



BRANDON  
UNIVERSITY



# *Rural By Design*

Recommended Actions from  
Rural Works! A Rural Policy Think Tank

**Bottom Left Photo:** Dr. Gervan Fearon, *President of Brandon University* received a cheque for funding applied rural research from Honourable Ron Kostyshyn, *Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development*. November 6, 2014. Keystone Centre, Brandon, Manitoba.

**Cover Design:** Alida Grelowski



### **Rural Development Institute, Brandon University**

Brandon University established the Rural Development Institute in 1989 as an academic research centre and a leading source of information on issues affecting rural communities in Western Canada and elsewhere.

RDI functions as a not-for-profit research and development organization designed to promote, facilitate, coordinate, initiate and conduct multi-disciplinary academic and applied research on rural issues. The Institute provides an interface between academic research efforts and the community by acting as a conduit of rural research information and by facilitating community involvement in rural development. RDI projects are characterized by cooperative and collaborative efforts of multi-stakeholders.

The Institute has diverse research affiliations, and multiple community and government linkages related to its rural development mandate. RDI disseminates information to a variety of constituents and stakeholders and makes research information and results widely available to the public either in printed form or by means of public lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences.

For more information, please visit [www.brandonu.ca/rdi](http://www.brandonu.ca/rdi).

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### **Special Thanks to our Sponsors:**

Honourable Ron Kostyshyn, *Manitoba Minister of Agriculture,  
Food and Rural Development*

Brandon University

Rural Policy Learning Commons



## Rural by Design

Rural by Design is a vision that inspires rural Manitobans to determine their own rural futures. At its heart is a focus on enhancing rural economic development in Manitoba by taking a design approach. This approach fosters innovation and flexibility. A design process embraces direct involvement and local ownership that is enabled by government. It embraces collaboration, creativity, and innovation; challenges past assumptions and fosters our choices for our desired futures. Elements of design are rooted in concepts, principles and theories; and reflection on successes, failures and lessons learned. A design is evaluated and adjusted based on measureable results. *Rural Works! A Rural Policy Think Tank* held on November 6, 2014 in Brandon, Manitoba, is one step to contributing to Rural by Design.

## Talking Rural: A Courageous Conversation

The purpose of *Rural Works! A Rural Policy Think Tank* is first and foremost to create a time and place where people can come together to talk and understand rural as a dynamic place and rural development as dynamic activities. Its second goal is to create an understanding that rural development is not the property of one government department, but many departments influence rural Manitoba. Finally, the immediate purpose is to ‘open the door’ to having an ongoing conversation across departments that is informed by stakeholders with rural interests.

The conversation at *Rural Works!* is framed with a focus on rural economic topics, leaving social and environmental topics for another effort. Rural Manitoba is an economic contributor, it provides environmental goods and services, and it is an integral element of urban Manitoba.

Rural problems are wicked in that they often require not

one agency, but several to be involved and respond with success. Interdepartmental cooperation to understand and respond to rural challenges and opportunities begins with conversations: local, regional and across departments. Even though *Rural Works!* focused on economic factors, it is important to recognize rural issues also require integrating social and environmental factors.

Rural Manitoba is not the same beyond Winnipeg. In order to provide context to the conversation, rural Manitoba has at least three types of rural:

- 1) Northern and Remote (with an existing Northern Development Strategy),
- 2) Metro Rural (around Winnipeg with municipal partnerships defined in The Capital Region Partnership Act), and
- 3) Prairie Rural (the area that, as yet, has no plan).

Changes in federal and provincial government policy are impacting rural Manitoba. Changes such as: the loss of the Federal Rural secretariat and the Rural Team; municipal amalgamations and the shift to a rural development focus within Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Lessons from experiences arising from new provincial policy approaches such as British Columbia’s Rural Development Agency and Quebec’s rural regional governance structures also help frame the conversation about rural Manitoba.

The Rural Development Institute recognizes the important role Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development plays in creating a sustainable rural economy and has identified an additional 11 Manitoba government departments that connect directly to rural economic development in the province. Therein lays the challenge of rural policy. Any one department would be challenged to update, coordinate, and implement initiatives that are at times responsive and at other times proactive. In order for rural Manitoba to design a successful future, everyone, from rural Manitobans, to government, to businesses, to



academics, can be encouraged to join the conversation; to look at things with a fresh perspective; be willing to try new approaches and commit to building relationships and working together. All are needed to initiate and nurture rural by design as a process, an evolving plan, and activities.

## Rural Works! A Rural Policy Think Tank

*“A conversation across government departments of what rural and rural development means now and going forward is essential.”*

Dori Gingera-Beauchemin, Deputy Minister, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

The celebration of Brandon University’s establishment of the Rural Development Institute 25 years ago puts a true focus on the opportunities and challenges rural Manitobans face. RDI’s beginnings took root during a conversation defining a new rural agenda for Manitoba, 25 years later RDI is renewing and reigniting a conversation about rural Manitoba. On November 6, 2014, government staff, invested community stakeholders, and academics continued advancing this conversation in Brandon at *Rural Works! A Rural Policy Think Tank*.

Over 70 people from a broad spectrum engaged in rural development in Manitoba came together for this event. Most provincial departments involved in rural development sent representatives from senior management to front-line staff. Rural leaders and advocates from community and business organizations also enriched the conversation. Rural academics shared data, case studies, and ways of doing research that provided a new perspective to how rural development can be done in Manitoba.

The voices at *Rural Works!* are not all the voices in rural Manitoba. Yet the participants’ insights and opinions reflect

the diversity of their backgrounds. Strengthened by their diversity, everyone shares a common purpose and focus on the broad question of: “How do we work together to advance rural development in Manitoba?” The reflection of one of the participants demonstrates that we are prepared for the difficult conversations and the big decisions: “Of all the places, the communities, the provinces, the states, the regions that I’ve visited over the years, I don’t think I’ve ever seen as much common sense of purpose, mutual respect, willingness to collaborate as I have here in Manitoba. It’s real. It’s capital. It’s wealth. It’s political, social capital that you all have and need to capitalize on. So, I am very impressed.”

*Rural Works!* continues the conversation about keeping and building a healthy, vibrant rural Manitoba. This document includes a brief summary of themes from the day and includes concrete actions that the Manitoba government can take to keep this conversation going and move towards rural Manitoba by design, not default.

## Manitoba Departments Engaged in Rural Development

- Aboriginal and Northern Affairs
- Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
- Conservation and Water Stewardship
- Education and Advanced Learning
- Finance
- Housing and Community Development
- Infrastructure and Transportation
- Jobs and the Economy
- Labour and Immigration
- Mineral Resources
- Municipal Government
- Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection



## Looking at Rural Manitoba Differently

Rural by Design challenges assumptions about rural Manitoba through a respectful conversation that redefines common understandings. Painting a picture of rural Manitoba based on current assumptions is easy: A homogeneous collection of small towns where farming is the centre of the economy. ‘Nothing will change because the people in Winnipeg and Ottawa don’t listen. If they would just fix the road, build a new school, and reopen the hospital we would be fine.’

Rural Works! participants know this picture is inaccurate. Rural Manitoba’s economy is more than agriculture. Rural Manitobans are diverse. Collaboration, creativity, and innovation drive planned change in communities across rural Manitoba. A good conversation starts with asking tough questions about our assumptions and it flourishes when participants are open to looking at rural Manitoba differently.

## Continuing the Conversations

Participants at this think tank entered several conversations reflective of a selection of concepts, issues and interests; conversations involving data, the role of agriculture, functional economic regions and investing in rural. They demonstrate a willingness to rethink how rural development in Manitoba is done and the ability of citizens, academics and government to get together and define rural Manitoba’s future. Staff from different departments, across levels of government play the important role of enabling the conversation, listening to what is said, and providing leadership in articulating a broader vision for rural Manitoba.

## Data

Good information is key to making informed decisions and planning for the future. The amount and quality of data available about rural Manitoba is limited and eroding. Collecting and sharing data is happening, and we can make improvements. We have the capacity to select, interpret, and use data, and we can build more. Thoughtful consideration on how wealth and success in rural Manitoba is measured is now part of the conversation because we better understand that what is measured impacts what is valued in rural Manitoba.

## Where Does Agriculture Fit Today and Tomorrow?

Another important part of a new conversation about rural development in Manitoba is where agriculture fits. How agriculture is defined is as varied as how regions are defined. There is agreement that agriculture producers and processors are important parts of rural Manitoba’s landscape and economy. How does rural policy attract young people to agriculture? How can rural policy take advantage of innovations such as renewable energy and value added processing?

## Functional Economic Regions

A thoughtful, broad discussion about functional economic regions in rural Manitoba will build the foundation of a new rural design. What are functional economic regions and what is their purpose? How are functional economic regions defined? How do we build connections between functional economic regions and existing regional structures? There are as many perspectives about regionalism as there are regional organizations in rural



Manitoba. A focus on functional economic regions makes an abstract concept tangible. The benefits and limitations of regionalism in general and functional economic regions in particular merit further investigation and should include consideration of recent regionalization efforts in New Brunswick and Quebec.

## Who Invests in Rural Manitoba and How

There are different kinds of investments in rural Manitoba; how investment is defined, measured, and valued is about more than just dollars and jobs. The often discussed seven capitals (financial, built, natural, human, social, intellectual, and political) are a good framework for the conversation moving forward. Focus on how the value of rural Manitoba can be better articulated and promoted to investors and who those investors can help lead to successful economic development. This will be supported by planning that invests beyond basic replacement and recovery and into reinvention and restructuring, more regionally than locally.

## Role of the Manitoba Government

Political will and a commitment of resources at the organizational, community, provincial, and federal levels

enables a coordinated and planned approach to rural development. Facilitating the creation of an Economic Development Strategy for the Prairie Rural area supports advancing rural development in Manitoba. Provincially, a common plan could include an analysis of how departments could plan and communicate collectively. Forming a central agency or coordinating body or special operating agency could be considered. Another topic of consideration under the plan could be to co-locate departments in rural communities, which could assist in informal communication between department staff. There is strong recognition of the important role Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development plays working directly with communities, as well as advancing rural development within the provincial government.

Specific areas of focus for Manitoba's Prairie Rural Economic Development Strategy include: a sector by sector analysis of the rural economy to determine opportunities and challenges for growth; how to improve rural access to financial capital; how functional economic regions can be used to foster a regional approach to development; and partnerships between governments, business, and education institutions to provide skills training and fill labour market needs in rural Manitoba.



## Community Recommendations for Action

- 1. Initiate and participate in conversations about the many dimensions rural development in Manitoba. Share those conversations with all levels of government to assist in articulating a Prairie Rural Economic Development Strategy.**
  - Remember that you can influence rural policy by making your voice heard, sharing your ideas and stating your case.
  - Join with others to strengthen your voice.
  - Consider topics and issues from different perspectives. Different perspectives may lead to different solutions.
- 2. Ask questions to better understand how different government departments are involved in rural development. Contribute to helping government and others move forward in stating a common vision and improving service delivery into rural regions.**
- 3. Consider approaching your economic development activities based on a functional economic region as a way to respond to issues and opportunities in your community and others. Seek and share examples in effective economic development from other provinces and regions.**
- 4. Inform your decisions by investing attention and resources into data collection.**
  - Ask yourselves: *“What information do we need to plan as a community, region and province; what information do we have locally; and how might we collect and share that information”.*
- 5. Apply your energy and resources to collaborative approaches for rural economic development in Manitoba. Inform yourself of what resources, research, and expertise exist in government and organizations that can support social, economic, and environmental planning for successful rural development.**
  - Partnerships are integral to achieving your vision. Consider ways to build and strengthen partnerships with neighbours in your functional economic region.
  - Invest in capacity to do more regional economic development – partnering with rural and urban communities, tax sharing agreements, qualified and trained professional staff, and working with a plan.
- 6. Pay attention to and list your assets; what are they and how can local and regional assets be used for your growth plan for the future. The seven capitals (financial, built, natural, human, social, intellectual, and political) can be a useful framework for ensure you have identified a range of assets for your planning for the future.**



**Pictures (L-R):** Dr. Lars Hallsrtom - *Director of the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities*, Dr. Thomas Johnson - *Professor at the University of Missouri – Columbia*, Dr. Ryan Gibson - *Assistant Professor at Saint Mary's University*, Dr. William (Bill) Ashton – *Director at the Rural Development Institute*, Hon. Ron Kostyshyn – *Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development*, Dr. Robert Annis – *Research Affiliate at the Rural Development Institute*, Joy Dornian – *Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development*, and Dr. Ray Bollman – *Adjunct Professor at the University of Saskatchewan*, November 6, 2014. Keystone Centre, Brandon, Manitoba.

# Thank You...

## To Our Sponsors

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## To Our Speakers

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Hon. Ron Kostyshyn  
Joy Dornian, B.A. M.A.  
Robert Annis, Ph.D.  
Ray Bollman, Ph.D.

Lars K. Hallstrom, Ph.D.  
Ryan Gibson, Ph.D.  
Thomas G. Johnson, Ph.D.

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