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Key economic development partners gather to support access to capital for Texas' rural businesses and communities

(San Antonio, June 18, 2019) -- The South-West Texas Small Business Development Center Network (SWTXB), located at The University of Texas at San Antonio Institute for Economic Development (UTSA IED), brought key economic development partners together to support a collaborative agreement between the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) and Texas United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA) to support businesses and agricultural economies in rural Texas. The collaborators committed to increasing access to capital through enhanced collaboration and coordination in areas of mutual interest.

Other federal agencies including the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Association of Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC) were present to express their ongoing support to rural Texas.

“Our mission here at the Texas Department of Agriculture is to help empower rural communities and promote Texas agriculture,” said Commissioner **Sid Miller**. “By participating in the Texas Rural Challenge, TDA is able to share information on agency programs and resources to help cultivate rural economies and direct financial resources where they’re needed most. By helping rural businesses innovate and keeping rural health care accessible, TDA is working to ensure rural Texas continues to thrive.”

The organizations made their commitment on June 17 at the 10th annual Texas Rural Challenge in New Braunfels, Texas. The statewide conference, organized by the UTSA IED, is providing a forum for business leaders and economic development professionals to promote best practices in rural business growth and offer opportunities to spur economic development relationships and ideas that help rural Texas communities thrive.

“USDA is committed to partnering with local leaders to provide the tools and resources needed in order to ensure rural prosperity in Texas today and in the future,” said **Edd Hargett**, Texas State Director for USDA Rural Development. “We are excited to have the opportunity to collaborate with these partners to enhance rural economic development relationships and build stronger communities.”

U.S. Representative Mike Conaway served as the opening keynote speaker of the Texas Rural Challenge. As the ranking member of the House Committee on Agriculture, Conaway discussed the challenges that Texas rural communities currently face.

Over the coming years, the partners will expand opportunities for collaboration in rural communities by developing innovation clusters in rural areas and by increasing the accessibility to funds to improve financing opportunities for rural small businesses. The partners will also identify prospects to deliver programs, methods to increase tax cut benefits and provide tools to help rural small businesses export products around the world.

“UTSA was proud and excited to once again bring Texas’ best and brightest economic development experts together to challenge and lead our rural businesses and community to a more resilient and sustainable future,” said **Albert Salgado**, executive director of the UTSA South-West Texas Border SBDC Network. “The 10th Annual Texas Rural Challenge conference provided the ideal venue to bring elected officials, technical assistance providers and rural community leaders together to collaborate toward bringing more capital, both public and private, to rural communities.”

The UTSA Institute for Economic Development is dedicated to creating jobs, growing businesses and fostering economic and community development. Services include professional business consultation, technical training, research and strategic planning for more than 43,000 small-to-medium sized businesses and organizations annually. The South-West Texas Border SBDC Network stretches for 79 counties across south, central, west and Gulf Coast Texas. This vast and diverse territory encompasses 108,000 square miles including our state’s capital.



Key state and federal partners commit to a sustainable Rural Texas at the 10th annual Texas Rural Challenge in New Braunfels, TX

Left to Right:

- *Charles "Tee" Rowe, President & CEO, America's SBDCs*
- *Ruth Hughs, Chair, Commissioner Representing Employers, Texas Workforce Commission*
- *Justin Crossie, Regional Administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration-Region VI*
- *Congressman Mike Conaway, U.S. Congressman, Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Agriculture*
- *Sid Miller, Commissioner, Texas Department of Agriculture*
- *Edd Hargett, Texas State Director, U.S. Department of Agriculture*
- *Chet Garner, The Daytripper*