



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada



Government of
Saskatchewan



HUMBOLDT ROUNDTABLE

*Working Together
for the Future of Our Rural Communities*

SUMMARY REPORT

**Humboldt, Saskatchewan
October 28, 2005**

Publication # 10109E
© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2005
Cat. No. # A114-25/2005E-PDF
ISBN # 0-662-42468-9

This summary report is available on the following Web site:
www.rural.gc.ca/dialogue/reports_e.phtml. For further
information on the Rural Dialogue, please call 1-888-781-2222
(toll-free number).

Canada

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. FOREWORD	1
2. INTRODUCTION	1
3. THE NATIONAL RURAL FRAMEWORK'S (NRF) FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS	2
4. IMPROVING COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY AND VIABILITY	3
4.1 Challenges and risks related to the viability of rural communities	3
4.2 Priorities for government collaboration	6
4.3 Actions for governments	8
4.4 Roles for communities and stakeholders	11
4.5 Projected outcomes and results	12
5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEP	14

HUMBOLDT ROUNDTABLE

Working Together for the Future of Our Rural Communities

**Humboldt, Saskatchewan
October 28, 2005**

1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place at the Roundtable held in Humboldt, Saskatchewan on October 28, 2005. No limits were placed on the participants during discussions. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada or the Government of Saskatchewan.

Since their first meeting in the spring of 2003, ministers responsible for rural affairs in Canada have been striving to work more closely together and to better take into account rural realities when developing policies and delivering programs and services. Consultations with rural citizens to date have highlighted the importance of supporting communities in achieving their visions and in finding ways to better coordinate actions between governments.

Building on past consultations and in anticipation of another ministerial meeting to decide on an approach for closer cooperation, the Humboldt Roundtable was organized and was the third in a series of roundtables being held in different parts of the country.

As governments in Canada continue to explore approaches for closer cooperation, an enhanced understanding of the major challenges and priorities for action will contribute to ongoing joint efforts aimed at improving the viability of rural communities.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Humboldt Roundtable was jointly organized by the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Saskatchewan Department of Rural Development. The event was co-hosted by the Honourable Wayne Easter, Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development, and the Honourable Clay Serby, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, Deputy Premier and Minister of Rural Development.

Participants at the event (30 in attendance) included: representatives from provincial, regional and local organizations, associations and societies, and area municipalities; community and academic leaders; economic development officers; aboriginal and youth representatives; and representatives of the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

The results of the Roundtable will help guide the future actions of the Government of Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan in support of rural communities and will contribute to the ongoing development of the proposed National Rural Framework (NRF). Joint federal,

provincial and territorial work to date on the proposed NRF has identified five areas of focus for collaboration among governments (described in section 3 of this report), which provided the context for the Roundtable discussions.

Under the theme “Working Together for the Future of Our Rural Communities”, participants were invited to share their views on the major challenges to the viability of rural communities, priorities for government collaboration and action, the roles of communities, and the results or outcomes that could be expected from collaborative action. Opinions and suggestions were transmitted to government representatives both verbally and in writing. This report stems from discussions on and responses to the following questions:

1. What are the two or three greatest challenges or risks related to the viability of rural communities?
2. In your opinion, which of the challenges or risks that you have identified should be priorities that the ministers of both orders of government should be working on?
3. What actions should governments take to address the priorities you have identified?
4. As a stakeholder, what role do you think communities should play in the approach you are suggesting ministers take?
5. What results do you expect from governments? For example, what progress should ministers be aiming for after three --- or even five --- years of engagement, with regard to the priorities you recommend?

3. THE NATIONAL RURAL FRAMEWORK (NRF)

The over-arching goal of the proposed NRF, a framework to facilitate federal, provincial and territorial collaboration on rural issues, is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an environment in which communities and citizens have access to improved social and economic opportunities.

Throughout the dialogue, participants covered a number of topics relating to the five NRF focus areas (described below). A summary of the topics discussed are presented in section 4 of this report.

Sustainable Livelihoods	Factors affecting how Canadians can provide for themselves and their families to live in rural communities that are economically and socially healthy.
Environmental Stewardship	Ways in which rural and urban communities can share with governments the responsibility for good management, the benefits of natural resources and a healthy environment.
Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure	Approaches allowing communities, working together with governments, to develop and maintain physical, social and knowledge-based infrastructure that addresses their needs.

Engaged Populations and Institutions	Opportunities for institutions and governments to provide the environment where Canadians can actively participate in making decisions that affect the community.
Demographic Adaptation	Openness to the range of options rural communities may need to consider in order to adapt to ongoing changes in population, economics and services.

4. IMPROVING COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY AND VIABILITY

Rural communities face multiple challenges. International, national, regional and local factors all play a role in their current realities and future potential. Rural challenges are cross-cutting, they do not fall neatly within the mandate of one government department or one level of government. Coordinated approaches are therefore required. As rural communities are very diverse, actions to improve community sustainability should be flexible and sensitive to local circumstances. To meet rural challenges and maximize opportunities, communities and all levels of government should work together.

4.1 Challenges and risks related to the viability of rural communities

As stakeholders active in the development of their communities, participants at the Humboldt Roundtable provided their perspectives on current rural challenges. A number of risks were identified and some common challenges emerged such as: addressing demographic changes; supporting Aboriginal people; addressing the decline of agriculture; supporting economic development; and providing and maintaining infrastructure.

4.1.1 Demographic Changes

Demographic changes, such as the out-migration of people, the aging population and the resulting population decline, are significant threats to the viability of rural communities. Youth migrate to urban centres for educational and employment opportunities. Seniors migrate due to or in anticipation of declining health care services in rural areas. Aboriginal people - a growing demographic in Saskatchewan, especially youth - move to urban areas due to inadequate housing and the lack of basic services on reserves.

Immigration strategies are needed in rural communities. Attracting immigrants to the Humboldt area is one strategy that would help address the current and considerable labour shortage issue and would contribute to reducing the population decline.

4.1.2 Supporting Aboriginal People

Steps should be taken to support Aboriginal people to more fully participate in Saskatchewan's economy, particularly in strategic planning processes. First Nations (FN) reserves are some of

the few places that have a rising demographic. This wealth of potential should be targeted and support provided in the areas of: education, skills development, leadership, mentorship and advisory services, and business development and funding. Without these, the number of Aboriginal people on welfare will continue to increase. One participant indicated that a number of problems are poverty related, such as literacy, health and addictions.

The lack of or limited access to funding is a major challenge for Aboriginal people seeking to start and expand a business. There are no one-stop shops for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to access all programs and services. Many Aboriginal people are not comfortable in dealing with non-Aboriginal advisors of the Canada Business Service Centres where there is a general lack of understanding of their people and culture.

While funding is available from Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC), the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) and through the Venture Capital Funds (VCF), many Aboriginal people lack the money, equity/assets and credit rating necessary to qualify for loans and secure the bridge financing. They are also more limited in terms of expertise to develop business plans. Many Aboriginal communities rely on funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, which in turn creates a false sense of economy on reserves. Aboriginal people living off reserves are turned away from their bands when seeking business funding. They are informed that bands have no money for economic development and that off-reserve Aboriginal people are not entitled to assistance.

The creation of large band ventures usually relies on the leadership and advice of off-site non-Aboriginal consultants who have limited knowledge of what is needed to sustain or address past, present and future challenges. Additionally, these ventures only benefit the few band members that manage or are involved in these operations instead of benefiting the entire band. Greater emphasis should be placed on supporting and creating small privately owned Aboriginal businesses that have a potential to grow. However, it was noted that Aboriginal businesses in small towns are not frequented by non-Aboriginal people and consequently fail as they cannot develop or increase their customer base. Furthermore, the business community in some small towns is usually not receptive to the Aboriginal community and show a lack of interest in bridging economic and social gaps.

4.1.3 The Decline of Agriculture

Agriculture is in a depressed state. A long-term Canadian agriculture vision is needed for this industry. Even though there is value-added in this industry, a fundamental problem exists in competing with world prices as expenses are growing drastically. Low commodity prices send a ripple throughout every business in an agriculture dependent community.

Forty-seven (47) percent of Canada's farm lands are in Saskatchewan, at the same time the number of Saskatchewan farmers is declining. Many agricultural producers cannot get out of farming because there are few potential buyers. This is probably due to a lack of farm income, the cost to buy machinery and products (e.g. chemicals) and the current commodity prices.

One participant noted that some people who obtain another job to supplement their farm operations eventually give up farming as that job is more profitable. While U.S. agricultural policies are flawed, they help American citizens – competitors of Canadians – make a living.

For instance, cash returns of Iowa corn growers and hog operations are high and guaranteed because they operate under different sets of rules than in Canada.

Predictable, fair and adequate farm income and farm disaster programs are needed. The Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) program is unfair and should be improved to ensure that farmers are treated with respect. More collaborative agriculture and public good research are needed, where all players would increase their contributions. This research should be planned for and coordinated over a 10-year period.

4.1.4 Economic Development

Communities are the basic foundation of society and should therefore be supported to ensure they remain or become sustainable. Economic development, particularly in an agriculture or resource-based economy, is a challenge in rural communities. The tourism industry is affected by the outdated road signage policies. Economic development that also pits communities against each other or that destroys the sense of community and quality of life accelerates the demise of a community. While some communities are strong and viable, others are not likely to grow because they lack the capacity to advance. Communities need a leadership strategy to help them move forward and learn.

As a result of declining rural populations and decaying infrastructure, the cost of operating a business in rural Saskatchewan is increasing while markets are shrinking. This has caused the closure of many small businesses in rural communities which has in turn forced a number of people to relocate to larger centres to gain employment and to access goods and services. Small businesses also face stiff competition from government in attracting qualified personnel due to government pay structures and benefits. As one participant noted:

“In small business we get what is left over from the government workforce.”

Property tax assessment practices are outdated. The existing assessment system was invented many years ago when the ability to pay was demonstrated by the size of a house. This is no longer true for the residential and business community. The current system should be changed as it punishes those who upgrade or build new facilities and does not consider the services being provided through these facilities.

Entrepreneurs, individuals and organizations face significant barriers in accessing capital and other resources and in finding out about the necessary requirements to move forward on projects. Provincial government departments are sometimes at odds with each other. Government practices are often hard to understand and seen as unfair. Timelines for getting services and other resources are too long. Programs that are poorly designed result in having to fit projects to what is available instead of what is needed. Some government bureaucrats located in urban centres have little understanding of how their decisions affect real life in rural Saskatchewan.

The Action Committee on the Rural Economy (ACRE) assists communities by identifying opportunities and by trying to remove regulation and programming barriers. They found that there are 1,800 programs in support of entrepreneurs, delivered through seven (7) different agencies at all levels of government. Despite the high number of programs, ACRE discovered

that accessing these programs was difficult and in some cases made more difficult by the sheer number of choices of programs. There is a need to collapse this multitude of programs into fewer more meaningful programs.

4.1.5 Infrastructure

Funding and maintaining infrastructure (e.g. water, health and educational facilities, etc.) and services is a challenge for rural Saskatchewan communities. Many closures of hospitals, schools, grain elevators and rail lines, among others, occurred in recent years. The reduction in population impacts the ability of governments at all levels to sustain services. It was noted that Saskatchewan has a new federal/provincial infrastructure program. This new deal should address and reduce some infrastructure pressures and could be used for growth.

A number of services found in larger centres are not available in rural communities. The need to transport goods and for people to travel greater distances to access services using roads has increased as goods and services are no longer available in smaller centres. These factors have increased the cost of maintaining roads and other infrastructure. While both the federal and provincial governments collect taxes from road users, money collected is not reflected in the conditions of the roads.

Without roads that are safe, well-maintained, upgraded and usable by all economic sectors (e.g. agricultural, energy, tourism and manufacturing), rural Saskatchewan cannot be viable and be able to move forward. Tourists and businesses will not continue to take part in attractions and activities due to poor road maintenance. Manufacturers will not continue to operate a business in a community they cannot get their personnel, equipment and products in and out of because roads are inadequate. Inadequate roads also limit access to health care services, educational facilities, and recreational facilities and activities, among others.

Resources should be directed to improve the education system, including funding of telecommunications infrastructure. These are valuable in helping to retain youth in rural communities. Rural daycare is something that rural women have been requesting for a decade and that is needed in rural communities. Urban developed service models (e.g. health care) are sometimes implemented in rural communities without first considering if these will work in a rural setting, which in turn is frustrating for these communities.

4.2 Priorities for government collaboration

Participants were invited to make suggestions as to what roles governments could play and what priorities should shape government activities, in addressing communities' challenges over the next three to five years. These are presented under the relevant NRF areas of focus.

4.2.1 Sustainable Livelihoods

A long-term Canadian agriculture vision should be developed through collaboration between the federal and provincial governments, industry stakeholders, farm organizations and communities, but should be led by the Government of Canada. This should include improved

support for farmers and increased commodity prices. Without better support, an entire agriculture dependent community can be at risk. Community jobs (e.g. in nursing homes, schools) are often filled by the spouses of farmers, and local businesses depend on citizens working in the agriculture sector. As noted by one participant:

“There is a lesson to be learned from the Americans and their work between Congress and the Senate in forming a national vision for agriculture.”

The current federal/provincial split (60:40) of the farm income program costs should be changed. The financial responsibility should be increased on the federal side (e.g. 75:25 or 80:20) to match programs across Canada. It was noted that program decisions are primarily made by the Government of Canada.

To ensure communities become or remain sustainable, commitment is needed by all levels of government. Attitudes and methods of doing things must change. Governments should think beyond conventional economic development and growth as this does not necessarily translate into an increased quality of life. For instance, if a big business settles in a rural community but offers low wages, it is the business that profits. An employee may need two jobs to make a living, which in turn affects his quality of life. Small and medium-sized enterprises need to be supported to create employment opportunities, with competitive salaries and benefits, in rural communities.

Collaboration is needed to provide mentoring, partnering and funding to Aboriginal people to encourage their involvement in the economy. Support in these three areas would in turn help with succession planning at all levels of employment and business.

Research should be the responsibility of both the federal and provincial governments. The Government of Canada has moved away from public good research to favour partnerships. Although this can be good, some areas are being overlooked.

4.2.2 Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure

Governments should address social problems that affect economic development and work with rural communities to determine their needs in these areas. Funding and maintaining infrastructure and services should be a priority for both levels of government. Information technology and communication infrastructures, including training to use these technologies, are needed to participate in the knowledge-based economy. The Community Access Program (CAP) and SchoolNet were cited as technological infrastructures that provide youth the means to prosper in rural Canada. As stated by one participant:

“The top 20 careers in North America? ...those with a computer base – these jobs don’t include farming or trapping.”

Education and other incentives, such as bursaries, scholarships, future tax credits and low interest loans, should be offered to Aboriginal youth to encourage them to remain in Saskatchewan and participate in the workforce off reserve. Partnerships should also be

developed with Aboriginal communities in the areas of apprenticeships, trades and other professions, to promote access and participation in the workforce.

4.2.3 Engaged Populations and Institutions

Federal and provincial ministers and governments should work together regardless of political stripes. For instance, the provincial Regional Economic Development Authorities and the federal Community Futures Development Corporations have separate funding, offices and staff even though their goal is to support economic development.

The federal and provincial governments should involve others (e.g. municipal government officials, leaders, stakeholders) to cooperatively work together. All players who can make the rural economy grow should be involved from the very beginning to accomplish the work. Governments should also enable and support regions to work in partnerships. The Government of Canada should act as facilitator on the solutions proposed by community leaders.

Governments should ensure all stakeholders, including Aboriginal people, take part in strategic decision-making processes. For instance, the FN band governments could be a source of direction related to the inclusion of FN people. Governments should help create closer linkages to the Aboriginal population. Non-Aboriginal residents of Saskatchewan should be educated about the past, present and future contribution of the Aboriginal population to create an understanding that both cultures can move forward in partnership and harmony.

4.2.4 Demographic Adaptation

Governments should work on sustaining the rural population, which is directly affected by the lack of services and the decaying infrastructure in rural communities. They should make greater efforts to encourage immigration in rural communities.

4.3 Actions for governments

Participants were invited to make recommendations as to what actions governments should take to address the priorities identified in support of rural community viability.

The Government of Canada should lead the development of a long-term Canadian agriculture vision in collaboration with the provincial government, industry stakeholders and farm organizations. Agriculture and public good research, involving all key players (e.g. producers), should be undertaken. A comprehensive and long-term research plan would need to be developed in order to the identify gaps.

Governments should ensure that Canadian farmers are on the same level playing field as the rest of the world in terms of commodity prices. The Government of Canada should improve the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program by establishing a longer period to reach the needed income margins. The Canadian Wheat Board's pricing for the inventory of commodities is unfair.

Governments should examine and change the current taxation systems and the regulations that limit rather than enhance economic development in rural communities. It was suggested that a tax incentive program be developed to attract businesses to establish or expand their business in rural Canada. The focus of such a program should be on attracting business types that will create long-term employment opportunities instead of attracting short-term initiatives (e.g. employment on a five-year project). Governments should eliminate the duplication of administrative services by consolidating them.

Governments should measure economic development against environmental and social impacts. Social development should be as important as economic development. Ensuring that rural communities have a sound social base is key. Municipal governments should be treated as important partners in discussions related to environmental issues, economic development and social development. Governments should provide guidance rather than regulate community actions and processes. Economic, social and business lens should be developed for use by government departments. Governments should track economic and social development (e.g. literacy rates, housing conditions, number of high school graduates) and create benchmarks in these areas.

Governments should provide support for leadership in economic development. They should also provide income tax credits to those who contribute to the economic development of their community or region. Greater flexibility in government funding would assist rural communities in ensuring their sustainability. Governments should encourage communities to work in cooperation, instead of competing with each other to develop their economy, and to exchange ideas and information. In this context, one participant stated:

“We are all in this together, and a collaborative approach that looks at the needs of all is required.”

Governments should assist rural communities in diversifying their economies, especially in the agriculture sector. They should increase their support for the creation of more private enterprises. Governments should encourage and support communities to build their own industries and processing plants. It was suggested that changes be made in the way farms and businesses are financed and can be transferred to the next generation. Young people wanting to take over the family farm or business cannot do so if they have to capitalize it.

Governments should develop new and different strategies that address challenges related to both physical and social infrastructure, including providing services to rural Canadians. For instance, providing education does not have to be in a school building. One participant, noting that many current problems are a direct result of doing things the same for too long, indicated:

“Innovate – don’t be afraid to find new solutions to the problems of transportation, schooling, health care, environmental issues and social issues.”

Governments should make significant infrastructure investments in rural Saskatchewan. The infrastructure priorities that have been established by the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities should be addressed. Governments should provide funding to develop parks and build recreational centres as these contribute to the quality of life in rural communities.

Governments should take action to make apprenticeship programs equitable (e.g. journeyman/apprenticeship ratio, duration of classroom training) across all provinces and territories. Training programs should be developed to train key trades (e.g. plumbers, electricians, machinists) that are in short supply in rural areas.

Federal and provincial government ministers should acknowledge the Aboriginal people. They should include the Aboriginal people at all levels to ensure participation in the economic, social and political development of Saskatchewan and Canada. It was noted that Aboriginal people may be reserved but acknowledging their cultural traditions may alleviate tensions. Trust building will also be needed to initiate meaningful dialogue to initiate change. Governments should invite Aboriginal people to participate in formulating policies that establish Aboriginal people as stakeholders in all areas, encourage the teaching and influence of FN Elders, and promote the leadership recommended by FN Elders.

Government should increase the education funding for Aboriginal people to be reflective of this growing population, to encourage Aboriginal youth to consider future opportunities and to participate in the workforce and economy. They should provide access to job markets in business and government. Governments should encourage entrepreneurship, education (e.g. trade skills) and partnerships with FN reserves. It was suggested that leadership and job skills training, basic skills in accounting and business management, and resource material be made available at the band school level.

Governments should provide capital for Aboriginal people to start or improve a business. They should also encourage non-Aboriginal sectors to use the services of existing or new Aboriginal businesses. Incentives should be provided to small communities to hire Aboriginal people which would in turn promote interaction and partnering. Governments should also provide incentives to Aboriginal entrepreneurs who mentor Aboriginal youth in business, in the workplace or at conferences.

Governments should customize immigration programs to repopulate rural areas and address labour shortage issues. This should include providing significant incentives to attract immigrants as well as developing entrepreneurial programs for them in the areas of manufacturing, processing, trades, operating a business and for other professions. Control periods of such programs should be established to sustain the ties of immigrants to the rural communities.

In areas with a large Aboriginal population, governments should emphasize economic development opportunities and training programs for Aboriginal people rather than providing immigrants opportunities in an Aboriginal community that has a significant unemployment rate. In this context, the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee program should be amended. This program allows businesses to bring in immigrants to solve labour retention problems created by low pay and poor working conditions. Governments should make long-term investments in the Aboriginal community - a population committed to remaining in the province - instead of depending on immigration as a short-term solution to population decline and labour shortage. Such investments would result in declining welfare rolls.

Governments should include rural Canadians (e.g. leaders, stakeholders) on decision-making boards. They should also collaborate with Aboriginal communities on various programs. The Government of Saskatchewan should give a stronger voice to the Aboriginal people by involving them in meaningful dialogues on the political, economic and social structure of the province. It was suggested that the importance of the Aboriginal people to the economy and province as a whole be taught in schools of non-Aboriginal communities to foster equality and respect. This should include creating awareness about the Treaties and the Canadian, provincial and territorial obligations.

Governments should develop sustainable community profiles. This should include conducting research to determine the correlation between community services and population decline, and between retention and growth. Particularly, determining which core services are needed to sustain a viable community, and when citizens should leave their community to relocate to one that offers the necessary services. These factors would be essential in selecting pilot communities, which would then assist communities in making decisions about their infrastructure investments.

4.4 Roles for communities and stakeholders

Participants were invited to make suggestions as to what roles communities and stakeholders should play in addressing the issues and approaches discussed.

Municipal governments should take greater interest in the bigger aspects of environmental issues, economic development and social development. To achieve sustainability, communities must be prepared to develop their social capital and have the capacity to easily adapt to change. Communities should develop their own economic and social development strategies. Defining a region as a community could be a way in ensuring sustainability. For example, the Battlefords Tribal Council, through the Regional Economic Development Authority, established a one-stop service/training centre in a vacant space of a Community Futures Development Corporation office.

Economic and social development strategies should be developed in collaboration with all stakeholders, including Aboriginal people, and be based on mutually beneficial ideas and principles, which would in turn encourage cooperation. Agreements could be prepared between all municipalities to work together. Individuals in rural communities should take on an active leadership role by getting involved in decision-making bodies. Incentives should be provided to Aboriginal people to encourage their participation.

It was suggested that Regional Economic Development Authorities or similar community organizations develop and coordinate local repopulation and community development initiatives. This would include facilitating the participation of key business and community leaders to provide support for these new initiatives, and obtaining appropriate community buy-in and support.

Communities should conduct SWOT analysis – identifying their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats – and then promote their respective strengths and opportunities. Greater importance should be placed on work done at the community level by the municipal government, non-profit and service organizations, churches, schools and youth groups.

The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), in partnership with the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), is identifying barriers municipalities are creating on themselves. March and April 2006 province-wide workshops, co-hosted by SUMA and SARM, will focus on things that can be done to cooperate. It was noted that planning committees are needed in some Saskatchewan communities and that lessons can be learned from planning mistakes of cities.

Communities should provide support for entrepreneurship and economic development. It was suggested that attractive municipal tax regimes be developed and offered. Similar communities should work together to provide the services needed to sustain rural Saskatchewan. Communities could help in trying to attract new land buyers and private businesses.

Saskatchewan communities should acknowledge the difference in the quality of life between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies. They should approach existing issues, address current challenges and consider opportunities in an innovative, consistent and systematic way. For instance, a proactive and long-term approach should be developed to address the education issues being faced by Aboriginal people in the province. Communities should also play a role in educating non-Aboriginal residents about the role of Aboriginal people in the overall vision of Saskatchewan and Canada.

Communities could become local points of contact for government programs and services and facilitators between governments and Francophone communities in Saskatchewan.

4.5 Projected outcomes and results

Participants were invited to share the outcomes and results they expect from government actions over the next three to five years to address the priorities raised throughout the dialogue. **Participants envisaged many positive outcomes for their communities.**

All levels of government would collaborate to improve the viability of and quality of life in rural communities. This collaboration would result in:

- a formal strategy being developed to ensure the sustainability of rural communities;
- resources being provided for community planning;
- a concrete action plan, with measurable objectives, being prepared to implement the strategy;
- the quality of life in rural and urban communities and between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population being equitable;
- an immigration strategy - identifying the targeted population to increase the chance of long-term success - being developed to attract immigrants to rural areas;
- appropriate support being provided to help immigrants and host communities bond;
- the implementation of the immigration strategy being evaluated and modified as needed; and
- the rural population decline being slowed down.

Governments and communities would support the Aboriginal population by fostering a change in attitudes. For instance:

- the value of the Aboriginal people to the country would be promoted in educational institutions and through the media and by communities;
- educational curricula would include creating awareness and understanding of the treaties and of the Aboriginal people - their history, culture, demographics, and present involvement, future goals;
- youth from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities would interact in a more positive and respectful manner; and
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities would:
 - develop relationships by being involved in each others community;
 - develop and implement strategies and agreements in collaboration with all stakeholders;
 - work together toward common goals and future development;
 - create community and business partnerships.

A long-term Canadian agriculture vision would be developed in collaboration between the federal and provincial governments, industry stakeholders, farm organizations and communities. The agricultural sector would be supported and encouraged. For example:

- a competitive environment would be fostered in this sector;
- regulations that support growth in this industry would be developed;
- an easy to understand program would be developed to pay farmers what their product is worth, and in turn encourage existing farmers and attract new ones;
- less raw agricultural materials would be exported;
- infrastructure would be provided to develop agricultural businesses;
- a better farm disaster program (e.g. Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization) would be developed; and
- an agriculture and public good research strategy would be developed.

Governments would support social and economic development of rural communities. For instance:

- social and economic indicators would be tracked;
- a single window system for economic development would be developed and funded by multiple governments - for instance, bilateral agreements between the Government of Canada and the Regional Economic Development Authority of the province;
- additional ways would be found to collect investments from communities themselves;
- regulations that limit rather than enhance economic development would be analyzed and changed - such as inter-provincial ones;
- application for funding would be easier to access and be simplified;
- government programs would be coordinated, streamlined, and easier to access and navigate;

- tax incentives and seed money rather than grants would be provided to support local communities;
- credit would be made easier to access for communities to develop;
- a tax incentive program would be developed and implemented to specifically encourage businesses to establish or expand their businesses in rural areas; and
- rural communities would become more independent.

If governments followed through on the actions outlined in this report, rural communities would have the tools, capacity and infrastructure necessary to ensure their long-term viability and to revitalize their economy. For instance:

- more government services would be available in rural areas;
- governments would significantly increase funding for rural infrastructure;
- technological infrastructure (e.g. high speed Internet) would be provided in rural communities;
- education would be delivered in innovative ways;
- educational opportunities would be made available to Aboriginal people, immigrants and rural citizens to develop careers;
- job placements would be offered to Aboriginal people to participate in the economy; and
- daycare would be provided in rural communities.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEP

Participants at the Humboldt Roundtable were satisfied with the results of the event and felt that the event had met their expectations.

They saw all levels of government as having a role to play in ensuring long-term sustainability and viability of rural areas, it should start with communities themselves. Communities should take steps to build their capacity, identify their strengths and weaknesses, be adaptable and plan strategically for their future. All levels of government should collaborate with communities in such activities, by providing them resources and access to educational and training opportunities, while increasing the flexibility of their programs to better meet rural circumstances. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities should also work together towards common goals and future development, resulting in bridging economic and social gaps.

*“... communities are the basic foundation of society, and without sustainable communities, all else will fail
... sustainable communities can only be developed as a whole package.”*

Participants also stressed that the agriculture sector plays an important role in the economy of Saskatchewan and Canada and needs to be better supported and strengthened. In this context, a long-term Canadian agriculture vision, as well as regulations that support growth in this sector, should be developed. Better farm income and farm disaster programs should be developed or existing ones improved, and commodity prices should be increased to create a competitive environment.

Social and economic development was viewed as very important to the sustainability of rural communities. It is important for all players (e.g. municipal government, community leaders, Aboriginal people, stakeholders, etc.) to participate in discussions on development. Immigration is an important means to reduce population decline and address labour shortage; however, investments should be made in the Aboriginal population - a growing demographic - to capitalize on this wealth of potential that can contribute to the economy. Increased support to Aboriginal communities is especially needed in the areas of education, employment and business development. Governments should support rural and Aboriginal businesses by improving access to capital and programs, by removing regulatory barriers, and by providing tax incentives. Rural businesses should receive assistance in providing employment opportunities at competitive salaries and benefits in order to address labour shortages by attracting qualified personnel.

It was felt that governments should be innovative in providing communities the necessary infrastructure and services to ensure their viability. Technological infrastructure (e.g. high speed Internet) provides youth with access to education and provides businesses the opportunity to participate in the knowledge-based economy. Physical infrastructure (e.g. roads) is essential to encourage businesses to remain or settle in rural communities, access goods and services and attract tourists. Social infrastructure (e.g. educational, health care and daycare facilities, housing) is needed for rural citizens to access training opportunities, obtain essential services and improve their quality of life.

As a next step, the Humboldt Roundtable discussions will help guide the federal and the Saskatchewan governments as they continue to explore opportunities for cooperative and joint action in support of rural community viability. Federal/provincial work to date on the proposed National Rural Framework has identified opportunities for collaboration in all five areas of focus: sustainable livelihoods; environmental stewardship; innovative approaches to rural infrastructure; engaged populations and institutions; and demographic adaptation.