

CENTER *for* RURAL POLICY and DEVELOPMENT

Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

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Summer 2007

Rural Minnesota Forum a Success

This year's Rural Minnesota Forum on health care was the Center's largest and one of its most successful. The topic, "Health Care Reform: Time for Another Minnesota Miracle," drew 160+ attendees and generated a lively discussion on the possibilities and potential for health care reform in the state of Minnesota.

The issues of access to health care and health care insurance, affordability, enough doctors and nurses, the aging population and how to care for them were some of the most frequently discussed at the forum. The afternoon conference took place June 18 in Duluth and served as the first day of the Minnesota Rural Health Conference. The forum was designed to bring together as many policy makers and health practitioners as possible to create a discussion on the current problems with our health care system and possible solutions.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Douglas Wood of Mayo Health System in Rochester, began the session by asking the question of our current health care system: should we reform, transform or accept the status quo? In his talk, Dr. Wood presented the weaknesses of the current system - barriers to access due to cost, increasing costs due to technology that may or may not be effective, and lack of focus on prevention — and offered a vision for transforming the system through best practices that would control costs and improve care at the same time. Dr. Wood's Powerpoint presentation can be downloaded from our web site at www.ruralmn.org/rmjforum.php.

Dr. Wood was followed by two panels. The first gave legislators the opportunity to review with the audience what health care policy work was accomplished during the recent legislative session. House Health and Human Services Finance Division chair Tom Huntley (DFL-Duluth) and Senate Health and Human Services Budget Division chair Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis) were joined by health committee members Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba (DFL-Long Prairie), Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud) and Sen. Betsy Wergin (R-Princeton).

In the second panel Liz Quam, president of the Minnesota Rural Health Association, Dr. Patty Lindholm of the Fergus Falls Medical Group, and

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Carol Church, RN, and Patti Martin, Carlton County Public Health, discussed rural health care access issues with Sen. Patricia Torres Ray (center) during the afternoon session.



Former state senator Sheila Kiscaden (at podium) moderated legislative panelists Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud); Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis); Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba (DFL-Long Prairie); Sen. Betsy Wergin (R-Princeton); Rep. Tom Huntley DFL-Duluth).

Center seeking proposals for Rural Wind Energy Development Assistance Program

This spring the Minnesota Legislature and Gov. Pawlenty authorized a one-time appropriation to establish the Rural Wind Energy Development Assistance Program, and the Center for Rural Policy and Development was designated to administer this program. As a result, the Center is seeking qualified organizational applicants to establish and administer this new program. The program is designed to provide technical assistance to rural entities, both public and private, that wish to develop wind energy electric generation projects for the purpose of selling the energy to an electric utility through a power purchasing agreement. The total amount of the grant is \$975,000 over two years; 35 percent of all grant funds dispersed must be matched by the applicant with qualified funds.

As prescribed by the Legislature,



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New grant allows networking on a national scale

A new grant from the Kellogg Foundation is giving the Center for Rural Policy and Development the opportunity to work with other rural organizations to form a national rural network. Through the *Rural People, Rural Policy Initiative*, the Kellogg Foundation, based in Battle Creek, Mich., is working to bring together rural organizations from across the country to meet and network on a regional and national basis in an effort to build a nationwide network of rural advocates and organizations.

The purpose of this initiative, according to the Kellogg Foundation, is to create a "rural policy system" of organizations that can go forward and shape policy that benefits rural America's communities. The goal of *Rural People, Rural Policy* over its five years is to create a critical mass of people with the know-how to advocate for and act on rural issues.

The Center was chosen to join the second-year group of organizations and will participate in three "peer learning" sessions over the next 12 months. In these sessions, representatives of organizations attend sessions on defining issues, group dynamics, framing policy and more. Center staff also attended Kellogg's first ever National Rural Assembly at the end of June, held in northern Virginia outside Washington, D.C. At this assembly, more than 300 rural leaders met to take part in a "21st Century Town Meeting," discuss critical rural issues and attend a Congressional hearing on rural America.

"Probably the biggest thing holding rural America back is the vast distance that separates communities and groups," said Marnie Werner, program manager for the Center and a participant in the *Rural People*,

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Rural Minnesota Forum

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Maddy Forsberg of the Southwest Area Agency on Aging gave their views on “What every legislator should know about rural health care.” Legislators and other government officials then seated themselves around the room to listen as audience members discussed the same question. The notes from these discussions were then collected and will be written up and distributed to all state legislators. Ten legislators were in attendance, plus several staffers of other legislators, a representative from Sen. Norm Coleman’s office, and the chair of the Governor’s Health Cabinet.

“The purpose of the Rural Minnesota Forum is to bring people together in such a way that they have the opportunity to not just listen to people talk about issues, but to be able to talk about them themselves, and to feel like someone is listening,” said Center president Jack Geller. “The Forum is a major part of our civic engagement mission, the heart of which is just that: getting people engaged. There’s a lot of will and brain power in rural Minnesota. We just want to help get everyone working together.”

RMJ Fall: The Institutional Change issue



Can Minnesota’s transportation funding strategy keep up with demographic change? Is an education system designed to fit an agrarian schedule still adequate for the 21st century? What will county government look like in the next 150 years?

The subject to be tackled in this fall’s *Rural Minnesota Journal* is institutional change, and the questions above are some of the primary topics. “By looking at institutional change, we’re asking whether the systems that have served us well in the past are still the right ones for today and tomorrow,” said Center president Jack Geller. “Does a long summer vacation from school still make sense now that so few people farm? It may or it may not. Is a county government system with a geography based on how far a person can travel in a day by wagon an efficient use of public funds going forward? Some would say yes, absolutely, and others would say no, we have

too much local government. We’ll use this back and forth to look at these issues.”

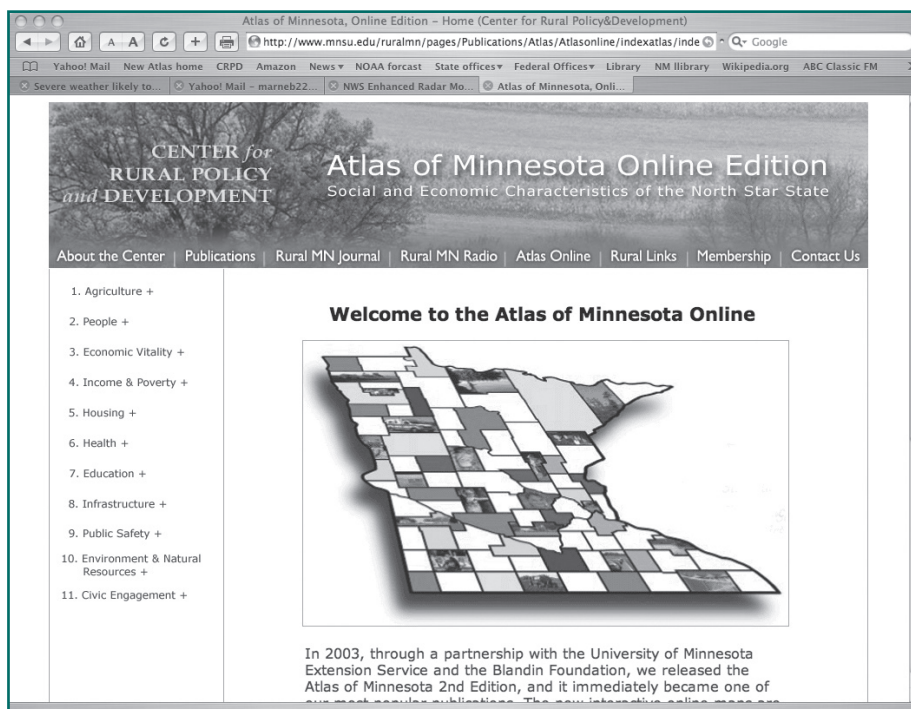
As the population in Minnesota grows, shifts and changes in age, race and background, this issue of the Journal will look at five institutions in this state: education, governance, transportation, telecommunications and health care. Each topic will be addressed by at least one, and in some cases two or three authors all discussing alternate views of the issue.

“It should be a thought-provoking piece, and we’re really looking forward to producing it and sharing it with Minnesotans,” said Geller.

The next issue of *RMJ* is scheduled to be released in October. As always, it will be available free of charge in print (there is a small charge for postage if it is mailed) and on our web site at www.ruralmn.org.

Atlas Online getting new look

The Center for Rural Policy and Development’s Atlas of Minnesota Online is getting a new look for summer, along with updated data. The Atlas section of the web site will now coordinate with the rest of the site in appearance but will still work in the same user-friendly way with maps and pop-up data. We are also continuously updating data and plan to begin adding data for municipalities this fall. Keep watching as the Atlas grows.



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RMJ Rural Minnesota Journal

Winter 2007

Examining Rural Health Care

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www.ruralmn.org.

My late father-in-law loved farming. Even growing up on a farm in southwestern Nebraska during the Great Depression did not temper his enthusiasm for what he was sure was to be his future occupation. Unfortunately, World War II put a major crimp in his plan, and upon his return from the war, he found himself serving the small farming communities in his region as a representative of the local gas company until his retirement. But he never stopped thinking like a farmer.

Growing up on a farm connects you and imprints in you the cyclical nature of life. As a city kid I certainly understood that there were four seasons and that each one was unique. But I never understood the seasons the way my father-in-law did. For him, each turn of the seasons brought new hope, new risk, new chores, new anxieties and new wonderment. He also had imprinted in him the idea that all of life is cyclical - you know, what goes around comes around. And therein lies what some call the "agrarian dilemma."

When you believe that life is cyclical it often gives you a straightforward path to addressing many of life's challenges. After all, no matter how long the drought lasts, you just know that sooner or later it's going to rain. And conversely, no matter how hard or long it rains, sooner or later you will see the sunshine again. With such a cyclical orientation, a reasonable strategy to life's challenges is to hunker down and wait it out.

After all, sooner or later it will change for the better. And there, in fact, lies the dilemma.

Hunkering down and waiting it out works for those challenges that are cyclical. If I only had a nickel for every time I heard my father-in-law state, "It's nothing that an increase in the price of corn wouldn't fix." Clearly, such statements reflected his belief that regardless of how low the price of corn dropped, sooner or later it would rebound. Accordingly, the trick was to reduce expenses, hunker down, and wait for corn prices to rebound.

But what if the challenges that you are facing are not cyclical? In fact, I would suggest that many of today's challenges for our rural communities are not cyclical at all, but linear. In other words, what goes around doesn't

From Out Here... On the Agrarian Dilemma

Jack M. Geller, Ph.D.,
President

necessarily come back around. Let me give two brief examples. Thirty years ago when I was in college many of my friends opted out of college and went straight into the workforce. Looking back now, many of them were able to find well-paying jobs, enabling them to build a secure future for themselves and their families. But today with just a high school diploma such a successful outcome is much less likely. Clearly, education commands much more of a premium in the workplace than it used to, and all the hunkering down in the world won't change that. Another linear pattern is the continuing replacement of labor with capital, and few industries exemplify this better than the farming industry. Continuing advances in equipment and agricultural chemicals has in effect squeezed the majority of labor out of farming over the past 60 years. It's a linear trend in rural America that has led experts at this year's annual agricultural outlook conference in Washington, D.C., to note that there are now 64 million people living in rural America, and 62 million of them don't farm! Don't look for a turnaround anytime soon.

So what does all this mean for rural Minnesota's future? Simply put, I believe that many of the challenges we face today in rural Minnesota are more linear in nature than they are cyclical. As a result, simply waiting for things to turn around will not be an effective strategy. But I also believe rural

Minnesotans are resourceful and creative in crafting the right solutions and strategies for their own communities. With good information and the right attitude anything is possible. I see that regularly as rural Minnesotans come together to discuss their collective future and take action in their cities and towns.

So step up, get involved, use good information and help craft the future of your community for yourself and your kids. Putting another soup bone in the pot and hunkering down simply won't work this time around.

(Dr. Geller is president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development. He can be reached at jgeller@ruralmn.org)



Center seeking proposals

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an eligible applicant must be a nonprofit organization, which, in addition to 501(c)(3) IRS-designated organizations, includes centers and institutes residing within nonprofit and public colleges and universities. For-profit consulting firms and proprietary colleges and universities are not considered eligible. Applicants must provide documentation of their nonprofit status.

To be considered for this grant, applicants must document their experience and expertise in the development of commercial wind energy projects; understand the legal, engineering and financial requirements for such projects; and demonstrate their ability to deliver such technical assistance throughout rural Minnesota.

All proposals accepted must be received or postmarked by **August 17, 2007**.

The Rural Wind Energy Development Assistance Program will provide a variety of technical tools and resources to rural entities seeking to develop commercial wind energy projects. Specifically, the program will provide assistance to local project development in the following areas:

- Identifying target communities with favorable wind resources, community interest and local political support;
- Providing assistance in the areas of legal, engineering and financial services;
- Providing assistance in securing and reserving wind turbines, as well as assuring their maintenance over time;

- Creating marketing opportunities for utilities to meet their renewable energy obligations through the purchase of rural community-generated wind energy;
- Providing assistance in negotiating fair power purchasing agreements with electric utilities;
- Facilitating transmission interconnection and delivery of energy from rural and community wind projects;
- Lowering the market risk facing potential wind investors by supporting local wind development from start to finish.

In addition, the successful applicant may consider aggregating multiple rural entities into larger groups to achieve the size and market power necessary for planning and developing significant rural wind energy projects.

All eligible proposals will be reviewed on the basis of the applicant's recent and relevant experience in providing services similar to those required by this RFP, including staff qualifications, experience and expertise; the applicant's work plan and procedures for providing the required services, including the capacity to provide such technical assistance to entities dispersed throughout rural Minnesota; and the appropriateness of the applicant's budget, along with the required 35% matching funds.

Please visit our web site at www.ruralmn.org for full details regarding the program.

New grant allows networking

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Rural Policy project. "The Kellogg Foundation is serving as kind of a rural policy matchmaker, bringing together groups that wouldn't find each other otherwise and sharing knowledge and experience. We're bringing in our experience with research and policy making, and it seems to be very much appreciated."

The Kellogg Foundation's mission is to "help people help themselves" and their communities. While the Kellogg Foundation cannot itself advocate for or criticize any particular cause or policy, its goal through *Rural People, Rural Policy* is to help rural organizations understand how policy making works and how they can work together to advocate for rural America.

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DEED convening competitiveness forums

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development is holding a series of forums on economic competitiveness around the state this summer with the goal of bringing together state and local leaders to identify partnerships and strategies needed to develop a globally competitive Minnesota.

DEED is inviting local elected officials, legislators, workforce investment board members and staff, economic development professionals, higher education leaders, school board members, business owners, media representatives and others to discuss issues such as current workforce development strategies, new organizational models, and statewide versus regional strategies. For more information on the forums, visit "Minnesota Competes" at www.positivelyminnesota.com.

Region	City	Place	Date	Register by
Southwest	Redwood Falls	Redwood Falls Community Center 901 Cook St.	Friday Aug. 3	July 27
South Metro	St. Paul	St. Paul Technical College 235 Marshall Ave.	Wednesday Aug. 8	Aug. 1
Northwest	Thief River Falls	Ralph Engelstad Arena 525 Brooks Ave. N.	Wednesday Aug. 15	Aug. 8
North Metro	Brooklyn Park	Brooklyn Park Community Activity Center 5600 85th Ave. N.	Wednesday Aug. 22	Aug. 15
Southeast	Owatonna	Holiday Inn 2365 NW 43rd St.	Friday Aug. 24	Aug. 17

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SUMMER 2007

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