

## Ohio

Business and Cooperative Services | Rural Cooperative Development Grant

### Partnership Helps Rural Cooperatives Thrive in Appalachian Ohio



The OSU South Centers in Piketon, Ohio. Photo courtesy of OSU South Centers.

The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) Center for Cooperatives, based at the OSU South Centers in Piketon, Ohio, helps enhance quality of life by integrating teaching, research, and extension to support cooperatives with technical assistance and education programs.

“We help co-ops through technical assistance that supports best

practices in many forms – legal, financial, business – that are all designed to explore opportunities and help existing co-ops, or those interested in creating one succeed,” said Hannah Scott, Program Director of the CFAES Center for Cooperatives at OSU South Centers.

Since 2001 the Center has been able to achieve this goal by partnering with USDA Rural Development through the [Rural Cooperative Development Grant \(RCDG\)](#) program which provides funding to help grow economies in rural areas by assisting individuals and businesses start, expand, or improve cooperatives and other mutually owned businesses.

“The grant served as a base to get us started and it was an important part of our funding portfolio that allowed us to pursue other funding opportunities, including endowed funds provided by the legacy cooperatives in Ohio and a management services agreement with the Mid America Cooperative Council, a non-profit trade association of cooperatives and allied organizations” said Thomas Worley, Ph.D., Director of the OSU South Centers.

Funding has helped cooperative businesses with feasibility studies, analysis and planning, and technical assistance to build business capacity. It has also helped with continuing education and technical assistance for cooperative agriculture and food system development, helped small businesses in the forest and wood products industry explore the cooperative model, and identified ways to enhance rural connectivity.

“We have been able to move into training and education, expanding training to new employees working for co-ops and ‘director development’ helping us to develop leaders for co-ops,” said Hannah. “The RCDG provided the opportunity for helping out more people in the community.”

Assistance from the Center comes in myriad ways. Since 2018, it has worked with nearly 120 projects, helping explore a new business enterprise or develop an existing one - leading to creation of 12 new businesses.

Since 2019, its “Foodpreneur School” program has engaged nearly 170 food and farm entrepreneurs ready to grow their businesses through increased sales and marketing or to learn about issues with local food processing.

Also, since 2019, the Center has hosted 24 learning sessions through its Appalachia Cooperatives Initiative, a learning network of cooperative, community, business, and economic developers that has connected 500 people with resources or information about the cooperative model and applications in Central Appalachia.

And recently, the Center co-hosted the 2024 Cooperative Law Conference to develop a community of practice and resources to support attorneys engaged in cooperative work.

“We have the ability to see the landscape of resources available and provide them with those resources,” said Hannah. “This is important for some clients who don’t have lots of resources, so we provided them with the means to get assistance.”

In total, since late 2018 the Center has trained and educated nearly 2,200 individuals around the cooperative model and rural business topics – helping with understanding business planning and development, director training, and more.

“A lot of people we work with under the RCDG cannot afford professional services so it has let us say, ‘we can help you,’ and that’s what we are here to do in helping groups make informed decisions,” said Hannah.

Obligations: \$199,963 / \$199,925 / \$199,974

Obligation Date: September 22, 2017 / September 23, 2019 / September 26, 2022

Congressional: U.S. Rep. Brad Wenstrup (OH-02); U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown and J.D. Vance

Impact: Building and supporting cooperatives in Appalachian Ohio.



The CFAES Center for Cooperatives and Small Business Development Center at the OSU South Centers co-presents a training series in Gallia Co., Ohio. Photo Courtesy of OSU South Centers.