

# CENTER *for* RURAL POLICY and DEVELOPMENT

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY • MANKATO

*Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future*

NEWSLETTER No. 5

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## *The Atlas of Minnesota: A New Resource for State and County Governments*

The challenge of documenting and understanding some of the significant social and economic characteristics and changes across Minnesota's 87 counties has just gotten a little easier for county planners, regional development commissions and others concerned with community develop-

ment. The Center for Rural Policy and Development at Minnesota State University, Mankato recently released an atlas documenting many of these social and economic characteristics, county by county. Entitled, "*Atlas of Minnesota: Social and Economic Characteristics of the North Star State*," the atlas contains approximately 100 maps of Minnesota displaying these characteristics with differences reflected for each county. Maps in the atlas are partitioned into five sections: (1) Agriculture & Environment; (2) Demographics; (3) Health & Crime; (4) Economics; and (5) Education.

Dr. Jack M. Geller, President of the Center for Rural Policy and Development noted that they have been working in concert with the Department of Geography at Minnesota State for the past year to create the resource document. "Many times during routine conversations with policymakers it is mentioned that it is a shame that we don't have good information on a particular topic, only to discover that in fact the information is available. Rather, the challenge is that the wealth of data that is collected by various state and federal agencies are spread across dozens of websites and agency documents. The *Atlas of Minnesota* is our first attempt to begin to aggregate some of this data and display it in an easy to use format," Geller noted.

Dr. Jose Javier Lopez, Assistant

Professor of Geography and Editor-in-Chief of the Atlas led the team of geographers and geography students who developed the project. "One of the most rewarding aspects in the development of the atlas was the opportunity to collaborate with graduate and undergraduate students. The

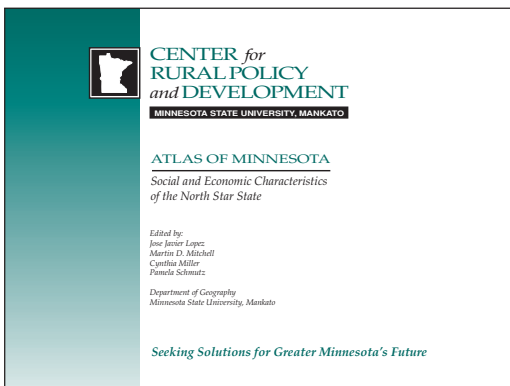
project allowed our students to put into practice their cartographic skills," noted Dr. Lopez. "Also, another positive aspect of this endeavor was

the integration of data from different sources. Unlike many atlases that only concentrate on U.S. Census data, we consulted local sources," Lopez added.

In discussing the value of the atlas, Dr. Martin Mitchell, chair of the Geography Department at Minnesota State noted, "The atlas provides rural communities and legislators with a snapshot of how they compare to the metro area relative to a variety of socio-economic variables."

The Center has received many positive comments regarding the release of the Atlas. "First, people tell us that they like it and how useful it is; then they ask us how we decided which statistics to include or exclude; and then of course, they ask us when will we update it," Geller noted. "Clearly, with the full release of the 2000 Census data in the near future, we hope to expand and update the Atlas in 2002."

Copies of the Atlas of Minnesota were distributed to all state legislators, county boards, state department commissioners and other key policymakers. A limited number of copies are available by request from the Center for Rural Policy and Development (507) 389-2599. An interactive web-based version of the atlas is to be added to the Center's website later this summer.



## *Rural Perspectives... Dean Barkley, Director Minnesota Planning*



*Minnesota Planning is a state agency with the goal of providing timely information about critical issues to policymakers and the public. Individuals within Minnesota Planning work together to keep Minnesotans focused on the future, and to influence policy decisions for a better future through long-range planning.*

*Dean Barkley served as a key developer of the Minnesota Reform Party, and was appointed director of Minnesota Planning by Governor Ventura in January 1999. He is a director of the Minnesota Compact, which advocates clean campaigns. An attorney since 1977,*

*he practiced law prior to his appointment.*

*Director Barkley has been hosting public meetings called "listening posts" to hear what citizens across the state think about issues important to their regions.*

**Q**

*Would you please define rural Minnesota as you see it today?*

**A**

I define rural Minnesota as that area lying outside of the seven county metro area. It is difficult to define rural Minnesota since each region is different and faces many different problems. It depends on what area you are talking about.

If you are talking about western Minnesota, you see an area that is facing declining population and declining economic opportunity. Western Minnesota must deal with the factors that are causing its youth to leave. As one person put it in Marshall, "When you are attending more funerals than baptisms, you are in trouble." Other areas such as southeastern and central Minnesota are facing growth problems similar to the metro area. Infrastructure and planning are much greater issues for them.

Finally, I would state that we must begin thinking about rural strategies more broadly than just agricultural problems. The economies of all these regions must diversify and begin to attract some of the excess growth now happening in metro Minnesota.

**Q**

*I understand you have been hosting town meetings across the state, how many have you held and what are you hearing?*

**A**

We have held ten. The most widely discussed issue coming out at these listening posts is that of telecommunications. Every region has expressed a deep concern for having state-of-the-art telecommunications access at a fair price. These regions rightly know that if they do not have this basic infrastructure available, that they will be left behind in the new economy.

**Q**

*What will you do with this information, what is your plan of action?*

**A**

We are working with the Department of Trade and Economic Development to hold a follow-up meeting with these regions at the Rural Summit in Rochester this summer to confirm findings from listening posts and to start a dialogue with local leaders. Action steps will be determined to deal with problems identified. Issues could include roads, affordable housing, training, recruiting business to their region or stopping the youth from leaving their area.

**Q**

*How do you intend to support and encourage rural development and growth in Minnesota?*

**A**

By partnering with and collaboratively addressing issues with the elected leadership of the area.

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## Rural Perspectives...

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**Q** *In your opinion, what is the most important issue affecting rural development in our state?*

**A** Availability of telecommunications infrastructure at competitive prices, along with the availability of training for their workforce. Without these two elements, new business will not locate to rural Minnesota.

We have wasted one year by not doing anything on telecommunications legislatively. The Administration's telecommunications bill went nowhere this session because of lack of buy-in by the legislature. Individual legislators must be educated on the urgency of doing something next year to expedite the building of a competitive telecommunication system for all of Minnesota that is readily available to all parts of the state at a competitive price.

**Q** *What is the best opportunity your office currently gives to rural Minnesota?*

**A** An open door to come in and communicate with us.

**Q** *Presently, what tools are available to help rural communities grow economically?*

**A** DTED has a program to attempt to locate expanding businesses to rural Minnesota. There are several programs available both from the state and non-profits to help build affordable housing. The Minnesota Department of Economic Security has several training programs for workers. Minnesota Planning has resources available to help communities do long range planning, etc.

**Q** *Do rural communities understand how to use these tools?*

**A** Not all do. The key to making any of this work is local leadership. If you have it, things work well. If you don't, you will continue to decline.

**Q** *How do people get more information?*

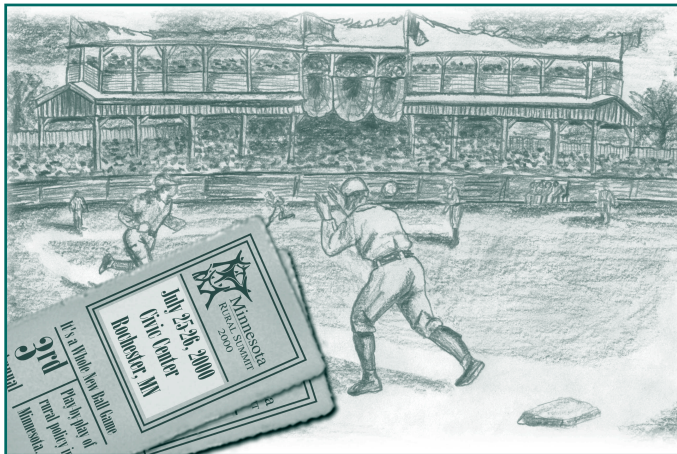
**A** Call us at 651-296-3985 or call DTED (Department of Trade and Economic Development) at 800-657-3858.



## Minnesota Rural Summit 2000: *It's a whole new ball game*

Learning stations and a ball park theme will offer opportunities for learning and networking at Minnesota Rural Summit 2000. The third annual Minnesota Rural Summit will be held at the Rochester Civic Center July 25-26, and is expected to top last year's attendance of over 600. Rural development has become "a whole new ball game," and will be addressed in a variety of interactive exercises during the event.

"The Summit will be fun," said Marcie McLaughlin, executive director of Minnesota Rural Partners. "Policies are changing. For so long, it's been ag policy that sets the stage for rural Minnesota. Now, that's not the case." She defines rural Minnesota as anywhere outside the seven-county metro area. "Diversification has become very important," she said. "We're looking at rural Minnesota differently now than we did in the past." She hopes to illustrate how the rules have changed with the "whole new ball game" theme. No matter how much you like the game, you can't succeed if the rules have changed.



Mark Drabenstott, director of the Center for the Study of Rural America, will provide the keynote address. He will address five specific issues:

- Closing the digital divide
- Energizing entrepreneurs
- Leveraging the new agriculture
- Sustaining the rural landscape
- Boosting human capital

Practical applications and interactive sessions will help attendees learn and apply strategies to strengthen their rural communities and organizations.

"Before people leave, we want to give them a chance to make a commitment to their community," McLaughlin said. "It's important to make new linkages with folks and organizations you might not normally consider as relevant to your goals." One way to do that at the Summit will be through interactive workstations. Individuals will form teams, and experience a county-fair atmosphere as they play "Who wants to be a Minnesotanaire" or "Let's Make a Deal."

"We're trying to get people to think outside the box," said Monica Hendrickson of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission who coordinates the logistics of the Summit. "It should be fun, but it should also give a good overview from many different subject areas."

The Minnesota Rural Summit is not a typical conference. Plenty of one-on-one time, breakout sessions and learning stations will encourage all involved to broaden their views and build support. "I'm looking forward to it," said Russ Wille, executive director of Region 9 Development Commission.

"I think it will be very worthwhile. People in different areas don't always get a chance to see what others do. With the cross section of people that attend, there will be some great networking opportunities."

Wille stressed the benefit of contact with a variety of groups. "Many groups have a common goal," he said. "This offers a way to work together." Many organizations, state and local agencies will be represented. Anyone interested in rural development will attend.

A complete itinerary for the Summit can be found on MRP's website: [www.minnesotaruralpartners.org](http://www.minnesotaruralpartners.org).

## Center receives grant from the Blandin Foundation

The Center for Rural Policy and Development at Minnesota State University, Mankato has been awarded a 3-year grant of \$200,000 from the Blandin Foundation in support of their rural policy research efforts. Dr. Jack Geller, president of the Center, reported that the grant is part of a continuing effort to build the funding base of the Center as a public/private partnership.

"The Blandin Foundation is widely known throughout the state of Minnesota as one of the premier philanthropic organizations with programmatic interests in rural Minnesota. We are

extremely pleased and honored that they would see the value in the Center and provide such a generous contribution toward our efforts," Geller said.

In discussing the grant, Paul M. Olson, president and chief executive officer of the Blandin Foundation commented, "We at the Blandin Foundation see the Center for Rural Policy and Development as a thoughtful and nonpartisan voice in the discussion of issues that will affect the future of our state. The Center, while still in its infancy, is already providing a high level of service to meet the needs of key policymakers in the Legislature, executive department and other public officials

throughout Minnesota. We are pleased to support the Center in its development, so it will grow and have an even greater impact over time."

Last year the state legislature appropriated \$200,000 for the rural policy "think tank" on condition that they raise an additional \$200,000 from the private sector. "I am pleased to announce that as of today, the Center has raised \$485,000 in private fundraising. Obviously, we are well on our way in building the public/private partnership the legislature was seeking," Geller added.

In April, I had the opportunity, along with a dozen other Minnesotans to attend the first annual conference hosted by the Center for the Study of Rural America. This new Center, established by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City titled its conference, "Beyond Agriculture: New Policies for Rural America."

Dr. Andrew Isserman, an agricultural economist from the University of Illinois, delivered one of the most thought-provoking presentations. Dr. Isserman's thesis is that one's evaluation of how well rural America is doing is somewhat a function of how you define rural America. Because these definitional boundaries are so crucial, simple categories of metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan are virtually useless. To emphasize his point, he noted that 50 years ago some of the best medical care in the world was being practiced and delivered in the rural community of Rochester, Minnesota. However, as Rochester grew economically and demographically, it soon left the categorical boundaries of the non-metropolitan and is now categorized as a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). But the question is, has the delivery of health care suffered because Rochester can no longer be claimed as part of rural America?

Today, there really is no meaningful definition of rural. In fact, "rural" is a residual category. That means that while we have all these precise census definitions for metropolitan statistical areas and urban places, rural is simply what remains after everything that can be categorized, gets categorized. This can create quite a dilemma.

## What's in a Name?

by Jack M. Geller  
President  
Center for  
Rural Policy  
and Development

Dr. Isserman suggests that some of the most economically prosperous and wealthiest places in the U.S. today are communities like Rochester. He categorizes these places as not rural or urban, but "formerly rural." Of course this is an intriguing concept that one can take to extremes. If you go back far enough in time, you can argue that even New York City is formerly rural. But it does make you think how we label things.

So I went back to the Minnesota's population tables and sure enough, some of the highest growth counties in the state today, were categorized as non-metropolitan in 1960. This includes most of the secondary and tertiary suburban rings of the Twin Cities, as well as counties such as Olmsted and Stearns. As Dr. Isserman would suggest, these formerly rural counties are doing quite well.

So what does it all mean? Well there's a strange irony that if rural economic developers succeed too well in their task that their reward is to have their county removed from the categorical ranks of the "non-metropolitan." Ultimately, if you take it to its logical conclusion, "rural" will end up being defined not by population size, density or geography, but rather, as the most successful communities leave their rural label behind, rural places will increasingly be defined by limited resources and economic decline. However, the truth is that rural, urban, metropolitan and non-metropolitan are just arbitrary definitional boundaries. At the end of the day we're one Minnesota and the growth and prosperity of the state as a whole is what really matters.



## FY 2001 Small Grant Program Announced

The Center for Rural Policy and Development is once again seeking applicants to conduct innovative research on salient social and economic issues that affect greater Minnesota. Individual and collaborative projects of limited duration (up to one year) are eligible to apply.

"This is the third 'Request for Proposals' we have issued, and each time we do this we receive many thought-provoking ideas from researchers all across Minnesota. This has become a very effective way to engage faculty and build a network of researchers with expertise in a variety of disciplines and topical areas," noted Dr. Jack Geller, president of the Center.

Postcards announcing the Request for Proposals will be mailed in July to over 1300 individuals and organizations on the Center's mailing list. Applications can be downloaded from the Center's website at <http://www.ruralmn.org>, or by calling the Center for Rural Policy and Development at (507) 389-2599. The deadline for completed applications is October 20, 2000.

### CENTER for RURAL POLICY and DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Rural Policy and Development Small Grant Program announces the availability of its FY2001 Request for Proposals (RFP). Copies of the RFP can be obtained by calling (507) 389-2599; via e-mail at [crpd@mnsu.edu](mailto:crpd@mnsu.edu); or through its website at <http://www.ruralmn.org>

**The Deadline for Completed Applications is:**

**October 20, 2000**

*For further information regarding the RFP, the Center, or its programs, call (507) 389-2599*

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