

Oregon Rural Development Roundtable



Summary of Oregon Rural Development Roundtable

Corvallis, Oregon

June 17, 2009

Those in Attendance:

Don Albrecht – Western Rural Development Center
Bruce Weber – Director, Rural Studies Program, Oregon State University
Mark Edwards – Sociology, Oregon State University
Mindy Crandall – Rural Studies Program, Oregon State University
Lena Etuk – Rural Studies Program, Oregon State University
Mallory Rahe – Rural Studies Program, Oregon State University
Shirley Kalkhoven – President, League of Oregon Cities
Mary Shoen-Clark – Executive Director, Oregon Coast Community Action Agency
Matt Epstein – OSU Extension Citizen Advisory Network
Craig Smith – Executive Director, Rural Development Initiatives, Inc.
Ethan Seltzer – Director, School of Urban Studies and Planning, Portland State University
Jeff Anderson – Senior Program Officer, Oregon Community Foundation

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

Participants were asked to list their two-three most important positive features about Oregon's rural areas. Their responses were:

1. Extensive natural resources and amenities. People are connected to and care about the natural world.
2. Sense of Community – people live in rural Oregon because they want to live here. They care about their community and they communicate directly about the problems the community is experiencing.
3. Oregon is progressive. There are competing interests; however, people are willing to come together and discuss the problems and concerns. Policies to protect farmland and open spaces are exceptional.

Session Two: Priorities for Strengthening the Future of Rural Areas

Participants were asked: As you ponder the future of your state's rural areas, 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 counties and communities in your state?

- 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. Lack of human capacity.
2. Resource management and conservation.
3. Rapid population growth.

Session Three: Digging Deeper into the Three Priority Areas

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

1. Lack of human capacity
 - a. Specific Challenges Faced by Rural Areas of Oregon
 - i. Education levels tend to be low in rural areas.
 - ii. There is a mismatch between the skills of many rural workers (such as the lumber industry) and those needed for high-quality employment in the modern world.
 - iii. Some marketable skills that don't require a college education, such as welders, are in relatively short supply.
 - iv. Lack of leadership involvement and skills.
 - v. There is a lack of high-quality employment.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched

- i. Initiate leadership development programs.
 - ii. Initiate workforce development programs.
 - iii. Find a way to keep young people in school and reduce problematic behaviors, such as drug use.
 - iv. Initiate entrepreneurial development programs to help people build their own businesses.
- 2. Resource management and conservation
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas of Oregon
 - i. Resource-based economies have long struggled with cycles of boom and bust.
 - ii. The lumber industry is way down because of (1) the inability to cut trees on federal land, (2) the Endangered Species Act, and (3) the recent crash of the housing market greatly reduced demand for lumber.
 - iii. Vast reductions in the number of salmon in some rivers.
 - b. Strategies/initiative that should be launched
 - i. Rural areas have a great need for accurate and timely data in order to tell their stories and to obtain available grants.
 - ii. There is a need to convene decision makers and have open discussion on critical, yet controversial issues.
 - iii. Rural residents need a voice in state and national policy.
 - iv. Make scientific research available to rural residents.
 - v. Share best practices and solutions to seemingly intractable problems that work.
- 3. Rapid Population Growth
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas of Oregon
 - i. Communities in high amenity areas are experiencing the problems associated with larger populations, i.e. less contact with nature and more traffic and congestion.
 - ii. The people moving into rural communities are often very different from the people who are already there.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Again, rural areas need timely and accurate information.
 - ii. Share best practices for dealing with rapid growth.
 - iii. Make scientific research available to rural residents.

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 your state's land-grant universities in relation to the THREE priority areas identified in Session Two and discussed in Session Three. Their responses were:

- 1. Research Needs
 - a. Provide an improved understanding of the ecological, economic and social implications of reductions in the timber industry.
 - b. Provide an improved understanding of the implications of rapid population growth.
- 2. Extension/Outreach Needs

- a. Implement leadership training, workforce training and entrepreneurial development training programs.
 - b. Provide a means of sharing best practices relative to dealing with controversial resource conservation issues and approaches for dealing with rapid growth.
 - c. Make scientific-based research available to the residents of rural areas in an understandable form.
 - d. Provide access to accurate and timely data.
3. Potential Partners
- a. Federal land management agencies
 - b. Other colleges and universities within the state
 - c. League of Oregon Cities
 - d. Oregon counties and NACO
 - e. Rural Development Initiatives, Inc.
 - f. Other foundations including the Oregon Community Foundation
 - g. Oregon Coast Community Action Agency
 - h. Eastern Oregon Rural Alliance