic, environmental, policy, and social stressors – affect farmers’ well-being, their commitment to farming, and adaptive strategies. Results show that all four stress domains are negatively related to both commitment and well-being, with stronger associations for the latter. However, commitment to farming remains strongly and positively correlated with farmer well-being. Additional analyses reveal positive relationships between place attachment and commitment, and between perceived social support for farming and well-being. Farmers report using multiple adaptive strategies, including reducing expenditure on farm inputs, postponing major purchases or retirement, and/or even cutting back on social or leisure activities. This research contributes to understanding farmers’ commitment to farming despite structural constraints that challenge their livelihoods and overall well-being.

### **Distilling Community Resilience: Can a Problem-solving Theory Help?**

*Curtis Friedel, Virginia Tech; Thomas Awuni, Virginia Tech.*

Adaption-innovation (A-I) theory, originated by Dr. Michael Kirton, in 1976, is a problem-solving theory which offers a group-based problem-solving process for the management of change. Often used in the context of leadership and leading teams through organizational change, A-I theory brings insight to societal change through the separation of size, speed, simplicity, and style associated with a particular change. The aim of A-I theory is to reduce conflict and improve collaboration; by recognizing we each have an innate and stable problem-solving style, found to be independent of one’s intelligence, learned skills, motivation, values, culture, and ethnicity. Through this proposed conceptual framework, research propositions will be provided to how A-I theory may help communities develop and enable capacities (individual, social, governance, and economic) through the strengthening of participation and belonging. This theoretical presentation will share insights to how Cooperative Extension agents may facilitate conversations to improve community resiliency.

### **Uneven Safety Nets: Cyclone Insurance Disparities and Structural Inequality Among Small Rural Food and Nonfood Businesses in Coastal Areas.**

*Omowunmi Odeyomi, North Carolina A&T State University; Godfrey C. Ejimakor, North Carolina A&T State University.*

Rural small businesses in the coastal South face rising climate risks, yet access to adequate cyclone insurance remains uneven. This study analyzes disparities in insurance adequacy and premium burdens among food and nonfood enterprises using data from the Coastal Small Business Insurance Survey. Ordered logistic and generalized linear models show pronounced inequities: women-owned and food-related businesses have 28–32% lower odds of obtaining adequate coverage and pay premiums about 34% higher than male-owned or larger firms. High-risk coastal enterprises exhibit a 0.42-point adequacy gap compared to inland firms, even after controlling for revenue tier, ownership type, and years in operation. These findings reveal how climate vulnerability intersects with gender, industry, and place-based disadvantage to shape rural livelihood security.

The presentation highlights implications for equity-centered climate adaptation, including cooperative insurance strategies and more inclusive underwriting practices to strengthen resilience in rural Southern communities.

### **Building a National Model of Extension in Romania- A Community Diagnostic Assessment.**

*Aishat Aina, University of Georgia; Abigail Borron, University of Georgia; Peng Lu, University of Georgia; Brandy Walker, Gary Hawkins, University of Georgia.*

Perceptions of community and personal agency are central to understanding how residents engage in and benefit from localized development efforts. In partnership with a southeastern land-grant university, this study applies the Community Diagnostics + Social Impact (CD+SI) framework to examine Romanian residents' (farmers and non-farmers) perceptions of community capitals and individual agency across six counties. A nationally distributed survey (N = 1,000) revealed consistently positive assessments of community capitals except political capital falling a little above the mid-point in two counties. Comparative analyses showed that farmers reported significantly higher personal agency than non-farmers, and that perceptions of community and self-differed across all capitals ( $p < .001$ ), except for community-level built/financial capital. Findings contribute to rural sociology and participatory development scholarship by establishing an empirical baseline of data in a post-socialist setting. Results also provide actionable insights for tailoring capacity-building and informing the design of university-based extension initiatives in Romania.

### **Cooperative Organization as an Intervention to Address some of the Complexity of Multi-Generational Legacy Property**

*Thomas Gray, Rural Business-Cooperative Service USDA.*

Multi-generational legacy property (MLP) arises when land is transferred informally across generations, producing fragmented ownership, unclear title, and heightened vulnerability to forced sales through partition actions (North Carolina A&T State University, n.d.; SRDC, 2023). These structural conditions have disproportionately affected historically oppressed landowners in the U.S. South and have contributed to longer-term land loss among these same groups (Johnson Gaither, 2019). This paper examines formal cooperative organization as a potential intervention possibly capable of stabilizing MLP. Cooperatives can consolidate title within a single legal entity, establish democratic governance, and support sustainable land-based economic development (FSC). They also facilitate intergenerational planning and youth engagement in land stewardship. Yet cooperatives may also face various sociological challenges, including trust deficits, legal complexity, pre-existing family conflict, and the practical demands of operating a business. This paper/presentation reviews these opportunities and constraints within broader issues on cooperative ownership and organization.

### **Forwarded Futures: Heirs' Property, Displacement, and the Geography of Black Land Loss.**

*Abosede Onifade, Auburn University; Ryan Thomson, Auburn University.*

Black land loss has long shaped the geography of inequality in the United States, yet the demographic pathways through which rural displacement unfolds remain understudied. This project examines how heirs' property structures the mobility of Black families in the U.S. South and beyond. We argue that while migration has historically opened new life chances, it has also served as a forced adaptation to exclusionary land regimes. Using county-level tax billing records, partition sale archives, and new interview data with heirs' property owners in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina to identify two distinct patterns: short-distance moves 'up the road,' where families stay close to their homeland, and long-distance migrations to urban areas. We combine demographic analysis with qualitative insights to show how title insecurity shapes mobility choices, erodes family wealth, and repositions property as liability rather than asset. Our findings underscore how heirs' property problems continue to undermine the rural community capital that anchors local futures. Ultimately, migration to and from the South reflects a compelled movement, marking a new chapter in the struggle for land.

### **Heirs' Property: A Comparison of Vermont & Alabama.**

*Francine Miller, Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law; Jacy Fisher, Varner and Associates.*

Since Vermont is a predominantly rural state where land is often passed down through generations, one might assume it has high rates of heirs' property. However, some research has shown that Vermont's rate of heirs' property and clouded title is manageably low. While the anomalous results may be due to the state's methods for tracking property data, various aspects of Vermont's unique cultural and legal landscape appear to contribute to the state's relatively low rates of clouded title. Based on the paper, *State Incentives to Clear Title and Facilitate Property Transfer: Focus on Vermont*, we will examine the various aspects of Vermont's unique cultural and legal landscape that contribute to the state's relatively low clouded-title rates. We'll discuss the frequent use of deeds to avoid probate and thereby prevent clouded title issues from arising and look at how Vermont's property tax system strongly incentivizes clearing title. Finally, we'll examine methods for correcting clouded title that do not require a full probate process. Finally, we will compare Vermont's law and culture to that of Alabama.

### **Rooted in Legacy: Strengthening Families Through Heirs' Property Education.**

*Casey Townsend, Kentucky State University; Alethea Bernard, Kentucky State University; Kevin Slovinsky, LiKen Knowledge; Kendal Bowman, Southern Regional Development Center.*

Heirs' property blurs ownership and fractures generational stability, especially for families striving to hold onto land woven with history. After numerous educational workshops—and 122 wills completed across seven counties—one truth became undeniable: when families are given the tools to understand heirs' property, they act. At the 2025 Small Farmers' Conference, the response spoke even louder. Among participants, most of whom were Black landowners and primarily women, the desire for continued guidance was clear. Eighty-five percent sought additional estate-planning education, and seventy-eight percent wanted deeper training on clearing titles. Seventy-four percent requested a list of heirs' property attorneys, and seventy percent wanted referrals for estate planning. Many were ready to place their land into productive use, with sixty-seven percent interested in agricultural or forestry leasing. The need is real, and the hunger for knowledge is growing. The conference data shows that many families are interested in protecting their legacy.

### **Enhancing Knowledge and Changing Action in Minimizing Heirs' Property Issues through Community Education.**

*Raksha Khadka, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Lila Karki, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Prem Bhandari, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Nicole Cook, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Samantha Capaldo, University of Maryland Eastern Shore.*

Heirs' property causes land loss and legal risks, yet prevention strategies remain underexplored. This study evaluated the impact of heirs' property workshops by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension across Maryland. Post-event surveys (N=123) measured knowledge gains and behavioral intentions. Ordinal logistic regression showed significant improvements in identifying heirs' property ( $p=0.0039$ ;  $OR=0.34$ ), recognizing its impacts ( $p=0.0346$ ;  $OR=0.31$ ), and understanding how tax and partition sales drive land loss ( $p=0.0046$ ;  $OR=0.37$ ). Education, gender, race, and occupation shaped outcomes. Findings show targeted education enhances knowledge, preparedness, and proactive actions to address heirs' property challenges.

### **Rebuilding the Past to Create a Different Future: Collective Memory, Exclusion and Disciplinary History.**

*Julie N. Zimmerman, University of Kentucky.*

What role does having a sense of one's place in their disciplinary history play in the present? If we cannot see ourselves as part of our discipline's past, are we less likely to see ourselves playing a role in its future? After all, as the saying goes, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. But what if we don't know who they are? Integrating collective memory and the role of historical memory in group identity with research seeking to 'fix' disciplinary history by including forgotten figures in American sociology, this presentation examines an overlooked implication of excluded histories in contemporary disciplinary identity. Approaching disciplinary history from this perspective opens the opportunity for a more complex role for historical analyses in disciplinary identity not only as examining the past, but as also playing a role in supporting a different kind of future.

### **Black Farmers and Agricultural Organizations: Insights from a Q Methodology Study**

*Cari Cearley, Oklahoma State University; Courtney Brown, Oklahoma State University; Tania Peebles, Tuskegee University; Angel Riggs, Oklahoma State University*

Current research acknowledges the role agricultural organizations play in the success and sustainability of farmers; however, a gap exists in understanding how Black farmers experience and perceive them. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of Black farmers concerning agricultural organizations. Q methodology revealed the subjective viewpoints of Black farmers through three emergent themes: The Resilient, Community-Oriented Advocate, The Pragmatic Seeker, and The Empowered Insider. The findings reflect the nuanced experiences and perceptions of Black farmers, illuminating the diverse ways they engage with, benefit from, and find value in agricultural associations. This study contributes to the current literature by addressing the lack of research on the experiences and perceptions of Black farmers in the U.S., and serves to elevate the voices of Black farmers whose experiences have often been overlooked or generalized in agricultural research.

### **Behind the Keyboard and the Camera: Critically Assessing Photography for Studying Rural Gun Ownership**

*Abe Neis-Eldridge, Middle Tennessee State University*

The use of photography in social research is often encouraged as a complement to textual description. Photos can uniquely immerse the audience in a study's setting, participants, and analysis by providing a window for readers to see as the author saw. However, photography in social research should not be employed uncritically or for illustration alone. Indeed, photographic evidence in research requires critical engagement to determine its merits and pitfalls for the research, the community on which it is based, and how its presentation may influence readers' understandings of the subject matter. Drawing from Gillian Rose's discussion on photography in geographic studies, and using data collected in 2022 and 2025, this paper considers the use of photos when studying gun owners in rural Northeast Tennessee. Providing a forum to discuss the need for reflexivity and critical awareness of the power laden in photos when researchers take, analyze, and present them.

### **Resolving the 'jobs versus the environment' dilemma in natural resource sectors: How Alabama's forest products industry aligns extraction, livelihoods, and ecosystems.**

*Matthew Zinsli, Auburn University; Kelli Russell, Auburn University; Mykel Taylor, Auburn University; Garrett Antonio Martinez, Auburn University; Amelia Pugh, Auburn University; Madison Harris, Auburn University.*

Rural scholars have examined the notion that environmental policies threaten natural resource industries and jobs – glossed as 'jobs versus the environment.' While highlighting how economic and political elites employ working-class rhetoric to undermine mobilization and regulation, less attention is given to how industry co-opts environmentalist discourse. Drawing on 43 interviews with Alabama's forest products industry, we examine stakeholders' perceptions of 'sustainability.' We find that interviewees frame rural employment and forestland preservation as downstream of the industry's economic viability, which depends on mass consumerism. Concerns about rural employment and forest biodiversity are sidelined in favor of sustainability as what is 'good for industry.'

## **ABSTRACTS – POSTERS**

*(Listed in the Alphabetical Order of Lead Author)*

## **Testing Stress-Reduction Messages and Images to Support Farmer Well-Being**

*Elizabeth Abati, University of Georgia; Abigail Borron, University of Georgia; Anna Scheyett, University of Georgia; ChaNaè Bradley, Fort Valley State University*

Farmers face unique stressors that affect their mental health and well-being, yet stigma and cultural norms often discourage help-seeking behaviors. To inform effective outreach materials, we conducted message and image testing at the 2025 SOWTH: A Regional Small Farms, Big Community Conference. Sixteen farmers and farmer-adjacent participants evaluated stress-related messages and photos for resonance and clarity. Quantitative results showed that It's okay to not be okay and It's okay to take a break were the most impactful of the five tested, particularly among female farmers. Images depicting family and togetherness, such as a black family and a couple with sheep, were most appealing to participants. Overall, majority of the participants provided positive qualitative feedback about the steps-to-dealing-with-stress messages, with emphasis on taking breaks and joining a community. These insights will guide communication strategies aimed at fostering farmer well-being and reducing stigma surrounding mental health in agricultural communities.

## **Building a National Model of Extension in Romania: A Participatory Pilot Project Development**

*Aishat Aina, Abigail Borron, Zsuzsa Incze, Ovidiu Mărginean, Márton Balogh, Civitas Fundația*

Romania's agricultural sector lacks an institutionalized extension system responsive to local socio-economic and cultural conditions. This study examines the country's first large-scale participatory effort to design a university-based extension framework, informed by the U.S. Cooperative Extension model in partnership with a southeastern land-grant university. Using the World Café method, interdisciplinary teams of university faculty, farmers, community leaders, and NGOs co-designed three pilot extension projects during a national co-creation conference in Bucharest. Qualitative analysis of pre-, mid-, and post-conference survey responses revealed three themes: (1) strong stakeholder motivation rooted in the perceived value of university-community linkages for rural development; (2) concerns about the financial and administrative feasibility of extension activities; and (3) the essential role of a structured and inclusive facilitation process in fostering collaboration. Findings contribute to participatory extension scholarship by documenting early stakeholder perspectives and identifying contextual factors shaping system-building efforts in post-socialist rural environments.

## **Convergence and Gap: A Cross-Group Analysis to Inform Romania's Developing Extension Model**

*Lydia Belflower, University of Georgia; Aishat Aina, University of Georgia; Abigail Borron, University of Georgia; Brandy Walker, University of Georgia*

The Romanian Extension Education Program is a multi-year collaboration led by the [SE US UNIVERSITY] and Romanian agricultural universities to explore how a university-based Extension model could strengthen rural communities. This qualitative study analyzes two data sources from Year 2 of the program: 35 reflexive journals written by five Romanian Fulbright professors during a four-month immersion in the U.S. Cooperative Extension System, and two focus groups with visiting Romanian university administrators. Using thematic analysis and cross-group comparison, the study examines how participants conceptualize the role of universities in rural development; identify gaps, barriers, and "missing connections" in Romania's current advisory landscape; and converge or diverge on priorities for system building. Findings illuminate how institutional trust, boundary-spanning roles, and perceptions of community needs shape attitudes toward a university-led extension model. The poster will present a comparative theme matrix and actionable recommendations relevant to rural policy, community capacity, and institutional change.

## **From Back Roads to New Possibilities: Rural Youth and Technology in Eastern Kentucky**

*Dr. Marcus K. Bernard, Dean College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources Director – Land Grant Programs Kentucky State University ; Dr. Tyrell Kahan, DVM, MDP, DACVPM Associate Extension Administrator, Cooperative Extension Program, Kentucky State University; Dr. Buddhi Gyawali, Lead Scientist for The Center for Geospatial Intelligence and Environmental Security, The School of Agriculture & Natural Resources-Kentucky State University; and*

*Laura Rogers, Kentucky State University Small Farm Area Agent; William Rogers, Senior Research and Extension Assistance, Kentucky State University*

In the hills of Appalachian Kentucky, rural youth are discovering new possibilities through hands-on technology tied directly to the land. This poster highlights youth engagement through agricultural drone demonstrations, smartphone photography, and farm-based science education. Many of these young people had never considered technology as part of their future until they saw it connected to farming, land management, and real careers. From learning how drones support agriculture to using photography as a way to tell their community's story, these programs are helping youth see their rural home as a place of opportunity rather than limitation. By blending traditional knowledge with modern tools, new pathways are opening for young people in the New South—rooted in place, yet reaching forward.

### **Understanding the Pattern of Food Waste Generation, Management Challenges, and its Scope as Soil Amendment**

*Ashmita Bhandari, Graduate Research Assistant, Kentucky State University; Dr. Manisha Parajuli, Assistant Professor of Forestry, Kentucky State University*

Food waste generation and land degradation from coal mining are major global environmental concerns. In the United States, approximately 40% of food is wasted, while over 5 million acres have been impacted by coal mining. Food waste derived compost presents a sustainable solution to address both challenges by diverting organic waste from landfills and enhancing degraded soils through organic amendments. Despite the relevance of both issues in Kentucky, limited research exists on current management practices, food producer's participation in composting and coal mine landowner's willingness to utilize food waste compost for reclamation. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing food waste generation patterns in Kentucky, focusing primarily on restaurants, and assessing mine landowner's willingness to adopt compost as a soil amendment through two separate semi-structured surveys distributed online and in person. The findings will support circular economy strategies and inform land reclamation policies in the Appalachian region.

### **Harvesting understanding: An historical analysis of produce policies in the U.S. and India**

*Sravani Kari, University of Georgia; Jessica Holt, Ph.D., University of Georgia*

This study analyzes the U.S. Farm Bill's provisions for fruit and vegetable producers and compares them with India's agricultural policies governing horticultural crops. While both nations prioritize food security and rural livelihoods, their policy structures, subsidy systems, market supports, and extension services differ significantly, shaping distinct challenges for fruit and vegetable farmers. By examining historical issues such as market volatility, and input costs, this research identifies common barriers and unique regional pressures faced by growers in both countries. A central aim of the project is to explore how structured intercommunication between U.S. and Indian farmers—supported through policy dialogues, cross-cultural extension partnerships, and shared best practices—can contribute to more resilient production systems. The study ultimately proposes communication-driven solutions that enhance the sharing of knowledge, strengthen farmer networks, and inform future policy innovations that support sustainable fruit and vegetable farming globally.

### **Texas 4-H GLOBE Youth: An Immersive Simulation of Global Issues and Leadership Development**

*Amber Kearney; Dr. Darlene Locke Texas A&M University Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication (ALEC)*

The Texas 4-H GLOBE Program was designed to provide a two-day immersive learning experience in which youth explored relevant global issues, such as food security and poverty, and developed desirable traits like empathy and leadership, through simulation-based activities. Participants (n= 24), ages 12- 17, were assigned to one of six simulated global communities. Over five hours, the youth prepared a meal with limited resources to experience global food insecurity. Reflections were collected through open-ended questions and were analyzed using the Transformative Education Framework (Kyle & King, 2024). ATLAS.ti was used to apply framework-aligned codes and identify patterns. Findings indicated increased empathy, global awareness, and the development of a leadership identity. Youth recognized the value of collaboration, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. The program encouraged youth to reconsider assumptions about community and leadership, showing that immersive simulation can promote global learning without international travel, while remaining low-cost. We recommended that educators implement simulation activities supporting experiential learning for rural youth.

## **Rooted and Rising: Appalachian Women's Pathways Through Higher Education**

*AnaLiese Mitchell, University of Florida*

Appalachian women in higher education often face marginalization and underrepresentation. This study examines female Appalachian students' experiences at an Appalachian-serving institution through qualitative interviews, highlighting themes of solidarity, agency, belonging, and quality of life. Findings show strong peer and faculty support fostering growth, with many participants committed to remaining in Appalachia post-graduation to advance regional progress. Communication skills and community engagement emerge as vital for reimagining Appalachia's future. Implications include addressing infrastructure gaps, improving dorms, and increasing cultural representation across disciplines. Support for marginalized groups, including queer students, is emphasized. Future research should explore disparities between STEM and Arts & Sciences majors and cultural blindness regarding campus resources. These insights inform efforts to enhance inclusivity and support, contributing to Appalachian students' success and well-being.

## **Engaging Students in Understanding Rural and Urban Community Challenges: A Classroom-Based Comparison Study**

*Shari Moxley, University of Arkansas; Betsy Garrison, University of Arkansas*

Classroom-based research offers a strategy to engage students and to deepen their understanding of contemporary community issues. This study explored how undergraduate students enrolled in a rural sociology course at a southern land-grant university perceived the most significant challenges facing rural and urban communities. Respondents (n=60) rated 17 issues on a 5-point, degree of importance scale for both contexts separately. Results from  $\chi^2$  analyses revealed three significant differences ( $p < .05$ ): mental health, and alcohol/drug abuse were viewed as more pressing challenges in urban areas, while water quality was rated as a greater concern in rural areas. Other issues, such as poverty, education, and broadband access, were perceived as equally important in both context. These results demonstrate that students recognize both the shared and distinct challenges between place types and suggest that classroom exercises can strengthen awareness of structural inequities and better prepare students for their professional roles.

## **The Economics of Nitrogen Optimization: The Case for North Carolina**

*Alice Mukunzi, Kenrett Jefferson-Moore, Department of Agribusiness, Applied Economics and Agriscience Education; John Ng'ombe, Department of Economics; Harmandeep Sharma, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Design, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Greensboro, NC 27411.*

Nitrogen (N) is essential for crop productivity, yet inefficient use increases costs and environmental risks. This study estimates optimal N application rates for corn production in North Carolina to reduce over- and underapplication, enhance profitability, and minimize environmental impact. Corn was selected due to its economic significance. We address two key questions: (1) What N rates maximize yield and profit while minimizing losses? and (2) How do spatial and temporal variations in N use across counties inform better fertilizer guidelines? Using county-level panel data (2012, 2017, 2022) from USDA-NASS, field experiments, and Extension trials, we apply statistical simulations using production function models—including quadratic, Cobb-Douglas, translog, and the Linear Response Stochastic Plateau (LRSP) model. LRSP simulations with Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) identify yield plateaus and inefficiencies. Field trials validate outcomes and support site-specific recommendations. The integrated approach provides novel estimates of stochastic yield plateaus and optimal N rates.

## **How Does E-commerce Adoption Affect a Retailer's Financial Performance? Evidence from Kroger**

*Sophia Njoh, Graduate Student, Kentucky State University, Frankfort, KY 40601, USA; Etumnu Chinonso, Kentucky State University, Frankfort, KY 40601, USA; Sait Sarr, Kentucky State University, Frankfort, KY 40601, USA*

E-commerce has become a major channel through which traditional retailers meet shifting consumer expectations. However, the real impact of moving online, particularly on revenue and profit, has not been clearly established. Using the Synthetic Control (SCM) Method, this research will explore how Kroger's expansion into e-commerce from 2013 to 2024 has influenced its organizational and financial performance. The goal is to provide a clearer picture of how e-commerce adoption may contribute to, or limit growth for traditional retailers, both in the urban and rural context. The findings are expected to offer useful insights for both researchers and business leaders interested in digital retail strategy and performance outcomes.

## **The Economic Impact of the 2022 Eastern Kentucky Flood**

*Ayodola Olatunji, Kentucky State University; Etumnu Chinonso, Kentucky State University*

In 2022, a catastrophic flood occurred in Eastern Kentucky, resulting in the loss of 44 lives and causing millions of dollars in damage. However, there is limited comprehensive analysis in the economic literature regarding the economic impacts of this flood. Using a difference-in-differences (DiD) framework, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the causal effects of the flood on three key economic outcomes: income, unemployment, and poverty. We expect the flood's impact to be overwhelmingly negative. The findings are expected to highlight the economic vulnerability of victims of natural disasters and emphasize the need for effective recovery interventions.

## **Evaluating Early Girl Tomato Production in Drip Hydroponic and Soil-Based System in a Caterpillar Tunnel Environment**

*Sodiq Oyediran, Kentucky State University; Siddhartha Dasgupta, Kentucky State University*

Most fresh-market tomatoes consumed in the United States are imported, creating supply chain vulnerabilities and limiting late-season availability of locally grown tomatoes. High tunnels provide an opportunity for Kentucky growers to extend production into cooler months. This study evaluates early vegetative performance of 'Early Girl' tomatoes grown in three systems—Coco Coir, Pro-Mix, and Soil—under late-summer to fall high-tunnel conditions. Twenty-seven plants (nine per system) were monitored weekly for height, SPAD chlorophyll, and leaf area. Hydroponic plants in Coco Coir and Pro-Mix showed stronger early growth than soil-grown plants. By week five, hydroponic plants reached 85–92 cm with SPAD values of 48–50, compared to 78 cm and 44 SPAD in soil. Improved nutrient delivery in hydroponic systems supported plant health during declining temperature and light levels. These preliminary results indicate that drip hydroponics may offer a cost-effective strategy for Kentucky growers to bolster late-season tomato supply.

## **Digital Media Use and Gender Barriers Among Female Agricultural Producers in Oklahoma**

*Kierson Reasner, Oklahoma State University; Linnea Harvey, Oklahoma State University*

Despite women's growing presence in agriculture, limited research examines how female agricultural producers leverage digital media for business success and community-building. This qualitative study examines how female agricultural producers in Oklahoma utilize digital media platforms to overcome barriers and build professional networks. Through semi-structured interviews with 17 female farmers and ranchers, findings reveal that participants face persistent differential treatment, with expectations to prove competence beyond their male counterparts while balancing multiple roles. Despite these challenges, women strategically employ Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok for consumer education, direct-to-consumer sales, and connecting with like-minded producers across geographic distances. However, significant technological barriers persist, including poor rural internet connectivity and limited platform knowledge. This research illuminates how agricultural women cultivate resilience through digital innovation while navigating deeply rooted gender expectations, demonstrating the intersection of traditional farming culture and emerging technological adaptation in rural communities.

## **How Can Mitigation and Adaptation Aid Tomorrow's Farmers to be Sustainable**

*Cynthia Rice, former Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University*

Innovators among the farming community are the hope for a sustainable future. Changing solutions for successful farming operations are shaping the economic life and agricultural operations are continually assessing risks and options. There is no set plan of operation, instead there is a changing set of circumstances which can be tweaked as various climate change scenarios come into play. Whether it is a biological pest or an environmental condition based on weather or a disease which decimates a crop, plans are made both short and long term for viable farm operations. There is no longer just one revenue path and no long a successful farm operation plan but instead many paths and multiple resources as events and resources come into play to shape the current future predictions of the farming cycles locally and globally. Education and resources are shared as among the farming community to successfully ensure a sustainable future.

## **Land Fertility, Food Sovereignty and a Sustainable Future**

*Cynthia Rice, former Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University*

In a nation where land degradation, natural resources such as water, uncertain timing of labor needs and no guarantee of financial support, the future of sustainable farming appears questionable. Yet, there is no other way to feed our local, regional, national and international populations a healthy, nutritious diet. There is no plan B. Instead practices are evolving to cope with unexpected weather and environmental changes. People are experimenting on what actually works in today's farming operations. Natural cycles are changing and farmers must change with them or go out of business and literally lose their homes and production bases. No farmer can overlook the contributions to a sustainable agricultural future from the small to large grower with practical experience to academics who propose successful farming strategies. To ensure our continued survival, communities must craft laws and support systems to allow farmers to keep supply food to our communities and beyond.

## **The New Dangers Farmers Face as the World Approaches 1.5 Degree C and Above**

*Cynthia Rice, former Kentucky State University; Maheteme Gebremedhin, Kentucky State University; Buddhi Gyawali, Kentucky State University*

Economic, social and environmental factors affect successful transition to sustainable farming in a hotter future. Mitigation of extenuating circumstances and adaptation of successful practices affects livelihoods and the lives of the agricultural community. From implementation of bio-digesters, to bio remediation, to biochar to biodiversity, the biological aspect of farming is crucial to a continuing farm existence. Looking at the interactions of weather on plant and animal production and successful strategies to reduce current and future risks for the agricultural producer to come back another year to farm again. There is no year to year successful farm plan as no year is a guaranteed set of experiences but instead an ever changing scenario as timing, environmental factors and social interactions affect a successful and sustainable farming life. As farmers experiment, new practices for the same farm cycle are developed based on temperature, precipitation and threats from ecological factors come into play.

## **Picture Your Place: Youth's Perspectives of Their Rural Communities**

*Ethan I. Shoemake, Oklahoma State University; Carson H. Tyree, Oklahoma State University; Audrey E. H. King, Oklahoma State University; Bradley M. Coleman, Oklahoma State University*

This project engaged rural 4-H members to explore community strengths and challenges using participatory research methods. Framed with the Community Capitals Framework, we examined how different forms of capital (i.e., social, cultural, human, political, financial, built, and natural) shape opportunities for youth. A SWOT (i.e., strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats) analysis approach helped guide their analysis of their communities. To capture deeper insights, we incorporated an art elicitation exercise, allowing youth to visually express their perceptions of their community's unique attributes. The use of the Rapid Rural Appraisal methodology ensured timely, context-sensitive data collection while fostering local engagement. Findings highlight the importance of investing in social and cultural capital to empower rural youth and strengthen community resilience. Next steps for this project include sharing findings with local leaders and community outreach planning with youth.

## **Helping Farmers to Understand the Importance of Farm Operations Documentation for a Success Business**

*Marion Simon, formerly Kentucky State University, Cynthia Rice, formerly Kentucky State University*

Many farmers do not have the accounting background to do financial records, do bookkeeping duties or document the activities of farm operations. Financial records training often assumes a level of experience or training which farmers do not have the time to take. The importance of proper and complete records, the legal requirements for taxes, insurance claims, profit and loss sheets or account ledgers is often a collection of documentation that farmers hand over to their tax preparers. Helping farmers to understand the usefulness of previous years' records, current year's financial cash flow and debts and future financial planning was part of a goal of a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant. In easy to understand language, some basic information on financial documentation and using such information to help in farm management and planning demonstrates the importance of proper documentation is a first step to a successful farm operation.

## **Beyond the Willing Farmer: A Meta-Analysis of Practice Adoption Research**

*Jo Smeby*

To develop effective Extension programming that will increase the use of sustainable practices in row crop production, we sought to understand existing literature on nutrient management adoption. A systematic search of Web of Science, Agricola, and CAB Abstracts was conducted using keywords such as barrier, challenge, and sustainable (n=140). Each article was screened using Covidence for context and categorized based on whether the barriers were simply identified or actionable recommendations were provided. Analysis of the final dataset (n=69) illustrates a critical gap; few studies focus on the behaviors and adoption challenges specific to nutrient management. Of those that do exist, the context is overly specific, which hinders the development of methods and approaches for assisting producers in their adoption journey.

## **Pasture to post: Understanding beef influencers' role in the rural digital frontier**

*Allyson A. Spears, Texas A&M University; Theresa P. Murphrey, Texas A&M University; Kim Dooley, Texas A&M University; Dara Wald, Texas A&M University*

Rural communities nationwide are increasingly turning to social media to share their stories, preserve culture, and navigate public perceptions of agriculture in a rapidly changing landscape. This study uses social influence theory and opinion leadership to explore how beef influencers on Instagram create content that blends personal experience, education, and authenticity to build trust and engage diverse audiences. Through phenomenological interviews with 30 influencers and content analysis of 2,404 posts, findings reveal that seasonal rhythms of ranch life, generational knowledge, and transparent storytelling shape content, helping demystify agricultural production and strengthen rural-urban connections. Additionally, findings informed the B.E.E.F. Framework to assist other rural voices in online sharing. Influencers act as digital bridges, transforming everyday work into platforms of advocacy. As rural regions face demographic shifts and misinformation, content creators illuminate how social media can serve as a tool for resilience, visibility, and reimagining rural livelihoods in the New South.

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