

Dear NRE and CRRF Supporters,

November 6, 1998

It is time for an update on the progress of the New Rural Economy Project. At the same time I will provide a brief update. Many of them are outlined in a document I have put on the NRE Web site. You can find it in the FTP page under "What Have We Learned?". I'm sure that you will find it to be valuable reading.

1.1. The NRE Workshop at Nelson

The CRRF Conference provided an opportunity for many of the people involved in the NRE Project to meet for a special workshop. It was well attended, with over 25 people from all parts of BC. I provide a brief (and no doubt biased) view of our very successful meetings at the CRRF national Conference in Nelson, BC. There are many interesting and exciting stories to tell as a result of these events. We are very thankful to Tom Mann, Margo McPhail, and the dedicated people in the Regional District of Central Kootenay for providing us with a thought-provoking and enjoyable conference in the spectacular city of Nelson.

2. NRE Activities

As usual, there have been many activities and accomplishments in the NRE Project since the last of the country, and a few of our international guests. It was particularly exciting since this was the first occasion for us to compare experiences from the many field sites. It is gratifying to see how thoroughly the research in the sites is informing our work.

Some of the highlights of the Workshop are the following.

- C Bill Reimer announced the launching of the NRE Web site (<http://nre.concordia.ca>). It includes information regarding the project, but it is much more. All of the information, documents, and e-mail discussions relating to the project will be posted on the site. This means maps, photos, field notes, and statistical information will be made available to researchers and communities participating in the work. It promises to be an important communication and research tool for rural Canadians. Roger des Ormeaux is the Data Curator for the Center. He can be contacted at NRE@VAX2.CONCORDIA.CA
- C Tony Fuller and Ellen Wall outlined the findings from their work in the southern Ontario sites. Their work in these sites has been supported by the Sustainable Rural Communities Programme financed through the Minister of Agricultural and Rural Affairs in partnership with the University of Guelph.

They pointed to the dramatic changes taking place in their region: school board and service closings combined with the aggregation of community boundaries have placed considerable stress on rural citizens. They asked "How can we be effectively listening to these communities and provide research tools which can best serve their needs?" Tony also raised the question regarding the terminology we use for discussing our work. He suggested that the concept of "livelihood" has struck a cord with many of the potential partners and funders in his region.

- C Patrice Leblanc presented material from the 6 Québec sites. The Québec team was the first to complete the profiles for their 6 sites and are now eager to begin the next stage of the research. Patrice emphasized how important it was that we maintain frequent and regular contact with the sites in order to ensure our credibility in their eyes and to keep the level of motivation high.

The Québec team discovered an important difference between local administrators and the rest of the population with respect to the question of access to services. Local administrators felt that services should be located in their municipality (possibly to attract labour and increase the tax base), whereas most other citizens accepted that nearby services are sufficient, even if

they were in nearby communities. They felt that having to travel for some services was a reasonable compromise for living in rural areas without the high levels of traffic, pollution, and population. They did not feel this way regarding groceries, however. They wished to have a variety of fresh food nearby.

- C Greg Halseth outlined the results from the two Northern BC sites. Both of them face considerable economic leakages due to their location just off the main highway. It means that local people can easily get out, but tourists on their way to Alaska are unlikely to pass through the town.

Greg reinforced the concerns expressed by the Québec team that we need to deliver materials back to the communities. They must see tangible benefits to a relationship with our project. This could include information about their community, instruction regarding how to interpret it, contacts with other communities, or the rationales necessary to seek government funding. He also emphasized the need to develop a reasonable time-line for carrying out our research and developing the key findings.

- C Derek Wilkinson described his work in Humphrey, ON. This community has recently undergone a boundary shift by being amalgamated with the surrounding townships. When he approached the community, he found that as long as the NRE wasn't asking for money they were interested. They were particularly interested in learning how other communities deal with population dispersity and access to services given the changing geographic landscape.

- C Michael Gertler provided an outline of his work in the Saskatchewan sites. His concerns focused on the problem of whether the sites fit well into the allotted cells and the project design.

- C Peter Apedaile discussed his experiences in the Alberta sites. The first response of those in the sites was to reject the proposal since they experienced a significant problem of volunteer 'burnout'. Upon subsequent discussion, however, two of the three sites have expressed willingness to participate, and it is possible that the third will follow in the future. The problems of demand on volunteers is one which should be included in our study since it is shared by many rural communities.

- C Jaap Post and Ida Terluin from the Netherlands discussed their work on a similar project in Europe. Their principle foci were the employment levels and labour markets in nine European countries. They identified some of the major differences between leading and lagging regions from the point of view of labour employment. This work reinforced the importance of good networks, the capacity to diagnose the regional situation, intersectoral cooperation, and the adaption of policies to the strengths and needs of a region.

- C Several important questions were identified which summarize the concerns of those at the workshop. They are the following.

- C How do we give back to the communities and who represents the community?
- C What is a reasonable time frame for our work?
- C How do we make the plans a reality?
- C How do we negotiate the next stages of the NRE?
- C What are the best types of relationships to develop with the sites?
- C How should we identify the site boundaries in a systematic fashion?
- C What is to be done with the 'empty cells' in the sampling frame?

These questions and the discussion related to them was referred to the NRE Steering Committee for action.

2.1. NRE Theme Teams

Reports on the 4 NRE Theme Teams were given by the theme leaders. Additional members for the teams were identified and the teams met to prepare for their future activities. The themes and their leaders are identified below. Please contact the leader if you wish to participate in one of the teams. Descriptions of the themes are provided on the NRE web page. Results for the first two are summarized in the "What Have We Learned?" document on the FTP site and details of these findings can be found in the relevant reports on the same site.

- C Spatial dynamics of settlements and activities in rural Canada. Tony Fuller is the leader. (fuller@uoguelph.ca)
- C Processes of inclusion and exclusion of rural people and communities. Bill Reimer is the leader. (reimer@vax2.concordia.ca)
- C The changing structure of rural enterprises and institutions. André Joyal is the leader. (andre_joyal@uqtr.qc.ca)
- C Processes of change in natural resources and their associated communities. Michael Gertler is the leader. (gertler@sask.usask.ca)

2.2. NRE Working Groups

Two working groups have been established to organize activities related to the next stages of the NRE Project. Information on these groups can be found on the NRE site. For further information contact the group leader.

- C Working Group on Third Sector Organizations and Associations. Greg Halseth is the leader. (halseth@unbc.ca)

This group is busy developing a framework and instruments for examining the role of voluntary associations and third sector organizations in rural communities. They will be testing the approach in 8 of the field sites and using this as a basis for future work in all of the sites. Not only are they interested in describing the characteristics of these organizations, but they will be exploring the problems local groups face when attempting to establish partnerships with government. Work is proceeding quickly on these issues, so if you wish to become involved, contact Greg immediately.

- C Working Group on Major Changes in Rural Canada. Bill Reimer is the leader. (reimer@vax2.concordia.ca)

This group is mandated to prepare a report regarding the most important structural features or processes affecting contemporary rural Canada. In doing so they will examine the data on the rural Canada database which reflects those structures or changes. They have decided to produce the report by asking a number of prominent researchers and practitioners for their reflections on these issues. They will be asked to consider those structures and processes which are most important for community, business, and government decision-makers to consider when identifying their strategic options for the future.

2.3. NRE Task Force on Methodology

As a result of our work in the sites, we have been faced with a number of important methodological issues which need to be addressed. This includes questions about the validity of the sampling frame, the appropriate boundaries for the research sites, the protocols which are used as we establish relations with those sites, and the comparability of the information we are gathering. Many of these questions will not be easily resolved and many more will arise as we move ahead on our project. A Task Force on Methodology has been established to address these questions, to identify new ones as they emerge, to suggest solutions where appropriate, and to propose strategies for dealing with the problems which are too difficult to solve in the short term. We expect that the activities of this committee will form a valuable basis for our future work and choices. The members of the Task Force

are Tom Beckley (tmbeckle@nrcan.gc.ca), Patrice Leblanc (patrice_leblanc@uqat.quebec.ca), Bill Reimer (reimer@vax2.concordia.ca), and Derek Wilkinson (derek@nickel.laurentian.ca).

3. A New Partnership with Japan

The Nelson conference was also the occasion for an exciting new liaison between CRRF and the "Institute for Rural Revitalization for the 21st Century" (IRR21) in Japan. The NRE Project plays a significant role in this liaison. For 5 years, CRRF has been discussing the possibility of a formal agreement between our organizations. Members of our network have visited Japan on a number of occasions and representatives from Japan participated in our National Conference in Coaticook two years ago. This year Dr. Nobuhiro Tsuboi attended the conference in Nelson with a proposal from the IRR21 team to establish a formal exchange and research program between Canada and Japan. Our common interest in the revitalization of rural communities is the primary focus of this exchange. We will send two people to Japan to sign the agreement this winter.

This agreement is a most exciting one for us. Not only does it provide a valuable opportunity for us to learn from the Japanese, but it stands as a unique accomplishment in international relations. To our knowledge, it is the only agreement of its kind with Japan. We are very indebted to Peter Apedaile for all of the energy he has expended to make this possible.

4. A Brief List of Activities Under Way

In summary, here is a list of the activities now under way. As you can see, there is considerable work being done with some valuable and exciting results likely to emerge. If you see something which interests you, contact us immediately so that you won't miss out. If you are concerned that something is missing, let us know. Don't forget to check out our web pages on a regular basis.

- C The 4 Theme Teams: prepare frameworks and projects.
- C Working Group on Third Sector Organizations and Associations: prepare framework, design instruments, select sites, conduct site research, prepare reports.
- C Working Group on Major Changes in Rural Canada: identify consultants, prepare papers, organize workshop, prepare report.
- C Task Force on Methodology: identify issues, collect information regarding contacts with sites, prepare responses to issues, prepare reports.
- C Site Teams: complete profiles where appropriate, prepare feedback materials for local people, identify local needs.
- C Data Centre: develop web site, integrate 1986, 1991, 1996 census data into rural Canada database, conduct analysis in support of Working Groups and Sites.
- C Steering Committee: integrate, verify, expand the vision!

5. Reports and Documents

Our list of reports and documents is growing. Most of these can be found via the NRE web pages.

- C The NRE Research Business Plan
- C A Sampling Frame for Non-Metropolitan Communities in Canada
- C A Preliminary History of Rural Development Policy and Programmes in Canada, 1945-1995
- C Analysis of Leading and Lagging CSDs in Rural Canada
- C The Social and Economic Integration and Isolation of First Nations Communities: An Exploratory Review
- C Access to Federal Government Services in Rural Canada: Preliminary field site findings
- C The Spatial Dynamics of Labour Supply in the New Rural Economy, by Tony Fuller
- C A List of Variables in the NRE Rural Database
- C NRE Field Site Manual

C Understanding the NRE: What Have We Learned?

6. CRRF Membership

Don't forget that the NRE Project is only one part of CRRF activities. By joining CRRF, you not only support the NRE, but you connect yourself to the full network and resources of the Foundation. Individual membership is \$100/year or \$400 for 5 years. With this membership you are entitled to \$30 worth of ARRG/CRRF publications of your choice and a discount of 30% on any additional such publications. You are also invited to provide tax-deductable donations to the Foundation.

To join, simply send your cheque or money order to:
The Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation
c/o The Rural Development Institute
Brandon University
Brandon, MB R7A 6A9

Include the following information with your submission:

Name

Institution or Firm

Mailing Address

City

Province

Postal Code

Telephone Number

Fax Number

E-Mail Address

A list of your specific interests related to rural Canada

If you wish further information about CRRF, check out our web page at:
http://artsci-ccwin.concordia.ca/SocAnth/CRRF/crrf_hm.html

We hope to hear from you soon.

Bill Reimer

Past-President of CRRF and Interim Research Manager for the NRE

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