

**November 10, 2021**

**Coming Together for Racial Understanding receives national award**



Coming Together for Racial Understanding received the 2021 National Diversity in Extension Award at the annual Food and Agriculture Excellence Awards, hosted by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities on November 9, 2021. The award, sponsored by USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Cooperative Extension, recognizes significant contributions and accomplishments in achieving and sustaining diversity and pluralism.

The Coming Together for Racial Understanding Team, coordinated by the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) at Mississippi State University, is comprised of Extension specialists and administrators from 22 Land-Grant Universities from 17 states, and other national representatives. The team developed a process to train Extension professionals to help facilitate community dialogues across the country around issues of race and discrimination. To date, 29 states have sent teams to a national train-the-trainer workshop to help launch efforts within their own states.

Rachel Welborn, Associate Director of the SRDC, who has coordinated the effort, recognized the value of bringing people together across the lines that often divide us, stating, “Investing ourselves in the important task of trust-building through dialogues is essential for meaningful change.” This is in keeping with the initiative’s Unique Value Proposition which states: Coming Together for Racial Understanding is a dialogue-to-change process for



communities seeking new pathways for working together across racial/ethnic lines that seeks to foster understanding and build trust in order to take informed collective action for meaningful change, unlike required diversity, equity, and inclusion training alone which seldom seeks to develop trusting relationships among participants.

“Each year, these awards showcase the fundamental, transformative difference Cooperative Extension continues to make in our society,” said NIFA Director Dr. Carrie Castille. “This important partnership and excellent programs like these are a testament to the true value of Cooperative Extension capacity funds more than a century after the Smith-Lever Act created this unparalleled system of outreach and education that enriches every community across the nation.”

“Congratulations to the outstanding professionals who were honored on November 9th,” said ECOP Chair, Dr. Wendy Powers, Associate Vice President of the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. “They are leading the way in communicating trusted science to the latest generation of learners and problem-solvers in communities across the nation.”

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**Reference links:**

Coming Together for Racial Understanding: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/civildialogue/index.html>

Presentation video: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/civildialogue/Coming-Together-for-Racial-Understanding-2021-Review-Video.mp4>

Awards Program:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ie7xujcv1zz08uw/APLU%20Awards%202021%20Fnl.pdf?dl=0>

Team Members: [https://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/food-environment-and-renewable-resources/board-on-agriculture-assembly/cooperative-extension-section/ecop-members/ecop-documents/2021\\_diversity\\_award.pdf](https://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/food-environment-and-renewable-resources/board-on-agriculture-assembly/cooperative-extension-section/ecop-members/ecop-documents/2021_diversity_award.pdf)

