



ACTION COMMITTEE ON THE RURAL ECONOMY

**Rural Service Sector Subcommittee Report
March 2001**

Dick DeRyk (Chair)
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David Sloan
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INTRODUCTION

Members of The Rural Service Sector Subcommittee:

Dick DeRyk - Chair
Yorkton, Business Operator and Tourism Industry Promoter

Debra Ehmann - Co-Chair
Dundurn, Farmer, the Canadian Coalition for Agriculture Safety and Rural Health employee

Doug Griller
Quill Lake, Farmer and Retailer, President of the Saskatchewan Bison Association

Lester Lafond
Saskatoon Businessman, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN)

David Marit
Fife Lake, Farmer and Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) Director

David Sloan
Richardson, Farmer and Chair of the Area Transportation Planning Committees' Chairpersons' Committee

Nial Kuyek
Staff Resource, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Barry Gunther
Staff Resource, Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development (SECD)

The Subcommittee was mandated to examine the service-producing sector in rural Saskatchewan, both private and public. Included are utilities, transportation, communications, finance, insurance, real estate, retail and wholesale trade, government services, health and education services, tourism, accommodation and food services, and services to businesses, dwellings and people. Given this very wide scope of the rural service sector, the Subcommittee spent the first three meetings discussing these areas and identifying the issues that need to be addressed.

In this process, the Subcommittee concluded that dialogue with key organizations of the rural service sector relative to issues and strategic plans was necessary if the Subcommittee was to make meaningful recommendations for the future of Saskatchewan's rural services sector. Accordingly, the following consultations were organized for this purpose:

February 16, 2001:

- Saskatchewan Transportation Company
Greg Beattie; John Miller
- Saskatchewan Water Corporation
Claire Kirkland

February 23, 2001:

- Commission on Medicare
Patrick Fafard
- Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations
Louise Simard; Tonya Duffy and Ken Kosoloski
- Sask Power
John Wright
- Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association
Garry Shaddock and Craig Melvin

March 2, 2001:

- Department of Education
Craig Dotson; Margaret Lipp, Gerry Singchin, Darlene McLeod and Terry Myers
- Saskatchewan Arts Board
Jeremy Morgan
- Sask Culture
Rose Gilks
- Tourism Saskatchewan
Roy Anderson

March 16, 2001:

- Sask Tel
Darryl Silzer; John Meldrum; Ken Wittal

March 19, 2001:

- Department of Economic and Co-operative Development
Cam Pelzer; Van Isman
- Department of Highways and Transportation
Ron Styles; Barry Martin; Carl Neggers;
Daryl Nixon
- Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training
Neil Yeates; Wayne McElree; Linda Smith,
Laureen Gatin
- Sask Energy
George Barnhart
- Saskatchewan Medical Association
Dr. Martin Vogel; Ed Hobday

These consultations were vital to the Subcommittee better understanding the issues involved and policies, programs and strategic plans already in place by key stakeholders to address these issues. All organizations invited to participate did so with senior representatives and with frank and quality dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Water and Waste Management

Water supplies of sufficient quantity and good quality, and effective waste management practices that protect air quality and water resources, are essential to life in rural Saskatchewan and the growth of the rural economy.

Recommendations

- Government needs to play a strong advisory, advocacy, coordination and regulatory role to ensure the protection of vital water resources for present and future generations.
- Education on water quality management and monitoring is needed for rural residents and municipal technicians.
- Greater inter-municipal cooperation for staffing and infrastructure development and maintenance related to water quality and waste management needs to be pursued. For example, a municipal employee with expertise and training in water quality and waste management could provide these services to neighbouring municipalities on a contract basis.

- It is not practical for every community to obtain and sustain a complete water treatment and distribution infrastructure. Criteria needs to be developed for practical alternatives, including, for instance, distribution of raw water to households with their own treatment systems (the so-called under-the-sink systems). User-pay and community-based decision-making need to be key principles in this decision process.
- The role and financial support of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) in farm and rural water development which has diminished in recent years should be restored to previous levels.

II. Transportation

A basic public passenger and freight transportation system is necessary for the future of the rural economy.

An affordable and quality municipal road and provincial highways system is important to the future of rural Saskatchewan, from both economic and social perspectives.

Recommendations

- That the Government of Saskatchewan provide funding to the Saskatchewan Transportation Company to provide basic public passenger and freight transportation services to rural Saskatchewan where use warrants.
- In an effort to be more proactive, all jurisdictions responsible for roads and transportation must do a better job of educating the public on the load capacity of roads and highways, the importance of weight compliance and safety issues.
- That the Action Committee on the Rural Economy further examine the following transportation issues necessary to achieve an affordable and suitable municipal road and provincial highway system.
 - Further improve the coordination and integration of planning the permanent municipal road and provincial highways system between the provincial and municipal governments through the Area Transportation Planning Committees and other such mechanisms.
 - Remove the politics from planning and resource allocation decisions.
 - Finalize the road classification system.
 - Provide rural municipalities with the authority to designate permanent haul routes.
 - Funding decisions are now largely based on traffic volumes. Economic and social factors need to be included in the decision criteria, to give proper relevance to factors such as distance from major centres, sparsity of population, and the needs of business.
- Highway signage is very important to rural communities and businesses. Directional signage for communities must be effective and up-to-date. Provision of signage within the highway right-of-way for specific businesses and community services should be available on a cost-recovery or cost-shared basis.
- The Department of Highways must have a three-year capital works program to be more timely and cost-effective and to allow multi-year funding commitments.

III. Professional, Personal and Business Services

Technological capacity is a necessity if finance, insurance and real estate businesses are to operate competitively and efficiently in rural Saskatchewan.

The provincial regulatory process is slow to provide decisions, and slow to resolve conflicts between urban, rural, agricultural and other land uses.

The agreed that the marketplace generally determines the nature and number of private sector professional services and that these will only be available in rural Saskatchewan if economic and regulatory/operational conditions are favourable.

Rural communities are experiencing increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining professionals such as doctors, veterinarians, nurses, teachers and emergency medical technicians.

Some communities and organizations have used innovative approaches to address this problem. Several municipalities in the Assiniboia area financed the education of a local student through medical school with a requirement for local service after graduation. The Saskatchewan Medical Association maintains a fund to financially support relief doctors (locums), vacation relief and scholarships.

Recommendations

- That provincial government approval processes for zoning, planning and development, water and sewage, and other approvals be reviewed and streamlined to be more time efficient and to meet the needs of proponents. The recognizes that this could ultimately require further resources.
- Develop a fully integrated, comprehensive, multi-discipline single source database of information available to municipalities, economic development organizations, businesses, professionals and others including detailed information on soil, water supply, transportation infrastructure, incentives, local government structure, land ownership and taxation.

- Better integration of agriculture, economic and rural development programs and services should be pursued with municipalities, REDAs, Community Futures projects, and provincial departments to:
- Eliminate duplication.
 - Create efficiencies, linkages and synergies.
 - Create a “one-stop shopping” service.
- Publicly funded agriculture development programs and services need to be maintained and enhanced to further the growth of Saskatchewan agriculture at primary production and value-added levels.
- Support and promote the concept of local municipalities and professional/trade organizations financing the education of tradespersons and professionals, with a requirement for service in rural Saskatchewan.
- Recognize the need for isolation and remoteness incentives to attract professionals to rural areas.

IV. Emergency Services

Police, firefighting and emergency medical services are essential but are high cost services in rural Saskatchewan due to sparsity of population and distance.

Recommendations

- A local approach and cooperation between municipalities should be encouraged for firefighting services. Incentives should promote co-operation between municipalities.
- There is need to create awareness of what citizens can do to supplement police services through programs such as: Rural Crime Watch, Crime Stoppers, and Citizens on Patrol.
- Rural air strips must be reviewed and enhanced for emergency medical services.
- Training for firefighting must include rural conditions.
- There is urgency to ensure speedy implementation of a province-wide 911 emergency response system.

V. Arts and Culture

Saskatchewan is seen as a leader in partnerships and volunteerism that support arts and culture.

The arts provide both physical and intellectual relief and diversion for people in rural Saskatchewan.

The rural environment is generally well-suited to the lifestyles and interests of artists.

Recommendations

- Entrepreneurial training is needed for arts and culture. Research on opportunities and business models needs to be made available.
- Performing and visual arts events, often located in larger urban centres, provide rural communities with opportunities for community-based entertainment and culture which provides diversity, and an enhanced quality of life. Public arts policy must assist rural areas to develop these opportunities at a local level.

VI. Tourism

Tourism in Saskatchewan’s 4th largest industry.

The attitude of Saskatchewan people is an issue at times. The tourism potential of Saskatchewan is not widely recognized by Saskatchewan people.

TourNet is a method for public access to Saskatchewan’s tourism operators.

Recommendations

- There is need for education about opportunities and the undeveloped potential for aboriginal, agricultural and ecological tourism.
- Specific opportunities in agritourism and ecotourism must be identified and qualified; and potential rural private and public sector partners must be involved in the development of these opportunities.
- Specific opportunities in aboriginal tourism must be identified and qualified involving First and Metis Nations in that process and subsequent development.

- Saskatchewan’s history, often preserved at the local level, provides vast opportunities for greater development as is already being done in communities such as Moose Jaw, Whitewood, Batoche, Battleford, Verigin and others.
- A dedicated tax should be seriously considered to provide funding for tourism product development and marketing.
- There needs to be greater access to hunting licenses for foreign hunters using Saskatchewan outfitters.

VII. Education

The Subcommittee’s discussions relative to the K-12 system focused on declining rural populations, school enrollments and the configuration of the future system.

Post-secondary education was particularly examined from the perspective of accessibility of education and training opportunities in rural Saskatchewan and ways to educate youth for employment in rural Saskatchewan.

The high quality of Saskatchewan’s K-12 and post-secondary education systems is acknowledged.

Recommendations

- That the Saskatchewan School Trustees’ Association, Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation and Department of Education co-operate to fast-track pilot projects that will provide education locally through distance education and technology as an alternative to extended busing.
- That entrepreneurial training be developed and included in our K-12 school system.
- That the expertise of local people and the availability of local facilities, such as automotive shops, institutional kitchens, etc., be used to deliver education programs where such expertise and facilities are not readily available within the education system.

- Given the continuation of declining enrollments and school closures, policies and programs for renovations of facilities must be given at least the same priority as construction of new facilities.
- Saskatchewan’s universities need to be aggressive in recruiting and thus retaining our best high school graduates through scholarships and other incentives.
- In allocation of “seats” in various professions and disciplines in post-secondary education, priority should be given to students who will commit to future service in rural Saskatchewan.
- Enhance agriculture in the school curriculum and acknowledge its importance to Saskatchewan and Canada.

VIII. Utilities and Electronic Communications

The commitment of Sask Energy, Sask Power and Sask Tel to rural Saskatchewan is acknowledged as is the relatively high quality and cost-competitive services which they provide.

Electricity and natural gas costs resulting from demand charges or similar pricing strategies can be a major disincentive to the operation of cultural and recreational facilities in rural Saskatchewan.

Recommendations

- Sask Energy’s approach to link rural offices by electronic communications technology and move work to offices with capacity is a model to be considered by provincial government departments, crown corporations and agencies to maintain a presence in rural Saskatchewan, avoid office closures, and provide employment.
- The Subcommittee endorses Sask Power’s Green Power Program and the pursuit of wind-power, co-generation and other electricity generation alternatives, many of which appear to be feasible in rural Saskatchewan.

- A program should be established to assist small communities with the energy costs of operating cultural and recreational facilities and to encourage energy efficiency in operating local facilities.
- The Subcommittee strongly reiterates the January, 2001 recommendation of ACRE for extension of high speed internet and cellular telephone services throughout Saskatchewan.
- Incentives to promote exploration and development of natural gas in Saskatchewan should be considered.
- As the health care system consolidates, Saskatchewan's emergency services systems must be enhanced to provide a strong sense of security and assurance to rural residents that the infrastructure exists to provide speedy access to health care facilities and services that may be some distance away.
- The first priority must be an effective primary health care strategy and system that is proactive, understood, and supported by funding. Only when this is in place can an effective governance model be developed with clear definitions and understandings of roles, authority, accountability and autonomy.

IX. Health Services

Provision of health care services is critical to rural Saskatchewan. It determines where people will live.

Recommendations

- The Subcommittee supports the implementation of primary health care services on a coordinated, integrated and multi-disciplinary team basis. This would ensure that health professionals do not work in isolation, would reduce professional "burn-out", and would make it easier to recruit and retain professionals.

Appendix 1 Schedule of Meetings

Saturday, November 27, 2000

Saturday, December 16, 2000

Saturday, January 13, 2001

Tuesday/Wednesday, January 23 and 24, 2001

Thursday/Friday/Saturday, February 15, 16 and 17, 2001

Thursday/Friday, February 22 and 23, 2001

Friday, March 2, 2001

Friday, March 16, 2001

Monday, March 19, 2001

Wednesday, March 25, 2001