



ONE VISION, MANY VOICES

HOW TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE RURAL CANADA

Recommendations from the National Symposium
Rural Matters! Forging Healthy Canadian Communities
July 5 – 8, 2008 | Edmonton, Alberta

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Prepared by Western Sky Management Associates Inc. for
the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties

Edited and designed by uc\Communications.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2008, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) hosted a national symposium – *Rural Matters! Forging Healthy Canadian Communities*. The goal was to bring together delegates from across the nation to discuss important issues pertaining to rural Canada.

Over the course of the symposium, eight rural sustainability workshops were held to help set key priorities for rural Canada to focus on in the years to come.

Based on the common themes of these priorities and other discussions held during the symposium, seven recommendations were derived to be presented to governments and stakeholders on how to build a sustainable rural Canada.

THE PRIORITIES OF RURAL CANADA

GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

1. Restructure power and authority to municipal government
2. Clearly define levels of responsibility
3. Build capacity to address short- and long-term community needs
4. Institute long-term regional planning
5. Develop community plans that engage all stakeholders
6. Always consider a regional approach
7. Allow for municipal fiscal capacity

INFRASTRUCTURE

8. Be fiscally responsible and innovative
9. Meet local needs to retain workers
10. Provide adequate physical, social and cultural infrastructure
11. Review appropriate levels of government taxation
12. Ensure industry development respects community standards
13. Reduce or eliminate barriers to growth and development
14. Organize and mobilize resources

ECONOMIC

15. Promote partnerships and cooperation with neighbours
16. Provide more sustainable funding and training programs
17. Increase revenues
18. Reduce the regulatory burden
19. Make use of new technologies
20. Pool educational assets
21. Improve communication and access to services
22. Showcase quality of life

ENVIRONMENT

23. Develop incentives for stewardship practices
24. Develop and adopt environmentally supportive policies
25. Reduce emissions through technology
26. Practice water conservation
27. Create effective policies and legislation to protect the environment
28. Develop local solutions
29. Develop efficient solid waste strategies
30. Develop rural solutions for rural Canada



IN BRIEF

HOW TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE RURAL CANADA

- **Increase cooperation and partnerships** among rural municipalities, senior levels of government, industry, rural stakeholders and Aboriginal communities.
- **Increase educational opportunities** for rural Canadians by reducing the barriers to access post-secondary opportunities.
- **Increase high-speed connectivity** in rural and remote regions of Canada to ensure readily available access to critical information and to promote opportunities.
- **Ensure stable, predictable funding** for local and regional governments, not necessarily based on population.
- **Establish a federal ministry** dealing solely with issues and opportunities of rural and remote Canada.
- **Establish a rural network** to share best practices for rural economics, infrastructure, environment and governance across all jurisdictions of Canada.
- **Communicate the messages** from the *Rural Matters!* symposium to decision makers, rural organizations and community leaders.





II. A SEED IS PLANTED

More than simply land, rural Canada is a vital part of this nation's economy, culture and future.

While vast, rural Canada is far from empty. Home to more than 10 million citizens, rural Canadians are as diverse and unique as their urban counterparts.

The seed of *Rural Matters!* was originally planted by the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) to commemorate its centennial. The event, and the ideas and recommendations it generated, grew much larger than was ever thought possible.

In all, more than 800 delegates representing rural and remote Canada participated in some 35 educational sessions and listened to keynote addresses delivered by international experts in politics, sustainability, environmentalism and the media. Most importantly, the symposium helped re-focus the national spotlight on rural Canada and gave its representatives an opportunity to collectively become an advocate of rural challenges and opportunities.

2.1 Rural Matters! The Idea

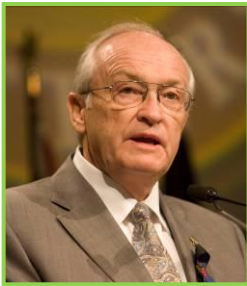
“Rural Matters! is an opportunity to affect change ...”

– Gord Steeves, FCM President / Donald W. Johnson, AAMDC President

From July 5 – 8, 2008, the AAMDC hosted the national symposium, *Rural Matters! Forging Healthy Canadian Communities*.

For 100 years, the AAMDC has been helping rural municipalities achieve strong and effective local government and to celebrate this milestone a national symposium on rural issues was proposed. An event of this magnitude that focused primarily on rural issues had not been undertaken in decades.

As the idea grew and the symposium began to take shape, it was clear that *Rural Matters!* should be more than a one-time event. Now more than ever before, rural Canada is at a critical juncture where there are choices to be made about the future. This would be an opportunity to do more than talk and network – it would be the start of something that would last much longer than four days in July.



AAMDC President Donald W. Johnson



FCM President Gord Steeves

RURAL MATTERS! BY THE NUMBERS

4 DAYS

+800 DELEGATES

+30 WORKSHOPS

30 PRIORITIES DEVELOPED

7 RECOMMENDATIONS SUBMITTED

97% PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION LEVEL

2.2 The Goal of Rural Matters!

The symposium offered profound keynote presentations and a series of education sessions designed to generate ideas and actions to create a sustainable rural Canada. These presentations and sessions covered a range of topics including governance, economics, environment, infrastructure, youth and Aboriginal issues.

Delegates rolled up their sleeves in the Rural Sustainability Workshops to set key priorities and propose recommendations for strengthening the economic, governance, infrastructure and environmental foundations of rural communities. These recommendations are vital in forming the common ground for rural Canada, to advocate rural interests and needs to the federal and provincial governments with a united voice.

The goal of *Rural Matters!* was to bring together delegates from across the nation to discuss important issues pertaining to rural Canada and increase the awareness of rural Canada as the foundation of this country. With delegates representing rural Canada from coast-to-coast-to-coast, it was possible for rural leaders, policy-makers, youth and other stakeholders to help shape their own futures. It was an opportunity to develop a united vision for building sustainability and facing the challenges of the future together – as Canadians.





III. MANY VOICES

As part of *Rural Matters!*, distinguished speakers from across Canada came together to discuss issues surrounding rural sustainability. The keynote speakers addressed issues ranging from the effects of climate change on the Inuit people to halting rural poverty.

The program was anchored by Master of Ceremonies and former Leader of the Official Opposition, Deb Grey. Ms. Grey skillfully brought together the symposium's diverse voices and spoke to the importance of rural-urban cooperation.

3.1 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

3.1.1 Rex Murphy – The Other Half: Rural Canada and Why it Counts

Noted Canadian commentator, columnist and talk-show host, Rex Murphy delivered a powerful keynote presentation on the living connection between rural communities and cities.

Mr. Murphy recounted the fateful day of September 11, 2001 when the terrorist acts in the United States diverted aircraft from around the world to alternate locations – including Gander, Newfoundland.

In all, 6,700 stranded passengers, a few dozen dogs and cats, and two exotic monkeys en route to a United States zoo were dropped on Gander and the small towns around it such as Gambo.

The citizens of Gambo, through their instinctive, rural nature, reacted quickly and compassionately to the passengers of diverted planes who were stranded in the small community for days. Those stranded were treated with warm shelter, food and, most importantly, rural hospitality.



*“It is not a question of **does** rural matter, [rural] is the most vital component in the actual social code and sensibility of one of the most fortunate countries on the face of the earth.”*

— Rex Murphy

Mr. Murphy stressed the point that this hospitality could have occurred in any community across rural Canada because all rural communities in Canada shares similar values. It is this social code and sensibility of rural Canada that still lives and breathes and is the core of what Canada was built from. This, Mr. Murphy explained, is the root of Canadian existence including our urban populations who have ties to rural locations.

“There is a living connection between rural communities of this country and cities of this country but unfortunately the cities have internal gravity that calls all attention to them.”

— Rex Murphy



3.1.2 Mike Harcourt – Sustainable Communities: Cities Need Rural Canada

Former Premier of British Columbia and current chair of the Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, Mike Harcourt developed the theme about the fundamental relationship between rural and urban.

Using examples from British Columbia, Mr. Harcourt spoke about the development of more than 500 new protected areas in the province since 1992 and the comprehensive collaboration process that was required from all stakeholders. Aside from the new protected areas, many land-use initiatives were developed as a result of this process, including a protected areas strategy and a commission on resources and the environment.

“Community success [does] not come from size or opportunity alone, but from meeting challenges and adversity, seizing and maximizing possibilities, and developing a collection of creative solutions to apparently insoluble problems.”

— *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians*

Mr. Harcourt also talked about his involvement with the federal external advisory committee on cities and communities. In the committee's 2006 report, *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians*, is the recommendation that the leadership role of the federal government should be one of facilitation and partnership to deliver locally appropriate solutions to issues of national consequence.

Local governments must have the power to make choices about how to raise and use resources, including tax choices. To this effect, a unique process will take shape: responsibilities and resources will first shift from the federal government to the provincial and territorial governments, and then from the provincial and territorial governments to the local level.

3.1.3 Dr. Patrick Moore – Environmentalism in the 21st Century

Dr. Patrick Moore, a founding member and former President of Greenpeace, presented some engaging ideas to the delegates on 21st century environmentalism. After working with Greenpeace for fifteen years, Dr. Moore came to the realization that compromise and co-operation with the involvement of government, industry, academia and the environmental movement is mandatory to achieve sustainability.

Dr. Moore's suggestions on approaching modern environmentalism included moving towards an economy that is based on renewable energy and material resources. He stressed the importance of developing a more globally unified analysis of the relationships among land-use, energy and resource consumption, forests and biodiversity and population – including the importance of improving and increasing agricultural production.

The problems presented by Dr. Moore are of concern and importance to rural Canadians. Many of the environmental issues of today are a result of urbanization and industrialization and often the solutions reside in rural communities.

**The challenge of today's environmental issues
will be to find solutions that are attainable
and reasonable for everyone.**



3.1.4 Senator Joyce Fairbairn – Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty

The chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Senator Joyce Fairburn spoke about the committee's report, *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*. The report, released in June 2008, is the result of two years of study and cross-country consultation with rural Canadians.

Senator Fairbairn offered some alarming examples of situations that have been affecting rural Canadians. She mentioned issues such as the shift from rural to urban and its affect as well as cases of neglect by the federal government related to policies and programs that do not meet the needs of rural Canada.

The Senator indicated that the government also fails to recognize serious issues faced by rural people, such as poverty and what its main causes are. One consistent theme that emerged from the report was that Canada's income support policies are tangled, confusing, punitive and outdated and they often impede rather than advance the cause of poverty reduction.

"If we lose our rural communities, we lose a bit of ourselves, our heritage – we lose the option for a different way of life."

– Senator Joyce Fairbairn

The first step in meeting these challenges, she recommended, is to explore innovative approaches to social policy programs and delivery. Many of Senator Fairbairn's suggestions revolved around officially recognizing rural Canada and offering real solutions for dealing with the present issues. She reiterated the importance of revitalizing rural communities and developing programs that foster rural leadership and implored the federal government to put rural issues back on their policy agenda.

3.1.5 Sheila Watt-Cloutier – The Right to Be Cold

The Inuit are an important part of rural Canada and their traditional way of life is being threatened by the change that has come to their homelands. These turbulent changes, together with historical traumas, have created an incredible breakdown of Arctic society.

As a voice for the 155,000 Inuit living in Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Russia, Sheila Watt-Cloutier is tackling the many issues indigenous peoples are facing today including environmental pollution, sustainable development, preservation of culture, and the current realities of global warming.

"Global warming is not just an environmental issue for the Inuit; it is an economic crisis for everyone."

– Sheila Watt-Cloutier



This is not only an environmental issue; rather it is also about the indigenous peoples and the health of both their bodies and their culture. By putting climate change in the arena of human rights, the focus moves from solely being that of a political, economic and technical issue to human impacts and consequences that affect their children, families and communities.



3.1.6 Chief Clarence Louie – Preserving our Past by Strengthening our Future

Chief of the Osoyoos Indian Band for more than 20 years, Clarence Louie stressed the important role Aboriginal communities play within Canada and the opportunity for these communities to become strong economic leaders.

Chief Louie believes that Aboriginal people and government must make self-sustaining job creation and business growth an everyday priority – real, decent paying jobs that provide true opportunity. Although economic development is the means to achieving self-sufficiency, the Osoyoos Indian Band continues to emphasize the importance of maintaining the native language and culture in all aspects of band activities, including business.

The success achieved by Chief Louie's band highlights the fact that rural communities can reach economic prosperity by focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. His ideas are not only important for Aboriginal communities but for all rural communities of Canada.

3.1.7 Dr. Mark Partridge – Building Vibrant 21st Century Communities: Skip Hot Fads and Lose the Rear-view Mirror

The C. William Swank Chair of Rural-Urban Policy at the Ohio State University, Dr. Mark Partridge delivered a keynote address that focused on today's rural Canada and how to make it prosperous. His main message was that rural Canadians need to focus on their strengths rather than current trends and fads. Too many communities, Dr. Partridge stressed, skip the basics and jump on the latest fad such as alternative energy, ethanol, immigrants, creative class, clusters and tax incentives. As well, rural Canada also relies too much on the "rear-view mirror" by continuing to make the same mistakes over and over again.

Dr. Partridge suggests there is a myth that rural Canada's prosperity solely relies on the natural resource sector. This, he claims, confuses sector prosperity with place prosperity. Dr. Partridge recommends that it is time to recognize rural-urban interdependencies.

"Too often, federal and provincial policy is aimed at making this imaginary place 'healthy' by supporting resource sectors."

– Dr. Mark Partridge

Regions that realize they are linked will have a competitive advantage in the global economy. Rural Canada also must understand that the 21st century will belong to places that use their knowledge to leverage their assets. Dr. Partridge emphasized the importance of shifting the focus to business retention and expansion as well as the importance of concentrating on realities, adopting positive strategies that do not require perfect foresight and realizing that education and entrepreneurship are crucial.

Looking at the global economy and the opportunities to advance their communities is necessary for economic prosperity. Self-sufficiency was a common message brought up by the delegates during the workshops and all realized the importance of identifying how to achieve it.

It is essential for rural Canada to focus on the present and to use their resources in a practical way.



IV. EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

Rural Matters! featured more than 35 educational sessions on a variety of issues relevant to rural Canada ranging from governance to Aboriginal issues. The sessions were designed not only to provide information but to engage and challenge delegates to come up with ideas about what a sustainable future for Rural Canada might look like.¹

¹ Detailed individual educational session materials are available on the *Rural Matters!* website – www.ruralmatters.ca.

4.1 GOVERNANCE

Good governance is about both achieving desired results and achieving them in the right way. In these sessions the consensus was that there is a need to create more independence for rural communities and develop more authority and decision-making abilities for these local governments.

SESSIONS

- Managing Risk in Rural Communities – An Insurance Perspective
- Rural-Based Communities Virtual Cluster Model
 - The Future of Rural Canada
- Rural Diversification Models in Canada and Abroad
 - Regional Governance Models Across Canada
- Major Changes Affecting Rural and Small Town Canada
- From Restless Communities to Resilient Places – What is Next?
 - Re-population Issues and Strategies
- Emergency Response and Preparedness in Rural Canada
 - Community-based Development Organizations
- Responding to Meth in Alberta: Prevention Works!



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

In the session, *Regional Governance Models Across Canada*, David Bruce of Mount Allison University, stressed the importance of understanding the initial motivations and starting points of what it means to govern. There is a need, he suggests, to think outside traditional municipal boundaries and to consider the benefits across the entire region.

In addition, Dr. Douglas Knight of the University of Alberta suggested that it is not the governance structure or mechanisms that make a city region work; it is the presence of functional personal inter-relationships, leadership, motivation, and a sense of the importance of regional synergies and systems thinking.

The common theme presented was efficiency, highlighting the need to improve communication and collaboration between levels of government as well as urban and rural centres.

If regional governance is to be successful, leadership, innovation and clear goals are required.

The presentation given by representatives from the Rural Development Institute of Brandon University mentioned lessons learned from regional round table discussions. Namely that developing trusting and valued relationships and partnerships within and between communities, governments and academic institutions require deliberate effort, time, along with financial resources and committed, skilled and sustained leadership.

Partnership-building processes should be considered as investments. Resources are needed to develop, maintain and grow these investments.

“Regional governance is different than regional government – it is not necessarily about replacing legacy governments, but evolving to have additional forums for planning and decision-making.”

– Rural Development Institute of Brandon University



4.2 RURAL-URBAN INTERDEPENDENCY

The rural-urban divide is counterproductive – interdependency is the key to a healthy and vibrant Canada. In order to be successful, rural communities and urban areas must work together and compromise in order to bridge the divide – this is only possible through cooperation and building of trust.

SESSIONS

- The Rural-Urban Interface
 - Planning and Building for Sustainability
- The Capacity Building Power of Community Collaboration
 - The Role of the Media in Rural Sustainability
 - Role of Academic Institutions in Rural Development



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

In *The Rural-Urban Interface*, Dr. Mark Partridge suggested there is unnecessary tension in rural and urban communities – each feels the other is taking advantage of them. Government disconnect, according to Dr. Partridge, is the main concern and regional cooperation is needed.

BRIDGING THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE

- Increase rural-urban voice in joint matters
- Economic development
- Transport people/access to services and amenities
- Provide public services at a lower cost
- Environment/land-use
- Education/health
- Quality of life initiatives such as recreation and cultural venues, or broadband service
- Increased political clout for common interests

– (Adapted from Dr. Mark Partridge's presentation *Rural-Urban Interdependence: Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide*: Rural Matters Conference, July 6, 2008)

The idea of community sustainability and growth also brought forth many ideas and different perspectives. A common theme focused on looking forward to the future, not the past.

Innovation in rural areas is of utmost importance and there is a need for it to be recognized as not just an urban idea. Dr. John Bryden, from the University of Aberdeen, summarized his findings from research on innovation in rural and urban centres. He presented studies that indicate innovation decreases the further from core centres but showed that, in many cases, rural regions exhibited higher rates of new enterprise formation than their nearest cities.

“It is not the governance structure or mechanisms that make a city-region work; it is the presence of functional personal inter-relationships, leadership, motivation, and a sense of the importance of regional synergies and systems thinking.”

– From Dr. Douglas Knight's presentation *It's Not the Model That Matters*



4.3 ENVIRONMENT

Responsible economic growth relies on striking a balance between development and protecting the environment. Rural Canada is committed to working together to protect our natural resources from both internal and external stresses associated with rapid economic growth.

SESSIONS

- Rural Land-use and the Environment
- Water Connections: Gateway to Canada's Water Information
- Green Energy: A Look at Municipalities Generating Green Power
 - The Future of Energy on Earth
- Resolving the Disparity Between Environment and Economic Interests
- Rural Canada's Vulnerability to Climate Change and Global Warming



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

One of the key issues that arises from the growing economy is concern over the environment and climate change. The presentation given by Health Canada mentioned the severe impact of climate change, ranging from extreme weather events to social and economic impacts.

THE COST OF CLIMATE CHANGE

2001-02 drought in the prairies estimated losses of \$3.6 billion and \$5.8 billion in agricultural productivity and GDP – a loss of 41,000 jobs in agricultural sector.

-- Wheaton et al. (2005)

The presentation suggested those most vulnerable are: seniors, children, the chronically ill, low income and homeless people, as well as northern residents, disabled people and people living off the land.

Dr. Wayne Caldwell from the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph mentioned that strategic planning, communication and engagement with the community is important in setting priorities. It is important for communities to determine what environmental plans or policies exist. He suggested balancing economic, environmental and social issues using a broad definition of planning and overcoming perceptions with reality. It is important to form alliances and partnerships with industries that can help mitigate the effects on the environment from their business operations.

From the forest industries perspective, Parker Hogan with Alberta Forest Producers Association suggested it is important to establish public participation mechanisms in order to ensure that a balance exists between the needs of the community and that of industry. These arrangements help ensure the economic strength and the quality of life of each relevant area so that the environment is no longer an "issue", it is a value.

Global demand for industrial products is ever increasing, resulting in negative effects on the environment. It is important for rural communities to work in coordination with many parties such as government and industry to help appease the situation.



4.4 ECONOMICS

The economy is at the forefront of many policymakers' agendas and it is always important to consider new ways of promoting prosperity among communities. The messages pertaining to the economy encouraged the delegates to find creative ways of helping rural Canadians compete on a global scale.

SESSIONS

- Rural Alberta's Development Fund
 - Tools to Build Entrepreneurial and Vital Communities
- Planning For and Managing Economic Change in Communities
 - Labour Issues: The Use of Temporary Foreign Workers in Western Canada
 - The New Rural Economy – Capital Building Examples in Rural Communities
- The Role of Cooperatives in Rural Sustainability and Development
 - Relationships with Resource Industries
 - Resolving the Disparity between Environmental and Economic Interests
 - Digital Prosperity – Building the Next Rural Legacy



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Dr. Wayne Caldwell of the University of Guelph focused on what constitutes a healthy community and what partnerships and strategies are needed to obtain it. In his presentation, Dr. Caldwell also suggested that the economy, environment, society and culture are all interrelated and work together to create a sustainable economy.

RURAL CANADA ECONOMIC MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH

- Small towns can't compete in the global economy.
- Industrial recruitment is the best strategy for economic development.
- The rural and urban economies are not interdependent.
- Towns that are 'too small' have no future.

FACT

- *Small towns throughout Canada are home to an amazing variety of highly sophisticated, entrepreneurial successes.*
- *Communities must adopt a broad-based economic development plan that supports existing business and encourages entrepreneurship.*
- *Many city residents often forget that our essential raw materials need dynamic rural infrastructure to get from rural to urban markets.*
- *There is no magical size at which a town can survive.*

—(Source: Planning for and Managing Economic Change in Rural Communities. Dr. Wayne Caldwell – Rural Matters, Edmonton July 6, 2008)

One area that affects the economy of rural areas is re-population. Dr. David Bruce suggested the main reasons for re-population are: population decline in non-metro-adjacent, long period of economic adjustment, aging of the population, youth out-migration and lack of immigration in most rural communities.

Dr. Bruce discussed three potential strategies for re-population which include: the retention of existing population (youth, young families and seniors), new population to rural areas (urban residents, immigrants) and repatriation. It is important to involve both the senior levels of government and communities to work on an action plan to mitigate any problems.

One way to vitalize communities is to build on their entrepreneurial skills by spotting opportunities and encouraging entrepreneurship.



4.5 ABORIGINAL

Although there are many similarities between Aboriginal communities and small rural communities, it is vital to realize the uniqueness of the Aboriginals. The goal of these educational sessions was to help better understand such differences and to explore new ways to help develop a positive and cooperative relationship.

SESSIONS

- Advancing Aboriginal Inclusion through the Use of E-Learning Technology
- Aboriginal Leadership, Vision and Strategic Focus in Transforming our Communities



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Aboriginal communities in Canada are unique and have struggled with maintaining their traditional way of life in modern society. In his presentation, Brian Calliou of the Banff Centre, suggested that, although there are differences between Aboriginal communities and the rest of rural Canada, there are also many similarities. As such, many of the same problems and challenges exist in the Aboriginal communities.

BUILDING THE CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT SELF-GOVERNMENT

- Revitalizing our nations is the overall objective
- Become self-governing and not dependent
- Exercise local sovereignty
- Reconcile traditions with modern leadership and management knowledge
- Two pronged approach:
 - i) build community capacity
 - ii) build individual leadership capacity

--(Adapted from Aboriginal Leadership, Vision and Strategic Focus in Transforming Our Communities: Rural Matters Conference, July 7, 2008)

One way to help Aboriginal communities is by improving access to education and understanding differences in learning styles. Martin Sacher has been devoting his time to improving Aboriginal education for almost a decade. In 2000, while visiting Sunchild First Nation, he recognized the need and challenge required to improve First Nation's education.

It was at Sunchild that Mr. Sacher developed and implemented the successful Sunchild E-learning model, which is an alternative method of delivering education. The Sunchild model is interactive and teachers use Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) to conduct classes unlike other cyber highs that offer teacher feedback once weekly and merely provide distance-learning education online. Sunchild cyber high allows student flexibility with classes recorded that can be accessed through an archive.

Currently, this alternative method has developed into an educational opportunity for students on 23 reserves across Alberta and the Northwest Territories and most recently in an urban Calgary setting. Statistics indicate that Sunchild cyber high's students have a greater than 70 per cent course completion rate and the school has graduated 80 per cent of its students.

For successful transformation to happen in Aboriginal communities, capacity needs to be built at the community level – roles must be defined and a strong vision developed.



4.6 YOUTH

Key to rural Canada's future, today's youth must be recognized as a powerful resource that is unique from all previous generations. With the changing demographics across the nation it has become imperative to explore new methods of recruiting and engaging the youth of today.

SESSIONS

- Youth, Culture and Community
- Youth Engagement in Politics, Decision-Making and Community
- Farm-On



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Starland County's presentation, *Youth Engagement in Politics, Decision Making and Community*, termed young people born between 1980 and 2000 as 'Millennials', and outlined possible ways to get them involved.

The Millennials have grown up in a different world, and as such, it is important for communities to notice the difference when recruiting youth for employment or volunteering. The first step is recognizing that today's generation wants to be linked to a cause or a mission – being collective in action yet with the freedom to act as individuals. While technology will play a large role in engaging youth, it is not the only requirement.

Farm-On is an example of a service to help preserve the family farm business by matching new farmers who do not own land, with retiring farmers who do not have heirs to continue the family farm business. Farm-On suggests that youth are the key to the future of agriculture and the family farm – a cornerstone of rural Canada.

RECRUITING 'THE MILLENNIALS'

- Promote diversity; gender, age and race
- Offer concrete learning and skill development opportunities
- Have competitions and games
- Immediacy – in responses and inquiries
- Use the young volunteers you have already to recruit more
- Allow the opportunity for "new" positions.

--(Adapted from *Youth Engagement in Politics, Decision Making and Community*; Rural Matters Conference, July 7, 2008)

Farm-On released the *Rural Agriculture Youth Strategy* in 2006 with the primary goal of identifying the challenges experienced by young adults involved in agriculture. Using this information, organizations and agencies can develop and plan for support, training and opportunities specifically for this age group in the agricultural industry.

In part, the strategy suggests that geographic location does not change results significantly. Young adults involved in agriculture believe that accessible support and affordable learning and training opportunities are a challenge but can be met by delivering short courses, one-day workshops and conferences.

"Be compassionate and optimistic about the future. We are a generation who will have to deal with many environmental and sustainability consequences in the future, but if we teach ourselves now and are passionate about our industry, we can show that sustainability is possible."

-- Respondent Comment in *Rural Agricultural Youth Strategy*





V. ONE VISION

Over the course of the symposium, eight rural sustainability workshops were held to help set the key priorities for rural Canada to focus on in the years to come. The workshops were based on the themes of governance and sustainability, infrastructure, economic and the environment. This section identifies 30 immediate priorities for rural Canada over the coming years.²

² Detailed information, including comprehensive data from the workshops, is available on the *Rural Matters!* website – www.ruralmatters.ca.

5.1 GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

5.1.1 Leadership and Governing Structures

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > What options and strategies are available for rural communities to develop strong financial partnerships with governments and the private sector?
- > What options and strategies are available for enhancing engagement and creating, equipping and retaining leaders in rural communities?
- > What ways can we best strengthen regional coordination and relationships among multiple levels of government?

RURAL PRIORITY #1

Restructure power and authority to municipal government levels

Workshop participants felt strongly that there is a need for a shift in power from the federal and provincial levels of government to the municipal level. The shift in power from higher levels of government could be achieved through restructuring and rebalancing government jurisdiction and taxation instruments to the municipal level. Recognizing municipalities as a formal level of government will also increase the legal power and governing ability of municipal governments in Canada.

It was further suggested to develop grants to promote inter-municipal partnerships. A grant focused on inter-municipal partnerships is an excellent way to promote regional coordination and partnerships based on the needs of all parties.

RURAL PRIORITY #2

Clearly define levels of responsibilities

Development of a governance structure with clearly defined levels of responsibilities is essential before a shared governance model can be achievable. This includes looking for options to streamline operations and services at municipal, regional and provincial levels.

RURAL PRIORITY #3

Build capacity to address short- and long-term community needs

Capacity can be built to address short- and long-term community needs by ensuring resources are available to turn ideas into actions. Inter-municipal forums will assist in building capacity among our elected officials at the municipal and regional government levels.

RURAL PRIORITY #4

Institute long-term regional planning

Rather than forcing regional governance, strategies should focus on developing a transparent and clear process that is based on the long-term planning needs of municipal governments. Long-term regional planning will provide the certainty and consistency required for all stakeholders.



5.1.2 Capacity Building and Community Sustainability

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > What are the options and strategies for building economic, environmental, social and cultural capacity in rural communities?
- > How can we best move sustainability, innovation, knowledge and technology into practice?
- > How can we best coordinate and promote sustainability best practices in rural communities?

RURAL PRIORITY #5

Develop community plans that engage *all* stakeholders

To properly identify community priorities and build capacity, community plans must take into account all affected stakeholders. A truly shared vision and holistic community plan will engage youth, Aboriginals, seniors and all community members through open dialogue. Develop leadership and build partnerships through joint use agreements (mutual aid) in education, communication, economic and social areas.

Community assets must be identified and built up through the proactive coordination and cooperation of facilities and services at a municipal and regional level. This involves the completion of a community asset inventory identifying opportunities to share services and community based facilities.

RURAL PRIORITY #6

Always consider a regional approach

To make the best use of existing resources and to avoid duplication, a regional approach should always be considered first when developing community plans. This involves identifying community leaders or champions that are best able to advance sustainability across a region through expressing their ideas with others and organizing a team or a rural network to implement solutions.

RURAL PRIORITY #7

Provide fiscal capacity

All three levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal – must have the ability to do what they do best through appropriate fiscal capacity. By restructuring and reallocating municipal revenue streams to allow for proper capacity, all levels of government will benefit.

“The texture of Canada and its foundational values get its soil and historic growth from the great rural enterprises of the entire nation.”

– Rex Murphy



5.2 ECONOMIC

5.2.1 Economy, Labour and Population

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > What are the options and strategies for developing and sustaining vibrant local economies (in an increasingly globalized world) in rural Canada?
- > How can rural communities best address their labour force issues, attract and retain talented people as well as encourage economic creativity, connectivity and entrepreneurship?
- > How can rural communities build on existing economic strengths and resources to add value and diversify their economies?

RURAL PRIORITY #8

Be fiscally responsible and innovative

In order to be sustainable, municipalities must be fiscally responsible. This involves identifying assets for self-sufficiency and, if necessary, reallocating municipal funding. Municipalities should also seek provincial government support for regionally depressed areas by amending funding formulas and establishing a rural areas resource revenue sharing agreement.

Regionally depressed areas are often overlooked due to low population densities and higher costs to provide services. Revenue sharing agreements will help to ensure long-term commitments and funding to regionally depressed areas and would assist in the creation of regional partnerships.

RURAL PRIORITY #9

Meet local needs to retain workers

Provide accessible training to address local needs by working with colleges and distance education facilities to support labour market gaps. Training at the local level is often one of the best ways to develop and maintain a local labour force.

Develop trades training, both mobile and virtual, in rural areas. Advancements in technology and education have enabled mobile and virtual training opportunities in many remote rural areas where it was previously not available.

RURAL PRIORITY #10

Provide adequate physical, social and cultural infrastructure

In order to be competitive rural communities must be able to provide adequate infrastructure in all areas of life. One way to do this is to develop and expand the use of Internet-based technologies for application in rural and remote areas as much as possible. This would include use of high-speed Internet access for everyone in rural areas. Web-based technology development in rural areas should focus on maintaining and developing a competitive advantage by developing rural economic opportunities.

Develop and maintain infrastructure in rural areas. This includes water, sewer, soft services, roads, transportation, communication, community and family based cultural and recreational services through access to adequate funding.



5.2.2 Industry

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > How can rural communities support industry in developing and sustaining vibrant local economies, in retaining talented people and in encouraging economic creativity, connectivity and entrepreneurship?
- > What strategies do rural communities need to employ to ensure they are “investment ready”?
- > What strategies, policies, tools and resources are required to make industry more economically and environmentally viable in Canada’s rural communities?

RURAL PRIORITY #11

Review appropriate levels of government taxation

Review and reallocate forms of taxation, where appropriate, to rural municipal levels.

RURAL PRIORITY #12

Ensure industry development respects community standards

It is important that industry ensures any new development is transparent and follows appropriate local standards, bylaws and guidelines.

RURAL PRIORITY #13

Reduce or eliminate barriers to growth and development

Barriers to growth and development can be eliminated or minimized through proper land-use planning and bylaw development with community and regional needs and goals in mind. A community audit is one way to prioritize community needs and goals in concert with land-use planning and development.

RURAL PRIORITY #14

Organize and mobilize resources

Develop a community-based education, marketing and communications strategy that promotes and celebrates community values. A community-based strategy would include marketing community uniqueness while promoting and celebrating community values.

“It is people that make a difference. It is gatherings like this that make the difference. We need you. We need you to help rural Canada realize its own potential.”

– Senator Joyce Fairbairn



5.3 INFRASTRUCTURE

5.3.1 Core Infrastructure

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > What core infrastructure is necessary to support the future development, viability and sustainability of rural communities?
- > What strategies, tools and resources do rural communities need to manage and preserve their existing infrastructure assets?
- > What options and strategies do rural communities have to deal with escalating infrastructure costs?

RURAL PRIORITY #15

Promote partnerships and cooperation with neighbours

Through partnerships, municipalities can learn from their neighbours in order to help increase regional economic stability, access more funding and streamline inter-jurisdictional regulations. Rural Canada believes that strategic planning and knowledge/information sharing is essential. This includes strategic tools such as bylaws, enforcement, preventative maintenance programs and vision and future planning exercises. Establishing partnerships and promoting cooperation among municipalities including industry, volunteers and regulatory agencies will allow for pooling of resources and create efficiencies.

RURAL PRIORITY #16

Provide more sustainable funding and training programs

Rural Canada believes that there should be more funding available from senior governments that are long-term and promote regional cooperation. Training programs should be more readily available and compliment the funding to ensure successful implementation. The funding, however, must not come at the cost of losing local governance.

RURAL PRIORITY #17

Increase revenues

To maintain fiscal viability for future growth and maintenance of current services and infrastructure, municipalities have to find innovative ways to increase revenues. This includes:

- Negotiating with senior governments for increased funding with fewer restrictions.
- Adjusting the current federal/provincial and municipal cost sharing arrangements to better suit the needs of municipalities.
- Considering local area improvement taxes or user-pay for municipal infrastructure

RURAL PRIORITY #18

Reduce the regulatory burden

The federal and provincial governments must streamline their own processes to reduce bureaucracy and regulations that are barriers to municipalities. Municipalities should encourage discussions with senior governments to reduce red tape without the expense of reducing accountability.



5.3.2 Social and Service Infrastructure

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > How can rural communities attract and retain health, education, social services and private sector professionals?
- > How can innovation and technology best be used to ensure rural businesses, citizens and communities have equitable access to health, education, legal, social and other professional services?
- > What strategies, tools, and resources are required to address housing shortages currently being faced in rural communities (e.g., social housing, affordable housing, seniors' housing and long-term care facilities)?

RURAL PRIORITY #19

Make use of new technologies

Tools such as teleconferencing, tele-health, video conferencing and electronic records are one way to attract and retain health, education, social services and private sector professionals. In order to do this, satellite offices that house this infrastructure should be reasonably accessible throughout rural Canada. For this and other technologies to work, it is also essential that rural Canada has reasonable access to high-speed Internet.

RURAL PRIORITY #20

Pool educational assets

Rural municipalities should look at utilizing present school infrastructure for alternative uses such as trades training, short courses, evening courses and other educational opportunities. As well, by increasing educational institution partnerships in rural Canada (e.g., distance learning), citizens who would otherwise leave for post-secondary education can remain in their communities and train for local opportunities.

RURAL PRIORITY #21

Improve communication and access to services

Services are not valuable unless people know about them. Communities must advertise available services using communication tools such as websites, brochures, newsletters and the local media.

More than communicating services, residents must have access to services and training facilities. This would include bringing mobile training facilities to municipalities to allow less travel for rural citizens or by ensuring that adequate transportation is available (e.g., seniors' vans).

RURAL PRIORITY #22

Showcase quality of life

Communities should increase quality of life infrastructure and services to meet the increased demand of families. Communities need to ensure that state-of-the-art quality of life infrastructure is in place to both retain and attract residents. In addition to traditional economic development efforts, rural communities should also look at ways to market quality of life elements as the "face" of the community. This includes features such as safety, recreation, culture and education – important factors for families looking to relocate.

5.4 ENVIRONMENT

5.4.1 Air, Water and Land

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > To strengthen Canada's environmental stewardship, what can we do to protect and preserve our:
 - air?
 - land, wildlife habitats? and,
 - ground, potable, coastal and surface water resources?

RURAL PRIORITY #23

Develop incentives for stewardship practices

Compensation for current ecological activities and incentives for new initiatives should be developed or increased. This would include rewards for individuals who demonstrate stewardship practices as well as incentives for ecological goods and services in policy development and wetland watershed protection.

Rural Canada believes that there is a need to expand the eco-trust system to ensure control is with the landowner. Equitable funding needs to be in place for rural service needs such as regional water and sewer infrastructure.

RURAL PRIORITY #24

Develop and adopt environmentally supportive policies

Municipalities should develop policies to protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive land. Long-term smart land-use planning should be practiced to ensure a small ecological footprint on the environment. This planning should include an effective toolkit for all to follow and implement successfully. Rural Canada strongly believes that the consideration of wildlife and conservation should be incorporated in municipal development plans.

Municipalities should also encourage green zone designation in all areas across rural Canada. This includes further conservation of riparian areas, as well as potentially designating a percentage of land available to natural space, addressing the issue of all terrain vehicle use in sensitive areas, and developing tree cutting bylaws to encourage woodlot management.

RURAL PRIORITY #25

Reduce emissions through technology

Rural Canada should promote and use low emission technology that has been proven and best practices in other jurisdictions around the world. Examples include fuel efficient technologies or injecting manure techniques. Alternative technologies should also be investigated such as hydro, nuclear, wind and carbon capture and storage.

RURAL PRIORITY #26

Practice water conservation

Municipalities should practice improved water conservation methods to ensure quality water is available for future generations. Compensation and incentives should be made more available to ensure this occurs across all regions of rural Canada.



5.4.2 Climate

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- > How can rural communities show leadership as it relates to climate change policy, mitigation and greenhouse gas reduction efforts?
- > How can rural communities advance the understanding of the risks and opportunities associated with climate change for a more sustainable future?
- > Which strategies for addressing climate change, global warming and greenhouse gas emissions are most achievable from a sustainability perspective?

RURAL PRIORITY #27

Create effective policies and legislation to protect the environment

Before any regulatory permitting occurs, climate conservation standards should be developed and approved. This would provide appropriate oversight on new development with regards to climate control. Rural Canada believes that another way to reduce climate change would be to effectively transfer freight from truck to rail to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

RURAL PRIORITY #28

Develop local solutions

Municipalities often develop home grown solutions to climate change. Municipalities should lead by example to develop local solutions such as the locally produced and locally consumed concept. This reduces transportation and greatly reduces the impact on our climate if residents produce and buy local goods. Municipalities that introduce alternate energy sources should be rewarded through incentives to assist in development.

RURAL PRIORITY #29

Develop efficient solid waste strategies

Municipalities that develop comprehensive strategies that effectively control solid waste will benefit immensely. Regional partnerships and holistic approaches should be considered, whenever possible, when investigating solid waste disposal opportunities.

RURAL PRIORITY #30

Develop rural solutions for rural Canada

The best ideas about rural Canada come from rural Canadians. Municipalities need to ensure that senior levels of government are listening and not providing solutions in absence of local representation.

“We value our independence, families and communities and we value the land.”

– The Honourable Ray Danyluk, Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs



VI. HOW TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE RURAL CANADA

Rural Canada is a highly diverse economy and society, from its coastal regions, through to its remote areas and agrarian heartland. Rural Canada provides employment, forest products, minerals, oil and gas, manufactured goods, food security, and foreign exchange. It educates a third of Canada's youth, manages the environment and provides a wonderland of recreational amenities for all Canadians to enjoy. Because of all of this, when rural communities succeed, the nation succeeds, and cities and suburbs have more resources for continued growth and prosperity.



Conversely, when rural communities falter, it drains the nation's prosperity and limits what we can accomplish together as a country. We now face the challenges of how we sustain, fuel, feed and nurture both ourselves and a fragile and uncertain world. A vital rural Canada has a contribution to make in this effort and the responsibility to take on that endeavour.

A set of principles is needed on how to build a modern and sustainable rural Canada that is ready to face the challenges of the future. Change will not occur instantly but gaining commitment from all levels of government to build a comprehensive action plan for rural communities to sustain themselves is the ultimate outcome.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE RURAL CANADA

RECOMMENDATION #1

> Increase **cooperation and partnerships** among rural municipalities, senior levels of government, industry, rural stakeholders and Aboriginal communities.

Regional collaboration can help meet many of the challenges facing rural communities. Partnerships are critical to successful rural development amongst communities, government ministries and industry. Rural regions can build allies to reach the critical mass necessary to attract economic development and provide governmental services.

KEY ACTIONS

- Engage communities in regional decision-making promoting effective partnerships and innovative efficiencies.
- Develop grants to promote inter-municipal partnerships.
- Encourage inter-municipal forums to assist in building capacity among our elected officials at the municipal and regional government levels

RECOMMENDATION #2

> Increase **educational opportunities** for rural Canadians by reducing the barriers to access post-secondary opportunities.

More effort and resources are required to encourage rural youth to pursue post-secondary schooling and return to rural communities to build their careers. Furthermore, people working in and operating businesses in rural communities need access to opportunities to upgrade and enhance their skills on an ongoing basis. This is essential to ensure that businesses and industries can develop and flourish in rural Canada.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop trades training, both mobile and virtual, in rural areas.
- Provide opportunities for people who are under-employed to upgrade and expand their skills so they can take advantage of opportunities that are available in their home communities.

RECOMMENDATION #3

> Increase **high-speed connectivity** in rural and remote regions of Canada to ensure readily available access to critical information and promote opportunities.

High-speed Internet and new developments in telecommunications hold enormous potential for rural communities and rural businesses. Rural citizens and business owners should be using high-speed Internet and leading edge technologies to help attract and retain citizens.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop and expand the use of Internet-based technologies for application in rural and remote areas.
- Provide targeted support to municipalities and community-owned cooperatives to ensure that businesses and homes have access to high-speed Internet.



RECOMMENDATION #4

> **Ensure stable, predictable funding for local and regional governments, not necessarily based on population.**

Rural Canadians believe that government funding formulas, policies and regulations do not recognize their unique circumstances and that it is increasingly difficult to get rural concerns on provincial and federal agendas.

KEY ACTIONS

- Seek provincial government support for regionally depressed areas by amending funding formulas and establishing a rural areas resource revenue sharing agreement.
- Adjust the current federal/provincial and municipal cost sharing arrangements to better suit the needs of municipalities.
- Provide stable, long-term funding for regional networks involved in rural development.

RECOMMENDATION #5

> **Establish a federal ministry dealing solely with issues and opportunities of rural and remote Canada.**

Citizens of rural Canada require better access to information, support and advice from a wide range of federal government programs and services. Currently, a number of different federal ministries offer programs and services that impact rural Canada. Clarity and coordination of services are required to effectively serve this unique and valuable part of our nation.

KEY ACTIONS

- Formal recognition of municipalities as a level of government that ensures local issues and opportunities are addressed in cooperation with senior levels of government.
- Restructure and rebalance government jurisdiction and taxation instruments to the municipal level.

RECOMMENDATION #6

> **Establish a rural network to share best practices for rural economics, infrastructure, environment and governance across all jurisdictions of Canada.**

Rural communities across Canada need to learn from each other to foster improved communications between industry, communities, rural organizations, policy makers and academia around issues of sustainable rural community development. Senior governments are encouraged to support rural community led development and the 'joining up' of issues of governance, economics, environment, infrastructure, youth and Aboriginals – stimulating international comparative research and related policies.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify champions to advance sustainability best practices at a regional level through the sharing of ideas and coordination of rural networks.
- Support rural partnerships, regional cooperation, alliances and grassroots community organizations through a combination of incentives, tools and information, training, best practices information and direct support
- Continue to host a *Rural Matters!* type of conference to occur every three years rotating through jurisdictions across Canada.



6.2 NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATION #7

- > **Communicate the messages from the Rural Matters! symposium to decision makers, rural organizations and community leaders.**

Building a sustainable rural Canada starts today.

All delegates who participated, all speakers who were involved, all those who are in positions of decision making in rural Canada need to create a common voice for a sustainable rural Canada.

Rural Matters! was not designed to be the solution to every challenge in rural Canada but to act as a catalyst for action – actions that will sustain a rural way of life that was vital to our past and even more vital to our future.

KEY ACTIONS

- Continue to be an advocate of rural Canada and share the findings of the symposium to local decision makers, provincial and federal politicians and rural associations across Canada.



VII. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Partners

Many government agencies and not-for-profit associations were represented at the *Rural Matters!* symposium. These agencies were instrumental to the success of the event by providing direct funding and volunteer support. Participants gave presentations, hosted and facilitated workshops and information sessions, provided transportation for delegates and offered planning advice and support as required.

Rural Matters! would like to thank its strategic partners who helped with the development of the symposium:



The following *Rural Matters!* Advisory Committee members spent endless hours of their time and provided excellent insights and direction to the symposium:

- Gord Steeves, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Dwight Oliver, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
- Mark Oberg, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
- David Marit, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities
- Ron Bell, Association of Manitoba Municipalities
- Darren Aldous, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
- Janice Romanyshyn, Alberta Municipal Affairs
- Robert Hornbrook, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
- Ray Darwent, Rural Secretariat

Appendix B – Sponsors

An event of this magnitude would not have been possible without the tremendous support from these sponsors and contributors. The AAMDC would like to thank its sponsors and contributors who helped with the development of the symposium.





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