

Education, Exploration, and Spring Escapes

The rising cost of college education is an issue that is attracting the attention of a wide range of people, from students to policymakers. In researching the story on education affordability, Ed English said he noted the changing needs of the labor force from producers to knowledge workers and how higher education must adapt accordingly.

“I saw a bumper sticker once that said, ‘If you think education is expensive, try ignorance,’” English said. “The wisdom of that idiom is as true now as ever. Next to spending on health care, maybe no other expenditure is as significant as the cost of education. What is interesting is how distance learning will be a factor in cost containment. What is the point at which distance learning maximizes its cost effectiveness? Will it be when there are only a few flavors of a particular course serving all institutions nationwide? Or will it be something less than that? And as the number of distance learners rises, when will we reach the equilibrium point at which no more face-to-face education can be shifted online? Clearly we are moving that way, but where the finish line will be is far from certain.”

On the international front, this issue’s feature on Brazil’s discovery of large undersea oil reserves required authors Laurel Graefe and Steve Kay to dig a little deeper: four miles beneath the seabed, to be precise. Apart from the technological feats required to extract the oil, Kay was more concerned with the oil wealth’s potential effects on Brazil’s economy.

“In researching this article, I was reminded how, due to the so-called ‘resource curse,’ the prospects of billions of dollars in oil revenue can come with a potentially high price tag,” Kay said. “I found that researchers in Brazil already see signs of the resource curse in municipalities receiving revenue from oil royalties.

It’s apparent that governments need to be prepared with policies that can mitigate the negative impact of the resource curse.”

On the home front, Lela Somoza’s story on the growing agritourism industry in the Southeast points to the public’s interest today in where their food comes from and how it makes its way to their table. The article also highlights the tenaciousness of many of today’s small farms. Agritourism has given farmers an effective way to diversify and supplement their income with activities like farm “staycations.”

“I was surprised to learn how inclusive the agritourism sector is,” Somoza noted. “A range of activities—even the gleaned food to feed the hungry—is part of this fast-growing industry, but I’d never thought of them as agritourism. These activities are helping farmers stretch their ability to earn a living beyond their harvests and also contributing to volunteerism.

“It was also really amazing to learn how many farmers involved with agritourism are embracing social media as a way to market their operations, something I learned from my conversation with Dora Ann Hatch of Louisiana State University. Many farms don’t have the marketing budgets to roll out high-profile advertising campaigns, so they’re using blogs, Twitter, and Facebook to let people know what’s new on the farm.”

Our Regional Economic Information Network pages in this issue feature current Southeast economic information and data. We hope you enjoy the issue, and please visit the Atlanta Fed’s website at frbatlanta.org to see the supplemental material that accompanies the online version of *EconSouth*. ■

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Editor’s note: Throughout this issue, Southeast refers to the six states that, in whole or in part, make up the Sixth Federal Reserve District: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

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