



ACTION COMMITTEE ON THE RURAL ECONOMY

Community in Evolution Subcommittee Report

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INTRODUCTION

Communities are the backbone of the social and economic viability of rural Saskatchewan - the foundation upon which our future rests.

The Community in Evolution Sub-Committee focused its efforts on:

- analysis of issues and trends in rural Saskatchewan,
- development of a picture of what our communities will look like in 10-15 years, and
- development of strategies that will ensure strong, sustainable, vibrant rural communities.

Overview

The Community in Evolution Subcommittee was mandated to develop strategies that will ensure strong, sustainable, vibrant rural communities. The subcommittee consulted, researched, analyzed and sought technical expertise to gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding and picture of rural Saskatchewan communities “today”. A variety of rural Saskatchewan residents, community groups and organizations were invited to make presentations. A survey was conducted in conjunction with the Rural Service Sector Subcommittee on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding rural communities and the rural service sector. The feedback from all of these venues was integral to the development of our recommendations and wherever possible, we have tried to incorporate that feedback in our report.

The subcommittee also retained the services of Doug Elliott from Sask Trends Monitor, to undertake in-depth research and analysis on community trends. Several of Mr. Elliott’s findings are cited in this report.

It was apparent from our findings that “status quo” was not part of the solution and the subcommittee’s recommendations are reflective of this message.

No one factor can be pointed to as the cause of rural decline. They are all interconnected; that is to say, each factor is dependant on the other, e.g. infrastructure, social programs or business, to sustain and grow rural Saskatchewan.

Government is being asked to change the way in which it works with rural Saskatchewan. Communities want the erosion of their infrastructure and services to stop. Rural Saskatchewan cannot grow and diversify without them. They want Government to set in place a comprehensive long-term rural strategy and action plan, and they want to be engaged and involved from the grassroots level. Rural Saskatchewan needs sustained commitment. Finally, they want Government to deliver a message that community development will be supported in Saskatchewan. Rural Saskatchewan cannot prosper without addressing a community’s economic, environmental and social needs in unison.

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

I. Rural Opportunities

That the provincial government will:

- a) Develop and implement an on-going and long-term (20 years) rural strategy and comprehensive action plan that focuses on all sectors and utilizes the strengths in rural Saskatchewan.
- b) Create a Rural Opportunities Office (Rural Revitalization Office be renamed the Rural Opportunities Office) to work with rural Saskatchewan (an ACRE-type broadly based process) in developing strategies and action plans.

The Rural Opportunities Office will:

- be accountable to rural Saskatchewan,
- serve rural citizens through the mechanisms of policy, service delivery, and investment with a “one stop, no wrong door” approach,
- champion rural issues and initiatives, e.g. infrastructure, economic and community development, health, education, etc., to ensure departments work together to minimize red tape, barriers and to address overlap and duplication, and,
- lead by:
 - pulling together a cross-departmental team to work with rural people on initiatives and issues,
 - developing a cross-departmental funding strategy and sourcing the funds,
 - implementing the funding strategy to enable common table/forums at the regional level (Opportunity Regions) and provincial level (ACRE-like group), and,
 - providing a toll free telephone access, developing its own website with an interactive, comprehensive data base, which co-ordinates, integrates existing data, and fills any identified database gaps.

II. Co-ordinated Services

That the provincial government will:

- a) Encourage and enable the emergence of “Opportunity Regions” from the grassroots in rural Saskatchewan to alleviate the multiplicity of regional boundaries and to foster community development by:
 - providing incentives for collaboration and coordination,
 - stopping the erosion of government delivered services from rural areas while this process evolves,
 - working with the existing grassroots organizations (REDAs, West Central Municipal Government Committee, Mid Lakes Community Coalition and other grassroots regional groups) to establish “Opportunity Regions”, and,
 - aligning all regionally delivered provincial programs and services with the grassroots “Opportunity Regions”

To encourage and enable this regional process, the following stages were identified and must occur concurrently at both the regional and provincial levels:

Stage 1:

Role of the “Opportunity Region”:

- lead and utilize what is working now, to identify common issue/region,
- develop and/or build on common tables/ forums, and,
- encourage involvement from all social, economic and environmental departments, agencies, and groups/organizations, etc.

Role of the Provincial Government/
Rural Opportunity Office:

- provide incentives and on-going technical support to encourage and enable common tables/forums through utilization of what is working now.

Stage 2:

Role of the “Opportunity Region”:

- utilize common tables/forums to provide community development programs, services, and enable inter-community and municipal co-operation,
- use the Rural Opportunity Office (ROO) to coordinate social, economic, and environmental development across government departments/agencies, and,
- become a common holistic (social, economic and environmental) region for service delivery coordination through common boundaries and government collaboration by 2005.

Role of the Provincial Government/Rural Opportunity Office:

- utilize the “Opportunity Regions” through the Rural Opportunity Office (ROO) to build on, modify, and expand regional structures to deliver holistic community development (social, economic and environmental),
- provide on-going government support to enable common table approaches and service delivery at the “Opportunity Regions” level throughout the province,
- realign government departments and agencies on the same regional basis as the “Opportunity Regions” (moving to more common boundaries for a responsive means of service delivery), and,
- ensure government departments and agencies utilize the “Opportunity Region” to enable coordinated service delivery by 2005 (all government departments will align resources to match identified needs of each region).

III. Financial Support for Community Development

That the provincial government will:

- a) Establish the “Saskatchewan Opportunities Foundation” in a partnership between government and rural Saskatchewan. This enables government to support business and development in the province. It will transfer the decision-making for business and community development funding programs to the Foundation. It requires that government maintain a leadership role in:

research and development, technical expertise, and long-term sustainable funding by:

- Entering into a long-term, on-going (20 year plus) agreement (in alignment with GDP recommendations and projections) to help fund the Saskatchewan Opportunities Foundation. The fund will be established through the public funds including new monies, PST revenue and the consolidation of current provincial funding programs, and private investment/tax credits. Government will identify funding programs from all departments that fit within the goals and objectives of the Foundation and transfer the monies for those programs to the Foundation in order to significantly streamline the funding process.
- Operating the Foundation as a self-perpetuating, long-term, patient entity that is removed from the politics of the day. Significant financial commitments will be required from government during the start-up years. A broadly based board of directors, representing the diversity of community and regional stakeholders, will manage and administer the Foundation. The Foundation will be at arms-length from the government.

Saskatchewan Opportunities Foundation

Goal:

- To effect sustainable community development in Saskatchewan

Objectives:

- To provide one-stop point of access for individuals, businesses, and community organizations in need of funding assistance.
- To support community development.
- To recognize that there are times when rural businesses require a greater percentage of assistance due to a larger number of obstacles—offers a hand up not a hand out.
- To assess applications based on their “social”, “economic” and “environmental” contributions to the community and/or labour force development.
- To provide quick turn around on funding decisions.

- To tailor funding based on the need of the business or community group rather than program criteria. Overarching principles such as community support, viability, public good, accountability and past performance will be considered.
- To provide the business and/or community organization with continuity. (Foundation is aware of background and the next stage in development versus applying to various government departments.)
- To maximize federal funding due to third party status.
- To maximize private investment through various tax incentives.
- To provide on-going, long-term sustainability.

Types of Funding:

The Foundation will offer multi-faceted levels of funding, including:

- Grants for supporting existing, new or expanding businesses that could include:
 - feasibility studies,
 - business planning,
 - development of marketing plans/ implementation industry strategies, e.g. tourism,
 - Specific infrastructure required for business development (e.g. Manitoba Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) - Infrastructure Program) to assist communities to improve sewer, water, energy services, transportation access, waste disposal facilities, telecommunications, and,
 - transitional funding with flexibility around the percentage of eligible funding. Greater support will be given to those applications that fit within a community's/region's strategic plan for supporting new or expanding businesses.
- Loan Guarantees for business loans and capital costs for new or expanding full time small and home-based businesses. The loans would be offered and administered by banks and credit unions at an interest rate of prime plus 1%. Conditions of a matching component and a requirement for applicants to attend business seminars would be attached.

- Repayable Loans that offer financing to “high risk” businesses who wouldn't otherwise qualify for traditional loans and allows for flexible repayment terms that aren't necessarily structured around monthly installments.
- Scholarships and Bursaries - support training for jobs. Funding would be provided to businesses to pay a portion of training costs for small businesses with a tied commitment of the employee to stay in a job for a certain period of time (an apprenticeship type program). These training dollars would not be tied to entry-level positions. It would assist companies in enhancing skills of current employees. Similarly, it would also be used as a mentorship program for youth. Assistance would be provided to cover a portion of the youth's training in return for a tied commitment for return service.
- Grants for Leadership Training (see recommendation 7).
- Leadership training, as delivered through the Leadership Saskatchewan program, develops leaders that are able to step forward and lead in developing a long term vision, initiate projects and see them through to completion, thereby, leading to long-term viability for their community. It can revitalize volunteerism in communities. It enhances communication in a region, leading to collaboration to address regional issues and/or accomplish regional projects. As communities dialogue and work together on the modules, issues and community based projects. Leadership training can create a bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and communities by developing an understanding of cultural differences and commonalities.

IV Health/Emergency Services

That the provincial government will:

- a) stop the erosion of services and ensure essential health and emergency services are available in rural communities to sustain and enable development.
- b) Provide funding to:
 - match municipal contributions for emergency and fire protection equipment, telecommunications systems and GPS systems,

- ensure comprehensive 911 linkages to good, coordinated, dispatch services with GPS services for fire protection and emergency response,
- provide funding for adequate training for firemen, First Responders, and other rescue personnel for rural communities.

The following factors must be considered in providing these services:

- industry development,
 - business growth and expansion,
 - commuting population - traffic volumes/ transportation of dangerous goods, etc.,
 - location of closest primary/acute facilities, health centres, ambulance services, etc., and,
 - demographics (population would not be the only factor considered).
- c) Integrate fully the economic and social impacts affecting rural Saskatchewan into a health strategy in order to support the growth of the new rural economy (e.g. GDP menu options). A planned transition is critical to services such as good emergency health services, community based health services, home based health services, and adequate 911 response.
- d) Involve all rural residents, including First Nations, in the development and maintenance of rural health programming and services.
- e) Implement a province-wide 911 system immediately. Global positioning needs to be used with such a system and all mutual aid agreements must be in place and kept current. Adequate signage must be provided and maintained in rural areas to facilitate emergency response.

V. Education Grants/Property Tax

That the provincial government will:

- a) Retain but reduce educational funding from the property tax base. The resulting reduction in local revenue must be provided from general provincial revenues.
- b) Immediately complete the education system funding review — the Foundation Operating Grant process is not working.

VI. Working Together with Aboriginal Peoples

That Government and communities will:

- a) Work cooperatively with and build partnerships at all levels with Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Metis and Non-Status).
 - Meet with Aboriginal peoples and foster a shared understanding of our visions, and,
 - Develop working relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal communities on rural community development issues.

VII. Leadership Training

That the provincial government will:

- a) Provide funding for community-based leadership training initiatives through targeted grants under the Saskatchewan Opportunity Foundation. A comprehensive, broad based, ongoing approach is needed.

That all levels of government and other sectors will:

- a) Promote and enable leadership training which:
 - utilizes and builds on existing models and programs,
 - is comprehensive (beginning to advanced training),
 - is flexible to meet local needs. (e.g. past programs such as Co-op College training and present programs such as Leadership Sask),
 - is accessible through a variety of delivery modes,
 - is available to schools, clubs, community groups, businesses, local governments, First Nations, Metis Nation, and community organizations, and,
 - is accessible on a community and regional basis.

VIII. Diversity of K-12 Education

That the people of Saskatchewan will:

- a) Develop a vision of public education that promotes a broad liberal education at the secondary level, ensuring post-secondary institutions have a vision of specialized education.

- b) Adopt the philosophical structure of community schools in rural education systems as outlined by Saskatchewan Education. As a hub for a network of community organizations, community schools can foster the development and well being of the entire community.

That post-secondary institutions will:

- a) Change post-secondary requirements (real and assumed) to reflect the vision of public education. (e.g. calculus, 7 sciences).

IX. PST Revenue for Rural Development

- a) Amend the PST legislation to direct 5 of the 6 provincial tax points collected in urban Saskatchewan to the general provincial revenue and 1 provincial tax point to the Saskatchewan Opportunities Foundation.
- b) Amend the PST legislation to direct 2 of the 6 provincial tax points collected in rural Saskatchewan to the general provincial revenue, 2 provincial tax points to Saskatchewan Opportunities Foundation and 2 provincial tax points back to rural business and community.

BACKGROUND

The goal of ACRE is to build a network of strong, dynamic rural communities all across Saskatchewan - communities that can grow and prosper through a sustainable rural economy. The overall ACRE mandate is to act as a catalyst for exploring and generating innovative ideas for government and for industry that will address the challenges and the opportunities for sustainable economic development that could emerge from the changes that must occur in rural Saskatchewan.

The Community in Evolution Sub-Committee (see Appendix A for list of members) is one of eight action areas of ACRE formed to identify opportunities for government action to strengthen the rural economy of Saskatchewan.

The subcommittee conducted its meetings throughout the province in order to facilitate presentations from rural groups and individuals. The subcommittee held meetings in Watrous, Eston, Kenosee Lake, Fort Qu'Appelle, Humboldt, Davidson, Regina and Saskatoon (Appendix B). The subcommittee retained expertise to prepare a statistical report, Saskatchewan Community Profiles (Appendix C), to provide factual information and analysis on community trends from a variety of perspectives including, for example, demographic income and industry trends. As well, the subcommittee, in conjunction with the Rural Service Sector subcommittee conducted an analysis of rural

Saskatchewan that identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT-see Appendix D). The subcommittee also reviewed the reports and submissions of five other subcommittees.

The mandate of the Community in Evolution subcommittee is to provide a picture of what is happening in rural Saskatchewan other than on the farm. Questions and issues that were examined included the following:

- what is the current population and economic situation of our communities in rural Saskatchewan and how has that changed over time?
- given these trends, what will our network of communities look like in 10 to 15 years, and will they be able to adequately serve our efforts to maximize rural development?
- what can be done to ensure that social issues such as retaining youth and maximizing the opportunities for a growing Aboriginal population are addressed?

Many of the recommendations bear similarity to past recommendations, just as many of the issues are similar to those of past discussion forums. There are some significant trends to indicate that the situation has worsened. During the late 70s, throughout the 80s and into the 90s, rural Saskatchewan was seen to be those areas outside of

Saskatchewan's 10-12 cities; today, we are defining rural Saskatchewan as those areas outside of Regina and Saskatoon. Rural residents used to talk about how to keep people from moving to the cities; today, we are a province that is concerned about keeping people in Saskatchewan. There has been a general and steady deterioration of rural services. These trends must be reversed. The majority of the smallest of the rural communities will almost certainly decline in size but the larger communities have an opportunity to grow.

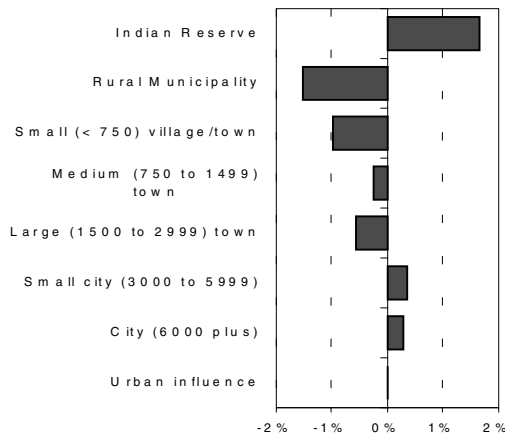
The challenge facing ACRE is grounded in demographic and socioeconomic realities. The rural population of Saskatchewan was approximately 550,000 persons in 1996 - 55% of the provincial population. Rural Saskatchewan is defined by excluding the population in the far North and in or near the Cities of Regina and Saskatoon. The population in rural Saskatchewan has been declining, on an almost continuous basis, since the 1950s.

Where are we now?

The current population decline follows a historical pattern of young people growing up on Saskatchewan's farms and in small towns and villages and then leaving for urban areas.

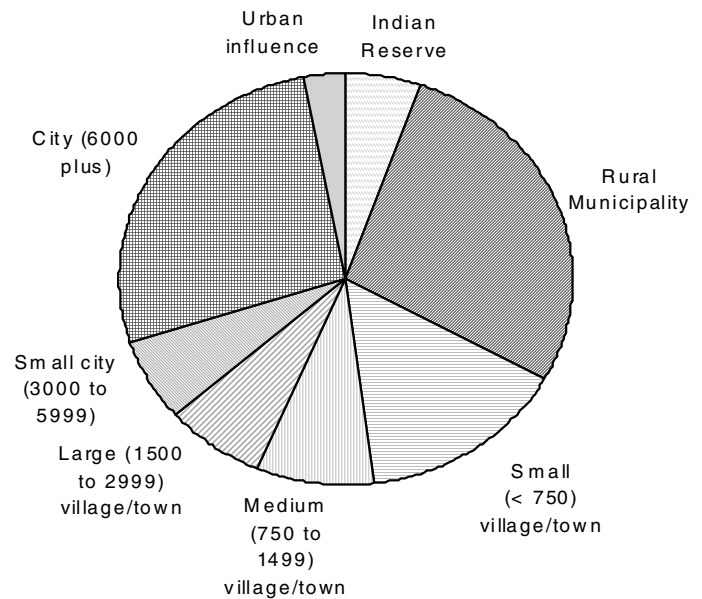
“Although there are exceptions, communities with smaller populations are declining more quickly than communities with larger populations.” (Average Annual Population Change-1981 to 1996)

Characteristics of current population of rural



Saskatchewan

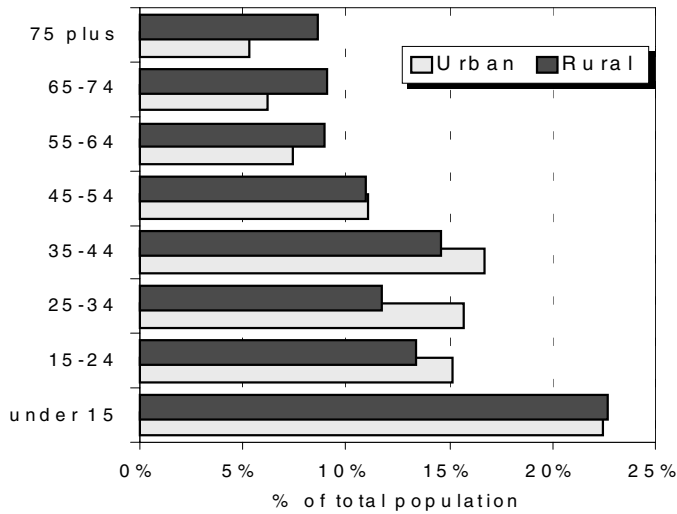
- An older non-Aboriginal population
- A young and growing Aboriginal population
- Lower levels of education and income
- A high dependence on government transfer payments
- A declining level of public services
- A declining service sector in small communities
- A decline in the economic activity of rural communities



Distribution of Population in Rural Saskatchewan (1996) shows the two extremes. “As a percentage of the rural population, 44% of residents live in rural municipalities or small villages/towns population under 750). At the other end of the scale, 33% live in communities with a population of 3,000 or more.”

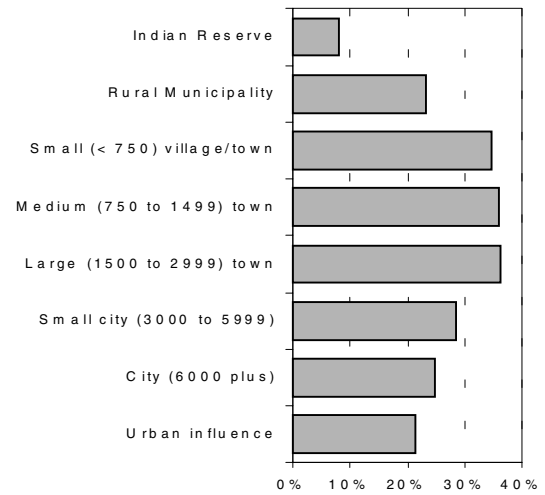
“Rural Saskatchewan has, relative to urban Saskatchewan, an older population. In 1996:

Age of Population



40% of the population was in the 15-44 age group compared with 48% of the urban population.

Proportion 55 and Older



27% of the population was 55 years and older compared with 19% of the urban population.

What if we don't move forward?

In examining the trends, studying reports and talking to rural people it is evident that the “status quo” is unacceptable. If the present trends continue, the rural population of Saskatchewan will continue to decline at a rate of nearly 1% per year.

While our committee has found evidence that larger communities in rural Saskatchewan tend to prosper, albeit at the expense of smaller communities in the surrounding area, there is evidence that a number of small communities are not following this trend. Smaller communities in rural Saskatchewan can grow, attract new industries, and retain young families. Population decline is not inevitable.

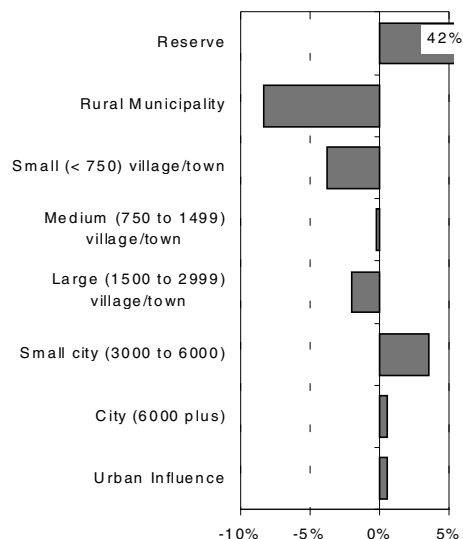
What do we need for the future?

If we look at the future of communities in rural Saskatchewan in a scenario that involves commitment, investment and growth, we see communities characterized by:

- Diversified economy: processing, tourism, agriculture, etc.;

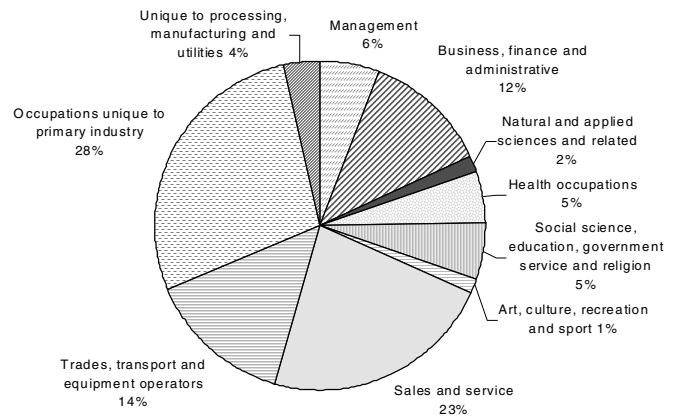
- Diverse population with a positive quality of life;
- Positive, proactive, co-operative, collaborative, regional approach to community development; and
- Sustainable education and health services in the community - the school as the centre of the community.

Employment Growth 1991 to 1996



“Employment is arguable the most important economic indicator for the health of the rural population. The employment rate has been effectively constant in the 1980s and 1990s, confirming the view that community populations rise and fall with the availability of work. This is also confirmed by the finding that the youth employment rate in rural Saskatchewan is higher than the overall employment rate.”

“Employment by Experienced Labour Force Occupation Group, Rural Saskatchewan, 1996 “shows the occupation breakdowns by rural community type...the occupational mix within industry groups is similar in rural Saskatchewan to the one in urban Saskatchewan...”



WHAT WE HEARD:

Rural Saskatchewan has many strengths...

...the Aboriginal population, one half of whom live in rural Saskatchewan, are a relatively young population that is **poised to contribute to the social and economic life of the province in a more significant way.**

...the ability of Saskatchewan farmers to find a way to provide the family’s income on 1,000 acres of farmland should not be discounted.

...a number of small communities are not following the pattern of **declining population.**

These exceptions show that even smaller communities in rural Saskatchewan can grow, attract new industries, and retain young families. Population decline is not inevitable.

The recommendations of our subcommittee build on rural Saskatchewan’s achievements; the members of the subcommittee are firm in the belief that if implemented, these recommendations will enable rural communities to achieve social and economic prosperity.

It is time for action.

RURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Background

A key strength of rural Saskatchewan identified through SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis was that it is an attractive place to set up a business. An innovative work force is available with a good work ethic and a multiplicity of abilities. By their nature farmers tend to be multi-skilled and many farmers and farm youth are seeking off farm work.

A further strength of the rural economy is the abundance of natural resources found in Saskatchewan. Advantages include an abundant supply of agricultural products, numerous tourist attractions and an abundant supply of inexpensive land. The agricultural sector is a potential source of strength for rural Saskatchewan.

In subcommittee consultations, working through government regulations was identified as a key concern for development project proponents in rural Saskatchewan. The current system is complicated and confusing for those working on projects. Lengthy response time is an issue. A pathfinder assistance and/or service is required, based on a coordinated team approach, that would assist clients in working through multi-level government bureaucracies and agencies. This service must respond quickly to rural development initiatives and find creative solutions for unique issues.

It is time for action.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...many successful projects had some key government support—someone in the bureaucracy who was in a position to support the project and facilitate the process.

CO-ORDINATED SERVICES

Background

Over the past decade, there has been a significant change in the way in which programs and services have been delivered in rural Saskatchewan. Regional planning, co-ordination and delivery has been encouraged by the provincial government as a way of eliminating duplication and achieving fiscal stability. However, for each provincial regional structure, there has been the introduction of a different regional boundary, e.g. Tourism regions, Area Transportation Committees, Health Districts, Regional Colleges, Social Services, ADD Boards, Crop Districts, REDAs, etc. The provincial government departments have not collaborated and coordinated with one another on their own regional service delivery. This multiplicity of provincial regional boundaries is creating major problems in development and delivery of services within rural areas. As a result:

- there is confusion, frustration and isolation at the local community level,
- development of a common, regional, co-operative, and holistic approach to the delivery of programs and services has not taken place,
- there is an inefficient service delivery system with different agencies and individuals working at cross purposes;
- programs and services (e.g. health, social services, education, tourism, highways, agriculture, economic, etc.) are fractured and eroded
- population figures are used as a base measure for the level of service delivered but each service uses a different population base, and,
- depleted rural population numbers have caused an erosion of services.

There has been a great deal of discussion around common boundaries, but this cannot be achieved until government departments align themselves with the grassroots regional boundaries that have been established.

The Regional Economic Development Authorities (REDAs) were the first organizations that were supported in defining their own grassroots regional boundaries. This grassroots process is not perfect.

WHAT WE HEARD:

... Why do we have different boundaries for health districts, school districts, REDA's, area transportation, social services, highways, tourism districts, regional colleges, ADD Boards, crop districts, emergency services (911 and fire districts), etc.?
... Has anyone given any thought to the negative social, economic, and environmental impact on rural development issues? – at the provincial, municipal, or any other level?
... We do not want to create another level of government or bureaucracy.

There are some areas in the province where the REDAs have not been perceived as fulfilling their mandates.

In an attempt to deal with common regional issues, problems or concerns various regional common table forums have emerged or are in the process of developing. To enable total, sustainable community/ regional development (social, economic and environmental) the forces of these common table forums where they exist must be utilized, expanded and strengthened. Motivation: “we can do more together than we can separately.”

The emergence of these common table forums has brought to the forefront the restrictive mandate of the REDAs. They are lacking the broader mandates of community development that goes beyond the economic aspects and encompasses the social and environmental aspects that are required to enable total, sustainable community/ regional development to occur.

All service delivery sectors (e.g. health, education, social services, transportation, etc.) cannot continue to work in isolation. To ensure total sustainable communities in the future, participation from all sectors is imperative to the common table process.

Throughout the consultation process one fundamental principle has been reinforced: any move towards common boundaries must be grassroots driven. Another level of regional authorities is not being recommended. There is a desire to work with the existing grassroots organizations that have been established voluntarily (REDAs, West Central Municipal Government Committee, Mid Lakes Community Coalition and other grassroots organizations) to encourage the development of common regional forums called “Opportunity Regions”. These would emerge through the discussion of common issues between all of the regional authorities. The following elements are seen to be key factors in developing the “Opportunity Regions”:

- RM boundaries
- trading areas
- population
- those regions currently working together
- geography
- creating an identity that is associated with an area or a region and not a particular town or city
- involvement of municipalities, school divisions, health districts, Aboriginal groups (including First Nation governments, tribal councils, Treaty organizations, Metis Regions), regional colleges, libraries, area transportation committees, social services, etc.

Primarily, the new “Opportunity Regions” would be an enhanced mandate of the existing REDAs, although, not necessarily in all regions. It is anticipated that there would be relatively the same number of “Opportunity Regions” as the existing REDA regions. Existing municipalities would retain their current boundaries.

The emergence of “Opportunity Regions” will require incentives from government to allow the collaboration and coordination to take place at the regional level.

It is time for action.

WHAT WE HEARD:

... We need to bring the social issues together with the economic issues. Many communities are dealing with a multiplicity of services even within provincial government services (providers are often unaware of each other’s involvement). It is very difficult to deliver service within the current structures.

...some regional forums are starting to evolve through voluntary participation like REDAs, why don’t we build on their strengths?

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Background

There is a gap in funding for community projects.

There has been a significant demand for project funding in rural Saskatchewan. However, the grant dollars made available have tended to be inadequate, targeted and somewhat inflexible. Rural residents have put forward many excellent project ideas — implementation is limited by minimal access to appropriate funding.

The winding down of the Partnership on Rural Development Program (PARD ended March, 1998) and more recently the Partnership on Water Based Economic Development Program (PAWBED ended December 1999), that were shared between the federal and provincial governments, has left a gap in funding for community projects.

The Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development in Saskatchewan (CARDS) Program has a limited mandate and is unable to fund non-agriculture rural projects.

In an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Saskatchewan communities undertaken by ACRE, strong support was expressed by municipalities, non-governmental agencies, the business sector and individuals for an increase in Government funding to facilitate development projects.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...“there are problems with the Securities Commission (ie. “Close Friends and Associates” regulations and Community Venture regulations) – restrictions of raising funds within a specified distance of the project ...many lending institutions have made it extremely difficult to raise capital for medium to large size projects.”

...often times the "social" agenda (impact on people in the community) gets overlooked when government funding decisions are made ...a business or community project must apply to several different programs during its development and start up phases.

Businesses and community groups don't know where to start—the magnitude of programs is overwhelming. Where do they start? How do they fit in? Do they qualify? What is required of them (community/business)?

...lost opportunity and jobs due to government's inability to be flexible on its funding program criteria.

...Government programs rise and fall with the politics of the day negating any long term planning and sustainability.

...politics and business investment do not mix consequently government is reluctant to get involved in direct investment.

...access to federal funding is precluded on some projects as provincial matching is not eligible.

...Government has directed more resources at cities than rural Saskatchewan.

Generally, it was identified that:

- access to capital for all projects is a problem,
- longer term, “patient” capital is required,
- funding lacks flexibility (e.g. “why do I have to match the project to the program criteria in order to be considered for funding?” or “program criteria falls short of meeting what the project requires”),
- transitional funding (e.g. switching to organic) needs to be available, and,
- timely response is required.

Manitoba has a similar program - the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) that annually receives \$17,750,000. The monies are directed towards such things as rural entrepreneur assistance, loan guarantees, infrastructure for business, feasibility studies, etc. The fund is also used to attract special or strategic projects through the provision of cash incentives.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...“Economic incentives to business are also favored. It is apparent that businesses and associations realize that the financial resources available in rural Saskatchewan today are not sufficient to enable the economy to revitalize on its own.”

...mentorship programs are needed to retain youth.

...apprenticeship programs are needed for all ages to assist small businesses with training costs.

...“a written submission to ACRE recommended “government **guarantee** investments to encourage investment in rural Saskatchewan.”

...This type of guarantee has proved to be effective in other jurisdictions such as Manitoba and North Dakota. In North Dakota such loan guarantees have been used extensively to promote New Generation Coops.

HEALTH/EMERGENCY SERVICES

Background

Lack of health services and uncertainty about access to health care services such as primary health care, home care emergency services are a major concern for rural Saskatchewan residents. People need to know what health services they can be assured of receiving within their rural communities.

Success breeds success. Successful industries in a community attract other support industries. It is next to impossible to attract quality industries, associated support industries, and to maintain existing ones, without essential service delivery.

Key considerations which must be factored into the delivery of health and emergency services, as opposed to using only population figures as a predictor of service needs, are:

- development of industry,
- the needs of seniors,
- the needs of families relocating to rural areas, and,
- the needs of rural schools in relation to health services.

Development can only happen with the assurance that adequate health and emergency services are in place within rural communities. Lack of equitable emergency services is a limiting factor in attracting development, maintaining on-going businesses and retaining the population base. Development will not happen without assurance of health/ emergency services being in place.

Further reform in the health care system could have further critical impact on the rural sector. Service provision based only on current population statistics would continue to deplete all health and emergency services. A meshing between industry development, economic, social and environment planning must happen to ensure the sustainability of rural Saskatchewan.

Another issue relates to First Nations in the health sector in rural Saskatchewan. There needs to be dialogue about relationship building among the health jurisdictions in rural Saskatchewan. First Nations are very important users of rural health services but

WHAT WE HEARD:

...health and emergency services within rural Saskatchewan are critical to:

- industry development
- families locating into rural areas
- seniors staying in rural communities
- business growth and expansion in rural communities
- K – 12 school survival in rural communities
- Labour force development in rural areas

...need to consider rural and remote health indicators beyond acute care services.

...need to consider social services, amount of industry, population, etc.

...a lot of health dollars have been spent on the Saskatchewan Health Information Network without seeing any results

...health care needs have to be determined at the regional/local level. Existing needs assessment is not adequate. (e.g. emergency services for outlying areas.)

play a limited role in the development and maintenance of health programming and services.

A further major concern was raised regarding the absence of a viable 911 system. Implementation of 911 services was initially announced in 1996; extensive work has been done on the system since 1998. While the entire south area of the province from Swift Current to Weyburn/Estevan and a small area around Prince Albert have been hooked up to

911 service (and the northern area as a whole is targeted for completion in 2001), the remaining Saskatoon and Regina regions are targeted for completion by the end of 2002. Coordination delays are identified as the main reason for the system not being fully implemented to date. All municipalities and districts need to be consulted to make sure all areas have the required services. Some areas do not have dispatch services and some areas do not have fire departments. Most fire departments are volunteer or a combination of paid and volunteer. Some areas have first responders and fire services—that alone is not adequate.

Comprehensive emergency services must be available to all for 911 to function. Saskatchewan needs to know what areas have mutual aid services; dispatchers are needed—with current information. Coordinated 911 services are contingent on dispatch, police, fire protection, ambulance and first responder services. At present the closest service is not necessarily dispatched.

Some municipalities have expressed concern about their ability to provide emergency services when their taxpayers already face significant taxation levels. The municipal tax base in rural Saskatchewan is not able to sustain emergency services. Access to equitable emergency services is an essential element in creating a vibrant and sustainable rural Saskatchewan.

Rural communities (local government, industry, business & service organizations) need to be involved in determining the true health and emergency “needs” (not wants) of each community within a district.

It is time for action.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...Some rural industries within the Province have a large commuting workforce from larger centres out to the smaller community (i.e. St. Brieux, Annaheim, Englefeld, Lanigan). This causes these smaller communities to have a much larger population by day then they do by night (i.e. St. Brieux; 1000 by day, 500 by night). As well, the commuting workforce does not contribute to the financial component of equipment for emergency service provision within that community (i.e. rescue units, fire trucks, first responders, etc). These services cannot be totally relied on through a volunteer system or through only municipal contributions.

... industry (manufacturers) there is potential for accidents at a much higher rate than within some other types of business. These accidents could be due to machinery use, travel (commuting to and from the workplace), the use of dangerous goods causing explosion, etc. Workers Compensation premium rates throughout industry are based on these factors.

...This fact holds true as well throughout farming. Farm accidents through machinery use and the moving of farm implements on the roadways creates the potential for more serious rural accidents to occur. With fire protection services it is a known fact that there are more farm fires within the province then there are fires within rural communities.

EDUCATION GRANTS/PROPERTY TAX

Background

The property tax contribution is no longer sustainable in connection with education funding and municipal requirements.

Rural Saskatchewan believes that local control of education is important and must be retained. At the same time, all residents of Saskatchewan retain some responsibility for the funding of the K-12 system and as such, local education funding should not rest solely on the property tax base.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...municipal governments have become “everything to everybody”. Their only means of funding is through an extremely reduced transfer payment from the province and their ability to collect property tax. They juggle their portion in order to not impose huge increases to the property owner because of the large education portion. This financial challenge has impacted their ability to support regional parks, regional libraries, infrastructure needs, tourism initiatives, REDAs, regional waste management systems and economic development initiatives

The Department of Education Foundation Operating Grant (FOG) provides the provincial share of operating revenue for K-12 education.

The ability of a school division to raise revenue locally is presently measured by its local property tax assessment base multiplied by a provincially determined equalization factor. To the extent that a school division’s local fiscal capacity is increasing, its grant will be lower. Hence to date at least 15 rural

WHAT WE HEARD:

...there is too much reliance on the property tax base to pay for education as well as municipal services. As the provincial government has downloaded onto the municipalities and school divisions, the property tax base has been used to make up much or all of the difference.

...Use an income based tax or part of the PST to help fund education –reduce the reliance on the property tax base for education funds - it would be more equitable - more people pay income tax or PST than strictly property owners. ...municipalities are unable to afford proper maintenance, or renewal of infrastructure since provincial revenue sharing has been reduced significantly and education has had to increasingly rely on the property tax to recover the provincial proportion of the education funding that has been reduced.

school divisions no longer receive any provincial funding under the Department of Education Foundation Operating Grant.

It is obvious that the goals of FOG that were viable at the time of its development are no longer feasible or reasonable in the twenty-first century.

The provincial proportion of the educational funding has been reduced or eliminated over time, forcing school divisions to rely on the property tax base. Coupled with reduced revenue sharing to municipalities from the province, this has intensified the pressure on the property tax base to the critical breaking point (e.g. tax revolts, non-payment of taxes and forfeiture of property).

It is time for action.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Background

The Aboriginal population is an important and growing component within the provincial population. The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the Aboriginal population are distinct so it is important to take these differences into consideration when examining community populations.

Approximately one half of the Aboriginal population lives in rural Saskatchewan. The highest proportion of Aboriginal people tend to be in communities near reserves (e.g. Fort Qu'Appelle and Meadow Lake) or large centers (e.g. North Battleford, Prince Albert).

The treaty relationship needs to be considered in the relationship between communities. This will be a significant influence on rural Saskatchewan. Connections are needed with and among federal, provincial, First Nations and local governments.

It is time for action.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...there is an opportunity for partnerships between communities and Tribal Councils to strengthen economic and educational opportunities
...First Nations are becoming more economically strong

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Background

Given the depopulation across Saskatchewan and the demand for developing a diversified economy throughout rural regions, there is a clear and present need to develop community leadership capacity. Two things are happening in rural Saskatchewan:

- we are losing our youth and our future leaders, and,
- the current leadership is aging, moving and retiring.

This has created a leadership void both now and for the future. The subcommittee firmly believes leadership training must be provided at a much younger age through the school system and youth programming. As well, community based leadership training must be made available for all residents.

For example, the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development (SCCD) provides community-based leadership development courses for communities. Leadership Saskatchewan (SCCD initiative) has proven to be a successful model of community based leadership.

Leadership training, as delivered through the Leadership Saskatchewan program, develops leaders that are able to step forward and lead in developing a long term vision, initiate projects and see them through to completion, thereby, leading to long-term viability for their community. It can revitalize volunteerism in communities. It enhances communication in a region, leading to collaboration to address regional issues and/or accomplish regional projects. As communities dialogue and work together on the modules, issues and community based projects. Leadership training can create a bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and communities by developing an understanding of cultural differences and commonalities.

Investment in community-based leadership development is critical to sustaining a vibrant rural Saskatchewan.

It is time for action.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...“that the most successful long-term rural projects have been home-grown “... need local leadership to get these projects up and running”

...mentorship programs are needed to retain youth

These are a few selected quotes from the 2000-01 participants in the Leadership Saskatchewan Program:

...”my suggestion is that all rural Saskatchewan communities have an opportunity to take this leadership course. It brings back hope into our lives.”

...”Needed this program to “push” a community group to go beyond usual leadership teams and try to be more cross-cultural. We had success and failures as we learned to work together.”

...I don’t think that a day has gone by without thinking about some aspect of the course material. I know that I now view people in a different light when communicating with them. If anything, this course has made me more tolerant and understanding of people...and that is worth its weight in gold alone.”

...”I hope all rural communities have an opportunity to get involved in the Leadership Program. The course teaches people to be open to change and to respect the uniqueness and strengths of others.”

DIVERSITY OF K-12 EDUCATION

Background

Currently there is not adequate time to take a range of classes in the K-12 system if post-secondary education entrance requirements and expectations are met. Students are unable to pursue other than a strictly academic program and still be eligible for post-secondary education.

Many post secondary programs require two senior level science and mathematics classes, thus requiring students to take a minimum of five sciences (often seven) in high schools and at least four math classes (often six). The result is that thirteen credits become compulsory despite the fact that only four need to be.

High schools need to offer an overall general education.

Options such as entrepreneurship, practical and applied arts, arts education, recreational opportunities and apprenticeship training need to be available to more students in rural Saskatchewan.

A further issue is the need for enhanced communications capability in rural Saskatchewan (i.e. high speed internet). There needs to be a more concerted effort at delivery of secondary and post secondary training in rural communities using the internet. This is especially relevant in providing more options to high school students, especially those students who are planning for careers in non-university areas.

Increased utilization of school facilities at the community level is needed. Rural communities need to use them as community halls, meeting facilities, recreation facilities and training centers beyond the regular hours of public school operation. Saskatchewan has discussed the concept of community schools for more than twenty years.

It is time for action.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...when university instructors teach a class with the assumption that every student has taken calculus at the high school level, calculus very quickly becomes an "assumed" requirement.

Thus university bound students perceive that they must have this subject, thereby eliminating other opportunities.

...curriculum courses exist for things like entrepreneurship, work experience, industrial arts, music, physical education, etc but few students choose those options because of the pressure to meet university requirements which allows no room for options other than strictly academic subjects. With few students choosing these courses the courses must be dropped in many rural schools.

...We need to keep our kids in their home communities for their elementary school years.

...Everyone needs a better understanding of rural agriculture and business but few agricultural courses or business type courses are offered in rural high schools – post-secondary entrance requirements preclude students taking these courses.

WHAT WE HEARD:

...”the education system should focus more on the technical trades. The system generally focuses on an academic training as a means to developing a career. The promotion of trade jobs as a career would provide a greater number of skilled professional to address this sector’s needs.”

...”the concept of “the Community School” be developed and expanded to provide more services to a larger portion of the adult population. That additional uses for school facilities be found to make it feasible to maintain the schools in small communities rather than closing them primarily because of current economic costs and declining enrolments.” (Community Viability and Rural Survival Conference Report, 1982)

PST REVENUE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Background

“Businesses located in rural Saskatchewan have been hit twice: once by the economic repercussions from a troubled agricultural sector and a second time by changes in the buying trends of their traditional customers.” (Community Economic Development Consultation Tour, March, 1990).

The issues of increased costs for rural residents to obtain goods and services and the changes in buying trends are as relevant today as they were in 1990.

Government needs to recognize the additional costs on rural residents in accessing goods and services and to provide financial incentives that will encourage “buy local” attitudes and attract new businesses to rural Saskatchewan.

An investment of a portion of the PST back into rural Saskatchewan businesses and communities would help to encourage business start ups and reduce costs for rural residents.

There needs to be further and more creative discussions with First Nations governments to work towards the investment of PST in First Nations communities, especially where this tax is being collected on reserve.

It is time for action.

APPENDIX 1

Community in Evolution Membership

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APPENDIX 2

Meeting Dates, Locations and Presentations

October 24, 2000 Davidson, Saskatchewan

- Don Leitch, Mid Lakes Community Coalition

November 21, 2000 Humboldt, Saskatchewan

- Diane Martz, Director, Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment, St Peters College on Sustainable Community Planning in Carlton Trail REDA region.
- Dan Swerhone, CEO of REACT waste management for the Carlton Trail Region

December 14, 2000 Manitou, Saskatchewan

- Lionel Sproul, Manitou Springs Resort Development
- Patrick Weichel, development of Mid Sask Grain Terminal

January 24, 2001 Regina, Saskatchewan

(with Rural Service Sector Committee)

- Irwin Blank, SAMA - property assessment
- John Edwards, Municipal Affairs and Housing - property reassessment and taxation policy
- Paul Beingessner, initial findings of the SWOT survey
- Doug Elliot, interim report on Saskatchewan Community Profile report

February 14, 2001 Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan

- Kevin Wilson, Saskatchewan Health, discussion of health policy and programs in rural Saskatchewan
- George Fayant, Métis Human Resources, Eastern Region III inc., discussion of tourism initiatives

March 27/28, 2001 Regina, Saskatchewan

- Doug Elliot, update on Saskatchewan Community Profile research
- Paul Beingessner, findings from the SWOT survey
- Van Isman, Economic and Co-operative Development
- Linda Smith, Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training

April 23, 2001 Eston, Saskatchewan

- Cliff Olornshaw, River Ridge Cattle Corporation
- Rob Lobdell and Bill Woods, West Central Road and Rail
- Ted Koester, West Central Municipal Government Committee
- Roger McLean, Canadian Select Grains

May 22, 2001 Muskeg Lake Board Room, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

- George LaFond, Muskeg Lake Tribal Council, Aboriginal Demographic Trends and Implications
- Lester LaFond, FSIN, Aboriginal Agriculture/Community Issues
- Laura Parenteau, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Environmental Issues and Water Supply Issues

June 8, 2001 Regina, Saskatchewan

- Dick DeRyk, Chair of ACRE Rural Service Sector (RSS) Committee, summary of findings from RSS report
- Doug Elliot, update on Saskatchewan Community Profile report
- Laureen Gatin, Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, summary of Role of the Schools report

July 16-18, 2001 Kenosee Lake, Saskatchewan

- review of findings from completed ACRE committee reports

Other subcommittee meeting dates included:

- August 20, 2001 Watrous, Saskatchewan
- August 27, 2001 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
- September 6, 2001 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

APPENDIX 3

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS IN RURAL SASKATCHEWAN

Final Report to the Community in Evolution Subcommittee and the Rural Service Sector Subcommittee of the ACRE Committee

Presented by Paul Beingessner March, 2001

Introduction

The SWOT survey that is the subject of this preliminary analysis was made available to about 1200 municipal governments, businesses, non-governmental agencies and individuals across Saskatchewan. It asked participants to present their views on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to rural communities and the rural service sector in Saskatchewan. It also asked them to identify strategies and actions that might improve the outcome for rural communities and for the rural service sector. Finally, it asked for some examples of success stories involving rural communities and the rural service sector.

Participants were given a deadline of January 12 to respond. This deadline was subsequently extended to February 23. Two hundred and fifty-three replies to the survey were received by the deadline.

Structure of the Report

The body of this report contains observations taken from a synopsis of the replies that were received. Within each category, the 4 or 5 points that were made most often are picked out and the common themes in them are explored.

While the most common themes are explored, there were a great number of ideas that were found in only one, two or three responses. Some of these are insightful, and, on occasion, some are picked out and commented on. Readers of this report are strongly encouraged to thoroughly peruse the appendix at the end, which contains a summation of all the replies that were received. You may find that some of the less frequently cited responses resonate with your own experience in rural Saskatchewan. The views of those who think “outside the box” sometimes provide surprising insight.

In the appendix, the responses are broken down into four categories - those from municipal governments,

both rural and urban; those from businesses and business associations (this included some labour groups); those from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as health boards and area transportation planning committees (the non-profit sector); and lastly from individuals.

A number of responses were made anonymously, and an attempt was made to attribute them to the appropriate category. This was facilitated by the fact that the questionnaires that were sent to, for example, RMs, were distinguishable from those sent to businesses.

Within each category, there is a list of replies to each of the 8 questions asked by the survey. Replies are listed in order of frequency

The largest number of responses by far, some 138, were from rural and urban municipalities. The categories of responses (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) from municipal governments are broken down into subcategories, and sometimes these are further organized around themes. This was done to make it easier to wade through the large number of different factors listed under each category.

The responses from the business sector and associations, and from NGOs, were not broken down into subcategories. This was unnecessary due to the smaller number of responses from these groups. The responses were also consolidated somewhat more. It was felt that the section containing responses from municipal governments would give the reader a flavor of the breadth of responses, and that nothing would be lost by broadening the categories for the other groups.

The responses from individuals (there were 16), are organized in an even briefer fashion. An attempt was made to outline only those responses that had not been mentioned to that point.

Observations

A few observations about the tone of the replies:

First of all, the respondents feel with deep conviction that rural Saskatchewan and rural communities are full of positive aspects, qualities that are ample and adequate to foster a vibrant and complete social and economic fabric. This is a province with a multitude of resources, both natural and human, and the human strengths are not to be underestimated. As one reply stated eloquently, the greatest strength of rural Saskatchewan is “people’s affection, devotion and passion to sustain their communities” and the “everyday practice of the values of respect, hard work and friendship”.

However, the list of weaknesses portrayed in the survey is even longer, and it is with this list that the sense of despair that pervades many of the replies begins to be felt.

While the list of strengths is long, the list of opportunities, which could naturally be expected to flow from these strengths is much shorter. Nevertheless, there are some innovative ideas expressed, along with the predictable call for more value added to agriculture.

The list of threats is the longest of all. Stated in one form or another by most respondents, there is an almost overwhelming belief that federal and provincial governments have abandoned rural Saskatchewan. This abandonment is seen as both part of the reason for rural decline and part of the barrier that keeps rural areas from overcoming their difficulties.

Given this belief, it is natural that many of the strategies to improve the situation would hinge on actions by governments.

Lastly there is a listing of success stories - a long list. Rural communities take pride in their efforts and this shows. The success stories are listed as a group as the last portion of this report.

Across all groups, there is a great commonality of responses, reflecting perhaps the fact that rural people not only wear many hats, but also have a good understanding of all aspects of rural social and economic life.

One other observation. Despite the sober tone of most of the responses, it was hard to read them without becoming excited. Not only are there so many people with a profound love of the rural way of life, but, that there can still be a sense of hope, despite the almost overwhelming nature of the situation, is enough to get the blood pumping again. If things are blackest before the dawn, rural people are striving to find the glint of light that foreshadows better times.

Municipal Governments - 138 responses

Strengths

1. People and Communities

Representatives of municipal governments were adamant that one of the most important strengths of rural Saskatchewan is the people themselves. Rural people work together, particularly in times of crisis, they support each other, and they have a strong sense of responsibility for the communities they live in. They do this with, and out of a sense of community pride and spirit.

This sense of responsibility for their communities is manifested concretely in volunteerism. Rural people do not hesitate to tackle the problems in their communities. They are willing to volunteer their own time to ensure that recreation, health care, and the many activities that are necessary to community life are able to function.

The First Responders program is but one example of the strength of the volunteer commitment to Saskatchewan. Rural residents have embraced this program and give many hours of their time and much of their own money to ensure that emergency health care is available to those far from ambulances and hospitals.

2. Lifestyle

Another strength, the one cited most often by respondents from municipal governments, was related to the rural way of life. Rural Saskatchewan is said to be a desirable place to live because of the safe and healthy natural environment. Safety is

reflected in low crime rates, while clean air and good water are two factors that contribute to the healthy environment. Another factor stated to make rural areas attractive is the low cost of living. This is driven largely by low housing costs.¹

It was also stated that the rural lifestyle affords all ages the opportunity for full participation in society. This extends to involvement in municipal government structures, in recreation, in volunteer activities, all aspects of rural society. Rural people tend to conduct their social interactions in multi-generational groups. The stratification by age that exists in urban society is much less a feature of rural living. Again, this is a feature of a social structure that sees community as involving and valuing the contribution of all members of society. Seniors in rural communities are not put out to pasture, and young people are valued for the contribution they make to the work of farming and for their participation in cultural and recreational activities.

Paradoxically, the shrinking population in rural Saskatchewan today may be part of the reason the participation of all members of this society is valued. With few people, everyone must be involved if all aspects of a healthy society are to function.

Respondents also identified rural schools as strength. Small class sizes can mean greater individual attention is available. The fact that everyone knows everyone in rural communities - teachers, students, parents and other citizens - means that deviant behaviour is less likely to be tolerated and problem solving is more likely to involve the larger community.

3. Business opportunities

Another strength of rural Saskatchewan is that it is an attractive place to set up businesses. There is an innovative work force with a good work ethic and a multiplicity of abilities. By their nature, farmers tend to be multi-skilled, and the deteriorating farm economy has ensured there are many farmers and farm youth who require and will seek off-farm work.

It was also stated as a positive feature that rural workers are willing to accept lower rates of pay than would be the norm in urban areas.²

A further strength of the rural economy is the abundance of natural resources found in Saskatchewan. Amongst those listed are a plentiful supply of agricultural products, numerous tourist attractions, transportation infrastructure, utilities such as electricity, natural gas and the telephone system, an abundant supply of cheap land resulting in low start-up costs for business, and natural features such as forests, minerals and water.

Customers in rural areas are said to be loyal, and the lack of many services was in itself cited as a strength. Since many goods and services are not available, there should be opportunities to set up businesses to provide these!

A final strength should be mentioned. The agricultural sector of the economy is seen as a potential strength. There is fertile land, ample crop and livestock production, (and a diversity of types of these) and there are competent farm operators with a knowledge base that is passed down from generation to generation.

One thing is readily apparent though. The agricultural sector was mentioned as a strength by less than 10% of those municipal government representatives who responded. This can only be seen as a dire indication of the state of the farm economy.

Weaknesses

1. Population

The level of population in rural areas was cited, over and over in a variety of ways, as a profound weakness in rural society. Rural populations are small, and they are falling rapidly and precipitously. Additionally, the rural population is aging rapidly, and the potential for a population crash in the next decade or two looms large.

¹ It should be noted that other factors affect the cost of living, and some survey respondents cited as a weakness the high cost of living that comes from having to travel long distances to obtain essential and other services.

² While this was seen as a positive feature for those wishing to operate businesses in rural areas, it was also noted in some responses that low wages are a weakness of rural areas, and even a threat to the long term success of the rural economy.

If there is a single factor that affects rural Saskatchewan in a negative way, responses to the SWOT survey clearly indicate that it is population.

The situation in rural Saskatchewan can be described as a downward spiral. Without a stable population, businesses cannot establish themselves with confidence, since they cannot be assured of a supply of customers or workers. As the population ages and declines, schools close and those that remain can offer fewer options. Businesses leave, and essential services cannot be supported and are moved to areas of larger population. Fewer goods produced and fewer services provided mean rural areas become less attractive places to live. There are fewer jobs, people must travel great distances to obtain the things they need, and the quality of life declines. It is difficult to appreciate the beauty of the rural environment, it is difficult to describe the pace of life in rural areas as relaxed, when one is speeding down the road to get to the next in a series of destinations.

The impact of a small population is also felt in the provision of government services. The services one takes for granted in urban areas - police and fire protection, telecommunications access, emergency health services are often unavailable in rural areas. More and more, governments use economic factors to determine if these types of services will be provided. For example, if there are not enough potential customers to make cellular telephone service a paying proposition for the service provider, cell service may never be made available.

This too becomes part of the downward spiral. If these types of modern services are not available, or only available at great cost, rural areas become unattractive places to live and undesirable places to establish an enterprise.

2. Roads

The road infrastructure in rural Saskatchewan was second on the list of weaknesses. Deterioration of provincial highways and, to a lesser extent, municipal roads is seen as a major detriment to the rural economy. Poor roads, for example, are a barrier to development of the tourism industry.

One community described a situation where a chiropractor had set up a once weekly practice in

their town, but quit after a few months. The problem was not a shortage of customers, but the time it took to travel the very bad stretch of highway that led to the community and the danger that the road posed to driver and vehicle.

Quality of life is also affected - many roads are bad enough to make travel over them an uncomfortable experience. Quality of emergency services, like ambulance and fire protection are also influenced. These service providers cannot in some cases provide rapid service because highway infrastructure is so deteriorated that traffic must travel slowly if it is to arrive at all.

3. Goods and Services

Also high on the list of weaknesses was the unavailability of a variety of goods and services, and the distance one must travel to obtain these. Mentioned especially often were medical services, both routine and emergency. Also, many communities have declined in population to the extent that a variety of consumer goods are no longer available, the viability of recreational facilities is questionable, and there is so much placed on a few shoulders that the leadership and volunteers in many communities are worn out.

As people travel to cities and larger centers to obtain goods and services they can no longer get in rural areas, their bonds to their home area weaken, they purchase goods they could get at home, and the negative spiral for business continues.

Another weakness mentioned frequently was a shortage of capital. Agriculture has hovered for years on the brink of disaster, and this has drained rural communities of available capital, farms have seen their asset values decline, and other businesses have been hard pressed merely to survive.

Furthermore, the dismal farm economy has affected the faith lenders have in rural areas. Some respondents indicated that banks and similar lenders are not willing to take risks on rural projects. Respondents also perceived that government grants and loans are not readily available, and saw this as a direct indication of a lack of support by governments for rural people.

4. Rural Economy

The weakened state of the rural economy has resulted in a lack of available jobs. Many respondents cited this. No doubt there is a greater demand for employment in rural areas than ever as many farmers seek off-farm work to subsidize money losing farms. And while there are some jobs provided by new industries, several respondents noted that these tend to be low paying. There is genuine reason to question whether a sustainable and stable rural economy can be built on minimum wage jobs.

5. Rural communities

All these factors have taken a toll on the spirit of rural people. While many respondents identified the indomitable spirit of rural people as a strength, there are also weaknesses within rural communities. Feelings of inferiority, negative attitudes, lack of vision, resistance to change, a closed sense of communities, and communities and farmers fragmented one from another are all mentioned as indications that rural people are in a social crisis as well as an economic one.

6. Governments have given up

The weakness which was common to the greatest number of responses was the sense that the people of rural Saskatchewan have been abandoned by both senior levels of government. This sentiment has its roots first of all in the failure of governments to respond adequately to the financial crisis in agriculture. That this should continue so long and be allowed to become so deep is taken as an irrefutable sign that governments do not care about rural people.

There is a strong belief that governments are willing to see the rural areas depopulated, that they not only pursue this in a passive sense by failing to supply adequate resources to agriculture, but they are actively involved in the destruction of the rural way of life by the withdrawal of services and failure to elucidate a positive vision for rural Saskatchewan.

That governments have ceased to believe in the possibility of revitalization of the rural areas is evident in the approach to the provision of modern technological infrastructure. Several respondents

indicated that the provision of cellular telephone and high speed internet service to all areas of the province is essential to the establishment of a modern economy. Certainly, economic experts tell us that the modern economy will be built on information. Those who command it will be the winners, those who fail to understand its importance will be the losers.

Despite this, governments have allowed the provision of these services to rural areas to be dictated by the demands of the marketplace. Had this same attitude prevailed over the last 5 decades, it is unlikely that much of rural Saskatchewan would yet have access to electricity, a modern telephone system, or natural gas.

Opportunities

As mentioned in the introduction, the list of opportunities delineated in the replies from municipal governments is far shorter than the list of weaknesses. Opportunities can naturally be expected to flow from the strengths that are perceived to be present in rural areas.

1. Tourism

Leading the list of opportunities is those presented by the tourism and hospitality industries. Respondents listed the natural beauty of the forests, lakes and wilderness of the province as an asset that is under exploited for tourist potential. They also mentioned the tourism opportunities provided by the rich history of the province. Recreation potential has a role to play here as well. Fishing, hunting, boating and winter recreation all provide unique opportunities to develop sustainable tourist industries in Saskatchewan.

2. Value Added

Value added activity in the agriculture sector was the second most frequently listed opportunity for rural Saskatchewan. Survey respondents did not usually identify the facets of this opportunity more specifically. Value added has become a common phrase in agriculture today. Here it was used to refer to such varied things as crop processing plants, livestock feeding and processing, production of specialty crops, production of ethanol and other alternate energy sources, and organic agriculture.

The responses indicate that rural Saskatchewan has embraced the message that value added enterprises are the road to prosperity and sustainability. It is less obvious that rural people have a firm grasp on the exact ways value added businesses can deliver the promised benefits.

3. Rural Lifestyle

Arising from the observation that one of the strengths of rural Saskatchewan is the lifestyle people enjoy comes the opportunity noted with the third greatest frequency - that the rural lifestyle itself provides opportunities for repopulation and economic development.

Respondents felt that a growing appreciation of the positive rural life style could lead to re-population, and could be the base from which the tourism industry could expand.

The aging provincial population was itself seen as an opportunity since it is believed there is a desire for safe retirement homes and recreation opportunities. This could become a significant driver in the rural economy.

4. Information Technology

Lastly, respondents pointed to the revolution in communications technology, and indicated that the “information age” could be used in many ways to enhance economic development.

Threats

1. Population Loss

As the small and aging population in rural areas was viewed as a major weakness, the threat of further population loss led the very long list of threats perceived by municipal governments. Fears were greatest that there would be a continuing exodus of young people from rural areas. One person pointed out that rural Saskatchewan is experiencing its own “brain drain” as a lack of quality jobs leads the best and brightest of the young to seek greener pastures.

2. Governments Out of Touch

The second greatest threat was perceived to be that the provincial and federal governments do not care about the future of rural Saskatchewan. This leads to a variety of threats including further diminishing of services in health care, education, and infrastructure, rising taxes, further deterioration of the agriculture economy, and a continued lack of leadership from governments in solving the problems of rural Saskatchewan.

Two things were apparent. Governments were perceived as part of the problem, and they were also believed to be a necessary part of the solution since government inaction was seen as a major threat.

3. Rail Abandonment and Elevator Closures

High also on the list of threats were concerns about accelerating rail and grain elevator abandonment and the certainty that this will result in further deterioration to the road network. Concerns were expressed that rural communities are unable to stop this trend, and that senior governments are neither prepared to intervene in a significant way or to ameliorate the damage

Continued degradation of rural roads was seen as threatening the economic recovery of rural areas. Businesses will not locate where roads are inadequate, quality of life is impacted, and tourism - seen as having the greatest potential to expand the economy - will not be possible without improvements to many roads.

4. Discouragement and Pessimism

Fully one fifth of respondents from municipal governments felt that rural areas are threatened by discouragement and mistrust brought on by repeated failure; resistance and skepticism of change; and a growing pessimism and victimization syndrome.

Though it was not the most cited threat, perhaps this loss of vision in rural areas is itself one of the gravest consequences of the decline in the rural economy.

5. Continuing Decline in the Ag Sector

There was also great distress over the state of agriculture. Respondents believe that governments have given up on the agriculture industry in Saskatchewan, and are unwilling to support it sufficiently to allow it to become viable.

It was clear there is a deep and profound belief that unless primary agriculture can yield a viable living for a significant number of people, the rural economy can simply never recover. It is believed that agriculture must remain the primary driver of the rural economy. Family farms must be able to generate sufficient returns to warrant a farmer's full time attention, or the economy simply will not be healthy. While it is understood that secondary processing of agricultural commodities can bring economic benefits, this was not seen as sufficient itself to sustain the rural economy.

If agriculture is not supported, the economy of rural communities can only continue to decline, the population exodus will increase, and the possibility of recovery will begin to fade away.

Strategies for Rural Communities

The list of strategies for rural communities is fairly lengthy, but many of the survey respondents were unable or unwilling to list a single strategy. This was profoundly disturbing as it indicated the depths of despair over obtaining a positive outcome, and a lack of consensus on how success could be achieved.

Many of the strategies for recovery for rural communities are predicated on action by government. While rural people largely believe that solutions must come from within their communities, they also are convinced they no longer have the resources to implement these solutions. Governments must be proactively involved, and that involvement will carry a financial cost.

Topping the list was the need for **tax incentives and grants** to attract and support investment, and provision of services to facilitate business development.

Second is the conviction that governments must support agriculture directly. **Subsidies**, which for years were seen almost as shameful by many

farmers, are now believed to be critical to level the playing field between Saskatchewan farmers and those in the US and EC. Direct subsidies are cited here, as well as the suggestion that education tax should be removed from the property base, and the requirement to improve safety nets in agriculture.

In addition to strategies that require direct financial contributions from governments, respondents felt that government has a **leadership** role to play. The tone set by government is seen as important to turning the rural economy around. It is recommended that governments increase the focus on tourism and hospitality industries, promote positive aspects of Saskatchewan for retirement, educate urban people about rural Saskatchewan, and carry out an information campaign to change negative attitudes and promote the good points of rural Saskatchewan.

Many respondents felt that rural areas are disadvantaged in comparison to major urban centers. The cost of supplying and obtaining goods and services is greater, jobs are fewer and lower paying, access to modern technologies is less. In order to offset this disadvantage, the suggestion was made several times that the **PST** in rural areas should be set below that in the urban areas, perhaps at 4% rather than 6%.

Strategies for the Rural Service Sector

Suggested strategies for the rural service sector contain a similar theme. Governments must devote greater financial resources to rural areas.

In this regard, **major improvements to rural roads and highways** was seen as the highest priority for the rural service sector, as well as grants for other infrastructure improvements.

It was suggested there was a need to improve government **rules, regulations and grants to promote value added** agricultural pursuits. Also a priority was government legislation and action to **halt rail and elevator abandonment**.

Municipal governments also noted the need for **greater co-operation** between municipal governments to enable industrial development (zoning bylaws, road maintenance agreements, etc) and joint use of infrastructure was deemed a necessary course.

Equally important was the need to **increase health care budgets** for rural health districts and to preserve at least the current level of health care services in rural areas.

Business sector and Associations - 48 responses

Strengths

The business sector and various associations representing business and labour agreed with municipal governments concerning the strengths of rural Saskatchewan. People's commitment to their communities, the quality of rural life and the availability of a workforce with a strong work ethic topped the list.

The availability of natural resources and raw products also rated highly as a strength, as did the plentitude of low cost land available for development.

There was a clear difference between larger and smaller communities in their responses. Larger, more successful urban communities were more likely to identify the availability of a range of services as a strength of the rural areas. Smaller communities were more likely to identify the lack of services as a barrier to success.

Weaknesses

This category of respondents also saw the small population base as a major weakness in rural Saskatchewan. A small, aging and falling population means a lack of workers, especially skilled workers.

They also identified as a weakness the limited range of many services, medical, retail, etc. They were quick to point out that big box stores in the expanding cities are hard for smaller rural business to compete with, as costs such as transportation are higher for businesses in rural areas.

A lack of new ideas and long term vision, and discouragement were seen as a weakness.

Opportunities

The business sector also believes there are significant opportunities to be found in value added processes for the ag sector, and in intensive livestock production. Tourism too, ranks high.

These respondents see the opportunity for partnerships between communities and with Tribal Councils to strengthen economic and educational opportunities.

They feel that the need for improvements to infrastructure provides the opportunity for significant economic activity.

Threats

Like municipal governments, businesses and associations perceive a long list of threats to rural Saskatchewan.

Most often mentioned is population loss, followed by the decline of the agriculture sector. Elevator and rail line closures and deteriorating roads also bring the threat of further economic disintegration, as do hospital, health care facility and school closures.

Strategies for Rural Communities

Subsidies to agriculture are seen as the highest priority, followed by the need for governments and other players to **promote the positive lifestyle** aspects of rural Saskatchewan.

Economic incentives to business also are favored. It is apparent that businesses and associations realize that the financial resources available in rural Saskatchewan today are not sufficient to enable the economy to revitalize on its own.

Strategies for Rural Service Sector

Strategies for the rural service sector focus on **upgrading of roads** and other rural infrastructure and the need to "regionalize" not rationalize **education and health care**.

There was also concern that mega projects are not the answer for rural development, but that economic improvements must be **community controlled** and community driven.

NGOs - 51 responses

Strengths

Strengths found in the rural areas by respondents from the NGO sector are very similar to those of the two previously described sectors. NGOs are more likely to identify the rural education system as a strength, citing low pupil/teacher ratios and the community college network that is in place.

Weaknesses

Like the other groups, NGOs point to deteriorating infrastructure and low rural population as major weaknesses. They rank resistance to change among rural people and a lack of focus and leadership as major weaknesses.

They also point out that there is a lack of available products and services, including high speed internet and cellular service.

Opportunities

Opportunities identified are as in the previous sectors.

Threats

Continuing consolidation of services to larger communities - rail lines, elevators, businesses, schools, buses, police, hospitals, government offices - is seen by NGOs as the most significant threat facing rural Saskatchewan.

This is followed closely by population loss and sense that governments have abandoned rural Saskatchewan.

NGOs also cite resignation, lack of feeling of control, despair, lack of leadership, and isolation as major threats

Strategies for Rural Communities

The most often cited strategy is to encourage **regional co-operation** to assess opportunities and share facilities. NGOs also see benefits in **cultivating entrepreneurial and leadership skills**.

They stress the need to renew infrastructure (transportation, education, and health) to create a climate to encourage development, and a need for governments to actively promote and commit to rural Saskatchewan.

Strategies for Rural Service Sector

NGOs differ markedly from the other respondents in one aspect. While municipal governments were particularly likely to point to rural amalgamation as a threat, NGOs describe a need for **rural amalgamation** and **improved intersectoral communication**.

Individuals - responses

Individuals who replied to the survey generally expressed similar sentiments and concerns to those raised by the other respondents.

In the appendix to the report, the replies listed for individuals are only those that are not found in the other categories of respondents.

Readers are encouraged to examine these replies.

Success Stories

The appendix lists the success stories identified by respondents to the SWOT survey. These are loosely organized by similarities.

It is worth noting that the level of pessimism in rural Saskatchewan caused more than a few respondents to indicate that they were unable to think of a single success story in rural Saskatchewan!

Conclusion

The SWOT survey reveals much about the psyche of rural Saskatchewan. It is a psyche that is seriously damaged by years of government neglect and economic disaster, especially in the agriculture sector.

Nevertheless, rural people know their chosen home is rich in resources and potential, both human and natural. They also know that time is running out. They believe that when the critical mass of people is lost to rural areas, recovery will become virtually

impossible.

While people clearly understand, as several stated, that solutions must come from within the people of rural Saskatchewan, they also strongly believe that government has to come on side to the issue of revitalizing rural areas. Every action taken by governments must be considered in light of this. Rerouting of a road, done for efficiency and safety of travel, can alter the economic structure of a town in an irreparable fashion. The lack of a social agenda when designing communication systems could mean that some rural areas will never have cell phone or high speed internet access.

Governments must engage as willing partners, as eager participants in a rural recovery that will be driven by the strength and courage of rural people.

Appendix

Municipal Governments - 138 responses

Strengths

Of the People and of the Community

- People work together in times of crisis and otherwise Support and encouragement amongst rural people 54
- Community pride and spirit 42
- Volunteerism 33
- Local government is close to people and effective 19
- Common sense approach to problem solving 8
- Co-operatives, service organizations well developed 5
- Ag expertise passed on to generations 3
- Close to large city (works as bedroom community, and is a strength when it gives access to services and goods) 3
- Community Colleges 2
- Regional Economic Development Committees . 1

Related to positive lifestyle

- Low crime rate makes rural areas attractive places to live; Safe and healthy lifestyle and natural environment; Low cost of living, largely driven by low housing costs 84
- Recreation available to all 17
- Opportunity for individual participation in all aspects of society 15
- Personalized customer service by businesses 10
- Affordable housing available, also senior's housing 10
- Schools - more individual attention, etc. Everyone knows everyone; 10
- Affordable services ie- recreation, snow removal 8
- Where hospitals and health care are available, these are identified as a strength 4
- Strong manufacturing base providing jobs 3
- Less acute poverty 1

Related to Business Opportunities

People strengths

- Work force with good work ethic and skills, innovative 35
- Lower wage scale 7
- Diversity of skills in workforce 6
- Youth with Positive goals and ambitions 1
- REDAs, TPCs, ADD Boards 1

Physical Resources

- Lots of cheap land for development means low start up costs for businesses 35
- Abundant natural resources including low cost resources such as feed grains 17
- Good water, some areas with a large water supply (e.g. Lake Diefenbaker), (also seen as attractive lifestyle feature) 12
- Low taxes for businesses and residential 11
- Many tourist attractions 7
- Strong regional transportation infrastructure . . . 6
- Utilities of power, natural gas readily available . 4
- Customer loyalty 3
- Vacant buildings available for use 2
- Businesses face less competition 2
- Competitive utility costs 1
- Close to wealthy market in US 1

Ag Sector

- Productive farm and pasture land 11
- Innovative Ag sector 6
- Strong beef industry 4
- Strong crop diversity 2

Weaknesses

Related to Business Opportunities and Economic Development

- Small, aging and falling population (also relates to quality of life) 77
- Deteriorated roads 43
- Poor ag economy 37
- Shortage of capital; ag tapped out, Banks unwilling to take risks on rural projects 21

- Long distance to markets and to bring in inputs resulting in high costs 17
- Poor cell phone and internet service, and other modern infrastructure 11
- Lack of government support through grants and technical assistance, lack of incentives for value added 11
- Government centralization of services has cost jobs 10
- Leadership and volunteers worn out 10
- Lack of rail transport 10
- Lack of large enough labour pool for large businesses, and lack of skilled work force 8
- Too much government intervention 8
- Low volumes for businesses mean must charge higher prices 6
- Economies of scale lacking 6
- Inability for youth to practice ag since it is not a viable industry 5
- Lack of access to professionals 4
- Short growing season, harsh climate 2
- Failure to develop natural resources, including tourism 2
- Limited natural gas service (too costly) 2
- Poor access to communications (TV, radio) in remote areas 2
- Small economic base 2
- Lack of financial institutions in many rural areas 1
- Lack of marketing for locally produced goods and services 1
- Postal service poor to remote areas 1
- Newcomers to communities not as loyal to businesses 1

Related to Quality of Life

- Limited availability of businesses and services, Long distances to goods and services Long distance to health care 44
- Poor emergency services, lab services, etc., lack of health care services generally, closure of rural hospitals 37
- Lack of jobs, particularly for youth 27
- Poor ag economy 24
- Higher cost of living because of less competition and more travel 10
- Few options for schools - 2nd language, extra-curricular, etc. 5

- Lack of access to professionals 5
- Longer school bus runs from school closures are a big negative for children 5
- Lack of bus service between communities and to cities 4
- Many jobs are low paying 4
- Lack of post secondary education 4
- Poor cell phone and internet service 3
- Limited educ opps for some situations eg special needs 3
- Minimal police presence 2
- Isolated 2

Related to Infrastructure

- Poorly administered economic development programs - poor oversight 5
- Fragmented local governments, too small to be effective in economic development 5
- Reluctance to amalgamate and share services . . 3
- REDAs seem ineffective (due to need to raise local capital) 2
- High cost of police services, inadequate policing 2
- Health Districts concept not working 2

Related to Community and People

- Feelings of inferiority, negative attitudes, lack of vision 8
- Decreased young people involved in community and in rural life; few things for them 7
- Small communities don't have infrastructure to attract businesses 5
- Resistance to change 5
- Closed sense of communities 4
- Communities and farmers fragmented one from another 4
- Lack of formal education among many so they don't take advantage of services offered, and cannot identify opportunities 2
- Communities not aggressive enough 1
- Lack of involvement of women in rural issues 1
- Having to commute for jobs means less time for family and community 1

Related to the Economy

- Low and falling tax base 11
- Lack of services means there are few service related jobs 10
- High taxation provincially (disadvantages us all) 7
- Lack of control over things like rail abandonment, freight rates, crop prices, foreign subsidies . . . 4
- Too dependent on agriculture 4
- Low property values 2
- Consolidation of service industries means job losses 2

All Encompassing

- Provincial and federal governments out of touch - do not care about rural Saskatchewan or agriculture. 79

Opportunities

Opportunities Arising from Natural Resources

- Tourism and hospitality industry; also eco-tourism; abundant wildlife for tourism, hunting and outfitting 37
- Agri-forestry and conventional 5
- Oil and gas development 5
- New types of ag production, eg organic, alternative crops. 4
- Potential for solar and wind energy, and canola based fuels, and to develop and sell the technology 2
- Wild game ranching 1
- Craft industries (native) 1
- Extensive irrigation potential 1
- Agriculture research 1

Opportunities Arising from Other Economic Development

- Value added industry ie: processing plants, specialty crops, ethanol 31
- Intensive livestock operations 14
- Livestock processing 4
- Short line railway development as major railways leave 3
- Waste management and recycling 2
- Ag equipment manufacturing. 2

Opportunities Arising from Lifestyle, People

- Growing appreciation of positive rural life style may lead to re-population. 14
- Recreation - increased wealth and leisure time for segment of the population means there are opportunities to develop recreation based industries 7
- Aging population looking for safe retirement homes. 7
- Since there are few businesses, opportunity to create more 3
- Expansion of long term health care as population ages 2
- people want to explore history and roots- rich heritage to work from 2
- First Nations becoming more economically strong. 2
- Co-operation with urban communities 1

Opportunities Arising from Structural Changes

- Information and communications technologies are making new things possible 6
- Municipal amalgamation. 5
- Emerging value added businesses allow investment opportunities 3
- New gen co-ops - this legislation makes possible new style of development 2
- Investment opps for corporate farms as farm size increases 1

Threats

Overall

- Loss of population (especially young) 48
- Provincial government out of touch, provincial and federal governments do not care about rural Saskatchewan; diminished government funding, continued government cutbacks and downsizing (common thread) 47
- Loss of jobs and lack of opportunity 15
- Rural service costs increasing faster than urban - Sask Power, telephone. 7
- Mindset that bigger is better - globalization 7
- Losing political influence due to small population 5
- Too much politicization of issues leading to poor decision making 4
- Poverty. 4
- Pollution of air, soil, water 1

Infrastructure

- Transportation and other infrastructure degraded, fear it will degrade further with rail abandonment and elevator closures 46
- Loss of grain elevators 42
- Loss of rail lines 39
- Health facility closure 32
- Municipal amalgamation 19
- Excessive government intervention, Securities Commission red tape 3
- Highway realignment hurts communities (bypassing them) 1
- Possible litigation because of poor infrastructure - roads, signs, etc. 1

Communities

- Closure of rural schools, and low school populations 42
- Lack of vision by rural people; communities reluctant to work together, discouragement, mistrust brought on by repeated failure; resistance and skepticism of change; Pessimism and victimization syndrome 25
- Deterioration and uncertainty of agriculture economy 21
- Rising property taxes, especially school; Excessive taxation, downloading of taxes 20
- Farms becoming too large, results in population loss 6
- Closure of post offices 4
- Closure of recreation facilities 3
- Communities falling below threshold for survival 3
- Water quality 2
- Conflict between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities 2
- Losing heritage, - old buildings, elevators, etc . . 1

Economy

- Larger rural businesses leaving to major centers; businesses closing 25
- Failure of province and fed governments to deal with ag crisis 15
- Rising property taxes, especially school; Excessive taxation, downloading of taxes 12
- People commuting to larger centers for work also shop there 11
- High fuel, chemical, implement costs, and taxes 10

- Loss of government services - moved to cities 10
- Low crop prices 9
- Loss of local machine dealers, parts and service 7
- Lack of incentive for investors 4
- Competition from larger centres 4
- Indian land claims (TLE) decrease tax base . . . 2
- Government over involvement and bad planning - eg SPUDCO 2
- Further deregulation of electricity, telephone, and natural gas 2
- Too much diversification into specialty crops results in over production, and falling prices. . . 1
- Consumer backlash (GMOs, animal rights, etc) 1

Strategies for Rural Communities

- Tax incentives, services and grants to attract and support investment 22
- Subsidize agriculture to overcome low prices for commodities 20
- Eliminate school tax from property tax base . . 12
- Assistance with researching economic development ideas 10
- Improve crop insurance and safety nets (increase government funding) 8
- Increase focus on tourism and hospitality industries 8
- Promote positive aspects of Saskatchewan for retirement 6
- Encourage development of short line railways 6
- Educate urban people about rural Saskatchewan 6
- Information campaign to change negative attitudes, promote good points of rural Saskatchewan 5
- Keep fuel costs down so that goods in rural areas aren't so expensive - e.g. tax incentives 5
- Change PST for rural communities to 4%, leave cities at 6% 4
- Encourage foreign investment, rural Saskatchewan is a third world country 3
- Promote winter tourism to those in warm climates 3
- Stop subsidizing private companies since this inhibits others from investing 3
- Develop regional water and waste systems 3

- Increase education funding in rural Saskatchewan 3
- Implement process to retain elevators 3
- Find ways to reduce ag input costs - e.g. Buyer’s co-ops for inputs 3
- Develop “shop at home” programs 3
- Government grants need to be available to maintain existing programs (not only available to new ones) 3
- Decentralize government services 2
- Incentives to develop co-operation between rural communities 2
- Actively promote optimism 2
- Increase in employment in rural for health care workers 2
- Subsidize intensive livestock to gain spin-offs 1
- Incentives for beginning farmers 1
- Encourage immigration to rural areas 2
- Ensure community control of development initiatives 2
- Lobby for a guaranteed annual income 1
- Promote alternate energy production 1
- Involve aboriginal people and their resources . . . 1
- Alternative marketing groups for crops to bypass traditional marketing channels, e.g. WCRR 1
- Promote and educate re new gen co-ops 1
- Strategic alliances between participants in the supply system 1
- Maintain high quality of the food we produce by proper health regs and livestock ID system . . . 1
- Encourage sharing of equipment between farmers 1
- Promote land trusts to facilitate intergenerational transfer of land 1
- Mentoring program between successful farmers and youth 1
- Promote marketing clubs as way to promote diversification 1
- Lower fuel taxes 1

Strategies for Rural Service Sector

- Major upgrade of rural roads and highways . . 18
- Increase grants to rebuild rural infrastructure . . 9
- Government rules, regulations and grants to promote value added agricultural pursuits 8
- Halt rail and elevator abandonment 7

- Cooperation between municipal governments to enable industrial development (zoning bylaws, road maintenance agreements, etc) and joint use of infrastructure 7
- Increase health care budget for rural health districts 7
- Bring in high speed internet for knowledge based services 5
- Increase opportunities for long term health care in rural health care facilities 4
- Band together as communities on a regional level to lower costs and duplication 4
- Governments must make utilities available at lower cost 4
- Regulations that create “forced” opportunities for recycling 3
- Increase in low income and seniors housing development 3
- Expand internet service to allow remote youth to continue education in their own communities 3
- Encourage amalgamation of RMs with small urbans rather than with other RMs 2
- Provincial maintenance grants for heavy haul routes 1
- Generation of electricity using oilfield wastes . . 1
- Utility rates for rural should be same as for urban 1
- Reform Farm Credit Corporation to assist agriculture, not make huge profits 1

Overall

- Provincial government to encourage rural development 15
- Downsizing may be necessary but do not eliminate 1

Business sector, Associations - 48 responses

Strengths

- People know their community and its needs, are committed to it; strong social network 21
- Quality of life: low crime, affordable recreation, housing, community spirit, involvement 19
- Available, hard working, intelligent workforce; low wage rates 18

- Lots of raw products produced, natural resources available 13
- Large, low cost land base available for development 8
- Some communities identify that they have good services available 6
- Easy for businesses to start, low costs, available labour, etc 6
- Strong ag and resource base (potential) 5
- Businesses have one-to-one relationship with customers 4
- Close relationship between community and school. 4
- History of successful collaboration among various sectors of society 3
- Pristine environment 3
- Lower pupil teacher ratios 3
- Local government mostly well managed 2
- Loyalty to local businesses 2
- Centrally located in Canada 1
- The family farm is an effective concept for passing on the knowledge base of agriculture 1
- FCC is an effective lending agent for rural areas 1
- Commitment to value of education 1
- Involvement of seniors in our community 1
- Many opportunities for tourism 1
- Volunteerism 1
- There is a willingness, even in urban areas, to preserve services to rural areas 1
- A tradition of innovative public sector programs 1

Weaknesses

- Small base of skilled workers; small population and shrinking; this largely due to failing ag economy 20
- Limited range of many services, medical, retail, etc. 16
- Cities expanding, big box stores hard to compete with; costs such as transportation for businesses in rural areas are too high. 11
- Lack of new ideas and long term vision, discouragement (also seen as a threat) 7
- Roads and other infrastructure in poor shape 6
- No jobs, brain drain from rural areas 6
- Limited range of services makes hard to attract professionals 5

- Too much travel and cost to obtain goods and services (affects quality of life) 4
- Shortage of capital 4
- Reluctance to invest in processing and other innovations, fearful of risk; “not in my backyard” syndrome 3
- Declining businesses, lack of services 3
- Low wages in existing jobs 3
- Economy ag based, not diversified enough 3
- Lack of competition in rural areas results in low levels of service 3
- Government perception of rural Saskatchewan as non viable; governments not seen as allies 3
- Government is centralizing all operations to cities 3
- Lack of equity and venture capital 3
- Small tax base 2
- Consumer mobility threatens local businesses 2
- Infrastructure lacking - three phase power, natural gas, high speed internet, etc 2
- Labour standards don’t apply to many northern and agriculture workers 2
- Government dominated by urban seats 2
- Far from major markets in large urbans 2
- Death of farming 1
- Lack of government commitment to research and development 1
- Lack of modern technology - high speed internet, cellular 1
- Schools so small they can’t provide recreation and other opportunities 1
- Shortage of affordable housing 1
- Poor farming 1
- Research is in the larger centers, not necessarily relevant to smaller centers 1
- Limited public transit 1
- REDAs not effective due to requiring too much volunteer time from overstressed, overworked and over-committed people 1
- Lack of entrepreneurs 1
- Absence of succession planning in transfer of farms 1
- Distance to emergency services and policing 1

Opportunities

- Value added for ag; community based 13
- Eco-tourism; tourism in general 9
- Livestock production and intensive livestock facilities 8
- New communications technologies provide opportunities for internet and communications based rural businesses 7
- Expansion of pulse and special crops sector . . . 5
- Oil field jobs 3
- Partnerships between communities and with Tribal Councils to strengthen economic and educational opportunities 2
- Infrastructure needs improving - would create jobs 2
- Opportunity to create businesses to fill the void of those leaving 2
- Technology export 1

Threats

- Population loss, especially young, and the downward spiral that results 23
- Ag in decline, affects other aspects of economy 13
- Elevator and rail line closures 13
- Deteriorating roads 12
- Hospital and health care facility closures 12
- School closures 12
- Negative attitudes toward Saskatchewan (also from rest of Canada); pessimism, resistance to change 11
- Business closures that accompany consolidation and regionalization 9
- Underfunding of education and other public services 7
- Declining labour force 6
- Take over of opportunities by centers of capital, increased foreign ownership, decision making by corporate interests rather than local communities (e.g. rail abandonment) 5
- Declining tax base 5
- amalgamation 5
- Deregulation and privatization are leading to loss of services 4
- Lack of government concern about all these . . . 4
- Input costs for farmers too high 4
- Urban/rural split 3

- High levels of personal stress brought on by economic conditions and community disintegration 3
- Competition from other countries 2
- Crop diseases and pests increasing 2
- Inability to begin farming as the industry is not viable 2
- High taxes 2
- Lack of dollars invested in infrastructure and health care 1
- Lack of global thinking; lack of training and upgrading 1
- Lack of technological infrastructure 1
- Loss of co-operative drive 1
- People's inability to pay for goods threatens rural businesses 1
- High energy and fuel costs 1
- Large farmers less likely to deal locally 1

Strategies for Rural Communities

- Subsidies to agriculture and help to transition young farmers into the business 7
- Promote positive lifestyle aspects of rural Saskatchewan 6
- More incentives to business: tax etc. 5
- Promote value added in ag 4
- Promote and establish tourism 3
- Focus on education and training 2
- Concentrate on development of core services 1
- Rural communities must unite to send a strong message to government to recommit to rural areas 1
- Take stock of community assets; assess opportunities; through local "think tanks" 1
- Look at success stories in other provinces and regions 1
- Promote food processing 1
- Province must take leadership role in helping communities to evaluate and develop options . . 1
- Promote internet technologies in business, education and health 1
- Co-operative investment in value added 1
- Expansion of livestock and pulse sectors 1
- Crown Corp or Government Department to partner in redevelopment of rural Sask. 1
- Strengthen "key" communities and abandon the rest 1

- Increase minimum wage and improve employment standards in rural areas 1
- Tax credits to young people returning to rural areas (e.g. to post secondary) 1
- Involve First Nations 1
- New Crown corporation or government department to reinvest in physical, social, cultural and economic life 1

- Little competition in same area 2
- Customer loyalty 2
- Close to American market 2
- Intergenerational activity 1
- Largest wheelchair program in Canada with strong knowledge base for product development 1
- Fewer labour problems 1
- First Responders system 1
- A sense of urgency 1

Strategies for Rural Service Sector

- Federal and provincial governments must provide money to upgrade roads and renew infrastructure 3
- “regionalization,” not rationalization of education and health care 3
- Encourage local businesses, mega projects often don’t work. 2
- Rural amalgamation to reduce costs 2
- Encourage co-operative development 1
- Develop major truck routes 1
- Upgrade access to communication 1
- Bottom line alone must not dictate level of services that exist 1

Weaknesses

- Deteriorating infrastructure 24
- Loss of population, especially young, aging population 21
- Resistant to change, lack of focus and leadership, resignation 13
- Few products available, lack of services - high speed internet, cellular, medical, etc 11
- Hard to attract capital, lack of capital 11
- Territorialism, lack of co-operation between communities and municipal governments 10
- Difficulty attracting qualified professionals and trades people 9
- Increasing distance to services 8
- Unstable, impoverished farm sector 7
- Higher cost of many goods and services due to lacking economies of scale and distances to travel 6
- Lack of capital 6
- Economy too focused on ag 6
- Lack of entrepreneurial skills and resources to build these; population often unaware of program and grants that are out there 6
- Volunteer burnout and downloading government responsibilities or volunteers 4
- Job opportunities in urban pull people away . . . 3
- Lack of cultural and recreational opportunities 3
- Limited celebration of economic success 2
- Distance from end users 2
- Higher utility costs - gas, electric 2
- Farms getting larger so fewer people 1
- Rural organizations often not good at dealing with the media 1
- Lack of jobs, especially for the young 1
- High fuel costs make commuting less viable . . . 1
- Lack of communication with First Nations . . . 1
- Poor transportation for disabled/seniors 1
- Unwillingness to accept outsiders and different cultures 1

NGOs - 51 responses

Strengths

- Positive aspects of rural communities - safe, healthy lifestyle, personal customer service, affordable housing, local governments close to people 34
- Communities working together, strength, resilience, volunteerism 33
- Strong work ethic, productive workers 18
- Land available for business start up and residential growth 13
- Recreational and tourism opportunities 9
- Good services and infrastructure in some communities 7
- Good education system, low student-teacher ratios, regional colleges 6
- Lots of raw materials available 5
- Low labour costs, large aboriginal population as potential work force 5
- Commitment to solving rural problems 3
- Programs like CARDS, REDAs etc 3
- Low taxes and start up costs for business 3
- Diversified ag 3

Opportunities

- Value added ag processing 21
- Eco-tourism, other tourism opportunities 17
- Location not as important in digital economy . . 4
- Expanded livestock production 9
- Aging population needing retirement locations and health care services 8
- Need for professional services in some communities - e.g. optometrist, electrician, . . . 1
- Greenhouse development using waste heat 1
- Carbon sequestration 1
- Custom services to agriculture 1
- Expanding market for medical supplies, especially “hard” goods - walkers, wheelchairs, etc 1
- Micro-breweries 1
- High energy costs for transportation may make local ag production (vegetable, fruit) more attractive 1
- Production of livestock feeds in many areas instead of just a few 1
- Partnerships with First Nations 1
- Forestry 1
- Agriculture implement manufacturing 1

Threats

- Continuing consolidation of services to larger communities - rail lines, elevators, businesses, schools, buses, police, hospitals, government offices, etc, 25
- Population loss 23
- Sense of abandonment and lack of vision by government and business 22
- Resignation, lack of feeling of control, despair, lack of leadership, isolation 20
- Declining incomes in farm sector 10
- Increasing cost of providing services 7
- Lack of job opportunities 6
- Rising tax burden, declining tax revenues 6
- Lack of understanding of rural issues by urban folk 4
- Lack of housing 3
- Increasing farm size, corporate farms 3
- Dangerous roads 2
- Efforts to weaken CWB 2
- Loss of independent farms/family farms 2
- Federal cheap food policy 1
- Farmland costs exceed ability of farmland to pay for itself 1
- Expectations for services will grow with technology 1

- Available capital in small areas is owned by elderly - have short investment horizon and low risk tolerance 1
- Loss of quality of life brought on by stress of financial insecurity 1
- Gun legislation is reducing numbers of hunters - causes loss of revenue 1
- Soil degradation due to erosion, pollution, etc . . 1
- Forced rural amalgamation 1
- Higher grain prices could discourage diversification 1
- Decline in adult education programs 1

Strategies for Rural Communities

- Encourage regional co-operation to assess opportunities , share facilities, etc 13
- Cultivate entrepreneurial skills and leadership skills 7
- Renew infrastructure (transportation, education, health) to create climate to encourage development 9
- Need governments to actively promote and commit to rural Saskatchewan 6
- Actively promote and market small town Saskatchewan as retirement communities and safe places to raise children 4
- Incentives for ventures 4
- Increased direct government support to ag 3
- Use communications technologies for distance education to enhance skills 3
- Reduce all taxes 3
- Promote way of life as tourist attraction 3
- Develop venture capital funds 2
- Give advantage to local businesses so they can compete with big box stores 2
- Encourage health related businesses, e.g. partner with SAIL to identify product needs and improvements 1
- Possibility of manufacturing of formed plastic health care products like raised toilet seats, urinals, etc. 1
- Possibility of manufacturing things which utilize tube construction - walkers, grab bars etc. 1
- Develop marketing strategies that cut out the middleman 1
- Use quality of life issues to attract business that are not location sensitive 1
- “Come Home to Saskatchewan” initiative “The Place to Live Naturally!” 1

- “Come Home to Saskatchewan, Stay and Profit Campaign 2005” 1
- Wild game ranching 1
- Local governments need to make economic development a priority 1
- Focus on education for native population 1
- Develop strategy for intergeneration transfer of farms 1
- Programs to convert marginal cropland to livestock production 1
- Recruitment strategies for professionals to move to rural areas 1
- Encourage rural communities to actively promote economic development 1
- Change electoral boundaries so rural constituencies are truly rural 1
- Legislation to deal with elevator destruction and rail abandonment 1
- Improve minimum wage and standards of employment 1
- Programs which encourage new homebuyers to invest in rural areas 1
- Involve First Nations in economic development 1
- Introduce restrictions to farm size to increase farm population 1
- Explore new ways to offer services - e.g. increase in surgeries in rural Saskatchewan due to waiting lists in cities 1
- Encourage community based businesses like co-op stores 1

Strategies for Rural Service Sector

- Rural amalgamation and improved intersectoral communication 3
- Improve access to technology (cell, internet, etc) 3
- Eliminate PST 1
- Greater funding to attract and retain employees in rural service centers 1
- Bonuses for professionals working in rural areas to attract them 1
- Encourage and assist short line railways 1
- Tax incentives for private industry 1
- Assistance to overcome barriers to private or co-operative ownership of abandoned elevators. 1

- Education commuters in bedroom communities to importance of shopping local 1
- Business management training 1
- Develop day care for farm families for day, evening, and night care during seeding and harvest 1
- Rationalize road network and improve the remainder 1

Individuals - 16 responses

Strengths

- Businesses extend a line of credit to their customers
- Seniors can drive in rural areas whereas city driving might be intimidating

Weaknesses

- Inability to sell property as population shrinks
- Low wages
- Dependence on government institutions as economic drivers
- Limited cultural activities

Opportunities

- Organic agriculture
- Markets for natural food products
- Greenhouse production
- Immigration - lots of space, quality of life
- Offering overflow services to cities i.e. rinks, etc.

Threats

- Assets of seniors living in rural Saskatchewan will leave when these people die. Concern for financial institutions.
- Excess governments - municipalities, school districts, etc
- Environmental damage from ag chemicals
- Inability to keep rinks, churches, community halls, theatres, etc due to high fixed costs such as utilities

Strategies for Rural Communities

- Insist that people in jobs relying on government money live in the areas they work
- Need to make agriculture more viable to repopulate rural areas
- Cap ag subsidies so as not to overly reward larger farms
- Remove policies that restrict trade between provinces
- Development of provincial Crown to develop rural Saskatchewan.
- More cost effective governments through amalgamation
- For services that have been centralized, better access - e.g. helicopter ambulance, distance education
- Encourage youth to stay in province by writing off student loans according to number of years they work in the province. If they stay for a while, they will settle in and be less likely to move

Strategies for Rural Service Sector

- Lower taxes through more efficient rural government
- Train rural service people in community development skills
- Look at the success stories and repeat them

Success Stories - Rural Communities

- Hog Barns, Feedlots, elk and bison production (new livestock ventures)
- River Ridge Cattle Co. - community based feedlot, Poundmaker at Lanigan, Red Coat Cattle Feeders, Velvet Independent Producers.
- Agra Processing, West Central Pelleting Plant - Wilke, Central Butte Pelleting Plant, Canada Select Grains, Cay Seeds - processors, Lily and Rose Seed Cleaners, Southland Processors - Frontier, Naber Seed and Grain, Norquay Alfalfa Processors restarted.
- Country Lane Poultry
- Ottenbreit's Meat Store
- Drake Meat Processors
- Thomson Meats
- Kitsaki Meats

- Food processing - maple syrup, saskatoons, etc.
- Delisle salad plant
- Schweitzer Ents - spices
- Restaurant and bakery which opened to serve hunters
- Holdfast coffee shop
- Parkview Diner
- New Co-op store at Wadena
- Pat's Emporium at Hudson Bay
- Community based Inland Terminals - NET, SWT, NWT, PWT
- Several U Pick Berry farms
- Mankota Weigh Company, Assiniboia Livestock
- West Central Road and Rail - community organized producer car loading
- Bickner trucking at Vanguard; other trucking firms run out of rural Saskatchewan.
- Farmers of North America
- Ancient Echoes Interpretive Center In Herschel
- Mural project in Margo, Kuroki and Invermay
- F Schneider Museum
- Tourism at Rosthern related to Duck Lake, Batoche, etc
- Western Hemispheric Shorebird Project at Chaplin
- Eastend T-rex
- Dinner theatres
- Twin Towers Ski Area at Stranraer
- Manitou Beach Mineral Spa
- Bed and breakfasts
- Tugaske Co-op
- Retail Fertilizer Outlet
- Bourgealt Industries
- Durafibre
- OSB companies
- Babcock's - Melville
- Pattison Liquid Systems
- Big Quill Resources
- Honeybee Manufacturing
- Manufacturing at St. Brieux. Anaheim, Engelfeld
- Eagle Industries
- Seed Hawk
- Bourgeault
- Doepker
- Seed opener invented by Hugh Barton
- Coverall Shelter Systems - St.Brieux
- PCS at Lanigan

- Saskferco
- Oil industry
- Porcupine Opportunities Program Sheltered Workshop
- Scott's Ornaments
- Little River Pond Mills
- Panther Industries in Davidson
- Manufacturing at Clavet
- Sierra Stone
- Forestry in some areas
- Tree planting company at Goodsoil
- Weyerhaeuser OSB plant at Hudson Bay
- Peat Moss plant in Canora
- Tourism in Eastend
- Prairie Rubber Corp in Assiniboia
- CCS Oil Landfill Site in RM 472
- Bio-tech at Asquith
- Local livestock and other auction marts
- Heartland Hay Operations
- New rink at Whitewood
- Super Draft in Kenaston
- Local halls and rinks built with local resources
- Regional Park at Leroy
- Expansion of Golf and Country Club in Canora
- Community Hall in Pleasantdale
- Fox Valley Community rink
- Fort Qu'Appelle - services of all types, First Nations partnership
- Aboriginal communities moving into tourism and forestry
- Meadow Lake Tribal Council
- Development of Emerald Park and Great Plains Industrial Park
- Influx of farmers from UK to Dysart area due to efforts of local realtor
- Mortlach's web page has brought families from BC to live there.
- Prince Albert Credit Union set up branches in communities where there were no banking services
- Rural Credit Unions took over when Bank of Montreal closed rural branches
- Forced amalgamation defeated
- Rural amalgamation successful in some areas
- "Any community that has managed to survive so far is a success story."

Success Stories - Rural Service Sector

- Eastend Health Center (2 doctors)
- Smeaton Health Center
- Smeaton Co-operative Health Care
- Building 45 bed level 3 and 4 nursing home at Wilke
- Jubilee Lodge nursing home
- Bethany Assisted Living Homes
- Assisted Living Program at Milestone
- Partners for Rural Family Support Intersectoral Group - Humboldt
- Rural water distribution systems
- Improved water supply in Colonsay makes community more attractive
- Waste Disposal Plant at Unity
- Melfort Rural Pipeline Assoc
- Logging roads in the north
- Short line railways
- Branch line retention in West Central area
- Communities repairing roads in south west Saskatchewan
- Local community at Medsted built a store with volunteer labour
- Community college classes offered locally
- Provincial rural service centers work and are trusted
- Marketing clubs
- Pool Tankard and similar community sponsored events
- Credit Unions and Co-ops
- Tugaske Co-op
- Post Offices - Canada Post has stopped closing them
- SARM liability self-insurance
- Private schools in small communities - Notre Dame, Briercrest Bible College, etc.
- Building of Alameda dam which provides recreation and tourism
- Community Futures Development Corps
- Elbow Economic Development Committee
- Partnerships between School Division, RSB and CRC in Melfort and SD, Town, CRC, Health Intersectoral Committee in Tisdale
- South East Rural Resource Committee
- Joint waste collection agreements in some RMs
- Joint fire protection agreements
- SUNTEP, NORTEP