

The Rural Secretariat

In support of sustainable and viable rural communities



2005

Canada 



Purpose and Overview

- To characterize the challenges of rural Canadian communities
- To outline the mandate, role and activities of the Rural Secretariat
- To provide an overview of the supporting mechanism for rural development in Canada
- To provide a case study of citizen engagement in the policy-making process



Rural communities are important contributors to Canada's economy...

- 31 percent of Canada's population
- 28.4 percent of Canada's workforce
- 6 percent of population are immigrants
- 33 percent of rural economy is resource-based
- 60 percent of new small business starts
- 8.3 percent are unemployed
- 13 percent of workers in knowledge and senior management-related jobs



...but face significant challenges

- Heavy reliance on a natural resource-based economy (e.g. agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining)
- Vulnerability to forces of globalization and sharp, cyclical downturns (e.g. BSE, softwood lumber duties, fisheries management, drought, flood, forest fires)
- Demographic change—out-going migration and aging population



Challenges (cont.)

- Declining tax-base
- Decreasing access to government services, education, information and social support
- Lagging health status
- Shortage of job skills, including leadership
- Infrastructure—e.g. transportation, water and knowledge-based



Government of Canada Responses

- Appointment of Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to be responsible for co-ordinating rural affairs
- Rural Secretariat established within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada



The Rural Secretariat: Mandate, Role and Activities

- The Rural Secretariat:
 - supports the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Parliamentary Secretary (Rural Development)
 - provides leadership and co-ordination for this cross-government initiative
 - co-ordinates collaboration amongst F/P/T governments responsible for rural affairs
 - promotes dialogue between rural stakeholders and the federal government



The Rural Secretariat's Partners

- Provinces/territories
- Rural teams/networks
- 32 federal departments and agencies
- Partners outside of government



The Rural Secretariat conducts a range of activities

- Rural Lens
- Research and Analysis
- Rural Dialogue
- Communications and Outreach
- Programs



Activities: Rural Lens

- The 'Rural Lens' is used to analyze impacts of federal government programs, policies and services on rural communities
- Develop the National Rural Framework that will focus rural policies and establish collaborative efforts between governments

Results

- \$105 million to rural and northern communities to implement broadband and \$155 million for a national satellite initiative
- *The Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund* - \$1 billion/5 years



Activities: Research & Analysis

Results

- Socio-economic studies completed; *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin* published quarterly
- Rural Profiles developed for each province and one nationally
- Rural Research Network established



Activities: Communication and Outreach

- Rural Teams
- Communications tools:
 - Web site
 - Newsletters
 - Exhibits
 - Etc.



Activities: Programs

- Investments in innovative community-based projects

Results

- *The Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative* supported 207 projects in 2000-2003, with \$9.3 million in funding
- *The Canadian Rural Partnership Pilot Projects Initiative* invested \$12 million in supporting 321 projects between 1998-2002
- *The Rural Development Initiative* supported 127 projects with one-year funding of \$2.8 million in 2002-2003



Activities: Programs

- Models Research Program
\$14.0 million /5 years

- Rural Community Capacity Building
Program
\$4.5 million /5 years

Total \$18.5 million /5 years



Engaging Rural Canadians

- Initial Objectives (1998):
 - Understand key rural issues, challenges and opportunities
 - Involve citizens in policy-making
 - Understand rural view of the federal role
 - Discuss Solutions



Engaging Rural Canadians

- Rural Newsletters
- Regional Dialogue Activities
- National Rural Workshop (1998)
- National Rural Conferences (2000, 2002, 2004)
- Communities and Stakeholders involved in leading Dialogue activities



Engaging Rural Canadians

- Lessons Learned:
 - **WHO** to invite: citizens who can put aside their immediate self interest and work for the common good
 - **WHEN** to involve citizens: right from the design stage and then at every significant project milestone
 - Use planning and evaluation tools that focus on outcomes (rather than process)



Engaging Rural Canadians

- Lessons Learned (cont):
 - Use an approach to the agenda/content that begins with a constructive vision of the future, rather than focussing on issues and problems of the past
 - Citizens want to share their experiences and deliberate amongst themselves (not be “talked at”)
 - Citizens want to feel a federal government presence (officials and politicians)
 - Citizens want an ongoing relationship



Overall Lessons Learned

- Improvements could include:
 - better understanding of the rural perspective in policy development
 - enhancing the information available to communities for planning purposes
 - aligning research more closely with policy objectives
 - developing an approach that encourages inter-jurisdictional and interdepartmental collaboration
 - co-ordinating the involvement of all levels of government in setting common priorities



Conclusion

- Rural communities face a wide range of challenges
- To date, the Rural Secretariat has had much success in its approach
- The Rural Dialogue has played an important role in this success, giving rural Canadians a voice in the policy-making process
- Nevertheless, a better coordinated approach by all levels of government would be more effective
- The NRF aims to introduce such an approach