

Introduction

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), an 1890 land grant institution and historically black college (HBCU), joins with the Gadsden County Development Council (GCDC) to apply for a strategy planning grant as part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration's (EDA), Recompete Pilot Program, designed to increase per capita income and reduce the prime age employment gap (PAEG). The strategy planning grant will allow

Gadsden County, Florida's GCDC to better determine the key transportation, child care, and agricultural strategies required for Phase 2 Recompete funding. The population is 55% Black with 11.7% of the population Hispanic, based on U.S. Census 2022 estimates. The county is designated as an eligible entity for the Recompete Pilot Program as shown in the map at left.

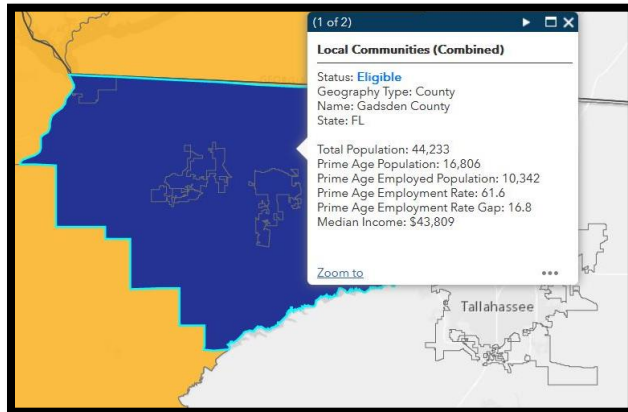


Figure 1. The map at left shows Gadsden County as an eligible combined local community for the Recompete Program.

Understanding of Conditions Leading to High Prime-Age Employment Gaps: Assets and Interventions to Reduce the Gap

With 55% of the county population Black and 11.7% Hispanic, Gadsden County is Florida's only majority minority country. The county has six municipalities within its 516 square mile area with only one of those communities, the City of Quincy, with a population greater than 5,000 people. A map showing Gadsden County and its six municipalities is shown as Figure 2. The county lies approximately 31 minutes west (26 miles) from Tallahassee, Florida, the closest major city.

Figure 2. The figure right shows a map of Gadsden County, Florida, with major roads and municipalities noted.

Gadsden County has a state designation as a Rural Area of Opportunity, indicating the county has been adversely affected by economic events or natural disasters. Further, Gadsden County is ranked overall as having "limited" economic development capacity, based on the Economic Development Capacity Index (EDCI), created by the EDA and Argonne National Laboratory (Argonne). A positive is that the county's industry composition is considered "elevated" based on the EDCI; however, infrastructure is ranked as low while human capital, financial, and institutions and partnerships are considered "limited" by this index.

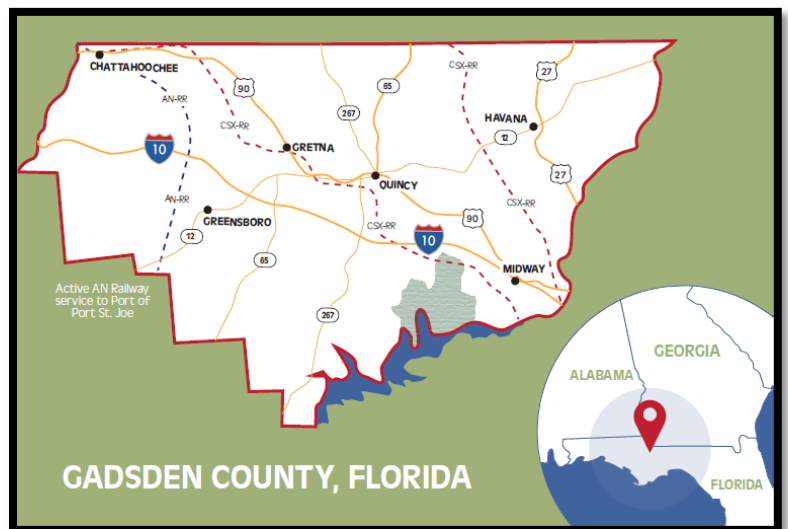


Table 1 below presents multiple demographic indicators for Gadsden County. Per capita income, high school graduation rates, college degrees, and broadband internet access are all considerably lower than state and national measures. With respect to lack of health insurance and the incarceration rate, Gadsden County has higher rates than the state and country.

**Table 1
Key Demographics for Gadsden County, Florida**

Demographic	City of Quincy (County Seat)	Gadsden County	Florida	United States
Population (2022)	7,719	43,403	22,244,823	333,287,557
Per Capita Income	\$17,117	\$21,651	\$35,216	\$37,638
High School Graduation Rate	72.1%	80.8%	89%	88.9%
College Degree	16.9%	19.6%	31.5%	33.7%
Households w/ Broadband Internet	54.7%	67.6%	87.2%	87%
Persons under 65 without health insurance	23%	16.6%	13.9%	9.3%
Incarceration rate per 100,000 population	N/A	2,320	1,129	976

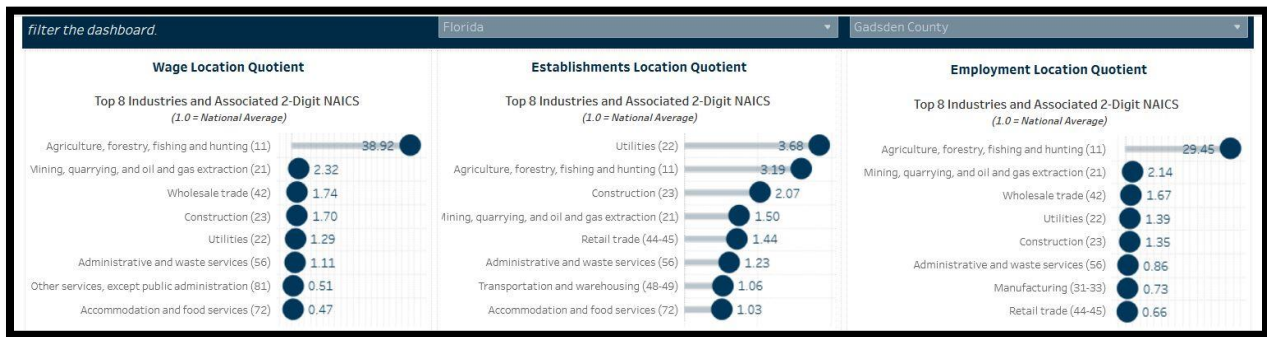
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts for U.S., Florida, Gadsden County, and City of Quincy. Some demographic indicators are based on 2017 – 2021 information. Vera Institute of Justice, Incarceration Trends, ages 15 to 64, 2019 data.

By the end of 10th grade, only 32% of Gadsden County students achieve an on-level or above English Language Arts competency, as measured by the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) in spring of 2023 (Florida Department of Education). Statewide, 50% of 10th grade students were at or above the English Language Arts grade level, demonstrating Gadsden County falls below the average. For mathematics (FAST), by the end of 8th grade in 2023, only 38% of Gadsden County students were at or above grade level in math, well below the state average of 55%. The GCDC has prioritized reading at grade level as one of its 10 strategies for talent development. The Gadsden County School District’s most recent grade (2022-2023) from the Florida Department of Education is C, indicating the schools require additional attention to achieve better results.

The National Economic Data Resilience Data Explorer (NERDE), another resource tool developed by the EDA and Argonne, provides additional information about Gadsden County relevant to the Recompete Pilot Program. Gadsden County is 80.5% rural, the county is designated as in a persistent state of poverty (24.2% of population compared to the national value of 12.6%), and has a designation of “relatively moderate” for the National Risk Index Rating. With a moderate Innovation Capacity (Stats America Innovation Intelligence) rating, Gadsden County has a low human capital and knowledge creation index, low business profile index, and low economic well-being rating. The county’s rating is moderate for business dynamics (business competitiveness) and employment and productivity (job growth and gross domestic product per worker). Gadsden County has a relatively high-risk rating for hurricanes and has had four major disaster declarations for hurricanes since 2020 (NERDE).

Figure 3 following shows Gadsden County has an overreliance on agriculture and forestry, compared to the national average, with other industries lagging well below the agricultural sector. While manufacturing is present, strategies are required to develop worker skills and provide wraparound support to enable a larger number of individuals to succeed at manufacturing jobs. With respect to growth in in the various industry sectors, the NERDE Industry Trends Location Quotient shows manufacturing as stable over a 5-year period across all three sectors (wage, establishment, and employment); agriculture and forestry is noted as growing (over a 5-year period) in terms of establishments.

Figure 3. Top industries in Gadsden County by wage, establishments, and employment.



Source: NERDE County Dashboard, Gadsden County, Florida, Industry Trends, LQ.

The preceding indicators illustrate the multiple factors that must be considered when developing strategies and programs to increase the PAEG within the county. The FAMU and GCDC team proposes a three-pronged approach to improving the PAEG and per capita income – providing focused support to the existing agricultural enterprises to increase production, jobs, and earnings; supporting the development and expansion of small businesses within the county; and providing multiple wrap-around programs to workers to alleviate barriers to work, with programs engaging the existing businesses.

The GCDC, located within the county and proposed as FAMU’s primary partner, recognized the need for a diverse set of strategies to increase its talent pipeline and offer the necessary skills sought by local employers. Under the direction of a Strategic Leadership Team, comprised of local manufacturers, transportation, and entertainment companies; K-20 education leaders; and health and human services providers, the GCDC completed and adopted a talent and economic development document, *Opportunities for All: Strategies for Inclusive Economic Development*. This document identifies ten strategies to guide its workforce activities, five of which are included as part of the Gadsden County Recompete Plan. These strategies are particularly relevant, as they were informed by 60 business interviews and seven industry, workforce, and human services focus groups. In other words, the strategies came from a diverse group of Gadsden County stakeholders to prioritize focused programs.

FAMU will leverage and seek to expand impact in Gadsden County of existing programs and services including supporting startup activity and business expansion through FAMU’s EDA sponsored Innovation Center, SBA and MBDA sponsored Small Business Development Center, and advancing agriculture enterprise and technologies through the College of Agriculture and Food Sciences Cooperative Extension Program programs. An important aspect with respect to assets is

the presence of two minority Chambers of Commerce within the area, the Capital City Chamber of Commerce (CCC) and Big Bend Minority Chamber of Commerce (BBMC). Both minority chambers offer small business loans and business support to local businesses; they will provide assistance to the small businesses within Gadsden County. In particular, the CCC will offer its 6-month Entrepreneurship Development Program (EDP) already in operation in Leon County; the CCC will expand the program into Gadsden County, offering both in-person and Zoom courses. The EDP focuses on six topics, including the basics of business formation; business processes, including cost savings; managing employees; the business plan; minimizing business risks and threats; and building strong financial projections. The CCC awards a certificate of completion to the participant at the end of the program. FAMU participates as part of a small business mentor network, also available to Gadsden County residents. An active program within Tallahassee, with interest to expanding to Gadsden County, is Women Wednesdays, weekly activities and programs of interest to women business owners in adjacent Leon County. The CCC director is an active participant in Women Wednesdays.

Proposed Activities for Identifying and Implementing Placed-Based Interventions

Upon award of the Recompete Strategy Development funding, FAMU will hire a Recompete Plan Administrator, to assume responsibility of the overall program, including contracts and grant management. The three areas proposed as part of the Gadsden County PAEG strategy are strengthening existing agricultural businesses, by adding technology and other innovations to increase yield, income, and create jobs; provide small business support through entrepreneur training, business expansion services, and access to capital; along with services targeted directly to workers. Based on the GCDC *Opportunities for All* talent development plan, specific worker services for the PAEG population and included as part of the Recompete Strategy are transportation and child care; resource navigators to support workers with issues that affect their employment (e.g., reliable child care); reading at grade level programs, supporting those with reading challenges; year-round work experience program for youth and entry level workers; and reentry programs targeted to work opportunities for those formerly incarcerated. The Strategy grant will provide funds to further develop the transportation and child care options, so the most needed and most suitable type of resource for workers can be established. For example, if there are shifts at local employers, child care and transportation solutions will need to take the staggered work days into account. Planning for the agricultural needs of local grower and other agricultural businesses will require detailed information about challenges these businesses face, current capacity, needs, and ways income can be increased within this sector. Finally, additional funds are planned for the GCDC, to expand the Executive Director's hours, as she is a part-time contractual employee.

Leadership Capacity and Ability to Engage Partners, Sectors, and Philanthropy

FAMU will assume responsibility for the overall Recompete Program Management, hiring the Recompete Plan Coordinator for the Gadsden County efforts and managing the budget and contractual entities who will provide the services and programs. The GCDC will assume responsibility for the provision of five programs, resource navigators to support workers; transportation and childcare services; reading at grade level; reentry programs for those returning from incarceration; and a year-round work experience program for youth and entry-level workers at local employers. The GCDC is led by a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) who also leads the Florida Economic Development Council. Both FAMU and GCDC have previously implemented and managed grant programs. FAMU and GCDC expect to also engage the

University of Florida, Institute for Food and Agricultural Services (UF/IFAS), to bring additional agricultural innovations along with its business technology resources, UF Innovate; both FAMU and UF/IFAS together operate Florida's Cooperative Extension Program. The two Tallahassee-based minority chambers of commerce, the CCC and BBMC, bring entrepreneurial resources as well as access to business capital to Gadsden County. Additional partners will be added during the implementation stage, including Tallahassee Community College, which operates a Gadsden Center; Career Source Capital Region, the workforce board serving Gadsden County; Gadsden County School District, for reading programs; businesses implementing the work experience program; United Way, Early Learning Coalition, and the Capital Area Community Action Agency for childcare programs; the Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency and Big Bend Transit for transportation planning and implementation of transportation strategies for workers; the Emergency Care Help Organization (ECHO) for employee resource networks; the FAMU Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for entrepreneurs and small businesses, as well as other organizations.

Potential funding sources to continue/expand Gadsden County Recompete efforts include the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) grant program; an EDA Tech Hubs proposal submitted by Florida State University and FAMU, that includes Gadsden County as part of the service area; and others. The Kauffman Foundation, focused on financial stability, upward mobility, and economic prosperity is another potential funder for Gadsden County efforts to reduce PAEG, improve resident well-being, and increase per capita income.

Project Budget Efficiency and Appropriateness to Activities Undertaken

The proposed budget identifies the funding for a Recompete Plan Coordinator and additional funding to expand staff hours at the GCDC, as the staff are only part time. Additional funds are allocated for three functional areas included as part of the overall Recompete strategy: improving agricultural yield and operations to create better job opportunities and income; identifying the type (e.g., infant) and location of child care needed for workers; and creating a transportation plan to develop solutions to transportation barriers for workers. Given these strategies pertain to specific areas of expertise, FAMU and the GCDC propose to engage content-specific consultants and/or staff to guide the process. For example, the joint FAMU-Florida State University College of Engineering operates the Resilient Infrastructure and Disaster Response Center (RIDER). RIDER works with local governments to enhance emergency response management, improve the resiliency of communities through improved materials and structures, and examines rural transportation as it pertains to equity and accessibility along with other functions. RIDER will potentially be engaged to inform Gadsden County's approach to transportation of workers who do not have reliable and/or available transportation. Additional fees for transportation planning/engineering studies are included for the transportation strategy. The child care strategy will require engagement of a child care consultant who is able to perform an inventory of existing child care facilities, types of care, and needs for care, particularly given the location of workers and available jobs. The agricultural sector will use an individual to assess the needs of local farmers with respect to newer technology and expansion of agricultural businesses. While some information exists through the statewide Cooperative Extension Program, the Recompete Strategy Planning funds will focus exclusively on Gadsden County and provide a comprehensive assessment of each operating agricultural business as it pertains to increasing income and providing new jobs.