



1000 N. First Street, Suite 11  
Albemarle, NC 28001  
Office: 704-986-3682  
Fax: 704-986-3685

## For Immediate Release

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Contact: Michael Smith  
704-986-3683

USDA Rural Development and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at NC State University announced today that Anson, Montgomery, and Stanly Counties have been selected as a Stronger Economies Together Phase 7 (SET) region. Collectively known as the "Uwharrie Region," these counties will now benefit from a focused initiative to explore regional economic advantages. The SET initiative will enable the Uwharrie Region to formulate an economic blueprint that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of that region. The Uwharrie Region will be joining six other regions across five states participating in SET during 2017-2018.

Launched in 2010 by USDA Rural Development and the nation's four Regional Rural Development Centers, the Purdue Center for Regional Development and their land-grant university partners, SET is now in place in more than 94 regions in 32 states. SET is intended to help strengthen the capacity of communities/counties in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region, one that strategically builds on the current and/or emerging comparative economic advantages of that region.

Leadership in each of the three counties has expressed their support for and appreciation of the SET initiative.

Anna Baucom, Chairman of the Anson County Board of Commissioners, said, "Anson County is pleased to join with Montgomery and Stanly counties to pursue Stronger Economies Together. Access to additional economic development services will benefit the whole region and will help us to align our economic development goals and pool our resources.

Jackie Morris, Chairman of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, similarly indicated, "We are excited about the opportunity of continued efforts for these three counties to come together as a region to promote our economic assets. Our counties share common boundaries as well as workforce, industry, and training programs that make our region unique. As a region we are much stronger than as individual counties. We look forward to the development of a partnership and plan for the Uwharrie Region."

Jann Lowder, Chairman of the Stanly County Economic Development Corporation, added, "Stanly County is pleased to be a partner with our neighbors in Anson and Montgomery counties on the USDA Stronger Economies Together Program. We share a number of regional assets and believe that by joining together in this effort we will benefit the citizens of the Uwharrie Region."