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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Product development strategies ready the North Carolina's Southeast region for private investment, new jobs

**ELIZABETHTOWN, N.C.** – An innovative regional program to support shovel-ready industrial sites and industrial buildings is generating results for the 20 counties of the North Carolina's Southeast region.

"We're grateful to our legislative delegation and their leadership for embracing this vision early on," says **Steve Yost, President of NC's Southeast**. "Legislators immediately understood how timely the opportunity was given the post-pandemic wave of industrial re-shoring and the urgency by businesses – especially manufacturers – to move quickly in ramping up new operations."

NC's Southeast's product development program began in 2021 with a \$5 million appropriation from the North Carolina General Assembly. Two years later, state legislators allocated another \$2.5 million to the initiative. Since launching the program, regional leaders have worked with local, state and private partners to identify 17 potential new industrial properties, develop 133 acres of "pad-ready" industrial sites, and support the construction of six industrial buildings. Altogether, the initiative has funded 33 infrastructure and product development projects across all counties across the region. Today, 100 percent of the funding has been deployed to the product development strategies.

"Site development is critical for the Southeast region right now," explains Gary Lanier, Director of **Columbus County Economic Development** and current President of the North Carolina Economic Development Association. Columbus County has used \$40,000 from North Carolina's Southeast to work with an engineering firm to identify new potential industrial sites in the county. The Southeast provided \$222,000 to support Lanier's efforts to make an available parcel at Southeast Regional Park pad-ready, which includes clearing, grading and extending infrastructure to the lots.

"Having sites ready to build can literally save a company a year or more on getting a building built," says Lanier. "That's a year a company can't afford to wait."

Officials in **Craven County** utilized \$262,000 from North Carolina's Southeast to improve infrastructure at the Craven County Industrial Park. Funds helped subdivide a 50-acre section of the property into seven lots.

"We've already sold one of the lots, two are now under contract by a shell-building

developer, and we have inquiries on the remaining four,” says Jeff Wood, Director of Craven County Economic Development. He says the grant leveraged \$2.4 million in other funds to enhance the park’s appeal for new jobs and corporate investment.

Wood chairs the NC’s Southeast Local Development Advisory Group (LDAG), which brings together his counterparts from the region’s 20 counties as well as private allies like utility and economic development officials. The group meets regularly to discuss emerging opportunities, share insight and craft new strategies.

“The Southeast team has engaged the LDAG every step of the way, seeking our feedback on what we think can work in our communities,” Wood says.

Twelve of the region’s 20 counties are currently designated by the North Carolina Department of Commerce as “Tier One” – a measure of economic distress that makes businesses investing there eligible for the state’s most generous financial incentives. The predominantly rural region relies on collaboration among economic development professionals and a long list of strategic partners.

“The Southeast’s leadership has leaned in and taken some serious leadership on this,” says Ryan Nance, Director of Economic Development at the Raleigh-based North Carolina Electric Membership Cooperatives. “It was needed – especially when you look across the region and consider the needs of those counties,” says Nance, also a member of LDAG.

“The Southeast is helping fill a need while resources like REDLG have seen increased competition for funds,” Nance says. “It takes partners to come together and bridge the gap.”

In **Cumberland County**, support from NC’s Southeast leveraged a larger Golden LEAF grant in making key improvements to existing infrastructure for industrial property. The county’s Sand Hill Road property lacked an access road that could give clients a ground-level view of the site. A \$262,000 grant from NC’s Southeast helped support the design of the road while \$937,600 from Golden LEAF supported the clearing and grading of a 30-acre section of the site.

“We were able to leverage Southeast funds with additional dollars,” says Robert Van Geons, President and CEO of the Fayetteville Cumberland Economic Development Corporation. “This is the last county-owned site in Cumberland County, and we needed to get it to a place where fast-moving projects could understand its potential upon the first visit.”

With improvements in place, the Sand Hill Road site is now under contract by a tech-industry development group initiating a capital investment that could approach a billion dollars.

In today’s business world, economic developers “have to demonstrate to clients they have the shovel-ready sites and infrastructure to serve their needs,” explains Van Geons, a national thought-leader in the profession. “Without those two assets, you won’t be successful.”

Scott Hamilton, president and CEO of the Golden LEAF, recalls other opportunities where his organization’s SITE Program and NC’s Southeast’s product development grants provided complementary funding in support of industrial sites in southeastern North Carolina.

“SITE Program funding assisted the **Duplin County Airpark** with design and grading costs, while NC’s Southeast funding covered costs associated with the development of an access road to the park,” Hamilton says. “In **Robeson County**, SITE Program funds supported site due diligence necessary to ready ComTech Business Park for the development of a pad-

ready site supported by funding from NC's Southeast. These are just two examples of the power of leveraged funding to help move the economic needle, especially in rural North Carolina communities," explains Hamilton, a veteran economic development professional who has led county, regional and multi-state programs.

*A public-private partnership headquartered in Elizabethtown, N.C., North Carolina's Southeast's mission is to provide strong economic development leadership in southeastern North Carolina through innovative marketing and collaborative regional initiatives that will support the creation of new jobs, generate capital investment and secure new business locations. Member counties include Anson, Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Duplin, Hoke, Jones, Lenoir, Montgomery, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland and Wayne.*

For additional information, visit [www.ncse.org](http://www.ncse.org)

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