



USDA grant fueling growth for science, education and economic development at SIUE

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, in partnership with the [University of Illinois Extension](#) and Monroe County Economic Development Corporation ([EDC](#)), has been awarded \$680,000 under the United States Department of Agriculture ([USDA](#)) National Institute of Food and Agriculture ([NIFA](#)) Non-Land Grant College of Agriculture ([NLGCA](#)) Capacity-Building grants program.

The project, “Fueling Growth: An Integrated, Capacity-Building Grant for Experiential Learning, Extension and Economic (E3) Development in Rural America,” leverages SIUE’s resources and faculty expertise for economic and community development, improved job creation and retention, and workforce education in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human (FANH) sciences.

Led by Bob Dixon, PhD, in the SIUE [Department of Chemistry](#), and Courtney Breckenridge of the [NCERC at SIUE](#), the project aims to provide startup, small, and medium businesses with the science and skills they need to grow by leveraging agricultural science resources and expertise with interdisciplinary, entrepreneurial approaches.

“There are real challenges and, more importantly, opportunities in rural America that the tools of science, social science and communications can help solve,” Dixon said.

“Thanks to this award from the USDA, SIUE students and faculty will be out in the community, using their knowledge and resources to work with small businesses, farmers and entrepreneurs to grow our future workforce and our communities. Businesses get the science and skills they need to grow, while students gain unparalleled applied learning and leadership experience, including strong incorporation of social science knowledge and theory.”

Thanks to the partnership with EDC, economic and community development is a critical emphasis of grant activities. Monroe County is a primary example of how to create new and sustained job growth and entrepreneurial activity in rural communities. With a vibrant small business community driven largely by food, beverage and agricultural-based companies including microbreweries, distilleries, restaurants, and a strong agriculture and agri-business sector, the county's business community understands how to leverage its rural resources for growth, and makes an ideal home for the project.

“Monroe County Economic Development Corporation is always seeking innovative new ways to support its existing business members and attract new opportunities to our region,” said Edie Koch, MCEDC executive director. “We are excited about the prospect of creating and retaining more jobs for the region through this new initiative. This project will not only provide new fuel to the entrepreneurial spirit of the region, but also will allow us to target our agriculture, food, and beverage companies with key services that will help them develop and grow.”

Agriculture education and career development in grades K-12 is the third focus of the E3 initiative. Led by the University of Illinois Extension Madison-Monroe-St. Clair division, the project will bring agriculture educators and experiences to classrooms across the Metro East.

“The University of Illinois Extension appreciates USDA's recognition of this project, which establishes exciting new partnerships that will benefit our region as a whole,” said Pamela Jacobs, county extension director for the University of Illinois Extension Madison-Monroe-St. Clair Unit. “Bringing agriculture education into the classroom helps raise students' awareness of the many career opportunities that exist and their understanding of some of the biggest issues of our time. This project brings SIUE, EDC and the U of I Extension together in a powerful new way to get agriculture topics and activities into classrooms across Monroe, St. Clair and Madison Counties, connecting young students to agriculture issues and experiences in a meaningful, exciting way.”

In addition to Dixon, Breckenridge, Koch and Jacobs, the project includes faculty and staff from six academic departments and five centers at SIUE, including chemistry, environmental sciences, sociology, geography, mass communications, nutrition, the NCERC, Office of Educational Outreach, the Small Business Development Center ([SBDC](#)), and the Environmental Resources Training Center ([ERTC](#)).

With the interdisciplinary strength of the collaborators and strong connection to key players in business and the community, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke is confident the grant will make a significant impact.

“This grant is further recognition of the excellent undergraduate and graduate teaching and research taking place at SIUE, and the many ways our students and faculty are shaping a changing world,” Pembroke said. “We look forward to working with our partners at the Monroe County Economic Development Corporation, the University of Illinois Extension, and the community to fuel community and economic growth using the tools of agriculture and science.”

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River’s rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.