

2021-2022

ANNUAL REPORT



GEORGIA'S
RURAL CENTER

Powered by Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

OUR STORY

In 2015, rural leaders approached Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College President Dr. David Bridges and Special Projects Director Scott Blount with the idea of creating a rural center for Georgia. Out of the initial conceptual proposal drafted by Bridges and Blount, the team transformed the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation from a vision to a reality.

Housed at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation, also known as Georgia's Rural Center, serves as a central information and research hub for rural best practices, which may include community planning, industry-specific assistance and cooperative efforts with state and federal entities, nonprofit organizations, and other higher education partners. Our focus is on producing results that directly impact rural and urban people and places, rediscovering all that is unique and extraordinary in the state's less populated areas and reminding all Georgians of the power and potential present in small towns and crossroad communities.

We work to recognize successful businesses and efforts and help other communities recreate those models throughout the state. While the Center's projects vary widely, the focus of each remains the same: reconnecting Georgia residents to all that our rural places have to offer.

OUR PRINCIPLES



REDISCOVER

all that is unique and extraordinary in the state's less populated areas



RECREATE

ideas working in rural Georgia to advance other communities throughout the state



RECONNECT

all Georgians to the vital role that rural people and places play in statewide success



REINVEST

in small towns and rural communities through internships and special projects

OUR WORK



MANAGEMENT

project management that results in completed projects benefiting rural communities



ADVOCACY

recommend policy change and/or implementation to benefit rural Georgia



DEVELOPMENT

create a portfolio of completed projects to share with other rural communities



COMMUNICATION

share the stories of rural Georgia and their impacts to the entire state



NETWORKING

establish relationships within rural communities to aid in advocacy and development of policy and prospective projects

RURAL GEORGIA'S TEAM

REDISCOVERING · RECONNECTING
RECREATING · REINVESTING



DR. DAVID BRIDGES

Director



SCOTT BLOUNT

Associate Director



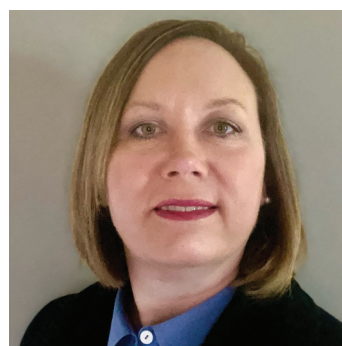
JANET COCHRAN

Project Manager



BRIDGETT MOBLEY

Logistics + Operations
Manager



CASEY BEANE

Project Manager



MARY CATHERINE GASTON

Communication
Specialist

OUR PARTNERS

Stanley M. Fletcher - Professor of Policy, CRPI + Abraham Baldwin
Agricultural College

Rural Health Innovation Center at Mercer University

Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA)

Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD)

Jessica Akins + Becca Turner - Oak + Willow Creatives

Eloise Stewart - Eloise. Design. Co.

PROJECTS

Projects working in
rural Georgia today
and tomorrow

TRANSPORTATION PROJECT NORTHWEST GEORGIA

The Regional Vanpool Study determined the feasibility of a vanpool program capable of linking long distance commuters from similar origins to similar destinations throughout the 15-county region. The study sought to identify a preferred vanpool operating model that best meets the needs of commuters within the study area and presents the most significant opportunities for expanded access to employment for residents residing within rural communities in the study area. Findings were presented to the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission Council and shared in summary with other stakeholders. The final report is available on the CRPI website.

HARRIS CLINIC PROJECT HARRIS COUNTY, GEORGIA

The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation worked with the Harris County Commission, the Harris County School System, and the Global Partnership for Telehealth to implement telemedicine capability throughout the Harris County School System. A grant from the Center covers a portion of the costs for startup equipment. This comes on the heels of the Center's work with Harris County and the Mercer University School of Medicine to open a health care clinic in Hamilton.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT RANDOLPH COUNTY, GEORGIA

The Randolph County Development Authority received a grant from the Center to support a workforce development project in Shellman, Georgia. The grant will go toward equipment and an internal, on-site training program. This grant will support jobs related to welding and fabrication.

HOSPITAL FACILITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT CANDLER COUNTY, GEORGIA

The Center worked with the Hospital Authority of Candler County to make urgent infrastructure improvements at the Candler County Hospital. Additionally, a needs assessment and feasibility study were funded to prepare Candler County Hospital to serve its residents better in the future.



GEORGIA PREMIUM MEATS PROJECT

SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

The Center worked with the Miller County Development Authority to facilitate the purchase of a slaughter house and meat processing plant located near Colquitt. The development authority received grants from the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation and the One Georgia Authority. The development authority borrowed the balance from a local bank with a capital lease from the Georgia Rural Hospital Food Collaborative, a not-for-profit Georgia company, backing the loan. The collaborative operates the facility as Georgia Premium Meats, and its mission is two-fold: purchase locally-raised cattle and hogs and process them for Georgia's rural hospitals and nursing homes.

GEORGIA GROWN TRAIL 27 PROJECT

NORTHWEST GEORGIA

The Center initiated and shepherded the effort to designate US Highway 27 in Walker, Catoosa, Chattooga, Floyd, Polk, Haralson and Carroll Counties as a Georgia Grown Trail in 2021. Signs indicating the route were installed in June 2022. The communities are working to add trail members and implement marketing efforts matching the trail map guides of other Georgia Grown Trails around the state.

Learn about more
projects the Center has
worked on over the years
by scanning the QR Code.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Advocating for
positive change for
rural Georgia

HB 1150 - FREEDOM TO FARM

REPS. ROBERT DICKEY, SAM WATSON, TERRY ENGLAND, RICK JASPERSE,
CLAY PIRKLE, BETH CAMP AND SEN. LARRY WALKER III

The Freedom to Farm Bill passed both the House and Senate this year. After many years of work on this legislation, the Georgia House voted 106-60 the bill from the General Assembly to the Governor, who signed it into law. This bill provides additional protection for agricultural entities against nuisance lawsuits. Protection starts after two years of operation as long as they are in compliance with all laws, rules, regulations and local zoning ordinances. This bill does not void environmental laws nor the authority for local governments. This bill is welcomed by rural communities across the state as the landscape of Georgia continues to be ever-changing, and farmers now have added protection without fear of being sued for normal farming practices.

HB 970 - AD VALOREM TAX - TIMBER

REPS. SAM WATSON, TERRY ENGLAND, JON BURNS, DEBBIE BUCKNER,
MATT HATCHETT, GERALD GREEN AND SEN. LARRY WALKER III

Due to the passage of this bill, Georgia voters will have the opportunity in Nov. 2022 to approve a statewide exemption from ad valorem taxes for timber-related equipment and timber products. If approved by voters, the legislation will also clarify existing guidelines for ad valorem taxes on timberland.





19
Total projects of the
Center to-date



60+*
Counties directly impacted
*more counties indirectly impacted

OUTREACH EFFORTS

A voice serving rural
Georgia with
data-driven results



18,498
Page views on website



5,049
Facebook followers



1,161
Instagram followers



483
LinkedIn followers

the Rural Development Council *appointments*

Georgia's Rural Center team is excited to officially welcome 12 leaders from different industries across Georgia to the Rural Development Council. The council was established to advise the staff of the Center. Governor Deal, Speaker Ralston, and Lieutenant Governor Duncan made their appointments, and Governor Kemp will make his appointments in the future. This council will work with Center staff to support rural Georgia and find opportunities to ensure rural Georgia advances with the rest of the state. Council members include:

Dr. Stuart Rayfield, University System of Georgia
Becca Turner, Oak + Willow Creatives
Gabe Evans, R.W. Griffin
Drew Echols, Jaemor Farms

Jim Pannell, Gray Pannell & Woodward LLP
Wayne Christian, Christian Kelly Thigpen & Co
Michelle Higdon, Mill Creel Equestrian Center
Jim Matney, Colquitt Regional Hospital

Jimmy Lewis, Hometown Health
Kent Sanford, Greater Gilmer Joint Dev. Authority
Marjorie "Betts" Berry, Retired Teacher
Karl Zimmer, Premium Peanut

ACTION IN RURAL GEORGIA



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Georgia's Rural Center



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