



2016 Annual Report

**The Partners for Rural America is the national
organization of State Rural Development Councils**

***Working together to improve the quality of
life in rural America***



Guiding principles for State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) from the National Farm Bill

- ▶ That SRDCs shall include representation from all agencies, organizations and individuals who are dedicated to enhancing economic and social opportunities for rural citizens.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall seek the support and participation of the governors of the states in which the SRDC operates.
- ▶ That participation in SRDC decisions and operations shall be open to all who wish to participate.
- ▶ The SRDCs shall represent the diversity of states' rural populations and geography.
- ▶ That all that participate in SRDCs shall have a voice in their decision and that the SRDCs shall be free from control of any single individual, organization, agency, sector, political party or interest group.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall provide open, neutral environments where all participants' voices can be heard and where major decisions are reached, whenever possible, through consensus.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall receive financial and other support from diverse sources.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall retain an executive director to manage the operation of the SRDC if financially able to do so, and if not, the SRDC shall be operated by a working board of directors.
- ▶ That all SRDCs shall participate in the nationwide network of SRDCs known as Partners for Rural America.

Recent Highlights of Partners for Rural America and State Rural Development Councils

Held annual conferences in Vermont (2013), Wyoming (2014), Virginia (2015) and Arizona (2016) attended by most of the active Councils to conduct organization business, plan for the future and learn from successful initiatives of the host SRDC and each other.

At its board meetings in alternate months had presentations by outside experts including Lillian Salerno, USDA Deputy Under Secretary; Bonnie (Hildreth) Gettys, President/CEO of Barry (Michigan) Community Foundation; Doug O'Brien, White House Domestic Policy Council; Lucy Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary at U.S. Department of Education; Brian Gibbons and Lynn Chadwick, National Telecommunications and Information Administration; Dan McGranahan, USDA Economic Research Service and Liz Sosa of Public Square Communities.

Representatives of SRDCs continue as active participants in the State Rural Policy Initiative to assemble and recommend best practices, help implement rural research and build a coordinated rural development approach.

Most all SRDCs continue to sponsor or are active participants in annual rural policy summits and conferences to call attention to rural needs and successes and build collaboration to address rural challenges.

Reaffirmed Partners for Rural America nonprofit corporation status with the District of Columbia and tax exemption from federal income tax with IRS.

Submitted a request to USDA for recognition of sixteen State Rural Development Councils who meet the criteria under the Farm Bill.

Acknowledges the efforts of SRDCs in Washington, Oregon and Idaho to advance and enhance initiatives across state lines, eliminate impediments, share expertise and seek new opportunities for rural progress with funding assistance from USDA.

Continues efforts to update and expand the Partners for Rural America website.

PRA changed its official address to that of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, P.O. Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601 and moved its banking to Community National Bank in Montpelier.

PRA commends Chris Marko, Co-Chair of Oregon Rural Development Council, for his service on the Board of the Community Development Society.



State Council Highlights



Overview of 2015 Accomplishments and Opportunities to Partner

Arizona Rural Development Council (AZRDC) is working to strengthen Arizona's economy in multiple ways. AZRDC helps rural businesses become more competitive and reduce economic leakage by providing business owners tools and resources including new technology training, marketing opportunities, and strategies for business development. Additionally, AZRDC works to increase new dollars to rural places through in-state tourism by leveraging arts and culture, Main Streets, and agri-tourism. Finally, AZRDC works to empower rural Arizonans to improve their access to healthy foods which has health and economic benefits for all residents.

Local First Arizona Foundation (LFAF) and Arizona Rural Development Council merged in 2013 and support two websites (www.localfirstazfoundation.org and www.azrdc.org) and a team of 8 staff with offices in Tucson, Phoenix, and Flagstaff. Additionally, AZRDC has a statewide blog, which gets read 10,000 times per month, an email list of 3,030 subscribers and LFAF has over 130,000 social media followers. The Rural Development Council works to create new models of community and economic development that tie together small businesses, historic main streets, tourism strategies, and community planning. The Rural Advisory Board consists of representatives from all 15 counties that work to develop quality topics and a diverse array of speakers for the Rural Policy Forum each year.

Rural Policy Forum

The annual Arizona Rural Policy Forum offers a venue for connecting rural economic development professionals, business owners, nonprofits, community leaders, and other rural stakeholders who are interested in sustaining rural communities. This year's 9th Annual Rural Policy Forum connected 225 representatives from every Arizona County to participate in over two days of workshops, speakers, tours and more. Over 50 speakers from Arizona and 3 national leaders in rural economic development joined us in Clarkdale to share best practices.

Healthy Food Systems: connecting Rural to Rural and Rural to Urban

Agriculture and food production are driving forces in the state's economy. Supporting Arizona food entrepreneurs, farmers, ranchers, and others in the local food industry is an important part of our mission in fostering community economic development and expanding access to affordable, fresh and local foods in urban and rural areas. Our portfolio of



Lea Marquez-Peterson, at the 2015 Rural Policy Forum.

foods initiatives demonstrates the connection between food, health, community and the environment, as well as fosters new opportunities for Arizona farmers, ranchers and food artisans.

Good Food Finder AZ

In 2015, the Local First Arizona Foundation launched an improved version of Good Food Finder AZ. Now featuring over 700 individual listings of where to find good food, Good Food Finder is Arizona's most comprehensive online directory of local food. Improvements made to the website include:

Food & Farm Finance Forum

This year's Food & Farm Finance Forum was held in historic Clarkdale in the Verde Valley. 132 farmers and producers, chefs and other local food buyers, economic development entities, local food system advocates, and students convened for two days to change the way our state feeds itself. This year's focus was on marketing and outreach, food aggregation and distribution, and access to capital and business development with an overall emphasis on collaboration.

Farmer+Chef Connection

In 2015, LFAF took full ownership of the Arizona Farmer+Chef Connection, an annual event with the mission of building wholesale business relationships between food producers and buyers. This year, the Farmer+Chef Connection has grown to over 400 attendees. Just over 50% of attendees were represented by buyers looking to set up direct wholesale purchase accounts with Arizona's food producers. Buyers who attended this year included a wide array of those looking to procure closer to home, ranging from locally-owned restaurants like Mama's Hawaiian Bar-B-Cue to large-scale purchasers such as Costco, Fry's, Aramark and Panda Express.



IDAHO

Overview of 2015-2016 Accomplishments

Community Reviews

In 2015 and early 2016, the rural communities of Preston, Fairfield, Kootenai, and Cascade asked the Idaho Rural Partnership to conduct 3-day community reviews to assess existing conditions, develop recommendations, and point the community toward funding and other resources it can use to help achieve community and economic development goals. A visiting team of 10-15 community and economic development professionals spent 3 days in each community, identifying issues and opportunities by listening to local residents, business owners, and elected officials. The process empowers communities to stimulate job creation and manage change on their own terms.

Legislature and State Funding

During its 2016 session, the Idaho Legislature gave its near unanimous approval of a bill updating the 2008 language that officially established the Idaho Rural Partnership as Idaho's state rural development council. Among other things, the amendments give the Governor and IRP board more flexibility regarding staff and board appointments. The legislation, House Bill 417, was signed by Governor Butch Otter on March 12, 2016.

The Legislature also included \$50,000 in the Idaho Department of Labor's budget to increase our capacity to evaluate and report on our efforts and on conditions in rural Idaho, generally. IRP has been awarded a combined \$30,000 in grant funding from Monsanto and the Idaho National Laboratory in the last 18 months.

Northwest State Rural Development Council Collaboration and Summit

Support from USDA-Rural Development allowed the state rural development councils in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington to join in a 2-year collaborative effort to share best practices, identify and pursue collective action across state lines, and more effectively serve our rural communities. IRP hosted and played a leadership role in a June 2016 summit of the three rural councils held in Boise. The Summit was attended by 45 people. A report of summit proceedings and recommendations going forward will be completed by the end of August.

ILLINOIS RURAL PARTNERS

www.RuralPartners.org

ILLINOIS

Engaged, collaborative and committed.

Each year Rural Partners engages in a series of specific projects and participates in several organizations and public policy forums to advocate for rural vitality issues. The Donors Forum completed a series of workshops devoted to rural community foundations and transfer of wealth workshops. Rural Partners was the primary funding entity for eight workshops that attracted 173 participants, including agribusinesses and farmers, representatives from community foundations and other community stakeholders.

Annually for twenty seven years Rural Partners collaborates with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) and the Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC), to host a statewide conference focused on rural development. This year, 255 people attended the conference. Presentation materials of the speakers may be found at www.iira.org under Conference/ Training.

Rural Partners and its constituent members work with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs and the Governor's Rural Affairs Council to update the Rural Illinois Resource Guide, which is a searchable, online database, representing the most comprehensive collection of rural development resources in Illinois. Entries in the database include federal, state, local, and nonprofit organizations with a primary mission focused on rural development, and sources of grants, low-interest and forgivable loans, technical assistance, research, and other items of interest to rural community stakeholders.

Rural Partners and several constituent members successfully wrote an application to the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. SET is a University of Illinois Extension/USDA Rural Development program. Rural Partners members also serve in advisory roles to the Illinois SET initiative.

Rural Partners and its members also participate in many rural initiatives, publish a weekly newsletter and send periodic emails to its members.



Carthage Memorial Hospital, Carthage IL, just one example of the type of facility that is so important to rural well being and economic benefit that Rural Partners supports. Thanks USDA and others for your assistance.

Illinois Rural Partners strives to maintain membership and board representation from the federal, state and local government, the private sector and the nonprofit community, all of whom are essential contributors to rural progress. Rural Partners members contribute and provide leadership in many rural development forums including the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, University of Illinois Extension Partners, Governor's Task Force on the Creative Economy, the Illinois Statewide Independent Living Council, Township Officials of Illinois, the Illinois Comptroller's Rural Advisory Board and the Partners for Rural America.

Iowa Rural Development Council

IOWA

Iowa Rural Development Council Focuses on Small-Town Capacity Building

Since its return in 2009, the Iowa Rural Development Council has provided a regular avenue for collaboration and communication between members from the public, private and non-profit sectors.

With a membership that includes federal agencies like USDA's Farm Service Agency, NRCS and Rural Development, the SBA and HUD, state partners such as the Iowa Economic Development Authority, Iowa Finance Authority, Iowa State University, the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Iowa, associations and organizations like the Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Telecommunications Alliance and Des Moines Area Community College, and economic development entities including Iowa Area Development Group, Professional Developers of Iowa and the Iowa Association of Business and Industry, the Iowa RDC is a powerful "who's who" among rural developers.

That quarterly convening is especially important due to the relative shortage of statewide organizations focused solely on "rural." Many RDC partners have ties to both urban and rural communities, a coherent "rural caucus" in the Iowa Legislature no longer exists, and there are few, if any, state government rural set-asides or programs. The RDC plays a vital role focusing the attention of such a diverse group of players.

In 2016, the Iowa RDC coalesced around a strategy that recognized the need for both data and templates for rural communities confronting a myriad of issues. RDC members pooled funds to engage the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship to devise a plan titled "Pathways to Prosperity - Empowering Greater Impact" that would both generate data on the status of rural Iowa and facilitate a discussion of the characteristics of small towns in Iowa, their rural capacity, and readiness for entrepreneurs.

A critical element of that statewide strategic plan will be the first state RDC-hosted Rural Summit, planned for November 2016 in Jefferson, Iowa. That gathering will target rural leaders, key partners and resource-providers and philanthropic entities. It's the hope of the RDC that attendees will gain insights into replicable rural success stories, key players across issue areas, and capacity-building concepts geared toward small towns.



The Iowa Rural Development Council and partner organizations are facilitating discussions about the characteristics of small Iowa towns, along with the state's rural capacity and readiness for entrepreneurs.

Iowa Rural Development Council Partnerships

Federal agencies— USDA's Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development, along with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

State partners—Iowa Economic Development Authority, Iowa Finance Authority, Iowa State University, University of Northern Iowa and University of Iowa

Association and organization partners— Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Telecommunications Alliance, Iowa Area Development Group, Professional Developers of Iowa, Iowa Association of Business and Industry and Des Moines Area Community College



Maryland

Rural Maryland Council To Receive Historic Level of State Funding

On March 29, 2016, the Maryland Legislature passed the Fiscal Year 2017 State Operating Budget which includes funds to support the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPPIF), a key step forward in addressing disparities in the State's rural areas. For the first time since 2006, the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund will receive \$2 million in funding for targeted investment to promote economic prosperity in Maryland's traditionally disadvantaged and underserved rural communities. By sustaining efforts to promote rural regional cooperation, facilitating entrepreneurial activities and supporting key community colleges and nonprofit providers, the quality of life in rural Maryland can be advanced over the next several years.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund will support the Rural Maryland Council's activities, the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) which provides capacity-building funds to rural nonprofit service providers, the states' five regional councils, and support for regional infrastructure projects, rural entrepreneurship development, rural community development, and rural health care organizations.



The Council hearing from the Maryland Secretary of the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation at its quarterly meeting on April 8, 2016 in Annapolis.



Besides its policy development activities, the Council hosted its biannual Rural Summit in December 2015. The 230 attendees heard from keynote speaker, Sheila Bair, President of Washington College and former Chair of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Other speakers discussed issues such as a nutrient management, transfer of wealth, rural community development and health care.

Rural Maryland Council

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

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Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Rural.maryland.gov

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Michigan

Bringing Together Rural Michigan

The Michigan Rural Council in partnership with the Rural Partners of Michigan held its annual Michigan Small Town and Rural Development Conference in April.

The conference attracts everyone from city managers to Chamber Directors to local economic development professionals who are interested and passionate about small towns in Michigan and the great potential of our rural areas.

Highlights of the conference included: a presentation on trail towns in Michigan and how rural areas can use trails to increase economic activity; a session on an innovative program in Michigan's thumb that is working with community foundations to implement a Talent Retention Program to incentivize college-educated youth to return home after obtaining a college degree; a joint presentation between state and federal departments on resources available to rural downtowns; the city planner from Mt. Pleasant speaking about how they worked with developers to facilitate redevelopment of properties without mandating full conformance with current standards, resulting in transformed downtown residential areas that are safer, more aesthetically pleasing and with significantly raised taxable values; and a session on how to address small town blight in a holistic, strategic way.

The conference provides an opportunity to showcase topics critical to rural development in a way that facilitates discussion of new ideas and moves ideas to action. Participants are inspired to see the innovative ways that rural areas across the state are finding ways to drive economies, increase wealth of rural areas and improve the lives of rural residents.



Michigan Environmental Council presents at the Michigan Small Town and Rural Development Conference on Trail Towns

Michigan Rural Council and Rural Partners of Michigan Partnerships

USDA-RD, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, The Council of Michigan Foundations, Michigan Energy Office, Michigan Community Action Agencies, Michigan Recreation and Park Administration, Michigan Environmental Council, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

<http://rural.cedam.info/>



Missouri Rural
Development Partners

MISSOURI

We're Back!!

Missouri's rural development council is once again working to become a significant voice for rural communities and people. Despite a few years on hiatus, the council is back and working hard to regain its place in rural Missouri.

A new board has been established along with updated bylaws and a new logo. The new logo links MRDP graphically with the other key organizations in the state — the Department of Economic Development, Missouri Community Betterment and the Missouri Partnership. Our new board includes representatives from state and federal agencies, key organizations and stakeholders, elected officials as well as small business owner and citizens.

An annual conference is planned for April 4, 2017 and will be our first in nearly 10 years.

MRDP, as are many of the state councils, is working hard to identify funding opportunities that will ensure a stable future. When the state rural councils were formed in the late 1980's they received funding from USDA-RD and many also received state support. With the loss of that funding, continuation for many has been a challenge. MRDP is investigating options including membership dues, sponsorships and grants.

Key initiatives for the next 18 months:

- Reach out to rural legislators to educate them on MRDP and the key needs in rural Missouri.
- Prepare for new state and federal government leadership and how to educate them on the importance of the rural council and needs in rural Missouri.
- Participate with University of Missouri Extension and the Missouri Department of Economic Development to conduct a survey of rural citizens and leaders on the key issues and prepare a report that will be distributed to all local and elected officials in early 2017. Coupled with this will be a report on the status of rural Missouri.



Brian Fogle, MRDP Board member and Executive Director of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, received the international Community Development Society's prestigious 2016 'Friend of Community Development' award.

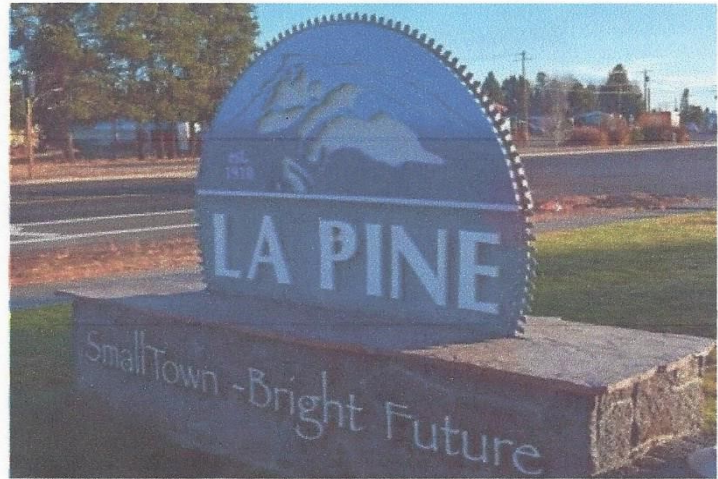
Sharon Gulick, Executive Director, Phone 573-884-0669 | MoRuralPartners@gmail.com | www.mrdp.net



Oregon

Oregon Rural Development Council Rural Forum Success

In 2014 the Oregon Rural Development Council (ORDC) revitalized its Executive Committee and developed a new Strategic Plan. Priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan include conducting at least three (3) Rural Forums to address local community priorities. The Governor's Office of Regional Solutions and several partners had been working with the City of La Pine, Oregon's newest incorporated city, and identified needs and opportunities to bring resources to the community. The City completed an intake form created by ORDC to identify priority issues and on October 26, 2015 ORDC and Governor's Office of Regional Solutions partnered to conduct a Rural Resource Forum to address: downtown revitalization; affordable, family, workforce housing; branding, development and community marketing strategy; resources for existing and new businesses and entrepreneurs; and water and wastewater infrastructure. The forum brought 30 people together representing the La Pine community and ORDC



ORDC and Governor's Office of Regional Solutions conducted a Rural Resource Forum in La Pine.

partners from local, state, and federal agencies and organizations. Outcomes include a grant from Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development to address building codes, a One Stop meeting with funders to address water and wastewater infrastructure needs, and a Housing Forum planned for June, 2016. In February, 2016, ORDC also conducted a forum "Making Rural Communities Better with Broadband" spearheaded by USDA Rural Development and ORDC in Bend. Topics included: updates and information on state and federal initiatives, including FirstNet; rural broadband success stories; strategies to leverage local and regional economic development, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and public safety initiatives; broadband project development; technologies; funding and technical assistance; and application information for USDA broadband programs. Outcomes include active regional broadband planning efforts started in three regions of rural Oregon and multiple applications for financial and technical assistance from USDA and other resource providers.

ORDC is planning a third rural forum in Southern Oregon focused on strategic planning for economic development in the fall of 2016. ORDC is also partnering with Partners for Rural Washington and the Idaho Rural Partnership to convene a Summit of Northwest State Rural Development Councils (SRDC's) in Boise, Idaho June 15-16, 2016 to share best practices and foster collaboration with support from USDA Rural Development.

For more information contact:: Chris Marko, ORDC CO-Chair, 503-228-1780, cmarko@rcac.org

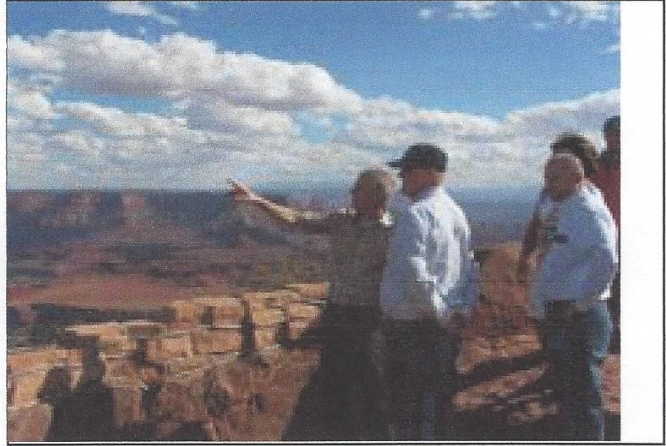
Megan Smith, ORDC Co-Chair, 541-346-3881, msmith@rcac.org



URDC Hosts the Utah Legislature on 2 Day Field Trip

This past September (2015), the Utah Rural Development Council (URDC) hosted the entire Utah Legislature (House and Senate) on a two-day site visit to rural southeast Utah (Yes. The entire Legislature). The tour was held in place of the Legislature's monthly interim meetings, and gave legislators a chance to see, hear, and feel rural issues in a way that just isn't possible in a typical committee meeting in the State Capitol building. It also gave local rural officials an unprecedented opportunity to educate legislators on their issues, concerns and priorities, and to build on-going relationships with both urban and rural lawmakers.

For the past four years, the URDC Board has worked to make this happen by extending an annual invitation to the legislature to make such a visit. This year, with inside help from the Lt. Governor -- who served on our Board before becoming Lt. Governor -- the legislature finally agreed.



State Legislators learn about local tourism issues while taking in the view at Dead Horse Point State Park, near Moab, Utah.

The trip involved 87 legislators, 23 spouses, and several legislative staff members. It required 3 tour buses, and 7 different motel properties in Moab to provide lodging for the group. The trip logged 550 miles of travel (10.5 hours of driving time), visited 4 counties, stopped in 6 towns, and tossed in a 3 hour rafting experience on the Colorado River for good measure.

Because of long travel times between stops, the URDC took full advantage of the "bus time" by having presentations by local officials on each of the three buses as they travelled -- rotating-in a new set of presenters at each stop. In all, there were 16 different presentations delivered by 39 different presenters. Some of the counties produced video presentations to show on the buses to make sure the presentations were consistent from bus to bus. The main themes were energy development, tourism, rural education challenges, and public lands issues.

At the end, one of the most prominent legislators tweeted the following: "Two jam-packed days of issue-laden legislative site visits in 4 rural counties. The most productive tour of my 23 legislative years."

Insert important data, accomplishments, and findings as well as information about next steps if any about this project. What is the success? Describe how the success responded to a problem or capitalized on an opportunity. Are there any direct benefits to rural people or communities? List partners who collaborated in the development or implementation of the project.

Include contact link and/or a link to your councils website here.



Vermont

Helping Vermonters and Vermont Communities Create a Better Future

Progress for Vermont: Advancing our Economic Future in an Age of Climate Change

VCRD is leading an initiative to expand businesses and jobs and to market Vermont as a national center for “climate economy” development. The initiative kicked off with a Climate Economy Summit in February 2015, bringing together over 400 participants to propose ways to advance the prosperity of the state while addressing the impacts of climate change. Throughout 2015, VCRD convened the Vermont Climate Change Economy Council, a broad-based group of business and policy leaders, to identify strategies to build Vermont’s prosperity and attract entrepreneurs who confront rather than just adapt to climate change. In February of 2016, VCCEC finalized its recommendations and submitted Progress for Vermont, their final report and action plan to the Vermont Legislature, the Governor, and the public. A second Climate Change Economy Summit was held to review the VCCEC recommendations, identify strategies to take these ideas to action, and build a partnership of leaders, communities, organizations, individuals, and businesses to advance them. To learn more visit www.vtrural.org.



The Vermont Climate Change Economy Council, convened by the VT Council on Rural Development, holds a press conference at the Vermont Statehouse to release their final report and action plan.

Community Visits

VCRD leads strategic action planning sessions to help communities set key priorities and connect with resources to advance them. In 2015, VCRD worked with 3 communities including Swanton, St. Johnsbury, and Craftsbury Vermont. Priorities have been established and work is moving forward to build an Arts Council, address Substance Abuse, improve outdoor recreation, advance economic development, improve housing, build a warming shelter, improve community connection and communication, better connect the school and the community, improve broadband access, advance land protection, redevelop a riverfront, and other initiatives to increase business investment, increase local job opportunities, diversify the local economy, and improve the quality of life.



Residents of Craftsbury Vermont come together for Community Meeting Day to review action ideas, select key priorities for the future of the town, and sign up for task forces to move those priorities forward.

Increasing Opportunity for all Regions of the Commonwealth

The Virginia Rural Center is a partnership of two non-profit organizations, the Center for Rural Virginia created by the Virginia General Assembly in 2004 and the Council for Rural Virginia created following the 2002 Farm Bill. The Center for Rural Virginia is chaired by Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr. and the Council for Rural Virginia is chaired by Ward Stevens of the Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Both organizations operate under a collective services agreement as the Virginia Rural Center and share an Executive Director, Christy Morton, for the purposes of improving economic prosperity across rural Virginia.

Accomplishments over the 2015-2016 operating year included hosting the 2015 Governor's Summit for Rural Prosperity, hosting the 2016 Rural Caucus Reception and Dinner, supporting landmark economic development legislation, as well as legislation redesigning Virginia's workforce system and working to enhance broadband access across rural parts of the state.



Virginia government officials talk economic development, workforce, agriculture, infrastructure, and other issues of importance to rural Virginia.

The Governor's Summit for Rural Prosperity brought together approximately 175 leaders from across rural Virginia including Administration Officials, legislators, local government officials, economic developers and business leaders focused on *Regional Strategies for Economic Growth*. The 2016 Rural Caucus Reception and Dinner brought together a similar audience to discuss legislative initiatives before the state legislature to improve rural economic development opportunities. This included the landmark *Growth and Opportunity Act* (Go Virginia Fund) created during the 2016 General Assembly Session to spearhead regional economic development projects bringing new business and expanding current businesses across the Commonwealth. This legislation was sponsored by Rural Caucus Chairman, Senator Frank M. Ruff Jr. and widely supported by Rural Caucus Members. Senator Ruff also sponsored workforce legislation to create the first statewide pay-for-performance workforce training program in the nation. Additionally, the Virginia Rural Center worked to enhance broadband expansion through legislation sponsored by Center for Rural Virginia Board Member Delegate Randy Minchew of Loudoun. This legislation created a permitting process for the Virginia Department of Transportation to ease access for telecommunications companies to older rural roads across the state to expand broadband.

Through partnerships with the McAuliffe Administration, the Virginia Legislature and many stakeholders, the Virginia Rural Center was able to move the needle on policies affecting rural economic development and will continue this work in the year to come.

Founded over a decade ago, the Virginia Rural Center works with thought leaders, policy makers and community activists to further economic opportunities across the Commonwealth for all citizens in all regions.



Washington State

Resources for Rural Washington

Partners for Rural Washington (PRWA) is a newly formed State Rural Development Council. Since its incorporation in November, 2015, PRWA has recruited a full board of directors, elected officers, and initiated several projects which will support community and economic vitality throughout rural Washington. At its first planning retreat, held in February, 2015 PRWA developed a list of priority projects which it has begun work on.

At the top of that list is the creation of a directory of resources available to assist and support rural communities in Washington State. This directory is not intended to replace or supersede existing catalogues or directories, rather it is intended to make quick access available to the many and varied resources which already exist.

Once the rural resource directory is completed (planned for late summer, 2016) it will be available to any and all rural interests and will hopefully be an asset for rural communities, organizations and businesses interested in any aspect of financial and technical assistance pertinent to rural Washington.

PRWA also participated with Idaho Rural Partners, and the Oregon Rural Development Council in a three state Summit in June of 2016. This two day effort had several goals. First it was an opportunity to share information about each others program of work. Second, in doing so, the organizations learned of best practices, as well as information about what each of the three organizations have in their future plans of work.

Finally, realizing that the Pacific Northwest is a distinct region of the country, the three organizations looked at ways in which they might work together to address regional needs and opportunities. One of the outcomes was the creation of an agreement which formalizes ways in which the three organizations will collaborate to the benefit of the rural parts of the region as a whole.



The founding board of directors of Partners for Rural Washington: back row L to R: Jon Devaney, Kim Herman, Tim Crosby, front L to R: Lael Duncan, Lisa Wellman, Judith Olsen, Mario Villanueva.

PRWA is currently comprised of representatives of the following:

Federal Agencies: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, USDA Rural Development, **State:** Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington State University Extension, Washington State Housing Finance Commission, **Non-Profit:** The Thread Fund, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Impact Capital, Okanogan County Community Action Council; **Private industry:** Washington State Tree Fruit Association.

To learn more about Partners for Rural Washington, visit our website: <http://www.partnersruralwa.org/>



Wisconsin

Wisconsin Engages Elected Officials and Rural Organizations

The northwoods of Wisconsin were humming with activity when Wisconsin Rural Partners brought the 2016 Wisconsin Rural Summit to the Potawatomi Casino and Resort in tiny Carter, Wisconsin. The two day event featured over 30 expert speakers, 140 participants and plenty of time for Wisconsin rural community leaders to network and develop relationships.

This was the 20th Summit WRP has hosted. The keynote speaker was Wisconsin Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and she was joined at the luncheon by a number of other state elected officials.

The Lt. Governor assisted WRP President Don Sidlowski and awards committee chairperson and WRP Secretary Coreen Fallat in awarding the WRP Top Rural Development Initiative awards to six outstanding recipients from across the state.

The six winning nominations included the Potawatomi Tribal Insurance group, which has expanded to provide coverage nationwide. A unique transformation of an historic county courthouse in Green Lake to a vibrant arts and community center was also cited as were the Viroqua Pop-Up Shop Initiative, Reedsburg Harvest Park Project, and the Flambeau River Community Growing Center. Sports enthusiasts loved the award given to the Milk Source Hunting Land Auction, which auctioned donated hunting rights provided by landowners to raise money for local food pantries, truly a grassroots effort.

Wisconsin Rural Partners is a private, non-profit corporation that seeks to develop leadership, networks and voice for the state's rural people and communities.



The Wisconsin Lt. Governor is joined by other state elected officials in congratulating the Potawatomi Tribal Insurance Company on their Rural Development Initiative award.

In 2015, Wisconsin Rural Partners collaborated with the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, USDA—Rural Development and the University of Wisconsin—Extension to present four Small Town Downtown Forums for communities with populations of 1,500 or fewer.

Rural Wisconsin Today is an annual publication that provides the latest data on rural Wisconsin along with trends along with observations on rural areas of the state provided by nine colleague organizations.

WRP helped to promote rural interests in Wisconsin by participating in workshops and seminars in 2015, including efforts for the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, WI Teachers of Local Culture and the Southwest Wisconsin Community Leadership Alliance



Just a few of our committed rural leaders at our 2015 annual conference in Virginia.

2015/2016 PRA officers:

Chair: Jerry Townsend, *Illinois Rural Partners*

Vice-Chair: Christy Morton, *Council of Rural Virginia*

Secretary: Charlotte Davis, *Rural Maryland Council*

Treasurer: Paul Costello, *Vermont Council on Rural Development*

Partners for Rural America dedicates the 2016 Annual Report to Paul Costello of the Vermont Council on Rural Development and Steve McHenry of the Rural Maryland Council who were original founders of this organization and continue by example and leadership to be by inspiration, sharing of their wisdom and guidance and the respect they command from others are a force that we relish and need.



Working together to improve the quality of life in rural America

P. O. Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601 | www.partnersforruralamerica.org