



SOUTHERN GEORGIA
REGIONAL COMMISSION



2022-2026 Southern Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Annual Update • December 2023

Atkinson - Bacon - Ben Hill - Berrien

Brantley - Brooks - Charlton - Clinch - Coffee - Cook - Echols - Irwin - Lanier - Lowndes

Pierce - Tift - Turner - Ware Counties

Contents

CEDS Strategy Committee.....	1
Introduction	2
Summary Background	3
Regional Cluster Analysis.....	10
EDA Investment Priorities	11
Economic Resilience	12
Equity & Environmental Justice	15
CEDS Process Overview	26
CEDS Vision Statement	28
Strategic Focus Areas	29
SWOT Analysis	30
Strategic Focus Area#1: State of the Regional Economy.....	35
Strategic Focus Area#2: Transportation, Community Facilities, Infrastructure, and Broadband.....	36
Strategic Focus Area#3: Education and Workforce Development	37
Strategic Focus Area#4: Population and Housing	38
Evaluation Framework.....	39
Regional Data Pages.....	44
Appendix	65



Southern Georgia CEDS Annual Update - December 2023

The 2023 Annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update for the Southern Georgia Economic Development District (EDD) is provided to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) under EDA Investment Number ED22ATL3020014. This update covers the activity period from January 1, 2023, through December 2023, a time period where the SGRC EDD showed resilience in its efforts to recover from the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the onset of COVID-19, unemployment and the region's economic conditions have fluctuated greatly. Since skyrocketing to 10.6% in April 2020 because of the pandemic, the region's unemployment rate has been trending lower, in line with both Georgia and the United States. Overall, when the regional average unemployment rate of 3.5% is compared to the 23.2% average poverty rate of the region, it becomes apparent that although many may be employed, they are woefully underemployed.

Nine of the SGRC's eighteen counties are areas of persistent poverty (more than 20% of a county's population lives below the poverty threshold). Although the SGRC EDD's overall poverty rate decreased slightly over the past year, six of the region's counties saw an increase in poverty rate.

According to the 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, the average per capita income in the region is a mere \$22,307, up only slightly from the 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates listed at \$21,050. This dismal number is in stark contrast to the United States' PCI of \$41,804 and Georgia's PCI of \$38,378. A further indication of economic distress is the region's average median household income (MHI) of \$48,647, which is significantly less than that of Georgia's at \$72,837 and the United States at \$74,755.

While some growth has been experienced within the region, persistent poverty, underemployment, and unemployment continue to plague the area. As a performance-based plan, the District's CEDS plays a critical role in adapting to global economic conditions by fully utilizing the region's unique advantages to maximize economic opportunity for its residents by attracting private investment that creates jobs. This plan sets forth the goals and objectives necessary to solve the economic development problems of the Southern Georgia region and clearly defines the measures of success.

The economic injury to the struggling SGRC region because of the coronavirus is substantial, and the Southern Georgia EDD is committed to assisting local governments, businesses, and stakeholders in their economic recovery efforts.

Southern Georgia CEDS Annual Update - December 2023

During the period covered by this update, the Economic Development Division (EDD) staff took part in planning meetings for over a dozen economic development projects throughout the region. When these projects come to fruition, all will result in private investment and jobs creation in the SGRC EDD. Previous project planning meetings culminated in the receipt of infrastructure funding for two economic development projects, resulting in the creation of 40 new jobs and \$215 million in capital investment, and \$500,000 for Capacity Building infrastructure in the SGRC EDD. Staff has continued grant administration and implementation activities for two EDA grant awards in Ben Hill County and the City of Douglas, which will result in the creation of 124 jobs and private investment of 58 million. Furthermore, SGRC EDD staff prepared and submitted an application for EDA funding with the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority which will bolster the creation of 390 new jobs and \$350 private investment to serve the new Walmart Dairy facility that will have a multi-jurisdictional impact in the Valdosta Metropolitan Statistical Area.

During the Southern Georgia Regional Commission's Fiscal Year that ended on June 30, 2023, the Lending Department had 7 loans closed totaling \$13,335,076. An additional 4 loans were packaged and approved but not closed \$4,349,597. Total volume for the year was \$17,684,673. SGRC's Loan Program portion of the total volume was \$6,699,950 with a private leverage of \$10,984,93. There were 152 jobs created or saved as a result of these loans.

Although the District is experiencing economic improvements in several areas, Southern Georgia must still find ways to reverse negative trends, to withstand economic shifts, and to move the region forward through regional initiatives aimed at fostering economic development – implementation of the CEDS will play a vital role in achieving this. Enacting the CEDS Action Plan will positively move the needle on the regional economy in the areas of jobs, wages, tax revenue, and private investment, and will have a strong positive impact on sustainable regional economic growth and diversification.



CEDS Strategy Committee

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What is a CEDS?

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission's (SGRC) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen the 18-county regional economy. The SGRC CEDS analyzes the state of the regional economy, sets goals and objectives, and establishes an implementation action plan. The SGRC CEDS is a regionally-owned strategy that fosters a continuing economic development planning process with public and private sector participation.

As a performance-based plan, this CEDS will play a critical role in adapting to global economic conditions by fully utilizing the region's unique advantages to maximize economic opportunity for its residents by attracting private investment that creates jobs. The SGRC CEDS is a regionally-owned strategy that is the result of a continuing economic development planning process developed with regional public and private sector participation. This plan sets forth the goals and objectives necessary to solve the economic development problems of the Southern Georgia region and clearly defines the measures of success.

The organization responsible for the development of this CEDS is the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC). As recipient of EDA Partnership Planning Investment funds (#ED22ATL3020014), the SGRC serves as a designated Economic Development District (EDD). The SGRC's planning district includes the eighteen county governments of Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Cook, Clinch, Coffee,

Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware, and the 45 municipal governments within those counties.

This CEDS plan follows the guidelines released by the US Economic Development Administration in September 2020. The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan developed by city and county elected officials, as well as economic, community, and workforce development professionals. The utilization of input and ideas from the diverse group of public officials and private sector representatives on the SGRC Council, Workforce Development Board, and the Strategy Committee ensures the inclusiveness of all demographic segments of the region in the CEDS planning process.

The following forms the basis for the SGRC CEDS:

- [Summary Background](#) of economic conditions in the region
- [SWOT Analysis](#) to identify regional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
- [Strategic Direction/Action Plan](#) based on the SWOT Analysis
- [Evaluation Framework](#) to evaluate the implementation of the CEDS and its impact on the regional economy



Summary Background

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) is an economic development planning district located in Southern Georgia. The vast 18-county region covers South Central to Southeast Georgia, and spans nearly 8,000 square miles. SGRC is the largest Regional Commission and Economic Development District in Georgia, both in the number of member counties served and in land area.

The SGRC is a multi-jurisdictional planning agency whose membership includes public officials, private individuals, post-secondary education representatives, workforce development representatives, economic development professionals, and other stakeholders throughout the region. The SGRC provides technical, planning, community and economic development assistance, and aging and workforce development services to the Southern Georgia region. The governing authority, or "Council," of the Regional Commission functions as the District Council in administering the District's EDA programs.

Agriculture, commercial timber production, and other rural development initiatives are all cornerstones of the Southern Georgia economy. However, the evidence of manufacturing is seen throughout the region and has helped to raise the per capita income, jobs creation and retention, and capital investments in some areas of the region.

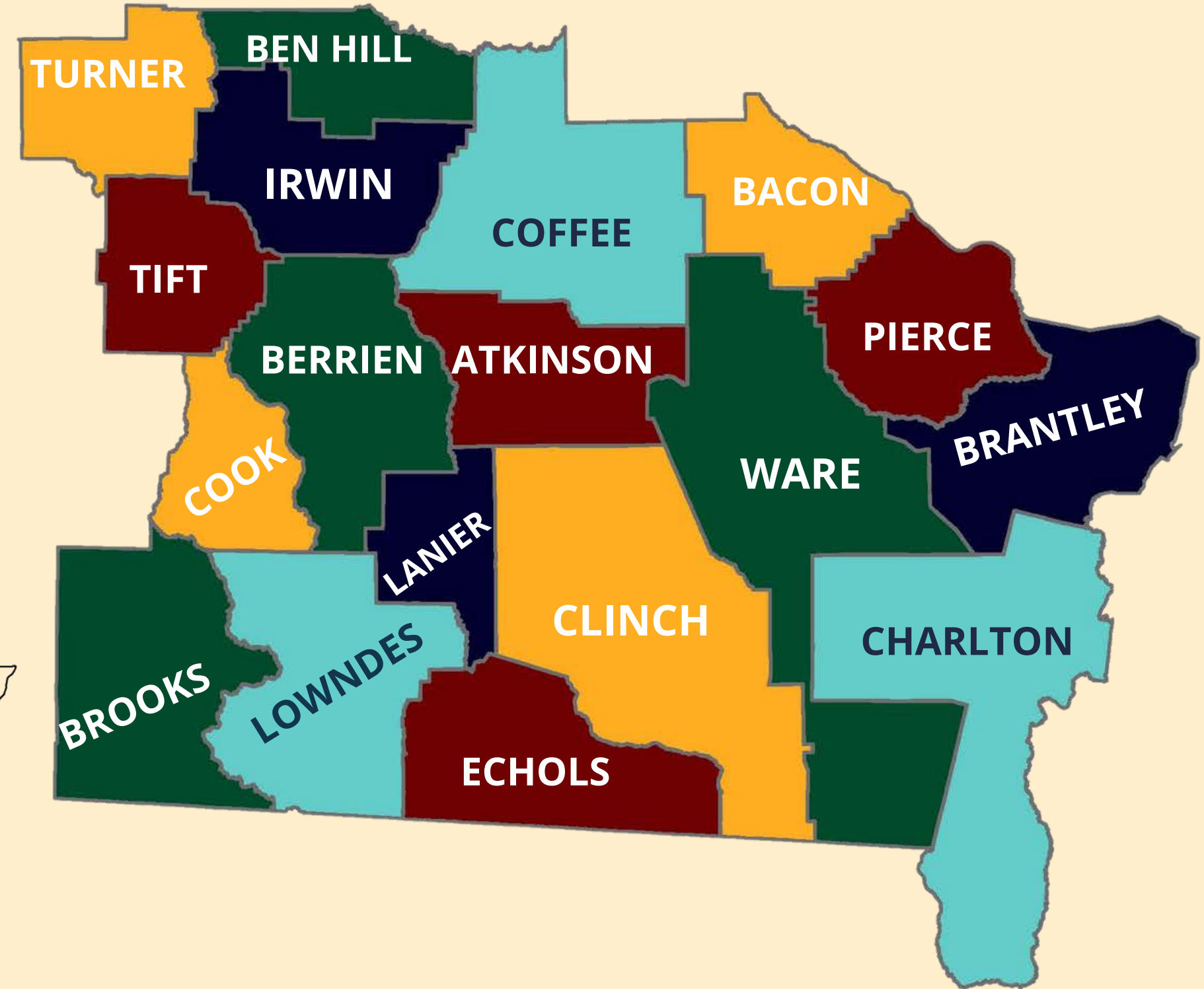
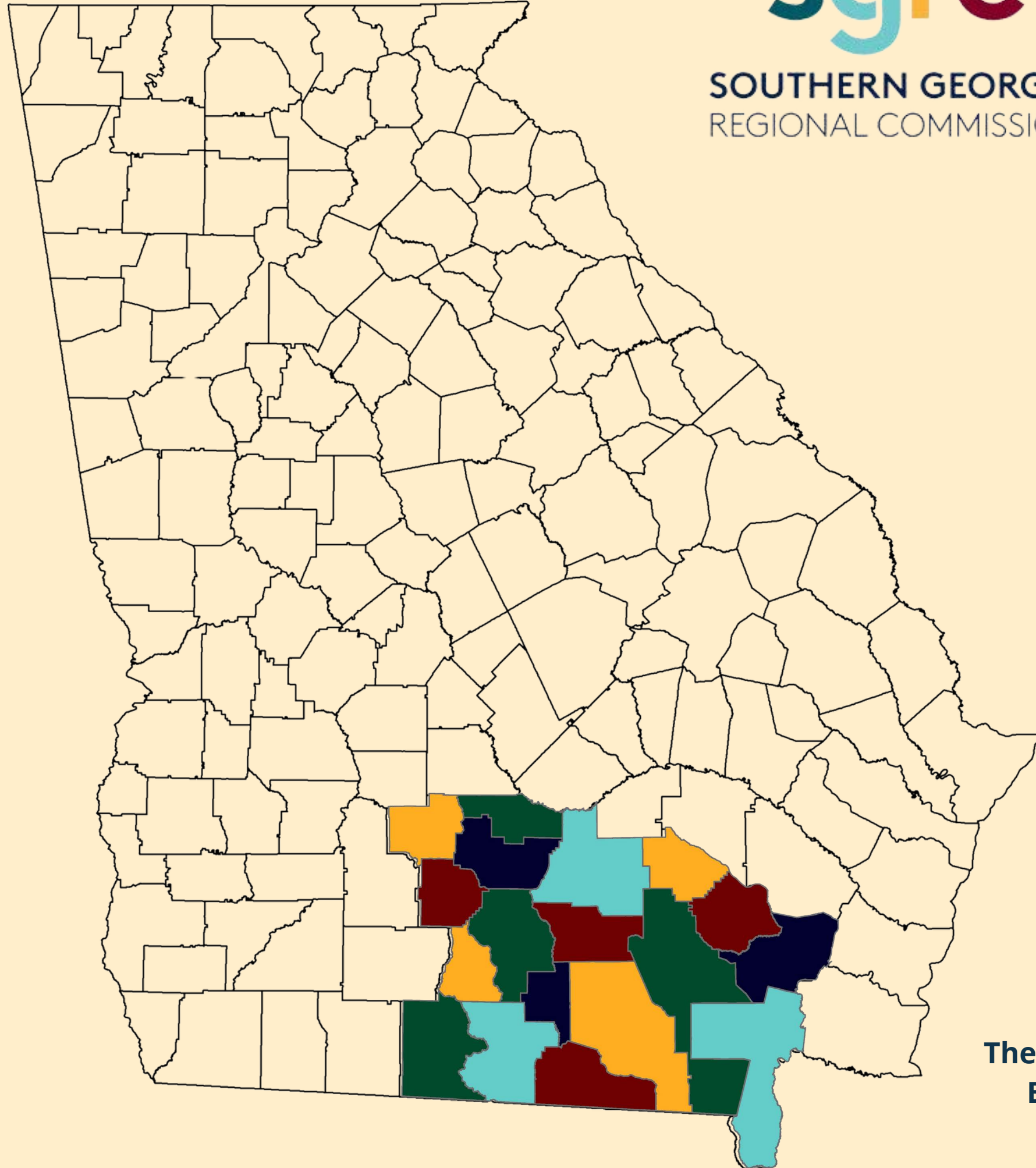
Valdosta, the major city and county seat of Lowndes County, is the only designated Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) located in the District. The counties of Lowndes, Brooks, Echols, and Lanier are associated with the MSA. Valdosta has a growing manufacturing, warehouse, and distribution base. It is also home to Moody Air Force Base and Valdosta State University. One county, Brantley, is associated with the Brunswick MSA, located outside the SGRC District.

The SGRC EDD has four Micropolitan Statistical Areas. They are: Douglas-Coffee County, Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County, Tifton-Tift County, and Waycross-Ware County. The Douglas and Waycross Micropolitan Statistical Areas each include an adjoining county, Atkinson (Douglas) and Pierce (Waycross).

The Southern Georgia region has a network of four-lane transportation arteries that directly connect to Interstate 75 and Interstate 95, which provides ease of access to the Georgia Ports. Sufficient highway transportation is essential to commercial and industrial growth. Significant improvements have been made to the highway and road systems in the Southern Georgia Regional Commission in recent years. These improvements have helped to open up areas of the region for various types of development and growth and provide safer more efficient transportation arteries.



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The Southern Georgia region includes Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties.

Demographics

The total population for the Southern Georgia Region increased from 406,586 in 2010 to 413,869 in 2020, a 1.79% increase. The population has increased to 417,230 as of 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, a 0.81% increase. As the regional population increases, so does the diversity, as nearly half of the municipalities are Minority-Majority. Growth within the region has not been consistent. Lowndes County had a 9.61% increase in population (2020-2021), the most substantial increase in the region. Other counties with population increases were Bacon, Ben Hill, Brooks, Clinch, Irwin, Pierce, and Tift.

Ten of the eighteen counties in the region experienced a loss in population between 2010 and 2020. According to the 2021 ACS estimates, ten of the eighteen counties once again experienced a loss between 2020 and 2021. Echols County experienced the greatest loss of 8.50%. The lack of job opportunities in these particular counties, especially for the population that is between 18 and 24 years of age, has forced this age group to move outside of these counties to work and live. Other counties with population loss from 2020 to 2021 were Atkinson, Berrien, Brantley, Charlton, Coffee, Cook, Lanier, Turner, and Ware.

The region's overall population is 63.6% White, 27.7% Black/African American, 5.3% two or more races, 1.2% Asian, 0.19% American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.11% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1.9% some other race. The region's overall Hispanic/Latino population is 7.7%

Socioeconomic Data

The poverty rate in the State of Georgia is 12.7%. One hundred percent (100%) of the Southern Georgia EDD's counties have a poverty rate higher than the state. Lanier (34.1%), Clinch (30.2%), and Turner (27.2%) Counties experience the highest rates of poverty in their communities, with Pierce (17.9%) and Lowndes (14.0%) Counties being the lowest. An increasing number of rural communities are experiencing persistently high poverty rates. In fact, eight of the eighteen counties in the SGRC region are listed as Persistent Poverty Counties. They are: Atkinson County, Bacon County, Ben Hill County, Brooks County, Cook County, Tift County, Turner County, and Ware County.

The average per capita income (PCI) in the Southern Georgia EDD is \$22,307, which is much lower than the State of Georgia's PCI of \$38,378. There are seven counties with PCI above the region's average of \$21,050; however, all eighteen counties in the Southern Georgia EDD are below Georgia's PCI of \$38,378.

Georgia's unemployment rate is 3.3%. Ten (55.5%) of the Southern Georgia EDD counties have unemployment rates higher than that of the state. Ben Hill (4.7%), Irwin (4.6%) and Turner (4.2%) Counties have the highest unemployment rates in the region and Clinch (2.7%) and Echols (2.7%) Counties have the lowest.

All eighteen counties (100%) in the Southern Georgia EDD have median household income limits below the state average of \$72,837. Lowndes (\$65,689) and Irwin (\$63,251) Counties have the highest median income limit, and Ben Hill (\$34,455) and Atkinson (\$35,741) Counties have the lowest.

In Georgia, 11.7% of the population is without health care coverage. All eighteen counties (100%) in the Southern Georgia EDD have a population above this rate. Echols (25.3%) and Berrien (21.7%) Counties have the highest percentage of residents without health care coverage, and Lowndes (13.3%) and Turner (15%) Counties have the lowest percentage of residents without health coverage.

Housing

Access to safe and affordable housing plays a major role in the SGRC EDD's economic competitiveness and resilience. The consensus of each SWOT analysis performed in the development of this CEDS identified the scarce availability of affordable workforce housing as a threat to the economic well-being of the region. In addition, declining housing conditions and the growing inventory of substandard rental housing, particularly in the region's cities, is having an adverse effect on quality of life. Smart housing planning is increasingly essential for healthy growth, regardless of a metro, suburban, or rural environment. The housing stock must include safe, affordable, and accessible for-sale and rental units, not only to meet social equity goals, but to ensure community health as well as economic vitality and economic health.

There are 179,014 housing units in the SGRC Region, with 153,384 (85.1%) being occupied. Clinch County has the lowest percentage of occupied housing units at 78.2% , with the median home value being \$71,500. Lowndes County has the highest percentage of occupied housing units at 89.3%, with the median home value being \$206,100.

Environment

The Southern Georgia Region is a vast, rural region spanning the Upper and Lower Coastal Plains of south-central Georgia. The mostly forested and agricultural region is comprised of approximately 7,810 square miles. The Region contains some unique natural features, including the Okefenokee Swamp, which, at 438,000 acres, is the largest "blackwater" swamp in North America. The 18-county Southern Georgia region is predominantly rural in terms of its land area and approximately half rural and half urban in terms of its population. The region's largest urban area is Valdosta, and other major urban clusters include Douglas, Fitzgerald, Tifton, and Waycross. Historically, the region's major industries were agriculture (both crops and livestock) and forestry, including the extraction of turpentine from pine trees. However, in recent decades, in keeping with national trends, the region has shifted from a production economy to a service economy. Although the majority of the region's land area is still used for agriculture and forestry, more jobs are now in service-providing industries than in goods-producing industries.

Infrastructure

A sound infrastructure plays a vital role in encouraging a more productive and competitive regional economy. When problems exist with the performance of infrastructure, the effects can be widespread. The quality of a region's infrastructure has a profound effect on its ability to attract development, and the success of companies that choose to locate there.

Many communities in the SGRC Region have aging infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, bridges), but lack of funding to address those problems. Most incorporated municipalities in the region have municipal water and sewer systems, except for a few smaller cities that do not. Some counties in the region provide water and sewer service to select areas. Storm water management is handled at the local level.

Broadband service in the region is provided through DSL, cable, fiber, fixed wireless, and satellite. Some areas of the region (such as Echols County) have only one broadband provider, while others have multiple providers. Not all broadband technologies are available in all areas of the region. However, due to the increasing importance of broadband access in daily life, business, and recreation, broadband availability is increasingly likely to influence development patterns throughout the region. Recent federal broadband funding directed to the Southern Georgia EDD will result in the deployment of additional broadband infrastructure and increased accessibility in the region.

Economy

The economies of the SGRC region have become more diversified over the past twenty years; however, this diversity did not make the region immune to the Coronavirus pandemic. With the arrival of COVID-19 came many challenges and changes in the economy and everyday life throughout the SGRCEDD region, Georgia, and the United States. Georgia's statewide shelter-in-place order issued in April 2020 brought with it closures of schools, colleges, businesses, and many local governments. There were mass layoffs throughout the region, school students were suddenly faced with the challenge of online learning, the unemployed were desperately searching for resources, and many hospitals were at a maximum capacity treating those struck ill by the coronavirus.

As offices and retail spaces were shutting down around the country, it became clear that some industries do not stop. This realization coined the term, "essential worker". While workers and staff throughout the United States sheltered-in-place, essential workers did not face any employment interruption. These critical sectors remained operational in order to preserve health, safety, and to keep America going.

Southern Georgia is beginning to recover with more and more businesses reopening and attempting to restaff. However, many businesses are finding it difficult to fill all of the available positions. Some attribute this worker shortage to increased unemployed benefits, while others cite childcare issues or concerns about contracting COVID as a deterrent to employment - perhaps it is a combination. Additionally, many sectors are facing supply chain interruptions and even shortages. The adverse effects of the pandemic are still present in the SGRC region, while the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic remain unknown.

Many of the eighteen counties in the SGRC region have areas that experience persistent economic distress and unemployment. In fact, because nine of the EDD's 18 counties have maintained poverty rates of 20% or more for the past 30 years, they are designated as persistent poverty counties. Although unemployment in the EDD is comparable to Georgia and the United States, there are notable disparities in unemployment rate by race and ethnicity. In the SGRC region, the Hispanic population faces an unemployment rate two percentage points higher than that of the white population while the Black population faces an unemployment rate nearly double that of the white population.

Barriers to economic prosperity in Southern Georgia are numerous. Efforts must be made to reverse negative trends and to move the region forward. The Southern Georgia CEDS emphasizes strategic approaches based on regional visioning and goal setting. Stakeholders will be able to use this CEDS as a guide to understanding the regional economy, thus empowering them to take action to improve it through regional initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable economic development.

Education and Workforce

The Southern Georgia Region's workforce is a geographically large workforce area with diverse industry sectors. The top five (5) industry sectors with the highest employment and total demand are Health Care & Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Manufacturing, Accommodations and Food Services, and Transportation and Warehousing. The region has a civilian labor force of 146,556 with a participation rate of 35.2%. The majority of employment opportunities can be found in five of the eighteen counties, including Lowndes, Ware, Coffee, Tift, and Charlton.

For many of the occupations projected to show the greatest growth in the coming years, advanced degrees and specialized training are not required. For example, retail salespersons, first line supervisors of retail sales workers, stockers, and order fillers typically require only a brief training period and do not require higher-level qualifications. However, some of the occupations that are expected to experience growth in the region in the near future do require advanced degrees and/or special training, for example: heavy and tractor trailer truck drives, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses.

The Southern Georgia Area Workforce Development Board (WDB) envisions the local one-stop workforce development system as the mechanism to promote, encourage, and coordinate the development of a well-trained labor force with skills to not only meet the needs of the area's current employers, but also to attract new business and industry to the area. It is crucial to continued economic resilience and prosperity that the region continues to develop a diverse set of industry sectors that provide living wage jobs.

Workforce Development through education and training is a critical need for economic development in Southern Georgia. Statistics show that a high poverty, low diversity region can turn away both potential employers and a potential workforce. Low literacy and educational attainment can cripple attempts at industry diversification towards high skill/high wage job growth. If higher paying industries are to be recruited to the region, then higher skilled employees must be trained and made available. Education and training are recognized as critical needs. Fortunately, there are a number of regionally significant institutions that are making a difference in the lives of many uneducated and/or untrained worker in the region. They are listed on the following page.

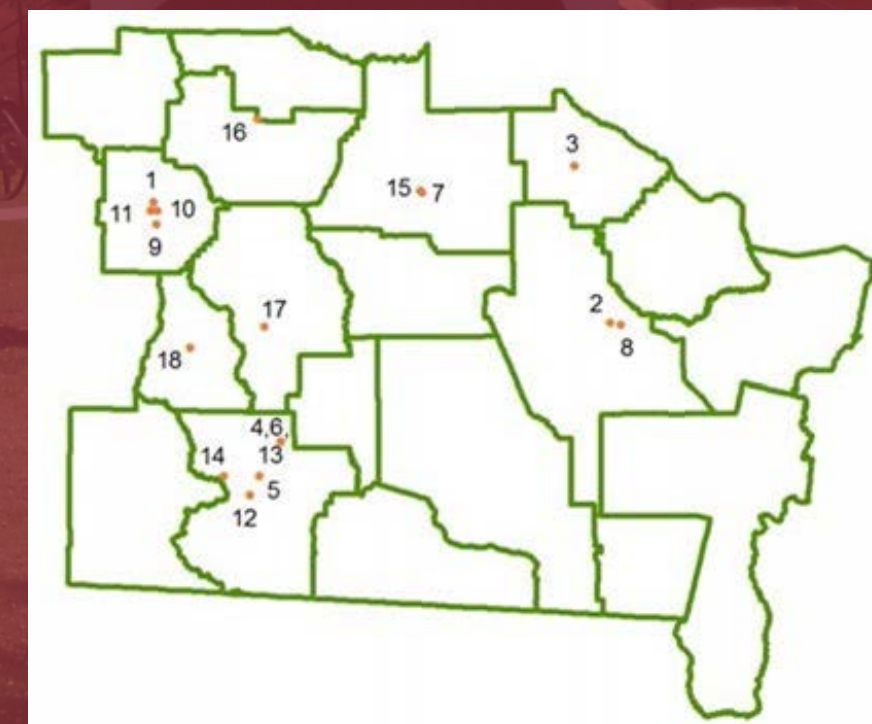
The Southern Georgia Area WDB will continue working with these educational institutions to ensure individuals have access to a variety of in-demand training programs to meet the specific needs of the region and create well-paying, quality jobs. The strong partnerships have set the stage for future progress.



Colleges and Universities

The Southern Georgia region is home to the following colleges and universities:

- 1. Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
- 2. Coastal Pines Technical College (TC)
- 3. Coastal Pines TC Alma Campus
- 4. Embry Riddle Aeronautical University Moody Campus
- 5. Georgia Military College
- 6. Park University Moody Campus
- 7. South Georgia State College
- 8. South Georgia State College Waycross Campus
- 9. Southern Regional Technical College Tifton Campus
- 10. Troy University Tifton Campus
- 11. University of Georgia Tifton Campus
- 12. Valdosta State University
- 13. Webster University Moody Campus
- 14. Wiregrass Technical College
- 15. Wiregrass TC Douglas Campus
- 16. Wiregrass TC Fitzgerald Campus
- 17. Wiregrass TC Nashville Campus
- 18. Wiregrass TC Sparks Campus

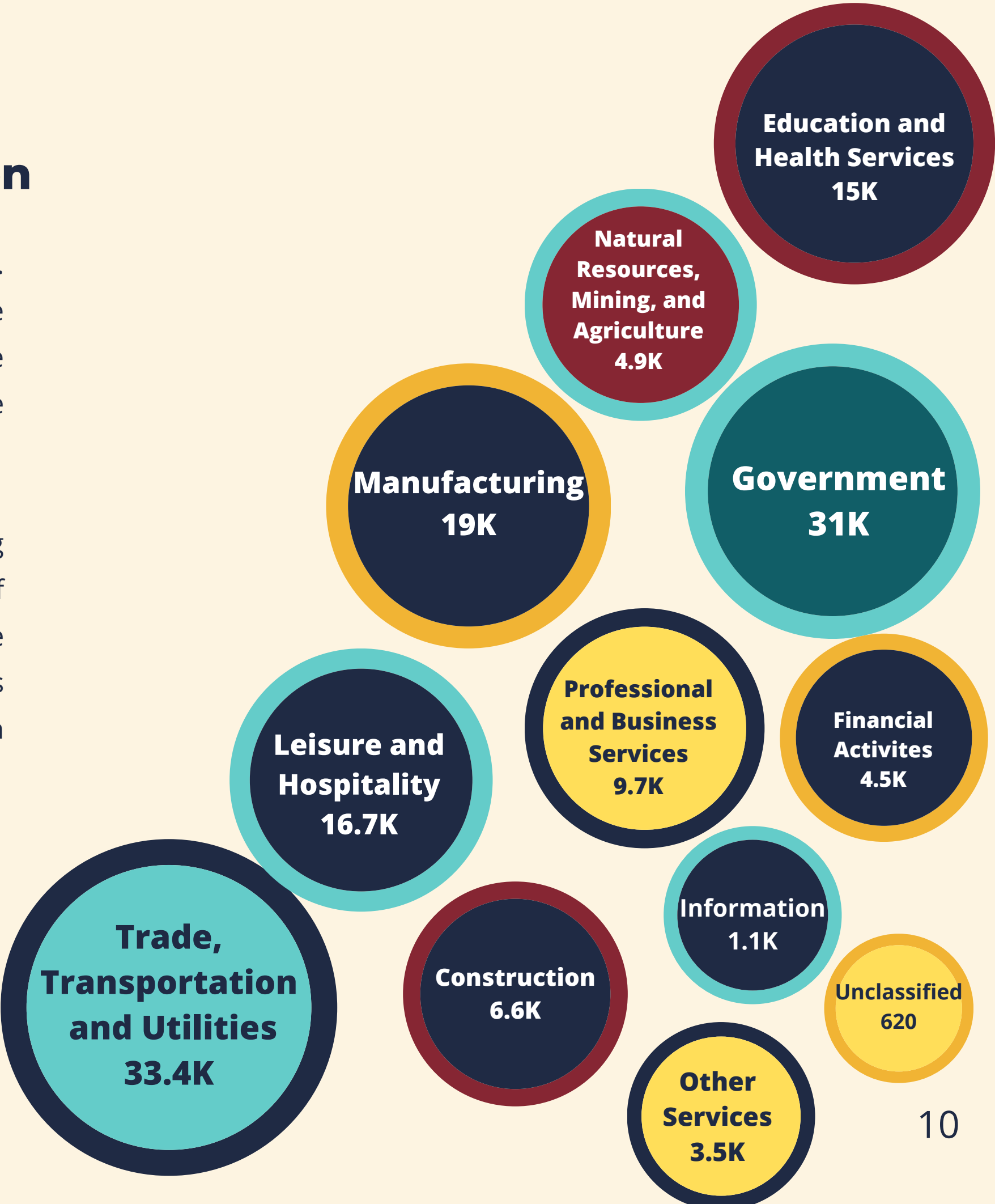


Top Industry Concentrations

Based on Average Employment in the Region

A cluster is a regional concentration of related industries in a particular location. Clusters are a striking feature of economies, making regions uniquely competitive for jobs and private investment. They consist of companies, suppliers, and service providers, as well as government agencies and other institutions that provide specialized training and education, information, research, and technical support.

Locating and analyzing the region's economic clusters was crucial to developing the strategic focus areas, and, therefore, the region's CEDS. The wide array of economic clusters in the 18-county Southern Georgia EDD region illustrates the diversity of the district's economy, and a critical component of the region's economic resilience. Currently, there are 15 strongly traded clusters in Southern Georgia.



EDA Investment Priorities

The Economic Development Administration's (EDA) investment priorities provide an overarching framework to ensure its grant investment portfolio – ranging from planning to infrastructure construction -- contributes to local efforts to build, improve, or better leverage economic assets that allow businesses to succeed and regional economies to prosper and become more resilient. Competitive grant applications will be responsive to the evaluation criteria listed under each individual funding announcement, including at least one of the below investment priorities:

1. Equity
2. Recovery & Resilience
3. Workforce Development
4. Manufacturing
5. Technology-Based Economic Development
6. Environmentally-Sustainable Development
7. Exports & Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)



Economic Resiliency



Economic Resiliency

The weight of the global pandemic has brought serious challenges to the Southern Georgia EDD and its economy. Rural small businesses were still rebounding from the Great Recession, and entered the COVID-19 crises with compounding, preexisting vulnerabilities.

The negative effects of the pandemic included:

- business closures,
- rural hospitals struggling to meet demand for healthcare,
- students with limited broadband experiencing educational gaps because of inability to participate in online education,
- hospitality industry decimated,
- supply chain disruptions, and
- mass layoffs throughout the region.

As COVID-19 tests the resilience of rural economies, their ability to remain places where people want to live and work is at a higher risk. Barriers to economic prosperity in Southern Georgia include poverty, infrastructure, economic exclusion, and limited resources.

The SGRC region will focus on understanding, sustaining, and investing in strategies that foster economic growth.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) defines economic resilience as the following: Regional economic prosperity is linked to the area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from disruptions to its economic base. According to the Economic Development Administration, in order to build economic resilience, regions should focus on both steady - state and responsive initiatives with the following two-pronged approach ¹:

*1) Planning for and implementing resilience through specific goals or actions to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region **(steady-state)**, and*

*2) Establishing information networks among the various stakeholders in the region to encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, education, and non-profit sectors to collaborate on existing and potential future challenges **(responsive)**.*

The Southern Georgia region has narrowed its focus to the following initiatives, developed from the two-pronged approach:

1. <http://www.eda.gov/ceds/content/economic-resilience.htm>

Steady-State Initiatives:

- Engaging in comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive participation from the community to define and implement a collective vision for resilience that includes the integration and/or alignment of other planning efforts
- Undertaking initiatives to broaden the industrial base by identifying emerging clusters that build on the region's SWOT
- Constructing and developing a resilient workforce that adapts to a shifting economy
- Maintaining geographic information systems (GIS) that link with business establishment data bases to track regional and local "churns."

Responsive Initiatives:

- Conducting pre-disaster recovery planning to define key responsibilities and actions
- Establishing regular communication of business community needs and issues through the SGRC Economic Development Professionals Advisory Committee
- Establishing strong leadership succession plans
- Further developing broadband through the use of small cells for reliable communication

In August 2020, the SGRC received Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for the purpose of assisting the region with pandemic recovery and increasing resilience. With this funding, the SGRC worked directly with communities to assess the region's needs and to devise a strategy to meet those needs through coordination, partnerships, and leveraged resources.

The result of those efforts is the development of the Southern Georgia Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan which identifies methods to strengthen economic resilience. The Plan can be viewed in its entirety here: <https://www.sgrc.us/community-and-economic-development.html>



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Equity & Environmental Justice

The Addition of Equity

In April 2021, equity was included for the first time as one of EDA's investment priorities, a list of key focus areas that provide the framework to guide the agency's approach to funding projects.

Economic development planning or implementation projects that advance equity across America through investments that directly benefit

1) one or more traditionally underserved populations (PDF), including but not limited to women, Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders or

2) underserved communities within geographies that have been systemically and/or systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic prosperity such as Tribal Lands, Persistent Poverty Counties, and rural areas with demonstrated, historical underservice.

Eight of the eighteen counties in the region served by SGRC are listed as Persistent Poverty Counties. They are: Atkinson County, Bacon County, Ben Hill County, Brooks County, Cook County, Tift County, Turner County, and Ware County.

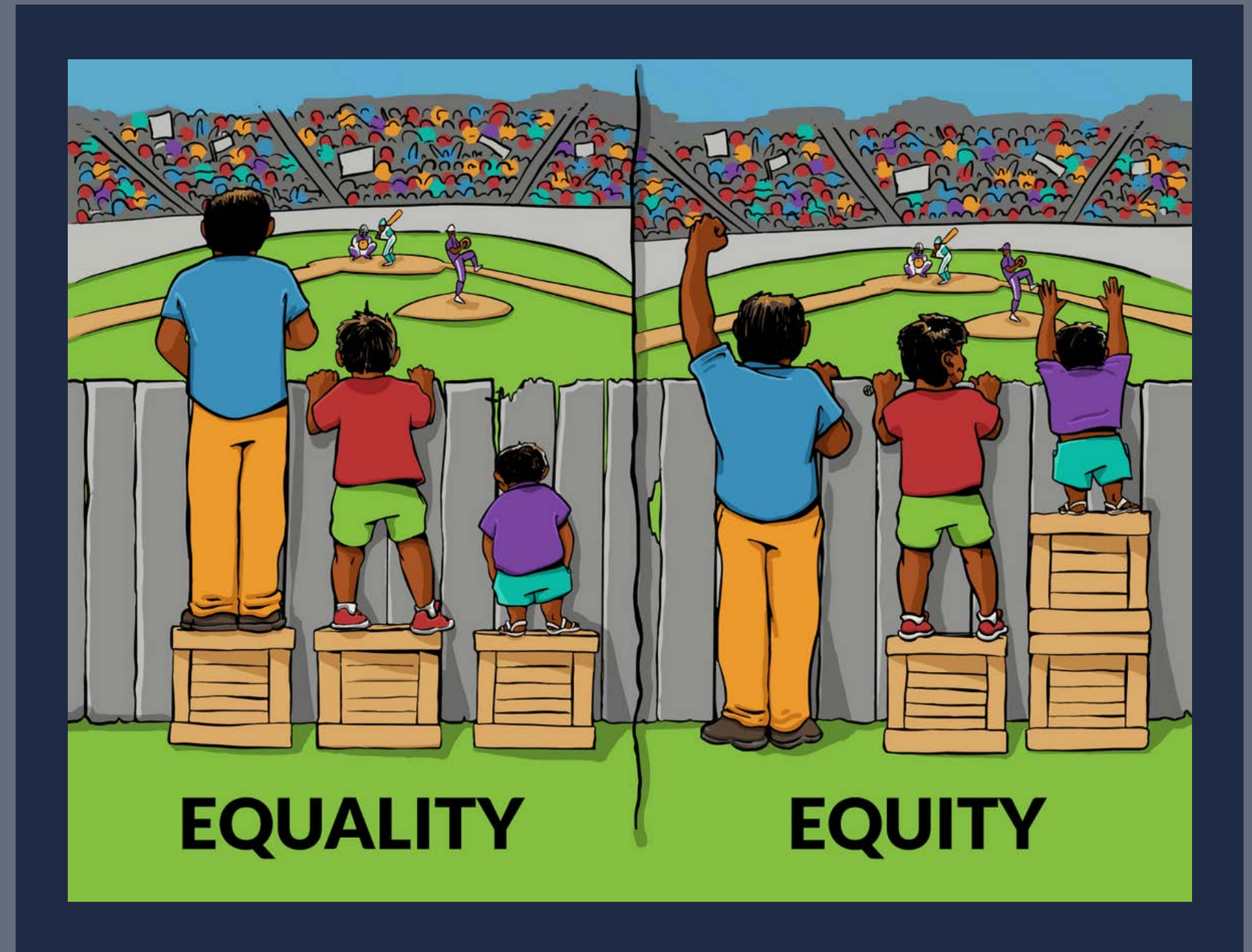


Economic Equity

The term **equity** refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that **we do not all start from the same place** and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. The process is ongoing, requiring us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures.

According to a September 2021 Brookings Paper on Economic Activity (BPEA), "The opportunity to participate in the economy and to succeed based on ability and effort is at the foundation of our nation and our economy. Unfortunately, structural barriers have persistently disrupted this narrative for many Americans, leaving the talents of millions of people underutilized or on the sidelines. The result is lower prosperity, not just for those affected, but for everyone."

Eliminating systematic disparities has the potential to produce large economic gains.



Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Fair treatment means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.

Meaningful involvement means:

- People have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health;
- The public's contribution can influence the regulatory agency's decision;
- Community concerns will be considered in the decision making process; and
- Decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.



SGRC Underserved Communities

The disadvantaged Census Tracts included on the following pages exceeded the 50th percentile (75th for resilience) across at least four of the six disadvantaged indicators. These six disadvantaged indicators include: Transportation Access, Health, Environmental, Economic, Resilience, and Equity. Each of the six indicators are assembled at the Census Tract level using data from the CDC Social Vulnerability Index, Census America Community Survey, EPA Smart Location Map, HUD Location Affordability Index, EPA EJ Screen, FEMA Resilience Analysis & Planning Tool and FEMA National Risk Index.

**Transportation
Access**

Health

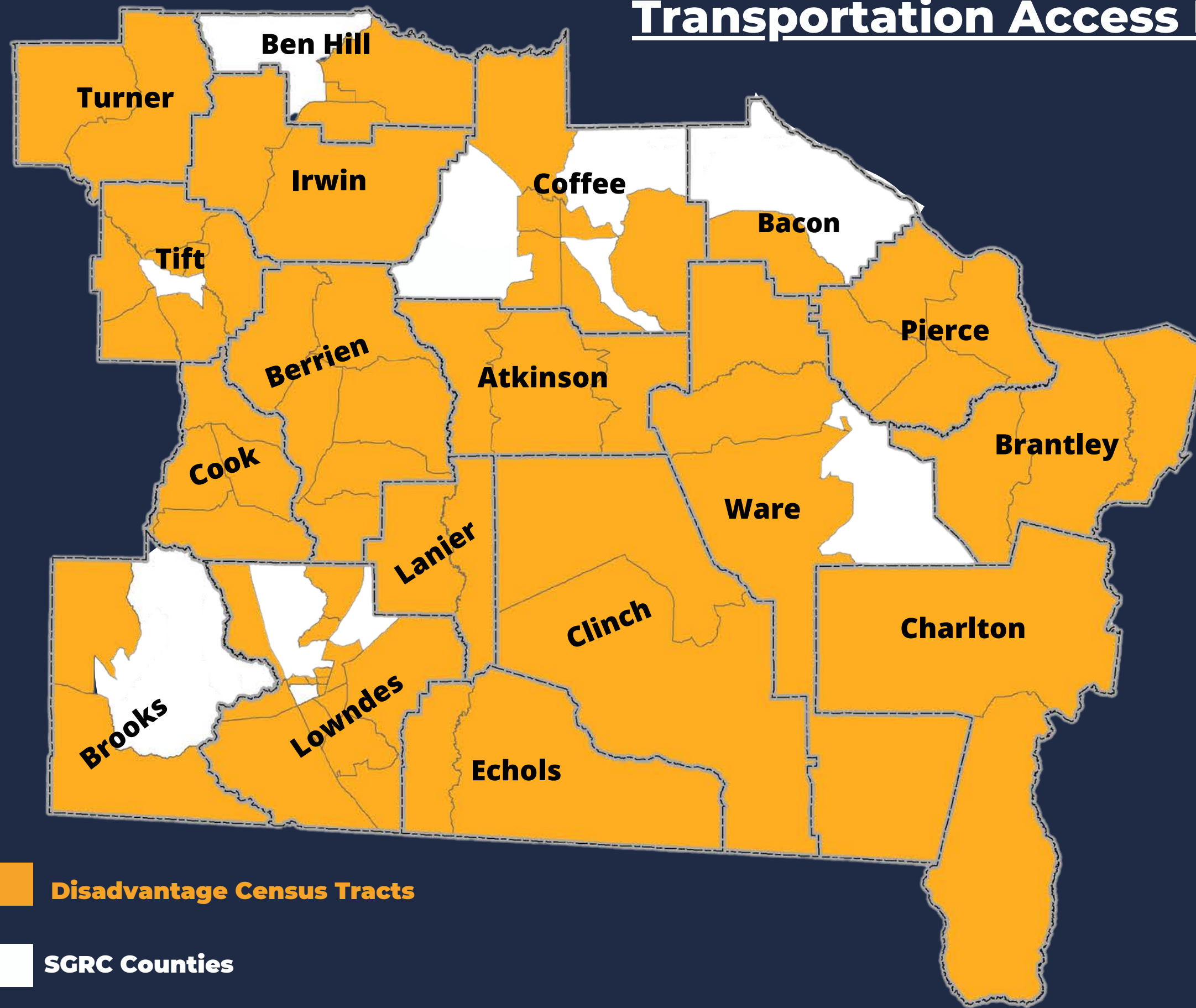
Environmental

Economic

Resilience

Equity

Transportation Access Disadvantage Indicator



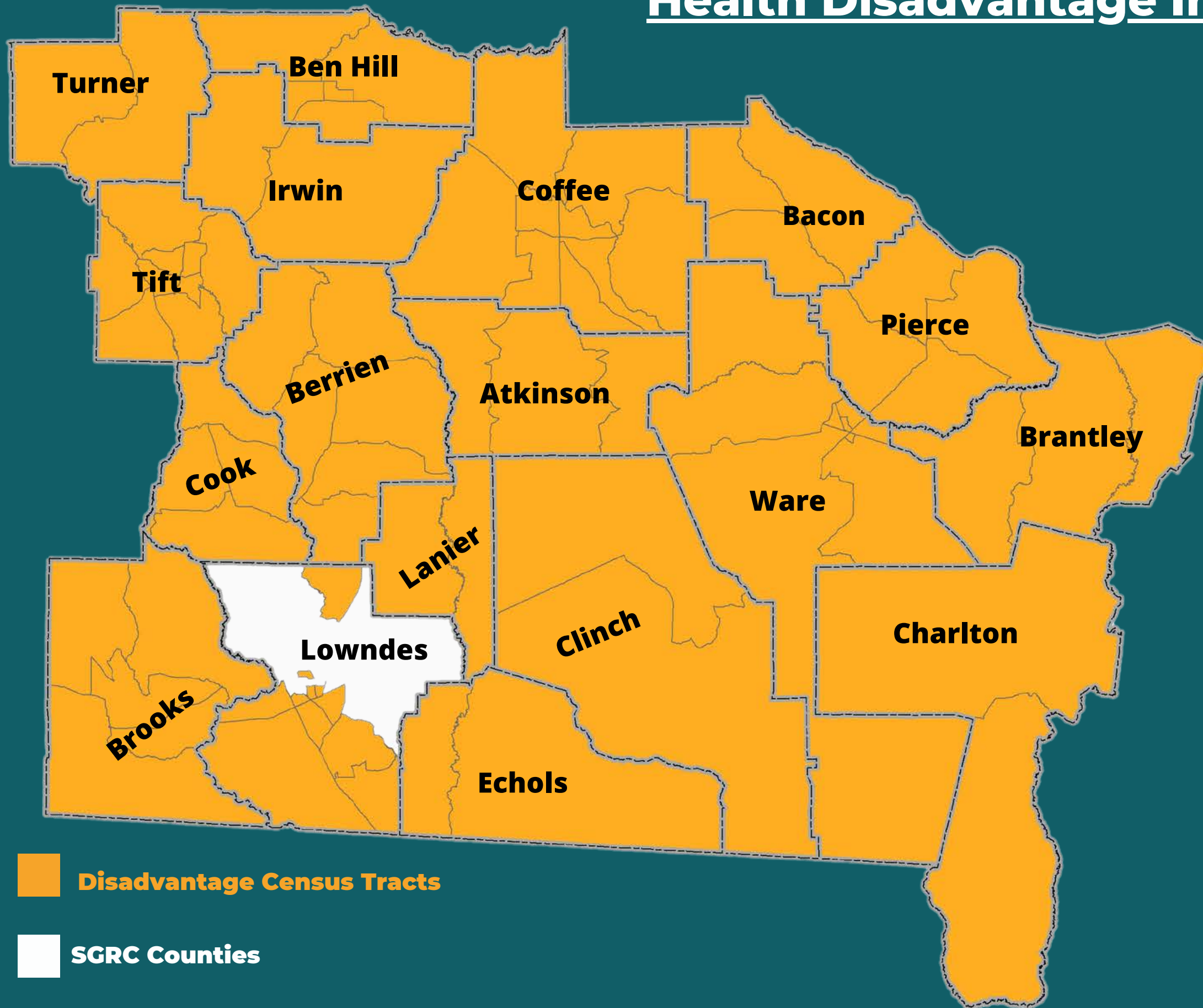
<u>County</u>	<u>Census Tracts</u>
Atkinson	9601-9603
Bacon	9702.02
Ben Hill	9601, 9604, 9605
Berrien	9701-9706
Brantley	9601-9603
Brooks	9602, 9606
Charlton	101, 102
Clinch	9701-9702
Coffee	101, 103-105, 107, 108.01
Cook	9601-9604
Echols	8801-8802
Irwin	9501, 9502
Lanier	9501, 9502
Lowndes	101.01, 101.03, 102.01, 104.02, 105, 106.04, 107-108, 110-112, 114.01-114.03, 115-116
Pierce	9601, 9604
Tift	9601-9605, 9608-9609
Turner	9702, 9703
Ware	9501-9502, 9504, 9508

 Disadvantage Census Tracts

 SGRC Counties

Transportation Access disadvantage identifies communities and places that spend more, and longer, to get where they need to go.

Health Disadvantage Indicator



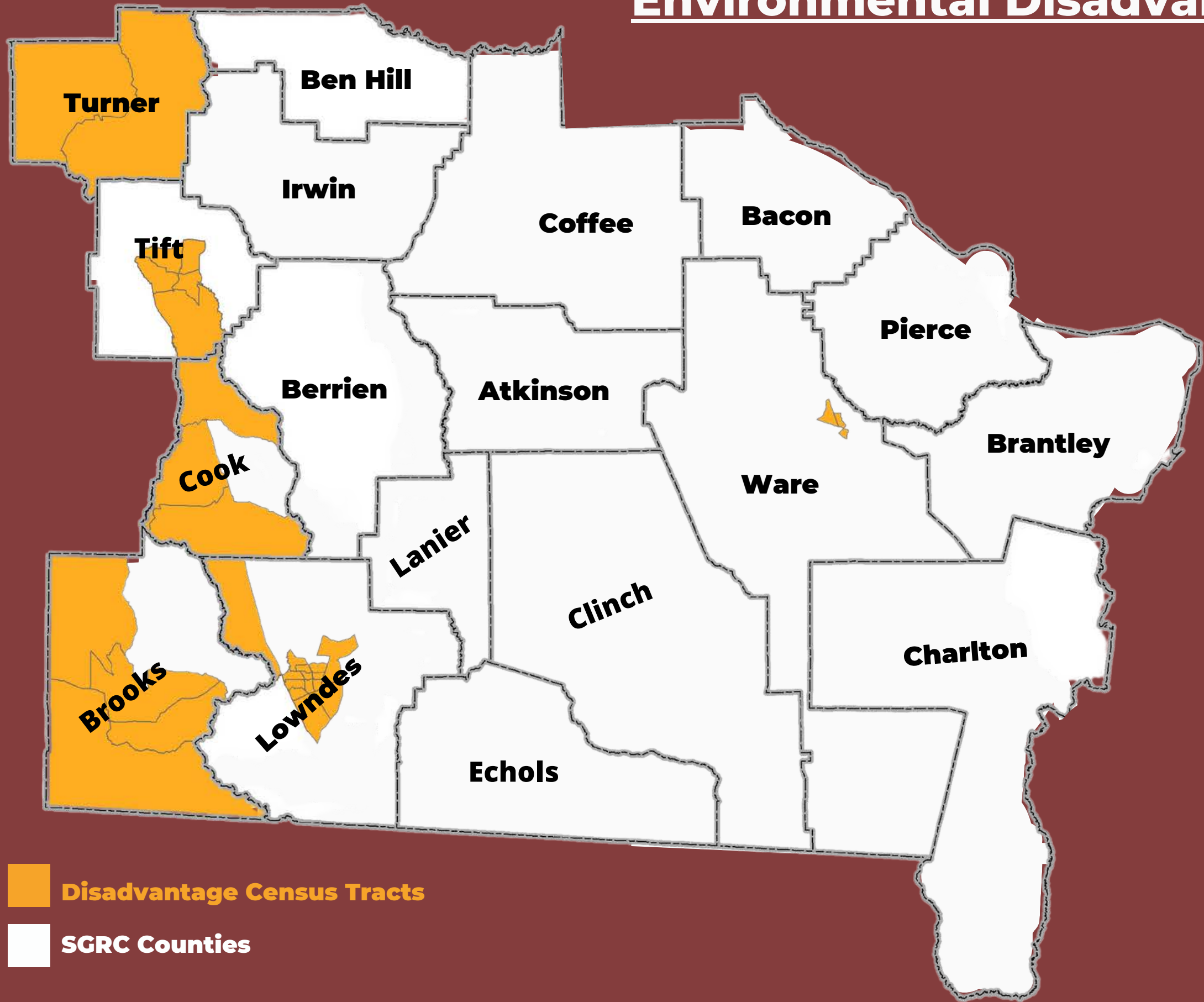
<u>County</u>	<u>Census Tracts</u>
Atkinson	9601-9603
Bacon	9701, 9702.01-.02
Ben Hill	9601-9605
Berrien	9701-9706
Brantley	9601-9603
Brooks	9602-9606
Charlton	101-102
Clinch	9701-9702
Coffee	101-107, 108.01-108.02
Cook	9601-9604
Echols	8801-8802
Irwin	9501, 9502
Lanier	9501, 9502
Lowndes	101.01, 101.04, 108-110, 113.02, 114.01-114.03, 115-116
Pierce	9601-9604
Tift	9601-9609
Turner	9702, 9703
Ware	9501-9509

 Disadvantage Census Tracts

 SGRC Counties

Health disadvantage identifies communities based on variables associated with adverse health outcomes, disability, as well as environmental exposures.

Environmental Disadvantage Indicator

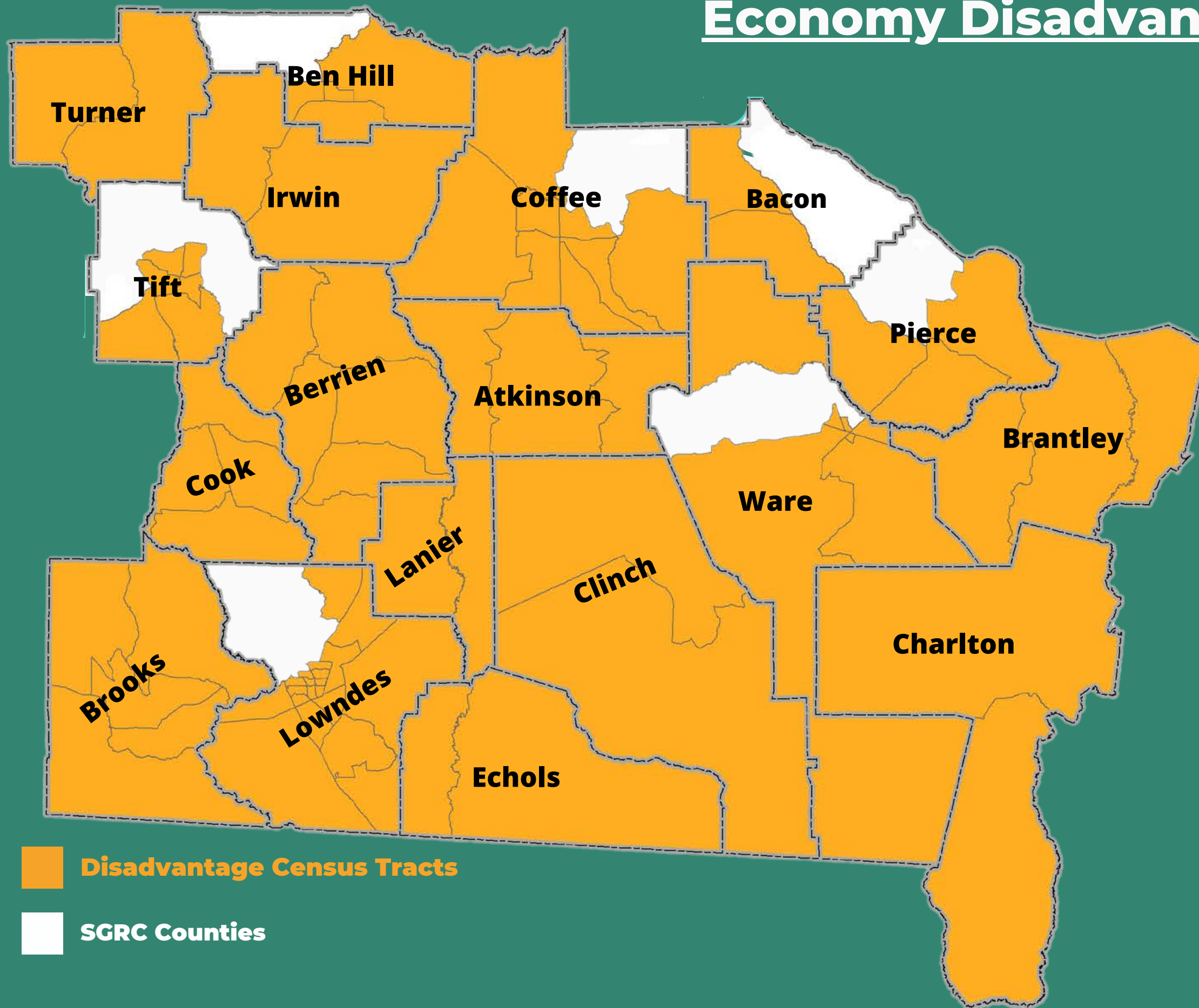


<u>County</u>	<u>Census Tracts</u>
Brooks	9602, 9604-9606
Cook	9601-9602, 9604
Lowndes	102.01, 103.02, 104.01-104.02, 105, 106.04, 108-112, 113.01, 113.02, 114.02
Tift	9603-9604, 9606-9607, 9609
Turner	9702-9703
Ware	9504, 9507

Disadvantage Census Tracts
 SGRC Counties

Environmental disadvantage identifies communities with disproportionate pollution burden and inferior environmental quality.

Economy Disadvantage Indicator



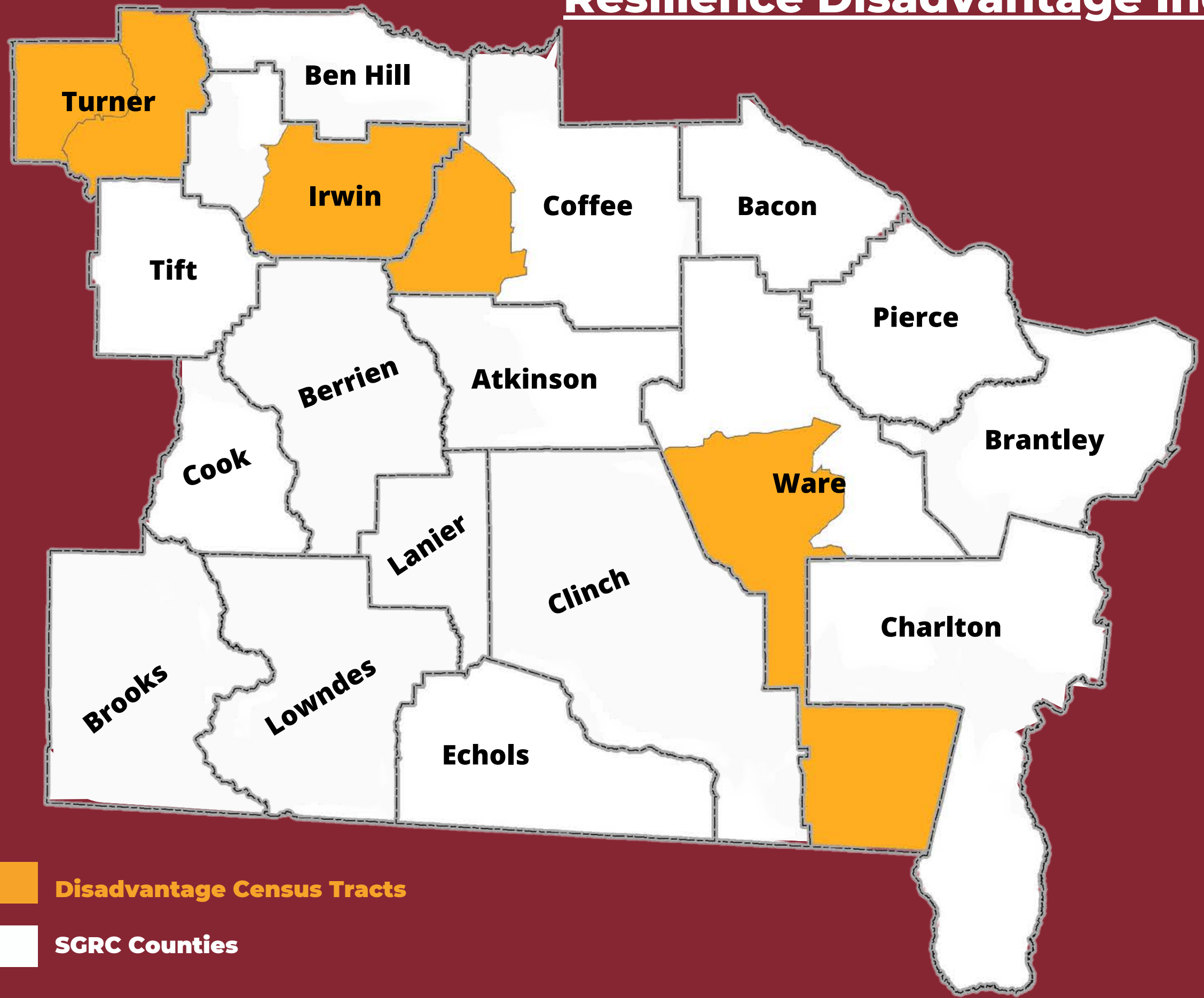
Disadvantage Census Tracts

SGRC Counties

<u>County</u>	<u>Census Tracts</u>
Atkinson	9601-9603
Bacon	9702.01-9702.02
Ben Hill	9601, 9603-9605
Berrien	9701-9706
Brantley	9601-9603
Brooks	9602-9606
Charlton	101-102
Clinch	9701-9702
Coffee	101, 103-107, 108.01-108.02
Cook	9601-9604
Echols	8801-8802
Irwin	9501-9502
Lanier	9501-9502
Lowndes	101.01-101.02, 104.01-104.02, 105, 106.01, 106.04, 107-112, 113.01-113.02, 114.01-114.03, 115-116
Pierce	9601, 9603-9604
Tift	9603-9604, 9606-9609
Turner	9702-9703
Ware	9501, 9503-9504, 9506-9509

Economic disadvantage identifies areas and populations with high poverty, low wealth, lack of local jobs, low homeownership, low educational attainment, and high inequality.

Resilience Disadvantage Indicator



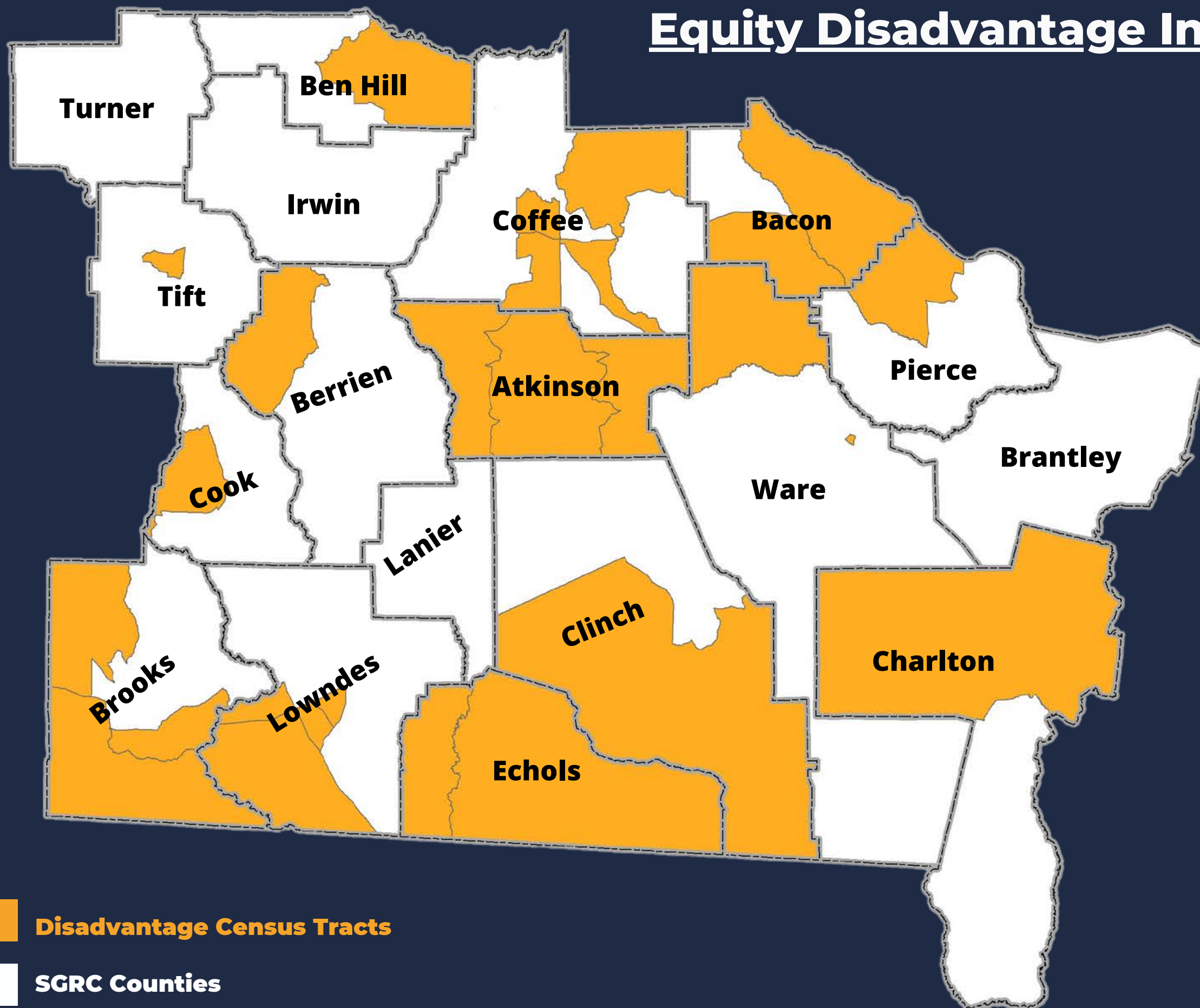
<u>County</u>	<u>Census Tracts</u>
Coffee	106
Irwin	9502
Turner	9702-9703
Ware	9508

 **Disadvantage Census Tracts**

 **SGRC Counties**

Resilience disadvantage identifies communities vulnerable to hazards caused by climate change. 24

Equity Disadvantage Indicator



<u>County</u>	<u>Census Tracts</u>
Atkinson	9601-9603
Bacon	9701, 9702.02
Ben Hill	9601
Berrien	9702
Brooks	9602, 9605-9606
Charlton	101
Clinch	9702
Coffee	102, 105, 107, 108.02
Cook	9602
Echols	8801-8802
Lowndes	108, 114.01-114.03
Pierce	9602
Tift	9603
Ware	9501, 9507

 **Disadvantage Census Tracts**
 **SGRC Counties**

Equity disadvantage identifies communities with a high percentile of persons (age 5+) who speak English "less than well."



CEDS Process Overview

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is designed to be an inclusive, strategy driven planning process that defines a regional vision for economic growth and resilience and identifies local priorities for future investment.

A goal of this CEDS is to identify where investment can be made to further diversify the region's economic base. Creating local businesses and industries will result in stronger local economies and therefore, economically resilient regions.

The 2022-2026 Southern Georgia CEDS report is a strategic five-year plan that assesses current status, and identifies resources and services that support regional economic stability and prosperity.

The issues of economic resilience and equitable access to jobs and other opportunities are integral to the Region's economy.

CEDS Planning & Implementation



In April 2022, the Southern Georgia Regional Commission kicked off the CEDS planning and implementation process by emailing a survey to members of the CEDS Strategy Committee and local government officials. In addition, the survey was promoted via the SGRC's Facebook page.

The SGRC held CEDS Strategy Committee workshops in May and June, and consulted with members of the Workforce Development Board during its June meeting.



Data collected from the surveys, input from the CEDS Strategy Committee, and the SWOT Analysis, identified four Strategic Focus Areas to support regional economic resilience:

- State of the Regional Economy
- Transportation, Community Facilities, Infrastructure, and Broadband
- Education and Workforce Development
- Population and Housing

The Strategic Focus Areas served as the basis for the SWOT Analysis, Action Plan, and creation of the CEDS Vision Statement.

Strategic Focus Areas

1. State of the Regional Economy

2. Transportation, Community Facilities,
Infrastructure and Broadband

3. Education and Workforce
Development

4. Population and Housing





SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis of the regional economy should answer the question, “Where are we now?” by using the relevant data and background information to help identify the critical internal and external factors that speak to the region’s unique assets and competitive positioning. The SWOT is a strategic planning tool used by organizations to ensure that there is a clear objective informed by a comprehensive understanding of a region’s capabilities and capacity. A SWOT analysis identifies the region’s competitive advantages—those indigenous assets that make the region special or competitive in the national and global economies—juxtaposed against those internal or external factors that can keep a region from realizing its potential.

Determining and analyzing what the region already possesses that could be leveraged better to build the capacity for growth, including competitive cultural, economic, technological, intellectual and physical assets, is critical to developing the strategic direction and implementation plan to promote regional economic vitality. Leveraging assets refers to using the activities and engagement of business, government leaders and other stakeholders to maximize the economic potential of a region. In addition, the SWOT analysis should consider economic resiliency. Specifically, what factors and/or elements are in place (or need to be put in place) to ensure the long-term success, viability, and durability of the regional economy?

State of the Regional Economy

Strengths

- Land Availability for New Growth
- Existing Manufacturing
- Transportation Corridors
- Agriculture/Agribusiness
- Timber Industry
- Cost of Living
- Natural Resources
- Climate
- Proximity to Florida
- Trained and Qualified Workforce
- Regionalism
- PP Collaboration
- Tourism
- Low State Income Tax

Weaknesses

- Aging & Undersized Infrastructure
- Lack of Funding for Economic Development
- Underdeveloped Industrial Parks
- Lack of Regional Collaboration
- Lack of Leadership & Lack of Understanding in Leadership
- Lack of Funding for Industrial Parks
- Revitalization of Downtowns
- Lack of Value-Added Agriculture
- Dysfunctional City/County Boundaries
- No Money for Industrial Recruiting
- Lack of Available Product
- Lack of Workforce Population
- Low Labor Force Participation
- Unskilled Workforce

Opportunities

- Growth Toward Rail
- Highschool Industrial Education
- Leadership Development Designed to Incite New Leadership
- Tax Credits/Business Incentives for Entrepreneurs
- Projects Focused on Responsible Sustainability
- Value Added Agriculture
- Tourism Development
- Tax Credits/State Rural Incentives
- Downtown Revitalization
- Film Industry
- Natural Resources
- Low Cost of Living
- Job Tax Credit

Threats

- Population Loss
- Commercial Blight
- Low Labor Force Participation Rates
- Poor City & County Relationships
- Internet Sales Depleting Local Retail
- Low Minimum Wage
- Lack of Leadership
- National Economy
- Threats to Rural Healthcare
- Homelessness
- Trickle Down Entitlements
- Lack of Jobs for College Graduates
- Lack of Focus from State
- Rising Cost of Healthcare
- Ignoring Community Weaknesses
- Unfunded State & Federal Mandates
- Lack of Workforce Housing

Transportation, Community Facilities, Infrastructure, & Broadband

Strengths

- Transportation Corridors
- Proximity to I-95, I-75, I-10, Ports, Major Markets & Regional Airports
- Georgia Ports
- Rails
- Private Partnerships for Transportation
- Condition of Roadways
- Electric
- T-SPLOST/TIA
- Water
- Improvements to Broadband
- Tech Schools CDL Programs
- CDBG Accessibility for Infrastructure

Weaknesses

- Aging & Deteriorating Water & Sewer Infrastructure
- Resistance of Rail Lines to Allow for Growth
- Overpasses for Vehicles Over Railroad Tracks
- Inadequate Transportation Corridors Between I-75 & I-95
- Lack of Reliable Broadband & Cell Service
- Lack of Natural Gas Capacity
- Workforce Attitude
- Passing Lanes on 2 Lane Highways
- Leadership
- EV Charging Stations
- Affordable Housing
- Involvement of School System

Opportunities

- EMC Incentives for Broadband
- Affordable, Working Class Housing
- Water & Sewer Upgrades
- Extension of Natural Gas Service
- Upgrades to Local Meeting Venues in Need of Repair
- Cost of Utilities
- Broadband-Starlink
- Workforce
- Public Transportation
- Career Academies
- Healthcare
- Industrial Parks Infrastructure Upgrades
- Leadership
- Cheerleading Chamber of Commerce as Promoter
- Expansion of Rail
- Quality Affordable Childcare
- Need for Transportation Workforce

Threats

- Low Labor Force Participation Rates
- Affordable Housing
- Lack of Market Rate Housing
- Lack of Reliable Broadband & Cell Service
- Lack of Natural Gas Capacity
- High School Students not Trained for Employment in Existing Industries
- Struggling Rural Hospitals
- 4-Laning Highways, Bypassing Small Towns
- Lack of Public Transportation
- Leadership
- Low Population Numbers
- Hospitals
- Regional Collaboration

Education & Workforce Development

Strengths

- Strong Network of Technical Colleges
- Southern GA Regional Commission Knowledge
- Targeted Training for Demand Occupations
- Cohesiveness Between Technical Colleges & Service Providers
- Clusters and Pathways
- Quickstart for New Industries
- Relationship between K-12 & Technical Colleges
- Financial Assistance Opportunities
- Workforce Savvy Chamber of Commerce
- Apprenticeships

Weaknesses

- Politics
- Large Section of Population not Entering the Workforce
- High School Dropout Rate
- Lack of Quality Workforce to Attract New Businesses
- 2 Georgias-Atlanta vs Rest of the State
- Mismatch of Skills Needed & Skills Available in Existing Workforce
- Skillset of New Generation of Workers Entering the Workforce
- Transportation
- Low Wages
- Childcare
- Failure to Pass Drug Test
- Turf Guarding
- Turnover Rates
- Workforce Emigration
- Lack of Focus on Manufacturing

Opportunities

- High School Industrial Education
- Market Local Jobs in Schools- Incentivize Educated to Stay Local
- Apprenticeships, Internships, & Mentor Relations with Industries
- Increase Collaboration on Trade-Based Curriculum in Schools
- New Strategies for Economic Development
- Attract More Tech Jobs
- HOPE Career Grant
- Regional Collaboration for Costly Programs like STEM
- Marketing of Technical Colleges
- Early Childhood Education & Learning Centers
- Prepare Workforce to Assume High Skill Jobs
- Diversify Job Opportunities
- Leadership
- Dual Enrollment

Threats

- Lack of Quality Workforce to Attract New Businesses
- Failure to Understand what Workforce Skills the Economy of the Future will Require
- Low Wages
- Workforce Emigration
- Lack of Turnover in Elected Positions
- Qualified Leadership
- Drugs, Mental Health & Incarceration
- Losing Graduates to Larger Areas
- Difficulty Attracting Students into Manufacturing
- Lack of Access to Technical College Programs
- Personal Financial Skills
- Lack of Tourism and Recreational Opportunities
- Lack of Effective Academic Remediation Plans
- Perception of Lack of Opportunities
- Lack of Qualified Workforce
- Resistance to Change in Education
- Transportation

Population & Housing

Strengths

- Retiree Attraction
- Wide Open Spaces, Small Communities with Caring People
- Short Commute Times
- Utilities
- Cost of Land
- Roads
- Availability of Service Infrastructure
- Growth
- New Construction
- Low Cost of Development
- Lower than Average Housing Costs

Weaknesses

- Losing Population
- Losing Educated, but Retaining HS Dropouts
- Decline in Housing Stock
- Need Higher Quality, Affordable Rental Housing to Deter Dilapidated Rental Housing
- Aging Population
- Need More Affordable Housing/Starter Homes
- Lack of Codes and Code Enforcement
- Lack of Rural Healthcare, Affordability
- Low Average Wage, High Housing Cost
- Low Census Count
- Blight

Opportunities

- Creating Functional/Unique Neighborhoods
- Educating Students at an Early Age about Local Workforce Opportunities
- Ease of Life, Low Traffic, Safe Communities
- Cost of Living
- Rehabilitation of Dilapidated Housing Close to Downtown Areas
- Expand Code Enforcement, Especially in Downtown Areas
- Implement Consistent Zoning
- More Housing
- Attractions for Young People
- Relationship with Housing Authority
- Funding Opportunities for Dealing with Blight
- Mixed Use Downtown
- Develop Partnership Opportunities

Threats

- Uneducated Workforce
- Lack of Soft Job Skill Training
- Conversion of Usable Agriculture Property into Solar Farms
- Lack of Low Cost, Quality Housing
- Conversion of Usable Agriculture Property into Subdivisions
- Lack of Collaboration Between Local & Regional Govts
- Emigration of Educated Young Adults
- Lack of Code Enforcement
- Drugs
- Rental Rates
- Homelessness
- Lack of Recreation
- Poorly Constructed Housing

Strategic Focus Area # 1

State of the Regional Economy

GOALS
Create regional groups (authorities) to take ownership of existing, underdeveloped industrial parks to build out infrastructure for industry
Implement programs to foster entrepreneurship growth
Recruit/encourage value-added food processing (agribusiness)
Infrastructure Assessment
Adequate Staffing for Industries
Land availability for new growth

ACTION PLAN
Identify existing industrial parks that could be considered regional; Identify a funding source for infrastructure and ongoing maintenance; Establish community collaboration or MOU for revenue sharing
Teach value of entrepreneurship at primary and elementary levels; Have communities develop entrepreneurial strategies of identifying assets; Connect with community network
Identify commodities for value added products; develop product infrastructure for food processing; Partner with agriculture community
Analyze infrastructure age, capacity, and availability
Seek out resources to assist employers in filling positions
Identify 3 to 5 regional megasites

Strategic Focus Area # 2

Transportation, Community Facilities, Infrastructure, and Broadband

GOALS

Expand Natural Gas Service

Develop more family event venues

Pass T-SPLOST (TIA-2)

EV Stations

Create better connectivity between I-75 and I-95

Provide broadband to all unserved and underserved people throughout the region

ACTION PLAN

Pursue funding to improve existing infrastructure

Work with GDECD tourism to develop regional strategy for local community venues to attract tourism dollars

Submit regionally significant transportation projects

Expand the network of charging stations in the region

Widen corridors that have a positive regional impact

Pursue funding to increase broadband availability

Strategic Focus Area # 3

Education and Workforce Development

GOALS

Start Career Education earlier in school system

Strong, official partnership between school system, technical college, & industries to address skills currently in demand and for future needs

Increase labor force participation rate

Improve the quality of the workforce

Increase accessibility to high-demand technical curriculum and programs

ACTION PLAN

Recruit high school graduates for jobs with local industries;
Educate middle school students about the importance of careers in home community

Identify responsible agency for facilitating and holding accountable the partnership; Incentivize industry participation

Better skills training

Target skills training to meet business and industry needs

Expand high-demand career education on high school and technical college campuses

Population and Housing

GOALS
Regional Housing Studies and Cooperation
Regional Recruitment
Increase Housing Stock
Change mindset concerning multi-family affordable housing
Limited access to affordable, workforce housing

ACTION PLAN
Determine where the commuters are traveling from and whether or not there is a demand
Better marketing of regional assets and amenities; Pool resources between the communities
Pursue funding for housing rehabilitation, reconstruction, and demolition in declining neighborhoods; Strengthen code enforcement; Develop incentives for construction of workforce housing
Educate the public about the benefits of multi-family affordable housing
Identify barriers to the development of affordable housing

Evaluation Framework

Performance measures will be used to evaluate the implementation of the CEDS's four Strategic Focus Areas. The evaluation frameworks on the following pages will be used to assess how the region is performing and what needs to be improved.

1. State of the Regional Economy

Promote economic development strategies that encourage entrepreneurship, support existing industries, attract new employers, and stimulate tourism.

2. Transportation, Community Facilities, Infrastructure and Broadband

Protect, expand, and enhance critical infrastructure and connectivity for existing and future community growth.

3. Education and Workforce Development

Facilitate growth and development of an educated, skilled, prepared workforce by utilizing available programs and resources.

4. Population and Housing

Create an inviting sense of place through rural renewal and other strategies in order to retain population, and to attract new members to our community.



Strategic Focus Area 1: Performance Measures

Metrics:

- Revenue growth for key industries
- Number of businesses and entrepreneurs receiving services from community colleges and workforce development programs
- Number of new entrepreneurs/businesses
- Volume of small business lending and private investment



Strategic Focus Area 2: Performance Measures

Metrics:

- Volume of water and sewer capacity
- Number of grants funded for local infrastructure improvements
- Number of new businesses and industries recruited to the region
- Number of communities with broadband access



Strategic Focus Area 3: Performance Measures

Metrics:

- Number of jobs created/retained after implementation of the CEDS
- Number of industry recognized certificates issued for specific training programs
- Number of students in career and technical education programs that are linked to in-demand jobs
- Number of workers trained, placed, or otherwise impacted by workforce sector initiatives



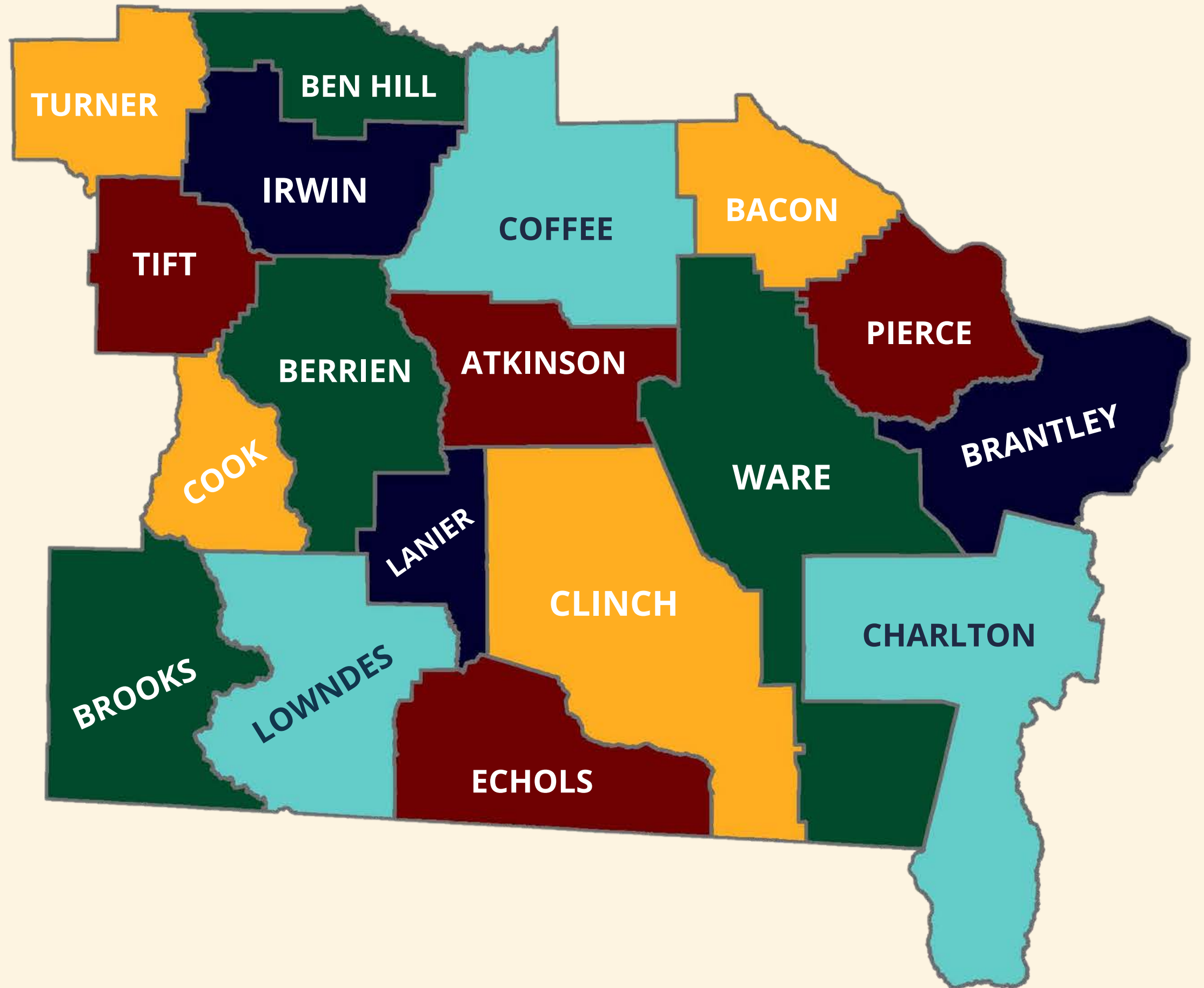
Strategic Focus Area 4: Performance Measures

Metrics:

- Number of Main Street Communities
- Number of Code Enforcement violations issued
- Resources available to aging population
- Population demographics
- Number of grants awarded for housing rehabilitation

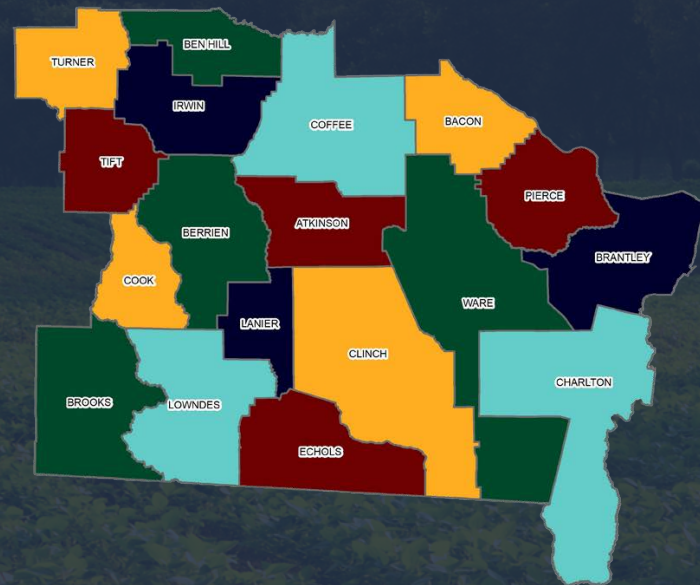


Regional Data Pages



Regional

Atkinson - Bacon - Ben Hill - Berrien
 Brantley - Brooks - Charlton - Clinch
 Coffee - Cook - Echols - Irwin
 Lanier - Lowndes - Pierce - Tift
 Turner - Ware Counties



2020 Census: 413,869
 2021 Estimate: 417,230

Population Percentage
 Increase 0.81%



Male - 49.8%
 Female - 50.2%
 Age 65+ - 63,416
 Under 18 - 101,266
 Median Age - 38.3
 Minority - 30.2%



Housing

Median Home Value \$100,522
 Occupied Housing Units 153,384
 Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.9%
 Rental Vacancy Rate 4.7%
 % of Housing Units that are
 Transportation Disadvantaged 7.3%

Economic



Median Household Income \$48,647
 Per Capita Income \$22,307
 Per Capita Living Wage
 \$31,752
 % of People Below Poverty Level 23.2%

Food Insecurity Rate



Region - 14.0%
 Georgia - 10.7%
 National - 10.4%



Top 5 Employers

Crown Healthcare Laundry Svc
 Tift County Board of Commrs
 Irwin County Hospital
 Orgill Tifton Distribution Ctr
 Patrick Farms

GA DOL
 1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Health Care & Social Assistance
 Manufacturing
 Retail Trade
 Accommodation & Food Services
 Educational Services

GA DOL
 1st Qtr. 2023

Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023



Current 3.5%
 6,456 Unemployed
 Georgia 3.3%
 U.S. 3.8%

1. US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
 2. US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
 3. www.livingwage.mit.edu
 4. www.feedingamerica.org
 5. Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Atkinson County

Founded 1917

County Seat: Pearson



2020 Census: 8,311

2021 Estimate: 8,269

Population Percentage
Decrease -.51%



Male - 50.0%
Female - 50.0%
Age 65+ - 1,148
Under 18 - 2,190
Median Age - 35.8
Minority - 26.4%



Housing

Median Home Value \$62,400
Occupied Housing Units 2,968
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate 3.3%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 5.8%



Food Insecurity Rate

Atkinson - 14.5%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$35,741
Per Capita Income \$20,287
Per Capita Living Wage \$31,358

% of People Below Poverty Level 26.9%



Top 5 Employers

Langboard
Cady Bag Co
Live Oak Homes
Atkinson County Pre Kndrgrtn
Freedom Trailers LLC

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Public Administration
Transportation & Warehousing
Wholesale Trade

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023
Current 3.4%
150 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Bacon County

Founded 1917

County Seat: Alma



2020 Census: 11,140
2021 Estimate: 11,163

Population Percentage
Increase .21%



Male - 49.2%
Female - 50.8%
Age 65+ - 1,754
Under 18 - 2,879
Median Age - 37.0
Minority - 18.4%



Housing

Median Home Value \$88,200
Occupied Housing Units 3,874
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.7%
Rental Vacancy Rate 6.6%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 8.3%



Food Insecurity Rate

Bacon - 15.3%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$40,391
Per Capita Income \$22,846
Per Capita Living Wage
\$30,400

% of People Below Poverty Level 24.5%



Top 5 Employers

Bacon County Family and Children
Alma Bacon County Fire Dept
Lamar's Pharmacy
America Protein Inc
Bacon County

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Health Care & Social Assistance
Administrative and Support and
Waste Mgmt.
Retail Trade
Public Administration

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2022



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 3.1%
149 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2022

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Ben Hill County

Founded 1906

County Seat: Fitzgerald



2020 Census: 16,889
2021 Estimate: 17,237

Population Percentage Increase 2.06%



Male - 47.4%
Female - 52.6%
Age 65+ - 2,982
Under 18 - 4,291
Median Age - 39.5
Minority - 40.2%



Housing

Median Home Value \$86,100
Occupied Housing Units 6,828
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 5.5%
Rental Vacancy Rate 5.7%

% of Housing Units that are Transportation Disadvantaged 10.1%



Economic

Median Household Income \$34,455
Per Capita Income \$20,298
Per Capita Living Wage \$31,898

% of People Below Poverty Level 25.6%



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Health Care & Social Assistance
Administrative & Support and Waste Mgmt.
Public Administration

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Food Insecurity Rate

Ben Hill - 14.3%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Top 5 Employers

Walmart Supercenter
Southern Veneer Products
Covered Wagon Trailers LLC
Wiregrass Georgia Tech College
Hospital Authority-Ben Hill County

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023
Current 4.7%
266 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Berrien County

Founded 1856

County Seat: Nashville



2020 Census: 19,206
2021 Estimate: 18,195

Population Percentage
Decrease -5.26%



Male - 49.4%
Female - 50.6%
Age 65+ - 3,200
Under 18 - 4,453
Median Age - 39.6
Minority - 13.9%



Housing

Median Home Value \$103,700
Occupied Housing Units 6,634
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.5%
Rental Vacancy Rate 8.0%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 5.0%



Food Insecurity Rate

Berrien- 15.1%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$44,907
Per Capita Income \$22,072
Per Capita Living Wage
\$31,002

% of People Below Poverty Level 21.1%



Top 5 Employers

D & D Farms
Life of the South Corp
Berrien Primary School
Food Lion
B H Electronics Inc

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Public Administration
Health Care & Social Assistance
Accomodation & Food Services

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 4.1%
310 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Brantley County

Founded 1920

County Seat: Nahunta



2020 Census: 18,924

2021 Estimate: 18,072

Population Percentage
Decrease -4.50%



Male - 49.5%

Female - 50.5%

Age 65+ - 2,916

Under 18 - 4,354

Median Age - 40.7

Minority - 5.6%



Housing

Median Home Value \$84,700

Occupied Housing Units 6,625

Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.1%

Rental Vacancy Rate 0.0%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 4.7%



Food Insecurity Rate

Brantley - 12.8%

Georgia - 10.7%

National - 10.4%

Economic

Median Household Income \$38,211

Per Capita Income \$19,942

Per Capita Living Wage

\$34,030

% of People Below Poverty Level 16.8%



Top 5 Employers

Cal-Maine Foods Inc

H & S Car Carriers

Okefenokee Rural Electric Membership

Hoboken Elementary School

Bay View Nursing Home

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Wholesale Trade

Retail Trade

Construction

Manufacturing

Health Care and Social Assistance

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 3.5%
270 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1. US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2. US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3. www.livingwage.mit.edu
4. www.feedingamerica.org
5. Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Brooks County

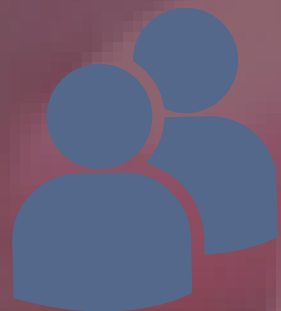
Founded 1858

County Seat: Quitman



2020 Census: 15,548
2021 Estimate: 16,254

Population Percentage
Increase 4.54%



Male - 48.3%
Female - 51.7%
Age 65+ - 3,104
Under 18 - 3,610
Median Age - 41.9
Minority - 40.3%



Housing

Median Home Value \$105,700
Occupied Housing Units 6,004
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.8%
Rental Vacancy Rate 3.0%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 6.3%



Economic

Median Household Income \$39,770
Per Capita Income \$27,821
Per Capita Living Wage
\$32,655

% of People Below Poverty Level 23.1%



Top 5 Industries

Agriculture, Forestry,
Fishing, & Hunting
Health Care & Social Assistance
Retail Trade
Public Administration
Manufacturing

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023

Food Insecurity Rate



Brooks - 13.0%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



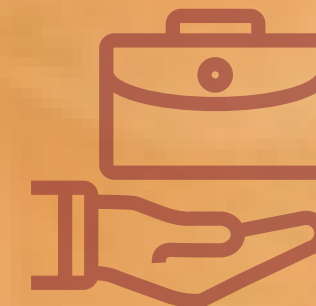
Top 5 Employers

Presbyterian Home
Crown Healthcare Laundry Svc
BCT Gin Co Inc
Langboard OSB
Aviagen Hatchery

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023

Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023



Current 3.3%
213 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Charlton County

Founded 1854

County Seat: Folkston



2020 Census: 13,032

2021 Estimate: 12,416

Population Percentage
Decrease -4.73%



Male - 58.6%
Female - 41.4%
Age 65+ - 1,982
Under 18 - 2,294
Median Age - 40.6
Minority - 31.3%



Housing

Median Home Value \$95,600
Occupied Housing Units 3,960
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.6%
Rental Vacancy Rate 9.4%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 7.7%



Food Insecurity Rate

Charlton - 13.0%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%

Economic



Median Household Income \$45,494
Per Capita Income \$21,824
Per Capita Living Wage
\$31,898

% of People Below Poverty Level 21.3%



Top 5 Employers

D Ray James Correctional Facility
Charlton County
AJM Packaging Corp
Geo Group-Folkston Ice Processing
Folkston Park Rehab & Nursing

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Administrative & Support and
Waste Mgmt.
Retail Trade
Accommodation & Food Service
Public Administration

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 2.9%
147 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Clinch County

Founded 1850

County Seat: Homerville



2020 Census: 6,648
2021 Estimate: 6,737
Population Percentage Increase 1.34%



Male - 49.6%
Female - 50.4%
Age 65+ - 1,015
Under 18 - 1,722
Median Age - 38.5
Minority - 31.8%



Housing

Median Home Value \$71,500
Occupied Housing Units 2,361
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 1.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate 10.9%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 10.8%



Food Insecurity Rate

Clinch - 15.6%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$47,750
Per Capita Income \$18,331
Per Capita Living Wage \$31,203

% of People Below Poverty Level 30.2%



Top 5 Employers

Mauser Small Packaging
Lee Container Corp
Clinch County Primary School
Clinch Memorial Hospital
Dupont Yard Inc

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Health Care & Social Assistance
Retail Trade
Agriculture, Forestry,
Fishing, & Hunting
Administrative & Support
& Waste Mgmt.

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 2.7%
79 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Coffee County

Founded 1854

County Seat: Douglas



2020 Census: 43,070
2021 Estimate: 43,048

Population Percentage
Decrease -.05%



Male - 51.8%
Female - 48.2%
Age 65+ - 6,099
Under 18 - 10,564
Median Age - 36.8
Minority - 32.3%



Housing

Median Home Value \$107,900
Occupied Housing Units 14,934
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 1.3%
Rental Vacancy Rate 1.9%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 7.1%



Food Insecurity Rate

Coffee - 13.6%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%

Economic



Median Household Income \$44,450
Per Capita Income \$21,528
Per Capita Living Wage
\$31,898

% of People Below Poverty Level 22.2%



Top 5 Employers

Pilgrim's Pride Corp
Coffee Regional Medical Ctr
PCC Airfoils LLC
Walmart Supercenter
Coffee Correctional Facility

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Health Care & Social Assistance
Educational Services
Transportation & Warehousing

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate As of July 2023

Current 3.7%
703 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Cook County

Founded 1918

County Seat: Adel



2010 Census: 17,212
2021 Estimate : 17,188

Population Percentage
Decrease -0.14%



Male - 48.7%
Female - 51.3%
Age 65+ - 2,725
Under 18 - 4,387
Median Age - 37.1
Minority - 29.6%



Housing

Median Home Value \$109,600
Occupied Housing Units 6,056
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.7%
Rental Vacancy Rate 6.6%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 6.7%



Food Insecurity Rate

Cook - 12.8%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$51,163
Per Capita Income \$22,490
Per Capita Living Wage
\$31,002

% of People Below Poverty Level 21.0%



Top 5 Employers

Walmart Supercenter
Williams Investment Co
Adel Public Works Dept
Southwell Medical
Vulcan Steel

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Health Care & Social Assistance
Accommodation & Food Services
Public Administration

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 3.3%
268 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Echols County

Founded 1858

County Seat: Statenville



2010 Census: 4,034
2021 Estimate: 3,691
Population Percentage
Decrease - 8.50%



Male - 43.8%
Female - 56.2%
Age 65+ - 581
Under 18 - 844
Median Age - 40.3
Minority - 33.8%



Housing

Median Home Value \$77,800
Occupied Housing Units 1,327
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate 7.1%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 2.4%



Food Insecurity Rate

Echols - 14.8%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$57,102
Per Capita Income \$23,036
Per Capita Living Wage \$32,655

% of People Below Poverty Level 25.4%



Top 5 Employers

Grim Way
Echols County Elementary
Coggins Farm & Produce
Big C Freight Inc
Corbett Electrical

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Agriculture, Forestry,
Fishing, & Hunting
Construction
Wholesale Trade
Transportation & Warehousing
Retail Trade

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 2.7%
48 Unemployed
Georgia 2.9%
U. S. 3.8%

1. US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2. US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3. www.livingwage.mit.edu
4. www.feedingamerica.org
5. Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Irwin County

Founded 1818

County Seat: Ocilla



2010 Census: 9,538
2021 Estimate: 9,615
Population Percentage Increase 0.80%



Male - 54.0%
Female - 46.0%
Age 65+ - 1,777
Under 18 - 2,050
Median Age - 40.0
Minority - 30.0%



Housing

Median Home Value \$85,300
Occupied Housing Units 3,604
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 1.6%
Rental Vacancy Rate 3.9%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 8.1%

Economic



Median Household Income \$63,251
Per Capita Income \$22,126
Per Capita Living Wage \$31,203

% of People Below Poverty Level 20.9%



Top 5 Industries

Health Care & Social Assistance
Retail Trade
Public Administration
Agriculture, Forestry,
Fishing, & Hunting
Wholesale Trade

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023

Food Insecurity Rate



Irwin - 12.1%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



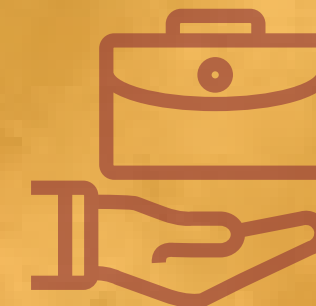
Top 5 Employers

Irwin County Hospital
Irwin County Elementary School
Cargomate Trailers
Irwin County Commissioners Ofc
South Central Primary Care

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023

Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023



Current 4.6%
158 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Bureau of Economic Development, Market Explorer

Lanier County

Founded 1920

County Seat: Lakeland



2010 Census: 10,078

2021 Estimate: 9,874

Population Percentage
Decrease -2.02%



Male - 48.4%

Female - 51.6%

Age 65+ - 1,315

Under 18 - 2,321

Median Age - 36.8

Minority - 28.5%



Housing

Median Home Value \$125,800
Occupied Housing Units 3,529
Homeowner Vacancy Rate .6%
Rental Vacancy Rate 6.4%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 9.1%



Food Insecurity Rate

Lanier - 17.8%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$50,172
Per Capita Income \$18,981
Per Capita Living Wage
\$32,655

% of People Below Poverty Level 34.1%



Top 5 Employers

Affinity Building Systems LLC
Lakeland Villa Convalescent Center
FMB Bancshares Inc
Patten Seed Co.
Lanier Elementary School

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Health Care & Social Assistance
Public Administration
Accommodation & Food Services
Retail Trade
Manufacturing

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

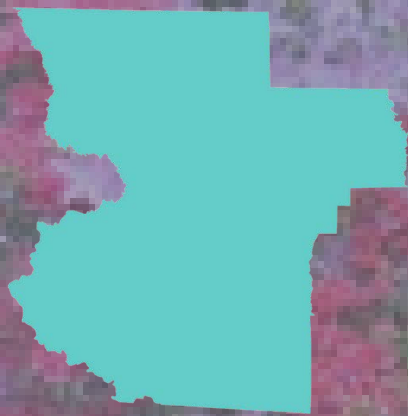
Current 3.9%
145 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Lowndes County

Founded 1825

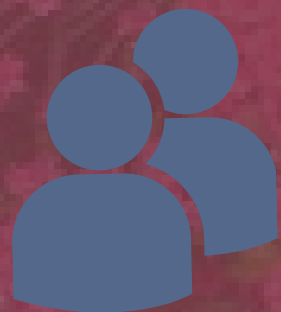
County Seat: Valdosta



2010 Census: 109,233
2021 Estimate: 119,739



Population Percentage
Increase 9.61%



Male - 48.6%
Female - 51.4%
Age 65+ - 15,675
Under 18 - 29,116
Median Age - 31.1
Minority - 47.5%



Housing

Median Home Value \$206,100
Occupied Housing Units 46,126
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.6%
Rental Vacancy Rate 3.0%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 6.6%



Food Insecurity Rate

Lowndes - 12.81%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%

Economic



Median Household Income \$65,689
Per Capita Income \$28,245
Per Capita Living Wage
\$32,655

% of People Below Poverty Level 14.0%



Top 5 Employers

Moody Air Force Base
Valdosta State University
Valdosta Administrative
Home Depot Rapid Deployment
Wild Adventures Theme Park

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Health Care & Social Assistance
Retail Trade
Accommodation & Food Services
Manufacturing
Educational Services

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate As of July 2023

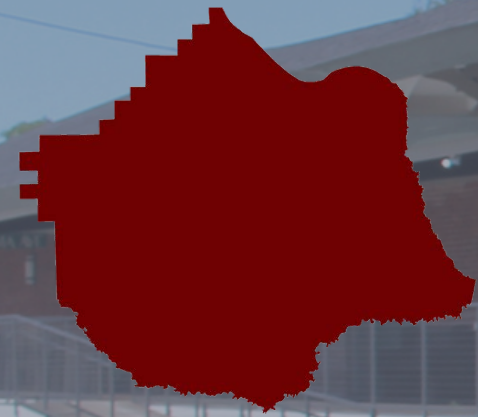
Current 3.6%
1,798 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Pierce County

Founded 1857

County Seat: Blackshear



2010 Census: 18,758
2021 Estimate: 19,644

Population Percentage
Increase 4.72%



Male - 50.4%
Female - 49.6%
Age 65+ - 3,413
Under 18 - 4,908
Median Age - 39.9
Minority - 14.4%



Housing

Median Home Value \$103,200
Occupied Housing Units 7,235
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.5%
Rental Vacancy Rate 0.0%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 4.0%



Food Insecurity Rate

Pierce - 12.0%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$59,942
Per Capita Income \$24,203
Per Capita Living Wage
\$31,358

% of People Below Poverty Level 17.9%



Top 5 Employers

Stewart Distribution Wholesale
Blackshear Elementary School
Thom's Transport Co
Pierce County Nursing Home
Mac 44 Forestry LLC

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2022



Top 5 Industries

Retail Trade
Wholesale Trade
Manufacturing
Construction
Accommodation & Food Services

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate As of July 2023

Current 2.8%
251 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Tift County

Founded 1905

County Seat: Tifton



2010 Census: 40,118
2021 Estimate: 41,148

Population Percentage Increase 2.56%



Male - 48.8%
Female - 51.2%
Age 65+ - 6,045
Under 18 - 10,229
Median Age - 35.9
Minority - 39.2%



Housing

Median Home Value \$131,400
Occupied Housing Units 15,287
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.8%
Rental Vacancy Rate 3.4%

% of Housing Units that are Transportation Disadvantaged 9.2%



Food Insecurity Rate

Tift - 12.3%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.3%

Economic



Median Household Income \$58,163
Per Capita Income \$26,154
Per Capita Living Wage \$31,218

% of People Below Poverty Level 22.1%



Top 5 Employers

Target Distribution Center
Lewis Taylor Farms
Walmart Supercenter
Heatcraft Refrigeration Products
University-Ga Tifton Campus

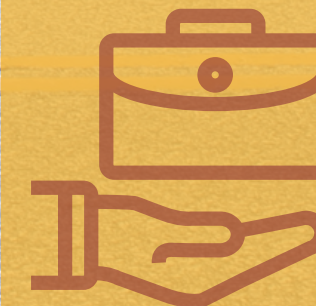
GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Health Care & Social Assistance
Retail Trade
Accommodation & Food Services
Educational Services
Transportation & Warehousing

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate As of July 2023

Current 3.4%
710 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Turner County

Founded 1905

County Seat: Ashburn



2010 Census: 8,930
2021 Estimate: 8,856
Population Percentage
Decrease -0.8%



Male - 48.8%
Female - 51.2%
Age 65+ - 1,593
Under 18 - 2,189
Median Age - 39.5
Minority - 43.6%



Housing

Median Home Value \$76,700
Occupied Housing Units 3,269
Homeowner Vacancy Rate 0.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate 0.8%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 8.9%

Economic



Median Household Income \$48,651
Per Capita Income \$20,299
Per Capita Living Wage
\$31,203

% of People Below Poverty Level 27.2%



Top 5 Industries

Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Public Administration
Wholesale Trade
Accommodation & Food Services

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023

Food Insecurity Rate



Turner- 16.2%
Georgia - 10.7%
National - 10.4%



Top 5 Employers

CMM Properties Piggly Wiggly
Turner County Elementary School
Ufb Ashburn
Piggly Wiggly
Pruitt Health

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023

Unemployment Rate As of July 2023



Current 4.2%
134 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1.US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2.US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3.www.livingwage.mit.edu
4.www.feedingamerica.org
5.Georgia Labor Market Explorer

Ware County

Founded 1824

County Seat: Waycross



2010 Census: 36,312

2021 Estimate: 36,084

Population Percentage
Decrease -0.62%



Male - 50.3%

Female - 49.7%

Age 65+ - 6,092

Under 18 - 8,865

Median Age - 38.3

Minority - 36.6%



Housing

Median Home Value \$87,700

Occupied Housing Units 12,763

Homeowner Vacancy Rate 1.5%

Rental Vacancy Rate 5.0%

% of Housing Units that are
Transportation Disadvantaged 10.0%



Food Insecurity Rate

Ware - 13.7%

Georgia - 10.7%

National - 10.4%



Economic

Median Household Income \$50,351

Per Capita Income \$21,034

Per Capita Living Wage

\$31,249

% of People Below Poverty Level 24.0%



Top 5 Employers

Memorial Satilla Health

Walmart Supercenter

Ware State Prison

Mall At Waycross

Baptist Village Retirement Community

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Top 5 Industries

Health Care & Social Assistance

Retail Trade

Accommodation & Food Services

Educational Services

Manufacturing

GA DOL
1st Qtr. 2023



Unemployment Rate

As of July 2023

Current 3.2%
512 Unemployed
Georgia 3.3%
U. S. 3.8%

1. US Census Bureau, 2020 Census
2. US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Data
3. www.livingwage.mit.edu
4. www.feedingamerica.org
5. Georgia Labor Market Explorer

CEDS Approval Resolution

Adopted by the SGRC Council on
September 22, 2022

RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

TO APPROVE THE 2022-2026 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)

WHEREAS, the eighteen counties of Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware make up the Southern Georgia Economic Development District as identified by the Economic Development Administration, and;

WHEREAS, the Southern Georgia Regional Commission has prepared an economic development plan known as the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)* which is a strategic plan for regional economic development that was developed through a locally-based, strategy-driven economic development planning process. Designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of a region, the CEDS provides a vehicle for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region, and;

WHEREAS, the 2022-2026 CEDS provides a summary background of the economic development conditions in the region; analyzes the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; provides a strategic direction through the implementation of goals/objectives and action plan; establishes performance measures; and outlines a plan to ensure the economic resiliency of the "District," and;

WHEREAS, implementation of the CEDS is vital to the economic development future of the "District", and;

WHEREAS, the Southern Georgia Regional Commission utilized public and private sector participation in the development of the CEDS, and recognizes the importance of public and private sector partnerships in the implementation of the CEDS.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Southern Georgia Regional Commission Council approve the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for 2022-2026, and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Southern Georgia Regional Commission continue to strive to meet the needs and attain the goals of the CEDS in order to ensure economic prosperity for the region.

Adopted by the governing Council of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission on the 22nd day of September, 2022.



Joyce Evans, Chairman



Lisa Cribb, Executive Director

Appendix

Southern Georgia Regional Commission Council

Atkinson

Parker Liles
Robert Johnson
Robbie Stone

Brantley

Skipper Harris
Barbara Maefield
Vacant

Coffee

Ted O'Steen
Tony Paulk
Adam Smith

Lanier

Dennis Fender
Bill Darsey
James Barnes

Turner

Dana Whiddon
Sandra Lumpkin
Brandi Giddens

Bacon

Shane Taylor
Larry Taylor
Kevin Ellis

Brooks

Patrick Folsom
Don Morgan
Zurich Deshazior

Cook

Debra Robinson
Buddy Duke
Nyisha Key

Lowndes

Joyce Evans
Vivian Miller-Cody
Anthony Payton

Ware

Elmer Thrift
Michael-Angelo James
Barbara King

Ben Hill

Steve Taylor
Jason Holt
Jason Dunn

Charlton

James Everett
Lee Gowan
Vacant

Echols

Stanley Corbett
Cheryl Garner

Pierce

Neal Bennett
Keith Brooks
Steven Paul

Governor's Office

Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Berrien

Robert Griner
Travis Brown
Lisa Smart

Clinch

Henry Moylan
Vacant
Willie Hardee, Jr.

Irwin

Scott Carver
Melvin D. Harper, II
Mona Mackenzie

Tift

Tony McBrayer
Julie Smith
Vacant

Lt. Governor's Office

Keith Stone

Speaker's Office

Matt Seale

Local Workforce Development Board Member List

Frank Bannamon
Keith Bryant
Sandra Cole
Melissa Dark
Elton Dixon
Myrtice Edwards
Kevin Ellis
Katrena Felder
Jennifer Gainey
Jennifer Gillard
Sarah Gove
Johnathan Gray
Curtis Griffin
Melvin Johnson
Shannon McConico
William Palmer
Sean Panizzi
Darlene Tait
Paige Taylor
Leigh Wallace
Jamon Williams

Youth Committee

Frank Bannamon
Gerald Copeland
Adrienne Dixon
Katrena Fedler
Jennifer Gainey
Kelly Peacock

Executive Committee

Frank Bannamon
Keith Bryant
Jennifer Gainey
Melvin Johnson
April McDuffie
Sean Panizzi
Darlene Tait
Jamon Williams



Identification of Community and Private Sector Partners

Local Governments:

Atkinson County
City of Pearson
City of Willacoochee
Bacon County
City of Alma
Ben Hill County
City of Fitzgerald
Berrien County
City of Alapaha
City of Enigma
City of Nashville
City of Ray City
Brantley County
City of Hoboken
City of Nahunta
Brooks County
City of Barwick
City of Morven
City of Pavo
City of Quitman
Charlton County

City of Folkston
City of Homeland
Clinch County
City of Argyle
City of Dupont
City of Fargo
City of Homerville
Coffee County
City of Ambrose
City of Broxton
City of Douglas
City of Nicholls
Cook County
City of Adel
City of Cecil
City of Lenox
City of Sparks
Echols County
Irwin County
City of Ocilla
Lanier County

City of Lakeland
Lowndes County
City of Dasher
City of Hahira
City of LakePark
City of Remerton
City of Valdosta
Pierce County
City of Blackshear
City of Patterson
City of Offerman
Tift County
City of Omega
City of Tifton
City of Ty Ty
Turner County
City of Ashburn
City of Rebecca
City of Sycamore
Ware County
City of Waycross

Other Stakeholders:

Workforce Investment Boards
Airport Authorities
Boards of Education Business Owners
Chambers of Commerce
Private Citizens
Councils on Aging Development Authorities
EMA/EMS
Fire Departments
Historic Preservation Boards
Hospitals/Medical Centers Housing Authorities
Main Street Organizations Moody Air Force Base
Police Departments
Southern Georgia Regional Commission
State and Federal Agencies
Universities/Colleges
Valdosta/Lowndes MPO

Identification of Participation Techniques– Part I

We have employed the following participation techniques to involve the communities and private sector partners in the CEDS in order to create awareness of the plan and to gather a broad range of input into the development of the plan, and then continue participation for the implementation and evaluation of the plan. Some of the participation techniques are more intended to disseminate information, others to solicit input and participation.

Informational Techniques:

CEDS Update & Implementation Webpage

This webpage will be part of the Regional Commission website where all the information regarding the CEDS update and subsequent implementation activities will be displayed. The webpage will provide information on all meetings, PDF draft documents and will also include contact information for staff to provide more information, clarifications or details upon request.

Facebook Information Sharing Page

The Facebook page "Southern Georgia Regional Commission" will serve as an information clearing house to distribute information on meetings, progress, and provide opportunity for comments, especially for those stakeholders that are not able to attend meetings.

Email

Emails will be utilized to notify and invite stakeholders to workshops, meetings, and other events.



Identification of Participation Techniques– Part II

Work Sessions

Work sessions with stakeholders provide input and feedback on the identification and assessment of the economic development problems and opportunities, and the implementation program including the goals and objectives, plans of action, and the performance standards proposed by staff.

Surveys

A short survey solicited input from Stakeholders on issues, opportunities, and performance standards. The survey was distributed by email, placed on the SGRC Facebook page, and made available during various stakeholder meetings.

Quarterly CEDS Implementation Meeting

A regularly scheduled quarterly meeting will be held to discuss the implementation of the CEDS with the stakeholders and partners and to evaluate the status of activities, initiatives, and investment priorities.

Webpage and Facebook Page

Both the webpage and Facebook page will not only provide information, but are also geared towards providing comments, engaging in discussion, and contacting staff.



Evaluation Framework

The following are the additional performance measures that will be used to evaluate the Southern Georgia Regional Commission's successful development and implementation of the CEDS.

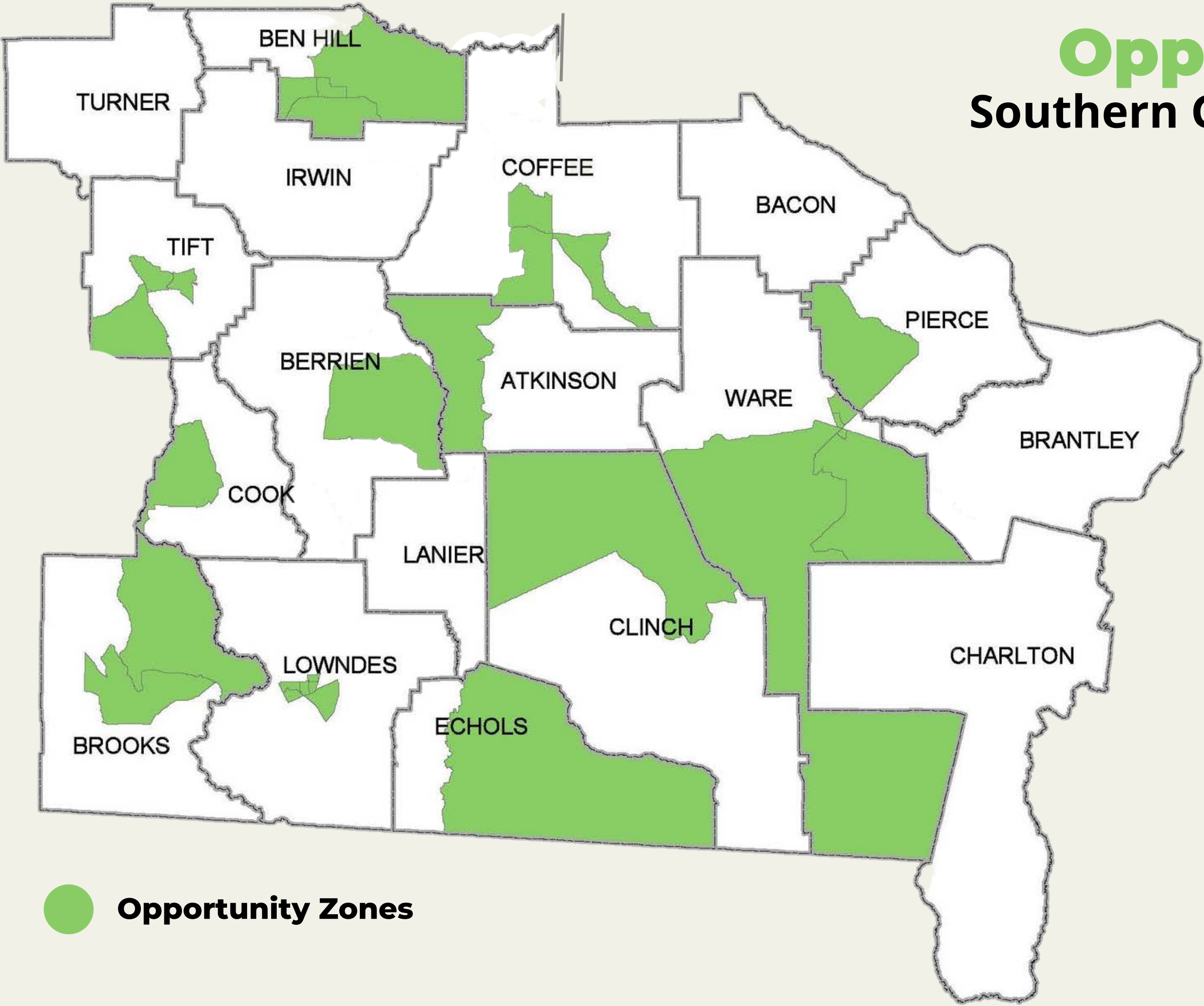
1. Number of jobs created/retained and private investment made after implementation of the CEDS.
 - a. Quarterly reporting from regional ED Pros (Chambers of Commerce, Better Hometown and MainStreet programs, and Development Authorities) on jobs creation/retention and private investment in their local communities.
 - b. Quarterly updates from the Southern Georgia Regional Commission Loan Program division on new private investment in the region.
 - c. Local businesses/industries in region advertise successful growth and job retention through PSA's, newspapers, local television and radio.
 - d. Compare Census statistics
 - e. Evaluate tax digest increase/decrease
 - f. Evaluate sales tax increase/decrease
 - g. Increase/decrease in business licenses
 - h. Governors listing of imminent business/industry closures.
2. Number and types of public investment undertaken in the region.
 - a. Semi-annual reporting from the Regional Commission, Local Governments, and the Workforce Development Board on new investments in the region.
3. Changes in the economic environment of the region.
 - a. Local governments, ED Pros, and the Workforce Development Board report major changes to the region's economic environment to the Regional Commission.

Opportunity Zones

Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Opportunity Zones are a federal economic development tool focused on improving the outcomes of communities across the country, especially in areas that have suffered from disinvestment over many years. Opportunity Zones are designated low-income census tracts where tax incentives are available to groups or individuals who invest in an Opportunity Fund and hold their capital gains in Opportunity Zone-related assets or property.

There are 38 Opportunity Zones in the SGRC EDD. By establishing a clear vision for the future and identifying both assets and challenges, the CEDS can help the attract investments in the region 's Opportunity Zones.



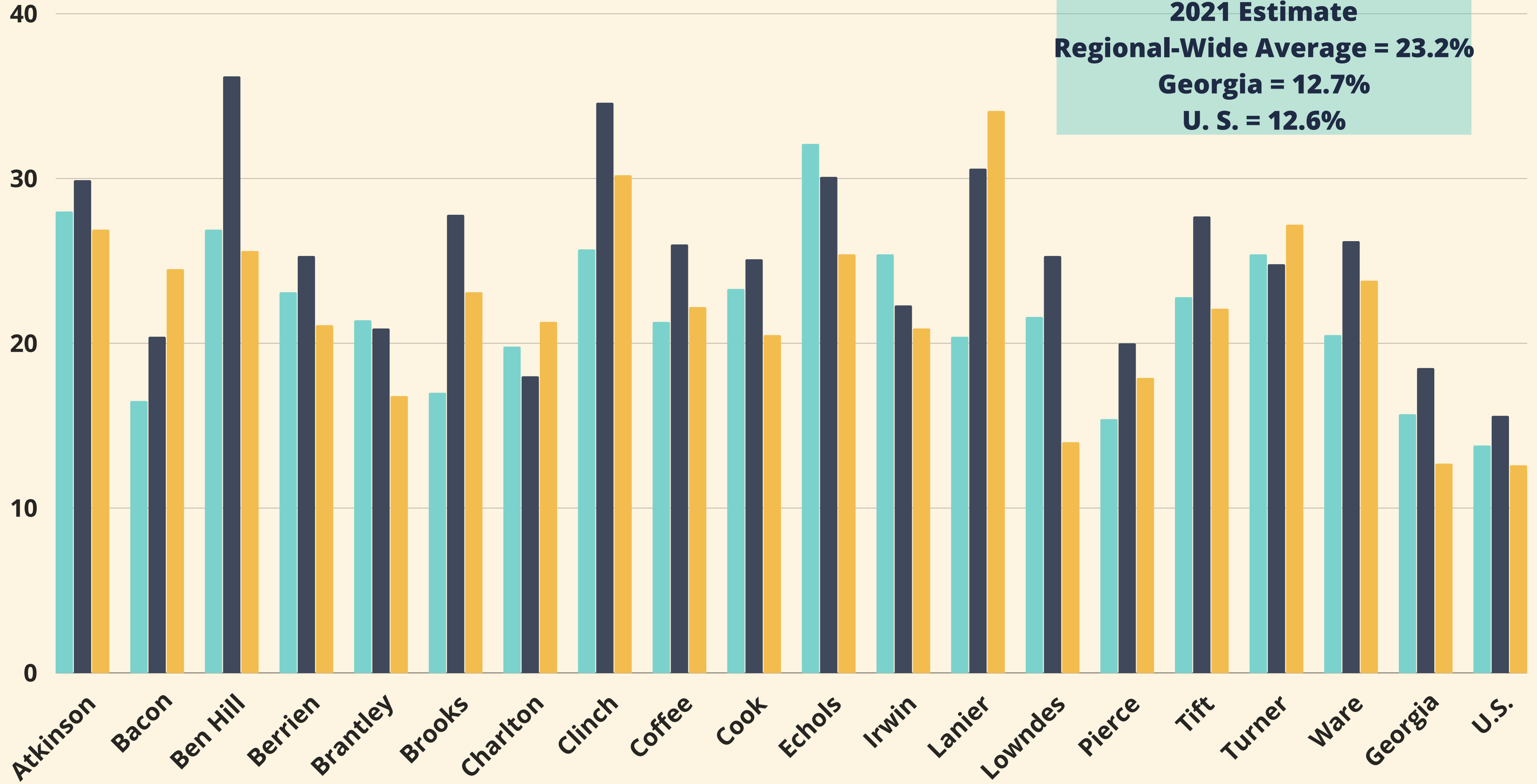
 Opportunity Zones



POVERTY RATE %

■ 2010 Census ■ 2015 Estimate ■ 2021 Estimate

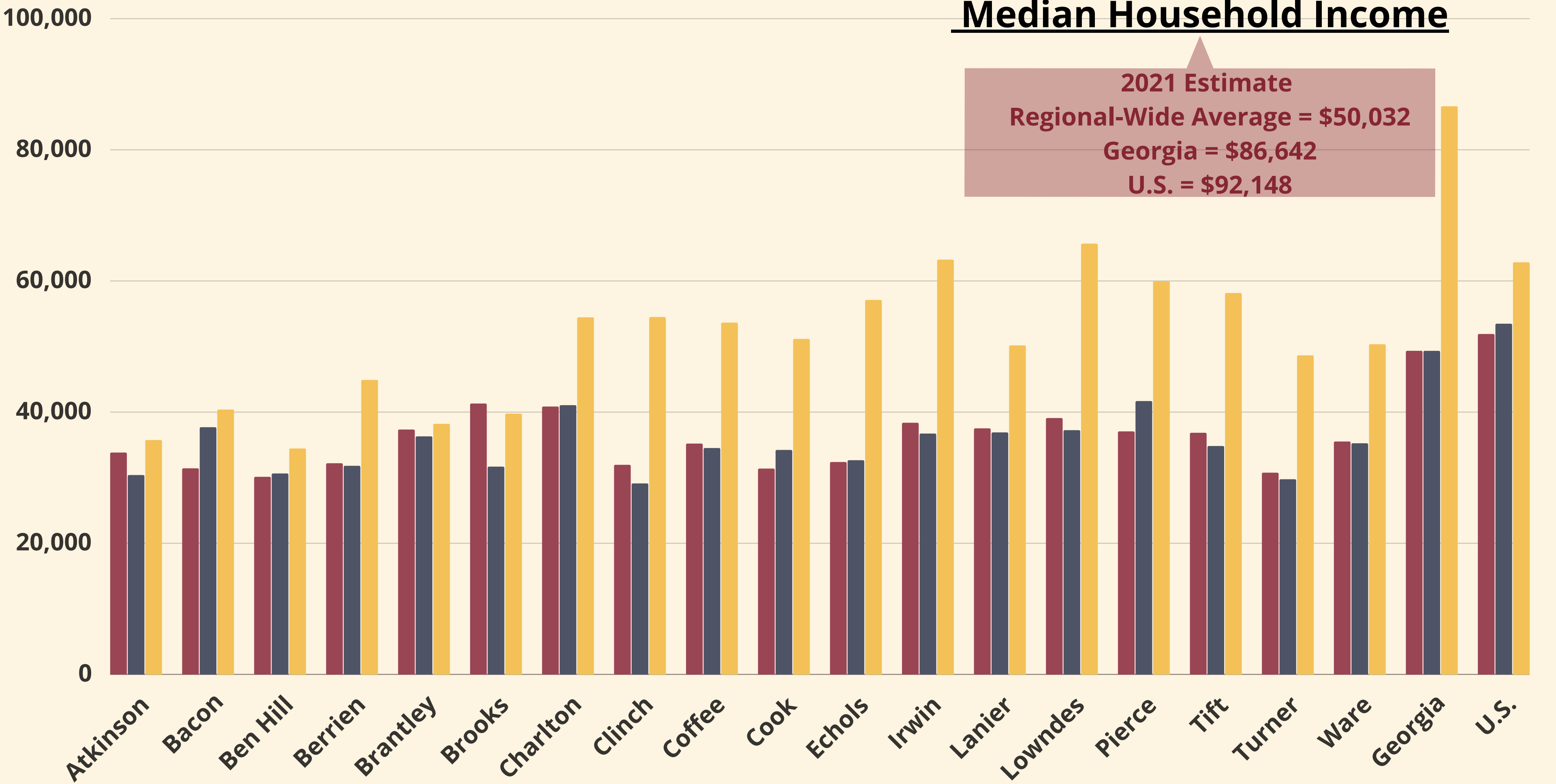
2021 Estimate
Regional-Wide Average = 23.2%
Georgia = 12.7%
U. S. = 12.6%



2010 Census 2015 Estimate 2021 Estimate

Median Household Income

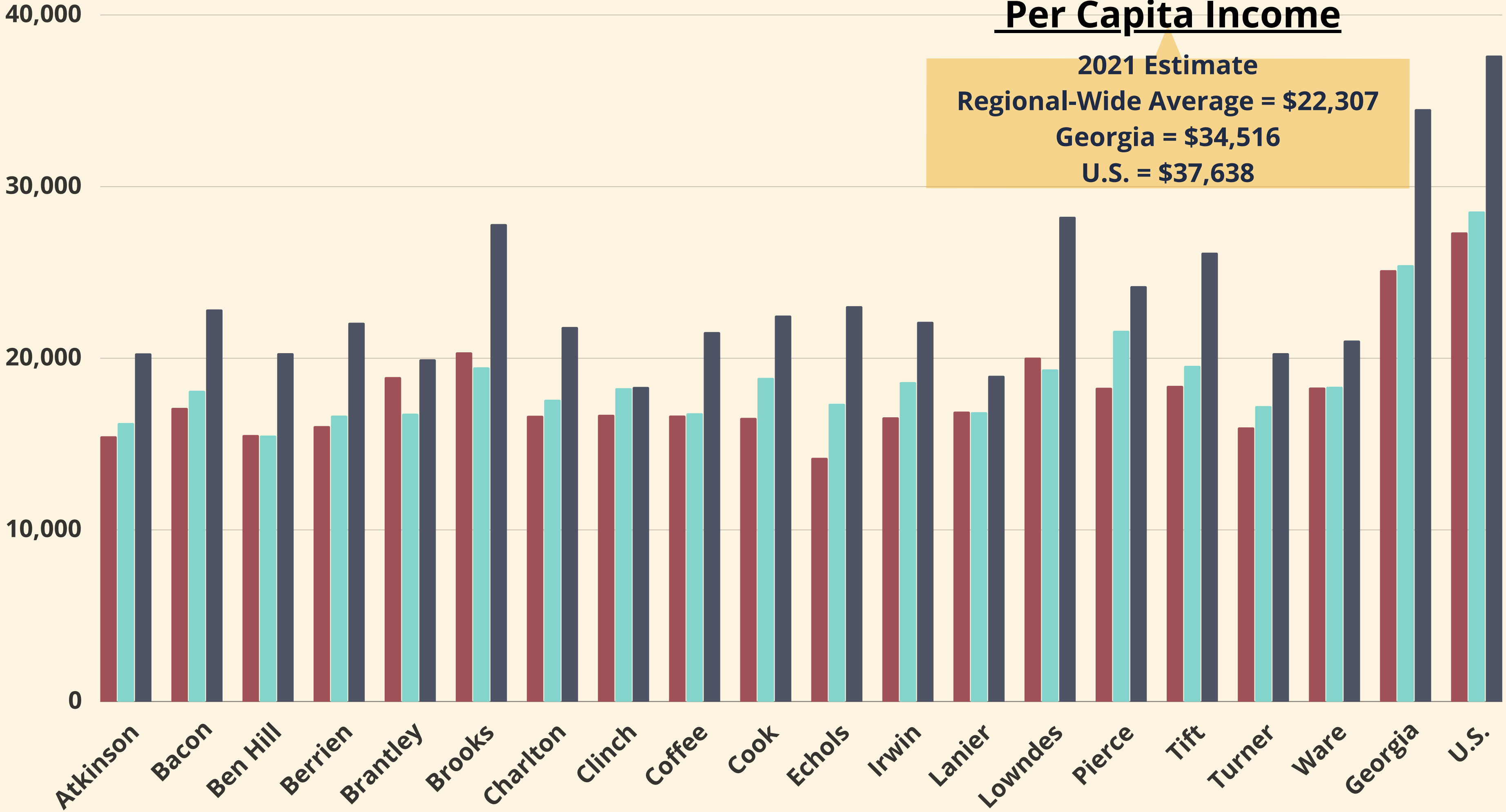
2021 Estimate
Regional-Wide Average = \$50,032
Georgia = \$86,642
U.S. = \$92,148



■ 2010 Census ■ 2015 Estimate ■ 2021 Estimate

Per Capita Income

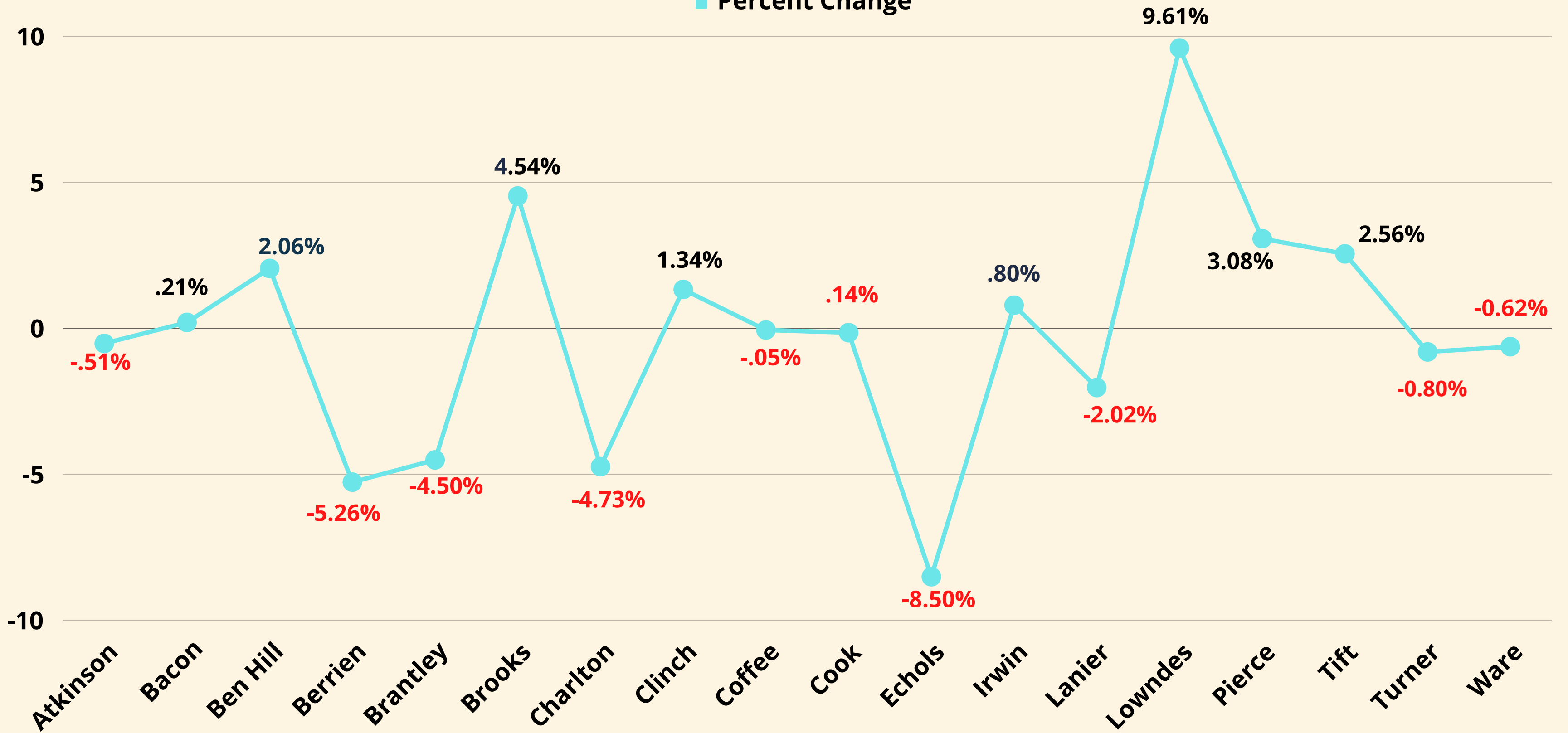
2021 Estimate
Regional-Wide Average = \$22,307
Georgia = \$34,516
U.S. = \$37,638



Population Growth by County

2010-2021

■ Percent Change

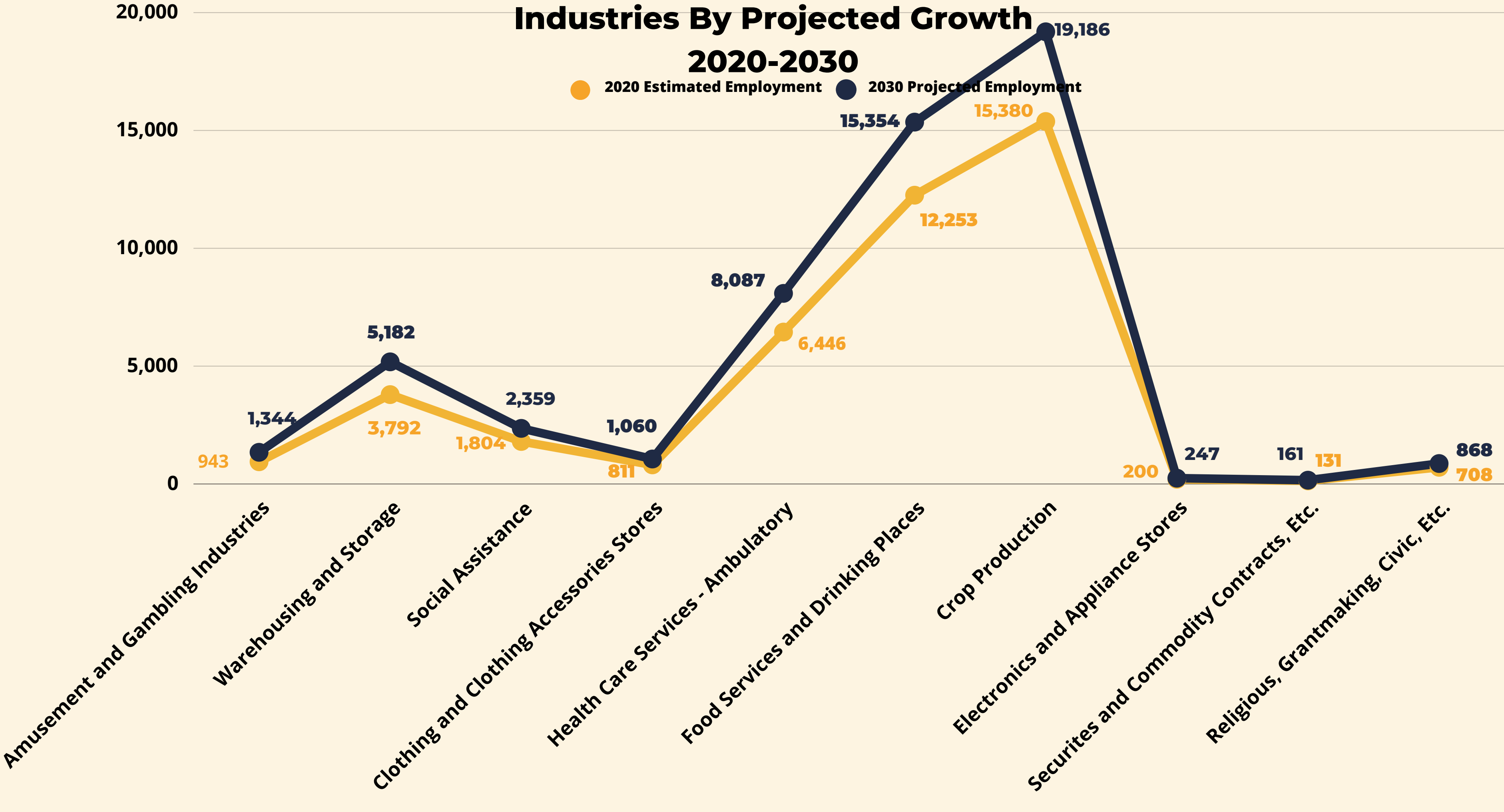




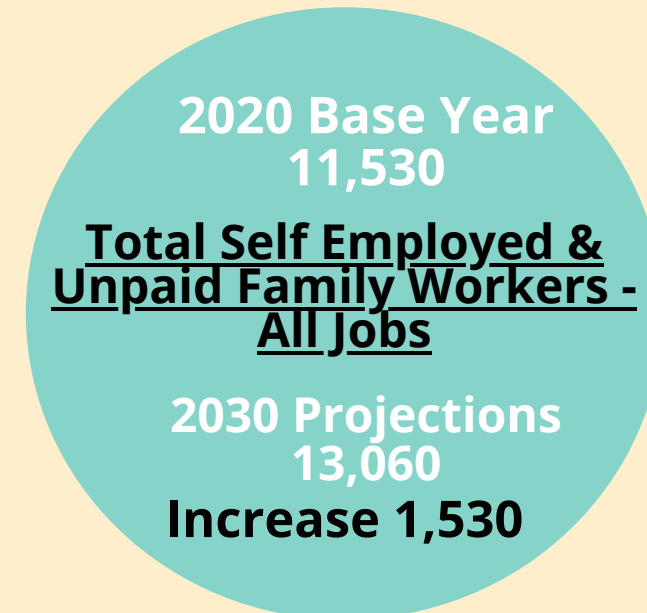
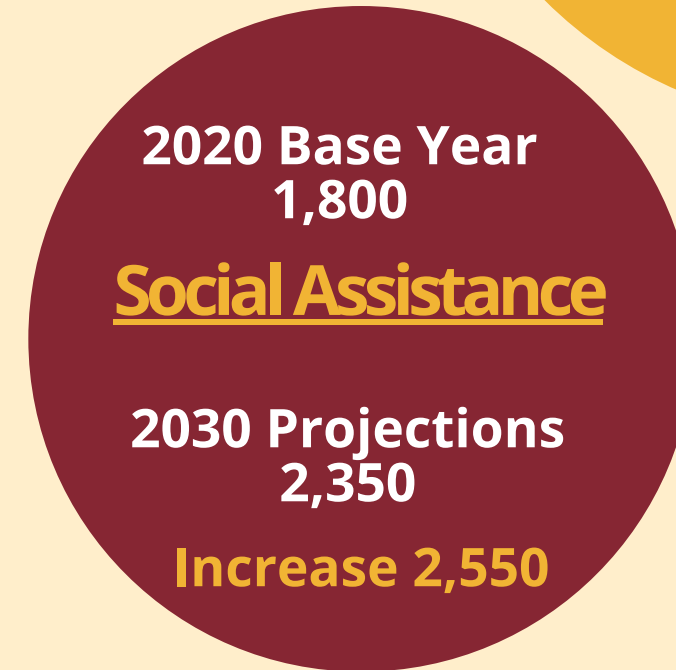
Educational Attainment of Workforce 25 years & older

<u>County</u>	<u>Less than 9th Grade</u>	<u>9th to 12 Grade, No Diploma</u>	<u>High School Graduate, GED or equivalent</u>	<u>Some College, No Degree</u>	<u>Associate's Degree</u>	<u>Bachelor's Degree</u>	<u>Graduate Professional Degree</u>	<u>Total</u>
Atkinson	939	807	1,739	836	372	288	285	5,266
Bacon	438	778	2,873	1,912	492	368	439	7,300
Ben Hill	610	1,270	5,796	1,727	915	914	353	11,585
Berrien	574	1,862	5,107	2,212	1,156	1,081	554	12,546
Brantley	518	1,813	5,641	2,518	1,159	308	501	12,458
Brooks	744	1,346	3,865	2,497	977	1,251	652	11,332
Charlton	761	981	3,688	1,881	673	739	355	9,078
Clinch	521	660	1,701	978	221	350	152	4,583
Coffee	2,421	4,063	11,127	4,912	1,902	2,648	1,340	28,413
Cook	607	1,454	3,536	2,479	1,151	1,013	830	11,070
Echols	166	369	1,153	444	158	195	65	2,550
Irwin	297	1,117	2,308	1,302	521	536	608	6,689
Lanier	310	666	2,875	1,110	546	768	384	6,659
Lowndes	3,498	4,852	18,913	15,738	7,630	10,621	10,438	71,690
Pierce	743	1,084	5,561	2,301	1,442	1,109	925	13,165
Tift	1,382	2,821	8,809	4,774	3,837	2,189	2,509	26,321
Turner	404	854	2,101	1,329	821	447	230	6,186
Ware	1,355	3,111	10,273	4,392	1,891	2,340	1,170	24,532

Industries By Projected Growth 2020-2030



Long-Term Industry Projections 2020-2030



Occupations By Projected Growth



2020 Base Employment

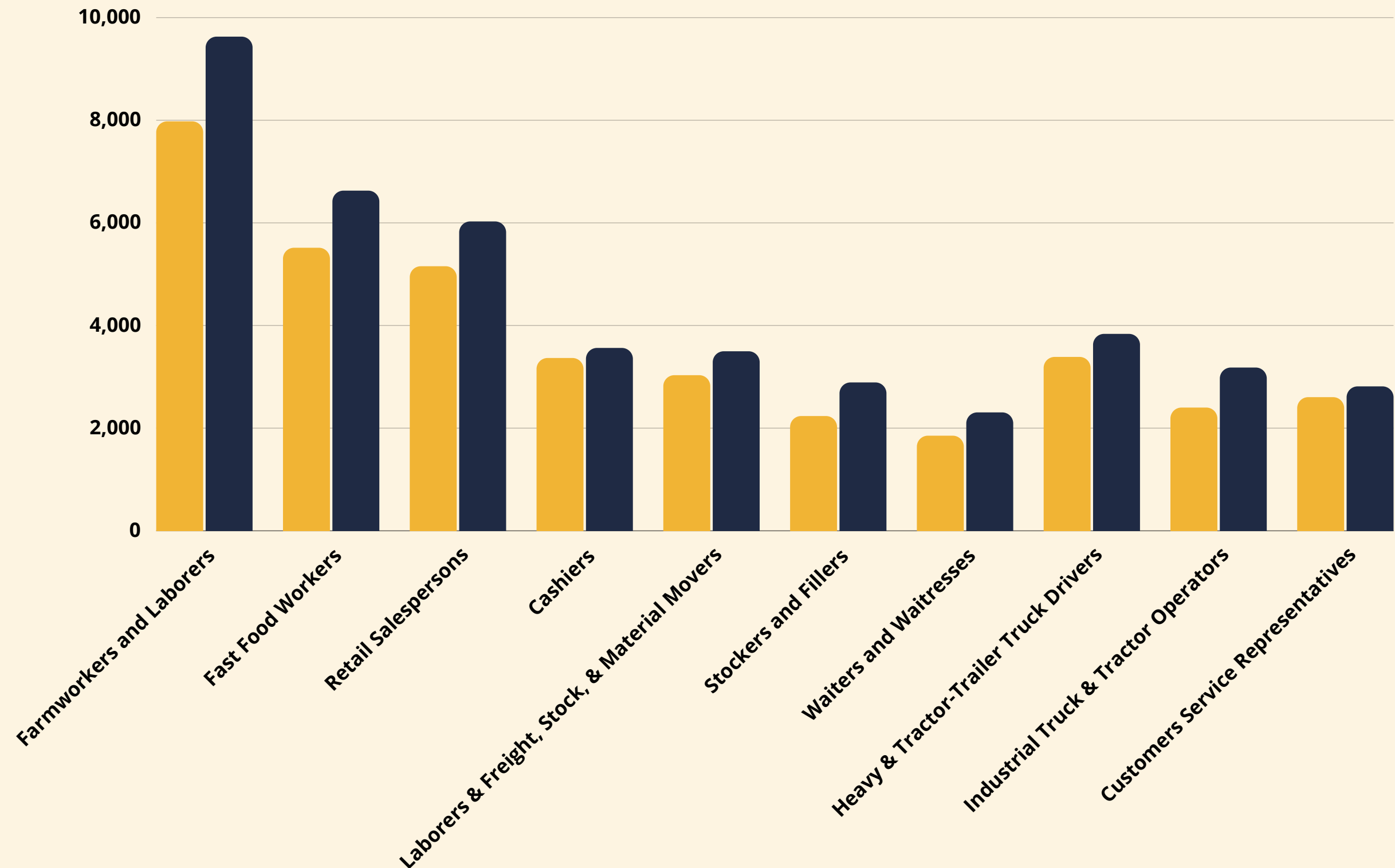
2030 Projected Employment

2020-2030

Percent Change in Employment 2020-2030

Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food - 1.86%
 Farmworkers & Laborers, Crop, Nursery, & Greenhouse - 1.90%
 Retail Salespersons - 1.58%
 Cashiers - 0.57%
 Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers - 1.44%
 Stockers and Order Fillers - 2.60%
 Waiters & Waitresses - 2.22%
 Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers - 1.25%
 Industrial Truck & Tractor Operators - 2.85%
 Customer Service Representatives - 4.75%

Occupations 2020-2030



Change in Employment 2020-2030

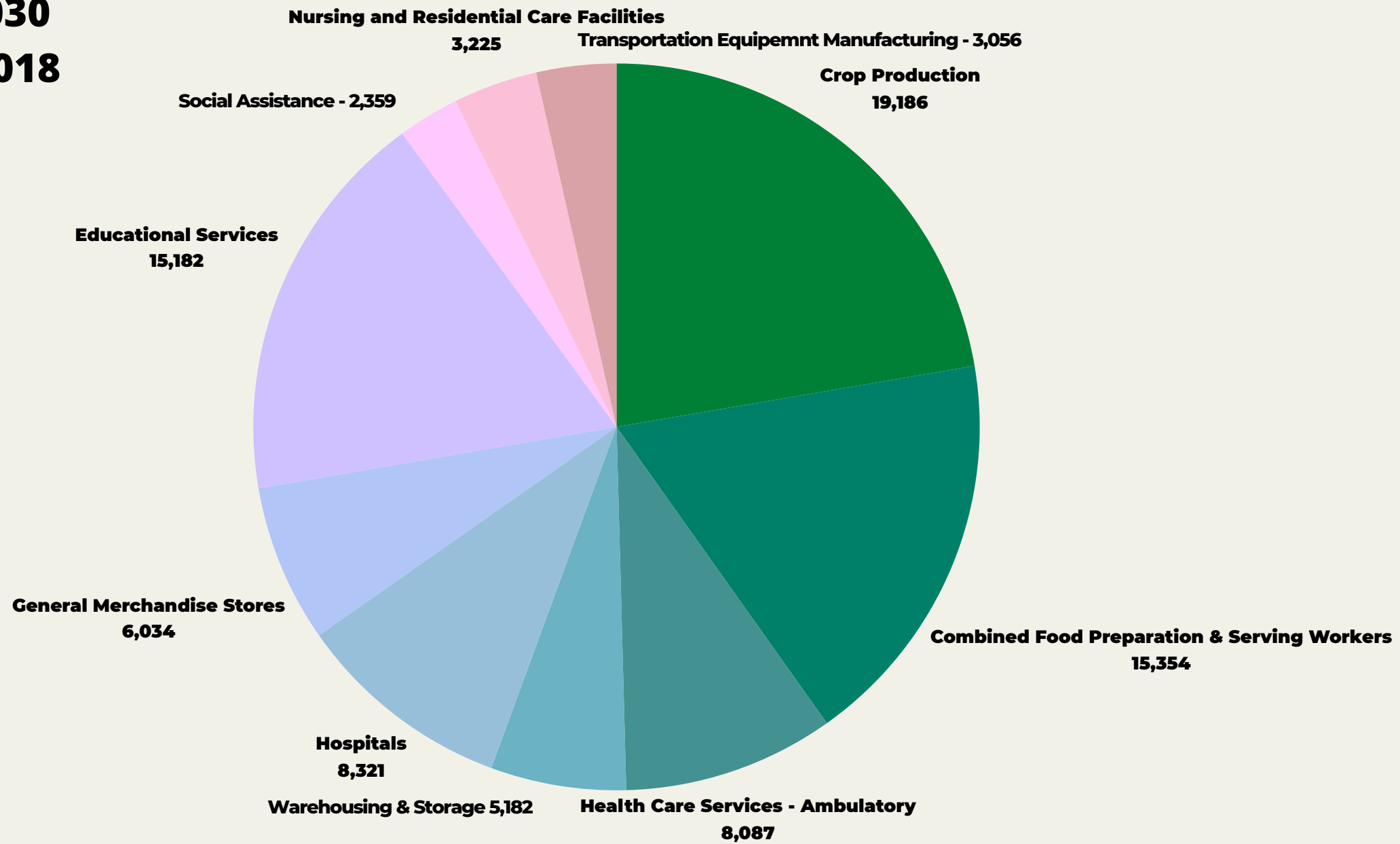
Combined Food Preparation & Serving, Including Fast Food - 1,342
 Farmworkers & Laborers, Crop, Nursery, & Greenhouse - 1,544
 Retail Salespersons - 8.62
 Cashiers - 647
 Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers - 474
 Stockers and Order Fillers - 462
 Waiters & Waitresses - 446
 Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers - 4.38%
 Industrial Truck & Tractor Operators - 376
 Customer Service Representatives - 361

Long-Term Regional Occupational Projections

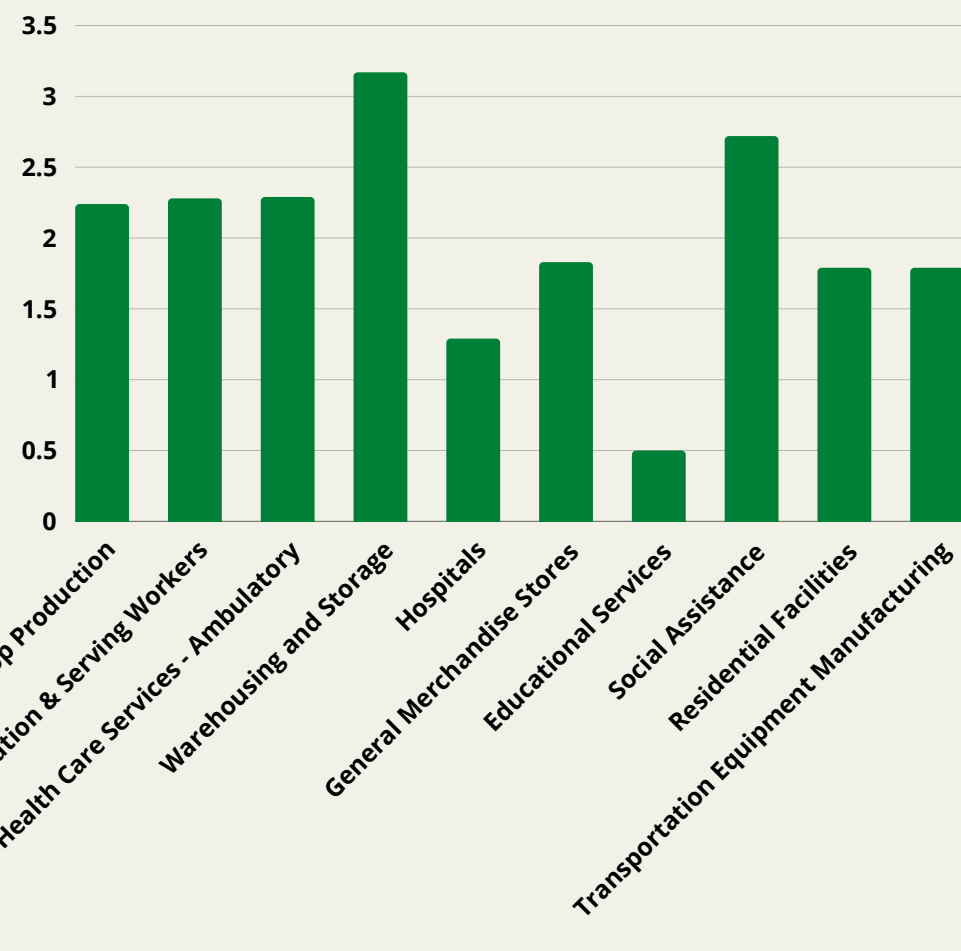
2020-2030

LWDA#018

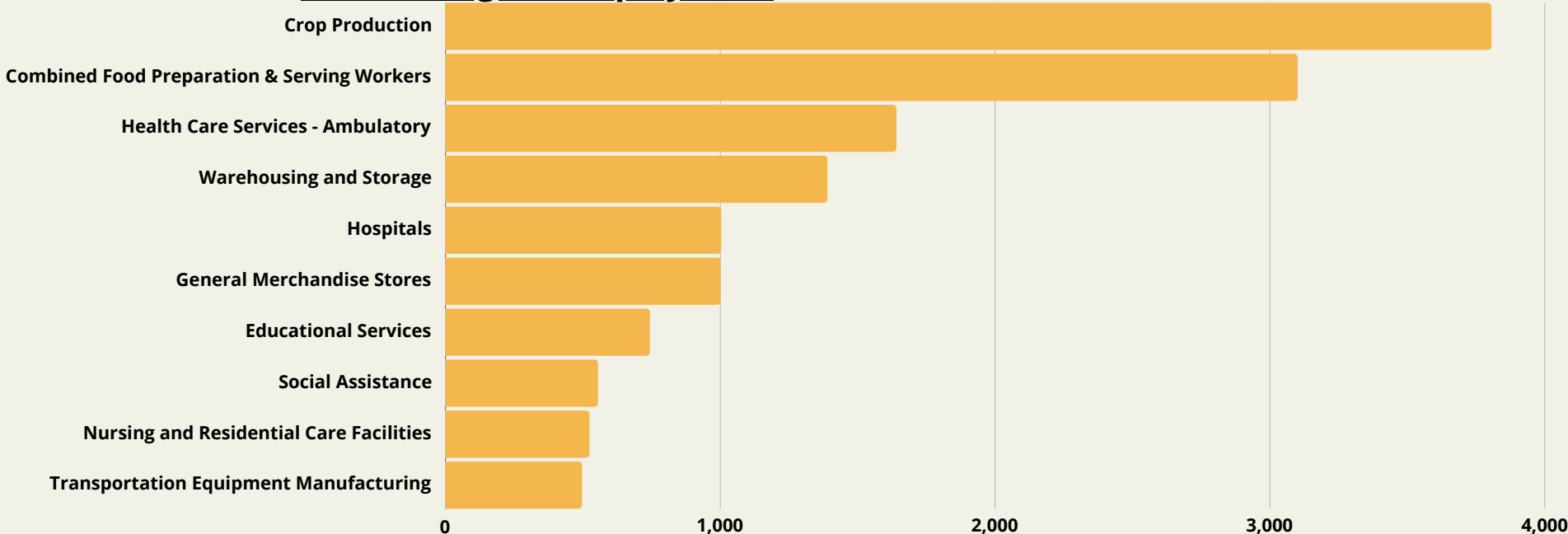
2030 Projected Employment



Percent Change in Employment



Total Change in Employment



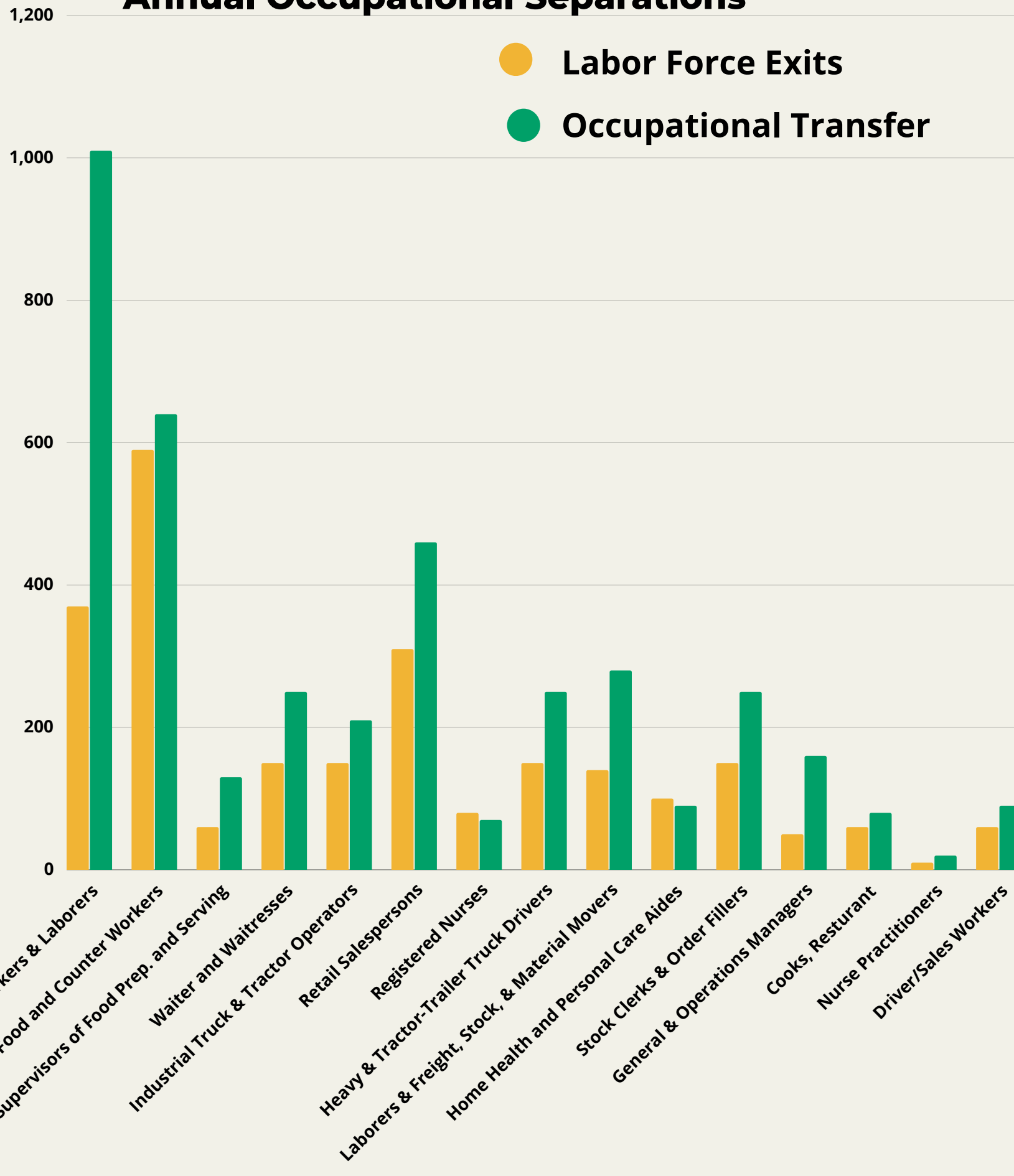
Source: GA DOL Office of Workforce Statistics and Economic Research, July, 2021

Long-Term Regional Occupational Projections

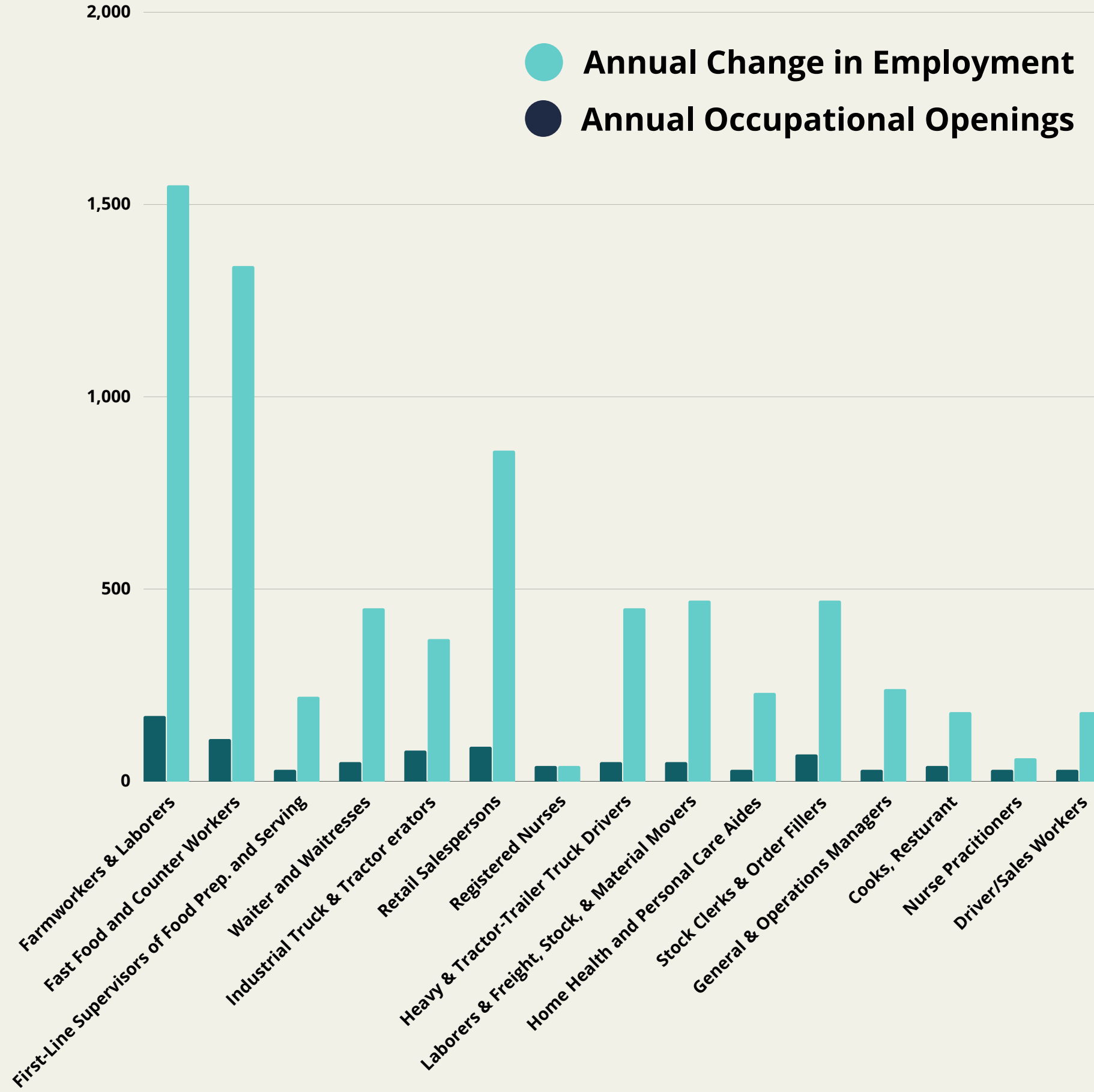
2020-2030

LWDA#018

Annual Occupational Separations



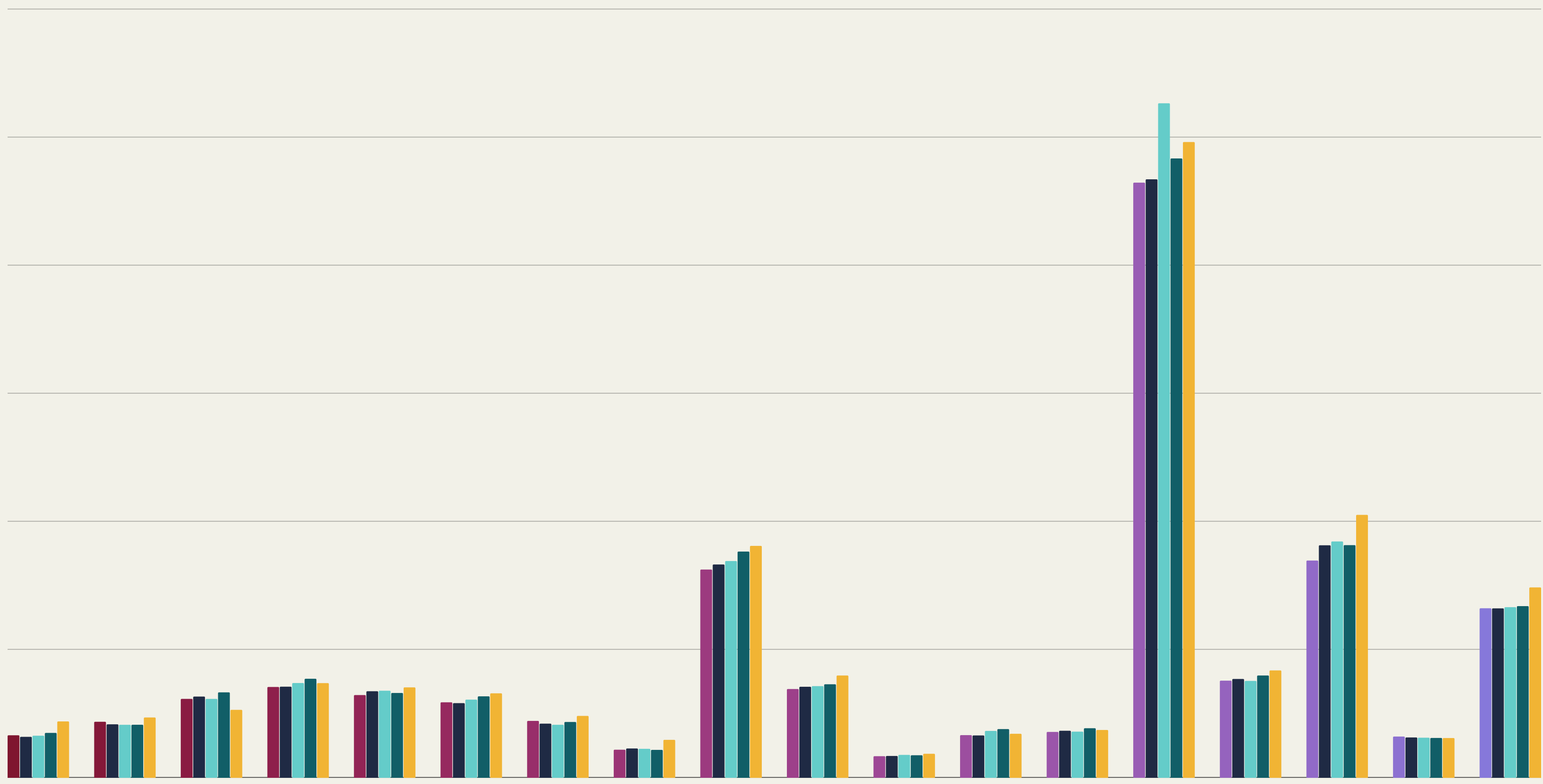
- Annual Change in Employment
- Annual Occupational Openings



■ 2017 Employment ■ 2018 Employment ■ 2019 Employment ■ 2020 Employment
■ 2021 Average Employment

60,000
50,000
40,000
30,000
20,000
10,000
0

Atkinson Bacon Ben Hill Berrien Brantley Brooks Charlton Clinch Coffee Cook Echols Irwin Lanier Lowndes Pierce Tift Turner Ware





SOUTHERN GEORGIA
REGIONAL COMMISSION



2022-2026 Southern Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Annual Update • December 2023

Special thanks to SGRC Staff Member Michael Rivera for providing many of the beautiful regional images featured within this document.