

Taking action for sustainable rural communities



The Third
National
Rural
Conference

**Conference
Report**

October 21–23, 2004
Red Deer, Alberta



Canada

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Message from the Honourable Wayne Easter

Rural Canadians are creative and motivated. They're also dedicated to making their communities the best places they can possibly be.

The Government of Canada recognizes the vital role rural areas play in the prosperity of this country and wants to ensure rural, remote and northern communities have the tools they need to thrive in the 21st Century. This starts with understanding what communities are doing and what they need from governments to meet new challenges.

That was one of the goals of the Third National Rural Conference held in Red Deer, Alberta, October 21-23, 2004. The conference focused on five subjects important to rural Canada: community capacity building, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, youth and northern issues. Participants from across the country talked about actions in their own communities, what it takes for local efforts to succeed and what else could be done.

The discussions were passionate! I was struck by the enthusiasm, drive and willingness of rural citizens to work together to strengthen and sustain their communities. This positive and forward-thinking approach is truly making a difference in rural Canada.

I was also impressed by the energy and ideas of the youth who attended both the Youth Forum and the main conference. Rural youth are leaders of today, as well as tomorrow, and they certainly demonstrated that in Red Deer.



The Third National Rural Conference was a further step in the Rural Dialogue—a process which has engaged more than 16,500 Canadians since 1998. Through this continued exchange of experiences, knowledge and ideas, rural stakeholders are helping to shape and sustain vibrant rural communities across Canada. I am pleased to share with you this report which summarizes what was said at this event.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Easter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wayne" and the last name "Easter" clearly legible.

Wayne Easter

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister
of Agriculture and Agri-Food with
special emphasis on Rural Development

2 **Foreword**

This report summarizes discussions that took place at the Third National Rural Conference held in Red Deer, Alberta, October 21-23, 2004. The report is not intended to be a complete record of the conference sessions, but does provide a comprehensive summary of the main proceedings, recommendations and next steps.

Unless the speaker is identified, the statements in this document were made by participants or recorded in workshop notes and do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.

3 Overview

The Third National Rural Conference was held in Red Deer, Alberta, October 21-23, 2004 with the theme of “Taking Action for Sustainable Rural Communities.”

Building on previous National Rural Conferences in Magog, Quebec in 2000 and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 2002 and a series of regional stakeholder roundtable meetings held during the previous year, the Red Deer conference provided an opportunity to explore what rural communities across Canada are doing to chart a future that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

The conference focused on five areas: community capacity building; entrepreneurship; infrastructure; youth and northern issues. About 315 participants from rural and remote communities in every province and territory were challenged to identify what is working, what challenges and barriers remain, the priorities for action at the community level, how governments can foster and support these local efforts and how communities and governments can work more effectively together.

There were many opportunities for information gathering, learning and networking, including plenary sessions, discussion and learning workshops and a question and answer session with the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development, Wayne Easter. Guest speakers and workshop presenters covered a range of subjects including: updates on progress since the last National Rural Conference; status of the National Rural Policy Framework, and community planning tools including how to access information, stimulate

innovation and promote entrepreneurship, protect cultural heritage, encourage youth engagement, and benefit from regional planning approaches.

In addition to the main conference, about 60 young people participated in a one-day Youth Forum held in Red Deer on October 21. A report from the Youth Forum was presented during the National Rural Conference and is summarized in this report. The first Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards were presented at a special event held on the evening of October 22 at Red Deer College; a brief profile of the award winners is included in this document. The report from the Advisory Committee on Rural Issues, delivered during the wrap-up plenary session, is also summarized in this conference report.

The plenary conference sessions and Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards ceremony were recorded by the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) and broadcast several times over the fall and winter of 2004/05.

Three federal government departments — Canadian Heritage, Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification Canada — played a lead role in partnership with the Rural Secretariat in putting on the conference. The Government of Alberta, Infrastructure Canada, Social Development Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Statistics Canada, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture were involved as associate partners, while Farm Credit Canada and the Alberta Federal Council were contributing partners.

4 Summary of Plenary Speeches

Conference Themes and Objectives

The Honourable Wayne Easter, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development

Mr. Easter opened the conference by thanking participants for attending and expressed the hope that the conference would produce results “that can make a difference in the lives of people in rural communities right across the country.”

As a starting point, Mr. Easter reiterated that Canadians want their communities to be safe, with affordable housing, good transportation, clean air and water, and abundant green spaces. He stressed that rural communities play a key role in meeting Canada’s goals for both economic competitiveness and social development.

Acknowledging the many difficulties facing rural communities, such as BSE in farming, changing weather patterns, and challenges in the fisheries, Mr. Easter articulated the view that there are ample opportunities to build a strong and sustainable rural Canada, a belief reflected in the conference theme, “Taking Action for Sustainable Rural Communities.”

Mr. Easter outlined the objectives of the 2004 National Rural Conference:

- to continue the ongoing dialogue with rural Canadians concerning challenges and issues facing rural Canada;
- to report progress and actions since the last rural conference;
- to identify effective community actions that address key challenges and to explore how all levels of government can support these community actions.

He also referred to the importance of the informal networking and sharing of ideas among participants about current community initiatives, what has worked and what else can be done.

The Parliamentary Secretary told participants he was there to listen and would share what he has heard and learned with his colleagues. “I believe we are all working towards the same goal,” he said. “To ensure stronger, sustainable rural communities, a bottom-up approach is required. At the end of the day what matters are results on the ground.”

Mr. Easter highlighted some of the key achievements made since the last National Rural Conference in 2002. The first he cited was the sustained level of support for rural development, including the federal government’s renewal of the \$55-million Canadian Rural Partnership. Another was the increased involvement of youth in regional and national Rural Dialogue events, including National Rural Youth Conference held in May 2003. He reiterated the importance of the National Rural Youth Network in influencing federal policies and programs and pledged renewed support for the network from the Rural Secretariat.

“Canadians know that rural communities are key to both our social goals and our economic competitiveness.”

On the subject of high-speed Internet access for rural communities, Mr. Easter said he was pleased that the government had launched the \$105-million Broadband for Rural and Northern Development Pilot Program and the \$155-million National Satellite Initiative which will provide service to communities located in the far and mid north as well as other isolated and remote communities. “There’s a lot more to be done,” he said, “because we still have many communities that do not have high-speed Internet capacity.”

At previous National Rural Conferences, participants had asked that the federal, provincial and territorial governments work more closely together. To achieve that objective the first-ever federal-provincial-territorial rural ministers’ meeting was held in Kananaskis, Alberta, in 2003. At this inaugural gathering, rural development ministers discussed principles and a common vision and agreed to continue exploring ways of working together on behalf of rural, remote and northern communities.

As a result of the Kananaskis meeting, Mr. Easter reported, officials in respective governments are collaborating to develop a National Rural Policy Framework to renew the economic and social foundations of rural areas, build community capacity, and strengthen inter- and intra-governmental cooperation.

Mr. Easter positioned the conference as another important step for Canadians to collectively improve upon the future of rural Canada by laying out directions, building enthusiasm and finding more people to work on the ground “to make rural communities what we all want them to be... the best place for our children and grandchildren to grow up and raise their families.”

A Community Perspective

Gail Surkan, Former Mayor of the City of Red Deer

Mrs. Surkan welcomed participants to Red Deer and gave a compelling address about the importance of the “human ingredient” in community development – an often intangible concept that draws on rural heritage and roots, culture, values and relationships alongside the need for social, economic and technological advancement.

She described a collective emotional attachment to rural communities resulting from the historic settlement pattern that helped Canada develop and grow into the nation that it is today.

Pointing to the inevitability of changes transforming the nature of rural communities the world over, Mrs. Surkan referred to a deep sense of loss that many Canadians feel when confronted with increasing urbanization. She also referred to the impact that globalization of markets, technological change and industrial consolidation are having on our communities as measured by lost job opportunities, income and education levels, health status and physical infrastructure.

But beyond these developments, she said, is a sense of urgency that is attributable to a loss of essential relationships – to the land, to the sea and to one another.

“I believe we are sensing, not just the loss of familiar places – the villages and towns and sometimes even small cities where we grew up – but the loss of community per se: that is, the ability to live together in a values-driven environment that gives us a strong sense of belonging, of human scale and human importance,” she stated. People are troubled, she said, by the lack of essential human connectedness in the systems and spaces into which global trends are pushing them, particularly urban spaces.

The process of community development and sustainability can be more effectively supported, she said, when people feel a sense of shared future, have influence, and can build common value systems.

New settlement patterns in Canada and other countries are cause for hope and bear watching and understanding, Mrs. Surkan said. Some rural communities located in close proximity to metropolitan centres have been able to thrive and grow independently by creating strong economic ties and supply relationships, while at the same time providing “quality, human-scale, social living environments for people.” These communities are not like suburbs, she stressed.

Mrs. Surkan pointed to the growth trend of regional economies and the networks of communities which support regional prosperity. “Astute communities are banding together into well coordinated regional networks,” she said.

The former Red Deer mayor believes that there is much that rural communities can do to respond to the process of change. This includes changing long-held habits and finding new ways to provide more effective services to citizens. This can be done, she said, by sharing resources through networks of communities, taking advantage of improved communications infrastructure, distance learning, preventative health strategies and micro-production technologies.

“We have to understand our communities as essential living environments where people feel a sense of “shared future” where they have influence, where they work together to build common value systems.”



Gail Surkan, the former mayor of Red Deer, talks about rural Canada being a place of “quality people living in quality relationships,” in her address to delegates to the Third National Rural Conference in Red Deer, Alberta.

One of the most important roles Mrs. Surkan identified for rural communities is to construct and nurture inclusive, interactive and supportive social environments. The future of rural communities, she said, depends on their ability to embrace diversity and to be inclusive of many cultures, languages and values.

In the context of preserving, nurturing and acting on community values, Mrs. Surkan referred to the Central Alberta Economic Partnership of 45 communities that originally formed around economic development strategies. By seeing their future as “shared,” member communities learned to trust one another and move from competitive to collaborative behavior. This in turn provided a foundation for resolving issues on many different fronts, such as water protection and conservation.

Mrs. Surkan finished her address with a call to action for rural communities to identify and build on the “essential values that will maintain our contribution on the front line in advancing Canada’s economic and social goals.”

Keynote Address

The Honourable Andy Mitchell, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

The keynote speaker for the conference was Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Andy Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell’s speech emphasized that to be successful as a country, Canada needs both strong urban and rural communities and that policy makers need to understand the importance of their interconnectedness.

While issues like healthcare, education, transportation and the future of our youth are priorities in both rural and urban settings, the realities are oftentimes very different Mr. Mitchell said. Referring to rural factors such as distance to markets, lower population densities, and the cyclical nature of resource-based industries, Mr. Mitchell stated that “our programs need to take these differences into account.”

To do this, he said, it is essential that governments – federal, provincial and municipal – work together in a coordinated way. That’s why the development of a National Rural Policy Framework is so critical, he added, pointing out that a National Rural Policy Framework will establish a common set of objectives for rural and remote Canada.

Mr. Mitchell emphasized the importance of empowering communities to adopt a bottom-up approach to achieve sustainability. Government, he said, will provide tools and help communities to build capacity.

Reviewing progress to date in rural development, Mr. Mitchell referred to the Community Futures program as a world success story. He also pointed to the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund and the connectivity agenda, spearheaded at both the provincial and federal levels, as examples of programming priorities that were identified through the Rural Dialogue.

Mr. Mitchell also focused his speech on the importance of agriculture and agricultural-based industries, not just in rural Canada, but for all of Canada. It is a special industry, Mr. Mitchell said, that is populated by people who work hard and make sacrifices every day to ensure that Canadians have a safe and reliable food supply.

The government’s job is to ensure that producers can make a living, he said. A network of sustainable communities, he added, is necessary to support the natural resources industries that contribute so much to the success of Canada. The knowledge for ensuring a strong agricultural sector lies with communities and producers, said Mr. Mitchell, stressing the importance of collaboration.

“It’s essential as we move towards sustainability in rural and remote areas that we operate in a coordinated way, where governments – federal, provincial, municipal – work together, where they understand and have a common vision and common objectives.”

5 Learning Workshops

The Learning Workshops took place Saturday, October 23. These interactive sessions provided delegates with information and tools in support of local community actions. If you are interested in the information contained in these sessions, please contact the presenters directly.

From Information to Knowledge: Finding and Using Community Data

Participants worked with several key issues affecting rural communities, explored the value of various types of information (including locally available sources) and examined and considered strategies on using information. Examples from several rural communities were used to illustrate the process of using community data in an effective manner.

Contacts: Bill Reimer, reamer@vax2.concordia.ca and Ray Bollman, ray.bollman@statcan.ca

Business Vitality Index — Jumpstart your Community

The Business Vitality Index (BVI) is a community planning tool developed by the Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Kootenay. This session focused on how nine rural BC communities used the BVI to examine their business health. This session considered common areas of strength and weakness across case study communities, community success stories and recommendations for building entrepreneurial communities.

Contacts: Mike Stolte, mstolte@futures.bc.ca and Terri MacDonald, tmacdonald@futures.bc.ca

Youth are Key

This youth-led workshop was designed to provide a toolkit for youth involvement in rural communities. It included case studies of youth-led projects in Canada, an interactive presentation and discussion. The workshop also provided information on the National Rural Youth Network.

Contacts: Jennifer Rooke, rookejenn@netscape.net and Shawna Wallace, shawna.wallace@uleth.ca and Stephanie Maynard, steph.maynard@sympatico.ca

Using Broadband Connections for Rural and Remote Community Development

This live video-conference session brought together presenters from remote communities in different parts of Canada to share their experiences developing and operating community-owned broadband infrastructure and networks. Participants discussed a wide range of applications including remote health care diagnosis, distance learning, tele-justice and e-commerce.

Contact: Michelle Mayer, michelle.mayer@crc.ca

Community Foundations: A Vehicle for Building Capacity

This workshop highlighted some tools accessible through the 141 community foundations across Canada (www.community-fdn.ca). It included information on their local grant-making role and other tools they provide to communities such as training, governance and youth engagement.

Contacts: *Deborah Bartlett*,
dbartlett@telusplanet.net and
Lucie Saint-Gelais, saintgelais@webnet.qc.ca

The Innovation Network — Bridging the Gap between Idea and Implementation

Speakers shared the good, the bad and the ugly of developing the Peace Region Economic Development Alliance (PREDA) Innovation Network. Launched in 2002 it was created to assist the region's entrepreneurs in developing innovative and commercially viable products and services. Participants found out how PREDA identified a regional problem and what was done to fix it, namely: engaging in client services, awareness campaigns, workshops and regional partnerships.

Contacts: *Bruce Rutley*,
brutley-tin@peacecountrycanada.com
and *Bob Hall*, bob.hall@gov.ab.ca

Another Way to Succeed

Participants were equipped to take steps in their own communities to implement innovative projects that could address the challenges of a significant school drop-out rate, exodus of youth, and lack of specialized agricultural workers, all modelled after the work-placement and schooling approach of the first “Maisons Familiales Rurales” of Quebec.

Contact: *Clémence Rancourt*,
c.rancourt@globetrotter.net

Incorporating Cultural Values in Business and Governance Structures in the North

Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) means “The Inuit way of doing things: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit Society.” This workshop provided participants an opportunity to build for the future on a cultural foundation that does not end up with “token” or marginalization of the original culture.

Contact: *Peesee Pitsiulak*, ppitsiulak@gov.nu.ca

The Rural Innovation Challenge

Innovation is recognized as a driver in the knowledge-based society. All levels of government, along with business and industry, are applying innovation strategies for competitiveness and prosperity. This workshop provided participants with the opportunity to explore ways of recognizing and fostering innovations within their communities and the opportunity to pilot a community-planning process tool.

Contact: *Mary Robertson Lacroix*,
mary.robertson@sympatico.ca

Encouraging Success in Kugluktuk

Participants learned how a community responded to a sharp increase in youth crime by instituting an action plan called “Change Begins With Us.” This plan included a drop-in centre, computer training, emphasis on sports teams, and the highly successful Kugluktuk Grizzlies not-for-profit organization.

Contact: Millie Kuliktana, mkuliktana@gov.nu.ca

Facilitating Immigration in Rural Canada: Creating Preparedness Strategies

This session examined case studies and highlighted resources and support mechanisms required to help attract and keep immigrants in rural communities.

Contacts: Asthma Rezagui, amouk@nb.net and Margot Bégin, mbegin@corda.ca



Conference delegates participated in a number of conference workshops designed to share their challenges and successes throughout rural Canada. Here, conference delegates participate in the Innovation Challenge learning workshop.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities — A Regional Approach to Community Development

This workshop demonstrated how the Community Futures program across Canada uses innovative community engagement processes to solve regional community development issues. Participants were challenged to turn local challenges into successful collaborative solutions.

Contacts: Dr. Robert Annis, annis@brandonu.ca and Dan Borowec, dan@northcfdc.ca

6 Discussion Workshop Reports and Recommendations

On the first day of the conference, participants broke into groups of 15-25 people to discuss what rural communities across Canada are doing to remain viable and to chart a future that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The discussion groups provided community leaders an opportunity to share information, common interests and experiences and to suggest how governments can support communities in taking action to achieve their objectives.

These discussion workshops were organized under five subject streams: Community Capacity Building; Entrepreneurship; Infrastructure; Youth and Northern Issues. These five subject areas had emerged from a series of roundtable meetings with rural stakeholders held across Canada in the previous 15 months.

Participants were asked to discuss what is happening at the community level? What is working well and why? And, what else can be done?

The results of these discussions are summarized for each subject stream under three headings: Community Initiatives; Success Factors, and What Else Can Be Done. In the case of the Northern Issues stream, participants' comments are presented under the headings: Challenges Facing Northern Communities; Successful Initiatives, and What Else Can Be Done.

Participants were asked to discuss what is happening at the community level? What is working well and why? And, what else can be done?

A. Community Capacity Building

Community capacity building is a continuous process to develop local leadership and encourage citizen participation in community development. It enables a community or region to:

- identify its strengths and weaknesses;
- mobilize internal and external resources to meet local challenges;
- develop strategies for effective action; and
- take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Community capacity building is a way of ensuring community members have the necessary knowledge and skills to build individual and collective self-confidence and to help fulfill community needs through active citizen involvement.

Community capacity building is not an end in itself. It is a way to develop and harness a community's knowledge and talent in order to maximize what it can accomplish. This applies to all aspects of community well-being, including economic development, social services, recreation and culture, and preserving a healthy natural environment.

Community capacity building is a way to develop and harness a community's knowledge and talent in order to maximize what it can accomplish.

Presenters:
**Maria Labrecque-
Duchesneau,**
Marievalle, Quebec
and Scott Raible,
Medicine Hat, Alberta



Community Initiatives

Five examples of successful community capacity building initiatives were highlighted:

- The Regional Economic Development Alliance in Alberta and Saskatchewan for its work to help rural communities attract and retain businesses, provide training opportunities for local leaders, and contribute to employment skills planning for immigrants.
- The Saamis Immigration Project based in Medicine Hat, Alberta, for bringing together social and economic stakeholders in the strategic planning process for integrating new Canadians into their communities and pairing newly arrived families with established families.
- The community of Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia, for mobilizing its social base to deal with reduced services, redefine itself and build a foundation for the future when the town's main employer closed its doors.
- The University of Guelph's Alfred College, l'Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens and the Agricom journal for their strategic partnership that supports francophone farmers in Ontario through stable funding, technical training, communications, and activities.
- The Consortium du développement social de la Mauricie in Quebec, a partnership of regional government ministries that takes a collaborative approach to fighting poverty and exclusion.

Conference delegates participate in one of the many discussion workshops held during the Third National Rural Conference in Red Deer, Alberta.

Success Factors

Factors that contribute to the success of Community Capacity Building fell into two categories — Mobilization of the Community and Access to Tools.

Mobilization of the Community

- Inclusive leaders and convenors who have long-term vision and the ability to implement short-term actions and projects
- Organized continuous learning drawing on the experience of others in the community
- General spirit of cooperation
- Attitude and willingness to change
- Partnerships and collaboration across communities and between governments
- Identification and development of rural leaders, including youth
- Diversity and inclusiveness
- Involving stakeholders in decision-making
- Community pride and sense of ownership of issues

Access to Tools

- Local dollars to leverage other resources
- Support for entrepreneurship
- Supportive but not directive government programming
- Research and information tools and program funds

What Else Can Be Done

Areas where additional actions could be undertaken in support of community capacity building were identified as follows:

- More awareness and involvement of youth in the education system.
- Further development of stakeholder implementation capacity.
- Integration of newcomers to rural communities.
- Retention of skilled workers.
- Leadership succession planning through coaching and mentorship training.
- Promotion of rural/urban interdependence.
- Foster pride in communities.
- More regional approaches.
- Consistency and continuity of longer-term funding.
- Information sharing between governments and communities.
- Re-energizing the Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural Issues.
- Greater federal presence in rural communities.
- Increased support for community capacity building.

B. Entrepreneurship

Business enterprises, including cooperatives, are a mainstay in the economic and social viability of rural communities. Community encouragement and support for entrepreneurs are essential to long-term economic development in rural Canada.

Entrepreneurship refers to the process of starting, developing and managing a business. Entrepreneurship is usually associated with innovating and taking risks. It is a process through which individuals and groups pursue opportunity, acquire and expend resources, and create value through new enterprises.

Small and medium-sized enterprises generate employment as well as provide products and services to local consumers and customers beyond their home community. Entrepreneurship is particularly important in rural, remote and northern communities where local access to products and services may be more limited than in larger centers, and where there may be a desire to expand and diversify the community's economic base.

Entrepreneurship is particularly important in rural, remote and northern communities where local access to products and services may be more limited than in larger centers.

Presenter:

**Jean-Marc Lacasse,
Drumheller, Alberta**

Community Initiatives

Participants identified four areas where local entrepreneurship initiatives are occurring:

- Youth Entrepreneurship – Many different examples of youth entrepreneurship programs emerged during the workshops including co-operatives, school-based entrepreneurship programs, junior achievers and youth at risk programs. It was stressed that youth entrepreneurship was an important common thread throughout the discussion groups.
- Community Futures Development Corporations – CFDCs are well known for providing support to entrepreneurs through lending, coaching and business training.
- Mentorship – Numerous examples of mentorship programs – local, regional and national – were identified during the workshops. It was noted that mentorship programs are not limited to youth but may apply to anyone seeking guidance or direction.
- Micro-lending – Community Futures Development Corporations and Canada Business Service Centres were identified as examples of institutions that can “fill the gap” when it comes to support not provided by financial institutions.

Success Factors

The following success factors were identified and are presented in no particular order:

- Partnerships – Collaborative approaches are seen as necessary to foster entrepreneurship. Partnerships can be either formal or informal. Successful examples include the Business Advisory Network in Central Alberta, and the Aide aux femmes entrepreneurs (AFE) in Quebec.
- Mentorship – Mentorship is a means of guiding people in such a way that they can avoid making mistakes and is applicable to people of all ages. Successful examples cited include the Fondation de l'Entrepreneurship and the Canadian Youth for Business Foundation.
- Ongoing Support – Supporting entrepreneurship is seen as more than start-up support. Often businesses fail within their first five years due to a lack of ongoing support. Canada Business Service Centres and Community Futures Development Corporations were identified as two examples of organizations that provide such support to new businesses.
- Community-Driven Focus – Entrepreneurship programs must take a bottom-up approach.
- Co-operatives – Co-operatives are a proven approach to collaboration. Examples of successful models include co-op stores in Nunavut and the workers' co-operative in Quebec.
- Networks and Associations – By forming formal or informal networks and strategic alliances, small businesses can work together. An example provided is the Small Private Woodlot Owners Association in Nova Scotia which helps members obtain improved access to markets.

What Else Can Be Done

Six future actions to support entrepreneurship were highlighted:

- Long-term and stable government commitment to entrepreneurship programs – Programs that are in a state of flux year after year are seen as non-conducive to community entrepreneurship efforts.
- Building education and training into curricula for schools and communities – Leadership training and other soft entrepreneurial skills should extend through primary, secondary and post-secondary schools. Parents should also be involved. 4-H club activities were provided as an example.
- Develop a national centre for rural entrepreneurship – There are many Canadian organizations with resources, including materials on best practices. A national centre could coordinate efforts and available resources. The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) in the United States was mentioned as an example.
- Provide access to mentors – Mechanisms to provide access to experienced people who can help future entrepreneurs are seen as important. Such mechanisms could include on-line coordination and encouraging intra-community sharing of mentors across the country.
- Create a virtual entrepreneurship centre – Such a centre would function as a “one-stop shop” to provide entrepreneurs with all the services needed for starting a business. Due to the distance constraints of many rural communities, such a centre should be accessible through the Internet, again underscoring the need for high-speed access in rural municipalities.

- Better access to equity and capital – Existing funding and assistance programs for entrepreneurs were considered to be somewhat limited and amounts available to entrepreneurs do not necessarily reflect the times. Businesses need greater access to capital.

C. Infrastructure

Facilities and services play a key role in defining a community. A community's infrastructure will significantly affect the quality of life it offers to its residents and its ability to attract business and remain viable.

A community's infrastructure consists of physical networks and assets, as well as core public services and institutions that are essential to economic activity and to people's quality of life. It includes physical infrastructure such as housing, highways, transportation terminals, municipal water and sewage systems, telephone and Internet connections, industrial land, energy generation and waste management facilities. It also includes social and economic infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, libraries, financial institutions, economic development organizations, and community and recreation centres.

With some exceptions, community infrastructure has historically been provided and maintained by various levels of government. However, private companies and cooperatives are involved in several key areas including telecommunications, financial services, air travel, some aspects of the health care system and private schools.

Presenter:

Nythala Baker, Vernon, British Columbia and Charles Édouard Landry, Paquetville, New Brunswick

Community Initiatives

The presentation focused mainly on general themes as opposed to specific individual initiatives:

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) – Federal government investment in ICT was seen as important in helping connect rural communities. For example, a successful federally sponsored ICT job creation program in the communities of North Bay and Timmins resulted in permanent infrastructure for Internet access in those communities.
- Social – This refers to a broad range of infrastructure initiatives that extend beyond physical infrastructure. Included are such things as social programs, education services and recreation facilities.
- Transportation for Goods and People – Initiatives to provide air, water and land transportation infrastructure were considered by participants to be especially important for remote and isolated communities.
- Environmental – Among the many forms of environmental infrastructure initiatives discussed, alternative and green sources of energy, including wind-power pilot projects, were highlighted as important.

Federal government investment in information and communication technology was seen as important in helping connect rural communities.

Success Factors

The following five key success factors were identified in the infrastructure stream:

- Community Consensus – In defining community consensus, participants felt that it was increasingly important to seek consensus on infrastructure planning, not just within a community, but among communities within a broader region.
- Communication – In consideration of the fact that infrastructure planning and implementation often involves a broad range of stakeholders, communications programs within the community need to be both horizontal and vertical to ensure optimal involvement.
- Access to Information – Good infrastructure planning requires access to quality information.
- Alliances – Strategic alliances among municipalities are viewed as extremely important.
- Resources – People, funding and technology.

What Else Can Be Done

Suggestions for additional actions included:

- Cooperation – Emphasis should be placed on promoting better vertical and horizontal cooperation within and between communities in planning for infrastructure.
- Better understanding of urban and rural interdependence – This theme was reflected in a number of subject streams at the conference and refers to providing urban communities with a greater awareness and understanding of rural infrastructure requirements and the importance of rural infrastructure to Canadian infrastructure systems as a whole.

- Staff support and training – On a regional basis, the process of building alliances within and between communities could be facilitated by support for and training of staff. Such training would also serve to build organizational capacity, help in the delivery of services and enable organizations to stay on top of new programs and initiatives.
- Public transportation for small communities – A key to providing public transportation infrastructure in small communities is to ensure that options are accessible, affordable and responsible.
- Rural Cabinet Minister – Some participants felt that creating a Cabinet post for a Minister to represent rural interests within the Government of Canada would elevate the importance of rural issues.
- Senior decision-makers as observers – The presence of senior federal and provincial/territorial officials as observers at the National Rural Conference and other Rural Dialogue events would serve to ensure a better understanding of rural issues in government departments.
- More equitable cost sharing – Participants felt that the existing model whereby municipalities, provincial and federal governments share the costs of new infrastructure on a 1/3:1/3:1/3 basis should be adjusted as many communities do not have the necessary financial resources available to upper tier levels of government.
- Shared regional approach – In working cooperatively with other communities to meet infrastructure needs on a regional basis, participants felt that it is important to evaluate initiatives to establish community buy-in taking into account the following factors:
 - financial capacity
 - socially acceptable
 - environmental sensitivity.

Other Comments

In addition, a suggestion was made to explore community representation on Rural Teams. Also, the phrase “Inclusivity versus tokenism” was put forward to capture the sentiment that community participation has to be meaningful.

D. Youth

The goal of achieving sustainable rural communities is profoundly influenced by the ability of communities to engage young people in their plans for the future. Young Canadians are leaders of today as well as tomorrow. They bring fresh perspectives and much needed skills to help rural, remote and northern communities meet the many challenges facing them in the 21st century.

Rural communities face a variety of challenges and opportunities which are influenced in large part by the decisions that young people make. The following are some of the most significant youth issues identified by young people and other rural community leaders: youth leaving, access to education, youth perceptions, youth leadership, and youth at risk.

Presenters:

**Marie-Eve Larocque, Embrun,
Ontario and Vixn Przybysz,
Vernon, British Columbia**

Community Initiatives

The following examples were cited:

- Youth in Municipal Councils – The first initiative involving youth relates to actively involving them in the democratic life and economic development of their rural communities through direct participation in the political process. A number of young people have been successfully elected to municipal councils in recent years.
- Youth Justice – In some rural areas, the Youth Justice Project actively involves young people in identifying appropriate sentences to be imposed on youth who have committed minor offences in their community.
- Place aux jeunes – This program targets young people who have left their rural communities in order to study in post-secondary institutions in urban areas. The program helps develop strategies that encourage young people to return, promoting economic potential and employment opportunities in the community.
- National Farm Registry – Organized by the National Farmers Union, this initiative lists youth employment opportunities in farming as well as farms that are for sale, hence the program description “farms without young farmers and young farmers without farms.”

Success Factors

Four elements were identified as keys to success:

- Youth involvement as full partners in the decision-making-process – Full involvement in the decision-making process means involving young people from the start and in all project development stages.
- Recognition of contributions by young people – Participants noted that success of community projects can be enhanced by promoting youth contributions, be they large or small.
- Involvement of the whole community in projects by young people – Community support of initiatives by young people was viewed as important to the success of these initiatives.
- Ability of young people to communicate with one another and with the community – Access to communications tools for learning about and sharing information on community projects and other topics was viewed as important.

What Else Can Be Done

The following actions were recommended:

- Provide an environment to encourage youth retention – Greater access to educational resources, such as colleges, universities or e-learning through broadband access, was viewed as a way to encourage youth to stay in rural communities. Another approach would be to provide student debt reduction incentives for young people who choose to return to rural communities after completing their studies.
- Ensure stable funding for youth organizations to encourage development projects instead of fundraising – It was pointed out that the time youth organizations are required to spend on fundraising detracts from the time spent working to engage young people in community initiatives.

- Provide good information about education and employment opportunities – Youth are often unaware of the diverse employment opportunities that exist in rural areas. For example, through various trade apprenticeships, youth can earn remuneration, gain work experience and make a contribution to the community.
- Discuss and promote other definitions of success – Changing attitudes about success is seen as a long-term, collective process. By promoting a definition of success that involves staying and helping rural communities to grow, young people who choose to stay will not feel lesser than their urban counterparts.
- Facilitate inter-generational bridging activities to build a sense of community – Participants stressed the importance of building culture, pride, healthy attitudes, relationships and ultimately stronger communities through mentorship and coaching.
- Encourage corporate responsibilities toward youth – It is not enough to rely on government funding for training or importing workers to rural areas, participants said. Instead, private sector enterprises should exercise social responsibility toward youth and provide skills training. In essence, public and private sector partnerships in training should be redefined.

It is not enough to rely on government funding for training or importing workers to rural areas. Private sector enterprises should exercise social responsibility toward youth and provide skills training.

E. Northern Issues

Canada's north, comprised of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the northern parts of British Columbia, the prairie provinces, Ontario, Quebec and Labrador, is a vast area comprising more than half of Canada's land mass, but is home to a mere 2% of the country's population. Most northern residents live in communities with populations of less than 1,000 people. A large part of the northern population is Aboriginal, comprising First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. The Aboriginal population is 23% of the total Yukon population and 49% of the Northwest Territories population. In Nunavut, 85% of the population is Inuit.

Northern communities are challenged by many of the same issues facing rural and remote communities in other parts of the country, including: access to health care, education and training; availability of housing; inadequate infrastructure; and dependence on single natural resource industries. However, in the north, isolation, climate, sparse population and conflicts between traditional and modern values and ways of life, must also be taken into account.

The acceleration of resource development in the north in recent years is providing northern communities with new opportunities for employment, economic diversification and improved amenities. At the same time, environmental, social and other costs associated with these projects have very real implications for northern residents. Ensuring that development occurs in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner requires active planning and participation by northern communities.

Northern communities are challenged by many of the same issues facing rural and remote communities in other parts of the country. However, in the north, isolation, climate, sparse population and conflicts between traditional and modern values and ways of life, must also be taken into account.

Presenters:

**Randy Cleveland, Yellowknife
Northwest Territories and
John Farinowsky, Haines Junction,
Yukon Territory**

Challenges Facing Northern Communities

In discussing northern issues, presenters felt it was important to highlight some of the circumstances and conditions that make northern communities unique. Starting with population, it was pointed out that if one took the 100,000 or so people who live in the 'rural' Thunder Bay area and spread them over 75 communities across half the land mass of Canada, it would provide a sense of the population dispersion in the north.

Variations in temperature are extreme. Winter temperatures are regularly as low as -56 degrees Celsius, whereas temperatures in the Yukon reached +43 degrees in the summer of 2004. On the environmental front, industrial pollutants are finding their way into whale and caribou meat. Evidence of climate change impacts in the north are increasingly being recognized.

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Rapid change is seen in the Northwest Territories' double-digit growth in Gross Domestic Product. Political change is also extensive, with many communities adopting self-government, while others are experimenting with a combination of comprehensive land claims and public government. Specific challenges were identified as follows:

- Regionalization/Dissociation – A common complaint in the northern discussion workshops was that, as regionalization occurs, services and government agencies are concentrated in cities such as Whitehorse, requiring northern residents to travel long distances, often at great expense, to access these services. Small communities also feel burdened as the federal government devolves powers and responsibilities to territorial governments and territorial governments in turn devolve activities to individual communities. The problem, said participants, is that communities do not receive adequate funds to fulfill their expanded roles. At the same time, remote northern communities do not have access to the types of programs and services that larger urban areas have.
- Youth – Northern communities want their youth to stay in school as long as possible and to continue on to receive post-secondary education, but they want young people to return to the community after completing their education.

- Growing Gap in Services and Infrastructure – In many northern communities, especially in Nunavut, growth is exceeding the local capacity of infrastructure and services (e.g. sewer and water).

In many northern communities, growth is exceeding the local capacity of infrastructure and services.

- Streamlined Governance (decision-making, information sharing) – Participants noted that approval processes often require consultation with, or approval from, government offices in other locations. This is very frustrating for people in remote communities who have a challenge simply accessing one office in their own territory. Encouraging governments at all levels to work together, share information, and involve local communities in decision-making would help a lot, participants said.
- Quality Relationships (within and between communities) – It is important for people in northern communities to work together, participants said. Municipal and First Nations governments need to work together on common goals for their communities and areas.
- Access to Opportunities – Opportunities for northern communities are often limited due to a lack of capital, infrastructure, skills and education, and working partnerships. For example, limited access to capital is a challenge when it comes to providing adequate housing. It was pointed out that home construction in the north can cost between \$200,000 and \$400,000 per house, not including land, and that banks are often unwilling to provide financing. Inadequate roads mean that northern industries must rely on seasonal ice roads in order to receive supplies such as fuel. On the education front, only one quarter of the Aboriginal population over the age

of 25 has a Grade 9 education. Finally, due to a lack of political stability resulting from devolution of federal powers and the process of settling land claims, it is difficult for northern communities to establish stable relationships until roles, responsibilities, and authority are resolved.

- Environmental Changes – Global warming is expected to be four times faster and more severe in the north than the rest of the world. Greenhouse gases and industrial pollution tend to end up in the north. Resource depletion must be planned for so that communities know what to do when resources eventually run out or cheaper alternatives are found.

Successful Initiatives

The presenters put forward the equation: “challenges and commitment to place equals successful adaptation” and presented examples of successful efforts in six categories:

- Collaboration, Partnerships and Power in Numbers – Elder care for First Nations and the Town of Haines Junction was cited. Three First Nations communities and the Town of Haines Junction, all within 50 kilometres of one another in the Yukon, each approached the government unsuccessfully for support to establish seniors’ complexes. However, when the chiefs and mayor of the four communities approached the Minister together, the door was opened for discussion about a shared facility. Similarly, in British Columbia, considering competing land uses of tourism and forestry, participants agreed it is important to involve all the people in an area in creating a plan for what the community wants. Such decisions, they said, should not be made solely by the municipal government.
- Youth Retention Programming — The Northern Graduate Program in the Northwest Territories provides employment opportunities to graduating

students to help them gain experience in their fields of study. Participants also stressed the importance of ensuring that education programs in the north maintain Aboriginal content. The government of Nunavut has a mandate to incorporate traditional Inuit knowledge in the delivery of programs and services, and to ensure that policies and practices are consistent with the beliefs, customs, values and the language of Inuit people.

- **Recognizing Local Expertise in Decision-Making** – In the Northwest Territories, community environmental boards reflect traditional “ecological” knowledge by exercising local responsibility for environmental management plans and monitoring the impacts of development and climate change in their locale.
- **Capitalizing on Assets and Advantages** – The example of Sault Ste. Marie’s development of a call centre industry shows how a community in transition can move through self-appraisal from being a victim to becoming a master of its own destiny.
- **Using Information and Communication Technology** – A growing number of southern universities are providing courses through northern colleges. The establishment of a virtual University of the Arctic, a cooperative of colleges, universities and other organizations committed to higher education and research in the north, is circumpolar in dimension. These examples, along with videoconferencing and tele-health services demonstrate how technology can be used to reduce the impacts of isolation.
- **Made-in-the-North-Institutions for Capacity Building** – The School of Community Government (NWT) provides governance training to communities. Good governance is a critical dimension of capacity building in the north.

What Else Can Be Done

The following were suggested as additional actions that could be taken by communities and governments in the north:

- Policies and incentives to encourage job and business creation.
- To help address the shortage of doctors and nurses in the north, the government could speed up accreditation of health professionals. It was suggested that accelerated accreditation could be provided for healthcare workers who agree to work for two years in the north.
- Expanding financial incentives that currently apply to university education to a wider range of educational facilities such as trade schools would make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable. It was suggested that Nunavut’s college courses for municipal and First Nations leaders on finance and administration should be expanded throughout the north.
- Accelerated devolution of authority and resources:
 - Land claims;
 - Self government; and,
 - Provincial powers for Territories.
- Streamlined government decision-making and approval processes through a single body – “one-stop shop” – would facilitate easier start-up for businesses in the north.
- Encourage job-relevant education and training in trades.
- Flexibility of national funding programs for northern applications.
- Increase Canada’s understanding of the North.
- Capitalize on International Polar Year in 2007.
- Foster pride in northern communities.

- Healthy communities require healthy people: creating healthy communities in the north requires a combination of approaches, an important one being the need to overcome the disabilities created by fetal alcohol syndrome.

To help address the shortage of doctors and nurses in the north, it was suggested that accelerated accreditation could be provided for healthcare workers who agree to work for two years in the north.

Additional Comments from the Floor

A participant from Kirkland Lake in northeastern Ontario commented that communities throughout his region are suffering from out-migration and shrinking economies. This, he maintained, is largely the result of decisions made by central governments and the urban majority, such as the closing of existing successful businesses. New rules, such as those for water that are being implemented in wake of the Walkerton tragedy, he said, are putting some businesses under. Northerners need to stand up and resist the imposition of stupid rules.

One participant from the Yukon commented on the issue of money from northern resources flowing from the north to the south. An example was given of the Alaska pipeline and the fact that First Nation's communities over whose lands the pipeline extends, do not receive any revenues whatsoever.

A third person commented on the importance of the co-operative model in providing rural and northern communities with ownership over "at least a portion of their economies." Cooperatives are suffering from a severe lack of support, she said, even though this form of enterprise has proven successful for over 150 years.

7 Youth Forum Report



The Youth Forum took place on Thursday, October 21. It was a lively discussion among about 60 youth participants from across Canada. The youth attending appreciated the opportunity to discuss a number of topics. They also gained a greater appreciation of the challenges of balancing community priorities through an interactive learning session entitled “Building Your Ideal Community.” They took pride in the fact that the Forum was organized by and for youth through the involvement of members of the National Rural Youth Network and that this network is becoming a strong and legitimate voice for Canadian rural youth.

Youth participants acknowledged that they are often forced to leave rural areas to pursue post-secondary education. They pointed out that rural students are frequently burdened with large student debts and many find it difficult to find work and move back to their rural communities. They noted that the Northwest Territories has implemented a program to forgive student loans at a rate of \$4000 per year provided they live in that jurisdiction after completion of studies. Quebec has a similar program.

Rural students are frequently burdened with large student debts and many find it difficult to find work and move back to their rural communities.

Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Andy Mitchell, meets with National Rural Youth Network members.

It was felt that since recent graduates often set long-term roots in the community in which they first work, a short-term investment has the potential to pay dividends for a generation or more into the future. Youth felt that the federal government had a role to play in setting up a similar program to encourage youth to return and settle in rural and northern communities.

Ongoing trade issues such as softwood lumber and BSE were of concern to rural youth. They expressed a desire for investments to help diversify rural communities’ economies so that they were not completely dependant on resource sectors for employment opportunities. Youth participants called for long-term program commitments with clear funding criteria so that communities could focus on making real progress in their communities instead of spending time deciphering funding models. They wanted to see better support in terms of implementation and follow-up for any new programs created.

Youth want to be more involved in their communities, but they need support to do so. They would like their voices to be heard and respected and to have their potential recognized. To this end, they felt that rural communities could be more proactive in developing leadership and offering community involvement opportunities for youth. They challenged everyone at the conference to return to their communities and involve youth by letting them know about the National Rural Youth Network.

Youth want to be more involved in their communities, but they need support to do so.

The Rural Secretariat would like to acknowledge the contribution of Stephanie Maynard, Karen Heisler, Amy Higgins, Chad Anderson and Heather Weber in the planning and delivery of the Youth Forum.

8 Report of the Advisory Committee on Rural Issues

Dr. Teresa MacNeil spoke on behalf of the Advisory Committee on Rural Issues. She introduced fellow members of the Committee attending the Conference, and presented an overview of their work since the Committee was established in April 2002.

The 16-member Committee includes rural citizens from across the country who work together to provide advice to the Parliamentary Secretary on public policy issues affecting people in rural, remote and northern Canada.

The Committee functions mainly through meetings with between-meeting teleconferences and e-mail consultations as required. Sub-committees have addressed topics such as rural research, the Kyoto Accord and rural Canada, and community capacity building.

The Committee emphasized the complexity of rural Canada — one size does not fit all — and identified the overall challenge to rural Canadians as one of stimulating solutions that work at the community level. It pointed out that research — in such areas as rural-urban interdependence, rural population size, new economic bases of rural areas, and defining what **is** rural — is required to meet that challenge successfully.

More information on the Committee's operation and the issues and challenges it has considered can be found in the *Report of the Advisory Committee on Rural Issues, prepared for the Third National Rural Conference*, available at www.rural.gc.ca.

9

Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards

The Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards were created for the Government of Canada to recognize young rural Canadians who share their passion, spirit and skills to benefit their communities. There are three award categories: Innovation, Leadership and Partnership.

To receive the award for innovation, the nominee had to have made an outstanding contribution to a rural, remote or northern community through an innovative and trend-setting initiative. For leadership, the nominee needed to encompass the spirit of leadership and have led a group or groups to take up projects with significant community impacts. Finally, to be the recipient for the partnership award, the successful individual had to have made an outstanding contribution to building, fostering or strengthening partnerships.

The Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards were launched in October 2003 and the first recipients were presented with their awards on the evening of October 22, 2004, as part of the National Rural Conference. During the awards ceremony, an announcement was made that nominations were being sought for a second year.

Innovation Award Recipient: **Jim Rutten, Lake Ainslie,** **Nova Scotia**

When Jim Rutten learned that 95% of the food found in Cape Breton stores was actually coming from out of the area, he decided to address the issue by creating interest for revitalizing agriculture in the community. His response? Get agricultural producers and processors, restaurateurs, landowners and consumers involved in a system that adds value to their work and promotes local agriculture products.

Mr. Rutten's innovative approach is educating the community and promoting diversified agriculture and healthy food. Through a series of workshops, a food festival and a new farmer's market in the community, he hopes to reconnect youth with the land, and raise awareness of the importance of fresh produce for all.

Leadership Award Recipient: **Corey T. Parsons, Fortune,** **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Corey Parsons encompasses the spirit of leadership in his home town. His passion for his community and its citizens led him to use his leadership skills to find new resources and partners for the people of the area.

His efforts have led to the development of new skills and knowledge within his community, as well as many new employment opportunities. His dedicated work resulted in the injection of nearly \$750,000 into the local economy, creating more than 70 part-time positions and over 25,000 hours of employment.

Corey Parsons' dedicated work resulted in the injection of nearly \$750,000 into the local economy, creating more than 70 part-time positions and over 25,000 hours of employment.



Understanding that rural communities face unique challenges, he has also spearheaded successful workshops and public meetings on topics ranging from seniors' issues to vandalism. His commitment to improving the quality of life in his community has made him an excellent coordinator for special events such as the Winter Carnival, the Summer Festival, the Waterfront Festivities, the Fall Exhibition and the Targa Newfoundland car challenge.

Through Mr. Parsons' skills, community involvement and activities, he has inspired people to develop and show initiative, as well as to exercise their full potential.

Partnership Award Recipient: Jason Mandes, Flin Flon, Manitoba

Jason Mandes, has been working for the past three years with the People First Group, a community inclusion program for people with developmental disabilities. Over that time, he has learned the value of positive role models and community development.

Mr. Mandes includes the People First members in many aspects of the charity hockey event put on by the organization — from selling and taking tickets, to greeting people at the door. Over the past three years, the People First Benefit Hockey Game has raised over \$1,200 to fund travel to out of town conferences. Mr. Mandes continues to forge new

Parliamentary Secretary Wayne Easter with Young Leaders in Rural Canada Award winners. From left to right: Jim Rutten, Corey Parsons and Jason Mandes.

community partnerships by organizing activities that benefit both individuals and the community as a whole. At the beginning of last season, the team decided to have a food drive called "Goals for Cans." The team agreed to donate a can of food for each goal the team lost by. In the end, 120 cans of food went to the Lord's Bounty Food Bank.

The People First Group has about 30 members from the Flin Flon area who live with developmental disabilities such as foetal alcohol syndrome, Down syndrome and cerebral palsy.

The Rural Secretariat would like to acknowledge the award designers, Chris Cooper and Shawn Sinclair, for the production of the commemorative award; Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC) for contributing prizes to the award recipients; and Jennifer Rooke, National Rural Youth Network, for the work in developing the Small Town presentation.

To learn more about the recipients of the first Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards, visit the Canadian Rural Partnership Web site at http://www.rural.gc.ca/dialogue/youth/article_e.phtml.

10 *Bear Pit Session*

The Bear Pit session was an opportunity for participants to express their views, ask questions and have an open dialogue directly with Parliamentary Secretary Wayne Easter. The views of the participants were wide ranging: from high airfare costs in Nunavut to ensuring that the new national childcare policy responds to all children and families, including those living in rural, remote and northern communities.

Participants spoke their minds and Mr. Easter responded. He emphasized that the Government of Canada remains committed to taking the views of rural residents into account when putting together new policies, programs and services. He further indicated that the Rural Dialogue, which has involved more than 16,500 Canadians since 1998 will continue, but added that following the Red Deer conference, time will be needed to analyze whether a national conference is the best way of obtaining input or whether rural Canadians would be better served through more focused regional events closer to home.

The following were among the points raised during the Bear Pit session:

- Small communities looking for a source of data and information, as well as good research models for rural-based research, should access the Research and Analysis section on the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP) Web site at http://www.rural.gc.ca/research_ephtml. The Rural Secretariat's Research and Analysis Unit

recognizes that universities and other groups doing research should be encouraged to collaborate, and that effort is needed to stimulate these bodies to include rural, remote and northern dimensions in their research. As a result, they have embarked on creating the Rural Research Network. Another good source for rural residents on rural renewal, community development and funding sources is the Canadian Rural Information Service (CRIS). CRIS is a clearinghouse for information relevant to rural Canada. It can be accessed through the CRP Web site at http://www.rural.gc.ca/cris/about_ephtml or by calling toll-free 1-888-757-8725. In partnership with the Rural Secretariat, Statistics Canada is building a rural research capacity, recognizing that the vast majority of public sector research undertaken does not include a rural, remote and northern dimension.

- One participant expressed the view that the Rural Secretariat has a role to play in ensuring regional initiatives have support in the form of rational and stable funding. The federal government has made a commitment to apply the Rural Lens to all new and renewed federal initiatives. The Rural Secretariat, both through awareness-raising and moral suasion, endeavors to work with federal partners to include due consideration of rural challenges in their policies and programs. The Rural Lens helps to highlight potential and/or real impacts on rural communities and citizens.

In the case of daycare, the Rural Lens should serve to point out particular opportunities for policy responses to ensure that the childcare policy responds to all children and families in Canada, including those who live in rural, remote and northern communities.

- One participant congratulated the federal government on initiating the National Rural Policy Framework. This participant welcomed the goal of working towards long-term sustainability and viability of communities so they can provide an environment where people have access to economic and social opportunities.
- Another participant spoke about the challenges faced by those living with disabilities in a rural community and the challenges that rural communities face in trying to accommodate those living with disabilities.
- The cooperative model and cooperatives were recognized as having a role to play to resolve some challenges to rural communities. The Cooperative Development Initiative was mentioned as an important resource to explore research and develop ways to use this innovative model.

(See http://www.agr.gc.ca/policy/coop/information_e.phtml.)

The Rural Secretariat employs the Rural Lens to help factor the needs of rural and remote Canadians into new policies, programs and regulations.



The Third National Rural Conference in Red Deer, Alberta featured lively give-and-take between Conference participants in both the workshop and “Bear Pit” sessions. Here participants debate one of the many issues delegates brought to the Conference.

- The National Crime Prevention Strategy was mentioned in response to concerns about youth suicide and low self-esteem. The National Crime Prevention Strategy focuses on the factors that put individuals at risk like family violence, school problems and drug abuse. Wayne Easter noted that while working as Solicitor General of Canada he had the opportunity to employ some of the strategies for boosting and maintaining good self-esteem in work with youth in high schools. (See www.prevention.gc.ca.)
- Concerns over the roll-out of a national child care program provided an opportunity to explain the Rural Lens as an element of the Canadian Rural Partnership, in particular, how the Rural Secretariat employs this tool to help factor the needs of rural and remote Canadians into new policies, programs and regulations.

- A youth participant noted that leadership comes in a variety of forms. The Rural Secretariat will be looking at how best to assist young leaders to continue to make a difference in their hometowns. They will continue to seek guidance and input from young rural Canadians in order to identify key issues affecting youth in rural communities.
- It was felt that Broadband access will provide a number of opportunities to rural Canadians to access health care, education and a competitive business environment. Recognizing that many communities do not have Broadband access, one young participant wanted an update on the Broadband for Rural and Northern Development Pilot Project (BRANDPP). It was noted that work on BRANDPP is already taking place and that the \$105 million funding was rolled out in two funding phases: the first for developing business plans and the second for implementing infrastructure.
- A general consensus emerged from the session that more emphasis should be placed on raising awareness of the interdependencies between rural and urban economies.

More emphasis should be placed on raising awareness of the interdependencies between rural and urban economies.

11

Conclusions and Next Steps

The Third National Rural Conference aimed to identify and encourage community-level actions which will contribute to vibrant, sustainable rural communities across Canada. The follow-up to the conference will occur within these communities as individuals and organizations act on information, ideas and contacts generated at the Red Deer meeting.

From a government perspective, the 2004 National Rural Conference served to renew and validate the perspectives and priorities being applied to existing and future initiatives. The messages we heard at the Third National Rural Conference revolved around three main topics:

- the importance of community capacity building;
- the need to ensure that all rural, remote and northern communities have fair and equitable access to government resources, and
- the importance of collaboration among and between all levels of government and between governments and community groups.

These messages will influence future government activities for rural, remote and northern communities.

Community Capacity Building

Different communities have different needs, not just for funding but for collaboration between various groups, building relationships, and managing networks. Some communities are better equipped than others to develop partnerships; some communities lean on higher levels of governments for capacity-building, and others are making good progress but are seeking additional tools to enable them to do more.

- Building on this base, the Rural Secretariat is committed to sharing what we heard at the conference with rural citizens and communities, and federal, provincial and territorial departments and ministries.
- The Government of Canada, through the Rural Secretariat, is committed to continuing to work closely with officials from all provinces and territories to develop a National Rural Policy Framework that takes into consideration different rural realities and the need for flexibility in finding local solutions to local challenges.

At the conference, we heard that communities want to be equipped with research data for decision making, as well as analytical tools and other support.

- The Rural Secretariat will continue work on a database of rural information and a directory of services and programs.

Communities want to be equipped with research data for decision making, as well as analytical tools and other support.

Fair and Equitable Access to Government Resources

Communities do not all have the same capacity to apply for and obtain government funding. It is clear that rural communities expect to be treated fairly—that all communities, regardless of their capacity, need to be able to access government resources.

Governments must continue to carefully track resources, rigorously evaluate policy outcomes and pro-actively share best practices and lessons learned. We must also strive to balance our reporting requirements with an engaged responsiveness to the needs of communities.

- The Rural Secretariat will continue to facilitate access to information and research and coordinate between governments and communities to provide tools and support.
- The Rural Secretariat is committed to continuing its ongoing dialogue with Canadians from rural, remote and northern areas concerning the challenges and issues they face.

It is clear that rural communities expect to be treated fairly—that all communities, regardless of their capacity, need to be able to access government resources.

Collaboration Among and Between all Levels of Government and with Communities

Conference delegates were clear on the need for government departments and different levels of government to work together. In previous Rural Dialogue events, citizens told us that it is time to work together. Conference delegates confirmed that this is still a priority for rural communities.

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments are working to develop a National Rural Policy Framework aimed at community capacity building, renewing the social and economic base of communities, and increasing intergovernmental collaboration for community planning, priority setting and designing programs.
- Community consultation and involvement remain a mainstay for successful rural development initiatives.

The Third National Rural Conference was an important forum for dialogue and exchange among rural citizens, key stakeholder organizations and government representatives. It provided participants with the opportunity to share their perspectives, confirm what is working well in rural communities now, and what else can be done to ensure a sustainable future. Hopefully, it also served as a catalyst for action, connecting people with knowledge, tools and resources that will be used to turn challenges into new possibilities for Canadians in rural, remote and northern communities.