



STATE OF GEORGIA

**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**Sonny Perdue**  
**GOVERNOR**

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Contact: Office of Communications  
(404) 651-7774  
Phil Foil, DCA  
(404) 679-4940

**Governor Perdue Launches Communities of Opportunity Initiative**

*Comprehensive Community Development Initiative Seeks To Create Economically-Stronger Rural Georgia Communities*

ATLANTA – Governor Sonny Perdue announced today the launch of the Communities of Opportunity (Co-Op) Initiative. The initiative was announced through an Executive Order. The full text of the Executive Order is found at the end of this news release.

“I’m excited about the Communities of Opportunity Initiative and the possibility it has to create some real change throughout rural Georgia,” said Governor Sonny Perdue. “Past statewide efforts to assist Georgia’s rural communities have produced mixed results. This initiative will challenge local communities to engage in a comprehensive and collaborative approach to community development.”

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs will administer Co-Op and work closely with the Governor’s Rural Development Council and a number of public and private partners. Governor Perdue serves as Chairman of the state’s Rural Development Council.

A 2003 study done by UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government concluded that our nation’s rural communities faced unique economic and community development challenges. A copy of the study is available at <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/services/research/poverty/georgia.pdf>.

Last year, UGA-Fanning Institute officials discussed study data with Georgia’s Rural Development Council. Council members analyzed the study data and began working closely with DCA and UGA-Fanning staff to develop a framework for the Co-Op initiative.

During summer 2006, DCA, UGA-Fanning Institute and Georgia's Rural Development Council met with state agencies, local leaders and citizens regarding this proposed effort. The participating counties included Burke, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lincoln, McDuffie, Taliaferro, Warren, Washington and Wilkes.

DCA, UGA-Fanning Institute staff and several other partners met with local leaders and conducted extensive surveys to capture up-to-date comments from citizens and business owners in those counties. The survey data confirmed: (1) a widespread awareness of the communities' limited economic vitality - both short and long term and (2) the interest and commitment of citizens and business owners to work together to improve the community's quality of life.

DCA and UGA-Fanning Institute researchers continue to review the data collected. In summer 2007, community assessments are scheduled to begin in the eleven rural counties of Georgia's Central Savannah River Area region.

"Co-Op lines up directly with Governor Perdue's vision for a growing, healthy, educated and safe Georgia," said DCA Commissioner Mike Beatty. "We are excited that Co-Op will encourage collaboration and accountability, as well as provide the tools and expertise these communities need. It should be noted that the strategies developed will be locally-driven."

Once launched, the Co-Op process will involve meeting with local stakeholders to determine their interest in participating. A community that decides to participate will receive an assessment and local, follow-up discussions will take place to determine focus areas. Based on a positive response by local community leaders, the Co-Op team will offer assistance to develop a community improvement strategy. Incentives for local involvement will also be offered.

"Co-Op also sets the stage for collaboration among local leaders and public and private entities that want to see real change in their communities. Most importantly, it makes these local partners accountable to each other," added Governor Perdue. "I applaud the efforts of the Rural Development Council to develop a comprehensive community development initiative that offers a blueprint for creating the types of growing communities where Georgians want to live, work, raise families and operate their businesses."

For additional information on Co-Op, please visit DCA's website at [www.dca.state.ga.us](http://www.dca.state.ga.us) or the Georgia Rural Development Council's website at [www.ruralgeorgia.org](http://www.ruralgeorgia.org).

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