

Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation

2018-2019 Annual Report



GEORGIA'S
RURAL CENTER

Powered by Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

2018-19 AT A GLANCE



ABOUT THE CENTER + MISSION

In 2017, 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 reality.

Housed at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, 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. With a focus on producing results that directly impact rural people and places, the center works to reconnect the state's 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. Believing that people are Georgia's most valuable asset, we reinvest human capital in the state's rural fringes through internship placement and innovative projects. Georgia's Rural Center is project and outcome-focused to rediscover all that rural Georgia has to offer the residents of the state.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Dr. Stuart E. Rayfield - *Leadership*
- Jim Pannell - *Finance and Tax*
- Jim Matney - *Health care*
- Marjorie J. "Betts" Berry - *Education*
- Karl Zimmer - *Logistics*
- Gabe Evans - *Business Development/Entrepreneurship*

CENTER PARTNERS

- Stanley M. Fletcher - *Professor of Policy*
Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation
and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
- Eloise Stewart - *Eloise. Design. Co.*
- UGA Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development (CAED)
- Georgia Department of Agriculture
- Rural Health Innovation Center at Mercer University

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Subscribe to our newsletter through our website to get quarterly updates from Georgia's Rural Center.

**Photos featured in this annual report were submitted to our photo contest or taken by Steve Robinson.

OUR TEAM



DR. DAVID BRIDGES

Interim Director

Bridges oversees direction and vision for the center and plays a vital role in project execution. Growing up in rural Terrell County, Georgia, Bridges understands the concerns of the state's small towns and rural communities.



SCOTT BLOUNT

Associate Director

Blount's experience in state government, specifically policy and budget, was a driving force behind the inception of HB 951 and the creation of the center. He is instrumental in project management and economic development projects.



JANET COCHRAN

Project Manager

Located at the center's north Georgia office, Cochran is responsible for developing and initiating projects to extend the reach of the center across Georgia. She brings a wealth of knowledge in the areas of tourism development and project management.



BRIDGETT MOBLEY

Logistics and Operations Manager

Mobley is the backbone to the center handling office support duties and assists with project management and development. Her commitment to student development has been instrumental in the implementation and management of ABAC Connect.



JESSICA AKINS

Communication Specialist

Growing up in rural Ohio fostered a passion in Akins to advocate for rural places across America. Now, a resident of rural, south Georgia, she works to tell rural Georgia's story by managing communication efforts and projects including social and digital media, print materials, and brand management.



MARY CATHERINE GASTON

Communication Specialist

A south Alabama native, now living in rural Georgia with her family, Gaston is the mind behind the creative writing and features for Georgia's Rural Center. Her passion for rural communities and love for writing bring the stories of rural Georgia to life.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The start-up year for the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation included a combination of challenges, opportunities, discoveries, and excitement, mixed with a strong dose of reality that there is much work to do in rural Georgia. The persistent background work of the House Rural Development Council and responsible leadership from the House, the Senate, and the Governor's office resulted in the passage of HB951, which created a center with a mission focused on prosperity through innovation in rural Georgia.

Our work is undergirded by a commitment to RECONNECT the state's rural and urban people and places, by REDISCOVERING all that is unique and extraordinary in the state's less populated areas. Furthermore, the center works to remind all Georgians of the power and potential present in small towns and crossroad communities in rural Georgia.

The center's team works to recognize successful businesses and efforts to help other communities RECREATE those models throughout the state.

Because people are Georgia's most valuable asset, we work to REINVEST in human capital in the state's rural fringes through internship placement, career development, and innovative projects, all of which will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the opportunities that exist in rural Georgia.

The State is blessed with many public and private organizations and resources essential to revitalizing Georgia's rural communities. Whether you prefer to call it collaboration, partnership, or teamwork, the synergy that comes from working together almost always results in the greatest success.

So we will continue to find ways to bring people, programs, resources, and innovation to the forefront for rural communities to create prosperity through innovation across Georgia.

David C Bridges

REDISCOVERING RURAL

From small towns to crossroads communities, rural Georgia is not just the state's far-flung, pleasant places, but also the people who call them home. In fact, 26% of Georgians live outside the state's urban centers*, and 120 of the state's 159 counties are considered rural.** Georgia's most profitable industry, agriculture, is also headquartered in rural Georgia, and generates \$74 billion dollars a year and one in every seven Georgia jobs. From military bases to movie sets, there's a whole lot more to rural Georgia than any singular definition can describe or calculation can quantify.

* <http://bit.ly/ruralGApopulation>
** <http://bit.ly/ruralGAcountries>

26%

of Georgians live outside
the state's urban centers

76%

of counties are considered rural

\$74 billion

Amount rural Georgia contributes to
the state's economy *annually* through
agriculture, the state's top industry.

COMPLETED PROJECTS

TALIAFERRO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPACT STUDY

The center prepared an economic impact study for the Taliaferro County Economic Development Authority and Harrison Poultry focusing on the job creation potential of the company's relocation from suburban Barrow County to rural Taliaferro County. The report was instrumental in securing approximately \$19.4 million in grants and incentives for the project.

DONALDSON DINING HALL SUPPORTED BY GEORGIA GROWN | TIFTON, GEORGIA

The center has supported the creation of the state's first Georgia Grown® college dining hall. In 2018, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College assumed operational control of Donaldson Dining Hall, committing to serve students Georgia-grown foods and purchase from Georgia-based food service providers.



AG SUMMIT | MACON, GEORGIA

Georgia's Rural Center, ABAC, UGA, and Fort Valley State University hosted the Ag Summit in support of the center's larger goal of developing a statewide strategy for agricultural education. Information garnered from the Summit in combination with information from an AgCareers.com survey will help define employment opportunities in agriculture within the state of Georgia.

ONGOING PROJECTS

MILLER COUNTY HOSPITAL COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

Partnering with Miller County Hospital to develop a multifaceted communication and education strategy, the Rural Center aims to help improve the public's understanding of the transformational work conducted in this rural community in south Georgia. The project focuses on fact finding, research, documentation of processes and accomplishments, employee training and community outreach in addition to developing an on-site nursing education program to help meet the growing demand for nurses in the state.

CO-OP ECONOMIC IMPACT | DOUGLAS, GEORGIA

The Rural Center is nearing completion of an economic impact study for one of rural Georgia's newest and fastest growing farmer-owned cooperatives. The study will demonstrate the economic impact to more than a dozen rural south Georgia counties and emphasize the important role that cooperatives play in adding value, retaining value, building wealth and otherwise positively contributing to economic vitality in rural Georgia communities.

GEORGIA INTERNATIONAL FOOD CENTER | MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA

The Rural Center is working with the Central State Hospital Local Redevelopment Authority in Milledgeville to create a multi-faceted study that could create a Georgia International Food Center, potentially expanding the state's ability to add value and transition from agricultural production to food production. This is a public/private partnership involving state agencies, federal agencies and the private sector.



ONGOING PROJECTS

SUNBELT AG EXPO STRATEGIC PLAN + IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The center is leading a comprehensive impact assessment and strategic planning exercise for the Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition. A ten-year-old study concluded that Sunbelt has an annual economic impact on south Georgia greater than \$16 million. The Rural Center has contracted with the Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development (CAED at UGA) to update the economic impact study, which the center will use in support of a forward-looking strategic plan to ensure continued and expanded impact of the Expo.

PECAN CO-OP ASSESSMENT + FEASIBILITY STUDY

In cooperation with the Georgia Agricultural Commodity Commission for Pecans, the Rural Center is conducting a needs assessment and feasibility study regarding the potential development of a Georgia pecan farmer-owned shelling and processing facility. The center has contracted with Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development (CAED at UGA) to conduct the study. A preliminary report is expected in the fall of 2019.

ABAC CONNECT

Working with a technology company, the center has developed a career and internship management system to place human capital from Georgia colleges in internships and permanent employment in rural Georgia. The results of summer 2019 college internship projects will be added to the system at the end of July, and the project will be introduced to the public in August 2019.

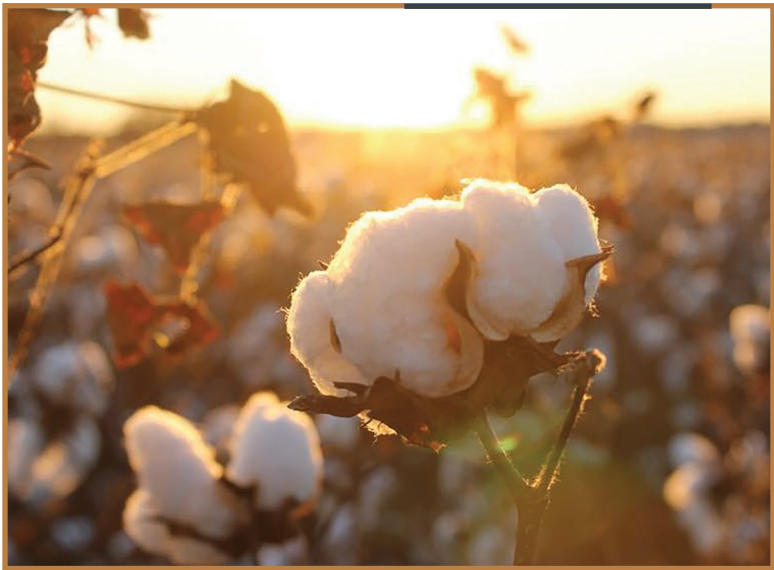
GEORGIA MEDICAL EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE PROJECT

The Rural Center is conducting a needs assessment, market study and feasibility study aimed at creating a regional simulation and continuing education hub to support educational and health care institutions who have the responsibility for providing health care in rural Georgia. The center worked with the South Georgia Medical Education & Research Consortium (SMERC) to conceive the project. Tripp Umbach, a consulting firm from Erie, Pennsylvania, was hired to perform the work. The Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center is a project partner. A preliminary report is expected fall 2019.

ONGOING PROJECTS

TERRELL COUNTY ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Working with officials in Terrell County, Georgia’s Rural Center is assisting to identify sources of funds for much-needed transportation improvements to a one-mile section of West Lee Street (New Bethel Church Road) that serves several businesses that are critical to the county’s economy, including the county’s only full-service farm supply business.



REVITALIZATION THROUGH TAX CREDITS

Rural Center team members conducted a review of successful rural revitalization efforts that utilized state tax credits for restoring or repurposing historic buildings. The center developed a series of feature stories that were published in June 2019 on the blog and social media. More features are anticipated to be added to the series in 2020.

GEORGIA RURAL HEALTH INNOVATION CENTER

The center is working cooperatively with the newly-created Mercer University Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center to identify communities where there are intersections of need regarding economic development and health care.

BERRIEN COUNTY MARKETING STRATEGIC PLAN

The Rural Center is working with Berrien County and the City of Nashville to update the city and county’s image through a rebranding effort. Focus groups will be conducted and a final creative strategy report with branding guidelines, messaging strategies, implementation timeline and budget timeline will be delivered at the end of the project. This project will be complete by summer 2020.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



SENATE BILL 2

- enables electric membership corporations (EMCs) to provide and operate broadband facilities or form, fund, support and operate a broadband affiliate

SENATE BILL 17

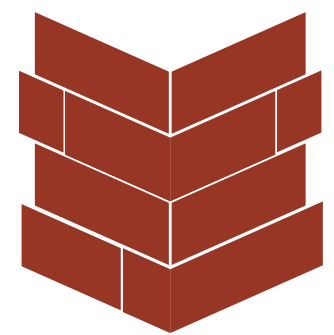
- allows cooperative non-profit corporations to furnish, improve and expand broadband services



HOUSE BILL 186 + 321

HB 186 created the Office of Health Strategy and Coordination to strengthen and support the state’s health care infrastructure and overcome existing barriers to the coordination of many health-related functions. Collectively, HB 186 + 321 deal with

- rural health care issues pertaining to Certificate of Need (CON) provisions,
- an extension of the Rural Hospital Tax Credit through 2024,
- hospital transparency provisions
- and the hospital provider payment program.



HOUSE BILL 224

- amends the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
- expands the Quality Jobs Tax Credit in rural areas (population of less than 50,000 with 10% or more of the population living in poverty per the U.S. Census Bureau)
- creates guidelines for Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit for manufacturing and telecommunications facilities located in rural counties

2019-2020 HOUSE RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Co-chairmen: House Education Chairman Rick Jasperse (R-Jasper) and House General Government Appropriations Chairman Sam Watson (R-Moultrie)

Vice chairman: House Motor Vehicles Chairman John Corbett (R-Lake Park)

Co-chairmen Emeriti: House Rules Committee Chairman Jay Powell (R-Camilla) and House Appropriations Chairman Terry England (R-Auburn)

COMMUNICATION + OUTREACH



During the first year of operation at Georgia’s Rural Center, communication and media efforts made a significant impact on bringing awareness to rural Georgia. The communication team at the center utilizes multiple channels of communication ranging from innovative, web-based media published to social media sites to more traditional media like print materials. In addition, Georgia’s Rural Center hosted it’s first photo contest to engage with our audiences and create user-generated content. Topics published this year covered legislative updates, agricultural and natural resources industry information, project updates, and highlights of rural communities. Georgia’s Rural Center works to bring rural Georgia to our stakeholders and communities by creating engaging content through infographics, photos, feature writing, and technical writing. Georgia’s Rural Center team has also been active in professional organizations and conferences such as Ag Summit, GEDA (Georgia Economic Development Association), Georgia Tech Economic Development Course, Georgia Academy for Economic Development, Hometown Hospital Policymaker Tour and Ag Media Summit/AAEA (American Agricultural Editors Association).

16,000+ fans engaged with top 10 Facebook posts

88 Google searches

308 Instagram + LinkedIn followers

470 Photos entered in photo contest

47 Published blogs

Featured on WALB evening news segment in fall 2018

3,022 Facebook fans

2,810 link clicks

215 Email subscribers

9 Project publications

BY THE NUMBERS

\$100,000+ spent on project execution

260 projected jobs created

46 rural communities directly impacted *

11 projects in progress

10 partnerships

9 publications produced

8 jobs supported + created

3 completed projects

*more counties indirectly impacted

Economic Development Projects

- Harrison Poultry Economic Impact Study
- Co-op Economic Impact Study
- Georgia Grown Dining Hall
- Pecan Growers Economic Impact Study
- Sunbelt Ag Expo Strategic Plan
- Milledgeville Parham Kitchen Project

Transportation Project

- Terrell County Road Improvement Project

Education Projects

- Ag Summit
- ABAC Connect

Community Development Projects

- Historic Tax Credit Discovery Stories
- Miller County Hospital Communication and Education Strategy
- Berrien County/ Nashville Creative Strategy

Health Care Projects

- Georgia Medical Education Technology Experience Project
- Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center Project



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