



INTRODUCTION

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The issues and problems confronting the residents and communities of rural America are severe. A partial list of these concerns includes **health care** provision, the availability of a quality **education**, the creation of more and better **jobs**, and coping with significant **resource and environmental issues**.

In my opinion, the best way to address these issues is to share ideas and learn from one another. Sharing and learning from each other is made possible because throughout the country there are capable, dedicated professionals developing innovative and effective programs that help rural residents tackle difficult problems. These individuals represent a number of agencies and organizations. The primary objective of *Rural Connections* is to enable these ideas to be shared more efficiently. This issue of *Rural Connections* presents nine articles that we are convinced will be of assistance to others as they seek to cope with troubling problems in their own community.

The articles in this issue of *Rural Connections* discuss a number of the more critical concerns confronting rural areas including rural health care, funding for rural schools, coping with growth associated with rapid

energy development, rural tourism, wealth creation, coping with problems associated with irrigation and scarce water supplies, mapping mine waste impoundments, and making the best of federal investments. The ideas and programs described are exceptional and I am convinced can benefit others. The author's of these articles come from a wide range of organizations that work with rural areas including USDA Rural Development, NACo (National Association of Counties), Extension professionals at Land Grant Universities, and grassroots local organizations. As always, I am so impressed with the rural development work being conducted in the West and my hope is that each of you can benefit.

I again extend my utmost appreciation to *Rural Connections* Editor Betsy Newman. Her skills are next level and it is a great pleasure to be her colleague.●