

- **Building a 21st century economy**

To assist with economic development in rural places, the Center emphasizes a three-pronged approach in which entrepreneurship, innovation and technology diffusion, and workforce development efforts are supported.

Entrepreneurship

Rural America is competing in the global marketplace, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to be the lowest cost provider of many of the mass-produced goods and services that have sustained rural economies in the recent past. Communities that can foster an entrepreneurial outlook among their population have a better chance of competing in today's environment. Rural areas have many assets that can be strategically positioned for a more vibrant economic system if appropriate ways of harnessing them can be identified. The Center is especially interested in: 1) Community systems to support entrepreneurship, especially new Americans, high-poverty populations, and entrepreneurial exploration for youth; and 2) Identification of new markets in manufacturing, service, or natural resource based industries, and value-added/niche markets for small & medium-size farms, including local foods.

Innovation/technology diffusion

The land grant universities are creators of new knowledge. Much of the knowledge generated at land grant universities has application in rural areas, both in agriculture and in other sectors. More efficient systems are needed for communities to become aware of new technologies and better understanding of human dynamics associated with adoption of new technologies. Moving from awareness to adoption requires assessment. Assessment involves determining whether the knowledge base is sufficiently developed to implement; awareness of potential adverse consequences as well as benefits is important in the assessment process. Increasing access to information technologies such as broadband is also important and can enhance entrepreneurial activities.

Workforce development

New business activity, innovation diffusion, and technology adoption require an agile and skilled workforce. Further, changes in the structure and nature of the U.S. economy have resulted in a skills gap, whereby there is a mismatch between employer labor needs and the skills employees bring to the workforce. The Center supports efforts to strengthen the workforce and bridge the skills gap. Importantly, given that success within the workforce and society depends greatly on childhood development, childcare and early childhood development is also priority.