



Items of Interest

Congrats to 2026 Bonnie Teater Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient, Dr. Alison F. Davis



The Southern Rural Development Center is proud to honor Dr. Alison F. Davis as the 2026 recipient of the Bonnie Teater Community Development Lifetime Achievement Award. Dr. Davis is the first recipient of both the Early Career and Lifetime Achievement Awards, receiving the Bonnie Teater Early Career Achievement Award in 2011. Dr. Davis has served as Executive Director of Blueprint Kentucky and as a professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics, Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment at the University of Kentucky since 2010.

In support of Dr. Davis' nomination, Dr. Stacey McCullough, Assistant Vice President for Community, Professional and Economic Development at University of Arkansas System-Division of Agriculture (UADA) Cooperative extension Service (CES) states that Dr. Davis continues to inspire her to "take risks and think creatively about achieving greater impact." At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Davis opened a restaurant business, which, according to Dr. Timothy Woods, extension Professor of Agricultural Economics at University of Kentucky, imparts her "empathy and awareness of real challenges small businesses face, positioning her as a credible figure when engaging with business, community, and academic audiences." Dr. Davis' success is attributed to her "sheer will, strength of character, resolve (and sense of humor)" as well as her ability to address "real life and societal challenges through a community and economic lens" according to R. Brent Elrod, Chief of Staff of U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

[Read the Full Press Release](#)

SRDC Welcomes New Communications Coordinator, Mariah Spiva



The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) is excited to welcome Mariah Spiva as our new Communications Coordinator, officially joining the team on June 16, 2026.

Mariah comes to SRDC from a higher education communications background, bringing a strong foundation in marketing, branding, and engagement. Her experience makes her a valuable addition to SRDC as we continue our mission of strengthening rural communities.

SRDC is thrilled to have Mariah on board and looks forward to the energy and dedication she brings to the team!

Estate Planning Workshop Protects Legacy and Preserves Family Property



Event Partners pictured **back (left to right):**
Natalia Cox, Destiny Greene, Alexa Rimmer,
Andraya Jackson, James Haynes;
Front: Giovanna Benitez

The City of Ocala Community Housing Services, in partnership with Community Legal Services and the University of Florida IFAS Extension, recently hosted the third free **Estate Planning 101: Secure Your Legacy – Heirs' Property & Future-Proof Planning** workshop. The educational event provided residents with valuable information on protecting family assets, avoiding legal complications, and planning for future generations.

The workshop focused on heirs' property—a common issue that occurs when property is passed down without a clear estate plan, resulting in multiple family members owning fractional interests in the same property. Participants learned how this type of ownership can create challenges, including title issues, probate complications, family disputes, and the potential for forced property sales.

Attendees also received practical guidance on estate planning tools that can help families preserve generational wealth and ensure their wishes are carried out. Presenters discussed the importance of wills, trusts, powers of attorney, healthcare directives, and Florida's Enhanced Life Estate ("Lady Bird") Deed as strategies to reduce probate complications and provide greater peace of mind.

In addition to explaining legal concepts, the workshop emphasized the importance of having open conversations with family members about estate plans, organizing important documents, and reviewing plans as life circumstances change. Taking these proactive steps can help prevent misunderstandings, reduce legal costs, and preserve family harmony for future generations.

The event reflects the City of Ocala, Community Legal Services, and the University of Florida IFAS Extension's continued commitment to providing educational opportunities that empower residents to make informed decisions about land, estate planning, and long-term financial stability, making Ocala and Marion County a great place to live, play, and prosper.

Southern University Digital Literacy Ambassadors Help Bridge the Digital Divide

The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center's Community and Economic Development unit launched its inaugural Digital Literacy Ambassadors Program to prepare undergraduate students to deliver practical, community-based technology education. Supported by a digital literacy grant from the Southern Rural Development Center, the program combines student leadership development, Cooperative Extension outreach and hands-on instruction to help residents strengthen the digital skills needed in their daily lives.



Before entering the community, the ambassadors completed training in digital literacy instruction, community engagement, and Cooperative Extension program delivery. The training prepared them to explain technology in a practical, approachable manner while responding to the varying experience levels and needs of program participants.

The ambassadors put their training into action by facilitating a multi-session digital literacy program for senior adults at the Charles Kelly Community Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Participants received hands-on guidance in areas such as computer and smartphone basics, email, internet safety, online communication, and accessing digital resources. The sessions provided participants with opportunities to ask questions, practice new skills, and become more comfortable navigating technology independently.

In addition to improving digital confidence among community members, the program gives Southern University students valuable experience in teaching, public service, leadership, and community engagement. It also demonstrates how Cooperative Extension can connect university resources with communities that may experience barriers to accessing technology education.



Cohort I includes four Southern University and A&M College's College of Human Sciences and Education undergraduate students pictured from **left to right**: Saige Kenner, Leslie Womack II., Sophia Chenault, and Bryman Williams.

Job Postings

Associate Dean and Assistant Director, Human Sciences Extension at Auburn University

The College of Human Sciences (CHS) at Auburn University and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) are seeking to fill the position of Associate Dean for Extension and Assistant Director for Human Sciences Extension Programs to begin no later than Fall 2026. This 12-month administrative position will fit within the organizational structures of CHS and ACES.

The Associate Dean/Assistant Director position reports jointly to the CHS Dean and the ACES Director. The position is classified as tenure track faculty with a joint CHS and ACES administrative appointment. The Associate Dean/Assistant Director provides vision and leadership in how Extension, research, academic programs, and other allied programs develop synergy to enhance collaborative research and evidence-based outcomes. The position is responsible for the coordination and integration of Extension programs that engage Alabama citizens in evidence-based programming and research to support the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

Questions about this position may be sent to the search committee co-chairs: Drs. [Casey Mull](#) and [Elaine Moliason](#).

[View more information and apply for the Associate Dean/Assistant Director position at Auburn University.](#)

Conferences, Workshops, Trainings

MGT-352: Incorporating Extreme Weather Planning into Hazard Mitigation Projects in Rural Communities (PILOT) Training

In-person: July 28, 2026, WVU Innovation Corporation, Morgantown, West Virginia

[ACCESS MGT-352 TRAINING INFORMATION](#)

Rural Sociological Society Annual Meeting

In-person: July 29-August 1, 2026, Embassy Suites by Hilton, Raleigh, North Carolina

[ACCESS RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING INFORMATION](#)

PER-337-V: Ensuring Continuity of Operations when Planning for Emergences in Rural Jurisdictions (PILOT) Training

Virtual: August 6, 2026

[ACCESS PER-337-V TRAINING INFORMATION](#)

Southern Region Planning Leadership Network (SR-PLN) Meeting

In-person: August 17-20, 2026, New Orleans Marriott, New Orleans, Louisiana

[ACCESS SR-PLN MEETING INFORMATION](#)

Rural Grocery Transition Specialist Course

Virtual: August 31-November 29, 2026

[ACCESS RURAL GROCERY TRANSITION COURSE INFORMATION](#)

Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) Summit East

In-person: September 15-16, 2026, IALR Conference Center, Danville, Virginia

[ACCESS CEA SUMMIT INFORMATION](#)

National Goat Conference

In-person: September 28-30, 2026, Hilton Garden Inn & Conference Center, Edmond, Oklahoma

[ACCESS NATIONAL GOAT CONFERENCE INFORMATION](#)

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