

Mount Rogers region gets nod for economic initiative

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U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development and Virginia Cooperative Extension have announced that two Virginia regions were selected for the 2015-16 Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative. The Eastern Shore, consisting of Accomack and Northampton counties and Tangier Island, and the Mount Rogers Planning District, made up of Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington and Wythe counties and the cities of Bristol and Galax, will benefit from a focused initiative to explore regional economic advantages and to formulate economic blueprints for the regions.

"The regions' economic blueprints will strategically build on the current and emerging economic strengths," said Basil Gooden, state director of USDA Rural Development for Virginia. "Both Virginia regions have tremendous potential for economic growth. The SET planning process will facilitate key discussions resulting in a high-quality economic plan that works in partnership with the great natural resources of both areas."

The Eastern Shore and the Mount Rogers Planning District were selected from among seven regions that submitted applications earlier this year. They will join 21 other regions across 13 states that were selected for SET in 2015.

"Extension is excited to partner with Virginia's USDA Rural Development office, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Virginia Tech Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics to deliver the technical expertise that will lead the regions through the planning process," said Edwin Jones, director of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

The technical support team includes the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development, the Virginia Rural Center, and various agencies from the Office of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade, including the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Tourism Corporation, and Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

Launched in 2010 by USDA Rural Development, the nation's four regional rural development centers, the Purdue Center for Regional Development, and its land-grant university partners, SET is now in place in more than 70 regions in 31 states. SET is intended to help strengthen the capacity of communities and counties in rural America to work together to develop and implement an economic development blueprint for multicounty regions, strategically building on the current and/or emerging comparative economic advantages of that region.

For more information on SET, visit the Southern Rural Development Center website (<http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/>) or contact Martha Walker (mailto:walker53@vt.edu), community viability specialist with Virginia Cooperative Extension.