

Mountain Promise

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Policy and Rural Communities





Appalachian Leadership and Development

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Mission of Brushy Fork

For more than one hundred years, Berea College has served the people of Appalachia.

The Brushy Fork Institute carries forward this commitment by working to develop strong leadership in the mountains.

Working with both existing and emerging leaders, we draw on local understanding and vision to help communities build for tomorrow.

Policy and Rural America Making New Connections in a Changed World

based on a presentation by William P. Browne to the Kellogg Rural Policy Dialogue Group

Outside Bill Browne’s home in Michigan lies a small lake that has been enjoyed by citizens of his small town for generations. One day as he looked out the window at his view, he realized that interests in the lake were controlled by the company that owned it, not by the people of the community who had enjoyed it for so many years. As development surrounded the lake, access was cut off to people who didn’t live in what Browne describes as a gathering of “rich white Republicans.”

As he considered this idea, he recalls that some words came into his mind: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Watching the development and the changes in access to the lake, Browne says, made him realize that rural residents are not endowed with the same

William P. Browne is a political scientist at Central Michigan University. He is the author of several books about rural policy, including The Failure of National Rural Policy: Institutions and Interests published by Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, 2001.

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opportunities, the same quality of life, the same capacity to affect forces around them that other Americans are.

Early in his career, Browne describes himself as having been an urban scholar—a role he says didn't take. "I was struck by the contrast that exists with a base of people in cities, and especially the suburbs, that doesn't exist in rural communities." In rural America, he proposes, you have a collection of people who have wants, need and thoughts about what they'd would like to see for their communities, but they don't feel that they can express their concerns and get any action. They are disconnected from the political process.

The Problem

The disconnection from the political process begins on the local level for rural residents. Browne notes that Americans no longer organize collectively at the local level. "Nowhere is that more true than in rural America," he says.

Rural America has been losing its social and economic institutions. Reflecting on the work of political scientist Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, Browne notes the demise of Lions Clubs, Elks Clubs, the Moose, the Rotary, the VFW and other social entities. He points out the decline in enrollment in rural schools. He hints that the skill associated with creating organizational activities in a community are lost at an early age.

"Kids don't organize in baseball leagues in many of these communities, and where they do organize, what I've noticed is that they don't organize themselves like when I was a kid. They are organized by somebody else."

Policy is not designed to meet the needs of people in rural communities because of a great disconnect that exists at local, state and federal levels between policy makers and rural residents. Browne credits this disconnect to the lack of political clout for rural America. He proposes that what clout rural America possesses lies with the agricultural establishment, a set of organizations which cannot fully meet the needs of rural communities in the U.S. At best, agriculturally based rural policy contains a few add-on programs to serve the needs of non-farm rural residents. At worst, national agricultural policy stands in the way of progress for these communities.

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To understand the role of the agricultural establishment in public policy and organized political clout for rural America requires an understanding of the histories and traditions that have gone on, from the local level to the federal level.

The History

To understand why rural policy exists as it does today requires looking back more than 100 years. "Production agriculture has had a major impact on [anyone] who cares about rural communities," says Browne. He points out four important acts that were passed at the federal level in 1862:

- the Act of Establishment of 1862, which set forth what would become the federal United States Department of Agriculture;
- the Homestead Act, which opened frontier land to settlement;
- the Morrill Act, which provided tracts of public land to the states for educational institutions that would originally concentrate on the science of agriculture; and
- the Transcontinental Railroad Act, which facilitated transportation to the west.

These acts were designed to facilitate the settlement of the American West by people who usually entered and often dismally failed at farming. "By 1914, we had a tremendous infrastructure of agriculture, with an institutional base that was unparalleled in the history of the world at that time," Browne explains. From the original legislation that was designed to serve an agrarian nation sprang price support programs, conservation programs and loan

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programs. These programs became an integral part of an industry that was seen as the backbone of rural communities—agriculture.

As the farm lobby strengthened, in large part by supporting federal governing institutions, members of Congress considered supporting agriculture as a good way of meeting the needs of rural constituents. Over the years, even as the number of farmers and ranchers diminished and towns that once boomed with agricultural business failed, the myth that rural America is solely an agrarian society prevailed. In reality, fewer than one percent of Americans live today on farms and ranches that are economically viable. Only ten percent of rural residents live on production farms.

“National policy making for a long, long time has articulated the view that agriculture takes care of all of rural America’s needs,” Browne notes. In truth, he proposes, agriculture no longer stands as a unifying force for rural communities and even prevents the creation of effective policy to address the diverse problems of rural people.

The Solution

So what is the unifying force through which rural America can develop the political clout to affect policy? “The organizing force in rural America is the notion that we live in small places with small populations,” asserts Browne. “Unfortunately, we face a diversity problem in that no rural communities are alike.”

Entrepreneurial rural leaders—people who understand the dynamics of their community—must become accustomed to thinking of themselves as part of the policy process.

Browne’s solution to unifying the diverse segments of rural America is to create alliances. People who are interested in rural health care, education, environmental issues, or transportation must

... agriculture no longer stands as a unifying force for rural communities and even prevents the creation of effective policy. . .

interact with one another as well as with people who have some political clout. Browne points out that rural leaders must look beyond the traditional allies, the people and organizations already interested in rural America, that is farmers and ranchers, and create an interest among those who can influence public policy. “[We have to] convince policy makers that rural America is

worth talking about,” declares Browne.

Browne suggests that rural residents identify policies that affect their daily lives then explore outside the existing farm network for policy makers who can be convinced of the value in improving conditions in rural communities. Paraphrasing Clay Cochran, who lobbied for rural America during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Browne stated: “Public policy making is a lot like the creation of coral—you can’t predict what you’re going to get...you have no idea what type of coral is going to be created.”

Rural communities must actively throw out seeds to those organized interests and governing institutions that provide the most promise for growth on the policy level. “It’s nice to give our seeds to our closest friends,” advises Browne, “but that isn’t necessarily going to be the most productive thing.”

Entrepreneurial rural leaders—people who understand the dynamics of their community—must become accustomed to thinking of themselves as part of the policy process. The role of rural nonprofits and networks of leaders is to facilitate the movement of these people toward being active in creating policy. Part of the challenge is to strengthen the alliance between urban and rural.

“Unless urban communities see some reason for rural communities to get something out of programs, they aren’t going to do it,” Browne pointed out. Population-wise it’s the tops (urban) against the bottoms (rural), he notes. Getting recognition of rural America as more than a home to farmers and ranchers will bring more people forward and bring the voice of rural Americans from the local to the state and federal level.

Rural Realities

Rural America



by Thomas D. Rowley of the Rural Policy Research Institute
Reprinted by permission of the Rural Policy Research Institute and the author

First, a note of disclosure: I know all the words to the theme song—first and second verse—by heart, the family dog is named Ellie Mae, her predecessor was Jethro, and were it not for the good sense and stubbornness of my wife, one of our sons would answer to “Dash Riprock” (the “real” Ellie Mae’s boyfriend, for those of you scratching your heads). I am, it could reasonably be said, a fan of *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

That said, CBS’s plans to resurrect the show as its latest reality TV offering give me pause (as does Fox’s notion to do the same with *Green Acres*—another favorite of my misspent youth). The obvious cruelty of having fun at other people’s expense, even when those people volunteer or get paid, is one concern. If television, rightly, refuses to stereotype and ridicule people based on their ethnicity, religion, or sexuality, why should it do so to people based on their geographic origin? (The answer, of course, is that television does not refuse to stereotype and ridicule people. It’s just usually done more subtly.)

Another concern is that such a show would feed the misperceptions of rural America and rural Americans that linger both in the public’s mind and in the public policy process. Such misperceptions can only hamper attempts to improve conditions and prospects in rural

America—that part of the nation that contains some 80 percent of our land and 25 percent of our people.

Here now, a few of the most popular—and pernicious—misperceptions.

The first, most obvious, and yet most persistent misperception is that agriculture is THE economy in rural America and therefore agricultural policy is THE rural policy.

Such thinking enabled Congress in the recent Farm Bill to favor the production of crops over the revitalization of rural communities by about 180 to 1—dollars, that is.

The reality is otherwise. Important as agriculture is to our communities, nation, and the world, the U.S. agricultural economy depends on the non-agricultural rural economy—not vice versa. Indeed, more than 80 percent of the total income earned by farm operator households across the nation comes from work other than farming, and fewer than one-fourth of farm families get the

majority of their income from farming. In addition, farmers account for about 5 percent of all rural jobs. Add in all of the jobs that depend on agriculture for their existence and you’re talking about only 25 percent.

The second misperception is really two in one—opposite sides of the same coin. On one side, many folks

close-knit communities
backwater places

honest and hard-working
narrow-minded and hard-living

the morale fiber of our country
hillbillies, hicks and hilarity

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think that all is well in rural America. For them, rural conjures up images of bucolic landscapes and close-knit communities free of poverty, crime, pollution, and all of the ills of big-city living. Through these glasses, rural people are all honest and hard-working—the moral fiber of our country, the backbone of our society.

On the flip side, many folks think that all is bad in rural America. For them, rural conjures up backwater places, narrow-minded people, and hard-scrabble living. This, one might guess, is the dominant view at CBS and Fox, where rural America apparently means hillbillies, hicks, and hilarity.

The reality is, of course, somewhere in between. Because rural America is far from homogenous (another misperception), who and what you find there varies quite a lot. As with most places, there is good and there is bad, things that should be celebrated and things that must be fixed.

The third misperception is also of the thesis-antithesis variety. Thesis: the problems of rural America are merely the results of market economics. For example, the level of any particular good or service in rural America—whether broadband tele-

communications, health care, or venture capital—is what it is because the markets have acted rationally, efficiently, and (according to some) optimally.

Antithesis: the problems of rural America are largely the doings of governmental (particularly federal) meddling, incompetence, and downright exploitation. From this perspective, the best thing government can do runs the gamut—from paying larger farm subsidies to putting in broadband to leaving rural America the heck alone.

Again, the reality lies in between. Markets do fail, and government does get some things right.

The final two misperceptions go hand in glove. Fourth, the “rural problem” is really a dilemma; no satisfactory solution exists. Fifth, it doesn’t matter anyway because rural America will always be there, and even if it weren’t there, we’d get along fine without it.

As to the fourth misperception, yes, rural problems continue but some progress has been made and still more can be made—if we clear up the misperceptions and take action based on the realities.

As to the final misperception, if it ever becomes a reality, let’s hope that it’s only on TV.

To see more articles from the Rural Policy Research Institute, go to their web site at www.rupri.org/articles/realities.html.

Spring Issue Will Explore Water Quality

Water is a precious commodity in any community. What is the current state of our water supplies in Appalachia? What issues are communities and individuals facing? What approaches have communities taken to solve their water problems? If you have a story or an idea, contact us using the information on page 2. Deadline for the spring issue is April 15, 2003.

Bush's Funding Reduction for ARC

A Major Policy Shift

As part of White House efforts to streamline government spending and avoid duplicative financial aid grants, the Bush administration has recommended appropriating \$33.1 million for the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) non-highway programs, a 50 percent reduction from the current year's funding. The ARC's Appalachian Development Highway Systems funding would be continued at approximately \$450 million per year through upcoming reauthorization of the federal highway bill.

The National Association of Development Organizations defines the Bush's funding proposal for the Appalachian Regional Commission as a major policy shift, which affects not only the ARC but also the Delta Regional Authority of the Deep South and the Denali Commission of Alaska. Bush proposes that these three regional planning commissions be restructured "from grant makers to regional planners and coordinators of regional investments." Under the Bush plan, the Economic Development Administration would direct more resources to projects in the nation's most distressed counties.

Affected by the cuts to ARC appropriations will be programs that provide resources to help local communities meet state matching dollars for projects such as job training, health clinics, building water and sewer lines and providing high-speed Internet access to rural areas. The proposed budget would endanger local plans for economic development in 410 counties that stretch from Mississippi to New York in the area defined as Appalachia by the federal government.

Since its creation in the late 1960s, the ARC has been credited with helping cut in half the number of distressed counties in the Appalachian region. The agency has seen the infant mortality rate reduced by two-thirds, the percentage of high school graduates doubled, and more than 800,000 households provided with water and sewer services.

ARC Federal Chair Anne Pope, who recently was sworn into her new office stated, "A number of federal programs ... are being affected by the

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A PolicyMaker Speaks

On his web site, Congressman Ted Strickland of Ohio explained his position on the proposed ARC funding cuts.

"The Administration argues in its proposed budget that other agencies can carry out the grant-making functions of the ARC. But this argument is severely flawed.

First, the ARC already works with other government agencies (and many private organizations) to leverage their funds so that a little bit goes a long way. As the budget itself points out, leveraging dollars against the contributions of other federal agencies allows the ARC to help Appalachian communities complete major projects they could not otherwise afford. Essentially, the ARC gives Appalachian communities a hand up; without financial contributions from the ARC, Appalachian communities would lose an essential source of leveraged funds.

Second, these other federal agencies are not getting increases in their budget to carry out the task being stripped from the ARC. In some cases, these other agencies are also seeing sharp reductions. So while the budget tries to make it sound like this money is simply being reprogrammed or streamlined into other agencies, in reality that is not what would happen if the budget were enacted. Dollars intended for Appalachia would actually be lost within other federal agencies that are national in scope."

Strickland, Ted. "Proposed Budget Cuts Do Not Reflect Positive Impact of ARC." 24 Feb. 2003. <<http://www.house.gov/strickland/Columns.htm>>.

Perceptions of Rural America

Congressional Perspectives

summarized from a report by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, and Greener and Hook

Federal legislators maintain a rich and complex view of rural life.

Federal legislators maintain a rich and complex view of rural life, not simply equating rural with agriculture. While they do not question that farming and the plight of the family farm dominate the many discussions of rural policy, legislators know that rural America's challenges go beyond agriculture. How legislators think about issues and solutions for rural America appears to depend largely on the region they represent.

Legislators from the Western U.S. often emphasize water use issues and concerns related to ranching and mining. Leaders in the South deal with the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement on job retention and struggle with fundamental poverty challenges. Meanwhile, members of Congress from the Midwest see the loss of farmland and the demise of the family farm as having critical impacts.

Lawmakers agree that "no one voice speaks for rural America."

Although legislators mostly agree on the complexity and diversity of rural issues, the farm bill still serves as the focal point of discussion about rural policy. The report notes, "Legislators

fundamentally want to support farmers and farming. The institution of farming is symbolic, representing an important piece of the American tradition..." They see value in subsidizing farming to maintain the nation's low food costs and allow the U.S. to compete in the international food market.

However, a fair amount of criticism revolves around the farm bill, its subsidy systems, and the large, well-funded and organized agricultural interests that support the bill. Many legislators perceive inequities in the subsidy system "that benefits corporate and wealthy farmers, without supporting the small family farm." Meanwhile, the lawmakers "feel stuck in a system that is captive of

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has produced a series of reports that explore Americans' perspectives on rural America. This report series includes perspectives from citizens, state legislators and Congressional leaders. This summary is taken from the report Perceptions of Rural America: Congressional Perspectives, which was based upon a bi-partisan survey of Congress and the Senate. The survey interviews took place between December 2001 and April 2002. This publication and others in the series can be downloaded from the W.K. Kellogg web site at <http://www.wkkf.org/programming> under the Food Systems and Rural Development link.

multiple interests and encapsulates other programs, such as Food Stamps, that are impossible to vote against.”

Despite the focus on the agricultural sector by federal policymakers, there is near universal agreement that job loss and the overall lack of economic opportunity is the most serious problem facing rural America. Most legislators agree that rural America has been devastated by the decline of the family farm and the difficulty of attracting industry to rural areas. Most members of both major parties “believe the key to the future viability of rural America rests in creating a more diverse economy.” As a contributing factor to rural out-migration, the prevalence of low paying jobs and hesitancy of businesses to invest in rural areas cause great concern.

Legislators also express concern over access to healthcare, noting that healthcare problems are exacerbated by several factors. Many of the small businesses in rural communities don’t offer health insurance. Patients often lack adequate transportation to get to rural hospitals or specialized care providers. Also, the Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement system puts extra financial strain on poor rural communities that cannot match federal dollars.

While legislators acknowledge that lack of access to education, good jobs and healthcare represents inter-related problems, the lawmakers cannot offer many solutions. Some named funding for businesses as one answer and place great hope on an “available workforce that has a strong commitment to hard work.” However, all survey participants agree that broadband Internet access is a way to create economic opportunities for rural America.

Beyond the Internet, lawmakers argue that “rural communities cannot attract industry without broader investment in infrastructure. Providing access to healthcare, educational opportunities, water and sewage, and transportation systems is a daunting challenge for

legislators in rural areas. The tension often arises between increasing economic diversity in rural areas and taking land out of agricultural use by family farms. Also, some lawmakers “balk at the degree of government investment required to provide these kinds of services.”

For legislators, tension also exists between preserving the rural environment and encouraging growth in rural communities. “Lawmakers place high value on the beauty of rural land.” From concerns about farming practices that pollute water resources to worry about suburban sprawl that inflates land prices and consumes agricultural land, environmental preservation is an underlying issue for much rural policy.

Raising rural issues on the congressional agenda is a challenge for legislators, partially because of the lack of numbers of representatives due to a small rural population. Lawmakers agree that “no one voice speaks for rural America.” They also perceive a fundamental lack of understanding about the issues that face the different regions in the U.S.

Even if they don’t understand every issue, elected officials do share the view that “there is something unique and particular about rural America that deserves attention, protection and support.” And participants in the congressional survey identified an array of mutually agreed upon goals, which include:

- Increasing resources to family farmers and rectifying inequities in the Farm Bill;
- Expanding access to broadband;
- Improving the rural healthcare system;
- Generating incentives for new business starts and job creation; and
- Preserving the rural environment.

These issues provide opportunity for a common agenda for rural America.

... there is near universal agreement that job loss and the overall lack of economic opportunity is the most serious problem facing rural America.

Creating a New Social Contract with Rural America Place Competitive Policy & Development

researched and written by Donna Morgan, Brushy Fork staff

Talk to people who deal with rural policy in America today and you will hear the resounding theme that current rural policy does not meet the diverse needs of rural communities. You will hear that policy is outdated, based on a rural situation that no longer exists, and designed with a one size fits all mentality. What has changed in rural America so that rural policy no longer serves everyone effectively? What must be changed to ensure that rural policy can adapt to meet diverse needs?

Rural development and investment in rural communities lies at the heart of effective policy. As Karl Stauber, President of the Northwest Area Foundation, states in a paper about investing in rural America: “All public policy is based on the intersection of individual and societal interests.” He suggests that, in the past, social contracts—unspoken agreements that provide for private and societal interests—have driven investment in rural communities. He holds that rural America must create a new social contract to provide justification for investing in rural areas.

Developing a social contract requires rural communities to identify the unique strengths they have to contribute to society. Based on the idea that a community’s uniqueness is a source of strength, Stanley Johnson of Iowa State University, states that “rural policy in the 21st century must center on enhancing the competitiveness of places.” This place-based policy focuses on geographic areas

rather than sectors and provides opportunities for development in communities that differentiate themselves.

The success of place-based policy depends on shared responsibility for policymaking that begins at the local level. David Freshwater of the University of Kentucky notes: “... if we truly believe in a locally based development process and if rural America is really as diverse as we say it is, then it is impossible for the federal government to play more than a supporting role in the development process...” Rural areas and federal and state governments must be accountable to one another for the creation of effective policy.

Social contracts

America has a long history of social contracts that form the basis of rural policy. From 1500 to the 1700s, urban areas existed mainly to serve rural residents of America. However, as urban America gained political and economic importance in society, rural policy became more separated. From the end of the 1700s until the 1800s, urban and rural America shared in a Frontier social contract.

America provided government-sponsored exploration, military protection, and the displacement of existing peoples for people who moved to rural areas. In exchange, rural America provided food to growing urban populations, raw materials for trade, and an outlet for a semiskilled workforce that could serve in the agricultural sector.

As frontier America faded in the 1890s, a new social contract emerged—the Storehouse social contract. The urban industrial revolution transformed the relationship between urban and rural areas. Rural America now supplied commodities to growing urban America, which now boasted the majority population in the U.S. During this time the urban majority exchanged their investment in subsidy programs for farming, transportation and infrastructure for a steady flow of affordable raw materials, surplus financial capital and English-speaking workers.

By the mid-1970s, the Storehouse social contract no longer applied to rural America and policy interests shifted as urban Americans no longer saw a compelling reason to subsidize rural enterprises and people. Since the 1970s demographics have shifted even more as America has become a suburban nation. In “Why Invest in Rural America?” Stauber outlines the following social and political trends:

- 1990: the first time more than 50 percent of Americans lived in metropolitan areas larger than one million people.
- 1992: the first time the majority of votes cast for president were cast in suburban districts
- 1994: the first time that suburban representatives occupied all the top five positions in the U.S. House
- 1996: only 76 of 435 Congressional districts were predominantly rural;
- 2001: the 2000 Census show America is a suburban nation. The majority of Americans live in suburbs, and the majority of political power is there.

Today, Americans, particularly those in suburban areas, question why they should subsidize anyone else, rural or urban. In today’s global economy, the world serves as America’s storehouse, so the agrarian idea that rural America feeds the world no longer applies as an answer

to what rural America supplies as repayment for subsidies. In fact, as Stauber points out, rural America no longer feeds America. “Today, America eats wherever it is convenient and cheap.”

So, it would seem that Stauber suggests rural America must find a source of the reciprocity required to establish a new social contract. He raises the question of identifying what nonrural America will get in return for investing in rural communities. He proposes that there is not one simple answer to why urban America would choose to invest in rural areas; instead he offers five basic reasons rural America deserves investment:

1. To protect and restore the environment;
2. To produce high-quality de-commodified food and fiber;
3. To serve as a laboratory of social innovation;
4. To produce healthy, well-educated future citizens;
5. To maintain population distribution and prevent urban overcrowding.

Considering that rural communities can offer these assets to all of America moves thinking from a sector-based arena to a place-based focus. In “Focusing on Differences: A New Approach for Rural Policy,” Stanley Johnson reminds us: “Economic theory tells us that value is derived from uniqueness.” He proposes that economic development will be most successful in those communities that differentiate themselves and form strategic partnerships to enhance the value of place-based policies.

Place Competitive Policies

Rural policy, Johnson proposes, has held that all places are created equal; thus policy strives to make them so. The result is communities that look alike and offer the same opportunities for all individuals,

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using sameness as a measure of success. For communities that don't fit the prescribed mold, policies have done little to enhance their competitiveness.

Place policy supports a community's competitiveness by highlighting attributes that represent the area's strengths and are attractive to individuals and other entities. When a community recognizes its differences from other communities, it can begin to identify the value of being unique. This uniqueness might stem from landscape, infrastructure, history or people. A community's unique characteristics might be naturally endowed physical assets, such as mountains, oceans, rivers and an attractive climate, or they might be created, such as airports, interstates and railroads.

Developing unique attributes can take time and requires some investment by the community. A community can enhance its value by building leadership capacity, improving environmental conditions, supporting special facilities and highlighting cultural uniqueness. As the community develops a strong economy, it meets the bigger goal of creating a unique lifestyle that attracts businesses and households.

By focusing on building community value, rural residents can question policies that do not support and sustain competitive uniqueness that will generate opportunities and value for the entire community. They will be able to counter sector-specific policy that does not serve the needs of their community. While current policies are not necessarily inconsistent

with place policy, a focus on place competitiveness provides a litmus by which local residents can test policies.

Identifying attributes that make a community different is just the first step in creating place competitiveness. The next step is to develop and articulate a vision that incorporates these unique strengths. Based on this vision, the community can create strategies that tailored to make the best use of its best attributes. This visioning and planning must come from the local level, resulting in a grassroots policy that expresses the community's uniqueness, value and vision to the rest of America.

In terms of creating a social contract, rural America must have a clear sense of what it can offer to the rest of the country. Communities must also think strategically about their place-based policies, keeping in mind that they cannot act alone and succeed. Because any place-based policies initiated by one community affect other communities, cooperation at the regional, state and national levels binds together local initiatives. Johnson points out that any new social contract must outline "the economic and social goals, roles and responsibilities and rules of future action for both rural America and the rest of America."

Place competitive policy focuses on building communities based on their strengths rather than relying on economic sectors such as agriculture or industry. As rural areas maintain their identity and become stronger the entire nation will benefit from partnerships and a shared social contract.

Resources

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Communicating with Legislators to Impact Rural Policy Issues

As a member of the local school board, Brushy Fork staff member Van Gravitt must communicate regularly with legislators. Below, he shares some pointers from a school board member manual.

- 1. Make Personal Contact.** Letter writing and e-mail messages both help, but are less effective than face-to-face communication. Call your legislators to schedule a time to talk about rural policy issues facing your community.
- 2. Provide Local Data.** Help your legislators understand how changes in rural policy would impact your community. A fact sheet containing benefits or losses is most helpful.
- 3. Focus Your Message.** Decide on two or three key points to communicate and stick with the message. Rural policy issues can be complicated; avoid the use of technical terms and jargon.
- 4. Hold a Pre-Meeting.** Decide who from your community will attend a meeting with your legislator and meet prior to your legislative meeting to determine who will deliver which messages. One spokesperson should ask the legislator for a direct commitment to the policy actions you seek.
- 5. Listen Carefully.** Legislators tend to speak in general terms. Try to draw out definitive answers to specific questions.
- 6. Know How to Handle Difficult Questions.** Don't be afraid to say you don't know how to answer a question. Make a commitment to get back in touch with an answer.
- 7. Volunteer Additional Information.** Offer to provide your legislators facts, data or evidence they need to support them on critical decisions.
- 8. Say Thank You.** Follow up with a thank you letter summarizing your understanding of what the legislator has agreed to do.
- 9. Publicly Recognize Supportive Legislators.** Share your appreciation for legislators who support rural policy development.
- 10. Stay in Touch.** Share good news about your community. Your communication is certain to be more effective if legislators hear from you in good times as well as bad.

Adapted with permission from Progress in Jeopardy; page 10; a publication of the Kentucky School Board Association; January, 2003.

20 Clues to Rural

reprinted from [Clues to Rural Community Survival](#) by Vicki Luther and Milan Wall

For more than a decade, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development has been conducting in-depth case studies of small towns and rural communities that are surviving against the odds. These twenty clues come from case studies of 18 such towns.

1

Evidence of Community Pride

Successful communities are often showplaces of community care and attention, with neatly trimmed yards, public gardens and well-kept public parks. But pride also shows up in other ways, especially in community festivals and events that give residents the chance to celebrate their community, its history and heritage.

2

Emphasis on Quality in Business and Community Life

People in successful communities believe that something worth doing is worth doing right. Facilities are built to last, and so are homes and other improvements. Newer brick additions to schools are common, for example, and businesses are built or expanded with attention to design and construction detail.

3

Willingness to Invest in the Future

Some of the brick and mortar investments are most apparent, but these communities also invest in their future in other ways. Residents invest time and energy in community improvement projects, and they concern themselves with how what they are doing today will impact on the lives of their children and grandchildren in the future.

4

Participatory Approach to Community Decision-Making

Authoritative models don't seem to exist in these communities, and power is deliberately shared. People still know who you need on your side to get something done, but even the most powerful of opinion leaders work through the systems—formal as well as informal—to build consensus for what they want to do.

5

Cooperative Community Spirit

Successful rural communities devote more attention to cooperative activities than to fighting over what should be done and by whom. The stress is on working together toward a common goal and the focus is on positive results. They may spend a long time making a decision, and there may be disagreements along the way, but eventually, as one small town leader put it, “stuff does get done.”

Community Survival

Realistic Appraisal of Future Opportunities

Many of the communities have already learned an important strategic lesson, namely building on your assets and minimizing your weaknesses. Few small communities believe that they are likely to land a giant industry. Many of them say they wouldn't want one if it came along, fearing too much dependence on one employer would be dangerous. The successful communities know that a more realistic approach considers the community and the region as the context for future generations.

6

Awareness of Competitive Positioning

The thriving communities know who the competition is and so do the businesses in towns. Everyone tries to stress local loyalty as a way to help, but many businesses also keep tabs on their competitors in other towns—they don't want any of the hometown folks to have an excuse to go elsewhere. This is an area in which the recognition of community assets—people, associations and institutions—is vitally important. The comparison of one town to another is a significant means to spur improvements.

7

Knowledge of the Physical Environment

Importance of location is underscored continuously in local decision-making, as business and civic leaders picture their community in relation to others. Beyond location, however, communities must also be familiar with what they have locally. For example, the issue of preservation and protection of natural resources must be balanced with development options. Communities that manage this balance have a long-term approach to both environmental preservation and economic development.

8

Active Economic Development Program

An organized and active approach to economic development is common in successful communities. This type of approach depends on public and private sector resources working hand in hand. Private economic development corporations are common, either as a subcommittee or an outgrowth of a Chamber of Commerce or commercial club. However, it's clear that the most successful towns emphasize retaining and expanding existing businesses as well as trying to develop new businesses. This is a "gardening not hunting" model of economic development.

9

continued on page 16

For more information on Heartland Center and the 20 Clues, visit their web site at www.heartlandcenter.info.

20 Clues for Rural Community Survival continued from page 15

10

Deliberate Transition of Power to a Younger Generation of Leaders

Young leadership is more the rule than the exception in thriving rural communities. In many cases, these young people grew up in town and decided to stay or returned later to raise a family. In just as many situations, they are people who've decided to make a life in the community even though they grew up elsewhere. However, it's typical in a successful community to have a formal or informal means for established leaders to bring new recruits into public service.

11

Acceptance of Women in Leadership Roles

Women hold positions of leadership in these rural communities and those roles extend beyond the traditional strongholds of teacher, nurse or librarian. In successful communities, women take on roles as mayors, law enforcement officers, non-profit managers, business owners, etc. In many communities, this inclusion is expanded to minorities, newcomers and all types of non-traditional leaders.

12

Strong Belief in and Support of Education

Good schools are a point of pride as well as a stable employment force, and rural community leaders are very much aware of their school's importance. However, this characteristic goes beyond the K-12 system to include an approach to life-long learning that puts education at the center of many community activities. Whether adult education is targeted at skills and job performance or hobbies and recreation, the successful community makes the most of education at all levels.

13

Problem-Solving Approach to Providing Health Care

Local health care is a common concern in rural communities, but strategies for delivery vary, depending on community needs. While one community may decide that keeping a doctor in residence should be the priority, another may choose to train as many people as possible as EMTs or to use telecommunications to augment a clinic. The point here is the variety of solutions to a common problem.

14

Strong Multi-Generational Family Orientation

These are family-oriented communities, with activities often built around family needs and ties. But the definition of family is broad, and it includes younger as well as older generations and people new to the community. A typical example of this attitude is the provision of child care for community hall meetings, thus allowing young families to attend.

Strong Presence of Traditional Institutions that are Integral to Community Life

Churches are often the strongest force in this characteristic, but other types of community institutions such as newspapers and radio stations, hospitals and schools fill this role also. Service clubs retain a strong influence in social activities as well as in community improvement efforts.

15

Sound and Well-Maintained Infrastructure

Thriving rural communities understand the importance of physical infrastructures—such as streets, sidewalks, water systems, sewage treatment plants—and efforts are made to maintain and improve them. In these communities, a clean-up day includes public parks and playgrounds, business owners keep sidewalks repaired, and volunteer labor and donated materials go a long way to maintaining public buildings.

16

Careful Use of Fiscal Resources

Frugality is a way of life in successful small communities, and expenditures are made carefully. People aren't afraid to spend money, when they believe they should, and then, typically, things are built to last. But neither are they spendthrifts. Expenditures are often seen as investments in the future of the community.

17

Sophisticated Use of Information Resources

Rural community leaders are knowledgeable about their communities beyond the knowledge base available in the community. In one town, for example, retail sales histories from a state university were studied for trend information. In another, census data was used to study population change. In many communities, computer links to the world wide web have made all types of information available.

18

Willingness to Seek Help from the Outside

There's little reluctance to seek help from outside resources. These communities understand the system of accessing resources, ranging from grants for infrastructure improvement to expertise about human service programs. Competing for such resources successfully is a source of pride for local leaders.

19

Conviction that, in the Long Run, You Have to Do It Yourself

Although outside help is sought when appropriate, it is nevertheless true that thriving small towns believe that their destiny is in their own hands. They are not waiting for some outsider to save them, nor do they believe that they can sit and wait for things to get better. Making a hometown a good place to live for a long time to come is a pro-active assignment, and these local leaders know that no one will take care of a town as well as the people who live there.

20

Hille Helps Design Oregon Curriculum

In the summer of 2002, Brushy Fork Director Peter Hille was recruited for a curriculum development team by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development. The Ford Family Foundation had contacted Vicki Luther, Co-Director of Heartland, to request a proposal to develop a community leadership program curriculum that could be delivered in Oregon.

In addition to Peter, Vicki recruited Lynn Youngbar, an Oregon-based rural development specialist. "The team had to have skills in adult education and hands-on experience in rural community programs. That, of course, is in addition to being able to deliver on a deadline!" said Vicki.

The group reviewed more than 40 different leadership programs and curricula and began the design process from a basic topic outline. Personal experiences such as Peter's with Brushy Fork Institute and Lynn's with knowledge of Oregon's rural issues helped in topic selection. During the team's first meeting, members framed the outlines, and established learning goals and outcomes for collective and individual sessions.

To meet the Ford Family Foundation's criteria, the program had to be highly practical and recognize rural issues. The program had to include a team project focused on community improvement. A field trip to the Oregon state capital in Salem was also part of the curriculum. The design team decided to offer each community team a mini-grant that would require local dollars as a match in order to offer experience in local fundraising.

The Ford Family Foundation staff had conducted local research, through focus groups, to determine learner needs and interests. The curriculum development team divided the topics into four sections: Discovery; Leadership Skills and Process; Networks, Relationships and Resources; and Outreach and Next Steps. Each team member drafted various parts of the materials and all participated in editing and research.

While working on the publication, the curriculum team was spread across the nation from Oregon to Nebraska to Kentucky, so electronic communication played a key role in getting the work done. Using telecommunications and weekly telephone conferences, the group created a 60 contact hour series in which participants identify, plan, implement and evaluate a local community improvement project. The project serves as the direct and immediate application of leadership development theory and techniques.

For more information about the curriculum or the development process, contact the Heartland Center for Leadership Development: info@heartlandcenter.info.

New Opportunity School for Women Accepting Applications

Applications for the summer session of the New Opportunity School for Women, a free educational and career exploration program, should be requested now.

The upcoming session is scheduled for June 1-21, 2003, on the Berea College campus. Application deadline is April 18, 2003. The program is designed for women of low-income who have completed high school, have a GED (or actively working on a GED), and do not have a college degree. Applicants should be approximately between the ages of 30 and 55.

The program provides educational opportunities through classes in computer basics, leadership development, Appalachian literature, and writing, in addition to lectures, field trips, and workshops focusing on building self-confidence.

Job search skills will be identified and participants will learn to write resumes and practice interview techniques. Those selected to attend will also have internships in a field of interest, either on the Berea College campus or in the community. Lodging and meals are provided and grants for travel and childcare are available.

Requests for applications and additional information should be addressed to the New Opportunity School for Women, 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, KY 40403, by phoning 859-985-7200, or by email info@nosw.org.

Leadership Development Program Counties Selected; Team Recruitment Underway

Participant counties have been selected for the 2003 cycle of the Brushy Fork Institute Leadership Development Program and recruitment for individual participants is underway. Invited to participate in this year's program are: Estill County, Kentucky; Randolph County, West Virginia; Barbour County, West Virginia; Meigs County, Ohio; and a team from Berea College.

If you know anyone from any of these counties who would be a good participant for the Brushy Fork Institute, please have them contact Van Gravitt by phone at (859) 985-3858 or by e-mail at van_gravitt@berea.edu.

The dates for the opening workshop of this cycle are September 11-13, 2003. The closing workshop will be held April 2-3, 2004.

2002 Annual Campaign Kicked Off

Brushy Fork kicked off its 2002 annual campaign in December. We'd like to express our appreciation to the following donors:

James E. Bush
David J. Cain
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Dr. and Mrs. M. Douglas Garrett
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Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Hille
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John and Charolette Sweet
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John C. Willis
Delmer Wilson, Jr.
Anonymous donors

Would you like to support the work of Brushy Fork Institute? A donation of \$15.00 will cover one subscription to Mountain Promise, or \$150.00 will pay to have the publication printed and mailed to an entire team of Brushy Fork Associates.

Send your donation to: Brushy Fork Institute, ATTN: Annual Campaign, CPO 2164, Berea College, Berea, KY 40404. You may also download a donation form from our web site at www.berea.edu/brushyfork/support.html.

Thank You

Proposed Funding Reduction for ARC continued from page 7

difficult budget environment.” Reactions from leaders throughout the Appalachian region have indicated opposition to the proposed ARC cuts.

The Associated Press quoted Representative John Peterson, R-Pa., who chairs the Congressional Rural Caucus in the House: “It’s always the programs that serve the most rural parts of the country that get the ax first. I certainly will not support it, and I will fight to maintain at least the status they’ve had.”

Virginia Governor Mark Warner, a Democrat who serves as chair of the thirteen states that sit on ARC, said: “The people of Appalachia have been hardest hit by the country’s current economic downturn. ... It would be a mistake to cut ARC funds, which have proven so successful in meeting the economic and community development needs of the people of Appalachia.”

While the ARC has usually been a meagerly funded program when compared to the \$2.2 trillion federal budget, in 2002 the Congress and White House has rewarded the ARC for its work by

approving a five-year reauthorization bill. The authorization level for funding ARC was \$88 million, \$55 million more than the agency is set to receive under the Bush plan. If the Bush budget passes, the funding cut will go into effect October 1, the beginning of the 2004 fiscal year.

Resources

“Bush Administration Proposes Major Shift in ARC Responsibilities.” National Association of Development Organizations. Home Page. 14 Feb. 2003. <<http://www.nado.org/legaffair/arc.html#shift>>.

Jordan, Lara Jakes. “Cash-strapped Appalachia faces a 50 percent cut in Bush budget.” Associated Press. February 3, 2003.

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