

Questions for Rural Canadians

Rural Dialogue Workbook



The Canadian Rural Partnership

The Government of Canada's

Commitment to Rural Canadians

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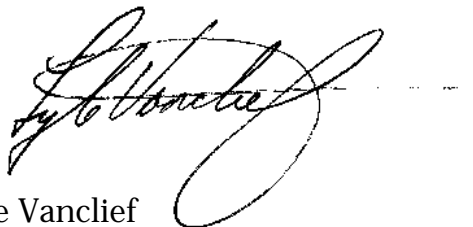
Message from The Minister responsible for rural affairs

The Government of Canada wants to assist the development of rural communities by supporting the social and economic opportunities of rural Canadians. The Rural Dialogue enables you to have a voice in the future of federal policies and programs that may affect you and your community. As we move towards developing a federal rural policy, we must have a good understanding and appreciation of the key challenges and opportunities for rural communities across Canada. Your views are important to us, and we need to hear directly from you.

We need to know what is required from federal programs and services to address the needs of rural Canadians. We need to know what improvements could be made to the programs and services we currently provide to make them more accessible. We need to work together through partnerships with you, and with other levels of government. We need to develop new ideas and approaches that will help you.

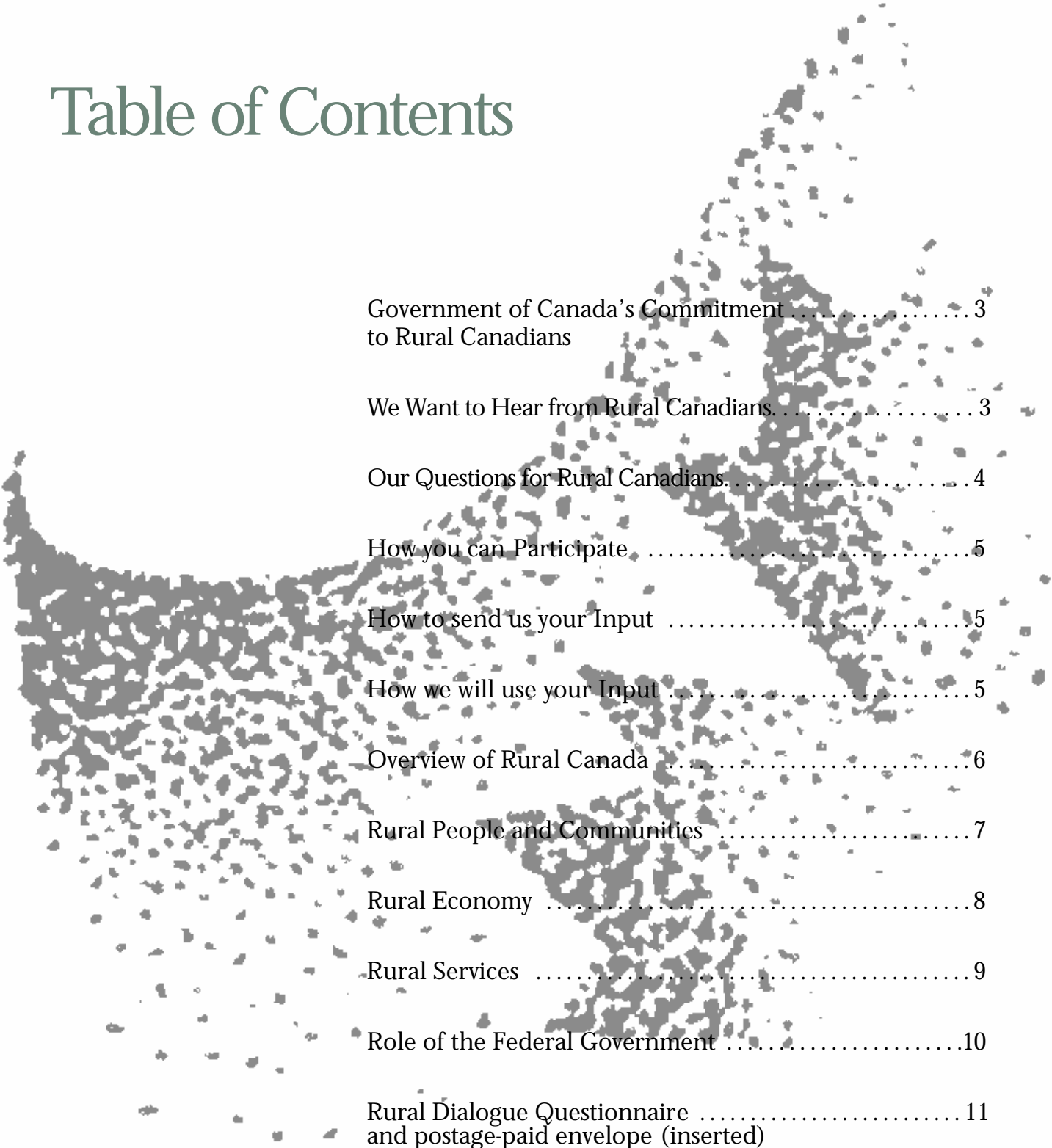
My commitment is that no matter how you choose to participate in the Rural Dialogue, your views will be taken into account and information on the outcome of the Rural Dialogue will be made available to you.

By providing input to the Rural Dialogue, you are helping us to better serve the unique needs of rural Canadians. Thank you for your participation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lyle Vanclief', with a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Lyle Vanclief

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Government of Canada's Commitment to Rural Canadians

The Government of Canada has made a commitment to “explore innovative policies and measures that give particular attention to increasing opportunity for Canadians in rural communities ...[and to]... adapt its programs to reflect the social and economic realities of rural Canada.”

Speech From the Throne,
September 1997

Canadian Rural Partnership
More than 20 federal departments and agencies are working together, and the Rural Secretariat in Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is providing the leadership and coordination for this cross-government approach. Rural teams have been established in every province and territory.

Rural Canada is a vital part of Canada's history, culture and economy. Rural Canadians make an important contribution to the prosperity and the social fabric of our country. The Government of Canada has a long history of working with rural Canadians, and with other levels of government, in providing programs and services. As we approach the millennium, we want to make sure that rural Canadians can share in local and global opportunities.

The Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP) is about doing business differently within the federal government. It is about coordinating federal efforts across departments and agencies to support the development of our rural communities. As well, innovative partnerships and networks are being developed among the federal government, other levels of government and rural Canadians to take action on rural needs. The future of the Canadian Rural Partnership will depend on the input of rural Canadians.

We Want to Hear from Rural Canadians

The Rural Dialogue is a two-way communication. It is about providing information to the federal government. It is also about the Government of Canada letting you know how it intends to respond to your suggestions. In addition, it is an opportunity for you and other rural residents to share ideas, challenges and success stories.

The goals for the Rural Dialogue are:

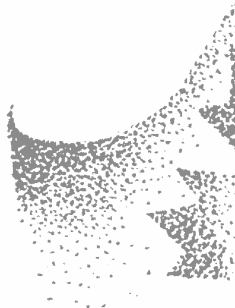
To develop a common understanding of the key challenges and priorities of rural Canadians.



To understand what rural Canadians expect of the federal government in supporting the sustainable development of rural Canada.




To identify better ways for the Government of Canada to respond to the needs of rural Canadians.



Our Questions for Rural Canadians

These key questions will help define the future role of the federal government in rural Canada.



1.
Rural residents are concerned about the future of their communities.
 - a) What are the key strengths of your community as you look to the future?
 - b) What are the biggest challenges that you, your family and your community face as you look to the future?
2.
What is preventing you and your community from overcoming these challenges?
 - a) What is holding you back?
 - b) What needs to be done?
3.
What organizations, levels of government, or others should be involved in working to overcome these challenges? How should they be involved?
4.
What role do you see specifically for the federal government in working with you to overcome these challenges?
5.
How can federal programs and services better support your community's needs (e.g., are there changes needed in the design, delivery, awareness or accessibility)?
6.
What is the best way for the federal government to continue to hear the views of rural people on an ongoing basis (e.g., meetings, surveys, polls, newsletters, advisory groups, the Internet, etc.)?

For your convenience, these questions are also printed on a detachable questionnaire included in this booklet. If you would like to answer some but not all of the questions, or if you would rather organize your ideas in a different way, that is fine. The key is that you let us know what you think. As well, if you have an example of a rural success story that you would like to share with others, see the last page of the questionnaire.

How you can Participate

Individually, or in discussion with friends and family, write down your thoughts and ideas. Send your comments to the Rural Dialogue by one of the means outlined below.

Community groups, organizations, schools or clubs may be interested in using this workbook in a discussion-type setting. Send the ideas and comments of your discussion to us (see below).

Facilitated Dialogue Workshops: A small number of facilitated workshops will be held in communities across Canada. These workshops provide an opportunity to discuss ideas and suggestions among members of your community in a structured session. For information on these sessions, please call our toll-free number, 1-888-781-2222.

How to send us your Input

Mail: You may mail the questionnaire with your input to the Rural Dialogue using the postage-paid envelope enclosed.

Fax: You may fax your input to us at 1-800-884-9899.

E-mail: If you would like to e-mail your comments to us, our address is Dialogue@em.agr.ca

Internet: This workbook is available through our Website at www.rural.gc.ca Please feel free to respond on-line.

Rural Dialogue input will be collected until the end of July 1998
FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL 1-888-781-2222

How we will use your Input

Your comments will be the basis for a National Rural Workshop, to be held in Fall 1998. This National Workshop will be used to review and confirm what we have heard across Canada and to make recommendations for future government action, including the development of a federal rural policy.

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report, please call 1-888-781-2222, or make sure you indicate this on the detachable questionnaire.



Overview of Rural Canada

Canadians value the unique cultural and geographic differences among rural regions across the country. Rural Canada is made up of many different communities. The diversity they represent means that “one size does not fit all.” Needs vary, and rural communities across Canada face different economic, social and environmental challenges.

National figures show that rural areas are different from urban areas: for example, rural areas have generally higher unemployment rates; formal education levels are lower; and, in many communities, more people are leaving than moving in.

However, national figures do not tell the whole story. Many rural communities are strong and growing and are proud of their quality of life. They have taken advantage of local opportunities, expanded their existing resource base, and attracted new businesses and investment.

The following sections outline some of the key challenges and opportunities that have been raised by rural Canadians.



What is rural Canada?

For the Dialogue, rural Canada includes rural and remote communities and small towns outside major urban centres, whether in the far North or close to major metropolitan cities. For example, it encompasses mixed-economy communities as well as those areas dependent on agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and trapping, energy, mining, and tourism.

Up to one-third of Canada’s population – approximately nine million people – live in rural regions.



Rural People and Communities

Atlantic Canada has nearly one-fifth of the rural population of Canada. Almost half of Atlantic Canadians live in rural communities. Most Acadians and the African Canadian community in Atlantic Canada live in rural areas.

More than half of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada live in rural areas. Three-quarters of the total population in the Northwest Territories live in small, isolated communities.

More than three out of every five on-reserve First Nations people are under 25 years of age and that proportion is expected to increase.

Winkler is Manitoba's fastest growing town. There are now 36 manufacturing plants in this town of just over 7,200, and Winkler's unemployment rate is close to zero per cent.

People are the foundation of any rural community. Most rural residents have strong social and cultural attachments to their communities. Over the years, communities have had to adapt to a changing world to survive. However, the pace of change in today's society is quicker than ever before and the challenges are, therefore, greater.

One of the great concerns to many rural communities is the continuing loss of young people through urban migration, particularly young, skilled adults. As young people leave, they leave behind an increasingly older population. Thus, many communities are faced with providing support services to an aging population. In contrast, many Aboriginal communities are witnessing an increase in the number of young people. In both cases, the challenge is to provide opportunities that will allow young people to remain in or return to rural communities.

Many new employment opportunities require different skills than were needed in the past. It is important to ensure that rural people have the opportunity to develop the skills required for these new jobs, whether it is the young person entering the work force or the older worker who may have been displaced from a traditional occupation. Access to training and skills upgrading, particularly in the use and application of new technologies, is essential to meet these requirements.

It is generally accepted that locally-driven development is more successful than solutions imposed from the outside. Rural communities are being asked to accept more responsibility for determining their future and providing services to their residents. While some communities already possess strong leadership and know-how to address economic, social and cultural development needs, others are struggling to develop these strengths. Many communities are still trying to figure out what their future priorities should be and how they can maintain the levels of service required to sustain their community. Increasing demands and reliance are being placed on community volunteers.





Rural Economy

The agriculture and agri-food, forestry, minerals and energy sectors together account for over a fifth of the Gross Domestic Product of Canada.

Five hundred predominantly rural communities are today largely dependent on resource extraction in the mining, forestry, and energy industries.

Tourism is one of this country's largest and fastest growing industries. Tourism growth, in fact, exceeded the rate of growth of the overall economy in 1995. Tourism provides many rural regions with an opportunity to diversify their economic base.

The majority of our rural communities have been built on natural resource and primary sector activities (agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and energy, hunting and trapping). These sectors continue to be major contributors to the national economy.

However, while productivity from most resource-based industries has increased, employment has generally decreased, mainly due to automation and technological changes. In addition, the seasonal nature of many of these traditional industries is characterized by reliance on government assistance to bridge the gaps between periods of employment.

Some of the economic challenges facing many rural communities include:

How to manage the renewable resource base to ensure its long-term sustainability.

•

How to build on existing strengths and develop local value-added processing.

•

How to build on local opportunities and ideas to develop new economic activities and businesses.

•

How to attract investment and new business.

•

How to access markets, information and capital.



In recent years, small and medium-sized enterprises have typically accounted for more than four out of every five jobs created. This is as significant in rural Canada as it is in urban locations.



Industry Canada's Community Access Program (CAP) is currently working to connect 5,000 of Canada's rural and remote communities to the Internet.

In Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia in particular, basic physical access to single phone lines is still a barrier for many rural households and businesses. Remote and isolated communities, particularly in the Territories, are also behind other regions in the ability to access and use new technologies.

Rural Services

Infrastructure and access to services are key to the development and sustainability of many communities. The level and type of infrastructure requirements (roads, rail, ports, airports, water, sewage treatment, telecommunications, etc.), vary from community to community and from region to region. Some rural communities are located near urban centres and have access to reliable infrastructure and services. Other communities are at a disadvantage because of their distance from urban centres and the associated high costs of providing infrastructure and services.

While health care and education are primarily provincial responsibilities, such fundamental services are becoming areas of critical concern to rural communities. Canadians everywhere have told the federal government that they want to retain a health care and education system that is accessible to all.

One way of ensuring that rural communities can participate in national and world markets, and overcome distance barriers, is through access to modern information and computer technologies. However, people need training in order to use new technologies to their fullest potential. In addition, to be beneficial to a wide variety of people, the technologies must also serve the needs of different types of learners, language groups, and ethnic minorities.

Information technologies can provide a variety of business and service benefits to rural communities, including:

Helping rural businesses obtain access to information, clients and markets.

Providing rural residents with ready access to programs and services.

Helping provide education, training opportunities and skills upgrading.

Providing new applications in areas such as rural health care.

The quality and cost of access vary from province to province. Information and computer technologies are an important component of rural development. They provide tools that can link rural communities to each other and to the world, as well as new ways of accessing information, programs and services.



Role of the Federal Government

Human Resource Centre kiosks, provided by Human Resources Development Canada, are providing easier access in many communities to employment insurance application procedures and job postings.

The efforts of the federal Regional Agencies and Industry Canada in supporting Community Futures/Business Development Corporations in rural communities across Canada provide a strong basis for local community development.

The Rural Resource Book, "Canada ... At Work in Rural Communities," lists more than 200 programs and services available to rural Canadians from more than 20 federal departments and agencies.

The Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy is designed to help Canada's youth make the transition from school to work and get their first job, through partnerships with business, labour, industry, not-for-profit organizations, communities and other levels of government.

Rural Canadians are in the best position to lead their own economic, social and environmental development. The federal government can assist this development by providing relevant programs and services, and by continuing to support community-based development through partnerships.

However, the Government of Canada recognizes that its role in providing programs and services to Canadians is changing. The federal government needs to work closely with rural people and other levels of government; provincial, territorial and local.

While it is true that some federal government offices and service outlets in rural communities have been closed, the federal government is committed to the challenge of reducing the cost of government while providing quality services to rural Canadians.

Canadians have clearly indicated that the federal government needs to be more efficient and effective. The federal government has had to re-think the delivery of programs and services to find new ways to be more accessible, such as using community-based partnerships and local delivery agents, as well as through computerized networks.

We are also working to reduce barriers which have put rural Canadians and their communities at a disadvantage.

The concerns of rural Canadians will be taken into consideration as the federal government changes how it does business.



Rural Dialogue Questionnaire

If you would like to answer some but not all of the questions, or if you would rather organize your ideas in a different way, that is fine. The key is to let us know what you think.

To help us gather together all the comments we receive, we would like to know a little bit about you. Please complete the following.

What is the name of your community? _____

In which province or territory is your community located? _____

What is your postal code? _____

Who was involved in the discussion about this workbook?

- Yourself male female
- Family (how many people?) _____
- Friends (how many people?) _____
- Group (how many people?) _____
Name of Group _____
(Organization, club or association) _____

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report for the Rural Dialogue, please call 1-888-781-2222 or fill in this section:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, Town or Village: _____

Province or Territory: _____

Postal Code: _____

E-mail address: _____

Telephone number: _____

1. Rural residents are concerned about the future of their communities.

a) What are the key strengths of your community as you look to the future?

b) What are the biggest challenges that you, your family and your community face as you look to the future?

You

Your family

Your community

(Your community is the local area in which you live)

2. What is preventing you and your community from overcoming these challenges?

a) What is holding you back?

b) What needs to be done?

3. What organizations, levels of government or others should be involved in working to overcome these challenges?

How should they be involved?

4. What role do you see specifically for the federal government in working with you to overcome these challenges?

5. How can federal programs and services better support your community's needs (e.g., are there changes needed in the design, delivery, awareness or accessibility)?

6. What is the best way for the federal government to continue to hear the views of rural people on an ongoing basis (e.g., meetings, surveys, polls, newsletters, advisory groups, the Internet, etc.)?

Any other comments?

Rural Success Story

If you have an example of a rural success story that you would like to share with others, please provide a short description together with your name, address, phone number, fax number (if available) and e-mail address (if available) so that interested rural Canadians may contact you directly for specific details. You will be able to access success stories either at: www.rural.gc.ca or from information provided in the final report.

The final report will be a compilation summarizing all responses. Individual responses will remain confidential, apart from the success stories that you would like to share.

The information is required by the Government of Canada for the purposes of future development of policy, programs and services. Information may be accessible or protected as required under the provisions of the Access to Information Act. The Collection Registration Number is AAFC POL-485-97039.