

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and Research Center

Other names/site number: The Training Center, RTRC

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 575 Federation Road

City or town: Epes State: Alabama County: Sumter

Not For Publication: ☐ NA Vicinity: ☒ X

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

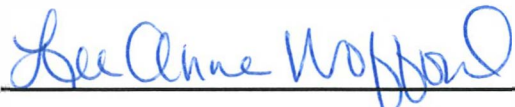
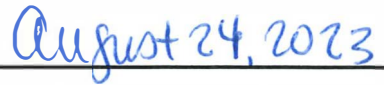
I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

		
Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer		Date
Alabama Historical Commission		
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

---

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

---

---

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☐

District

☒

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐



Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u></u>	sites
<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	structures
<u></u>	<u></u>	objects
<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/INSTITUTIONAL HOUSING

DOMESTIC/SINGLE DWELLING

AGRICULTURE/STORAGE

AGRICULTURE/ANIMAL FACILITY

AGRICULTURE/HORTICULTURAL FACILITY

AGRICULTURE/AGRICULTURAL FIELD

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/INSTITUTIONAL HOUSING

DOMESTIC/SINGLE DWELLING

COMMERCE/TRADE/BUSINESS

EDUCATION/EDUCATION RELATED\*

AGRICULTURE/STORAGE

AGRICULTURE/ANIMAL FACILITY

AGRICULTURE/HORTICULTURAL FACILITY

AGRICULTURE/AGRICULTURAL FIELD

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

Modern Movement: Ranch Style

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, CONCRETE BLOCKS

Foundation: CONCRETE

Walls: SHEET ROCK

Roof: METAL

Other: Brick

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

**Summary Paragraph**

Briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

The historic district of the Rural Training and Research Center is a multi-building agricultural training complex situated on 72.6 acres of land. This land was officially purchased by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives from the Panola Land Buyer's Association on January 19, 1972.<sup>1</sup> The historic 72.6 acres, comprising of 9 contributing buildings, 4 contributing structures, 1 contributing site, and 4 noncontributing resources, are situated within the southwest corner of a 374-acre working farm and educational center located in Sumter County, Alabama. The property reflects the agricultural and historic use of the property as a demonstration farm and training center for low-income, disadvantaged African American farmers and their families.

The historic district lies between the Tombigbee River and County Road 21 in a rural landscape with a surrounding low-density and forested area outside the National Register boundaries. The historic district contains most of the original buildings built for the Rural Training and Research Center's operation. The oldest buildings on the property were built before the Federation of Southern Cooperatives occupied the land in 1970, which includes a ca. 1960 wood frame barn, a ca. 1945 pump house, and a ca. 1945 vernacular ranch-style house. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives built three one-story vernacular ranch-style brick over masonry buildings in 1973 - the dormitory, office, and cafetorium buildings. The dormitory was built to house overnight trainees and visitors. The cafetorium was built as a multipurpose building with an auditorium, cafeteria and industrial kitchen, and boardroom. The office was built as an administrative center for staff members. The print shop and "gift shop"/yellow building are concrete block masonry buildings built in 1972. The contributing structures also include three bodies of water and a driveway that runs through the historic district. Although aspects of the landscape have changed to accommodate the Rural Training and Research Center's shifting agricultural needs, the landscape features and associations with its historic use retain integrity to the period of significance (1970-1973).

<sup>1</sup> Deed Book 105, page 259, Sumter County Courthouse.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

Non-contributing resources include the aquaponics bay located north of the cafetorium, an open-air wood pavilion, a metal frame hoop house, and a prefabricated home located at the northern boundary of the historic district.

### Present and Historic Physical Appearance

The Rural Training and Research Center (RTRC) is currently located on a 374-acre parcel situated between the localities of Gainesville and Epes in Sumter County, Alabama. The district is located to the east of County Road 21, a road off Interstate 59/20 that connects rural localities to Gainesville and Epes. The historic Federation Road cuts through the historic district and connects the buildings to the county road. The historic district is approximately 1 mile west of the Tombigbee River and 0.2 miles west of Toms Creek. The watershed of the Toms Creek and a sloping ridgeline make up the northern border of the historic district.

The nominated historic district consists of the southwest 72.6-acre portion of the RTRC's current 374-acre parcel. Legal documentation reports the deeded property as "more or less 40 acres," situated within a 374-acre parcel owned by Panola Land Buyers Association (PLBA), however, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives had access to 72.6 acres of the parcel, which encompasses the historic boundaries. During the period of significance (1970-1973), the Federation of Southern Cooperatives used the 72.6 acres for the Training Center's facilities and agricultural demonstration areas.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from tree growth and the abandonment of certain buildings, the landscape has had few changes since 1973, thereby retaining integrity of its rural feeling and association with the Training Center. Most of the contributing resources are located in the central area of the historic district. The wood frame barn, pump house, and ranch-style house were built prior to the Federation's acquisition of the 72.6 acres. The barn and house are in fair condition, but the pump house is in poor condition, as the roof and door are missing. A ca. 1945 manmade pond lies to the north of the house and pump house, which was expanded by 1973. The other water features and contributing Training Center buildings and structures were built between 1970 and 1973. These resources are in good condition, except for the Print Shop and "gift shop"/Yellow Building, which is in fair condition.

The northern part of the historic district has a large field, community garden, caretaker's prefabricated home, and landscape features relating to the staff members' occupation during the period of significance. The eastern part of the historic district - originally used for a feeder pig operation - contains the barn and various features primarily devoted to goat and loblolly pine silvopasture. Loblolly pine groves mostly characterize the southern and eastern portion of the 72.6-acre landscape, covering approximately 30 acres currently used for agroforestry and goat silvopasture.

The non-contributing buildings and landscape features include a pavilion, a community garden, a cooling shed, a prefabricated home, a hoop house, and an aquaponics bay. Several buildings constructed during the period of

<sup>2</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, June 26, 2022; Wendell Paris, personal interview, June 13, 2022; Deed Book 106, page 568, Sumter County Courthouse; George Howell to Panola Land Buying Association Inc., August 24, 1971, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

significance are no longer extant, including a small barn to the south of the print shop, a tenant house retrofitted as a storage shed, the staff's mobile homes, several greenhouses, and a pig parlor barn.

## Setting

During the period of significance (1970-1973), Sumter County was primarily agricultural with a mixture of cow farms and land for hunting and timber. The surrounding landscape is still agricultural and retains integrity with undeveloped private land bordering the Training Center's current property.

## Spatial Organization

### *Circulation Patterns*

The main driveway into the Rural Research and Training Center, known as Federation Road, begins at County Road 21 and intersects through the property at the northwest corner of the 72.6-acre boundary. Federation Road leads eastward from the eastern boundary line before curving to the south to a fork that divides the road from the main cluster of buildings and the agricultural buildings. The driveway predates the Federation, but was expanded upon by Federation staff beginning in 1970. Since the period of significance, the driveway expanded to connect the cluster of non-agricultural buildings by curving around their south elevations back to Federation Road. Past the barn in the east, the driveway becomes a lesser-maintained dirt road for farm vehicle use. These roads were used to access the Panola Land Buyer Association's land that intersects at the eastern boundary of the parcel, and were eventually incorporated into the Training Center's series of roadways once the land was fully ceded to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. The historic district also contains a series of trails in the southeast area that connects the various farming and research operations. These are mostly accessible by staff members using ATVs and a tractor.

### *Buildings and Structures*

The main buildings used by the Training Center stand in the central area of the historic district on a slightly elevated hill with a grass lawn. These buildings include the dormitory, office, cafetorium, and aquaponics bay. Federation Road runs between the office and dormitory with loblollys and crepe myrtle trees lining the road from the fork in the north to the parking lots. There is a dirt parking lot to the south of the office and dormitory. Loblolly pines and wood picnic tables are situated between the dirt parking lot and ca. 1973 pond. A paved parking lot was put in between the two buildings after the period of significance. A concrete path connects the road to the dormitory, office, and cafetorium. There is a grass lawn between the buildings that is used for overflow parking during larger events. Aside from the aquaponics bay, these buildings all have a similar design and materials.

To the north of the main Training Center buildings (the office, the cafetorium, and the dormitory) and on the opposite side of the road is a storage building that used to be a gift shop and wash house. A prefabricated home stands to the northwest of the gift shop on the same side of the road. On the other side of the road to the south of this building is a scattered cluster of cement cesspool slabs on a grassy lawn that indicate the former presence of a mobile home complex (ca. 1971). There is a hoop house and garden to the south of the former complex.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

To the south of the main Training Center buildings is a second cluster of buildings associated with the period of significance. This cluster includes a former dwelling house, which is the oldest building in the historic district (ca. 1945), a concrete masonry building, and a pump house. These buildings are at the southern end of Federation Road and situated to the south of the ca. 1945 pond. The concrete masonry building is the southernmost building, which has a stand of loblolly trees directly to its south. The pump house stands to the northeast of the dwelling house on the edge of the pond. This cluster is in a grassy lawn area with a paved concrete path between them.

A pavilion, shed, and the foundations of former greenhouses are situated to the northwest of the Big House across Federation Road. Evidence from the debris of the greenhouses indicate that they were wood and concrete block structures on cement slabs with metal roofs. A stand of loblolly pine trees is now scattered around the foundations. These buildings and structures stand to the east of the Center Pond and west of the Big House Pond.

A wood frame barn is located to the east of the main Training Center buildings and to the south of the ridgeline that defines the northern boundary. The barn is on the eastern edge of the Training Center's expansive lawn. The silvopasture pines stand to the east of the barn. There is an offshoot of Federation Road to the south of the barn that turns eastward into a less maintained driveway for farm equipment. This road continues past the historic district's boundaries. East of the barn is a small pond, which is situated on the eastern edge of the historic district boundary.

## Landscape (contributing site)

### *The Natural Environment*

The Tombigbee is the major water source that defines the eastern boundary of Sumter County. The county is bisected by the Sucarnoochie River, a tributary of the Tombigbee River. The soil north of the Sucarnoochie, where the Training Center is located, contains the soils and geological features that characterize the Black Belt region - gently rolling hills, slow moving streams and creeks, and limerock and prairie soils. The Tombigbee River and the many creeks in the county flood with heavy rains and deposit sediment in their watershed, which accounts for the higher topographical location of the historic district's buildings. The climate is influenced by the Gulf of Mexico with long hot summers and abundant rain, and a dry season from September through November. The historic district has a range of ecosystems ranging from meadows, ponds, and forests that provide habitat for boars, white-tailed deer, wild turkey, a variety of small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and aquatic birds. The ponds provide habitat for warm-water fish like bass and bream.<sup>3</sup>

### *Topography*

The historic district is mainly flat, with the greatest slope increase near the central area of buildings, which decreases west of the barn. Cement slabs from the Training Center's defunct feeder pig operation are on a small hill along the eastern edge of the historic district boundary. There is a natural ridge marking the northern

---

<sup>3</sup> Alan Brown, *Sumter County* (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Freddie Davis, interview, July 13, 2022.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

boundary of the historic district that curves from the gated entrance of the main driveway to the barn. The watershed for Toms Creek lies beyond this ridge. On the eastern edge of the Big House pond is a small stream that drains to Toms Creek. Toms Creek eventually drains to the Tombigbee River.

*Modern Land Use*

In addition to agricultural demonstrations and forestry training, the agricultural training complex is currently open to the public for fee-based recreation, including hunting, fishing, and swimming. The buildings are either used by staff members, interns, trainees and visitors, or they stand vacant. The meadow between the Center Pond and community garden is devoted to hay production, with several seasonal large hay bales present and a brush pile that the forestry department adds to after removing tree limbs.

Since 2006, the forested areas to the east of the barn and Big House have been used for silvopasture, rotating goats in enclosures to diminish the undergrowth under the loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*) as part of a grant-funded program with the USDA and Tuskegee University. The forested area to the southwest of the Center Pond was used for turkey silvopasture, but that project was abandoned. This section is now part of the hunting area leased out by the Training Center. The loblollies along the north, west, and south boundary borders are managed by the forestry staff with prescribed burns- these are among the oldest trees on the property that have grown up with the Training Center.<sup>4</sup> The other trees in the historic district include water oak (*Quercus nigra*), willow oak (*Quercus phellos*), hickory (*Carya*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*), longleaf pines (*Pinus palustris*), and poplars (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

**Federation Road (ca. 1970, contributing structure)**

Federation Road is the primary road within the historic district that begins at County Road 21 and runs through the central cluster of buildings and structures, terminating at the Big House. It is approximately 0.8-miles long with a gateway entrance (ca. 2000) at the northwest corner of the parcel that marks the beginning of the historic district. The gate has two brick pillars with light fixtures on top, as well as brick walls that extend north and south for approximately seven feet. There are two swinging metal gates between the pillars that provide access to the property. There has always been some form of a gate or cow fence in this location during the Federation's occupation. Before the Federation or the PLBA bought the property, Federation Road provided access to the barn and main dwelling. It was a dirt road during the period of significance, but has since become a dirt and gravel conglomerate. The road runs through the adjacent property to the west with access granted through an easement from PB May and his estate.<sup>5</sup>

When the Federation staff settled on the property in 1971, they added dirt driveways off of Federation Road to provide access to the future location of the central training buildings, the mobile home complex, and the fields east of the barn. Many of these driveways were built on existing small pathways used on the previous farm. The section of the driveway around the former mobile homes is now part overgrown with grass, but the section that forks southwest of the "Gifts Shop"/Yellow Building has become crucial for visitors arriving to the Training Center. This dirt and gravel driveway runs southward between the office and dormitory and curves back to

<sup>4</sup> Freddie Davis, personal communication, July 13, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Deed Book 105, page 263, Sumter County Courthouse.

**Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center**

Name of Property

**Sumter County,  
Alabama**

County and State

Federation Road, just northwest of the Big House Pond. Since the period of significance, a paved parking area on either side of the driveway to the north of the office and dormitory has been added for handicapped parking and ADA compliance. Concrete walkways from the parking lots to the buildings have also been constructed. Staff has continued to park vehicles south of these buildings and driveway, but now the mature loblolly pine trees along the Center Pond provide shade.

Small drainage ditches were put in along Federation Road and its offshoots to divert water from both the road and lawn. A large culvert was placed under the road to the west of the Big House pond after the period of significance to divert the water that flooded west of the road. Aside from functional changes like ditches and added gravel, these roads have been largely unchanged since the period of significance, retaining adding to the historic district's rural integrity.

**Big House Pond (ca. 1945, contributing structure)**

The Big House Pond – a nickname given by Federation staff – is located to the north of the Big House. It was a natural pond expanded upon when the former land owner, P.M. Norwood, cleared surrounding timber and dammed the eastern side between 1955 and 1964 to increase its size. He held hunting and barbeque parties on the property, and used the pond for recreational and functional purposes. The pond's size had doubled by 1973, with fewer trees to the east as a result from the interim owner timbering the land between 1967-1970. Since then, the Federation staff planted trees around the pond for erosion control and only use it for irrigation and recreational purposes.

This U-shaped pond is located to the east of Federation Road, separated by a downward sloping lawn to the water. It is north of the Big House and pump house, separated by a stand of mature loblollies on the edge of the slope. There are loblollies and water oaks to the north and east of the pond. This pond used to be much larger during the period of significance, often flooding across Federation Road. With the construction of a culvert under the road, the flood water was redirected back to the pond. A dam on the east blocked water flow to the stream draining to Toms Creek, but a beaver destroyed it and lowered the pond's water content.<sup>6</sup>

**Big House (ca. 1945, contributing building)**

The "Big House" is a rectangular painted single-story mixed wood frame and concrete masonry building that was originally constructed in ca. 1945 by Robert Buchanan as a dwelling and hunting lodge, and later retrofitted by the Federation to be an office in the early 1970s. The building is primarily constructed with concrete masonry units and has a two-foot-high wraparound decorative brick veneer band laid in running bond at the base of the building. The building has a semi-spraddle low-pitched gabled V-crimped metal roof and a red wood painted frieze, with a concrete chimney at the center of the ridge. The building faces north, rests on a poured concrete foundation, and is five bays wide and three bays deep. A semi-detached masonry barbeque smoker and semi-enclosed tiled patio, connected by a full-width covered porch, is located immediately south of the house. A covered porch extends off the north elevation over the three central bays. The house is situated on a slight

---

<sup>6</sup> Freddie Davis III, personal communication, July 12, 2022.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

elevation, around sixty feet south of the "Big House Pond" and twenty feet north of the Print Shop. The land surrounding the house is grassy and cleared of trees.

The principle north elevation is divided into five bays with the center bay being red painted wood double leaf out-swinging screen doors and double leaf in-swinging doors with two small glass windows at the top. The central bay is flanked by symmetrical eastern and western bays. The two eastern bays include a single hung metal encased window and two single hung metal encased windows separated by a wood mullion. The two western bays are similar. The doors and windows have red painted wooden cases. A full-height front porch with a concrete slab foundation beneath the extended roofline of the house, extends the width of the three central bays. Four painted knobby pine posts mounted in cement conical blocks support the overhanging roof at its eaves line. The central three bays are framed by the two-foot-high wraparound decorative brick veneer water table. The section of the band situated east of the three bays is partially collapsed and reveals the unfinished concrete masonry unit exterior under the brick veneer.

Structural evidence indicates that the south elevation was once a mirror image the opposite north elevation. A full-width addition was added to the south elevation by the Norwood family between 1960 and 1965, based on aerial photographs. The addition is divided into three distinct sections: the enclosed room on the easternmost portion of the elevation; the semi-detached barbeque smoker in the center; and a semi-enclosed patio with an open fireplace on the westernmost side. The entire addition is covered by a continuous metal shed roof that abuts to the original field of the roof. The porch is supported by three painted unelaborated wood square columns. The additional room on the easternmost side has one bay, which is a single hung metal encased window with a wood lintel and casing. The western elevation of the additional room has painted plywood paneling beneath the gable. An unelaborated square wood pilaster is situated on the southwestern corner of the extended unit. The center section of the south elevation is divided into three bays with the center bay a four panel and two window painted wood door. The eastern bay has two single hung metal encased windows separated by a wood mullion. A wood awning with asphalt shingles is attached a wood lintel above the windows. A decorative brick band fills the space between the foundation and the windowsill. The western bay of the center section is a short single hung window with a triple pane upper sash. Irregular mortar joints and an extended lintel indicate the replacement of the original window. A wood awning with asphalt shingles is situated above the westernmost bay and extends westward to the wall that separates the center from the semidetached patio on the westernmost section of the addition.

A semi-enclosed rectangular composite masonry barbeque pit is situated approximately three feet south of the exterior wall. The pit rests on poured concrete, is approximately fifty-five inches wide, thirty-four inches tall and one hundred and forty-four inches deep. The exterior of the structure is constructed with concrete masonry units, rounded on the outer southeast and northeast edges, with a brick veneer on the interior walls. The barbeque pit is abutted to the chimney of a concrete masonry unit fireplace of the same width. The chimney extends sixty-four inches above the roof with a concrete cap and metal wind vane in the shape of a rooster. The fire box is situated on the western facing elevation of the fireplace and opens to the patio on the south-westernmost side of the building. The patio is semi enclosed with low masonry and wood wall the same height as the barbeque pit. A bay a four panel and two window painted wood door leads from the building to the patio. A wood door that leads from the patio to the central section of the addition, spans the distance between the southwest corner of the fireplace to the southeast corner of the low wall. A decorative terracotta tiled floor with



Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

a circular sun motif covers the concrete foundation of the patio and continues south of the barbeque pit. A paved pathway leads from the patio door to the Print Shop southwardly.

The full-width addition of the south elevation is visible on the south side of the east elevation with the intersecting rooflines with metal flashing, differing brick quality and the distinct vertical seam between the masonry.

The east elevation is divided into three bays with the center bay being a small single hung window and the flanking two being double hung windows. The gable of both the original building and the addition are clad in paneled painted plywood. A trapdoor and gabled vent are present in the gable of the original building. A wood eave extends on both rooflines.

The west elevation is similar to the east elevation, with the exception of a wood door in the northern most bay, the addition of three painted horizontal panels of plywood to enclose the western side of the semi enclosed porch, and a large air duct between the center and south bays.

**Pump House (ca. 1945, contributing building)**

The pump house is situated on the southeast edge of the Big House pond and northeast of the Big House. It is 6 feet tall and constructed with concrete masonry units. The foundation of the building is a concrete slab. The building has one entryway on the south elevation. The entryway has a wood frame that is only partially extant due to what appears to be damage by fire, based on burn marks. The roof used to be similar to the Big House's former asphalt shingle roof, but is now missing.<sup>7</sup> The exterior concrete masonry units were painted white with red wood trim to match the Big House.

There are shallow basins that extend off the east and west elevations of the building. The basins are also constructed in concrete blocks and stand 2 feet tall. There is brick infill and two metal pipes on the basins' north elevation corners that run along the building. These pipes extend horizontally across the north elevation of the pump house and connect both basins.

There are two 4-foot vertical bracketed wood planks centered on the east and north elevations of the pump house. The south elevation appears to have once had an identical plank to the east of the door, but only an outline remains. The pump house is no longer in use and is in poor condition from lack of use and neglect.

**Barn (ca. 1960, contributing building)**

The red barn is located approximately 420 feet east of the auditorium with entrances on the east and west elevations. The east entrance leads to the driveway and the west leads to the goat enclosure. The barn stands on a slightly downwards slope towards the goat enclosures in the west and is situated south of a loblolly stand that rests on the edge of the northern boundary of the original 72.6-acres. It has a lawn surrounding all but the west entrance, which has a dirt and gravel path leading to Federation Road. This is usually used as a parking area for

<sup>7</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 13, 2022.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

large farm equipment. A concrete ramp on the west leads to a grassy area that used to be part of the feeder pig enclosure. This barn's frame is constructed with cedar trees that were likely harvested from the property.

According to aerial photographs, the wood frame, gambrel roof barn was constructed ca. 1960. When the property was purchased by the PLBA, the barn's frame rested on a dirt floor and there were two open wood framed shed-roofed additions along the entire north and south elevations. The Federation staff poured the current concrete floor in the late 1970s.

With exception to the two main entranceways, the exterior perimeter of the barn's foundation rests on concrete blocks. The exterior is sheathed with red painted replacement metal siding and covered with a standing seam metal roof. The east and west elevations have a large central opening on the ground level with access to the center aisle interior. The openings have two side-hinged barn doors within a wood frame, with doors made with plywood panels and wood railings, stiles, and crossbars. Above the doorways are hayloft entrances that extend from the top of the doorframes to the rafters. These entrances have a single side-hinged panel and wood door similar to the main doors within a wood frame. The metal siding is recessed above the hayloft opening, exposing corrugated metal siding. The roof's eaves are open, exposing the rafters.

The barn's shed roof additions on the south and north retain their original footprint, though they now have concrete block foundations and v-rib vertical metal siding. The side addition's west elevations are completely enclosed, but the southern addition's east elevation has a horizontal metal sliding window. The west elevation of the southern addition has wood fascia board, but the northern addition's metal siding covers it and extends directly to the roofline.

The barn's north elevation has a concrete ramp on the eastern side below a vertical metal sliding window. This ramp was for the pigs' entrance into the barn, but the former entrance is now covered by metal siding and a single sliding metal window. The west half of the shed addition is raised by one concrete block with a plywood-enclosed door in the center and a vertical metal sliding window to the west. The roof has overhanging eaves with wood fascia board. The roof material is identical to the main barn. The space between the addition's roofline and the main barn's roof has a combination of corrugated and sheet metal siding.

The south elevation has a six-bay addition with a concrete ramp on the east leading to a set of prehung double doors. To the west is a single prehung door and three metal horizontally sliding windows. There is a vertically sliding metal window on the westernmost side. The shed roof and space between the addition and main barn's roof are similar to the north elevation.

The roof was replaced ca. 2000. The deteriorated concrete blocks have been replaced over the years. The original exterior metal siding on the north and south elevations has been replaced with similar metal siding, though the metal on the east and west elevations have not been replaced.

### **Lagoon (1970, contributing structure)**

The "lagoon"- a name made by an early Federation staff member - is a rectangular livestock pond to the west of the pig parlor concrete slabs. It was built in 1970 by Wendell Paris and members of the Panola Land Buyer's

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

Association to serve as waste drainage from the farrowing barn that once stood on the slabs. This was part of a shared demonstration space for both the PLBA and the Federation.

The lagoon is on the edge of an inclining slope towards the west. There is a large drain on the western edge that connected to the pig farrowing barn. When it was built, the surrounding landscape had very few trees and vegetation, but it is now surrounded by loblollys and grass that are part of the silvopasture program. The lagoon is inside one of the goat enclosures, and there is a large run-in wood shed for the goats to the northeast of it.

**“Gift Shop,” Yellow Building (1973, contributing building)**

This building stands to the north of the auditorium and the fork in Federation Road, near the northern edge of the original acreage. It is situated on a sloping hill down to the Toms Creek watershed. The one-story concrete block building was used as a gift shop for craft cooperatives during the period of significance and later used as a wash house, health clinic, and now as storage. Federation Staff members and the L.L. Delaine Construction Company contractor firm built the gift shop on the foundation of a cow feed storage shed, though this conversion is not evident on the exterior.

The one-story, rectangular, yellow painted concrete block building faces west with a low-pitched asphalt shingle side gable roof. On the west (front) elevation, a concrete path leads from the grassy lawn to the central entrance that is part of the asymmetric four-bay façade. This path continues north along the east elevation to the identical northernmost entrance. The entrances have metal framed metal doors with small windows at the top. There is a window between the doorways, as well as a smaller window to the south of the central entrance. They are both horizontally sliding metal windows with protective metal bars. There are red painted concrete blocks situated below the windows to give an illusion of a window sill. There are vents along the overhanging eaves’ soffit with a gutter running along the west elevation’s fascia board.

The south elevation has a metal sliding window similar to the west elevation on its westernmost side. The concrete blocks break at the gable with vertical wood planks leading to the triangular gable vent below the roof’s pitch. The north elevation is similar to the south, but does not have any windows. The east elevation is also windowless. The soffit is decaying and asphalt shingles are sagging along the edge of the roof on the east elevation.

**Center Pond (1973, contributing structure)**

The Center Pond is a teardrop-shaped body of water to the south of the Office and Dormitory buildings. The surrounding landscape slopes upward from the pond, except for a small footbridge built in 2020 in the east that separates the pond from its overflow area and provides a path to silvopasture areas. There is a dam along the south with a flat area for a walking path. The northeastern and eastern side of the pond has a stand of loblolly pine trees.

**Print Shop (1972, contributing building)**

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

The Print Shop has a similar construction and design to the yellow building to the north. Both buildings were said to have had an “expedited construction process.” The Print Shop is located to the southeast of the Big House. The white and red painted exterior mimic the Big House style. The rear of the Print House was once attached to an L-shaped wood frame building. The wood framed building was torn down in the late 1970s, so all that remains is the concrete slab foundation. The wood frame building was built by P.M. Norwood and used as a small store until 1967. During the period of significance, there were fewer surrounding trees than the present wooded forest to the south and east. This building was the southernmost building used by staff for printmaking, material production, and an administrative office. Presently, it mostly sits vacant for storage and is occasionally used by local cooperative members as a woodwork shop.<sup>8</sup>

The Print Shop is a one-story, rectangular, white painted concrete block building with a low-pitched asphalt shingle side gable roof. The building has a concrete slab foundation with a sloped concrete grading around the north and west elevations. A cement slab walkway leads from the Big House’s southern porch entrance to the north entrance of the Print Shop, then wraps westward around the building to the west entrance.

The north elevation has two bays. The easternmost bay is a vertical metal sliding window situated in the center of the elevation. There are red painted concrete blocks under the window which serve as the window sill. To the west of the window is a double-leaf metal door. Similar to the yellow building, there is a vented soffit and wood fascia board along the eaves.

The west elevation has a single bay with double metal doors within a metal frame. These doors lead to the large concrete slab that wraps around to the south elevation’s entrance. Above the doors is vertical wood siding in the open gable entrance of the overhanging roof. A triangular metal soffit is at the roof’s apex. The east elevation is similar to the west, but there is no entrance or concrete slab around it. There is severe diagonal cracking in the masonry units on the south end of this elevation.

Located on the cement slabs, the south elevation has a semi-enclosed portico with a similar door to the north elevation with concrete block walls and an asphalt shingle front gable porch roof. There is a concrete ramp sloping up to the entrance. The concrete ramp was likely a later addition to accommodate for accessibility issues.

### **Dormitory (1972, contributing building)**

The dormitory was the first of the three central training buildings to be constructed. The dormitory has been used as housing for staff, visitors, and trainees since its construction. The only exterior alterations include the installation of a metal v-rib roof (2006) and A/C units below windows. The dormitory is located between the auditorium and office, with the Center Pond and driveway to the south. The façade faces north toward an expansive lawn. Overall, the exterior of the building is in good condition with integrity to the period of significance.

---

<sup>8</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 13, 2022.

**Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center**

Name of Property

**Sumter County,  
Alabama**

County and State

The dormitory is a one-story, 8-bay vernacular brick-on-masonry ranch building. It is rectangular in plan with a concrete block foundation, concrete block frame, and a running bond brick veneer. The v-rib side gable roof replaced the original asphalt shingle roof. The façade has recessed bays for windows and two entrances. Unlike the bricked interiors of the window bays, the entrances have vertical wood siding on the walls. The westernmost entrance bay has a recessed concrete slab with an ADA ramp leading to a wood-framed fiberglass door in the east corner. The interior of this bay has vertical wood siding. The windows in the fourth bay to the west have two metal sliding windows per bay with a brick header window sill. There is an A/C unit below the windows with Chinese holly bushes in front to hide them. The windows in the fourth bay to the west has plastic muntins, unlike the other windows. The sixth bay from the west includes another entrance with a concrete ADA ramp. To this entrance's west is a single metal sliding window in a recessed bay with similar depth to the other window bays. The westernmost bay is identical to the other bays with two metal sliding windows. The windows extend to the wood fascia boards below the eaves that continue along the roofline in all the façade's bays except for the entrances. There are vinyl soffits attached to the fascia board with air vents.

The east elevation has a brick exterior with horizontal siding on the open gable end. There is one recessed bay with a brick step up to a concrete slab. Within the bay is interior wood siding and a vinyl paneled door within a wood frame. The recessed bay's height extends to the material transition to vinyl siding. There is a vinyl vent triangle at the roof's apex. The west elevation is similar to the east façade with the combination of vinyl and brick, but lacks any bays.

The southern elevation has 9 bays, with an entrance on the westernmost side. This entrance is slightly recessed into the building with brick siding on the interior. It has a small concrete slab leading to a vinyl door and single sliding window. The two bays from the west are recessed window bays similar to the façade, but lack the holly bushes. The fourth bay from the west has a single sliding metal window within a small recessed bay. The next four bays have small single metal sliding windows flush with the building's brick wall. The easternmost bay is recessed and similar to the north façade's window bays with double sliding metal windows.

**Office (1972, contributing building)**

The office was the second of the three brick training center buildings to be constructed. It was designed to complement the dormitory's design, with brick-over-masonry materials and a vernacular ranch style.

The office is a one-story rectangular building with a concrete block foundation and frame with a running bond brick veneer. The façade faces north with a side gable v-rib metal roof and air vent in its center. A concrete slab extends across the façade, which leads to the parking lot to the north, Federation Road to the east, and another entrance on the west elevation. The windows on the façade are identical in materials and the brick header sills beneath them. The façade has five bays with symmetrical double sliding metal windows on the eastern and western sides. Between there symmetrical windows are two recessed bays. The second bay to the west is recessed with a concrete ADA ramp and two doors; the eastern double doors are fiberglass paneled doors and the western door is a single fiberglass paneled door. To this entrance's west is a single brick pilaster running vertically from the ground to the roofline. To the west is slightly recessed bay with two double sliding metal windows. There are holly bushes below the windows, with annual flowers planted between them. The windows extend to a wood fascia board that continues along the façade. Above the wood fascia board is a gutter system.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

The west elevation has a single recessed bay with brick walls and wood fascia board on the interior. It has concrete slab and a fiberglass door within a vinyl frame. Above the entrance is a transition to vinyl horizontal siding with a vinyl vent triangle. The east elevation is similar but lacks any bays. There is a concrete picnic table and wood sign near the east elevation.

The south elevation is similar to the dormitory with recessed bays and sliding metal windows. There are four recessed bays; the first and third from the west have a single window within a small recessed bay. The second bay to the west has two windows and the fourth has a larger single window. It is the easternmost of the three central training center buildings, with a sloping lawn that leads to the lawn in the northwest and the Center Pond in the south. Overall, this building has integrity and remains in good condition.

### **Cafetorium (1972, contributing building)**

The cafetorium – a nickname given by Federation staff for its multipurpose use - was the last of the three brick buildings to be constructed. The cafetorium is located to the east of the dormitory and office, facing west toward the lawn. Part of a small hill in this area was dug out to construct the building, where a concrete block retaining wall was constructed to the east and north. The space between the retaining wall and building has a grassy lawn. There is no landscaping around this building, except for the mowed lawn. There have been minor alterations to the building, including a replacement v-rib metal roof (2006) and small repairs. Overall, it retains integrity to the period of significance and is in good condition.

The façade of the rectangular building faces west with a side gable roof. Like the other brick buildings, it is a vernacular ranch building with a running bond brick veneer on concrete block masonry units. Unlike the other buildings, it has a square boardroom to the northwest that breaks up the otherwise uniform rectangular plan. This addition occupies a third of the roofline's footprint with a painted cement slab on the other two-thirds. The roofline on the east is continuous with the rest of the façade and covers a small passageway that leads from the façade to the cement slab on the west. There are six bays on the facade. The southernmost bay is slightly recessed with a concrete ADA ramp leading to a vinyl paneled door within a brick-lined interior. There are three sliding metal sliding windows to the north. The fifth bay from the south is the passageway between the boardroom and cafetorium. To its north is a metal sliding window. The windows have brick header sills, but do not extend to the wood fascia board like the other brick buildings' windows. There is a slightly overhanging eave with a vinyl soffit with air vents attached to the wood fascia board. A gutter lines the top of the fascia. A concrete walkway lines the façade and terminates at the covered passageway.

The south elevation has a large overhanging open eave that continues from the west side until the easternmost quarter of the elevation; this is a storage room whose roofline is flush with the north elevation's roofline. There is a recessed bay to storage room's west with an elevated concrete slab and brick-lined interior wall. There are two entrances to the building in this bay; one is a fiberglass door on the southwestern side of the storage room that faces the concrete slab. The other entrance is a paneled vinyl door facing south on the western corner of the concrete slab. The recessed bay has a vinyl frieze and a horizontal vinyl ceiling. The horizontal vinyl siding continues vertically from the recessed bay ceiling to the overhanging eave. West of the recessed bay is a brick

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

wall with no fenestration. The rake on the overhanging eave has horizontal vinyl siding that is missing at the roof's apex.

The north elevation of the cafetorium includes the covered passageway to the boardroom. The boardroom is located on the westernmost third of the elevation. There are three bays on the north elevation, one of which is a vinyl paneled door under the covered passageway. There is a vinyl paneled door on the easternmost side with a small concrete ADA ramp leading up to it. To the west is another vinyl door leading to a women's bathroom. There is a vertical vinyl frieze under an overhanging eave with air vents on the soffit. This elevation has an overhanging gable end with horizontal vinyl siding.

The board room was designed as part of the original building. It has a shed roof and west elevation that is continuous with the rest of the building. There is an entrance on the south elevation that is directly across the cafetorium's entrance. It is a vinyl paneled door. The east elevation has fixed blue-tinted windows in an L-shape along the top and north side. There are three windows below the vinyl vertical fascia with brick header sills. The northernmost window only has half of a brick header sill since the first of three long rectangular windows is directly adjacent. The north elevation has a large HVAC unit and no bays.

The east elevation of the cafetorium has six bays. The southernmost bay is a small metal sliding window. There is a double metal sliding window to the north, then a small recessed bay with a brick-lined interior and cement slab. There is a vinyl paneled door with two small windows in the top panels. There are three metal sliding windows to the north of this bay. There is an overhanging eave on the northern side. This elevation has most of the utilities for the building, with HVAC and three exterior A/C units.

**Storage Shed (c. 1971, contributing building)**

The wood storage shed is one-story, rectangular, wood framed building with a high pitched sheet metal roof. The is a wood door on the northern side of the building. The shed was likely constructed to serve as storage for the three greenhouse structures on the hill to the west of the Center Pond in 1971.

**Prefabricated Home (ca. 1970 [moved ca. 2000], non-contributing building)**

The prefabricated home stands on the northern edge of the historic district's boundary between the ridgeline and Federation Road. It belongs to the Training Center's caretaker, who has made several additions to the 1970s-era single-wide building. It was moved around 2000 from another property and now stands on a pier foundation made of concrete blocks and bricks. The building is made of vinyl and metal with a metal roof. The four-bay facade faces south with a wooden platform leading to the vinyl doorway and corrugated metal scrap covering the space between the home and ground. There is an addition on the northern elevation made of prefabricated and salvaged material with a v-rib sheet metal roof. Another addition is attached to the west made of plywood and metal with a screen-in porch on the north and east sides. There are several small objects around the building, including a hunting hook stand, fridge, prefabricated metal shed, lawn mower, smokers, and several gas tanks.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

### **Aquaponics Bay (2016, non-contributing building)**

The aquaponics bay is a semi-permanent building situated to the northwest of the Cafetorium. It was part of a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture given for the Training Center staff to grow food for local food shelters and farmers. It is a rectangular building with a metal frame that forms a gambrel shape. The metal frame sits on gravel. The east and west elevations are made of a hard plastic with double plastic doors. The north and south elevations have a plastic covering that rolls up to expose the interior.

### **Hoophouse (2013, non-contributing building)**

The hoophouse is a semi-permanent structure to the north of the community garden. This is the latest iteration of the Training Center's hoophouses, an agricultural practice they've used since 1972. It is a rectangular tunnel structure with a semi-circular roof, whose frame is made with roll-formed steel attached to a hard plastic rectangular frame on the ground. A plastic sheet covers the frame, which can be rolled up and tied, exposing a mesh siding. There are entrances on the north and south elevations made of mesh and plastic.

### **Pavilion (ca. 2000, non-contributing structure)**

The pavilion is a recreational open-air building for visitors and staff members, often used for picnics and barbecues. It was built to accompany the recreational activities that often take place at the Center Pond. It stands on the hill to the east of the pond and is surrounded by a lawn and loblolly trees to the west. There is a rectangular brick barbecue pit to the pavilion's southwest.

The pavilion is a rectangular structure with 10 wooden support posts on a concrete slab. The four corner posts stand in a 4-course tall, L-shaped decorative brick base. The concrete slab extends 5 feet to the west, where impermanent grills and smokers often stand. The posts support a gabled roof with corrugated metal sheeting. Next to the central eastern post is a water spigot that connects to the water lines.

### **Evaluation of Integrity**

The buildings and landscape retain integrity to the period of significance. The landscape still maintains the feeling of agricultural use, and the buildings have integrity to their historical associations. There have only been minor alterations to the buildings since 1973, including new metal roofs, the addition of A/C units below windows on the three brick buildings, and new doors. Federation staff replaced the original asphalt shingle roofs with metal roofing in 2006 and 2016. The barn's alterations include the vertical metal siding and metal sliding windows on the two wing additions, which were installed after animal production was no longer a focus for the RTRC. Lack of use for the pump house, Big House, Print Shop, and gift shop/Yellow Building has resulted in deterioration that has somewhat affected the integrity of their materials and design. The Big House received water damage in 2020 after a storm caused multiple pipes to burst in the ceiling, which led to a roof replacement, but the building needs restoration work. This event made the building uninhabitable and it has remained vacant for over two years. There are sections of its exterior where the brick veneer has fallen off and the wood porch on the north elevation shows signs of rot. The pump house is also no longer used, and the roof,



Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

door frame and door are all missing. Overall, the alterations and deterioration patterns do not adversely affect the location, design, materials, and workmanship of the historic buildings.

Several agricultural buildings have been torn down or removed since the period of significance, but the landscape still communicates the historic district's rural historical associations. The three greenhouse structures on the hill to the west of the Center Pond were destroyed by storms, and only their concrete slab and cinder block foundations remain. A pig parlor barn is also no longer extant after the feeder pig operation was abandoned and the materials were repurposed. Another change to the landscape includes the removal of the 12 mobile homes from the period of significance. However, these lost buildings and structures were not the primary resources in the landscape and their removal does not detract from the historic district's integrity.

The nominated historic district retains integrity of location and setting in a rural landscape, since the adjacent areas have not been developed and the land use patterns align with their historical use. The spatial relationship of the buildings, driveway, open lawns, walkways, and planting beds remain as they were in the early 1970s. The historic district retains key open spaces, such as the field between the community garden and office, the fields to the south and west of the barn, and the field between the two ponds. Aside from the noncontributing resources, additions to the historic district after the period of significance include the loblolly pine stands, several sheds, agricultural fencing, and several signs. Overall, the additions to the landscape are non-intrusive and compatible with the historic use of the historic district since they relate to the Training Center's agricultural and educational purposes.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

AGRICULTURE

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

SOCIAL HISTORY: CIVIL RIGHTS

**Period of Significance**

1970-1973

**Significant Dates**

1971

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

BUCHANON, ROBERT

NORWOOD, PERCY M

L.L. DELAINE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

\_\_\_\_\_

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and Research Center is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in agricultural history, Black heritage, and social history for its association with the Civil Rights Movement in southeastern United States and more locally in Sumter County, Alabama. The Rural Training and Research Center (RTRC) is a landmark of the Black cooperative and civil rights movements in the Black Belt of Alabama. It is being nominated as an intact example of the first training center of an African American cooperative organization, rooted in the Civil Rights Movement and in continuous operation since 1971 working to overcome discriminatory policies and represent the intersection of the cooperative movement, economic justice, and Black heritage in the region and nation. The period of significance begins in 1970s, because the land and the inherited buildings on the property were used for significant activities prior to the construction of any new buildings on the property. The Training Center is a product and realization of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC) - an umbrella cooperative organization formed in February 1967 by 22 cooperatives with the goal to serve as a means to connect and support all the diverse co-op efforts struggling across the South. This historic decision would establish the longest-running African American-led national cooperative organization in the United States, and the first to be established with the tenets of the Civil Rights Movement. As stated by scholar Thomas N. Bethell,

“The assignment [members of the 22 co-ops] gave to the new Federation was all-encompassing: Help us survive, they said, whether we’re involved in marketing crops, purchasing farm supplies or consumer goods, running stores, forming credit unions, building houses, catching fish, selling crafts, planting fruit trees, running cattle, buying land, raising pigs, or looking for jobs. If we need money, help us find it. If we need training, find the experts. If we can’t read, find us teachers. If we can’t balance our books, help us learn accounting. Help us get out of debt, school our children, provide better medical care for our families, look after our people.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1971, the FSC purchased 72.6 acres in Epes, Alabama to establish the Rural Training and Research Center (RTRC), the first and only place purposefully designed to support the training and development of all Black cooperatives in the American South. The RTRC served as the headquarters for the FSC until 1974.<sup>10</sup> After only a decade of operation the facilities at the RTRC enabled the FSC to support and coordinate the bootstrap economic-development efforts of about 30,000 low-income rural families organized into 130 cooperatives of various kinds in 14 states throughout the South.<sup>11</sup> The property’s significance reflects the agricultural and historic use of the property as a demonstration farm and training center for low-income, disadvantaged African American cooperative members, including farmers and their families. The Rural Training and Research Center (RTRC) was the only organization at the local level participating in such activities.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas N. Bethell, “Sumter County Blues: The Ordeal of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives,” Washington DC: The National Committee in Support of Community Based Organizations, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Prejean, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Bethell, “Sumter County Blues.”

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

From 1972 to 1973 the FSC built the main facilities of the RTRC – the office, dormitory, cafetorium, print shop, and “gift shop,” along with the adjoining land for agricultural demonstrations and agroforestry training. The historic district’s period of significance under Criterion A begins in 1970, when staff member Wendell Paris moved to the property and began operations, and continues to 1973, when the Federation of Southern Cooperatives had substantially transformed the land for the Rural Training and Research Center. The integrity of the historic district’s landscape and historic affiliation with the Civil Rights Movement and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives sustain the patterns of land use and rural setting in Alabama’s Black Belt region.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Black Heritage, Agriculture, and Social History

*Background Information: Agricultural Discrimination in Sumter County and the Black Belt*

Prior to European settlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Choctaw Nation occupied the land in Sumter County and took advantage of the rich soil, plentiful creeks, and streams that characterize Alabama’s Black Belt region. Although Europeans had traded with the tribes since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, American settlement began after 1829 when the land was wrested from the Choctaw Nation tribe under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.<sup>12</sup> These settlers brought enslaved Africans to cultivate the soil for cotton and strip the area’s timber, thereby forcing them to participate in a growing plantation agriculture system. The plantation system greatly affected the Black Belt’s demographics and culture, since the percentage of enslaved African Americans grew to outnumber the white population by the Civil War era.<sup>13</sup>

After emancipation, plantation landowners fought hard to redefine and control the new terms of freedom. In a region that relied on the cash-crop plantation system, a labor crisis spurred the tenant and sharecropping systems that disenfranchised freed African Americans across the South. Many freed people, who were intentionally kept illiterate, had little choice but to return to the land and agricultural practices they were familiar with since many were without mules, lines of credit, land, and farming equipment.<sup>14</sup> The sharecropper system was especially debilitating, as farmers were only paid annually for crops grown, and had their housing, clothing, food, and other necessities deducted from the meager payments. Tenant farmers rented the land from landowners by the acre, and paid the landowners “thirds” or “halves” of the revenue in crops or cash.<sup>15</sup> Banks refused to lend to African American farmers, forcing them to borrow from local merchants who drove up high interest rates and demanded cotton as a cash crop, a strategy that prevented crop rotation and deprived soil of its

<sup>12</sup> “Gaines’ Reminiscences,” *The Alabama Historical Quarterly* 26 (Spring 1964) in Louis R. Smith Jr., “A History of Sumter County Through 1886,” PhD diss. (University of Alabama, 1988), 75.

<sup>13</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Table No.2 Population by Color and Condition,” *Classified Population of the State and Territories by Counties on the First Day of June 1860*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: a history of African American cooperative economic thought and practice* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 211; Charlene Gilbert and Quinn Eli, “Taking Root: The Civil War and Reconstruction,” in *Homecoming: The Story of African American Farmers*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Livingston Journal*, November 13, 1868, in *A History of Sumter County Alabama Through 1886*, 158. In Sumter County, Gainesville and Livingston passed laws forbidding merchants from buying Black farmers’ goods after dark, making it difficult to earn revenue outside the tenant and sharecropping systems; John Zippert, email message.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

nutrients.<sup>16</sup> In many cases those merchants were also the plantation land owners. Most large plantations, such as Barnes Aduston Roger's plantation in northern Sumter County, also owned a store where tenants had to purchase their seeds, fertilizer and farm supplies, as well as groceries and clothes - hence why the tenant farming system was the economic successor to slavery, in the Alabama Black Belt and other similar areas of plantation agriculture in the South.<sup>17</sup>

These systems made it increasingly difficult for Black farmers to gain economic independence and realize self-sustainability, especially in Alabama's Black Belt where Reconstruction legislation, such as the 1901 Alabama constitution, reinforced legal and economic discrimination against African Americans in the state.<sup>18</sup> Despite these obstacles, there was a large increase in Black land ownership in the Black Belt from 1900-1930. After 1930, the federal government introduced incentives for farmers to selectively grow certain crops and keep part of their land fallow. The landowners increasingly turned toward machine harvesters and herbicides, ending their reliance on Black labor and effectively ending employment streams. This also made it difficult for small Black and White farmers to compete with larger landowners, and the number of landholding Black farmers dwindled.<sup>19</sup>

In the wake of land and voting disenfranchisement during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Black-led self-advancement unions and schools began organizing sharecropper and tenants with varying degrees of success, ultimately paving the way for agricultural activism and the cooperative movement in the 1960s. These efforts built on the work of influential Black leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver. Black farmers were organizing themselves in the south to break free of the sharecropping system and purchase their own land through early organizations like the Colored Farmer's National Alliance (CFNAU) established in Texas in 1886 and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union established in Arkansas in 1934.<sup>20</sup> These organizations, and the hundreds of smaller cooperatives that followed, were accompanied by political education and involvement as Black farmers, sharecroppers, and agricultural laborers were continually segregated from other farming organizations and agricultural opportunities supported by the government.<sup>21</sup> African Americans

---

<sup>16</sup> April B. Chandler, "'The Loss in My Bones': Protecting African American Heirs' property with the Public Use Doctrine," *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 14, no. 387 (2005), 393. The price of cotton plummeted after World War I, when Europe stopped transatlantic trading, causing land loss for many Black farmers. Boll weevils spread through the entire South by 1921, cutting cotton yields dramatically.

<sup>17</sup> Zippert, email message.

<sup>18</sup> Veronica L. Womack, "Black Power in the Alabama Black Belt to the 1970s," in *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule – African American Landowning Families Since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 235-240. The tenant-operated land tended to be the least valuable in South, which contributed to the cycle of economic instability. By 1930, the value of tenant-owned land in Alabama was the lowest in the South since it was stripped of its nutrients since tenants needed to keep pace with the cotton cash-crop system.

<sup>19</sup> Brian K. Landsberg, "Sumter County, Alabama and the Origins of the Voting Rights Act," *Alabama Law Review* 54, no. 3 (2003): 886. By 1900, there were over 78,000 registered African American voters in Alabama's Black Belt counties, but only 1,081 after the 1901 constitution.

<sup>20</sup> Omar H Ali, "Black Populism: Agrarian Politics from the Colored Alliance to the People's Party," in *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule – African American Landowning Families Since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 109. The CFNACU dissolved by 1896.

<sup>21</sup> Gilbert and Eli, "Strength in Numbers: World War I and the Peak of Black Landownership," in *Homecoming*, 38-40.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

were purposefully excluded from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) public expenditures; Black farmers were denied loans, assistance, and participation in agricultural academic programs.<sup>22</sup>

Cooperative organizing among African Americans has deep roots that reach back to the period of enslavement. Cooperative organizing often relied on collective action to find alternative strategies for economic independence and stability.<sup>23</sup> Cooperative ventures consisted of pooled resources to solve a variety of socioeconomic and familial challenges - some were grassroots-based and others were more class based and exclusive as they became more formalized in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> They operated within a network of established organizations and businesses to promote new connections based on a sense of trust and solidarity. Early cooperative efforts were advanced land acquisition in the Southern Black Belt toward the end or and after the Civil War, as people found that simply making land available for purchase would not alleviate economic issues that made it difficult to retain or purchase property.<sup>25</sup> Early cooperative economic action also took the form of mutual-aid and beneficial societies, mutual insurance organizations, fraternal organization and secret societies, buying clubs, and joint-stock ownership.<sup>26</sup> W.E.B. DuBois helped formalize the cooperative movement by promoting the "Rochdale Principles of Cooperation" as an important strategy for cooperatives' economic success, which would influence the major Black-owned cooperatives in the 1930s, and the resurgent cooperative movement in the 1960s.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1930s, education courses became an essential part of cooperative development. Schools like the Bricks Rural Life School in North Carolina, run by the American Missionary Association, had an adult education program and farming program in 1934 for African American cooperative development.<sup>28</sup> African American co-op leaders studied international cooperatives, including the Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia and Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in Spain, many of which stressed the importance of education as the essential element to maintaining success and longevity.<sup>29</sup> Another essential component of early cooperatives that clearly influenced the Federation of Southern Cooperatives was the use of study groups and leadership training – an element that Du Bois believe would promote the democratic ideals and fight African American

<sup>22</sup> Greta De Jong, "From Free Labor to Displaced Persons," in *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice After the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 20-21. The federal government's Commission on Civil Rights investigated the USDA in the 1960s and 1980s and found rampant discriminatory practices by many of its agencies.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Owusu Bandele and Gail Meyers, "Roots!," in *Land Justice- Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*, ed. Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Gimenez (Oakland: Food First Books, 2017), 33-35. African Americans still faced economic hardships that made it difficult to purchase land and necessary equipment. Likewise, they were not afforded the same opportunities for agricultural education as White farmers. Booker T. Washington had several Tuskegee-led efforts to promote African American land ownership, but they were not always effective and were not as people-centered as later grassroots agricultural cooperatives became; Womack, *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule*, 239. At the same time, Dr. George Washington Carver worked on sustainable and organize agricultural practices for African American farmers' use and education. These practices laid the foundation of modern organic agricultural practices.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, *Collective Courage*, 32 & 251. The seven cooperative principles of the "Rochdale Principles of Cooperation" are 1) voluntary and open membership, 2) democratic member control, 3) member economic participation, 4) autonomy and independence, 5) education, training and information, 6) cooperation among cooperatives, and 7) concern for community.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, *Collective Courage*, 91. Another example includes the Tyrell County Training School in North Carolina.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 85-94. The founders and early staff of the FSC studied the Antigonish movement and sent members to its summer institute between 1962-1964. FSC members also toured the Mondragon cooperatives in Spain in the 1970s.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

social subordination.<sup>30</sup> Training schools were established all over the nation by the 1940s and began incorporating cooperative economics, but they weren't founded for the purpose of African American cooperative development and self-improvement and didn't sustain a lasting cooperative mission.<sup>31</sup>

*Later Cooperatives*

African American cooperatives, ranging from co-op stores to farming, are the product of “racial solidarity and economic cooperation the face of discrimination and marginalization to pool their resources and create their own mutually beneficial and often democratic companies.”<sup>32</sup> Although the cooperative movement was stagnating by the 1950s, a resurgence began in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement. Scholars have suggested that the decline in teaching cooperative economics and its history, especially in African American colleges, was due to the McCarthy-era political repression in the 1950s. African American civil rights advocates were sensitive to the repercussions faced by activity suspected of supporting communism, and there was a conscious decision by some to separate economic rights from political rights during the 1960s.<sup>33</sup> However, grassroots civil rights activists, like many of those in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), promoted cooperative economic development as a strategy to reduce poverty and empower Black farmers. They began working with and advocating for African American cooperatives and mutual-aid societies in tandem with their political work.<sup>34</sup>

Several factors contributed to the rise of more formal cooperatives like the FSC in the 1960s. Black farm operators were increasingly displaced and left without jobs as white landowners began replacing Black labor with new agriculture technologies, leaving many without means of support. The use of tractors, mechanical harvesters, and chemical weed control reduced the need for African American labor.<sup>35</sup> Few job opportunities remained in these areas for folks without nonagricultural skills, and rampant discrimination barred many African Americans from finding other work.<sup>36</sup> As a result, rural African Americans continued leaving the South, especially from Black Belt plantation counties like Sumter, in search of better economic and education opportunities.

In the early 1960s, cooperatives began to address economic injustices for communities on a grassroots level.<sup>37</sup> Drawing from existing community organizations and networks of churches, cooperatives were formed to

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 256-257.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>35</sup> Gilbert and Eli, “Planting Seeds: The Post-War Boom,” in *Homecoming*, 136. By 1960 more than half of U.S. crops were picked by a machine, and Black farmers were struggling to purchase new equipment.

<sup>36</sup> Greta de Jong, “Staying in Place: Black Migration, The Civil Rights Movement, and the War on Poverty in the Rural South,” *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 388-389. Approximately 4.8 million African American southerners migrated from their home states between 1940-1960.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Prejean, personal interview. Charles Prejean, who later became the co-founder and first executive director of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, worked with the Father Albert McKnight and the Southern Consumer's Cooperative based in Louisiana. This cooperative was among several in southern states aimed at educating people about cooperative economics, cooperative business development, and credit union principles.



Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

support small business enterprises and farmers and their families.<sup>38</sup> These cooperatives decreased the interaction with White farmers, banks, and merchants. They helped to market products, pool resources, provided technical and agricultural expertise, and enabled farmers to switch from cotton to other crops. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), Black farmers continued to be displaced by White landowners for their participation in the Movement or by registering to vote. In Sumter County, hundreds of African American tenant farmers and their families, who later formed the Panola Land Buyers Association (PLBA) cooperative in 1965, were displaced from Barnes Aduston Roger's plantation and denied their cotton subsidy checks from him for exercising their right to vote.<sup>39</sup> Farmers were also evicted from the Parker Brothers plantation and other members of the Roger's family farms in the county.<sup>40</sup> Cooperatives struggled to incorporate land retention into their movement, since it was a complicated issue involving political and financial power. As a result, the need arose for organizations like the FSC and Emergency Land Fund (the mission of which was to retain land ownership).<sup>41</sup>

Civil rights organizers and their grassroots counterparts recognized that African Americans in rural areas needed a mechanism to avoid further migration, displacement, and cycles of poverty. Restoring Black voting rights was only one aspect of the solution, since Black southerners needed economic stability and opportunities in rural areas.<sup>42</sup> As the War on Poverty began to take shape in 1964, cooperatives began to formalize the movement with a coalition of civil rights organizations, like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), SNCC, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The coordinated work resulted in organizations like the Federation of Southern Cooperatives that sought to build on the major tenets of the Civil Rights Movement and also address the lack of jobs, training opportunities, and absence of funding for rural African Americans and their economic enterprises.

### *The Federation of Southern Cooperatives*

One of the challenges facing cooperatives in the rural Deep South, like the Southwest Alabama Farmer's Cooperative Association (SWAFCA) and the Southern Consumer's Cooperative (SCC), was the lack of organizational and technical expertise that could allow them to expand across multiple states.<sup>43</sup> A regional

<sup>38</sup> Monica White, "Agricultural Self-Determination on a Regional Scale: The Federation of Southern Cooperatives," in *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 97-98; Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 195.

<sup>39</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, June 26, 2022; White, "Agricultural Self-Determination," 101; Zippert, email message. Many of the families migrated away but forty families remained in Sumter County. These were the families that were contacted by Lewis Black, Albert Turner and Thelma Craig (Alabama staff of the Southern Cooperative Development Program - SCDP) to work together with P. M. Norwood, to redeem the three tracts - 1164 acres, which became the land where the Federation's RTRC is located. Since the SCDP was part of the FSC, they were in contact about the potential land-use for the future training center.

<sup>40</sup> Zippert, email message. John Aduston Rogers was the head of the Sumter County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) which allocated cotton allotments, subsidies and payments for deferring production. These payments were supposed to be shared with the tenants, according to their relationship with the land owners. The tenants on these three plantations (Barnes Aduston Roger, John Aduston Roger, and the Parker Brothers) sued the owners for their share of the cotton subsidy payments. The tenants won the lawsuit but were summarily evicted at the end of 1966.

<sup>41</sup> John J. Green, "Community-Based Cooperatives and Networks: Participatory Social Movement Assessment of Four Organizations" (Phd diss, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2002), 118-119.

<sup>42</sup> de Jong, "Staying in Place," 388.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 196.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

entity was needed to address the survival of Black agrarian communities in the rural South by establishing an umbrella nonprofit cooperative membership organization to support the proliferation of cooperatives as an alternative, democratic economic system.<sup>44</sup> In 1966, organizers Reverend Albert McKnight and John Zippert met with cooperatives in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee to talk about working together to address the issue. They also had the support of the Southern Regional Council (SRC), Voter Education Project (VEP), American Friends Service Committee, and civil rights organizations.<sup>45</sup> The group met twice at the Mount Buelah civil rights training facility near Edwards, Mississippi, owned by the Disciples of Christ Church.<sup>46</sup> Out of these meetings, they developed a proposal for the Southern Cooperative Development Program (SCDP). The proposal included a goal to develop a regional organization to “represent, provide services, including training; and advocacy for farmers and rural low-income people in the South.” The Southern Cooperative Development Program (SCDP) was funded by Ford Foundation in 1967 in a grant to the Southern Consumers Education Foundation (a 501(c)3 affiliate of the Southern Consumers Cooperative, started by Father A. J. McKnight and Charles Prejean).<sup>47</sup>

While the Ford Foundation was considering the SCDP proposal in 1967, the cooperative groups that met in Mount Buelah, supported by the SRC, VEP, SWAFCA and others, called for the meeting at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) at Atlanta University that Spring. Twenty-two cooperatives and credit unions from southern states attended and decided to formalize the work of incorporation by developing the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC). The following states were represented by the Federation: Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Florida. The cooperatives from Alabama included the Freedom Quilting Bee, Southwest Alabama Farmers’ Cooperative Association, and Southwest Alabama Self-Help Association, a credit union from Greensboro, AL, and a local cooperative grocery store. The cooperatives outside of Alabama included the Liberty House handicraft cooperative in Mississippi, Mid-South Oil cooperative in Tennessee, a vegetable producer and shrimpers cooperative from Hilton Head, SC, and credit unions from Northeast Jackson County, Florida.<sup>48</sup> This historic decision would establish the longest-running African American-led national cooperative organization in the United States, and the first to be established with the tenets of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>49</sup>

Charles Prejean was selected as Chair of the Board of this fledgling organization and later became the first Executive Director and staff member of the Federation.<sup>50</sup> This meeting included both credit unions and cooperatives because the early members recognized that rural African Americans were distrustful of White banks and many of the cooperatives needed help with their bookkeeping. They made it their goal to provide technical assistance to credit unions so they could increase their assets and improve bookkeeping skills, all while encouraging cooperatives that these were safe places to invest their money.

<sup>44</sup> Dania C. Davy, Savonala Horne, Tracy Lloyd McCurty, and Edward Pennick, “Resistance,” in *Land Justice*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> de Jong, *Invisible Enemy: African American Freedom Struggles After 1965* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell), 163. Father McKnight was involved in the establishment of over 2,000 cooperatives in southwestern Louisiana by 1962.

<sup>46</sup> Zippert, email message. The Voter Education project was headed by John Lewis at this time.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, February 4, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, February 4, 2023; Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 190.

<sup>50</sup> Zippert, email message. The Federation’s regional office was established at 52 Fairly Street in Atlanta, GA.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

Upon being granted funds from the Ford Foundation and U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), Father McKnight was appointed the Director of the SCDP and John Zippert became the Assistant Director.<sup>51</sup> The staff of the SCDP in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee worked in conjunction with the Federation in the early development period (ca. 1967-1970). Under the leadership of Father McKnight, the Federation developed the concept of the Southern Cooperative Development Fund (SCDF) as a lending institution to provide capital for the Federation's membership and other community economic development initiatives.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to from their mission to alleviate rural poverty, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives was also born out of the desire to support and sustain Black farmers through a philosophy and strategy of cooperative economic development, especially for the families and independently-owned businesses in rural low-income communities. The FSC founding document describes the organization as a "resource development center" that serves to provide technical assistance to members and addresses policy issues to advocate for low-income cooperative development.<sup>53</sup> It also emphasized FSC's commitment to retain people's access to their land, since the majority of the Federation's family farmers had land tenure and loss issues. The technical assistance would involve educating members on cooperative operations, financial literacy, product marketing and networking, loan and grant management, and the acquisition of federal financial benefits that had been long-denied to African Americans. Because the Federation was involved with helping their members access USDA grants and loans, they began negotiating with government officials to advocate for fair and equitable support for their farmers.<sup>54</sup>

The FSC began following the Rochdale Principles and established field offices in each participating state, which included Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Texas by 1973.<sup>55</sup> For many members, the democratic spirit of "one person, one vote," was their first introduction to realizing they could have a large impact on their community and personal lives. Their staff was largely comprised of former members of local cooperatives and civil rights organizations, like SNCC, CORE, and SWAFCA. Because they were involved in the Civil Rights Movement, staff members realized the importance of a bottom-up, community-led organization rooted in self-improvement, driven by the inherent connection between concerns over equality and economics.<sup>56</sup>

To realize their education mission, for both cooperative members and leaders, the FSC recognized the need for a permanent home base for programmatic operations and training in a central southeastern location. Although training schools and collective farm ownership were not uncommon, no other grassroots cooperative organization had established a training center, and many of the early members recall the "experimental" nature of their endeavor.<sup>57</sup> Universities like Tuskegee and Auburn had educational programs or extension services for

<sup>51</sup> de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom*, 141.

<sup>52</sup> Zippert, email message. The SCDF was incorporated in 1970, with Father McKnight as the Director.

<sup>53</sup> White, "Agricultural Self-Determination," 99.

<sup>54</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, February 4, 2023. Most of training for product marketing was how to meet the standards of the market for packaging, advertising, pricing, and washing.

<sup>55</sup> John Zippert, "The First 25 Years," unpublished. Between 1968 and 1971, the federation had grown from 22 cooperative groups to 45, with over 10,000 members.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022; Charles Prejean, personal interview, July 12, 2022; John Zippert, personal interview, June 26, 2022.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

rural African Americans, but these were not the work of grassroots cooperative organizing nor did they focus on self-empowerment through leadership development and collective ownership.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, by virtue of their cooperative principles, the Federation's training center would be collectively owned by the federation's members, giving them power in the organization.

By the time the Federation began seriously looking to purchase land for a training center, an affiliated cooperative member, the SCDP, was working with the PLBA to purchase land in Sumter County.<sup>59</sup> Lewis Black found a White property owner, Percy M. Norwood Jr. (who had recently lost three tracts of land in a foreclosure) and negotiated with him on the basis that the FSC would help redeem his land if he sold two tracts to the PLBA. Norwood used the property for hunting, often holding hunting and barbeque parties in the red barn and hunting lodge (the building now known as the Big House).<sup>60</sup> Norwood had grown pine trees on much of the land and had cattle on the undeveloped grassy areas. He eventually built a small store to the south of the Big House, for "business transactions."<sup>61</sup> Norwood took out a mortgage on the land in 1965, and lost it in foreclosure in 1967, by which time Preston C. Minus bought it at auction. Minus quickly timbered the pine trees on the property before Norwood could gain the property back, which was the condition it was in when the PLBA acquired it in 1970.<sup>62</sup> The purchase was opposed by the local White establishment, and the case was eventually brought to court where the judge ruled in favor of Norwood. After a property appraisal in 1968 raised the land price, Norwood gave the PLBA his right to purchase the three property tracts.<sup>63</sup>

At that time, Sumter County was one of the poorest counties in Alabama, with a majority African American population and a history of sharecropper and tenant farmer land loss and exploitation, agricultural collapse, and racial discrimination.<sup>64</sup> The rural struggle mirrored much of the state and region's history, but its location in Alabama's Black Belt region presented specific struggles for the Training Center and local affiliated cooperatives. Despite foreseen difficulties or organizing within a voter-suppressed county, the PLBA and FSC met in 1970 and came to an agreement that stipulated that the FSC would help purchase the 1,164 acres by servicing their mortgages in exchange for "more or less 40 acres" for a future training center and 20 acres for a future housing development.<sup>65</sup> The agreement was initially made informally by the two parties, where they

<sup>58</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 260. Tuskegee Institute and the Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association notably helped establish cooperatives, credit unions, and affordable housing in the early 1960s.

<sup>59</sup> Zippert, email message. Lewis Black was a member of the SCDP who worked with the PLBA on land acquisition. At this time, the SCDP was a cooperative under the FSC, so he had direct contacts with the FSC.

<sup>60</sup> Carrie Fulgham, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> John Zippert, personal interview. Lewis Black, with the financial support of the American Friends Service, entered into an agreement with Norwood to redeem the tracts of land. This sale was difficult to pass - the local judge kept refusing to hear the case because the tract's owners wouldn't show up at the meetings. The PLBA's lawyer, Oscar Adams, eventually removed the case to the Federal District Court in Birmingham and got the case adjudicated by 1970. By this time, Norwood didn't want the land since it was priced too high (\$178/acre) from the owners supposed improvements made by cutting timber.

<sup>63</sup> George Howell to Joseph L. Hansknecht Jr., May 3, 1971, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. When the PLBA received a site assessment of the land in 1968, the land contained the Big House, red barn, store building, tenant house, and a small unpainted barn.

<sup>64</sup> Landsberg, "Sumter County," 887. In 1960, Sumter County's voting age population consisted of 3,061 white people and 6,814 African Americans, yet 99% of registered voters were white.

<sup>65</sup> George Howell to Joseph L. Hansknecht Jr., May 3, 1971, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Part of the Federation's early agreement with the PLBA included their assistance to establish low-income

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

roughly outlined the southwest corner of Parcel 1 as the training center land. After this agreement, the Federation sent Wendell Paris, a former SNCC organizer and native of Sumter County, to live on the property in 1970 to help the PLBA members establish sound agricultural practices and prepare the land for an official training center.<sup>66</sup>

*Establishment of the Rural Training and Research Center, 1970-1973*

When Wendell Paris and his family arrived at the parcel in 1970, it needed extensive land clearing. The former property owners had badly cut the timber, making it difficult to grow crops. Paris spent that first year helping the PLBA clear and till the poorly timbered land and establishing a feeder pig program, for which they converted the eastern portion of the 72.6 acres into an animal production area. Within that year, they dug out a lagoon for animal waste for the adjacent pig parlor built to the east of the red barn and surrounded this area with hog fencing. This barn was likely built for P.M. Norwood's cattle operation on his property, with a hayloft for storage and sleeping quarters for visiting hunters. When Wendell Paris arrived at the property in 1970, he used the barn for the burgeoning feeder pig operation – the pigs and pig feed were housed here and the loft was used for hay storage. The Federation continued to use the entire barn for storage and animal production throughout the period of significance, but the barn began to be used for storage as the Training Center moved away from the demonstration farm projects.<sup>67</sup>

They converted a small barn to the south of the Big House into a feeder pig barn in 1970, and used the area south of the future Center Pond as a boar field. The feeder pig operation occupied the south and east periphery of the historic district and was considered a shared resource between the Federation and PLBA, but still a part of the RTRC.<sup>68</sup> Wendell Paris stayed in the Big House during this time.

While Paris was preparing the land for the training center, the FSC and their lawyers were negotiating the terms of the mortgages. The two parties eventually came to an agreement in 1971 to purchase “more or less 40 acres” free and clear of encumbrances and receive the PLBA's interest in Parcel I with the understanding that the land's boundaries were open to both parties' use.<sup>69</sup> Although listed as “more or less 40 acres,” the FSC developed 72.6 acres of Parcel I by 1973. This agreement was more of a formality to centralize the training center's future buildings and main operations to support the FSC's 125 cooperative membership organizations.<sup>70</sup>

---

housing complex in Sumter County; John Zippert, “The First 25 Years,” unpublished, 9. After years of legal and political battles, the 20 acres of land eventually became the Wendy Hills Subdivision with 40 units of housing.

<sup>66</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022.; Zippert, email message. The League Life Insurance Company a Michigan credit union insurance company, which was part of CLUSA, provided the first mortgage for purchase of the PLBA land in Sumter County, when it was secured in 1970. The SCDF provided funding for the second and third mortgages on the PLBA/Federation properties in Sumter County. Richard Russell, a Florida car dealer, who Father McKnight had met on an airplane, provided the fourth mortgage to acquire the PLBA/Federation properties in Alabama.

<sup>67</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Except for the red barn and lagoon, all the pig operation buildings and structures are gone, as the Training Center shifted towards raising cattle in the 1980s for Federation members across the South. All that remains of the pig parlor are two large concrete slabs.

<sup>69</sup> Deed Book 106, page 568, Sumter County Courthouse.

<sup>70</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022; George Howell to Richard Russell, November 23, 1971, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. By this time, the FSC had 125 cooperative membership organizations in 12 states.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

The Rural Training Center and Research Center (RTRC) was officially established in 1971 with the goal of establishing a place for local cooperative members to train year-round in vegetable farming, livestock production, cooperative business management techniques, and legal and financial services.<sup>71</sup> Their educational services served more than just farmers across the South, since they recognized that rural poverty should be alleviated by other, nonfarming economic endeavors. In September 1971, 22 staff members and their families moved to the site to begin programmatic training for cooperative members.<sup>72</sup> They arrived with 12 mobile homes, which they placed in star-like formations in a field with a dirt driveway surrounding the complex. All programmatic offices, except for finance, were moved to Epes from Atlanta in 1971 to push the RTRC's operations forward.<sup>73</sup>

The staff initially dedicated their time to establishing the RTRC office headquarters in the Big House and creating an infrastructure to support daily operations and future training sessions. The staff installed water lines from the Big House Pond to the pump house, mobile homes, greenhouses, and barns. The water in the Big House Pond was the major source of water for livestock and domestic use. Though potable, its high salinity content made it difficult for human consumption. The pond also stocked with warm freshwater fish, thus serving as source of food as well.<sup>74</sup> Although efforts were concentrated on creating the infrastructure of the RTRC, staff also spent these early months conducting consistent outreach to the fifty-plus cooperative members through letter writing and phone calls. For the first six months they were one party on an eight-party line.<sup>75</sup>

In late 1971 the RTRC began hosting monthly on-site training sessions for cooperatives members across the southeast to attend. These sessions spanned topics from creating credit unions, to introducing new agricultural practices, to running craft and consumer stores, to the legal basics of chartering a cooperative. These sessions were held in the Big House and led by Federation staff. Each session last two to three days, and folks from out of town would stay overnight in the Big House. These training sessions were also opportunities for locals and visitors to share their histories of failures, successes, and involvement with each other and brainstorm solutions for their communities. As Wendell Paris noted, people could share information, not just about cooperative development, but the necessity of organizing around issues in local communities. These early training sessions set the stage for the ongoing dialogue at the RTRC, where cooperative members could see that their economic issues could be addressed by political and collective action, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and ignorance about the systems working against them.<sup>76</sup>

The training sessions and workshop quickly grew in popularity, and the accommodations of the Big House were no longer big enough. The FSC staff felt increasing pressure to build facilities for larger workshops that could house and feed cooperative members from across the South. Based on a schematic drawing from 1971, the proposed facilities were envisioned to resemble an open campus with buildings surrounding a green lawn space

<sup>71</sup> George Howell to Richard Russell, November 23, 1971, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>72</sup> This included John and Carol Zippert, Charles Prejean, Wendell Paris, Meredith Richardson, and others.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Prejean, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Since the Big House and pump house are situated directly south of the pond, their initial construction was likely based on the pond's location.

<sup>75</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, August 26, 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

and pavilions.<sup>77</sup> Built with the limited funds allocated by the Federation, the dormitory and other brick masonry buildings had less architectural adornment than illustrated in the conceptual drawings. The actualized designs were more similar to military barracks than campus dormitories.<sup>78</sup>

The resulting buildings were arranged across the landscape, but still centrally located within the 72.6 acres. Their designs were collectively decided upon, but George Paris, Lewis Black, and Meredith Richardson were in charge of supervising the buildings' construction.<sup>79</sup> In 1972, the Federation amassed funding from private foundations, donations from members and indirect costs from grants staff to build the dormitory, a "cafetorium", print shop, and administrative center to plan and host large and small events and workshops, including the Federation's Annual Meetings.<sup>80</sup> The staff decided to build the dormitory first, since they recognized the growing need to house the increasing number of trainees.

The cafetorium was designed as a multipurpose space, with a boardroom, commercial kitchen, and large auditorium to host meetings and training sessions.<sup>81</sup> The dormitory was designed to host overnight visitors and trainees – a necessary inclusion for an organization that wanted to accommodate farmers from across the entire South. These new facilities made it possible to host more frequent workshops and a wider variety of services, including the design and production of the FSC's newspaper, the *Southern Cooperator*, in the print shop. The Print Shop was also used as an office during the period of significance. The Southern Cooperative was widely distributed among the Federation's affiliated cooperatives and their members, reaching thousands of people.<sup>82</sup> To celebrate the culmination of constructing the administration building – the last of the main training buildings – in 1972, the FSC hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony that included a banquet, handicraft and cooperative sales display, music in the cafetorium, and a guest lecture from the Department of Labor's Office of Rural Manpower Service.<sup>83</sup> The welcome address was given by Drayton Pruitt, the mayor of Livingston, with whom the FSC were trying to develop a positive relationship to ensure that their work would benefit the county's economic development.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Mockup drawing of the Training Center for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, February 1972, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>78</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, June 26, 2022. The dormitory, office, and cafetorium were designed and constructed with the help of L.L. Delaine, a local African American contractor with expertise in brick masonry buildings. Like the other brick buildings, the bricks came from Henry Brick Company in Selma, Alabama. The bricks were made with a soft-mud process, giving them a non-uniform texture.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Prejean, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>80</sup> United Press International, "State NDP Convention Saturday," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, May 25, 1972. During this year, the RTRC hosted the National Democratic Party of Alabama's state convention; Zippert, email message. The Federation staff donated a portion of their salaries to build the administration building and part of the dormitory.

<sup>81</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, June 26, 2022. It has been a multifunctional space since the period of significance and remains an integral building for the Training Center's operations. It is used as a workshop and lounge space, boardroom, kitchen for events and visitors, and the site for annual meetings. It has hosted speakers like Jesse Jackson, Harry Belafonte, and John Lewis.

<sup>82</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, June 26, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Ribbon-cutting ceremony pamphlet, 1972, Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. The Department of Labor had granted the FSC \$249,296 in 1971, which explains their presence at the ribbon-cutting ceremony; Leonard Ray Teel, "Cooperative Takes Steps Into Future," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 16, 1972.

<sup>84</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022. Paris explained that Pruitt eventually came to oppose the RTRC because of the FSC's credit union members and his interests vested in the county's white planters; House of Representatives' Committee on Public Works, "Statement of Hon. Drayton Pruitt, Jr., Mayor of Livingston, Ala," in *Extensions and Revisions to the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 As Amended* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 946-954. Drayton Pruitt

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

By 1972 the RTRC had 110 cooperative member organizations and approximately 30,000 individual families memberships, which ranged from farmers, to bakeries, handicrafts, metal stamping, and concrete brick manufacturing cooperatives. At this time the success of the RTRC garnered attention from across the United States for its growing member organizations and educational and technical training programming for cooperative members.<sup>85</sup> The RTRC began to serve as an incentive for African Americans to stay or return to the South by providing opportunities for them to actively contribute to local economies.<sup>86</sup> Although the Federation wasn't providing funds for African Americans to directly purchase land, they became involved with the Emergency Land Fund (ELF) in 1973 as part of their commitment to address the plight of Black land loss.<sup>87</sup> The RTRC had established a "Pass On" program with the Heifer International Program in 1972, where they kept cattle for short periods of time on the other acreage of the parcel belonging to the PLBA before transferring them to small farmers.<sup>88</sup> They were also involved in conversations with the federal government and building trade unions to incorporate job training opportunities in the next year.

FSC experience a setback in 1972 when the FSC's main government sponsor, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), cut FSC's funding after it refused to have its programs evaluated to "determine the effectiveness of a rural cooperative strategy to alleviate rural poverty."<sup>89</sup> The FSC refused the evaluation because they were not consulted about the criteria being used to evaluate them, nor were they informed about the consulting firm's role in the program. It was later determined that the OEO study was designed to justify the government's attempt to shut down this federal office by demonstrating that the rural poverty programs were unsuccessful.<sup>90</sup> This was nothing new to cooperatives, since government entities had been vetoing grant funds to similar organizations, such as the SWAFCA, on the basis of their "communist" or alleged divisive political agendas.<sup>91</sup> Cooperatives in the 1960s relied on private and public funding, but this often came with a requirement of expensive evaluations for low-income cooperatives. The FSC's major financial setbacks in the early 1970s set the tone for a future that wouldn't rely as heavily on external resources.<sup>92</sup>

---

initially supported their work, stating in a government interview, "I think it is necessary to note that in Sumter County a minority group training program has been funded by the Ford Foundation. They provide training for underprivileged whites and blacks to make 40-acre farms an economically feasible operation."

<sup>85</sup> de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom*, 148. The FSC had 110 member organizations and approximately 30,000 families by 1972. The cooperatives ranged from farmers, to bakeries, handicrafts, metal stamping, and concrete brick manufacturing.

<sup>86</sup> Teel, "Cooperative Takes Steps Into Future.";

<sup>87</sup> Green, "Community-Based Cooperatives," 118. The ELF kept a fund to retain families' land, and they participated in tax sales in order to resell land to Black families. Because the ELF and FSC had similar missions and communities, they merged in 1986 to become the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF).

<sup>88</sup> Charles Prejean, personal interview, July 12, 2022.

<sup>89</sup> de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom*, 156-. The OEO granted a white-owned consulting firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts \$385,000 to evaluate the rural cooperative programs they funded. They were still sponsored by the Ford Foundation, but they had cut their funding by 1972

<sup>90</sup> Bob Hall, "The Federation of Southern Cooperatives: Hard Times & High Hopes," *Southern Exposure* 2, no. 3 & 4 (Fall 1974), 43-46.

<sup>91</sup> Hall, "The Federation of Southern Cooperatives," 43.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 49.



Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

When Charles Prejean took a leave of absence in 1973, former SNCC member James Jones took over as the executive director for the year.<sup>93</sup> Jones and the FSC staff began to develop a heavy equipment training program that would prepare trainees for work on the Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway by using their labor for projects on the RTRC's land.<sup>94</sup> The grounds were mostly used for agricultural demonstrations and indoor training sessions, until the Training Center partnered with the National Heavy and Highway Coalition in 1973 to train Black youths in heavy equipment operation and other construction trades to excavate the Center Pond and build a dam.<sup>95</sup> This integral shift in the RTRC's programming offered African American men the opportunity to learn a skilled trade, join an organized union, and find economic stability in rural regions.<sup>96</sup> It ultimately provided opportunity for the RTRC to diversify its agricultural enterprises by allowing irrigation for row crop demonstrations and water for a larger cow herd introduced in the 1980s.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, these construction projects were the last major changes to the RTRC landscape and helped established its future agricultural and recreational use.<sup>98</sup>

The RTRC's early years were crucial to establishing the organization and landscape as a tangible outcome of civil rights goals, securing economic resources and finding dependable networks for Black self-improvement. The Civil Rights Movement's philosophy of democratic organizing and self-determination was inherently part of the FSC and RTRC's mission as they continued to provide members with economic improvement strategies and uplifting meetings about equity across the nation. Civil rights activists were turning to the programs offered by the RTRC to help bolster their communities' self-improvement, and many members became activists by attending these sessions and meetings.<sup>99</sup> And as several former and current staff members have noted, cooperative members who participated in activities at the RTRC became empowered to become political activists themselves. Overall, the Training Center staff and speakers actively tried to inspire people to overcome fears of participating in local politics, since some members were concerned about identifying with political issues.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>94</sup> Johnny Kampis, "Some Argue Waterway Aids Trade, Others Say it is a Waste of \$2 Billion," *Tuscaloosa's News* (January 9, 2005). The "Tenn-Tom" Waterway Project was a controversial and expensive federally funded project that cost almost \$2 billion dollars to complete. It connects the Tennessee and Tombigbee Rivers with a series of locks and dams; Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022. Part of the Tenn-Tom was supposed to flow through Gainesville, Alabama, but the Army Core of Engineers didn't end up using the channel they created.

<sup>95</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022. By this time, they had received a grant from the Agriculture Stabilization Conservation Services to build a pond for agricultural and domestic use.

<sup>96</sup> "Training Men for a Better Life," *Ebony*, December 1973, 94-100.

<sup>97</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, July 12, 2022. These projects replaced the feeder pig operation once the demand for that enterprise decreased, leading to the deconstruction of the small barn and shed south of the Print Shop formally used for the feeder pig operation.

<sup>98</sup> The RTRC continues to train students and limited resource farmers through sustainable agriculture and agroforestry trade programs, alongside their support for the development of new and existing cooperatives.

<sup>99</sup> Patrick Owens, "Southern Blacks Turn to Themselves," *Newsday*, December 12, 1972; Patrick Owens, "Civil Rights Role Changing in Deep South," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1972.

<sup>100</sup> John Zippert, personal interview, February 4, 2023. Some members only attended the RTRC's training sessions or marketing network opportunities and didn't actively participate in the non-training meetings held out of concern of retaliation from the white power structures or sentiments in their communities.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

Beginning in 1972, the RTRC began hosting the Federation's Annual Meetings, thereby becoming the outward-facing center point for the FSC and its cooperative members. Participants would stay in the dorms and gather for sessions in the Cafetorium. These meetings became important catalysts for inspiring cooperative members and their affiliates about racial issues and the cooperative movement across the country. By 1972 the roster of Civil Rights leader who attended workshops at the RTRC included Julian Bond, John Lewis, Vernon Jordan, Congressman Parren Mitchell (Maryland), and Andrew Young.<sup>101</sup> Having important civil rights leaders like these further substantiated the significance of the Federation and Training Center for the larger cooperative movement.

As a result of the RTRC's advocacy work, Sumter County and adjacent areas near affiliated cooperatives experienced increased Black voter registration and political involvement, helping to sustain social activism in the South after the civil rights movement.<sup>102</sup> Establishing a location that brought rural African Americans together ensured that the opponents to civil rights would not succeed in driving people from the land and securing the White vote. The training sessions could alleviate financial concerns by teaching members about self-sufficiency and networking without discriminatory practices, while the meetings and everyday conversations addressed issues of political opportunities. The Training Center became the locus of the Federation's increasing cooperative membership, and this network became an essential part of information sourcing as members could tell each other about voter suppression issues and effective counterstrategies.<sup>103</sup> Unlike previous iteration of cooperative training schools and collectively held farmland, the RTRC wasn't just a vocational school for all of the Federation's affiliated cooperatives, which reach over 130 affiliated member cooperatives by 1974 across the rural South.<sup>104</sup> It was also a gathering space for political leaders and rural African Americans that wanted to improve their communities by building trust in this growing network. The Training Center ultimately provided the tangible indication of the benefits gained when people work cooperatively together to improve their lives and social situations.

*The Federation of Southern Cooperatives After 1973: Becoming the "Heart and Soul of the African American Cooperative Movement"*<sup>105</sup>

The Federation has faced many struggles and road blocks since 1973.<sup>106</sup> Many of these obstacles are rooted in the Federation's political advocacy and Black self-determination, and the subsequent push back from local systems of White power. The FSC's resistance to these systems was never officially part of its training programs and was only voiced through their annual meetings and everyday conversations at the Training Center. Because of the dialogue facilitated at this meeting center, rural African Americans could see that grassroots efforts could affect their local power structures.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, the training and leadership received by

<sup>101</sup> Zippert, email message.

<sup>102</sup> Wanda B. Johnson and Curtis W. D. Pearson, "Sumter County," in *Fifteen Years Ago – Rural Alabama Revisited* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984), 76. James Jones and Wendell Paris were heavily involved with Sumter County politics in the 1970s and often organized African Americans in the county to address issues like public school conditions; John Zippert, "The First 25 Years," self-published.

<sup>103</sup> Wendell Paris, personal interview, August 4, 2022.

<sup>104</sup> *The Gazette*, "V.P. Resident Now On Co-op Southern Bd.," August 29, 1974.

<sup>105</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 194.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 211.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

co-op members at the RTRC would ultimately translate into other areas of civic society and the political arena. As previously discussed, the Federation and the cooperative movement are inherently entwined with political self-improvement, which was why civil rights organizations quietly supported their growth. Because of its political advocacy, FSC was accused of using federal funds for political work and subjected to an FBI and grand jury investigation from 1979 to 1981, which drained its funding.<sup>108</sup> The Federation also faced severe economic trials as a result of President Reagan's administration's cut-backs of federal anti-poverty programs, culminating in budget and staff reductions.<sup>109</sup> These economic hardships were acutely felt across the rural South, but the Federation's staff and determined cooperative members continued their training and assistance programs.<sup>110</sup> Because they had such a wide network across the South and were making differences in rural lives, the organization didn't dissolve like so many cooperatives in the past. Looking back on the early struggles and accomplishments of the FSC/LAF in 1987, John Zippert stated:

"The Federation's Rural Training and Research Center has been both a battleground and encampment within the struggle of the rural poor for political and economic self-determination. It is a testimony to the dedication, vision and long-time commitment that are necessary to realize the potential of such a place."<sup>111</sup>

After only a decade of operation, the RTRC enabled the FSC to organize, develop, and sustain more than 100 community-based economic development groups across 11 southern states, involving 30,000 low-income families. FSC provided employment and annual training at the RTRC for hundreds of people, about co-op principles and credit-union development. In turn, these folks taught each other in their own communities. They helped generate millions of dollars in new income for small farmers and other low-income rural people through cooperative business activities and assisted more than 250 small farmers to develop a livestock operation (feeder pigs, beef cattle, goats, rabbits) on their farms with the help of donated breeding stock. The Federation also helped construct more than 100 new cooperative housing units and rehabilitate more than 100 rural houses with the help of CETA-trainee labor and the Farmers Home Administration low-interest loans and grants. The Federation's actions through the Training Center have been described as creating "ripple effects" throughout the South, since they aren't a large grant-funding organization and rely on small donations and actions to generate changes in communities. By virtue of the FSC's cooperative and civil rights principles, their dedication to the rural poor has been about educating low-income people across the South on their economic and citizenship rights, while emphasizing the benefits of self-help and cooperative development and democratic decision-making.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Susan Youngblood Ashmore, *Carry it On: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 1964-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 292. The FSC spent \$1,000,000 defending itself in the inquiry, which never led to an indictment.

<sup>109</sup> Carolyn S. Carlson, "Black co-ops growing in rural south," *McComb Enterprise Journal*, April 13, 1983. This article describes some of the Federation's affiliated cooperative members, including the Louisiana-based Southern Consumers Cooperative founded in the early 1960s that grew to have over \$1 million in assets with a credit union and bakery by 1983. It also describes members like the East Georgia Farmers Cooperative, the Freedom Quilting Bee, and their oldest member – the Mississippi-based Mileston Farmers Cooperative founded in 1941.

<sup>110</sup> de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom*, 174.

<sup>111</sup> Parren J. Mitchell, "A Return Visit to Epes, Alabama," *Afro-American*, August 29, 1987, 4.

<sup>112</sup> Bethell, "Sumter County Blues," 21. The FSC also helped more than 200 low-income people save energy costs by installing wood stoves, solar greenhouses, and solar hot water heaters.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

The Federation of Southern Cooperatives continued to expand its member organizations and eventually merge with the Emergency Land Fund in 1986 to become the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/ Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF). This merger symbolized the ongoing commitment by the Federation to support the economic welfare of farmers and their families by advancing the stewardship of Black-owned land in rural regions.<sup>113</sup> By this time, the daily activities of the Federation were overseen at the central office in East Point, Georgia. Other staff were either at the RTRC or the State Association offices in Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Their cooperative members reached across the South, with several in South Africa and Cuba.<sup>114</sup>

For the past two decades, the Training Center has primarily responded to the needs of aging farmers in Mississippi and Alabama with their sustainable silvopasture and agroforestry programs. This sustainable approach to land use reflects the evolving needs of their cooperative members, who are looking for less intensive agricultural approaches.<sup>115</sup> Their commitment has led to several changes at the RTRC, including the shift to agroforestry, forester training sessions, and youth camps on the 1,164 acres they now own.<sup>116</sup> It also reflects the historic site's continued importance and significance to the South's agricultural trends and cooperative movement. Complementary to the FSC/LAF's commitment to cooperative development and land retention, they have maintained their commitment to political advocacy to the present day, becoming involved in local and federal measures that continue to achieve equity for low income, Black, and nonwhite farmers and families.<sup>117</sup>

As summarized by Bethell in 1982, since its founding, "The Federation has been sending out ripples – ripples of health care, and self-determination, and credit unions, and cooperative principles, and job opportunities, and management training." This origin of this ripple affect began at the Rural Training Center, and slowly permeated across the South and greater American landscape. The Federation today continues their political advocacy to combat the decline in Black farmers and land loss by remaining at the forefront of Farm Bills and other federal legislation, conservation protests, and legal education services (including heir property rights).<sup>118</sup> They've helped sustain their cooperative members that have been with them since their founding and early beginnings, including the PLBA and Freedom Quilting Bee from Alabama, and the Beat 4 Farms Cooperative and North Bolivar Development Cooperative from Mississippi. Their membership includes cooperatives and partnerships from Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, New York, Minnesota, and the Northeast.<sup>119</sup>

The Federation's persistent work has enabled their longevity and wide reach across the nation, and the RTRC remains as a working reminder of their dedication to rural African Americans. The FSC/LAF is the only

<sup>113</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 194.

<sup>114</sup> Green, "Community-Based Cooperatives," 118-122.

<sup>115</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Black Farmers in America, 1965-2000: The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives," *USDA Research Report* 194, 2003.

<sup>116</sup> Freddie Davis III, personal interview, July 12, 2022; Annual Report 2022, Federation of Southern Cooperatives/ Land Assistance Fund. The FSC/LAF has a standing partnership with the National Agroforestry Center, the US Forest Service, and the National Resources Conservation Service.

<sup>117</sup> de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom*, 189-190.

<sup>118</sup> Annual Report 2022, Federation of Southern Cooperatives/ Land Assistance Fund.

<sup>119</sup> Annual Report 2022, Federation of Southern Cooperatives/ Land Assistance Fund. The FSC/LAF also enters into partnerships with non-cooperative organizations aimed at farming education or regional sustainable marketing for their member's produce sales.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

existing African American regional or national cooperative organization in the United States and continues to be an important resource for cooperatives across rural localities.<sup>120</sup> As summarized by Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard:

“In many ways, the story of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund tells in microcosm the broader history of African American cooperatives. The reasons why it was started, its goals and aims, its challenges and threats, its focus on grassroots empowerment, economic independence, leadership development, and women’s development—all are elements of the entire experience of the Black cooperative movement.”<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 212.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*, 212.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

### Primary Sources

*Afro-American*. "17 Cornell students begin summer project." June 21, 1975.

Brown, Warren. "Federation is Focus of Racial Tensions: U.S. Accused of Aiding Political Push by Black Agricultural Cooperatives." *Washington Post*, October 4, 1979.

Deed Book 105, page 263, Sumter County Courthouse.

Deed Book 106, page 568, Sumter County Courthouse.

Carlson, Carolyn S. "Black co-ops growing in rural south." *McComb Enterprise Journal*, April 13, 1983.

*Ebony*. "Training Men for a Better Life." December 1973.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives Building Records, 1974. Sumter County Records Office.

Fulgham, Carrie. Interview by Elizabeth Donison. Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, July 12, 2022.

George Howell to Richard Russell, November 23, 1971. Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection. Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

George Howell to Joseph L. Hansknecht Jr., May 3, 1971. Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection. Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

George Howell to Panola Land Buying Association Inc., August 24, 1971. Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection. Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

House of Representatives' Committee on Public Works. "Statement of Hon. Drayton Pruitt, Jr., Mayor of Livingston, Ala." In *Extensions and Revisions to the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 As Amended*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972: 946-954.

Kampis, Johnny. "Some Argue Waterway Aids Trade, Others Say it is a Waste of \$2 Billion." *Tuscaloosa's News*, January 9, 2005.

Marks, William. "Black Dixie Farmers Plow Future Into Co-ops." *The Pittsburgh Press*, December 2, 1973.

Mockup drawing of the Training Center for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, February 1972. Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection. Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

Mitchell, Parren J. "A Return Visit to Epes, Alabama." *Afro-American*, August 29, 1987.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

Ribbon-cutting ceremony pamphlet, 1972. Federation of Southern Cooperatives Collection. Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

Teel, Leonard Ray. "Cooperative Takes Steps Into Future." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 16, 1972.

*The Daily Advertiser*. "\$910,000 In Grants Awarded." October 13, 1970.

*The Daily News*. "Tough Row to Hoe: Young, Black Farmers an Endangered Species." June 10, 1989.

*The Evening News*. "Food Lines." August 20, 1973.

*The Gazette*. "V.P. Resident Now On Co-op Southern Bd." August 29, 1974.

United Press International. "State NDP Convention Saturday." *Birmingham Post-Herald*, May 25, 1972.

United States Census Bureau. "Table No. 2, Population by Color and Condition." *Classified Population of the State and Territories by Counties on the First Day of June, 1860*.

Owens, Patrick. "Civil rights heroine hangs up her rifle." *Tri-City Herald*, December 17, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Civil Rights Role Changing in Deep South," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Southern Blacks Turn to Themselves." *Newsday*, December 12, 1972.

Paris, Wendell. Interview by Elizabeth Donison. Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, July 12, 2022.

Prejean, Charles. Interview by Elizabeth Donison. Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, July 12, 2022.

Zippert, John. Interview by Elizabeth Donison. Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, June 26, 2022.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The First 25 Years." Unpublished.

Secondary Sources

Ali, Omar H. "Black Populism: Agrarian Politics from the Colored Alliance to the People's Party." In *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule – African American Landowning Families Since Reconstruction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012.

Bande, Owusu and Gail Meyers. "Roots!" In *Land Justice- Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*, edited by Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Gimenez. Oakland: Food First Books, 2017.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

- Bethell, Thomas N. "Sumter County Blues: The Ordeal of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives." Washington, D.C.: National Committee in Support of Community Based Organizations, 1982.
- Brown, Alan. *Sumter County*. Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2015.
- Chandler, April B. "'The Loss in My Bones': Protecting African American Heirs' property with the Public Use Doctrine." *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 14, no. 387 (2005): 387-414.
- Davy, Dania C., Savonala Horne, Tracy Lloyd McCurty, and Edward Pennick, "Resistance," in *Land Justice Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*, edited by Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Gimenez. Oakland: Food First Books, 2017.
- de Jong, Greta. *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice After the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Staying in Place: Black Migration, The Civil Rights Movement, and the War on Poverty in the Rural South," *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 388-389.
- Gilbert, Charlene and Quinn Eli. *Homecoming: The Story of African American Farmers*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.
- Gordon Nembhard, Jessica. *Collective Courage: a history of African American cooperative economic thought and practice*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.
- Green, John J. "Community-Based Cooperatives and Networks: Participatory Social Movement Assessment of Four Organizations." Phd diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2002.
- Grim, Valerie. "Black Farmers, Civil Rights, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1997-2010." In *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule – African American Landowning Families Since Reconstruction*, edited by Debra Reid and Evan Bennett. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012.
- Hall, Bob. "The Federation of Southern Cooperatives: Hard Times & High Hopes." *Southern Exposure* 2, no. 3 & 4 (Fall 1974):
- Johnson, Wanda B. and Curtis W. D. Pearson. "Sumter County." In *Fifteen Years Ago – Rural Alabama Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984.
- Landsberg, Brian K. "Sumter County, Alabama and the Origins of the Voting Rights Act." *Alabama Law Review* 54, no. 3 (2003): 877-958.
- Smith, Louis R. Jr., "A History of Sumter County Through 1886." PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1988.



Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

United States Department of Agriculture. "Black Farmers in America, 1965-2000: The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives." USDA Research Report 194, 2003.

White, Monica. *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Womack, Veronica L. "Black Power in the Alabama Black Belt to the 1970s." In *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule – African American Landowning Families Since Reconstruction*, edited by Debra Reid and Evan Bennett. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012.

Youngblood Ashmore, Susan. *Carry it On: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 1964-1972*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

---

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 72.6

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. NW Corner: Latitude: 32.756975 Longitude: -88.128688
2. NE Corner: Latitude: 32.754669 Longitude: -88.121900
3. SW Corner: Latitude: 32.751180 Longitude: -88.128661
4. SE Corner: Latitude: 32.751191 Longitude: -88.121931

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The reasonable limits of the historic district's boundaries encompass 72.6-acres. The legal boundaries are described as follows: the northeast  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the southwest  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 31 located in Township 21 North, Range 1 west in Sumter County, Alabama. This description outlines the south and west boundaries of the historic district, but does not concisely mark the north and east. The northern boundary is defined by the natural ridgeline that slopes downward toward the Toms Creek watershed and curves around to the pig parlor area. The eastern boundary is based on reasonable limits from interviews with founding members, who stated that the PLBA and Federation shared the pig parlor area and it was incorporated into the Training Center's early boundaries.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic district's boundaries are defined by natural, legal, and reasonable limits. When the Federation of Southern Cooperatives initially entered into an agreement with the Panola Land Buyers' Association, they agreed to help the PLBA pay off their mortgages, provide jobs and housing for the PLBA members in return for "more or less 40 acres" for a training facility. Although documentation indicates an acquisition of "more or less than 40 acres," the FSC was actually granted 72.6 acres (which encompasses the historic boundary). These 72.6 acres were situated within a 374-acre tract of land ("Parcel 1") under mortgage to League Life Insurance Company. The insurance company eventually agreed to release the PLBA from their interest in Parcel 1 so the Federation could assume their position as the mortgager and purchase outright the 72.6 acres (formally known as "more or less 40-acres") tract in 1971. The PLBA granted the unencumbered

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

acres in the southwest corner of Parcel 1 to the Federation for the sum of \$10. They also granted the encumbered 334-acres in Parcel 1 for \$10, however, the FSC did not formally develop this land until all mortgages were paid in the late 1970s, after the period of historic significance.<sup>122</sup>

---

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Elizabeth Donison with Sarah Lerner  
organization: Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites  
street & number: 210 South 34<sup>th</sup> Street  
city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19104  
e-mail: edonison@upenn.edu  
telephone: (215)-746-6441  
date: August 23, 2023

---

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

---

<sup>122</sup> Written correspondence between George Howell, esq., and the Panola Land Buying Association (August 24, 1971), Amistad Archives; Deed Book 105, pages 263-264, Sumter County Courthouse; Deed Book 106, page 568, Sumter County Courthouse.

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and Research Center

City or Vicinity: Epes

County: Sumter

State: Alabama

Photographer: Elizabeth Donison and Sarah Lerner

Date Photographed: July 6, 2022 and July 21, 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0001

Overview of Cafetorium and noncontributing aquaponics bay, facing southeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0002

Facade of Cafetorium, facing east

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0003

South elevation of Cafetorium, facing north

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0004

North elevation of Cafetorium and the attached boardroom, facing south

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0005

Detail view of Cafetorium's boardroom and covered walkway on east elevation, facing west

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0006

Facade of barn, facing northeast

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0007

Northeast oblique of barn, facing southwest

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0008

Northwest oblique of barn, facing southeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0009

South elevation of barn, facing north

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0010

Dirt road leading west off of Federation Road with barn in the distance, facing northwest

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0011

Looking southeast across the Big House Pond with the Big House and pump house in the distance

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0012

Northwest oblique of the Big House, facing southeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0013

Façade of the Big House, facing south

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0014

Southwest oblique of the Big House, facing northeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0015

Southeast oblique of the Big House, facing northwest

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0016

East elevation of the Big House, facing west

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0017

Looking southeast across the greenhouse cement slabs with the Big House in the distance

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0018

Non-contributing pavilion and shed overlooking the Center Pond, facing southwest

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0019

Northwest oblique of the Print Shop, facing east

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0020

Southwest oblique of the Print Shop, facing northeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0021

Looking northeast across the tennis/basketball court with the hoophouse in the distance

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0022

Looking southeast across a fork in Federation Road with a directional sign in foreground and the dormitory, cafetorium, aquaponics bay, and barn in the background

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0023

Façade of pump house with the Big House Pond in the distance, facing north

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0024

Looking southeast across the lagoon

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0025

Looking south across the foundation of the non-contributing pig parlor

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0026

Looking southwest across the footbridge dividing the Center Pond from its overflow area

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0027

Looking northeast across the Center Pond from the footbridge with the office building in the distance

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0028

Overview of the office, dormitory, and cafetorium buildings, facing east

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0029

Façade of dormitory, facing south

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0030

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center

Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama

County and State

Southwest oblique of dormitory, facing east

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0031

Façade of office building, facing south

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0032

South elevation of office building, facing north

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0033

Looking northeast from parking area on Federation Road between the dormitory and office with the gift shop/yellow building in the distance

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0034

Overview of the gift shop/yellow building, dormitory, cafetorium, and noncontributing aquaponics bay, facing southeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0035

Façade of the gift shop/yellow building, facing northeast

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0036

Non-contributing hoophouse with the community garden and noncontributing cooling shed in the distance, facing southwest

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0037

Façade of the prefabricated home on northern boundary of the Historic District, facing north

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0038

Looking northwest to the entry gate on Federation Road

AL\_Sumter County\_Rural Training and Research Center\_0039

Overview of cesspool slab from former trailer home complex with the hoophouse in the distance, facing southeast

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center  
Name of Property

Sumter County,  
Alabama  
County and State

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

FSC Rural Training and Research Center

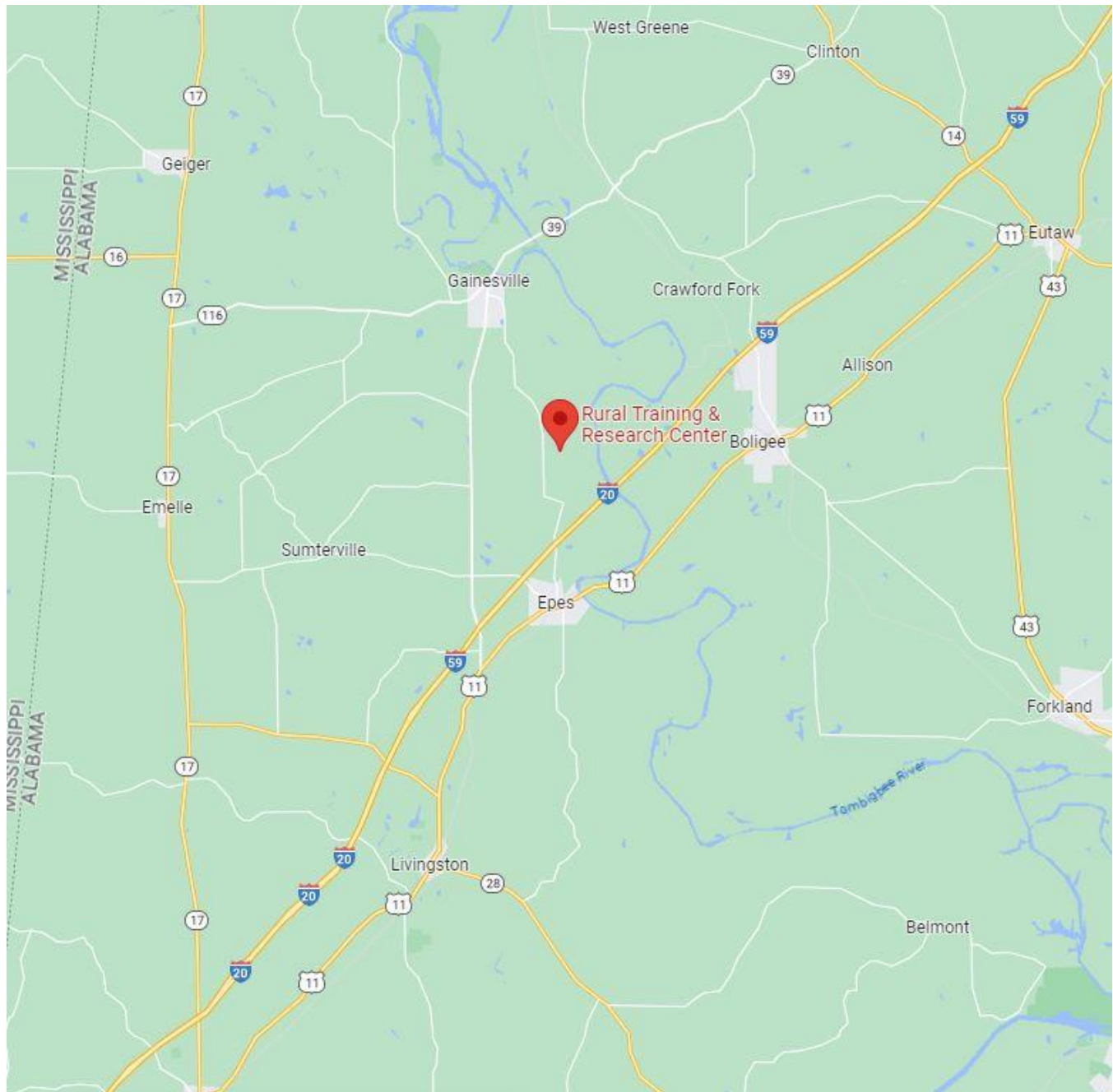
Name of Property

Sumter, A

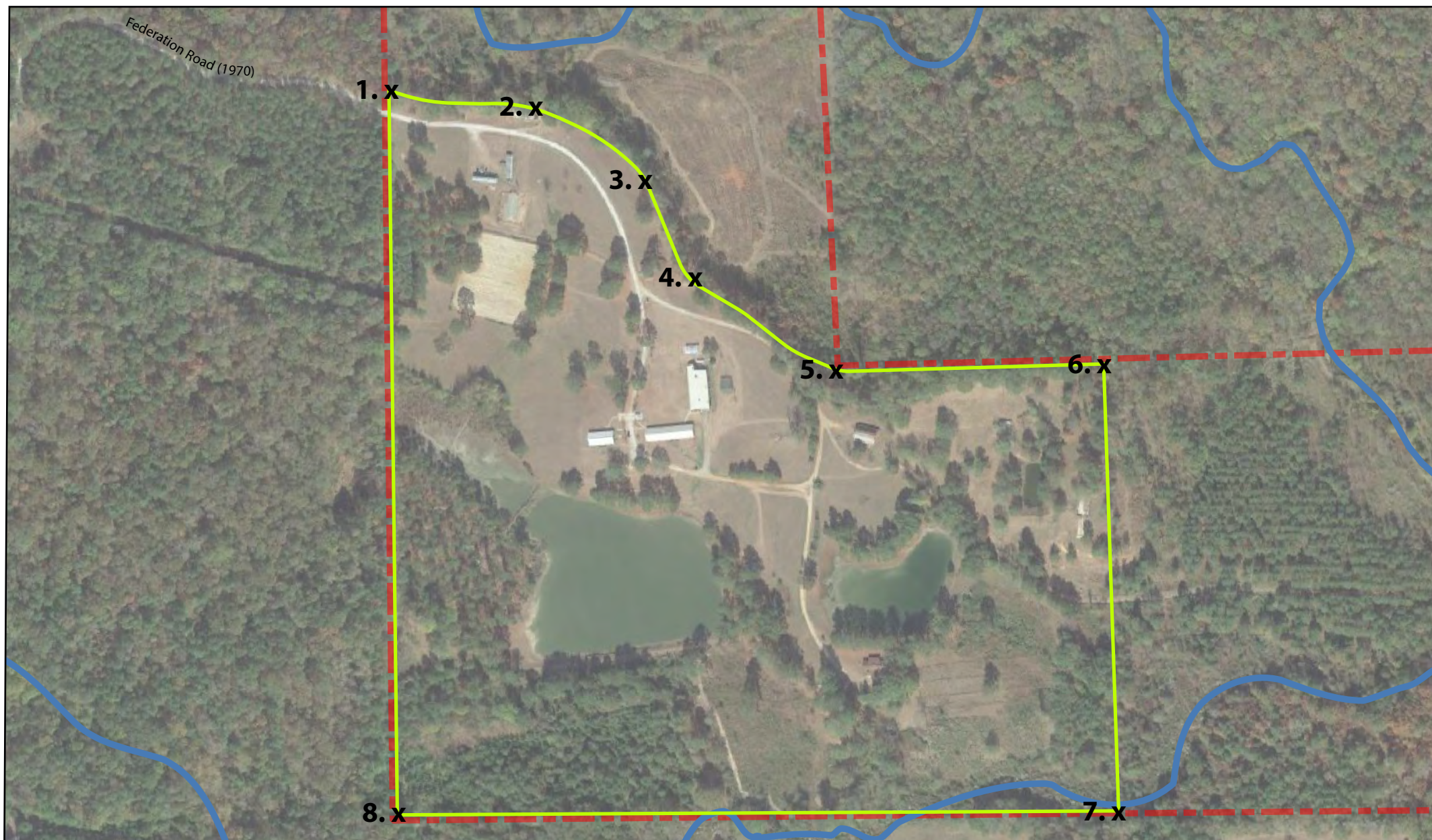
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number \_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_







### Site Map

Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and  
Research Center  
Epes, Sumter County, Alabama

0 250 500 Ft

0 0.05 0.1 0.15 Miles



Note:  
Information derived from Training Center,  
Google Earth (2016 aerial image), and field  
sources. Fieldwork conducted 6/27-28 &  
7/11-7/13/2022. Map by Elizabeth Donison.

### Legend

x = Lat, Long

1. 32.7569, -88.1286
2. 32.7567, -88.1272
3. 32.7561, -88.1262
4. 32.7552, -88.1257
5. 32.7545, -88.1245
6. 32.7546, -88.1219
7. 32.7511, -88.1219
8. 32.7511, -88.1286



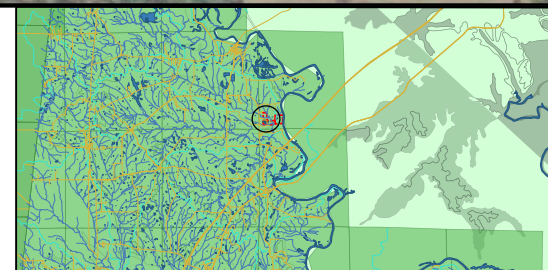
72.6-Acre Parcel  
Boundary



374-Acre Parcel  
Boundary (2022)



Toms Creek







### Photo Key Map

Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and Research Center  
Epes, Sumter County, Alabama




0 250 500 Ft

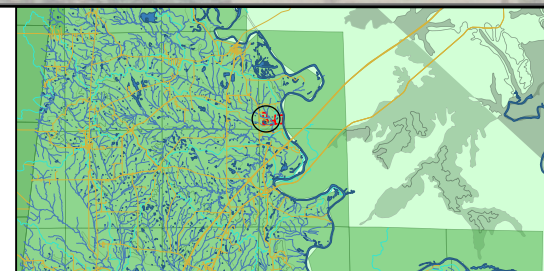
0 0.05 0.1 0.15 Miles



Note:  
Information derived from Training Center,  
Google Earth (2016 aerial image), and field  
sources. Fieldwork conducted 6/27-28 &  
7/11-7/13/2022. Map by Elizabeth Donison.

### Legend

-  Landscape Features
-  Buildings
-  Ponds
-  72.6-Acre Parcel Boundary
-  374-Acre Parcel Boundary (2022)
-  Toms Creek
-  Photo Location



**Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Rural Training and Research Center**

Name of Property

**Sumter County,  
Alabama**

County and State

Figure 1: Table of counted resources

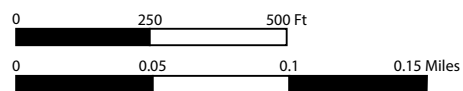
<i>Resource</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Resource Type</i>	<i>C/NC</i>	<i>Photos</i>
Big House Pond	ca. 1945	Structure	C	11
Pump House	ca. 1945	Building	C	23
Big House	ca. 1945	Building	C	11-16
Barn	ca. 1960	Building	C	6-10,
Lagoon	1970	Structure	C	24
Landscape	1970-1973	Site	C	10, 17, 21, 22, 25, 33, 38, 39
Federation Road	ca. 1971	Structure	C	10, 22, 33, 34, 38
Storage Shed	ca. 1971	Building	C.	18
Office	1972	Building	C	28, 31, 32
Dormitory	1972	Building	C	28-30
Cafetorium	1972	Building	C	1-5, 28
Gift Shop, "Yellow Building"	1972	Building	C	34, 35
Print Shop	1972	Building	C	19, 20
Center Pond	1973	Structure	C	26, 27
Prefabricated Home	ca. 1980; moved ca. 2000	Building	NC	37
Pavilion	ca. 2000	Structure	NC	18
Hoophouse	2013	Building	NC	21, 36, 39
Aquaponics Bay	2016	Building	NC	1





### Site Map

Federation of Southern Cooperatives' Rural Training and Research Center  
Epes, Sumter County, Alabama



Note:  
Information derived from Training Center,  
Google Earth (2016 aerial image), and field  
sources. Fieldwork conducted 6/27-28 &  
7/11-7/13/2022. Map by Elizabeth Donison.

### Legend

