

# rural development NEWS

## Agricultural Change and Rural Development

by *Cornelia Butler Flora*

Agriculture in the North Central region is facing major changes due to outside forces. The entire socio-technical regime that supports commodity agriculture must adjust. Those adjustments will require more attention to market forces and to regional networks on the part of farmers and ranchers and the many institutions that support them and benefit from their labor.

Crop agriculture in the North Central states is highly interrelated to incentives and safety nets provided by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (see [http://www.usda.gov/farmbill/commodity\\_fb.html](http://www.usda.gov/farmbill/commodity_fb.html) for the commodity title). There are two major outside forces that are likely to change the mandatory support for commodity crops that have been in place with strong, bi-partisan political support since the 1930s:

1. The unprecedented Federal budget deficit at a period when most discretionary programs have already been cut drastically.
2. World Trade Organization agricultural negotiations, which insist that all nations reduce production incentives. These negotiations have been further stimulated by the recent WTO rulings that U.S. cotton subsidies are unfair ([http://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/dda\\_e/draft\\_text\\_gc\\_dg\\_31july04\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/draft_text_gc_dg_31july04_e.htm), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/3662183.stm>), and that European Union subsidies of sugar exports are illegal ([http://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/news04\\_e/dsb\\_13dec04\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news04_e/dsb_13dec04_e.htm), <http://www.foodnavigator.com/news/news-ng.asp?id=55496-eu-fights-wto>).

These rulings signal that direct payments to farmers for production of commodities must change, despite appeals from both the United States and the European Union. Budget and trade pressures will undoubtedly trigger a shift in what some scholars call the "socio-technical regime" and its components. Those components include:

- Scientific knowledge.
- Engineering practices.
- Production processes.
- Technologies.
- Product characteristics (including the tangible and intangible ones that differentiate a product, such as how animals are raised).
- Skills and procedures involved in the entire value chain.



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- Ways of handling and verifying how land and products are managed.
- Ways of defining problems that are embedded in institutions and infrastructures (Rip and Kemp 1998).

A decline in commodity supports will cause dramatic restructuring in farming-dependent counties in our region, which are already suffering economic and social stress (see the most recent <http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/> for information on declined rural population and wages). The western part of the North Central region contains almost all the counties where in 2000, farm program payments were more than 20 percent of county household income (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Adjustments/ruralamerica.asp>). These were also counties of high out migration. In many counties in the western part of the region, more than 30 percent of the farmers and ranchers work off the farm less than 200 days per year (Eathington and Swenson 2001). That 30 percent can probably survive these policy changes; mid-sized farms will struggle to find alternatives.

Farmers in our region are constantly trying out different enterprises and different ways of integrating them into the market. But these “experiments” generally are nothing more than novelties. A wide variety of other structures must be in place for any of the innumerable novelties in agriculture to become innovations that are then more widely implemented. Scientists, farmers and ranchers are constantly producing novelties in terms of new products and new processes. However, without change in institutions and policies at many levels—local, state, national and international—these novelties do not last. Good ideas have to be embedded in supporting structures in order to endure (Flora et al. 2001).

Change must take place at all levels of the socio-technical regime for change to be sustainable. Rural development initiatives need to invest in creating linkages among the different levels, and support agglomerations of innovations around specialty goods and services that are valued for more than a single characteristic. One example is agritourism, including locality-based specialty foods, beverages and crafts based on the concept of terroir (the uniqueness of the land and climate—very different from the notion of land as an element that holds up crops that receive purchased soil amendments).

Forming alliances among innovators in science, technology, marketing and production will be key for this to take place. The research of Wiskerke and van der Ploeg (2004) reveals the power of such alliances in Europe, as well as the difficulties in forming them. The case of the VEL and VANLA environmental dairy cooperatives in Holland, as they worked to integrate environment, nature and landscape into dairy farming, shows the necessity for advocacy coalitions to influence public policy and market options.

The current socio-technical regime in the North Central region has overcome spatial and ecosystem differences with innovations that come from a relatively homogenous approach to production that is centralized in universities and seed and input companies. Novelties (which turn to niches and alternative socio-technical regimes) are a highly localized process, depending on local eco-systems and local cultures. Local embeddedness changes the characteristic of the product and requires new technologies, new value chains, and new policies to support them. This will be the challenge local and state government and firms will have to address. ○



Hoop houses for hog raising were initially novelties, implemented by a few innovative farmers and researched by a few university scientists. A number of farmers adopted hoop houses for hog raising. But because the only change was in production technology at the same time the industry was moving to contract growing (and therefore marketing), it did not stick at first. One can still see a rural landscape dotted with hoop machine sheds after the farmers dropped the novelty. Once other novelties were linked to the innovation in production however, the hoop house novelty became a niche. Branded pork that stressed high quality and happy hogs established a new value chain.

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## Notes from the Field

# Project Targets Economic Development While Providing Hands-on Experience with New Technology

*by Linda Hauge*

Looking for a way to get hands-on experience with new technology and connect with what other 4-H members are doing across the United States? That is exactly why 18 Williams County 4-H members decided to participate in the 4-H Youth Favorite Places project during the summer of 2004.

The 4-H Youth Favorite Places project involves youth across America sharing and promoting their own favorite places using GIS and Internet technology. The vision for this project is that recreational sites and activities preferred by youth and their families will draw tourism spending to small towns and rural areas—saving jobs, creating new ones, and retaining youth populations in rural communities.

In Williams County, North Dakota, we divided the county into three sections and 4-H members that lived in each of these areas came up with a list of more than 30 of their favorite places. A “favorite place” is:

- Found only in your community.
- A place, not an event.
- A public place that anyone can go to.
- A place of natural resources, cultural or recreational interest.

It was exciting to see what the youth considered as their favorite places. We spent a day in each area of the county. At noon we would eat together and talk about the places we had been and what they had learned. As we visited these favorite places, people were curious about what we were doing. This project gave youth an opportunity to interact with other youth and adults as they visited with them, explained the Youth Favorite Places project, and learned even more about their favorite places. As an Extension Agent, it gave me an opportunity to see some places that I had never visited or even known about after living in Williams County for almost 30 years.

### **Sharing and Promoting their Favorite Places Using GIS and Internet Technology**

Williams County 4-H received a grant from the North Dakota 4-H Foundation and purchased Garmin e-Trex Legend GPS Units. Following a basic introduction on how to use the GPS units, they were used to mark the coordinates for the Favorite Places. At each stop, one or two of the youth would record the GPS coordinates, fill in the information on the data input form and use a digital camera to photograph the site. Williams County 4-H also received one of the 2004 ESRI GIS grants. These gifts have given 4-H youth additional innovative technology experiences that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

**Favorite Place Name:** North Dakota/Montana Border  
**Street1:** 15550 Hwy. 1804  
**Street2:** Near Ft. Union  
**City, State Zip:** Williston, ND 58801  
**Phone:** (701) 572-9083  
**Web Site:** <http://www.nps.gov/fous>  
**Latitude:** 48.2519  
**Longitude:** -104.214

**Description:** At this point you can stand with one foot in North Dakota and one foot in Montana.

**Age Group:** All Ages

**Keywords:** North Dakota, Montana



A 4-H leader that was involved with this project reported that she thinks this was a very positive experience for 4-H members. They were able to use the GPS units and become familiar with how they work and what they do. It was also an opportunity to take ownership of a location in their area of the county and find its coordinates, and then give their own reasons as to why it is one of their favorite places. They even learned a little more about some of the landmarks in the county.

She stated that she has gone online and visited the YFP site and was able to check out places that other youth have submitted. She plans to have members check out this web site at their next club meeting. She also wants them to think of other spots that we might add to the list of favorite places when we continue this project next year.

The youth involved reported that they really had fun participating in the Youth Favorite Places project. It was something that they had not had an opportunity to do before. They also stated that when they visit the YFP web site, they could appreciate the work that went into this project. They are looking forward to continuing this fun project next summer, and hope that the results will be an invitation for families traveling through the area to locate some "kid friendly" places that they might visit along the way.

### **Rural Community Mapping: 4-H Youth Favorite Places**

Annually, the families of 7 million 4-H members vacation in the United States. Collectively they spend more than a billion dollars. The rural economic development objective of the Community Mapping Project is to attract these families to small towns and rural attractions. The community revenues will stimulate employment and redevelopment of attractions and community infrastructure. The youth development objective is to draw thousands of rural teens into community service projects that will involve youth in community planning and engage them in follow-up action programs. Impacts will be measured through youth taking on leadership and decision-making roles in their communities.

For more information on this Williams County 4-H project, contact Linda Hauge, extension agent, Box 1109, Williston, ND 58801; (701) 577-4590, [lindah@co.williams.nd.us](mailto:lindah@co.williams.nd.us). ☺

Notes from the Field is a vehicle for sharing ideas, tools and approaches that community development practitioners can apply to their own work. If you have ideas, tips or approaches you have found useful in your own community development work, along with a URL to additional resources if appropriate, please contact Mary Emery at [memery@iastate.edu](mailto:memery@iastate.edu).

# publications

## Sometimes it Takes a Child to Raise a Village

Yes, you read that correctly. Young people all over the world have become leaders in their communities. They bring big ideas for change, frank assessments of problems, and a willingness to work hard in order to get results. For these young people, merely volunteering is not enough. A passion for social justice guides their efforts. It makes them want to build their community, not just serve it.

*Creating Change: How Organizations Connect with Youth, Build Communities and Strengthen Themselves*, recently published by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, explores the complex links between youth development, community engagement and social justice. It is full of practical lessons, illustrated by concrete stories, that can help individuals and organizations bring about positive changes in their communities. It offers guidance for organizations interested in youth development and civic engagement, community development, service-learning as a strategy for social change, organizational development, leadership development, and program planning and evaluation.

The booklet is divided into two sections. The first, Youth Development and Community Engagement, explores ways that community organizations engage and support young people by involving them in community change. The second, Community Organizations and Social Justice, explores the conditions that organizations must create for young people to make their communities more just and equitable.

*Creating Change* is available from the Innovation Center at (301) 270-1700, <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>.

## Data Wheel Provides Benchmarks for Strengthening Rural Families

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has produced a *Data Wheel* intended to provide benchmarks that inform local, state and national discussions about building better futures for all rural children. Spin the *Data Wheel* to view the status of children in rural areas within each state based on data from the 2000 Census. Rural areas are classified based on 2003 definitions from the Office of Management and Budget, and include micropolitan counties and counties outside core-based statistical areas. State estimates are compared with a national average for each of the following 10 indicators:

- Children living in poverty.
- Children living in single-parent families.
- Children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment.
- Children living with a household head who is a high school dropout.
- Children living in low-income working families.
- Children without a vehicle at home.
- Children without a telephone at home.
- Children who have difficulty speaking English (ages 5-17).
- Teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19).
- Teens not attending school and not working (ages 16-19).



Strengthening Rural Families is an effort of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to assist those working to give vulnerable rural children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families.

The *Data Wheel* is available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation at (410) 547-6600, <http://www.aecf.org>.

## world wide web

### Center to Bridge the Digital Divide

<http://www.cbdd.wsu.edu>

The Washington State University Center to Bridge the Digital Divide recognizes Information Communication Technologies as powerful tools enabling communities, institutions and ordinary people to pursue desired futures not otherwise available to them. Simply providing access to technology, however, is not enough. They are focused on empowering people with the ability to apply technology with imagination and in ways that build community and create opportunity. The CBDD facilitates collaborative partnerships, provides educational outreach, research, and policy guidance resulting in expanded access to necessary telecommunications infrastructure and critical information technologies among underserved populations.

# digest

## **The Cost of Environmental Literacy**

How much do Americans know about the environment and what would it be worth to the U.S. economy if more of us were environmentally literate? The answer is about \$75 billion a year according to Kevin J. Coyle, president of the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, a nonprofit group established by Congress to support environmental literacy in its many forms.

In a recent paper, still in draft form, Coyle points to a compelling body of evidence that increased eco-literacy affects behavior. He introduces the notion of an "E-literacy Domestic Product," a dollar measurement of the value of environmental literacy on the U.S. economy. The EDP works like this: U.S. residential electricity use costs about \$233 billion per year. So, if Americans better understood electricity's link to pollution, and that led to their reducing consumption by 5 percent, it would lower their energy bills by \$11.5 billion a year. Along those same lines, Coyle points to \$6.8 billion in gasoline savings, \$14.2 billion in lower water use, \$25 billion less in small business overhead, and \$18 billion in healthcare savings. That's \$75.5 billion.

*Excerpted from a Trend Watching column written by Joel Makower and published in September 2004 by GreenBiz.com. Find the full article at [http://www.greenbiz.com/news/columns\\_third.cfm?NewsID=27072](http://www.greenbiz.com/news/columns_third.cfm?NewsID=27072).*

## **Using Value-added Agriculture to Create a New Rural America**

How can we stoke the fire of economic development in rural areas? How can we take advantage of the passion and entrepreneurial spirit that built rural America? Value-added agriculture can be a key component of rural economic development, fostering job growth, economic vitality and local wealth creation. Most rural communities have a strong agricultural production component that has historically contributed to the local economy. Value-added agriculture includes efforts to increase the value of these commodities and to do so before they exit the local area.

Value-added agriculture capitalizes on the consumer shift from mass markets to a market of mass niches, where goods and products are tailored for specific needs. Although use of the term "value-added agriculture" varies, an accepted version defines it as the process of converting agriculture outputs into products of greater value; increasing the economic value of an agricultural commodity through changes in genetics, processing or diversification; or the process of increasing the consumer appeal of an agricultural commodity. The essence of value-added agriculture is about changing the vision for agriculture and rural America. Technology plays a role, markets are key and all ventures take money, but it is ultimately about people developing a new vision for agriculture and their communities.

*Excerpted from an article written by Mary Holz-Clause, co-director of AgMRC, at Iowa State University. This article ran in the October/November 2004 issue of AgMRC action, a newsletter published monthly by the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center. Find the full article at <http://www.agmrc.org/about/agmrcactionpage.html>.*

# conferences

## **NACDEP Pre-Conference Training Opportunity**

The Community Resource Development program leaders in the North Central region, along with the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, are offering a pre-conference training opportunity at the NACDEP Conference in Las Vegas on February 15, 2005. Two sessions will be offered: one on program planning and evaluation for community development programs, and one on Appreciative Inquiry. More information is available at <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/nacdep/preconf/index.htm>.

## **Cambio de Colores (Change of Colors)**

The 2005 Cambio de Colores conference is scheduled for March 30 to April 1, 2005, in Columbia, Missouri. The theme of this year's conference is Latinos in Missouri: Connecting Research to Policy and Practice. More information is available at <http://www.cambiodecolores.org/>.

## **National Land Grant Diversity Conference**

The Change Agent States for Diversity Consortium is holding the National Land Grant Diversity Conference on April 27-29, 2005, in Greensboro, North Carolina. The theme of the conference is "Creating a Climate for Change: Strategies in the Land Grant System to Lead a Diverse America." More information is available at <http://www.casd.cornell.edu/>.

Visit the NCRCRD Web site at <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu> for more conference announcements.



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## Flora Interviewed as an Agent of Change for Sustainable Agriculture

Cornelia Flora, director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, is one of 14 women interviewed as an agent of change in a new book titled *Women and Sustainable Agriculture*. This book looks deeply into the need for change in the way food is grown and distributed in the United States. There are interviews with 14 dynamic women—producers, academicians, advocates and activists—all devoted to changing the current system.

Within a framework that offers brief overviews of the development of U.S. agriculture, the interviews allow the reader to hear firsthand what has gone wrong and what should be done about it. Part One focuses on concepts of traditional agriculture, organic growing and market viability. Part Two discusses pioneering agriculture and the process of restoring American farms to thriving habitats of biodiversity with clean water and healthy soil. Part Three considers the issues of industrial agriculture, the controversy of genetically modified foods, farm foreclosures, and the 2002 Farm Bill. Part Four returns to sustainable agriculture and how it can be made to work; discussions of farmers' markets, co-ops, and local food systems are included.

In Cornelia Flora's interview, she speaks about her experience with indigenous cultures in Latin America, about their communal work of the land and the diversity of their food. Flora's conversation is far ranging and compares the farming practices of traditional cultures with the practice of agriculture in America today.

*Women and Sustainable Agriculture: Interviews with 14 Agents of Change*, by Anna Anderson, is available for \$35 from McFarland & Company Inc. at 1-800-253-2187, <http://www.mcfarlandpub.com/book-2.php?isbn=0-7864-1747-1>.

## From Research to Practice

The NCRCRD was invited to present at a regional conference in Spencer, Iowa. Corry Bregendahl, research associate, and Susan Fey, editor, presented "From Research to Practice: Tools for Community Success," which included a description of a research project completed by the Center for the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. They also offered tools to use in the field as communities work to improve their efforts in community and economic development—a community index, the Community Capitals Framework, and an explanation of the Appreciative Inquiry process. These resources are complementary and can be used in conjunction with one another for research and/or practice in community and economic development.

The Great Lakes Corridor of Opportunities, a group that is taking a regional approach to economic development, sponsored the conference. The presentation is available at <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/pubs/pres.html>.

