The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is one of four regional centers funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to strengthen the capacity of local citizens to guide the future of their rural communities. Each Center links the research and Extension capacity of regional land-grant universities with local decision-makers to address a wide range of rural development issues. The Western Rural Development Center is hosted by Utah State University and receives support from Utah State University Extension and the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or other funders. The Western Rural Development Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability or veteran status.
The communities of the Rural West are confronted with a variety of significant challenges. At the top of the list are economic concerns. Throughout U.S. history, rural areas, compared with their urban counterparts, have had lower incomes, higher poverty rates, and lower rates of employment. These problems have been compounded in recent decades with employment declines in sectors that traditionally have been the primary employers of rural workers (agriculture, forestry, mining, and manufacturing). While employment in other sectors has increased, rural workers often lack skills to obtain high quality employment in these emerging sectors.

Rural communities also struggle with sustainable natural resource use. Resource depletion and policy changes have resulted in limitations on the use of some resources that have traditionally provided income and employment in rural communities. For example, timber harvests and livestock grazing have declined on federal lands throughout the West. In other cases, wild fluctuations in prices strain resource dependent communities. Thus, a number of rural communities were experiencing rapid economic and demographic growth because of energy developments. This growth has ground to a halt in recent months as a consequence of major declines in energy prices.

Addressing the concerns of rural communities is more challenging because each community is unique. One size does not fit all when it comes to rural development.

Despite the magnitude and complexity of rural concerns, the Western Rural Development Center is excited to work with our partners to help rural communities in the West address their issues and concerns. The Center is involved in wide-ranging programs intended to help rural communities address perplexing problems and issues. As described herein, the Western Rural Development Center has programs dealing with community development training, behavioral health, and policy research. Many of our programs are intended to build the capacity of Cooperative Extension so they better serve rural communities and their residents.

Many individuals play a vital role in the successes achieved by the Western Rural Development Center. I express special appreciation for the Center’s staff. I am deeply indebted to Betsy Newman as her skills and creativity are invaluable. We are also fortunate to have the very talented Amy Wengert and Shane Jensen contributing to our efforts.

I also appreciate the contributions of the Western Rural Development Center Board of Directors. We are honored to have such capable persons who are deeply committed to rural America help us with structure and direction. Further, much of the success of the Center is a consequence of our close working relationship with the other Regional Rural Development Centers and their leadership: the Northeast Center for Rural Development and their Director Stephan Goetz; the North Central Center for Rural Development and their Director Scott Loveridge; and the Southern Rural Development Center led by Interim Director Steve Turner and Program Manager Rachel Welborn. We also greatly appreciate the extremely capable guidance from Brent Elrod, the USDA-NIFA National Program Leader for the Regional Rural Development Centers.

I remain totally committed to improving the quality of life for the residents of the Rural West and I am convinced that the future is bright for the Western Rural Development Center.
The Rural West is at an economic, demographic, and ecologic crossroads. Many of the traditional sources of employment for rural residents, such as agriculture and the natural resource extraction industries of forestry and mining have been declining for several decades. In addition, the steady decline of manufacturing makes it increasingly unlikely that communities will be able to attract industry to offset declining resource-based employment. The skills developed by rural workers for employment in the resource-based and manufacturing industries do not translate easily into 21st century jobs. Yet at the same time, there are numerous opportunities for rural communities that simply did not exist in years past.

In order to more effectively address these issues and the emerging concerns facing the residents of the Rural West, the Western Rural Development Center focuses its efforts on three priority areas:

1. People-Based Development
2. Place-Based Development
3. Sustainable Natural Resource Development

The overarching goal of the Western Rural Development Center is to help rural communities prosper, thrive economically, and become self-sustaining.
The purpose of a Western Rural Development Center Community Development Fellows Program (CDFP) is to advance applied community development at land-grant universities and other organizations and institutions with an interest in the rural areas of the western region.

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FELLOWS**

Marion Bentley, Utah State University Cooperative Extension
Buddy Borden, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension
Steve Daniels, Utah State University
Kathryn Dodge, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Jody Gale, Utah State University Cooperative Extension
Thomas Harris, University of Nevada, Reno
Mary Martin, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension
J. Michael Patrick, New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension
L. Steven Smutko, University of Wyoming
Martha Sullins, Colorado State University
The Western Rural Development Center created the Community Development Extension Institute (CDEI) in collaboration with an enthusiastic and talented planning committee. The Institute brought together over 50 community development specialists and practitioners from throughout the region for two days of training and best practices.

SESSIONS

For a complete list of presenters and topics, visit the CDEI web page at wrdc.usu.edu/htm/programs/cdei

“Most of the training sessions were interactive and/or personalized. This is an excellent way to determine where the subject matter would apply during a normal day at work.” – 2014 CDEI Participant

CDEI PLANNING COMMITTEE
Monica Babine, Washington State University
Debra Hansen, Washington State University
Lorie Higgins (Co-Chair), University of Idaho
Jacque Miller, Colorado State University

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS
Steve Campbell, University of Arizona
Tom Harris, University of Nevada, Reno
Bruce Weber and Mallory Rahe, Oregon State University

“GREAT CONTENT, ORGANIZATION, SIZE, AND LOCATION. KNOWLEDGEABLE PRESENTERS AND INTERESTING PARTICIPANTS.”
– 2014 CDEI PARTICIPANT
The Western Rural Development Center’s Area Sector Analysis Process team (formerly known as the Community-Business Matching Model) has been busy at work taking their on-the-ground work and developing train-the-trainer materials for use by Extension.

ASAP assists communities in targeted, sustainable economic development by identifying:

1. Community goals and priorities for economic development
2. Community assets that will help achieve the community’s goals and priorities
3. Industry needs and factors important for locating their operations in a community
4. Businesses that are consistent with the community’s goals and priorities

The team has been developing the ASAP curriculum while, at the same time, piloting it in Wayne County, Utah. Implementation of ASAP in Wayne County received financial support from Southern Utah University and Wayne County. Local coordination is under the direction of Michelle Coleman, Wayne County Economic Director, and the Wayne County Commission. A steering committee of approximately 30 Wayne County residents has been actively involved throughout the process.
Grappling with behavioral health problems, especially substance use and abuse and mental health issues, is a continual struggle for many communities across the country. A particular challenge for community leaders is that the occurrence of these issues varies tremendously from location to location. Therefore, it is important for local leaders to have access to accurate data about substance abuse in their specific geographic location in order to be prepared and well equipped to deal effectively with the issue.

During 2014, CAPE solicited proposals and selected 10 pilot communities to participate in its community behavioral health benchmarking exercise. The pilot communities in the West were Dona Ana County, New Mexico, led by Sonya Koukel (New Mexico State University) and Clark County, Nevada, led by Buddy Borden (University of Nevada Reno). CAPE also offered 16 webinars and produced behavioral health profiles and snapshots for each of the pilot communities. This information is available on the CAPE website: healthbench.info.

CAPE IS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT
Brent Elrod, National Program Leader for Community and Rural Development for USDA/NIFA, helped launch the program at the federal level by establishing an interagency agreement with SAMHSA and the four regional rural development centers. “This is truly a collaborative effort. SAMHSA's investment brings the expertise of the Regional Rural Development Centers, our land-grant university partners, and the Cooperative Extension System to the ongoing effort to improve behavioral health outcomes in communities across America. Helping decision makers understand where to find the relevant data that is also specific to their locale will promote more effective behavioral health policies and programs.”
The Western Rural Development Center along with the other three Regional Rural Development Centers – the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, and the Southern Rural Development Center – received NIFA/AFRI funding to form the National Agricultural and Rural Development Policy Center. Known as NARDeP, the policy center serves to develop and deliver timely policy-relevant information on areas of importance to Rural America.

Since its inception, NARDeP has funded evidence-based publications including 36 policy briefs, three data briefs, and five working papers.

The 2014 briefs included a series on oil and gas development, economic impacts of sage-grouse EPA listing, California’s water scarcity, and the jobs outlook in the U.S.

Visit the NARDeP website to view and download the publications: nardep.info

Excerpt from the NARDeP Policy Brief, “Facing an Uncertain Colorado River Basin Future,” by Sharon Megdal, University of Arizona

Communities across the Colorado River Basin are facing complex water management challenges. Growing and competing demand for scarce water resources will require choices on the part of communities across the Colorado River Basin. Water will not come cheaply to those who demand more of it. Communities large and small must prepare themselves for the economic and hydrologic implications of greater conservation in the municipal and industrial sectors, increased agricultural efficiencies, water transfers that may involve land falling, increased consideration of water for nature, and investments in more advanced treatment technologies.
The Western Rural Development Center and National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals Western Region joined forces to collaborate on an ongoing series of webinars designed to provide educational and professional development opportunities throughout the year.

In 2014, two regional webinars were offered. There is no fee to participate in the webinars and they have been recorded and archived on the Center’s website.

**HOW EXTENSION EDUCATORS CAN HELP COMMUNITIES PREPARE FOR DISASTERS**
Presented by Susan R. Kerr
Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center

**LIVABILITY AND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION**
Presented by David Kack
Small Urban and Rural Livability Center
Western Transportation Institute
Montana State University

To view the webinar recordings, visit [wrdc.usu.edu/htm/webinars](http://wrdc.usu.edu/htm/webinars).

**DID YOU KNOW?**
The National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) was established in 2004 and is "intended primarily as the organizational vehicle by which we in Extension can strengthen the community and economic development program. “ Learn more about NACDEP by visiting the Association's website: [nacdep.net](http://nacdep.net)
**Rural Connections**, the magazine of the Western Rural Development Center, is published to inform the nation on timely research and activities by the West’s land-grant institutions and regional/national agencies as it relates to rural development issues in the region. Contributors include researchers, faculty, Extension researchers, specialists, and agents, practitioners, and professionals from throughout the West with occasional contributions from outside the region. To view/download past issues visit wrdc.usu.edu.

**EXTENSION’S ROLE IN SUSTAINABILITY MAY 2014**
Western Extension Agents, Faculty, and Specialists examine the 100-year history of Cooperative Extension and its unique position to effect nationwide change as it pertains to sustainability outreach and education.

**RC Monthly**
The Western Rural Development Center’s electronic newsletter, *RC Monthly*, is published each month. Distributed to over 800 people, it highlights the Center’s activities along with funding opportunities, upcoming conferences, trainings, and webinars. To receive *RC Monthly*, join our mailing list by visiting wrdc.usu.edu.

It is well understood that water is key to life on Earth, it is also a finite resource that must be properly stewarded. Earth’s water is continually cycling through our atmosphere, precipitation, surfaces waters, and groundwater, as well as much more gradually through glaciers. Saltwater makes up 97 percent of earth’s water, glacier’s 1.7 percent, which leaves only 1.3 percent of that water as potentially useful for people and ecosystems in our ground and surface waters. The role of Extension in water sustainability issues is many-fold. Indeed, *Extension has been working in these issues since its inception, as water is integral to agricultural production and quality.*
SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE STATISTICS

The Western Rural Development Center continues to use social media to listen, discover, share, and engage on topics related to living in the West. Great efforts were made in 2014 to increase our social media presence by sharing relevant information and engaging with followers through Facebook and Twitter. The Center continues to track growth and follower interests in order to more effectively engage its followers.

SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Facebook Snapshot (Aug. - Dec.)
Posts reached 756 individuals
Our Facebook followers are:
  57 percent Female
  40 percent Male

Twitter Snapshot (Aug. - Dec.)
Tweets earned over 51,000 impressions
459 impressions every business day
Our Twitter Followers are:
  66 percent Male
  34 percent Female
Our Twitter followers’ top interests include:
  Politics and Current Events (52 percent)
  Business and News (45 percent)
  Science News (42 percent)
  Green Solutions (38 percent)
35 percent of our followers live in the Center’s region

WEBSITE STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

43,050 Unique Visitors
70,531 Visits
141,452 Page Views
2014 COULD BE NAMED, “THE YEAR OF BOOKS,” FOR THE WESTERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER DIRECTOR DON ALBRECHT. HE HAD TWO IMPORTANT BOOKS PUBLISHED DURING THE YEAR!

Our Energy Future
Socioeconomic Implications and Policy Options for Rural America
Edited by Don E. Albrecht

Rethinking Rural
Global Community and Economic Development in the Small Town West
Don E. Albrecht
BOOK ONE

*Our Energy Future: Socioeconomic Implications and Policy Options for Rural America*

The book is a direct outcome of a series of policy briefs related to energy in the U.S., a project initiated by the RRDC National Agricultural and Rural Development Policy Center (NARDeP). Don Albrecht coordinated the policy brief series and served as editor for the book.

“SOME OF THE TOP SCHOLARS IN THE COUNTRY CONTRIBUTED TO THIS PROJECT,” SAYS ALBRECHT, “AND CHAPTERS IN THE BOOK COVER SOCIOECONOMIC ISSUES RELATED TO FRACKING, WIND AND SOLAR ENERGY, BIOFUELS, NUCLEAR ENERGY, CONSERVATION AND EFFICIENCY, AND OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES RELATED TO OUR ENERGY FUTURE.”

BOOK TWO

*Rethinking Rural: Global Community and Economic Development in the Small Town West*

Rethinking Rural summarizes characteristics of the isolation, mass society, and global society eras. It offers guidance to community leaders, policy makers, and scholars seeking ways to address poverty, increasing inequality, and shifting demographics, as well as resource management and conservation issues.

When Don Albrecht first assumed his role as director of the Western Rural Development Center in 2008, he spent months traveling to each state in the Center’s 13-state region conducting rural development roundtables. The roundtables were funded by the Farm Foundation and locally coordinated by a Cooperative Extension Specialist. The intention of the roundtables was to gain an understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing communities in the rural West. From this months-long journey the Western Rural Development Center created its five-year strategic plan and Don began writing the book. Since then he has continued to travel the region meeting with a multitude of experts and community leaders discussing innovative ways the West’s rural communities are adjusting to thrive economically, and observing the economic shifts that have occurred throughout the West.
The Western Rural Development Center receives its core funding from the United States Department of Agriculture National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and leveraged those funds in 2014 to secure additional funding for a number of projects.

Additional funds were received from the following organizations and agencies in 2014:

- Utah State University Extension
- Utah State University Extension Internship Program
- Utah Agricultural Experiment Station
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
- NIFA Agricultural and Food Research Initiative
The Western Rural Development Center, established by the Rural Development Act of 1972 “to provide for improving the economy and living conditions in rural America,” works closely with the land-grant colleges and universities throughout its region to promote excellence in research, education, and Extension, and build Extension’s capacity in the West.

1862 LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS
American Samoa Community College
Colorado State University
Montana State University
New Mexico State University
Northern Marianas College
Oregon State University
University of Alaska
University of Arizona
University of California
University of Guam
University of Hawaii
University of Idaho
University of Nevada
University of Wyoming
Utah State University
Washington State University

1994 LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS
Blackfoot Community College, MT
Chief Dull Knife College, MT
Dine College, AZ
Fort Belknap College, MT
Fort Peck Community College, MT
Institute of American Indian Arts, NM
Little Big Horn College, MT
Navajo Technical College, NM
Northwest Indian College, WA
Salish Kootenai College, MT
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, NM
Stone Child College, MT
Tohono O’Odham Community College, AZ
The Western Rural Development Center is one of four USDA-funded Regional Rural Development Centers. The Centers work within their respective regions and collectively on national projects.

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
Stephan Goetz, Director
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nercrd.psu.edu

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
Scott Loveridge, Director
loverid2@msu.edu
ncrcrd.org

Southern Rural Development Center
Steven Turner, Interim Director
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Western Rural Development Center
Don Albrecht, Director
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The Regional Rural Development Centers are a trusted source of economic and community development data, decision tools, education, and guidance in our nation’s rural communities.

Together the Centers form a one-stop shop to connect to the nationwide network of land-grant college and university researchers, educators, and practitioners to provide sound information and hands-on, community-level training. The trainings help rural communities make science-based decisions about their community and economic development investments.