

Washington Rural Development Roundtable



Summary of Washington Rural Development Roundtable

Spokane, Washington

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Those in Attendance:

Don Albrecht – Western Rural Development Center
Michael Gaffney – Washington State University Extension
Tony Garcia – Horizons – Washington State University
Robert Gore – Washington Department of Agriculture
Tuana L. Jones – USDA Rural Development
Jay McLaughlin – Mount Adams Resource Stewards
Chris Voigt – State Potato Commission

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

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

1. A high quality and diverse natural environment.
2. Economic opportunities abound because of access to markets, transportation infrastructure, low-cost energy, and a good mix of private and public land ownership.
3. People who are strong and resourceful, who possess a pioneer spirit and heritage. There is extensive cultural diversity.
4. There is a general commitment to environmental stewardship.
5. A strong formal and informal government "system" with strong leadership.

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. Economic Development
2. Natural Resource Stewardship
3. Human Capacity

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. Economic Development
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas of Washington
 - i. Many communities are dying. There is a lack of jobs, especially good, high paying jobs. This leads to outmigration and brain drain.
 - ii. Traditional sources of employment are declining – agriculture and the forests.
 - iii. Communities need to retain and grow their own businesses through entrepreneurial development. There are great opportunities in a global world for businesses in rural areas with access to modern technology.
 - iv. There is a lack of leadership in many communities that presents obstacles to the development of community capacity and appropriate policies.

- v. There are untapped opportunities to grow local and buy local and have businesses that support the local economy.
 - vi. Profit margins in resource industries are so small that is hard to secure capital.
 - vii. As land use moves from agriculture, we are losing the capacity to manage the land.
- b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
- i. Teach people entrepreneurial skills.
 - ii. Educate rural people about the variety of opportunities that are available in rural areas.
 - iii. Educate urban residents and policy makers about the value of rural areas and the services they provide.
 - iv. Develop business retention and incentive strategies.
 - v. Develop local leadership that will form strategic partnerships.
 - vi. Create micro-loan programs.
 - vii. Improve broadband access – and address other rural infrastructure issues.
 - viii. Help rural communities with grant writing.
 - ix. Don't give up on the traditional industries such as agriculture and forestry. Seek additional economic opportunities through processing and value-added.
 - x. Explore alternative tax structures, permitting, and regulatory environments.
 - xi. Examine policies to assure that businesses, including natural resource extraction enterprises, bring benefits and do-no-harm practices to rural areas. This is a concern because rural areas often lack a voice.
 - xii. Bureaucracy, regulations and red tape make things very difficult.
 - xiii. Strengthen agricultural, natural resource and other industry research to create efficiencies and develop markets.

2. Natural Resource Stewardship

- a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas of Washington
- i. There is a lack of water and other critically important resources.
 - ii. Many people lack a thorough understanding of natural resource issues. Protection often leads to overkill and the political weight is with those who don't live and work on the land.
 - iii. There is significant disagreement over both what the problems are and the solutions.
- b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
- i. A strong education program is needed to help people understand resource issues and where their food and fiber comes from and to improve the understanding of the general public about stewardship.
 - ii. Take a careful look at the Endangered Species Act and other regulations.

- iii. Water rights issues must be addressed. There is a disincentive to conserve because if you don't use your water you lose it.
- iv. Develop a comprehensive plan for climate change that recognizes the role that rural communities play.
- v. Convene and use collaborative processes for finding local solutions.
- vi. Remove the incentive for conflict and instead develop and implement a formal system of dispute resolution.
- vii. Explore different ownership structures, i.e. community forests, tribal group ownership.
- viii. Help with succession planning.

3. Human Capacity

- a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas of Washington
 - i. The rural workforce lacks the skills required for employment in the modern world. The needed skill sets have changed.
 - ii. There is a lack of people who are willing to work at some of the available jobs.
 - iii. The leadership in many rural communities is aging.
 - iv. There is a lack of leadership in many rural communities.
 - v. A brain drain as many of the most capable young people leave.
 - vi. There is a lack of entrepreneurial skills and capacity.
 - vii. Communities lack people who have the capacity to educate and develop skills.
 - viii. There is a lack of affordable housing, at least in amenity communities.
 - ix. Government and other programs are not reaching many rural communities.
 - x. There is a lack of strategic planning and prioritization.
- b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Teach leadership skills to the younger generation.
 - ii. Provide leadership-training programs.
 - iii. Provide entrepreneurial development training programs – including K-12 programs.
 - iv. Find additional funding to provide programs to teach the skills.
 - v. Provide technical assistance and provide grants to allow rural people to learn needed skills.
 - vi. Help conduct community assessments, strategic planning and prioritization.
 - vii. Explore comprehensive immigration reform.
 - viii. Explore regional collaboration.
 - ix. Provide incentives to have young people return home to rural communities after college.
 - x. Help make a business-friendly climate so people can establish businesses.
 - xi. Help provide affordable housing.
 - xii. Encourage public/private partnerships.

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. Additional agricultural and other natural resource research is needed to find more efficient approaches to farming/ranching and extraction.
 - b. Woody biomass – is there a supply for a sustainable industry or will it result in another boom and bust industry?
 - c. Conduct research to determine if various programs and approaches are economically sustainable.
 - d. Provide an improved understanding of social ills, such as high teen pregnancy rates and gangs, and how the effect communities.
 - e. Have researchers develop talking points that we can share with the general public.
 - f. Conduct gap analysis – what communities have access to broadband and other programs and which do not.

2. Extension/outreach Questions
 - a. Help communities assess strengths and weaknesses.
 - b. Develop education programs to encourage youth seek a college education.
 - c. Develop programs to reach Hispanic and other minority individuals.
 - d. Provide skills-training programs including leadership, workforce and entrepreneurial training.
 - e. Promote rural communities as livable places to work and live.
 - f. Promote buying local.

3. Partners
 - a. Horizons
 - b. Washington Agricultural Resource Team
 - c. Local nonprofits
 - d. State agencies – including Community Trade and Economic Development, soon to be Department of Commerce and Department of Agriculture
 - e. Federal agencies
 - f. Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council – State, Federal and local nonprofit organizations
 - g. Local businesses
 - h. Other education institutions, higher education, community colleges, school districts, etc.
 - i. Local government
 - j. Medical centers
 - k. Association of Port Districts
 - l. Foundations and private philanthropy
 - m. Public utility districts
 - n. Economic Development Councils

- o. Community Networks
 - p. Continuum of Care – (a social service agency)
 - q. Producer Associations
4. Big Picture Issues to Consider
- a. Endangered Species Act – currently a punitive act
 - b. Backlog of water rights issues
 - c. Immigration reform
 - d. Farm Bill
 - e. Washington Tax Structure
 - f. Workman’s compensation and unemployment insurance in Washington is among the highest in nation
 - g. Environmental regulations