

2022 RURAL RENAISSANCE REPORT

Presented by the Georgia Chamber, The Georgia Chamber Foundation,
and the Georgia Chamber Center for Rural Prosperity

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Having grown up in the South Georgia community of Fitzgerald, I've seen firsthand the challenges facing rural Georgia. Despite these concerns, the Georgia Chamber remains extremely optimistic for the future of these towns across our state. The facts clearly show we're entering a new era of rural prosperity. Last year, Governor Kemp announced that over 70% of all new economic development projects in the state were locating in rural communities. Those jobs and investments are rippling through local economies and lifting every Georgian!

Backed by a passionate advocate in Speaker David Ralston, the Georgia General Assembly has passed dozens of bills and financial measures to lift rural Georgia. Lt. Governor Duncan has championed legislation like our Georgia Heart Program to help critical infrastructure stay open during a global pandemic.

With this report we are, once again, reaffirming the Georgia Chamber's strongest commitment to serving our rural economies. The Chamber's 2022 Chairman, Ben Tarbutton, is from Sandersville, Georgia (population 5,550) and one of his personal priorities will be to continue the work we do for Rural Georgia. Our team is focused and is determined to make a positive impact through the Rural Prosperity Council and our programming.

We will continue to advocate for our rural communities. We will continue to support and inform our rural leaders. We will continue to work with partners like the Georgia Municipal Association, the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, and our college and university partners to serve our rural areas and develop a plan for success.

We are committed to rural Georgia, and we invite you to join the effort by becoming a part of our Rural Prosperity Council.



Chris Clark
President & CEO, Georgia Chamber

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

PAST CHAIR'S REMARKS

Since the Rural Prosperity Council's creation in 2017, we have believed that by working together, our members – state, local, education and business leaders – can implement innovative solutions to address unique issues and opportunities across the state.

Of particular pride has been the growth and depth of our Rural Prosperity events. Our first American Rural Prosperity Summit in Athens was a remarkable success in developing real world solutions for rural leaders across the country. In 2022, we will return to Athens and host events in Statesboro and Tifton. I hope you will join us.

As outgoing Chairman, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the members of this Council and for the tireless effort given to innovate and respond to each new challenge with courage and determination. It was my honor to lead our strong network of rural practitioners during these unprecedented times as we worked to support one another.

I look forward to all the many things this Council will continue to do in its service to our great state.



Matt Reed

President, Georgia CEO

Past Chair, Georgia Chamber Rural Prosperity Council

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Reed". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

OVERVIEW

Without question, Covid-19 profoundly affected our state in 2020 and 2021 in ways we had never experienced before. The impacts on businesses, families, schools, and communities were crippling and are still very real as we head into 2022. While the virus touched communities across the state, urban and rural alike, our smaller communities were affected more severely. Lack of broadband resources in our rural towns exacerbated the challenges of schools trying to safely educate children in a virtual world. Small town restaurants and shops closed their doors with many being the only provider of those services in the community. Global supply chain struggles crippled industries across the state. And our health systems are still struggling with unprecedented disruption.

The Georgia Chamber's Resiliency and Recovery Task Force partnered with the Georgia Chamber's Rural Prosperity Council to offer a package of recommendations to alleviate these impacts and offer a path toward post-pandemic economic recovery for 2020 and 2021. Many of the recommendations are long-term strategies that require persistent effort to be implemented and see results.

In 2021, we spent the entire year traveling to over 80 communities to listen to our partners about their needs, successes, and opportunities. Our statewide New Georgia Economy Survey provided unique insights that have led to new recommendations and strategies unveiled in this report.

This year's Rural Renaissance Report highlights those strategies as well as offers innovative solutions for critical areas facing Georgia's most special places. Specifically, we know we can help rural Georgia if we address the war for talent, construct a more innovative and diverse economy, and build infrastructure for the future.

As 2022 settles in, the Georgia Chamber will again implement an aggressive statewide engagement and inclusion strategy to listen to our members and partner chambers to develop solutions and celebrate success. If you would like us to bring the New Georgia Economy tour to your community, please reach out to our office. We also invite you to join us at over 50 regional and statewide events in 2022.



RURAL LEADERS SPOKE, WE LISTENED

TOP 5 WAYS TO ADDRESS RURAL WORKFORCE SHORTAGES BY 2030:

**ROBUST
DOWNTOWNS**



**BROADBAND &
INFRASTRUCTURE**



**AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**



**CAREER PATHWAY
ALIGNMENT**



**LOCAL INCENTIVES TO
ENCOURAGE RELOCATION**



TOP ISSUE FOR RURAL JOB CREATORS:

**QUALIFIED
WORKFORCE**

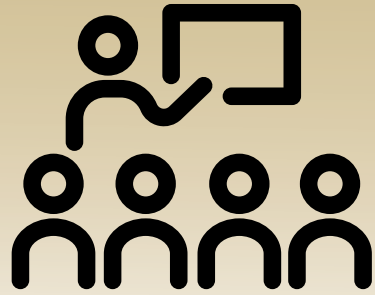


TOP ISSUE FACING AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY IN COMING DECADE:

**WORKFORCE
& IMMIGRATION
PROCESS REFORM**



RURAL REPORT



**WAR FOR
TALENT**



**ECONOMIC INNOVATION
& DIVERSIFICATION**



**INFRASTRUCTURE
OF THE FUTURE**

WAR FOR RURAL TALENT

No issue dominated our regional meetings in 2021 like the labor shortage and long-term challenges to growing the economy.

As stated in the *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2022* by Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, a successful birth-to-work strategy requires strong leadership in the sectors of early learning, K-12 education, post-secondary education, health, housing, and business and industry. To develop community resiliency, local school systems must perform at their best with necessary support from federal, state, and local partners.

We believe this approach, coupled with a dynamic workforce engagement strategy, is critical to win the war for talent in rural Georgia.

2025 GEORGIA LABOR

Healthcare: **+122000**
Manufacturing: **+27000**

2030 GEORGIA LABOR

Energy: **42%**
Construction: **40%**
Cyber Security: **33%**
Logistics: **30%**
Data Analyst: **31%**
Manufacturing: **27%**
Hospitality: **25%**
Technology: **23%**
Retail: **22%**

2030 HEALTHCARE LABOR

Nurse Practitioner: **52%**
Physical Therapist: **35%**
Home Health : **32%**
Management: **32%**
Physicians Assistants: **31%**
Educators: **23%**
Physicians: **19%**

BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE IMPACT

Construction: **+13000**
Logistics: **+2250**

Recommendations:

- Continue to support efforts to expand broadband networks to rural parts of the state so that all students have the opportunity for access
- Explore options to restructure education funding formula to provide a poverty weighted metric
- Support programs that provide extended learning time such as after school and summer programs with necessary investments in programming and transportation
- Encourage implementation of local talent pipeline strategies by fostering partnerships among education institutions, economic developers, and employers to assess talent shortages and develop programming to close the skills gap
- Increase FAFSA completion rates so more Georgia students understand their financial aid options when applying to technical colleges and universities
- Create a new state incentive for remote workers that encourages metro-based companies to hire in rural Georgia
- Encourage younger workforce and families to move to rural communities through new state incentives programs
- Create local grants to cover the cost of relocation for remote workers moving to rural communities
- Provide more flexibility and greater benefits to keep valued team members

WAR FOR RURAL TALENT

POST-SECONDARY COMPLETION RATES

34.4%

URBAN GA

16.7%

RURAL GA

RESIDENTS WITH ASSOCIATES DEGREE OR ABOVE

47.1%

ATLANTA

24.9%

RURAL GA

Recommendations Continued:

- Allow in-state tuition for Georgia DREAMER graduates of Georgia high-schools
- Engage retirees and seniors to re-enter the workforce
- Partner with organizations to help underutilized talent like those with disabilities or the previously incarcerated
- Reform legal immigration and visa programs at the federal level to better benefit industries that thrive in Rural Georgia like agriculture
- Re-align career pathways with local jobs
- Support and assist middle and high school administrators as they plan college tours and industry visits, so students understand their local college and career options
- Encourage community and business leaders to serve as mentors to students in the REACH program
- Increase targeted college and career guidance to ensure students know their local post-secondary education options, enroll in degree programs, and complete a credential or degree
- Support utilization of best practices and successful strategies to address K-12 learning loss in rural communities
- Develop needs-based financial aid for students at the post-secondary level

ECONOMIC INNOVATION & DIVERSIFICATION

Rural Georgia's communities and economies are more diverse today than at any time in our history. Rapidly growing minority communities are integrating throughout the state and are adding to its richness. From coaching little league teams to starting innovative businesses, this growth fuels the diversification that cascades across the community and across county lines.

Today's innovative employees and employers want dynamic, inclusive, and diverse workplaces and communities. Businesses with multi-ethnic and multi-generational teams see higher innovation and productivity improvements. Similarly, communities that embrace change and actively include all residents enjoy greater opportunity to achieve economic prosperity and revitalization.

Traveling and listening to rural leaders in 2021 we heard about innovative solutions to jump-start stalled economies, improve placemaking, fund projects, cultivate the next generation of job creators, and tackle emerging issues. Statewide we found Chambers of Commerce working creatively with partners and as regions to recruit talent, build workforce housing, and stimulate job growth.

We believe that local chambers and partners should focus on innovation and economic mobility while leveraging non-profits and engaging with minority organizations. Developing diversification strategies will be crucial to success.

Recommendations:

- Establish a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) task force or committee to identify and develop strategies to advance inclusion and increase long-term economic mobility
- Utilize resources like the Georgia Hispanic Chamber and the Atlanta Black Chambers as partners in DEI efforts
- Host minority contracting and supplier events to increase awareness of opportunities to partner with minority-owned businesses
- Seek to implement diversity hiring strategies that include underrepresented groups from across the community
- Develop better entrepreneurial training in high school and colleges to improve long-term innovation and business creation
- Allow stacking of incentives in Lesser Developed Census Tracts
- Monetize tax credits for targeted industries
- Allow grant funds to be used for speculative purchase of industrial property and the installation of infrastructure in rural communities
- Reform local zoning to allow for innovative housing solutions
- Develop a local task force of homebuilders and partners to cultivate local strategies
- Codify remote working rules implemented during 2020 that would encourage large companies to hire workers in rural communities to work remotely
- Promote outdoor recreation
- Encourage and promote policies that conserve farmland
- Build local maker space and incubator to serve students as well as the general population
- Continue to grow College and Career Centers



ECONOMIC INNOVATION & DIVERSIFICATION



TOP 3 WAYS TO HELP RURAL MINORITY SMALL BUSINESS IN GEORGIA

- 1 IMPROVE EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL**
- 2 IMPROVE SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CONNECTIONS**
- 3 IMPROVE FINANCIAL CAPITAL, CONTRACTING AND SUPPLIER DIVERSITY**

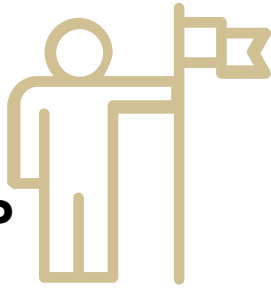
TOP 5 WAYS TO HELP IMPROVE RURAL SMALL BUSINESS SURVIVAL BY 2030

- 1 DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION TAX INCENTIVES**
- 2 BROADBAND AND E-COMMERCE**
- 3 ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION**
- 4 SUPPLIER CONNECTIONS**
- 5 AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

ECONOMIC INNOVATION & DIVERSIFICATION

TOP 3 ISSUES FOR RURAL ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

**LOCAL
LEADERSHIP**



**ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT**



**SMALL BUSINESS
SUPPORT**



12%

**RURAL MINORITY
GROWTH BY 2040**

INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE

Georgia has a rich history of investment in critical infrastructure. From our ports to our railways and interstates, the state is connected and growing because of it.

As we drove Georgia's backroads in 2021, we saw the positive impact of regional and local TSPLOST investments. We stood proud watching ribbon cuttings of facilities that would have located elsewhere if not for bold local leadership committed to building better roads and bridges.

But, when we look into the near future, we can see dramatic changes in the economy based upon reshoring, supply chain realignment, and the demand for goods, products and domestically grown commodities. Added to those changes is a growing population that will strain all systems. Our members are quick to point out that the infrastructure of the future includes traditional horizontal projects like four lane highway construction, but also includes a robust and integrated electric and gas grid, state of the art telecommunications and cybersecurity strategies.

If we continue to invest in these critical infrastructure priorities then Rural Georgia stands to gain from more agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, and logistics locations and expansions.

Recommendations:

- Continue to focus federal and state investments in broadband expansion
- Support public and private efforts to build out 5G networks
- Pass cybersecurity protections for Georgia businesses
- Support the completion of Plant Vogtle reactor expansion and the growth of sustainable energy resources
- Develop long term funding for airport improvements statewide
- Support the work of the Georgia Department of Transportation Planning Division in updating the state's Freight and Logistics Action Plan, with an eye towards prioritizing future investment in those priorities
- Support the work of GDOT's Intermodal Division and associated consulting teams as they develop a menu of fiscally responsible, economically viable funding mechanisms to address the economic constraints of the state's Freight and Logistics Action Plan
- Build on the work of the Electric Mobility Alliance to fully take advantage of federal incentives, as well as ensure that Georgia's tax system adequately captures all appropriate revenue for maintenance of the infrastructure being used
- Increase the availability of commercial truck driver training, facilities, and incentives to boost the number of available drivers and supporting workers



INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE

BEST STATES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

#11



TELECOMMUNICATIONS



TRANSIT



ENERGY



TRADE &
SUPPLY CHAIN



FREIGHT &
LOGISTICS



HEALTHCARE



CYBERSECURITY



E-MOBILITY





We applaud Governor Kemp, the Georgia Ports Authority, the General Assembly, and our Congressional Delegation for working with our railroads and trucking companies to address drastic supply chain disruptions and to start building a stronger system for the future.

Chris Clark

President & CEO
Georgia Chamber of Commerce



INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE: HEALTHCARE

COVID-19 clearly illustrated the importance of a strong rural healthcare system. While those systems performed admirably throughout the last two years, the ongoing demand has severely strained caregivers statewide.

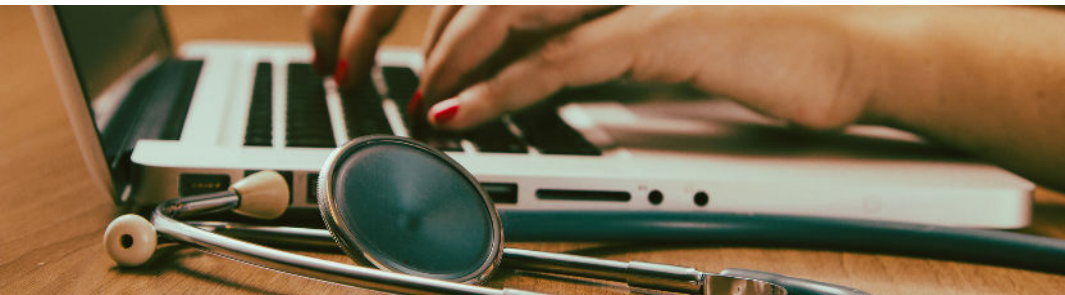
Additionally, many communities are experiencing increased demand for medical support due to aging populations. The loss of community medical facilities not only deprives residents of healthcare access, but is an economic loss to the community and hampers economic development efforts.

A resonating and repeated message in 2021 was that Georgia must start thinking of healthcare not as a service but as the critical infrastructure that it truly is.

To that end we must begin to refocus on healthy outcomes, addressing high rates of obesity, mental illness, diabetes, addiction, heart conditions and cancer in our rural communities.

Recommendations:

- Increase physician, nurse, and healthcare professional training, recruitment, and retention
- Develop a public-private task force to recommend prevention and wellness policies and strategies to lower cost and improve outcomes
- Develop new healthcare models for access to care for communities that demographically cannot continue to support a traditional hospital
- Expand the Georgia Heart tax credit for our most at-risk hospitals
- Address mental and behavioral health gaps in rural communities
- Utilize innovative tools and new technologies to create an efficient, affordable care delivery system
- Provide investment and support for school partnerships with regional health agencies and nonprofits to address health and social service needs of students
- Continue to offer innovative healthcare services like the Georgia Chamber SMART plan for small businesses and Farm Bureau's Health Care Plan for the agriculture sector
- Support and incentivize investments in telemedicine, financial compensation to health care providers that are consistent with technology advancements, and expansion of infrastructure necessary to healthcare services



INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE: HEALTHCARE

RESIDENTS LIVING IN A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREA

30.2%

GEORGIA

59.3%

RURAL GEORGIA

MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS PER 100K

146

GEORGIA

79

**RURAL
GEORGIA**

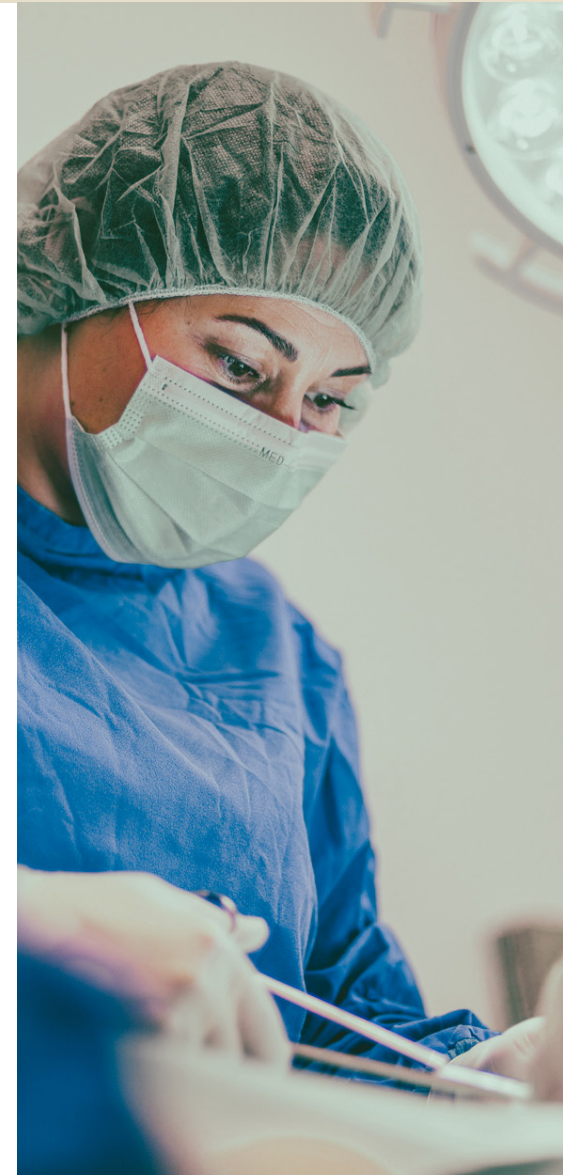
RURAL GEORGIANS AGES 65+

19%

2020

22%

2030





FLEX

Through a collaboration of the Fitzgerald High School College and Career Academy, Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Chamber of Commerce and Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Development Authority, the Fitzgerald Leadership & Entrepreneur X-perience, or FLEX, was created with one goal in mind – to spark an entrepreneurial spirit in the students of Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County. Program developers knew that with the right mix of sacrifices and rewards, students would learn to launch successful small businesses of their own that would eventually lead to a more vibrant, robust economy for the local community.

Students from Fitzgerald High School College and Career Academy and Irwin County High School compete in three rounds of competition with the final round including a “Shark Tank” style presentation given before a final winner is announced. The rules of the competition are simple, and the prizes are big – up to \$5,000 for the winning team – making this competition fun and competitive for all teams that enter. The community has fully embraced this competition by providing sponsorships and support.

This type of investment in the future is one that is worth noting.

For more information on FLEX, visit www.ben-hill.k12.ga.us/domain/1889.



One of the best things that anyone can do for a small town is to start a business. FLEX provides the opportunity for multiple businesses to begin all while strengthening the operations of our existing businesses in our community. The relationships built between the student owned companies and members of our Chamber of Commerce created a dynamic synergy that is strengthening our Chamber and our community.

Melissa Dark

President & CEO
Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County
Chamber of Commerce



K-12 InVenture Prize

Beginning in 2012, the K-12 InVenture Prize was created as a spin-off of the InVenture Prize at Georgia Tech, an invention competition for undergraduate students. The K-12 version of the competition is intended to inspire the next generation of engineers and entrepreneurs across Georgia by making invention education accessible to all students and teachers.

According to the website, teams seek to “identify real-world problems and design novel solutions through careful analysis, creativity, and the scientific method.”

Teams can qualify to advance to the National Invention Convention to represent Georgia. For more information on K-12 InVenture Prize, visit k12inventure.gatech.edu/.

Be Pro Be Proud

Be Pro Be Proud is an initiative started by the Cherokee Office of Economic Development and is leading the movement to bring a new generation of pride, progress, and professionals to Georgia's skilled workforce. According to the website, Be Pro Be Proud Georgia is the state's first mobile workforce workshop of its kind, providing students with an interactive, hands-on tour of the region's most in-demand technical careers. Simulated stations utilize the latest industry-driven technology highlighting careers in Commercial Truck Driving, Health Care, Plumbing, Welding, Robotics, Linework, as well as an off-board Skills Challenge.

For more information on **Be Pro Be Proud**, visit www.beprobeproudga.org/.

“

The business community had been searching for a way to bring pride back into the trades while addressing the skills gap. Be Pro Be Proud is not only ditching the stereotypes, but also inspiring young people to follow their passion. This initiative is energizing the next generation of skilled workers by highlighting 15 in-demand, high-growth careers while providing a hands-on experience. The mobile workshop is the game-changer. This school year, there have been 47 tour stops with over 7,000 Georgia students visiting. Of those, 93% signed up to “join the movement,” expressing their career interests. The actionable next step is connecting them with training and employers who are hiring.

Misti Martin

President & CEO
Cherokee Office of
Economic Development



GEORGIA CHAMBER RURAL INITIATIVE SUMMARY

For 107 years, the Georgia Chamber has led the call for prosperity in all of Georgia's 159 counties. In 2017, the Chamber committed to a long-term initiative focusing specifically of the success and future wellbeing of Georgia's many rural communities. The Chamber began its rural work by opening the Center for Rural Prosperity in Tifton, a regional office dedicated to providing support to rural communities, organizations, and businesses. The Center supported larger chamber efforts to collect data from polling exercises conducted across the state.

In conjunction with the Center for Rural Prosperity, the Georgia Chamber established the Rural Prosperity Council to foster discussion and insight into the most pressing economic and business-oriented challenges facing Georgia's rural communities. The overarching goal of the council is to identify and recommend solutions to drive economic prosperity for our rural communities. The council provides a place for rural practitioners, thought leaders, business owners, educators, and elected officials to network and develop meaningful strategy and public policy agendas. The RPC is one of the largest and most active councils in the Georgia Chamber with nearly 150 active members across the state. The council meets quarterly to address topics such as empowering rural leadership, strengthening economic drivers, improving quality of life, and recruiting and retaining talent, among many others.

Several rural focused events were developed to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to learn about the latest research and participate in idea sharing benefiting rural communities. These events include the Rural Prosperity Forum Series and the Rural Prosperity Summit that, in 2021, expanded into the American Rural Prosperity Summit to highlight rural best practices from across the country. More than 1,500 attendees from six states have attended the rural focused events since their inception. Finally, the rural initiative of the Georgia Chamber includes the development of the annual Rural Renaissance Report. The report is a summary of the recommendations made to legislators, rural communities, and businesses as a result of the research and data collected throughout the year from our polling efforts, listening sessions, and events as well as from our partners.



LOOKING AHEAD: 2022

The Georgia Chamber is pleased to have **Barbara Hampton**, President of Georgia Transmission Corporation, serve as the **2022 Chairperson for the Rural Prosperity Council** with **Michael Foor**, President of Kinetic Windstream – Georgia, serving as **Vice Chairperson**.



If you are interested in becoming engaged with the Rural Prosperity Council, please contact:

Tiffany Holmes, Director of the Center for Rural Prosperity at (229) 349-6900 or tholmes@gachamber.com.

Upcoming Events

Rural Prosperity Forum on Freight and Logistics
Statesboro | June 29

Rural Prosperity Forum on Rural Healthcare
Tifton | July 20

American Rural Prosperity Summit
Athens | October 4-6

Visit www.gachamber.com/events for more details.

RESOURCES

[2022 Legislative Policy Agenda, Georgia Economic Developers Association](#)

[2022 Policy Statement, Georgia Chamber](#)

[Bureau of Economic Analysis](#)

[Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center](#)

[Governor's Office of Budget and Planning](#)

k12inventure.gatech.edu/home

www.ben-hill.k12.ga.us/domain/1889

www.beprobeproudga.org/

www.cherokeega.org/

[Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2022, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education](#)

[Georgia Transportation Alliance](#)



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