

**COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
ACTIVISTS, AGENTS, AND ACADEMICS IN ALABAMA**
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INTRODUCTION

Alabama is endowed with a diversity of renewable and non-renewable natural resources. These resources have played a critically important role in the state's social and economic history and will continue to do so into the next century. The state's wealth of natural resources contrasts starkly with the poverty of large numbers of its citizens. Research conducted under a previous NRI project has documented that nowhere in the United States is the connection between natural resource dependency and poverty more clearly demonstrated than in Alabama (Bailey et al. 1996; Bliss et al. 1994a; Howze et al. 1994). Historically, natural resources (e.g., coal, timber, ground water and surface water, farm land, and fisheries) have been exploited with little regard to long-term consequences. At the close of the 20th Century, this extractive mind-set has been largely replaced by a narrow commodity production mind-set within both resource-based industries and related public institutions. A sustainable, resource-based rural development strategy has yet to be articulated for the state.

Alabama's citizens are neither ignorant nor apathetic toward their environmental and social circumstances. In recent years, citizens have begun to organize themselves into non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address environmental and social issues of local concern. Most existing, NGOs have environmental, objectives, while others work in the social justice arena. Few explicitly pursue, sustainable development goals which span both areas. The objectives of this proposed project are to document the phenomenon of increased citizen activism, to identify resources within the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) which could improve NGO effectiveness, and facilitate development of collaborative mechanisms between NGOs and ACES to promote sustainable development in Alabama.

In recent years researchers and development practitioners alike have come to realize the interconnectedness of natural environments and human well-being, (Kusel and Fortmann 1991; Rural Sociological Society Task Force 1993). Natural resource policy and rural development policy need to be linked if either are to provide a basis for sustainable development. The growth in numbers and activism of citizen groups in the United States, including in Alabama, is indicative of dissatisfaction with the pace and focus of public institutions charged with responding to these problems. As a Land Grant university, Auburn University has a clear responsibility to meet the needs of Alabama's citizens for sustainable development. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System, comprising the former Extension Services of Auburn University and Alabama A&M University, has a key role to play in shaping policies for sustainable development. The Extension System in Alabama, like counterparts in other states, is going through a crisis of identity as resources are shifted away from agricultural production and towards broader social mandates, including sustainable development. This project will contribute to this process. We see in this proposed project opportunities to accelerate the pace at which positive change occurs in Alabama by strengthening the capacity of citizen groups and the university community, including the Extension System, to jointly identify and work to resolve problems.

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The proposed project is organized around three objectives:

1) Document how citizen organizations mobilize, interact, and affect public policies dealing with sustainable development issues in Alabama and Oregon.

Approach: Compile inventory and profile of existing citizen organizations in Alabama.

2) Evaluate experience, opportunities, and constraints within Cooperative Extension at the county, state, and national level for promoting sustainable development. Emphasis on socially-sustainable forest-based development in Alabama and Oregon.

Approach: Document and critique USDA CREES programming in sustainable development; Develop comparative case studies of the sustainable development programs of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the Oregon State University Extension Service. Methods include literature review, analysis of official reports, key informant interviews with Extension administrators, county agents, and NGO representatives. Seek additional funding to conduct nation-wide, web-based survey of sustainable development activities by other state extension systems.

3) Develop and assess institutional mechanisms for fostering collaborative partnerships between citizen groups and extension systems to promote sustainable development. Elevate discussion of sustainability within the extension community.

Approach: Workshops and cross-state visits involving educators and NGO representatives from Alabama and Oregon.

Objective One will result in development of a directory and profile of citizen groups which focus their activities on issues pertaining to natural resources and social justice. A number of such groups already have been identified based on previous research on timber dependency (Bliss et al. 1993, Howze et al. 1994, Walkingstick 1996) and

hazardous and solid waste issues in Alabama (Alley et al. 1995; Bailey et al. 1994; Bailey et al. 1993), but no comprehensive directory exists. Such a directory would encourage cooperation and collaboration between NGOS, ACES agents, state agencies, and others with interests in natural resource management and sustainable development. This directory will be maintained as a Web site and will be updated regularly.

Research under Objective One also will yield important information on the extent to which citizen organizations have drawn connections between the condition of the natural environment and social conditions in rural Alabama. Preliminary findings based on previous research indicate that such connections are well understood by NGO leaders. For example, the Bankhead Monitor, a group which has been critical of the U.S. Forest Service's management of the Bankhead National Forest, expresses concern not only over replanting single species after multi-species stands have been logged, but also at policies which make it impossible for small-scale logging operations to compete with well-capitalized outsiders during timber sales. Similar connections between environmental quality and social conditions have become a common referent among activists in the environmental justice movement in Alabama (Bailey, Faupel, and Alley 1994; Bailey, Faupel, and Gundlach 1993).

Objective Two entails an assessment of potential within the Alabama Cooperative Extension System for contributing to sustainable rural development of Alabama, and for effective collaboration with citizen groups. This will involve identification of past, existing, and planned collaborative mechanisms, partnerships, and projects. This also will involve identification of key opportunity points for collaboration, including timely issues, advisory board opportunities, current projects, and key individuals. Attention also will be paid to identification of limiting factors, constraints, and impediments to collaboration.

Objective Three of this proposal builds upon the research base created in Objectives One and Two to explore the potential for development of new institutional arrangements between active players in the natural resource and sustainable rural development policy arenas. We will use the directory and profile of citizen groups developed under Objective One to identify groups which will be invited to participate in Objectives Two and Three. The goal is to identify and help establish institutionalized linkages between citizen groups, University and Extension System units, and other appropriate state agencies.

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PREVIOUS WORK

The literatures on natural resource management, sustainable development, and community well-being are enormous. In this section we address each of these topics separately. We close the section with a brief review of the participatory research literature, an approach which is relevant to our methods and purpose.

Natural Resource Management Management of natural resources so that they will continue to be available to future generations is a basic element in sustainable development. Social and biological scientists alike have come to recognize that participatory strategies actively involving stakeholders are most likely to succeed in management of natural resource systems (Berkes 1989; Larkin 1978). Common property management systems (McCay and Acheson 1983), in which a community or user group

has exclusive and enforceable property rights over a resource, are one approach to citizen involvement. Co-management systems (Pinkerton 1989), represent an alternative where a community or user group and a government agency jointly manage the resource. Despite increased attention among researchers to such alternatives, most natural resource systems in Alabama and the United States are managed in a bureaucratic mode where decisions are made within specialized government agencies (West 1982, 1994). The public hearing process, which frequently appears to irritate rather than inspire public confidence, has been the primary mechanism for soliciting public input (Szasz 1994).

Problems associated with this bureaucratic process in Alabama as it relates to solid and hazardous waste management have been the subject of a project funded by the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station and have led to several publications (Bailey, Faupel, and Holland 1992; Bailey et al. 1995a; Solheim, Faupel, and Bailey, in review). Research from this project identified approximately 50 grassroots environmental groups, most of which emerged in response to proposed solid waste landfills in their communities (Bailey et al. 1993). Most of these groups were short-lived and simply disappeared once the immediate threat was gone, a common fate among such grassroots organizations (Gottlieb 1993). Some groups, however, have continued in existence, shifting their focus to other issues. Alabamians for a Clean Environment (ACE), for example, a group formed to fight the nation's largest hazardous waste landfill near Emelle, Alabama, has disbanded (Alley et al. 1995). Leaders of ACE have formed two successor organizations, one focusing on development of women as leaders of environmental groups, and the other on regional development in a multi-county area of west-central Alabama and east-central Mississippi. In another case, a group that successfully fought a regional landfill turned its attention to questions of forest management policy.

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Sustainable development The contemporary paradigms of sustainable development and ecosystem management explicitly link environmental and social concerns. Thus, even though most NGOs of interest in Alabama do not operate under the banner of sustainable development, the combination of environmental and social justice concerns that motivate them are fully consistent with the meaning of this concept.

The sustainable development model has its roots in the search for effective rural development strategies, particularly in the Developing World. Perhaps the most widely used definition of sustainable development is that of the Brundtland Commission: "to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). In this tradition, human welfare is the primary objective, but protection and improvement of environmental quality is seen as an indispensable corollary. Simply put, the quality of life for humans is viewed as expressly dependent upon the quality of the environment: the two are linked. The concept of sustainability has generated a literature of its own among development and environmental scholars, resulting in the need for a typology of sustainabilities (Gale and Cordray 1994). That the concept, however defined, has political currency, is evidenced by the appointment of a President's Council on Sustainable Development. Its report addresses the linkages between environment and development expressly in a statement of beliefs: "Economic growth, environmental

protection, and social equity are linked. We need to develop integrated policies to achieve these national goals" (President's Council on Sustainable Development 1996, p. vi.).

Ecologists and natural resource managers in the United States, starting from an environmental protection objective, have reached a similar conclusion about the critical ways in which ecosystems and social systems are linked. Recognizing the critical role of social factors in ecological processes, particularly endangerment and degradation, ecologists are looking to social scientists to help explain these factors (Christensen et al. 1996, Yaffee 1996). The principle U.S. land management agencies have adopted ecosystem management as their operating philosophy, and invested heavily in developing practical management strategies which reflect linkages between ecosystems and social systems (USDA Forest Service 1996). Pronouncements regarding these important linkages far outnumber theoretical developments in the field, leaving it ripe for theoretical as well as practical contribution.

Citizens outside academia intuitively recognize ways in which environmental and social well-being are connected, a recognition noted by public opinion surveys throughout the United States (Dunlap and Mertig 1992). Longitudinal data covering the period 1970 - 1990 document the breadth and depth of environmental concern among the American public, a concern shared by most Alabamians (Bliss et al. 1994b). Results from a 1992 study of public opinion in Alabama and six neighboring Mid-South states demonstrate that most citizens in the region want environmental protection as well as economic growth, and believe they can have both (Bliss et al. 1997, 1994b). Despite identifying themselves "conservative" on most issues, the majority of these citizens support increased measures to protect environmental quality, even at some cost in economic growth or curtailment of the rights of private property owners (*ibid.*). Public opinion research in the region on the issue of ecosystem management suggests that support for the fundamental principles of the paradigm is widespread (Brunson et al. 1996). Although most citizens do not belong to activist NGOS, there appears to be widespread support for many of the environmental concerns voiced by such groups.

For purposes of Objective One, citizen organizations that mobilize around environmental, social, or sustainable development issues will be analyzed as components of a larger social movement. Resource mobilization theory is the most commonly applied framework for studying social movement organizations (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Mooney and Majka 1995; Szasz -1994; Zald and McCarthy 1987; Klanderman 1991; Jenkins 1983; Beuchler 1993). Rather than focusing primarily on the specific issue of concern and actions taken by the group, this approach leads the investigator to focus on how such groups mobilize and maintain memberships, finances, media contacts, and other resources necessary for their continued existence. The nature of the concern, how this concern is articulated, and whether the group is effective in pursuit of its goals are important to the group's ability to retain supporters and other resources. The focus on mobilization and retention of resources draws attention to questions of organizational adaptability and survival. As new members join or supplant old members and as conditions evolve affecting the issue that led to group formation, changes in strategy, leadership and even focal issue may occur.

Theories of bureaucratic power reviewed by West (1994) provide a framework for Objectives Two and Three, analysis of ACES' role in promoting sustainable development

in collaboration with NGOs. ACES' organizational culture is changing slowly, though not without resistance both from within and outside the organization. Until recently, ACES and its key constituency groups (i.e., commodity-based producer organizations) shared a common ideology and set of interests centered around production agriculture. West terms such mutually supportive relationships between bureaucracy and clientele group "cooperative domination." Such domination has served to focus ACES resources on the needs of large farmers and agribusiness firms. Over the past ten years, ACES has adopted a broader mandate and, increasingly, resources are being shifted to meet new needs, threatening the traditional pattern of cooperative domination. An important outcome of the proposed project would be to promote a process already underway that would provide ACES a broader and more pluralistic clientele base. Because they are organized, these new constituencies will be in a position to exert pressure on ACES to address their needs, providing a counterweight to the long-time domination of a handful of commodity organizations.

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Community Well-being The topic of community well-being associated with natural resource communities has received increased attention in recent years (Kusel 1995; Kusel and Fortmann 1991; Luloff and Nord n.d.; Overdeest 1992; Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Rural Poverty 1993). Supported by a previous NRI award, the authors of this proposed project explored community well-being in the forest dependent counties of rural Alabama (Bliss et al. 1993). Using a diverse set of methodologies, the researchers sought to understand the social consequences of the state's heavy economic dependence upon forest-based industrialization. Bliss and Walkingstick (1994) identified differing patterns of dependency based upon land use history, type of forest products manufacturing, and social structure. Joshi and Bliss (1996) documented the impacts of industrial recruitment policies in the forest products sector on investments in human capital development. Bailey et al. (1996) applied segmented labor market theory to the pulp and paper sector of Alabama's economy. Bailey et al. (1993) and Howze et al. (1994) contributed to building theory on natural resource dependency. Current research initiatives growing out of this intensive analysis of timber dependence include an analysis of changing forest tenure patterns and their affect on rural life (Bliss et al. 1996), and analyses of race and gender in Alabama's forest products industry (Perez et al. 1995; Hutchens 1996).

Participatory Research The proposed project will make use of participatory research techniques to strengthen the relevance of the project to the needs of Alabama's citizens. Participatory research, also known as participatory action research, is a form of collaborative research in which stake holders themselves participate (Fear et al. 1985; Lichty and Kimball 1985). Historically, participatory research has aimed to empower people, through acquisition and generation of knowledge, to effect social change (Park et. al 1993). Like participant observation (Salmen 1987) it aims to minimize the distance, and distinctions between researcher and research subject. Perhaps the best-known example of participatory research in North America is that of the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, in which local citizens collected and analyzed land ownership records in order to identify economic and political power structures influencing their lives (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 1983). We anticipate and will encourage active participation by NGO members and ACES employees throughout the proposed project, especially in planning for the statewide conference and any subsequent

activities it might initiate.

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RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Alabama's economy is closely linked to the state's natural resource base, and this is especially so in rural areas of the state. If the state's serious problems of rural underdevelopment are to be addressed, these resources need to be managed in a way that benefits rural communities and regions. Resource use patterns which focus on extraction or utilization of a single use may not provide as broad or stable a base for rural development as patterns which allow for multiple uses of available land and water resources. Examples of dominant single use of the state's natural resources include offshore gas development affecting recreational fishers and coastal tourism, hydroelectric development along the state's river systems, and extensive conversion of mixed pine -- hardwood ecosystems to plantations -- of genetically improved loblolly pine. Similarly, continuing to pursue a narrow commodity production orientation in Extension programming will not result in the sustainable development of the state or the desired improvements in quality of life for Alabama's rural poor.

A wide range of citizen organizations has emerged over the past decade in Alabama that have focused on what today we call ecosystem management. Many of these groups are organized around the protection of river systems, lakes or estuaries, though groups focusing on species diversity and multiple use of public forest lands as well as broader questions of environmental quality also play important roles in fostering public debate. These nongovernmental citizen organizations represent a challenge to state agencies and industry associations which historically have worked together closely to promote economic growth. The introduction of new actors representing a broader range of public concerns could affect natural resource policy through administrative and political processes. The ability of these citizen organizations to be effective in influencing policy will be determined by how effective they are in mobilizing such key resources as organizational memberships, financial support, and technical abilities.

The proposed research will focus on the role of citizen organizations in establishing policies related to sustainable development. Special attention will be devoted to aquatic resources and forest ecosystems, the two arenas that have attracted the most organizational activity by citizen groups. Most groups working on water resource issues have been formed in response to what are perceived to be real threats to the quality of life of members who live on or near the river, lake, or estuary of immediate concern. The origins of such threats include diversion of water to meet urban demands, industrial pollution, and large-scale clear cutting of forests. A recently completed masters thesis directed by one of this proposal's authors (Bailey) examined factors leading to group stability within the Water Watch Program (Drake 1996). Among the key factors contributing to success was prior organizational activity focusing on environmental issues by group members.

The second major category of citizen organizations includes those that are motivated by concern for forest ecosystems. Like their water resource activist counterparts, members of these NGOs organize around perceived threats to their neighborhoods, favored recreational areas, or landscapes. The Bankhead Monitor, a prominent environmental organization in the state, focuses primarily on management of the Bankhead National

Forest. Other NGOs are concerned about impacts of industrial forestry practices such as clear cutting, aerial spraying of herbicides, and conversion of natural forest types to pine plantations. Given that Alabama's forest industry is the largest manufacturing sector in the state's economy, and that two-thirds of Alabama is forested, growth of these forest-based NGOs is to be expected. The forest products industry is particularly important in rural areas in the southern half of the state where both the pulp and paper sector of the industry and the worst problems of rural poverty are concentrated. Social and economic issues associated with timber dependency in Alabama -have been the focus of a recently concluded research effort funded by the NRICGP (see "Previous Work"). The proposed project will build on knowledge gained from that project.

We appear to be entering an era of increased citizen participation in all aspects of natural resource management. Many federal agencies have held public fora to facilitate communication between agency leaders and constituencies. The EPA, for example, recently promulgated changes in the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act which will provide for expanded public participation. These changes are being incorporated into Alabama's regulatory system after public hearings scheduled for early in 1997. In the forestry arena, the Seventh American Forest Congress held in Washington D.C. Spring, 1996, contrasted with Congresses by being far more representative of the broad array of citizen, community, and tribal groups currently active on forestry issues across the country. Among the Congress' recommendations were mechanisms for increased participation by communities of place in natural resource management, and effective social science methodologies to evaluate public needs and perceptions. Alabama was one of many states which hosted pre- and post-Congress Roundtables. These are indications that the time is right to design workable institutional arrangements to expand public participation in the sustainable development policy process.

Our rationale for focusing on the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in process derives in part from the agency's strategic plan, in which it identifies a mix of natural resource and economic development objectives (Alabama Cooperative Extension System 1987). The plan identifies its top priorities as 1) regaining agricultural and forestry profitability, 2) developing, conserving, and managing natural resources, 3) enhancing family and individual well-being, 4) developing human resources, and 5) revitalizing rural Alabama. These can logically be interpreted as components of sustainable development. Secondly, as ACES is the primary institutional vehicle through which the citizens of Alabama are able to gain access to the resources of the state's land grant university system, it is the logical link between sustainable development NGOs and the university community. We believe that by strengthening this link, the proposed project will strengthen the capabilities of both partners, and make a substantial contribution to the sustainable development of the state.

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RESEARCH METHODS

The proposed project is organized around three objectives, each with a set of related research questions and associated methodologies. Because of the diverse nature of our subject populations, and the combination of basic research, facilitation, and active creation of collaborative mechanisms, the project will require application of a diverse set of social science methodologies. We will utilize the strategy of triangulation — the application of multiple data sets and types, multiple research methods, and multiple

scales of analysis - to build as comprehensive and rich an understanding as possible of the issues addressed. Additionally, we will utilize participatory research techniques, wherein research subjects and researchers become research collaborators in a joint endeavor to pursue goals of mutual interest. Below we present each objective with its related research questions, tasks, and specific methods.

Objective 1. Document how citizen organizations mobilize, interact, and affect public policies dealing with sustainable development issues in Alabama.

Related research questions:

- o What citizen organizations exist in Alabama with environmental and/or sustainable development objectives?
- o What are their aims, means, constraints, and capabilities?
- o To what extent do they integrate -environmental and development objectives?
- o What use do they make of research, and how do they obtain it?
- o What is their relationship to the Alabama Cooperative Extension System? Auburn University? Other state agencies?
- o What is their receptivity to enhanced collaboration with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System?

Task 1.1 Compile inventory and profile of existing citizen organizations active in the areas of environmental protection and sustainable development in Alabama.

Methods:

- o Review existing literature
- o Search World Wide Web
- o Use network of contacts established in previous research
- o Snowball sampling,
- o Direct participation of group members in identifying additional groups, defining selection parameters

Task 1.2 Assess goals, means, constraints, and capabilities of identified groups.

Methods:

- o develop case studies of citizen organization history, structure, and activities:
- o Semi-structured interviews with principle actors and others
- o Participant observation in group meetings and activities
- o Active participation of group members in determination of research direction

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Objective 2. Evaluate experience, opportunities, and constraints within the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in promoting sustainable development.

Related research questions:

- o What institutional resources (individuals, programs, materials) exist within the Alabama Cooperative Extension System relevant to the sustainable development challenges of the state?
- o To what extent are these resources utilized by citizen groups within the state?
- o What opportunities exist for expanding collaboration between the System and citizen groups?

Task 2.1 Document past, current, and planned collaborative efforts by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in the area of sustainable development.

Methods:

- o Review existing literature
- o Semi-structured interviews with faculty and staff within the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (especially subject area specialists and county agents)

Task 2.2 Assess potential for, and constraints to enhanced collaboration between ACES and citizen organizations.

Methods:

- o Semi-structured interviews with key informants
- o Focus group discussions with ACES agents, specialists, and administrators
- o Interviews and focus (groups to be jointly conducted by researchers and collaborating citizen group members)

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Objective 3. Develop and assess institutional mechanisms for fostering collaborative partnerships between citizen groups and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System to promote sustainable development.

Task 3.1 Create opportunities for increased communication between citizen organizations and ACES.

Methods:

- o Conduct joint field trips to sites of current activities or issues
- o Facilitated workshops) to plan joint activities

Task 3.2 Convene a statewide conference on participatory strategies for sustainable rural development, bringing together leaders and members of NGOs, ACES, and appropriate state agencies.

Methods:

- o Involve NGO leaders and ACES staff in conference planning
- o Mix plenary presentations and discussion groups
- o Include field tour of appropriate sites
- o Publish a conference proceedings

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The most significant overall result expected (and built into the research design) is increased awareness and communication between citizen organizations and ACES professionals. A related result will be increased mutual understanding, empathy, and respect. We further anticipate an increased level of interaction and collaboration to improve environmental and social conditions in rural Alabama. In addition, this project will result in:

- One M.S. thesis in Rural Sociology and one Ph.D. in Forestry.
- Articles in refereed journals.
- Conference proceedings.
- Articles and reports in the popular press
- Statewide conference bringing together diverse citizen groups, university and ACES personnel.
- Multiple meetings with representatives of citizen groups.

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ANALYSIS

For each of the many methods utilized in the proposed project, there are unique established analytical approaches. Most of our analysis will be qualitative in nature, drawing heavily on ethnographic and applied anthropological traditions. Comparative case studies, explication of key informant interviews, and focus group summaries will be used.

A significant two-way technology transfer component is built into the research design of this project through the extended joint participation of university personnel and citizens on the research team. In addition, the workshops, field trips, and final conference will have as a primary objective dialogue and sharing of mutually-generated insights. Conference proceedings, related extension bulletins, and articles in the popular press will further enhance the wide sharing of significant results.

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PITFALLS

There is a possibility that some prospective respondents will decline to be interviewed or participate as research partners in our study. Based on personal familiarity with a number of individuals who will be asked to take part, we do not consider this a serious risk.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, like similar programs in other states, is undergoing fundamental changes away from a commodity program orientation in an effort to address broader issues facing rural Alabama. Understandably, there, is some resistance to this development within ACES itself, and this may result in some potential respondents declining to participate in our study. We do not anticipate this being a major problem, given the current atmosphere of expectant change within the system due to the leadership provided by a new Vice President for Outreach and a new ACES Director.

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LIMITATIONS

The proposed project is focused on Alabama and questions can be raised regarding the applicability of findings from this case study to other states and regions. Every state is unique, but Alabama shares with its neighboring states widespread problems of rural poverty and dependence on natural resources. Alabama's diverse landscape (a broad and varied coastal plain divided from the Tennessee River Valley by a string of hill counties including the southernmost extension of the Appalachian Mountains) and complex demographic patterns present a number of different conditions to investigate. Results from our research are likely to be as diverse as Alabama's population and landscape. Other states in our region share similarly complex landscapes and populations. We anticipate our research findings and our efforts to link ACES and NGOs to be of significant relevance to other states in the Southeast and to other states more generally.

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