

Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement Established At Kansas State University

A new center at Kansas State University will lead the nation in new media technology research for the improvement of small rural enterprises.

On Feb. 10, the Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement was established to help small businesses succeed through new media marketing research. This interdepartmental effort represents a collaboration of previous federal grant funding and support from the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

University faculty in three departments led the establishment of the center: Lauri M. Baker, communications and agricultural education; Cheryl R. Boyer, horticulture, forestry and recreation resources; and Hikaru H. Peterson, agricultural economics.

"We saw a need for independently owned rural businesses to learn how to capitalize on new online media technologies in order to advance their business goals," Boyer said. "The team conducts research to determine how to effectively use social media to improve rural businesses and rural economies."

The center's objectives are to generate research-based knowledge related to new media technologies and rural enterprises while offering hands-on research experiences for graduate and undergraduate students in an effort to serve as a source for local, regional, and national rural enterprises and others involved in improving rural life.

"We have enjoyed the ability to conduct research that directly benefits rural economies and look forward to growing this effort through the establishment of the center," Baker said.

Baker, Boyer and Peterson have successfully secured U.S. Department of Agriculture grant dollars for initial research efforts and will continue to seek grant and industry funds to support the efforts of the center.

"The Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement will meet a national need for rural business new media research while addressing all three missions of Kansas State University through research, teaching and extension work," Peterson said.

The center aligns with the goals of a multistate project, "Sustainable Practices, Economic Contributions, Consumer Behavior, and Labor Management in the U.S. Environmental Horticulture Industry," which is funded by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and is a part of the ongoing effort to increase economic benefits to rural areas through increased understanding of consumer and business behavior in these specialized markets.