

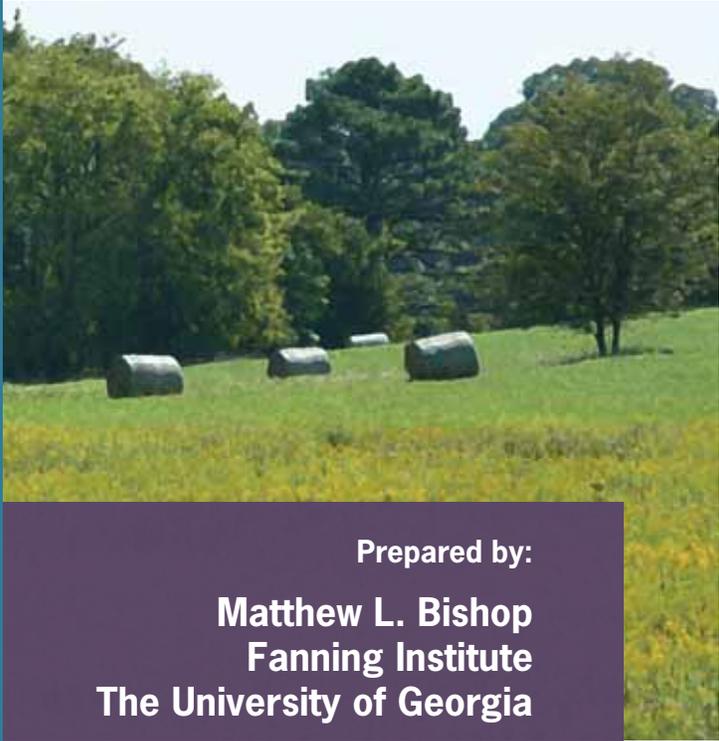


Communities of Opportunity

A Community Development Initiative of the Georgia Rural Development Council

**May 2007
Research Report**

Co-Op



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On behalf of the entire project team, we are pleased to transmit the Communities of Opportunity Research Report. This Report focuses on specific community economic development findings related to the eleven rural counties comprising state Service Delivery Region 7, the Augusta region.

Previous research of the Georgia Rural Development Council and the University of Georgia concluded that many of our rural communities are at a competitive economic disadvantage. This Report, which expanded upon the previous research and took a closer look at Region 7, found that rural communities often lack the human, community, and economic resources to be competitive in job creation and community building. This lack of resources has been compounded by the State of Georgia's difficulty in providing comprehensive rural community economic development assistance. As a result, even well-intentioned local, regional, and state community and economic development programs produced marginal results in rural Region 7.

This Report suggests that to combat these dynamics in rural development and foster greater return on investments across rural Georgia, the Georgia Rural Development Council should continue to implement the Communities of Opportunity Initiative as a pilot project in rural Region 7.

The project team extends a warm note of thanks to Mike Beatty, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, whose insight and support led to the initial conception of Communities of Opportunity, and to Phil Foil, Executive Director of the Georgia Rural Development Council. We would also like to thank those who contributed to the collection and analysis of the Report's findings: Tina Hutcheson with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs; Keith Atkins from the Small Business Development Center; Angela Fertig and Jason Seligman from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government; John McKissick from the Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development; and Sandy Christopher, Jan Coyne, Brenda Hayes, Louise Hill, Elizabeth Thorne Wallington, and Tyson Young from the Fanning Institute.

We sincerely hope that this Report contributes to a better understanding of the needs of rural communities across our great State.

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Introduction

Previous research conducted by the Georgia Rural Development Council and University of Georgia revealed that rural communities have lagged behind the rest of the state on a variety of socio-economic indicators over time. Relative to Georgia as a whole, rural communities are disproportionately impacted by the causes and consequences of persistent poverty and declining economic vitality. The state's well-intentioned yet imperfect rural investment policies, as well as the state's over-reliance on branch-plant manufacturing jobs, have incidentally placed rural Georgia at a competitive disadvantage to its urban counterparts when it comes to building individual and community wealth.

To combat the challenges resulting from the consequences of stranded investment in rural Georgia, the Georgia Rural Development Council is implementing the Communities of Opportunity (Co-Op) Initiative. Conceptualized not as a new program, but as a new community development philosophy acknowledging the uniqueness of rural communities, Co-Op is intended to transform the approaches of state service delivery by rewarding and recognizing successful, locally-driven community development initiatives.

In anticipation of an early summer 2007 statewide rollout of Co-Op, the Council commissioned the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute to conduct a pilot research project in state Service Delivery Region 7. Researchers from Fanning spent countless hours talking to leaders, conducting town hall meetings, analyzing state investment strategies, and surveying ordinary citizens to assess community economic development efforts in Region 7. Ultimately, the research findings reveal that state investments in rural communities of Region 7 have diminishing returns; as evidenced by the opinion of residents that their communities are great places to live, but not good places to earn a living.

The findings from this research clearly call for new approaches to rural community economic development in Georgia. The purpose of this report is to share Fanning's research findings, and recommend how the Georgia Rural Development Council can move forward with its Communities of Opportunity Initiative.

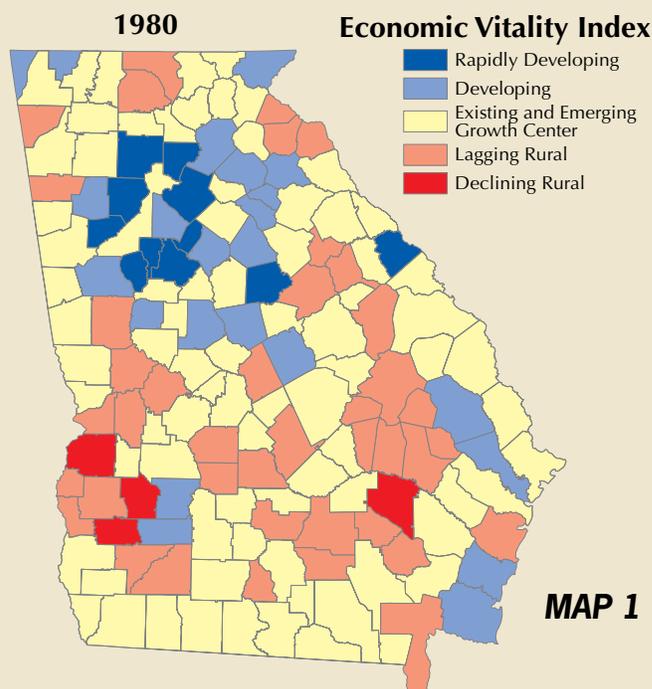
Over the last decade, much of the research on rural Georgia has focused on the socio-economic disparities between rural places and the rest of the state.

GRDC Research

Research commissioned by the Georgia Rural Development Council (GRDC) found that despite Georgia's unprecedented economic growth since 1980 (Georgia ranked fifth nationwide in job growth from 1980-2000), county economies in rural Georgia have lagged behind the economies of other places in Georgia and the Southeast.

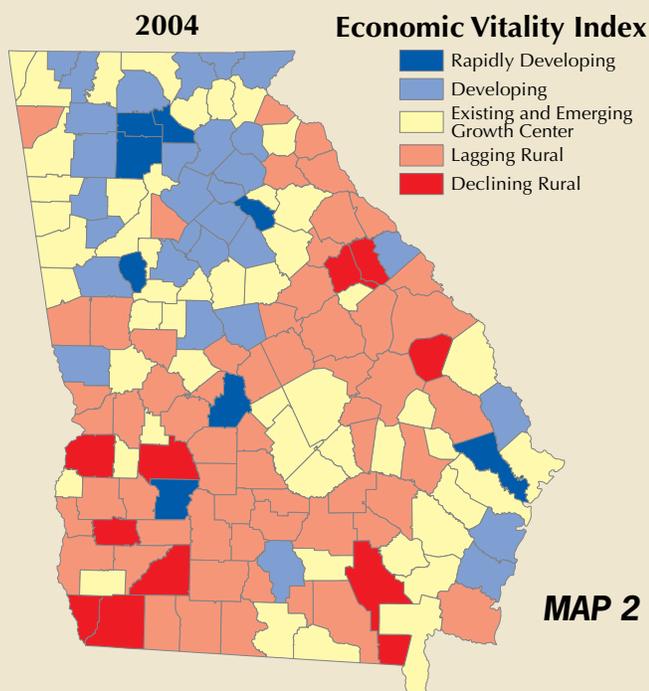
The GRDC's Economic Vitality Index uses the economic indicators of poverty rates, per capita income, average weekly wages, unemployment rates, population growth/decline, and workforce participation ratesⁱⁱ to classify Georgia's 159 counties from best to worst as Rapidly Developing, Developing, Existing and Emerging Growth Centers, Lagging Rural, and Declining Rural.

MAP 1 shows that in 1980 there were 11 Rapidly Developing counties, 23 Developing counties, 80 counties considered to be Existing and Emerging Growth Centers, and 45 Declining and Lagging Rural counties. A closer look at MAP 1 shows that nine of the 11 Rapidly Developing counties are located within the Atlanta metro area while all parts of the state (rural and urban) had Existing and Emerging Growth Centers.



Since 1980, rural county economies have not kept pace with the rest of Georgia and Southeast.

MAP 2 shows economic vitality for Georgia's 159 counties for 2004. While the number of Rapidly Developing and Developing counties increased from 34 to 38 in 2004, the number of Existing and Emerging Growth Centers declined from 80 to 51, a decrease of 29 counties. All of those 29 counties are located in rural Georgia. Likewise, the number of Declining and Lagging Rural counties increased from 45 in 1980 to 70 in 2004.



The Economic Vitality Index indicates that the economy of rural Georgia has not kept pace with the rest of Georgia and the Southeast.

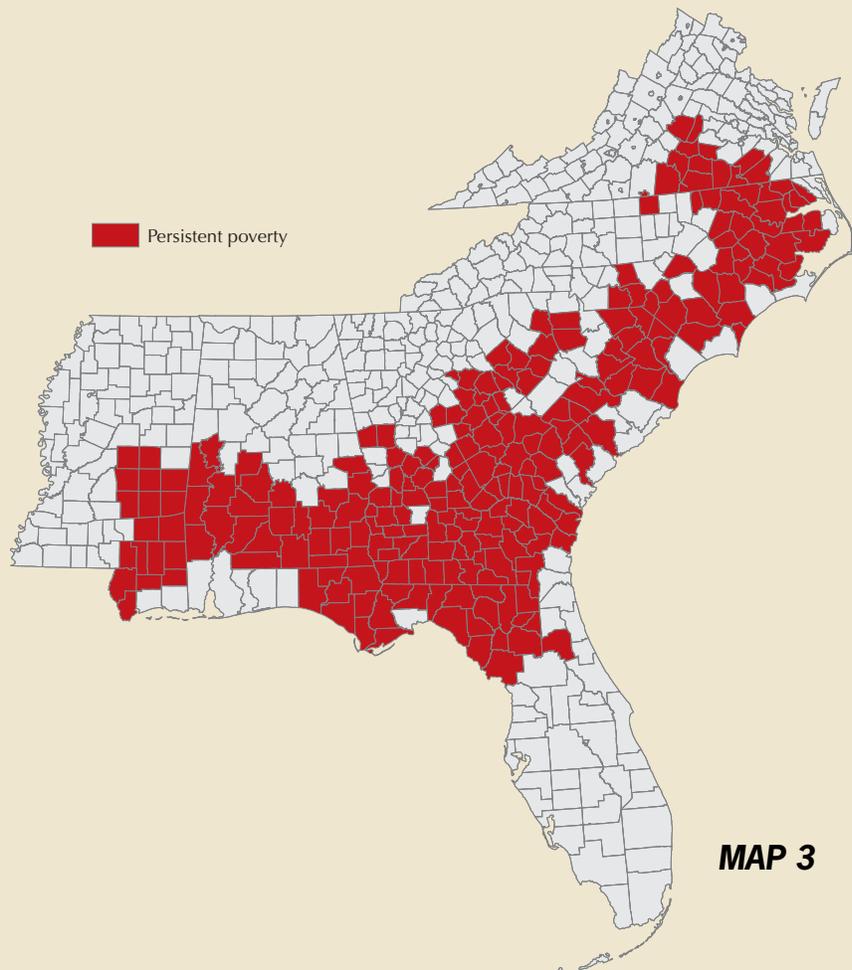
This simple analysis comparing economies in rural Georgia to economies elsewhere reveals a widening economic gap between rural Georgia and other places.

Building upon the findings of the Economic Vitality Index, the GRDC has also studied other human, social, and community phenomena in rural Georgiaⁱⁱⁱ. All of the GRDC research concludes that rural communities in Georgia are characterized as weak and distressed on virtually every measure of human capital vitality, fiscal capacity, technology and innovation, healthcare availability and access, and workforce housing.

In addition to the GRDC's findings, other research has investigated conditions in rural communities^{iv}.

UGA's Poverty Study

In the seminal *Study on Persistent Poverty in the South*^v, researchers from the University of Georgia found 242 counties across a seven-state region of the United States^{vi} that have had poverty rates among the nation's highest rates over the last three census periods (1980, 1990, and 2000)^{vii}. Ninety percent of the 242 counties (217 total) are located in rural places (see **MAP 3**).



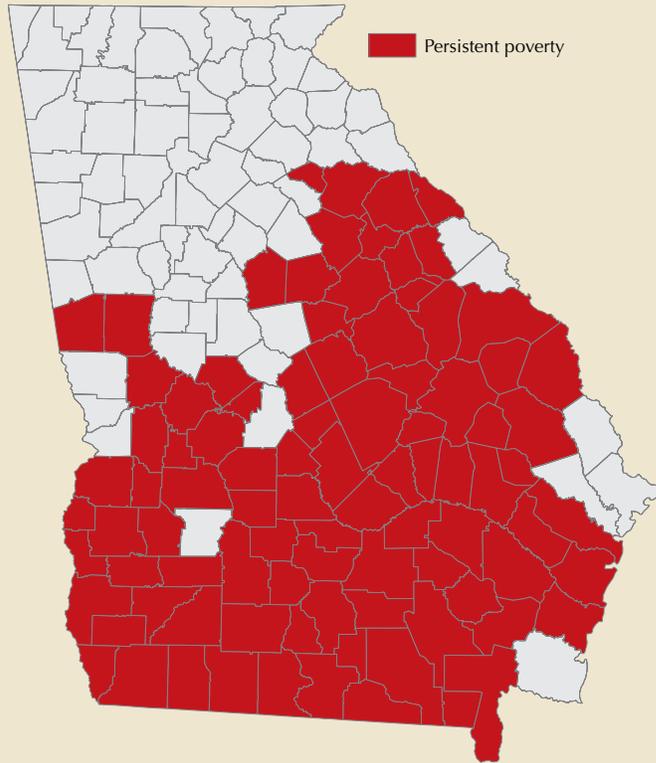
91 counties in rural Georgia have had poverty rates among the nation's highest since 1980.

MAP 3

These 242 persistent poverty counties are disproportionately impacted by poverty – the region's 2000 poverty rate is more than one and a half times that of the nation's (19.4 percent for the region v. 12.4 percent for the nation). The state of Georgia is at the geographic heart of the Southeast's persistent poverty region with 91 persistent poverty counties. All but seven of the 91 persistent poverty counties in Georgia are rural (see **MAP 4**, for the 91-county Georgia Persistent Poverty Region).

The poverty that persists in rural Georgia and the rest of the rural Southeast translates into many socio-economic ills for the individuals who reside in communities there. Specifically, the region is characterized by lower educational attainment, health status, unemployment, and homeownership rates.

MAP 4



To illustrate, **TABLE 1** compares some of the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the 242 persistent poverty counties with Georgia and the United States. (A column comparing the 91 persistent poverty counties in Georgia is also included in TABLE 1.)

TABLE 1

	U.S.	GA	Southeast PP Counties (n=242)	GA PP Counties (n=91)
Percent of population reporting White as primary race (2000)	77.1	66.1	62.6	61.3
Percent of population reporting African American as primary race or in combination with other races (2000)	12.9	29.2	33.9	36.1
Percent of population reporting Hispanic American as primary race (2000)	12.5	5.3	2.9	3.4
Percent of the population living in poverty (2000)	12.4	13.0	19.4	20.9
Percent of children living in poverty, under 18 years of age (2000)	16.1	16.7	25.0	27.4
Percent of elders living in poverty, age 65 and older (2000)	9.9	13.5	18.2	19.2
Percent age 25 & older without a high school diploma (2000)	19.6	21.4	27.7	29.5
Low Birth Weight Birth Rates per 1000 births (1996-98)	74.8	86.2	95.7	96.5
Percent of mobile homes per housing units (2000)	7.6	12.0	24.9	25.8
Unemployment (2000)	5.8	5.5	7.1	7.1
Per capita income (2000)	\$21,587	\$21,154	\$16,049	\$15,602

**Prepared for the Study on Persistent Poverty in the South.*

TABLE 1 (previous page) indicates that children and the elderly are disproportionately affected by persistent poverty in the Southeast and Georgia regions. In addition, the percentage of the adult population lacking a high school diploma in the poverty regions far exceeds that of Georgia and the nation; the poverty regions have lower birth weights, higher unemployment, and greater mobile home rates than the state and region; and per capita income in the 91 counties of Georgia is more than \$5,500 less than per capita income for Georgia.

These data indicate dramatic differences between the persistent poverty regions and the nation and state as a whole, but do not reveal the underlying reasons for why these conditions have persisted in rural Georgia.

How did we get here? What factors have contributed to the socio-economic gaps between rural Georgia and the rest of the state, a gap that consequently places rural Georgia's economy and way of life at risk?

Imperfect Public Policy

The research of the GRDC, as well as the findings of the Study on Persistent Poverty in the South and multiple publications of the Southern Growth Policy Board^{viii}, suggest that the imperfections of past community development public policies contributed to the socio-economic gaps between rural Georgia and its metropolitan counterparts. However well-intentioned, past policies have led to the following impacts on rural communities.

Over-Reliance on Branch Plant Manufacturing

Because of low taxes, cheap labor, and inexpensive land and infrastructure costs in rural Georgia, the state's rural economic development strategy historically relied upon recruiting branch plant manufacturing jobs. The jobs that were recruited typically were low-wage and required minimal skill sets^{ix}. The strategy was successful during the mid- to late-20th century as rural Georgia experienced significant job growth in the textile and manufacturing industry sectors. The late 1990's and early 2000's saw many labor markets open and expand abroad, meaning that as many of the jobs recruited to rural Georgia shifted overseas, massive unemployment and a pool of labor with non-transferable skills in rural Georgia resulted.

Culture of Dependency

A second impact of imperfect community development public policy is the creation of a culture of dependency. Specifically, public policies geared at the consequences of poverty (food stamps, welfare, housing subsidies, etc.) often had the inverse effect, causing individuals to become dependent on transfer payments and other public aid. Such policies, no matter how well-intentioned, failed to hold individuals and governments accountable for using public funds for assistance. Moreover, they reflect a lack of governmental interest and understanding in the potential benefits of social programs, reinforcing inadequate tax structures that rely on property taxes as the main source of revenue for local governments^x.

Uncoordinated Community Development and Public Education

Because of federal/state mandates and institutional turf issues, public institutions traditionally charged with community development and public education in rural Georgia have rarely coordinated their service delivery. For example, if a community's institutions (e.g., local government, school system, social service providers, business and industry association, etc.) do not communicate – regardless of reason – the strategic directions of those community institutions are likely to be incongruent. This results in uncoordinated community development and an untrained, unskilled workforce, leading to the community's inability to evolve in ways that reflect community and economic realities.

Misaligned Benefits from Development

Finally, a fourth impact on rural communities of imperfect community economic development public policies is that even if a rural community is able to recruit a new economic development engine but cannot supply a viable, skilled workforce, the community and its citizens often do not reap any of the development's benefits. The new jobs frequently go to workers commuting in from outlying communities; those outlying communities benefit from ancillary effects such as housing and retail developments; and the tax base for the community that recruited the development usually does not realize revenue gains for 10-15 years because of the costs to build new infrastructure, as well as the tax abatements and incentives used to lure the development in the first place.

These impacts, along with the research findings on rural Georgia's economy, indicate that past policies and practices have not produced the long-term impacts necessary for sustained success in communities. For rural Georgia, to maintain the status quo is to perpetuate a system that not only places rural communities at a competitive disadvantage to their urban counterparts, but also continues the practice of stranding federal and state investment in rural development efforts.

COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

A New Philosophy of Community Development

Convinced that something must be done to augment current rural community and economic development efforts, in the summer of 2005 Mike Beatty, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)^{xi}, and Dr. Art Dunning, Vice President for Public Service and Outreach at the University of Georgia^{xii}, convened a group of statewide partners^{xiii} to discuss strategies for creating a climate of success across rural Georgia. The charge for the group was straightforward: what can be done to spur community and economic development so that rural communities are places where people and businesses want to live and prosper?

*The Communities of Opportunity Initiative is a **new community development philosophy** for rural Georgia.*

Those initial meetings of the statewide partners led to the conceptualization of a new community development philosophy for rural Georgia – the **Communities of Opportunity (Co-Op)** Initiative.

The Co-Op philosophy uses customized, scale-appropriate approaches to community economic development that recognize the unique characteristics, challenges, and opportunities of communities.

Co-Op emphasizes participatory planning involving all segments of the community in assessing current community issues and designing and implementing strategies that proactively and comprehensively address those issues. In addition, the Co-Op philosophy is guided by the principles of avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches, rewarding communities for taking on persistent, intractable problems, and promoting solutions that address both the cause and effect of community concerns.

The Georgia Rural Development Council^{xiv} charged the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) with implementing the new philosophy statewide. To that end, Governor Sonny Perdue issued an Executive Order^{xv} calling on all state agencies to work in conjunction with DCA to successfully administer the Initiative. Additionally, in anticipation of a statewide rollout of the Communities of Opportunity Initiative in early summer 2007, DCA called upon the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute to design and implement a pilot research project in State Service Delivery Region 7. The following section presents the findings of Fanning's pilot study in Region 7.

REGION 7 PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT

In order to test the viability of Co-Op as a new statewide community economic development philosophy, the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute conducted a pilot study of state Service Delivery Region 7^{xvi}. Service Delivery Region 7 (see **MAP 5**) is a microcosm of Georgia with a central, urban area (Augusta), sprawling suburbia (Columbia County), and small, rural communities scattered around the region; hence, Region 7 is an appropriate "snapshot" of the state as a whole.



The goals of the pilot research were to assess rural communities in the region on a variety of socio-economic indicators; determine citizens' general perceptions and opinions about rural community development; analyze federal and state investment in the region over time; learn from local leaders how the state can work more effectively with rural communities to attract investment; and finally, introduce the concepts of Co-Op's community development philosophy and provide a mechanism for public feedback.

To realize these research goals, researchers from the Fanning Institute designed and implemented a research study that included the following elements:

- *Descriptive analysis of the region using a variety of socio-economic indicators and the methodologies of the GRDC Economic Vitality Index and the Study on Persistent Poverty in the South;*
- *Policy analysis of state and federal investments in rural Region 7 since 1980;*
- *A telephone survey reaching 401 residents of rural counties in the region;*
- *One-on-one interviews with 55 community leaders; and*
- *A series of 11 town hall meetings.*

Descriptive Analysis: A Look at Region 7

TABLE 2 provides a snapshot of Region 7 using several selected socio-economic indicators^{xvii}. (An expanded version of TABLE 2 with county level data can be found in Appendix A.) A closer look at TABLE 2 reveals some significant and even poignant facts about the region and its rural areas^{xviii}.

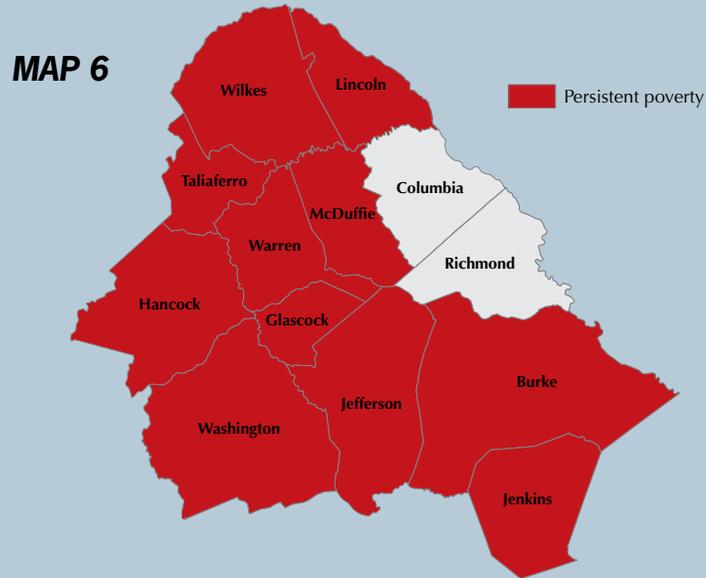
TABLE 2

REGION 7 PROFILE*	Region 7	Rural Region 7	Georgia
Total Population (2000)	419,634	130,571	8,186,453
Percent Change in Population (1990-2000)	10.9%	6.4%	26.4%
Percent African American Population (2002)	41.3%	50.3%	28.8%
Percent Hispanic Population (2002)	2.2%	1.7%	6.0%
Median Age (2000)	36.4	36.9	33.4
Per Capita Income (2002)	\$24,363	\$20,580	\$28,821
Transfer Payments as a Percent of Total Personal Income (2002)	20.2%	27.0%	13.3%
Annual Average Unemployment Rate (2003)	5.4%	7.2%	4.7%
Percent of All Persons Below Poverty Level (1999)	17.5%	23.1%	13.0%
Percent of All Whites Below Poverty (1999)	8.9%	10.2%	8.2%
Percent of All African Americans Below Poverty (1999)	29.2%	36.1%	23.1%
Percent Mobile Homes (2000)	17.3%	31.5%	12.0%
Average Weekly Wage			
Goods Producing	\$604	\$577	\$785
Service Producing	\$402	\$383	\$732
Total – Private Sector	\$496	\$484	\$744
Total – Government	\$512	\$484	\$687
All industries	\$497	\$481	\$734
Children absent more than 15 days from school (2004)	10.8%	10.2%	12.1%
Teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19) (2000)	10.3%	13.4%	13.6%
Adult educational attainment: HS graduate or higher (2000)	75.8%	64.4%	78.6%
Total Physicians (2002)	1,336	99	16,483
Hospital Bed Capacity (2004)	2,096	273	23,813

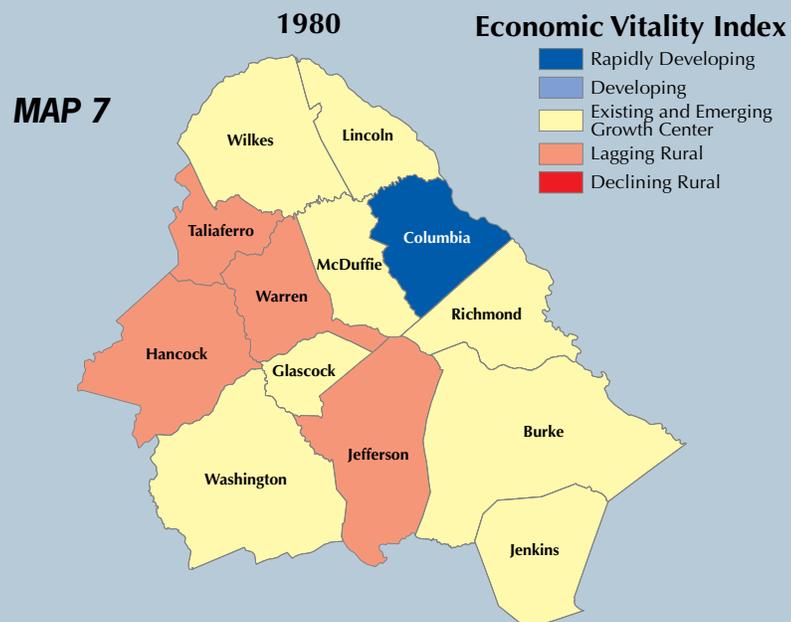
*Prepared by The University of Georgia Fanning Institute, 2006. All data taken from the Georgia County Guide (Facts and Figures & Firms, Employment and Wages) and Georgia KIDS Count.

- Nearly 420,000 people reside in Region 7, or about 5% of the state's population. One-third of Region 7 residents live in the rural places (131,000).
- Although Region 7's population grew from 1990-2000, the growth rate for the state was two and a half times that of Region 7's, and four times that of Rural Region 7's.
- African-Americans comprise a higher percentage of the total population in Region 7 (and Rural Region 7) when compared to the state as whole; on the other hand, the Hispanic population is comparatively under-represented in Region 7.
- With a median age of 36 years, the residents of Region 7 on average are slightly older than other residents of the state.
- Per capita income in Region 7 (\$24,363) is only 85% of the state as a whole.
- Per capita income for Rural Region 7 is only 71% of the state per capita income, translating into a per capita income deficit of \$8,200.
- There is a higher degree of dependency on governmental programs for income in Region 7 - about one-fifth of personal income comes from transfer payments (compared to only 13.3% for Georgia).
- Residents in the rural areas of the region are more dependent on governmental income as transfer payments comprise more than one-fourth of total personal income in Rural Region 7.
- Both unemployment and poverty rates are higher in Region 7 than in the state as a whole.
- The poverty rate for Rural Region 7 is 27%, meaning that 1 in 4 residents live in households where the income level is lower than federal poverty thresholds^{xix}.
- African-American residents are disproportionately impacted by poverty in Rural Region 7 (36.1% African-American poverty rate in Rural Region 7, compared to a 23.1% rate in the state as a whole).
- Mobile homes comprise a much greater percentage of total housing units in Rural Region 7 than in the region and state as a whole. Specifically, mobile home units comprise 31.5% of all housing units in Rural Region 7, nearly double the percentage for the Region as a whole and nearly triple the percentage for Georgia.
- The average weekly wage for Region 7 is only about 68% of Georgia's average weekly wage, translating into a region/state wage gap of \$237. Goods-producing occupations pay the highest average weekly wage in Region 7 at \$604, while service-producing occupations pay the lowest average weekly wage of \$402. Across all occupations, average weekly wages are lower for Rural Region 7 than for Region 7 as a whole.
- The percentage of the adult population with at least a high school diploma or equivalent is lower in Region 7, and even lower in Rural Region 7, than the state's percentage. Only 64% of the adult population (25 years and older) in Rural Region 7 are high school graduates or equivalent. On the other hand, both Region 7 and Rural Region 7 have lower high school dropout rates and absenteeism than the state as a whole.
- Healthcare services for Region 7 (as measured by physicians and hospital bed capacity) are primarily located in Augusta-Richmond and Columbia Counties. Consequently, the 99 physicians and 273 hospital beds in the 11 rural counties represent only 7% of all physicians and 13% of all hospital beds in the region.

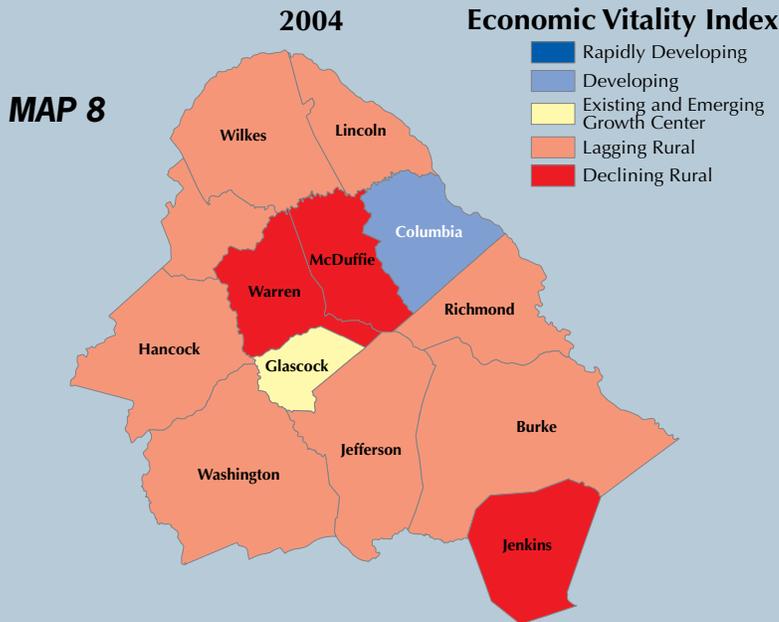
UGA's Study on Persistent Poverty in the South and the GRDC's Economic Vitality Index also illustrate current socio-economic conditions in Region 7. First, **MAP 6** reveals that every rural county in Region 7 is a persistent poverty county. As defined in the Study on Persistent Poverty in the South, this means that every rural county in Region 7 has had poverty rates in the nation's top two quartiles over the last three census periods (1980, 1990, 2000).



That persistent poverty in rural Region 7 has translated into poor economic performance is evidenced by findings of the GRDC's Economic Vitality Index. In 1980, most of Region 7's rural counties and Richmond County were considered Existing and Emerging Growth Centers; Columbia County was Rapidly Developing; and only four counties (Hancock, Jefferson, Taliaferro, and Warren) were considered Lagging Rural (see **MAP 7**).



However, in 2004 (see **MAP 8**) only two Developing and Existing-Emerging Growth Center counties remain in Region 7 (Glascock and Columbia Counties); with the rest of the region considered Lagging and Declining Rural. Clearly, Region 7's economy lags behind the rest of Georgia.



Policy Analysis

In addition to the descriptive data on Region 7, researchers from UGA conducted an analysis of federal and state community economic development investment programs^{xx}. Using 1985-2004 county-level data from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Program Awards Database and Carl Vinson Institute of Government's Tax and Expenditure Data Center, as well as data from the Georgia County Guide, KidsCount, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and US Census Bureau, the purpose of the analysis was to conduct an econometric study of the effects of state investments on a variety of indicators of community vitality. The specific research question asked was straightforward, "Do state investments in communities (e.g., grants/loans/technical assistance/bonds) have the intended positive impacts?"

Indicators of community vitality used in the analysis included poverty and high school dropout rates, participation in public assistance programs such as TANF/AFDC and food stamps, per capita income, average weekly wages, crime rates, and commuting patterns. The analysis also included a breakout by state investment type (e.g., loans, grants, bonds, housing subsidies, technical assistance, Governor's direct appropriation, etc).

The findings from the econometric policy analysis reveal several telling trends of past state investments in Region 7 rural communities:

- The number of state awards received by a county is significantly correlated with increases in the adult population (25 and over) without a high school diploma. One explanation for this correlation is net in-migration of low educated persons to fill jobs created as a result of the state investment.
- Holding the number of state awards constant over time, the total amount awarded to a county is significantly correlated with increases in welfare payments from the government. Again, the influx of low-wage workers resulting from the state's investment is one explanation for this correlation.
- Poverty in rural communities is impacted by state investment. Both loan and bond programs show significant negative effects on the county's poverty rate 3-5 years after the initial investment (e.g., the percentage of the population below the poverty line increases significantly).
- The state's investments in housing programs – rental assistance and homeownership programs – show positive impacts on poverty rates and commuting behavior. Poverty rates tend to decline three years after the investment, and the county's ability to retain residents as workers improves two years after the initial investment in housing programs. However, housing programs are negatively correlated with public assistance (e.g., the percentage of the population receiving AFDC/TANF increases significantly two years after the state's investment in county housing programs). This same negative effect holds true for the percentage of the population participating in food stamp programs.

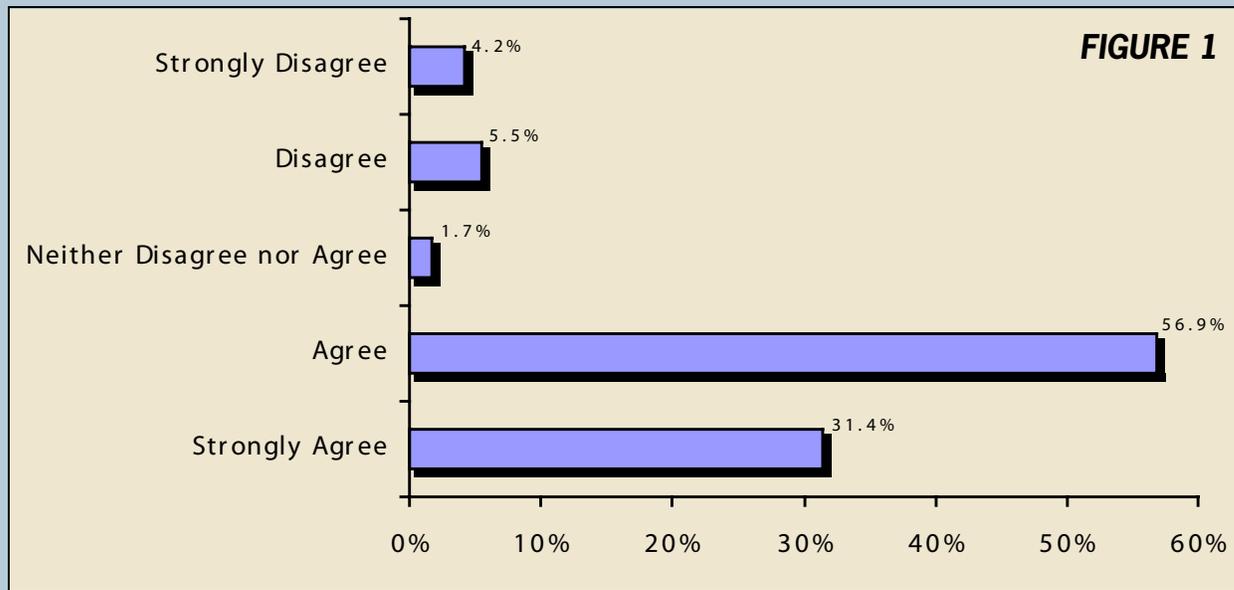
A synthesis of the findings indicates that state investments in rural communities have shown diminishing returns insofar as the impacts on multiple indicators of community vitality are positive. The analysis reveals that state investments have created patterns of migration within rural Region 7, where people move to the counties where state investments have created jobs. This trend would seem positive; however, those same state investments are creating low-wage jobs and by extension, low-income housing. Participation in public assistance programs increases, as do high school dropout rates, as a result of the state investment. All of these impacts make it clear that past rural community economic development policies are one explanation for stranded investment and distressed economic vitality in rural Region 7.

(A web link for the full report containing the analysis of state investment in communities can be found in Appendix B.)

Telephone Survey

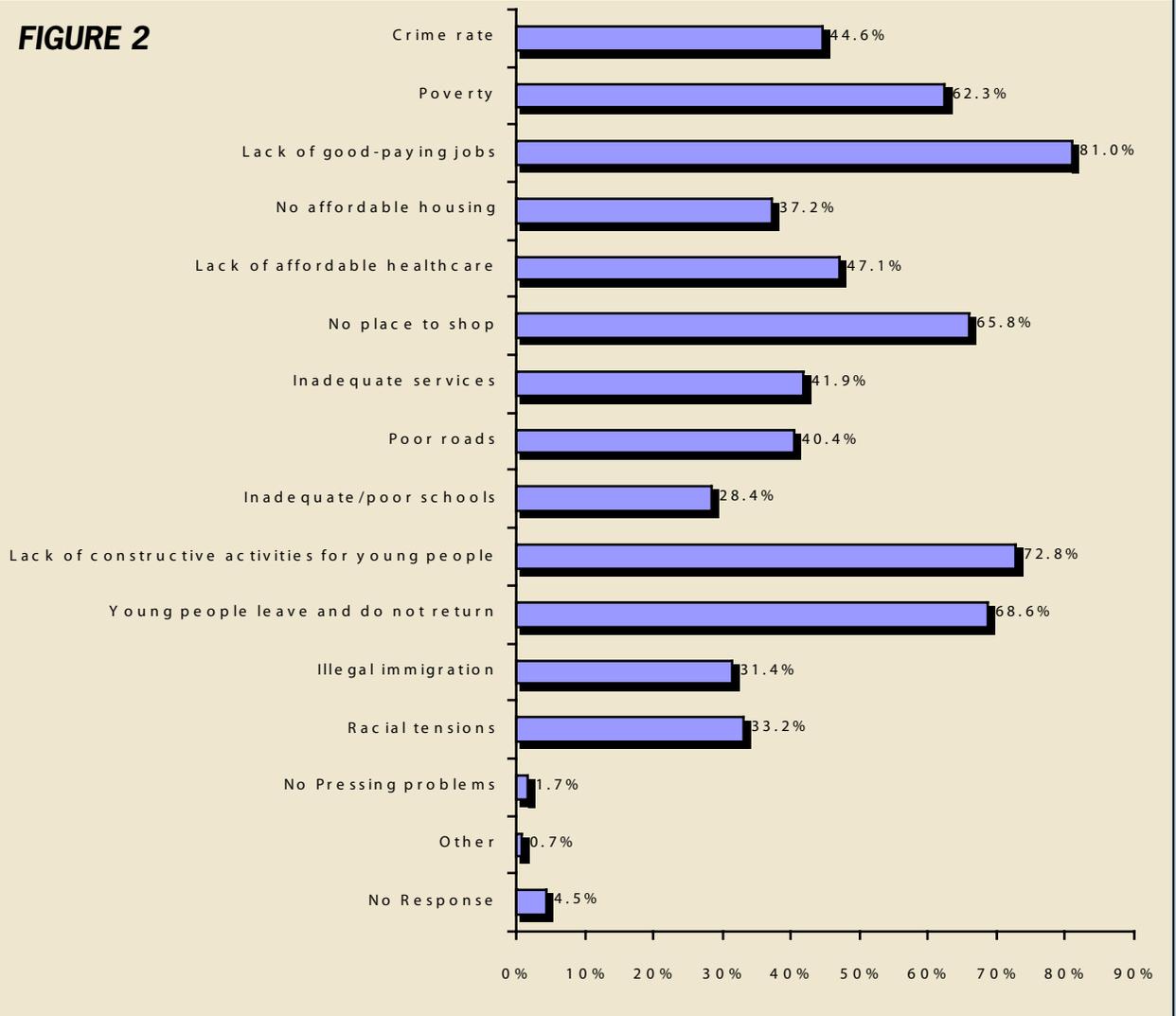
A telephone survey was also commissioned by researchers at the Fanning Institute as part of the pilot research. The survey was conducted by the Applied Research Division of the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center^{xxi}. The purpose of the survey was to assess rural citizens' general attitudes and opinions about community economic development. A total of 401 respondents from the 11 rural counties across Region 7 participated in the survey. A summary of responses and key findings follows (the Executive Summary of the survey report can be found in Appendix C).

- Residents of rural places in Region 7 are proud of their communities. Over 88% of respondents agreed with the statement, "My community is a good place to live" (see **FIGURE 1**), and nearly 80% agreed with the statement, "I am proud of my community."

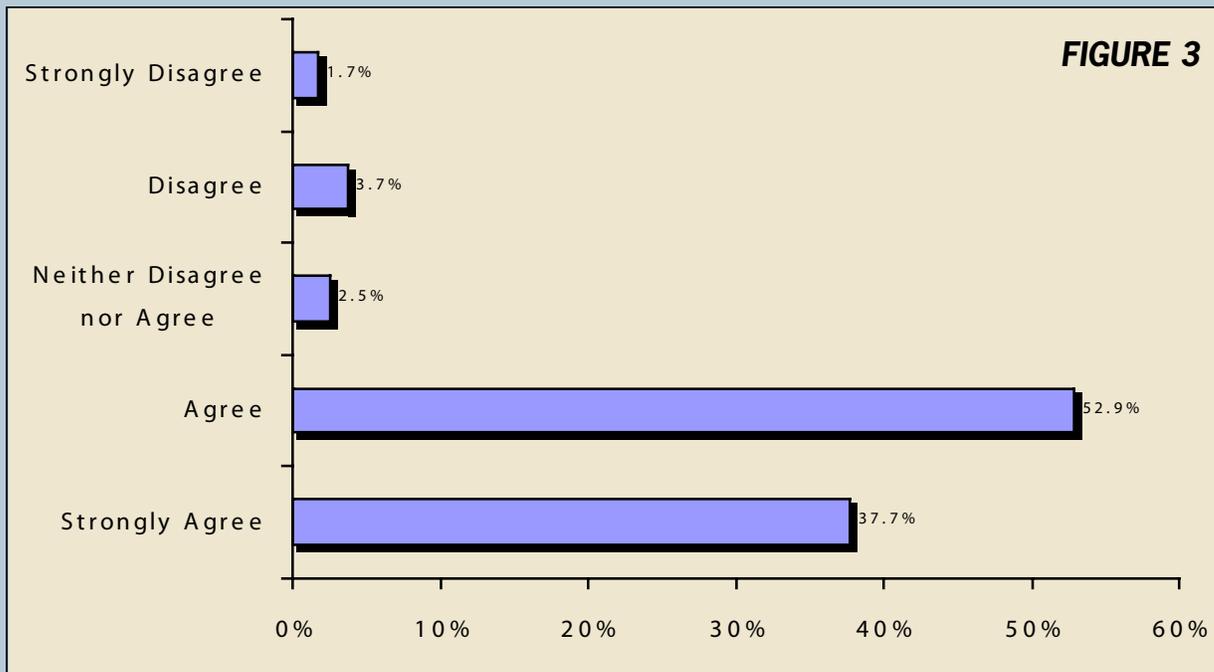


- Despite the opinion that their rural communities are good places to live, over half of survey respondents (50.4%) disagreed with the statement, "My community is a good place to earn of living."
- Other negative perceptions of rural communities' economic opportunities were revealed in the survey results - only 44% of respondents believe their community has a bright economic future and only 27% agreed that younger residents would want to return to their communities after completing their education.
- When asked about community problems, 81% responded that lack of good paying jobs was the number one issue for rural communities (see **FIGURE 2** next page).

FIGURE 2



- There is also a perception in Region 7 that rural communities are dependent upon Augusta for many services - 81% of respondents felt that their community is dependent upon Augusta for places to shop, eat, and work.
- Notwithstanding negative perceptions of economic opportunities and/or their communities' dependence upon Augusta, respondents had marginally favorable opinions of their community's leadership:
 - » **56%** ranked their community leaders' ability to handle problems as good or very good;
 - » **57%** responded favorably to questions about their leaders' ability to communicate with one another;
 - » **52%** said that their community leaders' ability to communicate with citizens was good or very good;
 - » **55%** agreed that their leadership is doing a good job to support local industry and business needs.
- The findings above help explain that nearly all respondents (91%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their communities could benefit from programs such as job recruitment, after school activities for youth, downtown development, and recreational programs (see **FIGURE 3**).



The telephone survey findings clearly indicate that although an overwhelming majority of rural citizens in Region 7 believe that their communities are good places to live, respondents felt that for various reasons, their rural communities are not good places to earn a living. These findings confirm the socio-demographic data for rural Region 7, as well as the policy analyses on state investment programs.

Individual Interviews with Community Leaders

In addition to the telephone survey that reached 401 citizens living in the 11 rural counties of Region 7, another element of Fanning’s research project was to conduct a series of individual interviews with Region 7’s community leaders.

With assistance from the Georgia Municipal Association, Association County Commissioners of Georgia, Family Connection Partnership, and regional staff from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, researchers from the Fanning Institute identified 55 key community leaders representing city councils, county commissions, development authorities, chambers of commerce, private businesses, local Family Connection collaboratives, non-profit organizations, churches, and community development corporations. The primary purpose for conducting individual interviews with key community leaders was to gain a perspective from those who work in community development on a daily basis.

The following represents the key themes that emerged from the individual responses to the questionnaire (The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix D). The themes are grouped into two overarching categories: Rural Community Assets and Rural Community Challenges. Like the telephone survey results, these themes echo the findings from the policy and socio-demographic data analyses, and clearly call for new approaches to rural community economic development.

Rural Community Assets

“There’s nothing greater than living in rural Georgia.”

- *Pride for Community and the Rural Quality of Life.* Nearly all leaders interviewed believe that their communities are great places to live. Citing a range of quality of life attributes, such as no traffic, small-town feel, low crime, nice neighborhoods, family-friendly atmosphere, historic and natural resources, slow pace of life, low taxes, and others, community leaders overwhelmingly and oftentimes emphatically stated how proud they are to live in their communities. Other sources of pride cited by community leaders included a strong faith-based community always willing to help in times of need; the idea that “everybody knows everybody else”; quaint downtown areas; tradition and history; and the low costs of living in rural places.
- *Dedicated People.* Those interviewed noted that the majority of the people who live and work in Region 7 are dedicated to making their communities better. Teachers, ministers, businesspeople, development professionals, elected officials, and healthcare providers, among others, were all commonly cited as being both knowledgeable of the issues of their communities, and also dedicated to finding solutions to those issues. This dedication to betterment of community translates into good working relationships and communications among leaders at the local level. The general consensus of those interviewed is that leaders of local institutions (e.g., government, education, business, social services) do communicate on a regular basis to discuss local issues and challenges.
- *Commitment to Regional Community and Economic Development.* Rural community leaders in Region 7 expressed overall satisfaction with their communities’ efforts to attract and retain industry and business. Part of that satisfaction stems from local leaders’ commitment to regional community and economic development. Community leaders in rural Region 7 acknowledge that the economic future of Region 7 depends upon the ability of communities to work together across geo-political boundaries; and that development professionals and elected officials do a good job of tapping into the resources of the state and federal governments that provide incentives for regional projects. Specific examples of the commitment to regional community and economic development are the efforts of the Unified Development Council and Authority of the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) Regional Development Center, the Regional Family Connection Collaborative strategic planning process, the newly formed Clarks Hill Partnership, and efforts to develop the US-78 corridor from Athens to Augusta.
- *Strong Efforts to Tap into the State’s Resources.* Although some frustration was voiced over the bureaucratic paperwork involved in applying for state resources, Region 7 community leaders had favorable opinions of the community economic development initiatives the state administers, and viewed their community’s efforts to tap into state resources as a strong asset. The Community Development Block Grant program, OneGeorgia Authority funding, Better Hometown and Main Street downtown development programs, QuickStart training through the technical colleges, the Cooperative Extension

Service, public service programs of UGA, and the programs implemented through the local Family Connection collaboratives were all cited as initiatives utilized by Region 7 communities.

Rural Community Challenges

- Recruiting and Keeping High-Wage Jobs. In contrast to the pride expressed by community leaders in the rural way of life in their communities and overall satisfaction with local and regional economic development efforts, community leaders felt that their communities face a challenge in being a good place to “earn a living”. Those interviewed agreed that one’s ability to earn a good living in Region 7 depends on the type of job persons hold and where that job is located. One leader described the phenomena this way:

“The lowest wage-earners in this region are folks working in agricultural and retail jobs. Small manufacturing pays higher than ag- and retail, but less than government jobs, teaching positions, and nurses. Of course, the professional service jobs across the region – doctors and lawyers – they are earning the highest salaries. And the more rural you get in this region, the lower the pay is no matter the type of job. The truth is that if you want to work a high-wage job, and you’re not a small-town lawyer or doctor, and if you don’t want to work for the government or school system, you’re probably going to have to go to Augusta to find it.”

Employment data on Region 7’s wage and labor structure confirm this leader’s description of the region’s economy; and the data indicate that government (usually the school system and county government) is one of the top three employers in all eleven rural communities that comprise Region 7.

One particular impact of higher-paying, non-governmental jobs being located primarily in Augusta-Richmond County is that residents leave their home counties to commute to work. Several leaders noted that residents commute as far as 75 miles one-way across five counties to get to work everyday. In fact, 39% of workers in rural Region 7 do not work in the county in which they reside. The percentage of commuters leaving for jobs elsewhere swells to more than 70% for some of Region 7’s rural communities^{xxii}. The challenge for rural communities is to recruit and keep jobs that pay well enough to allow commuters to work in the communities in which they reside.

Other issues community leaders mentioned in recruiting and keeping high-wage jobs are dismal educational attainment rates; a shortage of a trainable, skilled workforce; lack of affordable workforce housing; the counterproductive competition among rural economic developers in the region; and simply not having the resources, political clout, or experience to convince statewide economic developers to market rural communities.

- Customizing Public Education and Providing Technical Training. Tied directly to the community’s ability to recruit high-wage jobs is the quality of the community’s workforce. Rural leaders overwhelmingly agreed that public educators have a difficult time

customizing K-12 curriculum because of strict federal/state educational policies (e.g., No Child Left Behind). In turn, the technical skills that local industries need are not being offered in public schools, and industry must search outside the community and region for skilled labor.

- Teaching “Soft” Skills. Public educators not only face challenges in providing technical training, but their inability to customize K-12 curriculum precludes them from providing “soft” skills training. “Soft” skills are the skills required to maintain employment, as opposed to “hard” skills, the skills required to do a particular job. “Soft” skills include work ethic, showing up on time, dressing appropriately, motivation to complete tasks, effectively communicating with other employees, etc. Region 7 leaders cited a lack of “soft” skills as being another challenge rural communities face in recruiting industry.
- Providing Opportunities for Youth. Nearly all of the leaders interviewed mentioned that rural communities have a difficult time providing recreational opportunities for young people. Because of the lack of critical mass of young people in rural communities, there is no “market” for the types of recreational amenities typically provided by the private sector in suburban and metropolitan areas (e.g., bowling alleys, movie theatres, arcades, and skating rinks). The ancillary effects of rural communities not being able to provide appropriate opportunities for youth are higher than state and national average dropout and teen pregnancy rates.

The inability of rural communities to provide opportunities for youth results in many youth dropping out of school altogether, or seeking opportunities in other places after graduation. Educated, college-bound youth leave their rural hometowns for expanded job opportunities and better wages in metropolitan areas, leaving their communities with a less educated, untrained citizenry incapable of building wealth and sustaining community prosperity. This “brain drain” phenomenon is as prevalent in rural communities of Region 7 as it is anywhere in rural America.

- The Culture of Drugs. An alarming challenge for rural communities that all individual leaders mentioned in the interview process was the prevalence of drugs in Region 7. In particular, the cycle of poverty that persists in the rural communities of the region results in drug dealing as one of the primary sources of income for some. One leader described an experience with 3-year-old children at a rural daycare facility where the activity on the playground was sorting gravel and sand into “nickel bags” and “dime bags”. Other leaders who were interviewed shared similar experiences with drugs becoming part of mainstream culture in rural Region 7. Marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and crack were the most commonly cited drugs.
- Lack of Coordination across State Agencies. In addition to the challenges of recruiting high-wage jobs, customizing public education to meet industry demands, providing appropriate technical and “soft” skills training, providing opportunities for young people, and dealing with the culture of drugs in rural Region 7, community leaders expressed frustration with the lack of coordination across state agencies that do community economic development work in local communities. One local elected official described the situation this way: (next page)

“Agencies from the state oftentimes have no idea what each is doing in our community. They have a hard time connecting dots with each other, much less with our local folks. DCA’s doing this, DHR’s doing that, DTAE has a new training program, DOT’s fixing the state route through downtown. We spend a lot of time and energy trying to figure out what the state’s doing when we ought to be working to solve our community’s problems.”

- **Other Rural Community Challenges.** Many other challenges were mentioned by the rural community leaders interviewed. Those most commonly cited were lingering racial tensions; an inability to afford upfront infrastructure costs when a potential industry is willing to relocate or expand; loss of downtown businesses; changing workforce demographics (e.g., the influx of non-English speaking, Hispanic immigrants); and lack of land use planning and zoning.

Rural Town Hall Meetings

One other element of the Fanning Institute’s work for Co-Op was to conduct a series of town hall meetings. The goal of the town hall meetings was two-fold: (1) talk with local citizens about the issues and challenges facing their communities; and (2) introduce the concepts of community development underlying Co-Op to gain candid feedback from ordinary citizens as to how the state of Georgia should move forward in implementing the new initiative. Town hall meetings were held in each of the 11 rural counties that comprise Region 7, with over 450 citizens attending the meetings.

Using group decision-making techniques, participants attending the town hall meetings were divided into small groups and asked to respond to a series of questions about their community’s assets and challenges, ways to improve their community, and any advice they would have for the implementation of Co-Op in the future (the discussion questions can be found in Appendix E). A synthesis of responses from the town hall meetings revealed the following themes:

Community Strengths

Citizens who attended the Region 7 rural town hall meetings value many things about their communities:

- People
- Rural lifestyle
- Quality of life
- Schools and teachers
- Safe and friendly environment
- Sense of community
- Dedicated and accessible leaders
- Natural resources
- Active churches
- Tradition and history
- Festivals and events
- Proximity to I-20 and Augusta
- Cooperative spirit among citizens

Community Weaknesses

Despite the many strengths of Region 7 rural communities, citizens discussed many community weaknesses as well. In fact, citizens of the region listed some of the strengths as weaknesses:

- Lack of jobs and economic opportunities
- No recreational opportunities for kids and young people
- Limited healthcare availability
- Dilapidated buildings and houses
- No new housing developments
- Lack of leadership
- No public transportation
- Bad roads
- Teen pregnancy
- High school dropout
- Limited retail shopping
- Citizen apathy
- No emergency medical services
- Social and racial divisions
- Low skilled workforce
- Drug use
- Downtown stores have closed
- No or little enforcement of land use plan
- No access to high speed internet

Community Improvement

Based on the strengths and weaknesses discussed above, citizens suggested these ideas for improving their communities:

- Improve test scores and high school dropout rate
- Address racial tensions in community
- Involve more citizens in decision-making
- Enforce land use plan and zoning ordinances
- Provide youth and leadership development training
- Develop the exchanges along I-20
- Get more parents involved in the school system
- Establish mentorship programs with local businesspeople
- Coordinate municipal and county services
- Establish more public-private partnerships
- Four-lane major highways
- Encourage small business development and entrepreneurship
- Increase collaboration between school system and local government
- Expand tourism development throughout community and region
- Beautify roadways into the community
- Expand the industrial park
- Attract high-paying jobs

State Assistance

Town hall meeting attendees were also given the opportunity to share their ideas on how the state of Georgia might assist their communities with implementing the community

improvement ideas suggested. Not surprisingly, increased funding from the state was a common suggestion. Other ideas for the state include:

- Employ less stringent requirements for how the community can spend state dollars
- Recognize rural Georgia needs are much different from the needs of the rest of the state
- Provide incentives for heritage- and agricultural-based tourism development efforts
- Set up state offices in rural Georgia (“take state government to the people”)
- Provide funding for more Cooperative Extension personnel
- Provide incentives for human capital development (as opposed to brick and mortar projects)
- Coordinate state service delivery
- Get rid of the tier system (all Tier 1 counties are not alike)
- Provide infrastructure costs for high speed internet
- Restore education funding to local school systems
- Stop unfunded mandates
- Provide more technical assistance during local government comprehensive planning process
- Allow for more flexibility in public education curriculum
- Provide funding for new school construction
- Raise teacher salaries and provide incentives for teachers to move into rural Georgia
- Provide incentives for community housing developments
- Create state taskforce on drugs
- Increase “soft” skills training in statewide core curriculum

Citizen Feedback for Co-Op

Finally, researchers from Fanning facilitated a discussion about how Co-Op might be implemented statewide. To that end, citizens were asked for their input on what advice they have for administrators moving forward with the initiative. Citizens gave valuable, candid feedback:

- All groups in the community must be represented.
- The state should facilitate public input, openness, and accountability, but the process truly must be locally-driven for effective change to take place.
- Minimize the bureaucracy of establishing a new program (e.g., make it “administratively easier” to apply for the program).
- Ensure accountability by requiring Co-Op plans to be benchmarked.
- Because so much key information was collected during this process, insist on follow-up meetings with the communities in the pilot region (even if they do not want to participate in the Co-Op initiative).
- Tie participation in Co-Op to the incentives and designations of other state programs.
- Target financial and technical assistance to the real issues identified through the Co-Op process.
- Market Co-Op to elected officials through the Georgia Municipal Association and Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

Recommendations

The human, social, and economic realities found in the findings of the Fanning Institute's pilot research, together with the findings of previous research on persistent poverty and economic vitality, clearly show that the well-intentioned efforts of the past have produced marginal results. New approaches to rural community economic development are indeed needed – approaches that involve all segments of community, partner with local leadership, benchmark and measure return on investment, leverage private sector and non-profit resources, and recognize the uniqueness of rural communities.

The Georgia Rural Development Council's Communities of Opportunity Initiative is an earnest step in the right direction. To further assist the GRDC in implementing Co-Op, we offer the following recommendations. These recommendations reflect the findings of the pilot research, and augment previous work of the GRDC, University of Georgia, and Southern Growth Policy Board.

Recommendation #1: Continue to pilot Co-Op in Region 7.

Before a statewide rollout of Co-Op, test implementation of the program in the rural communities of Region 7.

Recommendation #2: Hire a Co-Op Coordinator.

To ensure effective coordination of state service delivery throughout the Region 7 pilot project, DCA should hire a Co-Op Coordinator. Adhering to the Governor's Executive Order directing state agencies to assist DCA with implementation of Co-Op, the primary responsibility of this new hire would be to work one-on-one with community leaders to align the resources of state agencies with specific community improvement strategies.

Recommendation #3: Expand the analysis of state investment policy.

The findings of the policy analysis showed that the state's investment policies have diminishing returns in rural Region 7. Expanding the analysis to all counties in Georgia would test this trend for the state as a whole and allow for comparative analysis across rural-suburban-urban communities.

Recommendation #4: Recognize and partner with private and non-profit organizations, associations, and foundations.

While state agencies are mandated to assist with implementation of the Region 7 pilot, efforts should be made to recognize and partner with the numerous private and non-profit entities working in rural Region 7. These organizations include local community development corporations, faith-based groups, philanthropic organizations, and the state's two local government associations – the Georgia Municipal Association and Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

Recommendation #5: Create a system for gathering and analyzing information.

To further the goal of instituting Co-Op as a new statewide community development philosophy for Georgia, a system should be established for gathering and analyzing information. This system might include examining existing models of community benchmarking such as Family Connection's benchmarking process, and reinstating the GRDC's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The primary roles of the TAC would be to examine the expanded research of state investment policies, investigate rural development best practices of other states for application to Georgia communities, and vetting the strategic "next steps" for Co-Op.

This report represents a call to action.

Research in Region 7 provides a glimpse of some of the distressing challenges facing rural communities in Georgia. Overcoming these challenges requires a systematic state strategy that gives local communities the ability to act, and Co-Op is a good start. The recommendations of the report will only enhance the efforts of **Co-Op**, and ultimately transform all of Georgia's communities into...

COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY.

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Appendix A: Region 7 Profile

REGION 7 PROFILE*	Burke	Columbia	Glascok	Hancock	Jefferson	Jenkins
POPULATION¹						
Total Population, 2000	22,243	89,288	2,556	10,076	17,266	8,575
Percent Change in Population, 1990-2000	8.1%	35.2%	8.4%	13.1%	-0.8%	4.0%
Percent Growth by Net Migration, 1990-2000	3.8%	69.1%	100.0%	69.9%	0.0%	14.0%
Percent African American Population, 2002	50.9%	11.3%	8.2%	77.7%	55.8%	40.3%
Percent Hispanic Population, 2002	1.2%	2.5%	0.5%	0.5%	1.7%	3.6%
Percent Under 5 Yrs. of Age, 2000	8.0%	6.9%	6.8%	5.8%	7.2%	7.1%
Percent Age 5-17, 2000	23.3%	22.7%	17.1%	18.3%	21.2%	21.4%
Percent Age 18-64, 2000	57.9%	62.4%	57.9%	63.9%	58.0%	57.9%
Percent Age 65 and Over, 2000	10.9%	8.0%	18.2%	12.0%	13.7%	13.6%
Median Age, 2000	33.0	35.4	39.6	35.8	34.9	35.4
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT¹						
Per Capita Income: 2002	\$18,300	\$30,345	\$21,005	\$15,310	\$19,503	\$18,598
Transfer Payments as a Percent of Total Personal Income: 2002	28.4%	10.1%	31.4%	39.3%	31.5%	30.2%
Annual Average Unemployment Rate: 2003	10.3%	2.9%	4.9%	7.6%	9.1%	5.3%
Percent of All Persons Below Poverty Level: 1999	28.7%	5.1%	17.2%	29.4%	23.0%	28.4%
Percent of All Whites Below Poverty: 1999	13.8%	4.1%	15.1%	3.8%	11.1%	13.2%
Percent of All African Americans Below Poverty: 1999	42.1%	12.8%	37.7%	35.5%	31.9%	48.7%
Food Stamps Participants per Month as a Percent of Pop.: fy02	17.9%	3.2%	8.0%	16.6%	15.6%	17.3%
Total Yearly Benefits Sum: fy02 (\$000)	\$3,831	\$3,041	\$186	\$1,543	\$2,316	\$1,381
Medicaid Recipients as a Percent of Pop.: 2002	35.9%	10.9%	28.6%	29.6%	37.0%	36.1%
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families as a Percent of Pop.: fy 02	4.0%	0.5%	1.9%	2.9%	3.8%	3.6%
Total Yearly Benefits Sum: fy02 (\$000)	\$995	\$576	\$54	\$319	\$725	\$356
Percent Mobile Homes: 2000	34.5%	13.6%	36.2%	36.0%	27.6%	35.2%
Index Crime Rate per 100,000 population: 2000	6,634.9	2,453.7	1,131.5	1,136.7	2,048.2	1,831.2
Homeownership (percent), 2000 ²	76.0%	82.1%	80.0%	76.4%	72.2%	73.3%
Voter participation (percent), 2004 ²	74.0%	83.0%	82.0%	66.0%	72.0%	75.0%
Average Weekly Wage ³						
Goods Producing	\$530	\$646	**	\$533	\$592	\$477
Service Producing	\$708	\$454	**	\$337	\$415	\$406
Unclassified - industry not assigned	**	\$415	\$0	\$0	**	\$429
Total - Private Sector	\$659	\$510	\$577	\$350	\$509	\$439
Total - Government	\$483	\$607	\$374	\$442	\$499	\$635
All industries	\$617	\$526	\$504	\$406	\$507	\$406
Percent Firms ³						
Goods Producing	20.2%	23.9%	**	12.8%	25.8%	17.5%
Service Producing	70.5%	72.2%	**	69.1%	64.9%	5.4%
Unclassified - industry not assigned	**	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	**	85.5%
Total - Private Sector	90.9%	96.9%	63.4%	81.9%	90.9%	14.5%
Total - Government	9.1%	3.1%	36.6%	18.1%	9.1%	4.2%
All industries	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Percent Employment ³						
Goods Producing	20.8%	24.7%	**	2.4%	41.4%	44.0%
Service Producing	55.3%	59.6%	**	36.5%	36.6%	2.3%
Unclassified - industry not assigned	**	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	**	73.7%
Total - Private Sector	76.2%	84.3%	63.8%	38.8%	78.1%	26.3%
Total - Government	23.8%	15.7%	36.2%	61.2%	21.9%	1.0%
All industries	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
EDUCATION/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT²						
Children absent more than 15 days from school (percent), 2004	7.0%	10.9%	19.3%	4.2%	8.0%	16.5%
Students who graduate from high school on time (percent), 2004	41.6%	73.3%	70.0%	75.4%	63.2%	62.1%
Teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19, percent), 2000	14.3%	7.7%	17.1%	9.4%	12.8%	14.1%
High school graduates eligible for the HOPE scholarship (percent), 2004	36.2%	63.9%	53.6%	51.1%	38.2%	30.5%
Children living in families where no parent is in the labor force (percent), 2000	20.0%	4.9%	8.5%	27.0%	24.4%	16.9%
Adult educational attainment: High school graduate or higher (percent), 2000	64.9%	87.9%	66.1%	62.2%	58.5%	62.0%
Students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals (percent), 2004	79.6%	20.4%	46.0%	83.5%	85.7%	77.3%
HEALTHCARE²						
Healthy Start Index: All three components (percent), 2004 ⁴	66.1%	78.9%	64.7%	56.3%	77.0%	60.8%
Teen pregnancies, ages 15-17 (rate per 1,000), 2004	53.6	22.5	LNE	48.8	39.4	58.5
Teen mothers giving birth to another child before age 20 (ages 15-19, %), 2004	30.0%	8.3%	LNE	LNE	21.2%	30.8%
Babies born to mothers with less than 12 years of education (percent), 2004	30.6%	11.3%	17.6%	25.9%	24.4%	28.6%
Substantiated incidents of child abuse and/or neglect (rate per 1,000), 2004	14.3	13.6	87.6	13.9	28.7	31.8
Total Physicians, 2002 ⁵	16	64	1	5	13	3
Hospital Bed Capacity, 2004 ⁵	40	-	-	-	65	40
INFRASTRUCTURE⁵						
2000 Census Area in Square Miles: Land	830.5	290.0	144.1	473.3	527.7	349.8
2000 Census Area in Square Miles: Water	4.5	17.8	0.3	5.5	1.9	2.6
Highway Mileage; Total Road Mileage	1,062.8	748.8	226.8	588.2	825.6	526.3
Highway Mileage; % Change in Total 1995-2005 ⁶	-0.1%	12.7%	-1.2%	0.7%	0.2%	1.4%
Highway Mileage; Paved Mileage; % of Total	58.9%	86.5%	60.3%	56.2%	65.7%	54.4%
2005 Public General Aviation Airports	1	0	0	0	2	1

Lincoln	McDuffie	Richmond	Taliaferro	Warren	Washington	Wilkes	Rural Region 7	Region 7	Georgia
8,348	21,231	199,775	2,077	6,336	21,176	10,687	130,571	419,634	8,186,453
12.2%	5.5%	5.3%	8.5%	4.2%	10.8%	0.8%	6.4%	10.9%	26.4%
87.9%	3.1%	0.0%	100.0%	65.5%	62.4%	100.0%	36.1%	34.6%	65.9%
33.4%	38.4%	50.5%	61.0%	59.5%	53.9%	43.0%	50.3%	41.3%	28.8%
0.9%	1.6%	2.3%	1.0%	0.9%	0.6%	2.0%	1.7%	2.2%	6.0%
5.4%	7.1%	7.1%	6.3%	6.8%	6.3%	5.8%	6.8%	7.0%	7.3%
19.0%	20.7%	19.7%	17.8%	19.5%	20.6%	18.1%	20.6%	20.6%	19.2%
61.0%	60.2%	62.3%	57.0%	57.6%	60.5%	58.9%	59.2%	61.3%	63.9%
14.6%	11.9%	10.8%	18.9%	16.1%	12.6%	17.1%	13.4%	11.1%	9.6%
39.3	35.2	32.3	40.2	37.8	35.6	39.0	36.9	36.4	33.4
\$21,088	\$24,529	\$23,994	\$18,549	\$19,625	\$23,137	\$21,293	\$20,580	\$24,363	\$28,821
22.8%	21.4%	22.5%	31.6%	32.2%	22.3%	28.6%	27.0%	20.2%	13.3%
9.8%	6.7%	5.4%	7.8%	12.4%	5.5%	8.0%	7.2%	5.4%	4.7%
15.3%	18.4%	19.6%	23.4%	27.0%	22.9%	17.5%	23.1%	17.5%	13.0%
9.6%	8.1%	12.1%	11.2%	10.6%	8.3%	8.3%	10.2%	8.9%	8.2%
26.6%	35.2%	26.3%	32.0%	37.6%	35.8%	29.2%	36.1%	29.2%	23.1%
10.7%	13.7%	14.4%	19.9%	15.8%	14.3%	12.1%	15.0%	12.1%	6.7%
\$790	\$2,688	\$29,754	\$332	\$862	\$2,707	\$1,122	\$17,757	\$50,552	\$578,446
22.9%	33.4%	27.1%	32.1%	34.3%	28.0%	27.0%	32.1%	25.0%	19.9%
1.6%	3.5%	3.9%	3.6%	3.7%	3.3%	2.5%	3.3%	3.0%	1.5%
\$165	\$798	\$8,403	\$90	\$258	\$746	\$326	\$4,832	\$13,811	\$146,264
38.2%	28.1%	9.2%	36.2%	35.2%	29.5%	24.7%	31.5%	17.3%	12.0%
1,707.4	299.5	5,808.6	2,879.8	1,602.7	1,961.5	2,516.6	2,581.0	3,811.1	4,362.8
81.7%	71.3%	58.0%	76.9%	77.0%	74.0%	75.5%	74.7%	68.2%	67.5%
77.0%	75.0%	78.0%	70.0%	73.0%	74.0%	76.0%	73.7%	78.0%	77.0%
\$431	\$577	\$834	\$589	\$578	\$928	\$532	\$577	\$604	\$785
\$350	\$432	\$563	\$267	\$385	\$485	\$425	\$383	\$402	\$732
\$0	**	\$459	\$0	\$0	**	\$0	\$61	\$145	\$767
\$385	\$493	\$615	\$332	\$483	\$632	\$470	\$484	\$496	\$744
\$441	\$532	\$730	\$418	\$482	\$515	\$502	\$484	\$512	\$687
\$404	\$501	\$642	\$384	\$482	\$600	\$478	\$481	\$497	\$734
25.8%	18.5%	13.3%	15.4%	20.0%	16.4%	20.6%	20.2%	17.3%	15.5%
61.0%	72.8%	83.6%	48.7%	61.0%	73.1%	67.1%	65.5%	76.3%	79.0%
0.0%	**	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	**	0.0%	5.5%	2.1%	2.1%
86.8%	91.3%	97.6%	64.1%	81.0%	89.9%	87.7%	86.3%	94.2%	96.6%
13.2%	8.7%	2.4%	35.9%	19.0%	10.1%	12.3%	11.3%	5.1%	3.4%
100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
28.2%	33.3%	14.6%	7.9%	38.6%	24.1%	31.7%	29.8%	19.5%	17.8%
37.0%	46.0%	61.9%	31.4%	37.7%	48.7%	43.4%	42.9%	57.2%	65.4%
0.0%	**	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	**	0.0%	4.8%	1.1%	0.2%
65.3%	79.3%	76.5%	39.3%	76.3%	72.8%	75.1%	72.4%	76.7%	83.4%
34.7%	20.7%	23.5%	60.7%	23.7%	27.2%	24.9%	25.1%	22.8%	16.6%
100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
11.8%	13.6%	11.1%	18.1%	10.3%	9.1%	9.9%	10.2%	10.8%	12.1%
64.4%	56.4%	62.2%	-	83.3%	61.8%	64.1%	-	-	65.4%
12.7%	11.9%	9.5%	20.2%	19.2%	13.2%	13.4%	13.4%	10.3%	13.6%
56.3%	58.1%	57.7%	LNE	39.5%	40.4%	47.0%	-	-	62.0%
10.3%	11.5%	16.5%	19.6%	20.4%	18.9%	11.0%	17.9%	14.2%	10.6%
71.0%	66.7%	78.0%	56.2%	57.1%	68.3%	65.0%	64.4%	75.8%	78.6%
60.4%	62.3%	65.0%	94.1%	84.7%	68.7%	61.6%	72.9%	56.1%	46.4%
61.1%	65.6%	69.5%	71.4%	70.3%	73.2%	66.1%	67.6%	71.0%	70.9%
39.6	51.8	62.1	166.7	55.2	24.6	51.6	-	-	39.4
LNE	21.4%	17.8%	LNE	41.7%	21.2%	20.8%	-	-	21.6%
23.3%	31.2%	24.9%	33.3%	27.0%	23.9%	27.4%	27.5%	22.8%	23.8%
25.6	31.6	22.2	39.5	68.1	25.7	24.6	27.6	21.7	23.1
3	22	1,173	1	5	21	9	99	1,336	16,483
-	47	1,823	-	-	56	25	273	2,096	23,813
211.1	259.8	324.0	195.4	285.5	680.3	471.1	4,428.6	5,042.6	57,906.1
46.2	6.5	4.4	0.1	1.2	4.0	2.6	75.4	97.6	1,518.6
346.3	496.3	1,104.3	234.8	431.0	953.3	565.1	6,256.4	8,109.5	115,408.6
0.2%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	-2.1%	-0.9%	-0.1%	-0.4%	1.0%	3.8%
67.8%	78.2%	97.0%	56.2%	60.6%	57.0%	66.6%	61.6%	68.8%	74.6%
0	1	2	0	0	1	1	7	9	106

⁴Healthy Start Index includes babies born weighing 2500 grams or more, babies born to mothers who received prenatal care in the first trimester, and babies born to mothers who did not smoke or drink alcohol during pregnancy.

⁵2005-2006 Georgia County Guide. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

⁶"400 Series Reports," 441-2004 and 445-2004. Georgia Department of Transportation, Office of Transportation Data.

Appendix B and Appendix C

Appendix B: Policy Analysis Findings

The full report, “Communities of Opportunity: Estimated Impacts of Awards to Counties for Georgia’s Region 7, 1985-2004”, by Angela R. Fertig and Jason S. Seligman, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, The University of Georgia, 2007, can be found at:

<http://www.fanning.uga.edu/communitiesofopportunityreport/policyanalysis/>

Appendix C: “A Community Development Survey: Georgia Service Delivery Region Seven” (Executive Summary)

In order to determine perceptions and attitudes of citizens residing in Georgia Service Delivery Region Seven, the University of Georgia’s Fanning Institute commissioned a community development survey to be conducted within the more rural counties in this region. This community development survey was conducted by the Applied Research Division of The University of Georgia’s Small Business Development Center. This report, A Community Development Survey: Georgia Service Delivery Region Seven, presents the survey findings.

The focus of this study was resident opinions and perceptions toward community development within more rural areas of Region Seven. For this reason, Richmond and Columbia Counties were excluded during the execution of the survey as it was determined that these counties represented a more urban or suburban nature.

The following is a summary of responses and key findings from the community development survey of residents within Georgia Service Delivery Region Seven:

- Over 88 percent of respondents (88.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My community is a good place to live.”
- Almost 80 percent (79.5%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am proud of my community.”
- Nearly 74 percent of respondents (73.8%) consider their community to be rural. Twelve percent consider their community to be suburban, and over 8 percent (8.5%) said their community was urban.
- Over half of respondents (50.4%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “My community is a good place to earn a living.” This is greater than the 41.6 percent of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed.
- When asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “My community is economically competitive and has a bright future,” over 47 percent of respondents (47.6%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Over 44 percent (44.4%) either agreed or strongly agreed.
- When asked to identify community problems or issues, 81 percent of respondents cited a lack of good paying jobs. Other issues cited by a large percentage of respondents include a lack of constructive activities for young people, and out-migration of young people who do not return.
- Over 90 percent of respondents (90.6%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My community could benefit from community improvement programs, such as job recruitment programs, after school programs, downtown development programs, and recreational programs.”
- Nearly 63 percent (62.8%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am satisfied with the performance of local schools.” Over one quarter of respondents (25.7%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- When asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “I am satisfied with my community leaders’ efforts to support existing businesses and industries in my community,” well over half of respondents (55.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed. Over 35 percent (35.2%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Over 51 percent of respondents (51.1%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am satisfied with my community leaders’ efforts to attract new businesses and industries to my community.” Nearly 40 percent (39.9%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Nearly 64 percent of respondents (63.8%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that younger residents would like to stay in their communities upon completing their education. Almost 27 percent (26.9%) either agreed or strongly agreed.
- Well over half of respondents (54.3%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Younger residents are able to stay in our community after completing their education.” Over 36 percent (36.4%) either agreed or strongly agreed.
- When asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “My community is dependent upon Augusta-Richmond County for many things, such as places to eat, shop, and work,” over 81 percent (80.8%) either agreed or strongly disagreed. Nearly 16 percent (15.9%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Nearly 56 percent (55.9%) of respondents ranked their community leaders’ ability to handle problems as either good or very good. Over 33 percent (33.2%) ranked their leaders’ ability in this regard as either poor or very poor.
- Over 57 percent of respondents (57.6%) ranked their community leaders’ ability to communicate with each other as either good or very good. Over 29 percent (29.6%) said their leaders’ ability to communicate with one another was either poor or very poor.
- Community leaders’ ability to communicate with citizens was ranked as either good or very good by 52.1 percent of respondents, while 30.9 percent ranked it as either poor or very poor.
- The effectiveness of state programs assisting community development efforts was ranked as either good or very good by 49.1 percent of respondents. Similar local programs were ranked as either good or very good by 52.8 percent. The effectiveness of University System of Georgia programs was ranked as either good or very good by 57.1 percent of respondents.
- Over 47 percent (47.4%) percent, expected either high or very high involvement of local government and state government in economic development efforts. Just over 36 percent (36.2%) expected the federal government to be either highly or very highly involved with such efforts.

These findings suggest that while the vast majority of Region Seven residents are proud of their respective communities and consider them to be good places to live, there is some concern among a significant number of residents about their ability to earn a living in these communities. As a result, a significant number of residents feel that their communities are not economically competitive. This helps to explain why an overwhelmingly majority of residents feel that their communities could benefit from different types of community development programs. Furthermore, there is a clear indication that a high level of government involvement, particularly at the local and state levels, is expected in economic development efforts.

The findings also point to fears about young people in Region Seven communities. A majority of residents believe that young people are neither able nor would like to stay in their communities upon completing their education. This suggests concern about the future availability of jobs in the region, as well as a lack of entertainment options for younger people. This is confirmed by the overwhelming number of residents who feel that their community is dependent upon Augusta-Richmond County for places to eat, shop, and work.

The telephone survey report can be found in its entirety at:

<http://www.fanning.uga.edu/communitiesofopportunityreport/AppendixC/telephonesurveyresults/>

Appendix D

Appendix D: Individual Interviews with Community Leaders: Questionnaire

- Q1. Do you feel that your community is a good place to live? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Q2. Do you feel that your community is a good place to earn a living? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Q3. Do you believe your community has a bright economic future? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Q4. Are you satisfied with your community's efforts to keep and attract industry and businesses in and to the community? Please elaborate.
- Q5. As a leader in your community, you must be proud of the community in some sense. What are some of the sources of that pride?
- Q6. Tell me a little bit about the educational systems in your community. What are some strengths? What are some weaknesses?
- Q7. Sticking with the young people theme, do you believe younger residents would like to stay in Region 7 after completing their education? If not, why not?
- Q8. Let's talk a little bit about Richmond and Columbia Counties and some of the other areas in the region. What are the relationships among leaders like? How about among residents? Do you think other communities are somewhat dependent upon those other places, or is it the other way around?
- Q9. What do you think citizens of this region value most about their communities?
- Q10. What are two or three of the most pressing problems or issues that you think citizens see as needing to be addressed in their communities?
- Q11. In your opinion (not what you think citizens believe), what are the three most critical issues this region will have to address to promote its long-term economic viability?
- Q12. Based on your response to the previous question, what strategies or initiatives do you recommend for dealing with those three most critical issues?
- Q13. Would you say that community leaders such as the Mayors and city councils, county commissioners, school board and superintendents, development staff, preachers, etc. communicate effectively with one another? If not, why not?
- Q14. Turning to the state of Georgia, what would you say about the effectiveness of state programs or policies such as the CDBG program, One Georgia, tax credits, etc. in assisting the region's development efforts? In your view, what are some of the positive and negative aspects of such programs? Feel free to give general comments, or to comment on specific programs.
- Q15. What would you say about the effectiveness of programs or policies of the University System such as programs run by the University of Georgia or Georgia Tech in assisting the region's development efforts?
- Q16. Philosophically speaking, how involved do you expect the State to be in local and regional development efforts?
- Q17. If you could do one thing to improve Region 7's competitiveness for the future, what would it be?
- Q18. And finally, if the Governor were here today, what would you tell him the state should do to help improve the region's competitiveness for the future?

A comprehensive listing of responses to the questionnaire can be found at:

<http://www.fanning.uga.edu/communitiesofopportunityreport/AppendixD/individualinterviewresponses/>

Appendix E: Town Hall Meeting Discussion Questions

- Q1. *What do you value most about your community?*
- Q2. *What do you consider to be your community's weaknesses?*
- Q3. *What three things would you change about your community?*
- Q4. *If the Governor and/or DCA Commissioner were here tonight, what would you tell them they could do to help you make the changes above?*
- Q5. *Based on what you've heard about the Communities of Opportunity Initiative, what advice do you have for its future implementation?*

Comprehensive town hall meeting results can be found at:

<http://www.fanning.uga.edu/communitiesofopportunityreport/AppendixE/townhallmeetingresults/>

ⁱSee the State of Rural Georgia report.

ⁱⁱUsing 1978-80 data for the 1980 index and 2002-04 data for the 2004 index, three-year moving averages for poverty rates, per capita income, population growth/decline, average weekly wage rates, workforce participation rates, and unemployment rates for each of Georgia's 159 counties are indexed against like data for seven southeastern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) to get the classifications.

ⁱⁱⁱSee the *State of Rural Georgians*, *Workforce Housing in Georgia*, *Healthcare Services for Rural Georgians*, *State of Rural Technology in Georgia*, and *Rural Health in Georgia* reports.

^{iv}See *The Southern Black Belt* report and Southern Growth Policy Board's *The Mercedes and Magnolia: Preparing the Southern Workforce for the Next Economy*, *Human Capital Strategies for the Next Economy: Best Practices from the South*, and *The New Architecture of Rural Prosperity* reports.

^vThe report can be found at <http://www.poverty.uga.edu/spps.php>. Two publications resulted from the Study on Persistent Poverty in the South: (1) *It's a Matter of Wealth: Dismantling Persistent Poverty in the Southeastern United States*; and (2) *Dismantling Persistent Poverty in Georgia: Breaking the Cycle*.

^{vi}Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

^{vii}Counties were defined as "persistent poverty" counties if they had poverty rates in the nation's top two quartiles of poverty during 2000 and during 1980 and/or 1990; and they were not part of the regions served by the Appalachian Regional Commission or the Delta Regional Authority.

^{viii}See the Southern Growth Policy Board's *The Mercedes and Magnolia: Preparing the Southern Workforce for the Next Economy*, *Human Capital Strategies for the Next Economy: Best Practices from the South*, and *The New Architecture of Rural Prosperity* reports.

^{ix}See the Southern Growth Policy Board's *The Mercedes and Magnolia: Preparing the Southern Workforce for the Next Economy*.

^xSee *It's a Matter of Wealth: Dismantling Persistent Poverty in the Southeastern United States*.

^{xi}See <http://www.dca.state.ga.us> for more information about the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

^{xii}See <http://outreach.uga.edu/> for more information about the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach at the University of Georgia.

^{xiii}The group included representatives from several statewide and regional organizations to include DCA, the Department of Economic Development, the Georgia Municipal Association, Association County Commissioners of Georgia, Family Connections, the Department of Education, Georgia Economic Developers Association, and the University of Georgia.

^{xiv}Chaired by Governor Sonny Perdue, the GRDC serves as a clearinghouse for ideas, policies, and programs that impact rural Georgia. The GRDC's mission is to advocate for rural Georgia, champion new development opportunities, and partner with public and private initiatives to strengthen rural communities. The GRDC is administratively attached to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), is staffed by DCA personnel, and the DCA Commissioner Mike Beatty is a voting Council member. See <http://www.ruralgeorgia.org> for more information about the Georgia Rural Development Council.

^{xv}See <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/communities/regionalism/programs/downloads/031207Gov%27sOfficeExecutiveOrder.pdf> for the Governor's Executive Order authorizing Co-Op

^{xvi}State Service Delivery Region 7 is comprised of 13 counties: Burke, Columbia, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lincoln, McDuffie, Richmond, Taliaferro, Warren, Washington, and Wilkes. Columbia and Richmond Counties are considered urban/suburban counties with the remaining 11 counties considered rural. Consequently, the counties comprising state Service Delivery Region 7 are also the counties served by the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) Regional Development Center.

^{xvii}In addition to Population, the indicators of community economic development, education/workforce development, healthcare, and infrastructure represent the four working committees of the Georgia Rural Development Council.

^{xviii}Rural Region 7 is defined as 11 rural counties outside of Augusta-Richmond and Columbia Counties. The 11 rural counties include Burke, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lincoln, McDuffie, Taliaferro, Warren, Washington, and Wilkes Counties.

^{xix}The 2006 federal poverty threshold for a family of four (two adults, two children) is \$20,444.

^{xx}Examples of the programs analyzed include the Community Development Block Grant, OneGeorgia, Section 8 Rental Assistance, Local Assistance Grants, Bond Allocations, State Housing Trust Fund, and Governor's Emergency Fund.

^{xxi}See http://www.sbdc.uga.edu/newsite/index.aspx?page_name=index for more information about the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center.

^{xxii}See the 2007 Georgia County Guide, Labor Commuting data.

General Information & Contacts

The University of Georgia's Fanning Institute provides outreach and promotes partnerships for the betterment of community and society. Working in the common ground of community, economic, and leadership development, faculty and staff use the knowledge and experience gained from working within these traditional fields to provide rich and customized approaches to addressing the complex problems facing communities and society. For more information, please visit Fanning's website at www.fanning.uga.edu.

To learn more about the *Communities of Opportunity Research Report*, contact **Matt Bishop** at (706) 542-6201, or mlbishop@uga.edu.

The *Communities of Opportunity Research Report* can be found in its entirety at: <http://www.fanning.uga.edu/communitiesofopportunityreport/>

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