

# Alaska Rural Development Roundtable



## Summary of Alaska Rural Development Roundtable

Anchorage, Alaska

May 6, 2009

### Those in Attendance:

Don Albrecht – Western Rural Development Center  
Mara Bacsujlaky – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Christi Bell – Alaska Center for Economic Development  
A.W. “Bill” Hall – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Franci Havemeister – Alaska Department of Natural Resources – Division of Agriculture  
Hans Geier – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Carol Lewis – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Bret Luick – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Dave Mills – National Park Service  
Christopher Perez – Rasmuson Foundation  
Pete Pinney – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Julie Riley – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Rita Jo Schloutz – CES Advisory Board  
Fred Schlutt – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Milan Shipka – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Darren Snyder – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Fred Sorenson – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Kari Van Delden – University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Bryce Wrigley – President, Alaska Farm Bureau

### Session One: What do we value about the rural areas of Alaska?

Participants were asked to list their two-three most important positive features about rural Alaska. Their responses were:

1. Strong connection to the land and natural environment
2. Cultural vibrancy and diversity
3. Sense of community – strong social and family networks
4. Rich, vast, healthy and intact natural resources
5. Independent, self-reliant and self-subsisting individuals

## Session Two: Priorities for Strengthening the Future of Rural Alaska

Participants were asked: As you ponder the future of rural Alaska, which of the following general rural development topics would you (personally) identify as being of highest priority to promoting the long-term survival and strength of these areas? That is, what THREE broad areas listed below would you select as being of “highest priority” for the future of rural communities in Alaska?

- Economic Development
- Economic/Social Inequality and Poverty
- Education and Workforce Development
- Health and nutrition
- Housing
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Leadership, Citizen Participation and Rural Public Policy
- Population Change/Migration Patterns
- Public Land Use and Management
- Public Services/ Public Infrastructure
- Renewable Energy Development
- Rural and Entrepreneurial Development
- Rural-Urban Interface and Growth Management
- Water, Biodiversity and other Natural Resources
- Other areas not listed above (please list):
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Then the group narrowed down the individual responses into the following three priorities:

1. Increase social and civic capacity through leadership development, self-determination, education, entrepreneurial development, and taking ownership of one’s own life.
2. Identification and access to available natural, social and technological resources for communities.
3. Food, shelter, safety and health security.

### **Session Three: Digging Deeper into the Three Priority Areas**

Next participants were asked to take these three priority areas that they identified during Session Two and identify challenges and strategies/initiatives that could be launched to address the challenges. Their responses were:

1. Increase social and civic capacity through leadership development, self-determination, education, entrepreneurial development and taking ownership of one's own life.
  - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Alaska
    - i. People need to feel a sense of efficacy – that they are in control of their lives.
    - ii. Populations are small and distances are great, often resulting in a lack of critical mass of people with leadership and other skills. This makes program delivery problematic as well.
    - iii. There is a general lack of emphasis on advanced education. Those who go away to college often don't come back.
    - iv. There is a lack of social and family responsibility, with an associated sense of welfare or entitlement.
    - v. People lack the capacity to listen, treat others with respect and communicate.
  - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
    - i. Implement youth development programs such as 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Boys and Girls Club and Big Brothers and Big Sisters that provide youth with adult role models and an awareness of opportunities.
    - ii. Initiate training programs in dialogue, deliberation and facilitation.
    - iii. Provide training and expertise in agriculture, business development and other programs that increase capacity.
    - iv. Provide training or mentorship in public administration.
    - v. Provide opportunities for place-based education.
2. Identification and access to available natural, social and technological resources for communities.
  - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Alaska
    - i. There is a lack of distance education infrastructure, and in many places information and communication technology is inadequate.
    - ii. Distance between communities is extensive and communities often have only a few residents, which makes the provision of information and communication and other technology difficult and expensive.
    - iii. Local governments have small staffs and few financial resources.
    - iv. Lost cultural knowledge is a growing problem in native communities.
  - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
    - i. There is a need to identify and develop critical partnerships and provide a means for improving rural community infrastructure.

- ii. An electronic library of information and resources would be very helpful.
- iii. Make science understandable and available for rural residents.
- iv. Make information available to assist local tourism and ecotourism enterprises.

### 3. Food, shelter, safety and health security

#### a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Alaska

- i. The vast majority of Alaska food is imported and the supply of food and other provisions could be interrupted.
- ii. There is a lack of production, processing, storage and distribution infrastructure.
- iii. There is a lack of K-12 science and nutrition programs. Curriculums are developed, but then never taught, often because of "No Child Left Behind."
- iv. The role of subsistence foods in food security needs to be understood and efforts made to improve capacity.
- v. Homes are of poor quality and costly, partly because of the high costs of importing materials.
- vi. Energy costs are high.
- vii. Major problems resulting from climate change including increased erosion near coastal communities and melting permafrost.
- viii. The availability and cost of health care and mental health care are problems.
- ix. Unintentional injury is leading cause of death in rural Alaska.
- x. Obesity and diet related issues are of growing concern.

#### c. Strategies/initiatives that should be implemented

- i. Programs need to be implemented that match the lifestyle of the people.
- ii. Educational programs need to be long-term and include an understanding of agriculture and food provision in the curriculum.
- iii. Programs to improve potential of small-scale and value-added agriculture and local foods would be helpful.
- iv. Programs need to be developed and information shared on production, processing, distribution and storage of food.
- v. Programs to communicate the needs of rural Alaska to Washington, DC.

## **Session Four: Research and Extension Needs and Potential Partners**

Finally, participants were asked to identify what they felt are the most critical roles that should be played by the state's land-grant university in relation to the THREE priority areas identified in Session Two and discussed in Session Three. Their responses were:

1. Research Needs
  - a. Increase capacity relative to the production, storage, processing and distribution of food.
  - b. Paeonias (peonies) and other flowers for cut-flower market.
  - c. Food security research on healthy food models that work.
  - d. Research on food consumption patterns in Alaska and the role of subsistence foods.
  
2. Extension/engagement/outreach needs
  - a. Programs are needed to improve resident understanding of commodity markets.
  - b. Programs about production, storage, processing and distribution of foods.
  - c. Community needs assessment surveys would be very helpful.
  - d. Successful distance and multimedia education programs.
  - e. Educate urban dwellers to improve their understanding of science and nutrition.
  
3. Potential partners for WRDC and Land-Grand Universities
  - a. Native corporations
  - b. Native Tribes and tribal councils
  - c. State and federal agencies
  - d. First Alaskans Institute
  - e. Alaskan Municipal League
  - f. Community Economic Development Association
  - g. Farm Bureau
  - h. Foundations – Rasmuson, Denali Commission
  - i. Other university and education departments
  - j. School districts
  - k. Private industry
  - l. Rotary Club – and other service and civic organizations
  - m. Local governments