



FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESS  
WATER CONSERVATION  
PREPARING YOUTH  
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES  
ILLICIT DRUG USE  
AGING IN PLACE

# INTRODUCTION

By Don E. Albrecht  
Director, Western Rural Development Center

Under the capable leadership of WRDC Assistant Director Betsy Newman, *Rural Connections* helps disperse exceptional applied research and outreach programs being developed by talented professionals from the West. By sharing this information, especially across state lines, we at the WRDC can help achieve our goal of assisting the Land-Grant institutions of the West and others to better meet the needs of rural communities and their residents.

The articles in this issue of *Rural Connections* continue the tradition and describe truly outstanding research and outreach programs that address significant problems and concerns. The topics explored in this issue include food security and access, water conservation, illicit drug use, economic opportunities, and programs to help the elderly age in place.

Jennifer Sowerwine describes how traditional tribal food systems have eroded. Among the tribes of the Klamath Basin, as on most reservations throughout the West, residents now live in food deserts. Dr. Sowerwine and her colleagues are participating in a partnership seeking approaches to address these healthy food concerns. In a second article on healthy food, Shiree Duncan, Roslynn Brain, and Kynda Curtis discuss wide-ranging benefits that result from eating nutritious locally-produced food and then describe successful programs to connect farmers with chefs.

In the West, scarce water resources have always provided severe development constraints. Policies and programs to address these concerns are especially critical today as demand for water continues to grow. Two articles in this current issue provide insights about the more efficient use of scarce water resources. Kelly Mott Lacroix and Mark Apel describe watershed-planning programs

in Arizona, while Brian Lee describes improved irrigation technology.

Another prominent concern in the West is illicit drug abuse. Yoon Lee found that certain segments of the rural population are more likely to use illicit drugs and that the drug of choice varies among people with different characteristics. Armed with this information, policies and programs to better address drug problems in the Rural West can be implemented.

The lack of economic opportunities in rural areas continues to be a major problem. Brian Knudsen of the National Association of Counties describes NACo's report titled *County Economies 2015: Opportunities and Challenges* that show economic opportunities vary greatly from one county to another and that some counties have more fully recovered from the economic recession than others. In continuing the discussion of the economy, Harriet Shaklee, Kathee Tifft, and Katie Hoffman discuss the vital importance of education in helping youth prepare for the modern economy and describe approaches to encourage and assist youth to achieve their educational goals.

The aging of the baby-boom generation means that the proportion of the U.S. population that is elderly continues to grow. Mindy Oxman Renfro tells us that each day 10,000 Americans are celebrating their 65th birthday and joining the ranks of 'older Americans.' There are numerous benefits for both individuals and society if the elderly can age at home rather than in institutions. Programs to assist in achieving this goal are described. ●