

NEWS RELEASE

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Rural Summit examines entrepreneurship, economic growth

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Rural residents are removed from the hustle and bustle of city life, but they'll need at least the hustle part if they hope to be successful entrepreneurs, said a Purdue University Extension small business development specialist.

"There aren't that many differences between urban and rural entrepreneurs," said agricultural economist Maria Marshall. "Both have to connect to a market need and then meet that need. It takes a lot of planning and work."

Marshall will speak on rural entrepreneurship during the second annual Indiana Rural Summit. The summit takes place Nov. 14-15 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown Indianapolis. The event is sponsored by the Purdue Center for Regional Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, and the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

The summit provides a forum where civic and economic development leaders can share ideas on rural growth and economic progress.

While rural entrepreneurs face challenges similar to their urban colleagues, it can be more difficult establishing a business in the country, Marshall said. Rural entrepreneurs sometimes struggle to identify a customer base and then reach prospective customers, she said.

"The entrepreneurs I've seen in rural areas usually look for niche markets," Marshall said. "I've seen candlemakers, people opening bed and breakfasts, and a variety of agritourism enterprises. And, of course, people in rural areas also need plumbers, mechanics and other more traditional services."

Making contact with customers from a rural address often requires a comprehensive marketing strategy, Marshall said.

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"These days rural entrepreneurs need a presence on the Internet to be able to be found by potential customers," she said. "Newspapers - especially community newspapers - also serve as an important tool in communicating with customers."

Location also can make or break a rural business, Marshall said.

"It depends on the business," she said. "If we're talking business-to-business, I'm not sure that location is such an obstacle. If the business is geared toward consumers, however, it can be more challenging. That's why Internet commerce has gotten so large."

Other summit speakers include Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman, Steve Gunderson of the U.S. Council on Foundations and a former U.S. congressman, Chuck Fluharty of the Rural Policy Research Institute, David Franklin of the Federal Highway Administration's Indiana Division, Brian Bergen of the Eastern Indiana Development District, Angie Cantrell of the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks, Deborah Markley of the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, John Winegar of St. Vincent Health Systems, Pat Bacon of the Indiana Venture Center, and Thomas Lyons of City University of New York.

Gov. Mitch Daniels is an invited speaker.

"The summit is the most important conversation about rural Indiana that will occur this year," said Sam Cordes, Purdue Center for Regional Development co-director and summit co-chairman. "All stakeholders - rural and urban alike - should make the summit a priority."

"It has been gratifying to see so many agencies and organizations involved in summit planning. None of this would have happened if Lt. Gov. Skillman had not launched the process that led to the RISE 2020 framework and initiative. The Indiana Rural Development Council Inc. is now the official steward of RISE 2020. However, all of us must help IRDC move RISE 2020 forward. Being a part of the Rural Summit is one way we can do so."

RISE 2020 - Rural Indiana Strategy for Excellence 2020 - is a 15-year framework for enhancing rural Indiana. Key elements include innovation and entrepreneurship, regional approaches, youth engagement, and civic leadership.

Summit registration is \$150 per person and includes a breakfast, two lunches, refreshments and materials. To register online and download a full schedule, log onto <http://www.in.gov/ocra/conferences.shtml>.

Accommodations at the Crowne Plaza Hotel are extra. The hotel is located at 123 W. Louisiana St., within two blocks of both the RCA Dome and Circle Centre Mall.

For more information about the Purdue Center for Regional Development, visit its Web site at <http://www.purdue.edu/dp/pcrd/>.

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Related Web sites:

Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs: <http://www.in.gov/ocra/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/>