


Rural and northern community
development policy in Canada:
thinking about agriculture

rplc-capr.ca
crrf.ca
billreimer.ca
Bill.Reimer@concordia.ca
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- CFA: Scott Ross - Speak to the group on rural community vitality, related policy dialogues, and the impact it has on Canadian agriculture from a community-based perspective.
- 30 minute presentation and a 15 minute Q&A, focused on some of the major developments in how rural community and related development policy has evolved in Canada over the past 20 years or so, and any insights into current dialogues in this area in Canada.
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- Thank you very much for this invitation.
- I am pleased to be included in your policy-development process for a number of reasons.
 - My colleagues and I are convinced of the importance of agricultural and resource-focused industries for the well-being and sustainability of rural and northern places.
 - We are too often discouraged by the way in which local and regional communities and conditions are overlooked by those in resource-based sectors. Not only does this result in less sustainable policy, but limits the sensitivity to assets that could support those sectors.
 - We have been inspired and energized by the occasions where collaboration takes place across sectors, departments, geographical locations, and experiences.
- To that end, I will keep my comments short so that we can learn from each other regarding the issues we face and work toward finding the points of insight and convergence where we can help each other.
- To get there, I will:
 - Briefly outline some of the important changes and policies affecting rural and northern Canada over the last few decades
 - Illustrate how I feel they are interdependent with agriculture and its policies, and
 - Put some questions before you that have emerged from my interpretation of community and regional-focused research.

Rural policy – historical trends

1. Most rural communities not internally sustainable
2. Labour prices increasing faster than capital
3. Depopulation of rural and remote areas

Non-rural policy impacts rural

- Transportation infrastructure
- National education and health
- Old Age security
- Human and social capital development



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- In order to set the context for our discussion I will identify three features of rural policy and changes that have significantly conditioned where we are today.
- First: Canada has always been a trading nation. The earliest European settlers established internally sustainable rural communities but after the 1700s, rural areas were settled with the policy objective of exporting commodities (whale oil, codfish, lumber, butter, wheat, coal, etc.)
 - Thus, after the 1700s most rural communities in Canada were not internally sustainable. They were already globally connected.
 - The more recent forms of globalization have meant the expansion of this condition and the increased power of large international players in the trade environment.
- Second: The price of labour has been increasing relative to the price of capital.
 - Therefore there has been a strong motivation in all resource industries to substitute machines for labour no matter how the prices fluctuated.
 - I expect you are very familiar with this in agriculture – and it is a feature of all resource economies: fishing, forestry, mining, and energy.
- Third: This has caused the depopulation of rural areas wherever those communities were unable to find employment in other sectors than primary ones.
- For the most part, these three features have been reinforced by our national and provincial policies both within and outside the agriculture sector.
- (*) It's not just agriculture or rural policies that affect the sector and the regional aspects of our concerns.
 - Transportation infrastructure was built to export commodities
 - National education and health service alignment has facilitated the movement of labour to the jobs rather than jobs to labour – and it can be done without those movers having to re-establish credentials or lose health benefits.
 - Old Age security facilitated the movement of children to other types of jobs and places rather than to remain to support their parents.
- How have these conditions affected the context for community and agricultural issues and policies?

Community Development Challenges – 1

- ▶ Urbanization
 - Commodity policies mean fewer people required
 - Decreasing political power of rural and remote regions
- ▶ State withdrawal and austerity policies
 - Policy silos become entrenched
 - Rural communities largely left on their own



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- (*)First: Urbanization and Mechanization are emptying out rural and remote regions.
 - This should be no surprise
 - A primary objective of Canadian agriculture and industrial policy in general has been to increase production efficiency, market dominance, and innovation in mechanization.
 - We have been very successful with this policy. The result is we simply need **fewer people** to produce more goods. As we have seen reflected in:
 - Larger, fewer farms
 - Rural and northern outmigration
 - Loss of services in remote communities
 - Significant reductions in community capacities
 - This is not a result of a failure of commodity policies, but a consequence of them
 - As rural-remote populations have decreased relative to urban ones, we have seen how the attention to community and rural issues on the part of federal and provincial policy-makers has diminished.
 - This attention gets driven more by crises than longer term objectives (health, disaster preparation, wealth-creation, sustainability)
 - Agriculture and rural research institutions have been disappearing or converted to narrow mandates directed to market and production objectives.
 - The responsibility for rural and regional issues has shifted from federal to provincial levels (federal still involved with trade and equalization issues, but with a more sector-specific lens)
 - Political legacy of overrepresentation of rural population is being lost
 - Urban issues and agendas will dominate the political discourse
 - Visibility of rural and remote contributions to the economy will diminish (note agriculture) because:
 - Urban people have fewer rural roots
 - Older generation is dying
 - Migration is more urban to urban
 - Immigrants are typically from urban regions
- (*)Second: The continued government withdrawal from the welfare state approaches of the 1950s have had significant impacts on communities
 - Privatization of state services in the name of austerity
 - Shift from a citizen to client-based approach to service delivery
 - Per capita basis for the distribution of those services which will always disadvantage lower-density regions (neo-liberalism)
 - Even less interest and support for rural policy (as opposed to sectoral). Policy silos become entrenched
 - During periods of austerity, the cross-departmental organizations are the first to go.
 - Most vulnerable organizations are those which examine issues relating to the interdependence of resource sectors and social or environmental conditions.
 - They are less entrenched and powerful
 - They are typically seen as a liability by the traditional departments as they struggle with scarcer resources and the threat of cuts.
 - Eras of the Rural Secretariat and strongly endowed regional agencies is over (federal)
 - Provincial foci on amalgamation of smaller settlements continues
 - Even QC has significantly defunded its very successful Rural Policy (the only one in the country that recognized rural as an inter-departmental issue).
 - Rural communities largely left on their own to manage multiple challenges (with less capacity)
 - In most provinces this has led to the bifurcation of communities into high and low-capacity
 - Once again, until 2014, QC was a notable exception.

Community Development Challenges – 2

- ▶ Increasing Mobility
 - Mixed record
 - Seasonal labour
 - Large scale food production
- ▶ Climate Change
 - Extreme weather
 - Changing climate patterns
 - Reduction in fossil fuels




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- Third community challenge: Rural populations are becoming more mobile
 - We are not reproducing ourselves
 - Must learn how to welcome and integrate strangers
 - In order to provide labour
 - In order to provide jobs and other opportunities for farm families
 - To continue the farms
 - To provide markets
 - To create the social capital for a vibrant community
 - We have a mixed record on such integration, however
 - We are largely a nation of immigrants, but this has not meant we have been welcoming to all.
 - Too often we deal with conflict by moving (or asking the others to move)
 - This has meant that rural communities are often relatively homogeneous although heterogeneous across communities
 - We can no longer proceed in this fashion – so we need to find new ways to live with those who are different – and see those differences as assets.
 - Fortunately, we have some impressive regions and communities where they have learned to do this. We have much to learn from them.
 - Two areas of particular concern to agriculture involve seasonal labour and large processing plants.
 - We can get much better at managing this – and we will have to do so.
- Fourth: Climate Change
 - Extreme weather creates new and more costly risks
 - Changing climate patterns mean new pests, growing conditions, and potential crops
 - Movement away from fossil fuels.
 - I am encouraged to see how your policy document highlights this.
 - It is another area where we see that agriculture policy must involve discussions with those in other policy domains: energy, infrastructure, transportation, environment, disaster management, industry, and social sectors.

What does this imply about strategic policies for the CFA – 1?


- ▶ More complex trade environment
 - Requires broader range of partners
- ▶ Urban domination
 - Look to urban interests
- ▶ Greater mobility
 - Enhance training and community supports


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- What do these challenges imply about agricultural policy?
- Many of the details are captured in your Standing Policy document but I wish to highlight a few more general issues that condition those details.
- (*)1. More complex policy environment
 - There will continue to be considerable focus on trade since we are increasingly dependent on agricultural international commodities (GATT, FTA, NAFTA, CETA, TPP)
 - Understandably, this drives attention to the details of economic conditions and issues
 - Agriculture comes in danger of being seen almost exclusively as an economic issue
 - Even as we are recognizing the greater interdependence of all policy issues (e.g. Europe – CAP, LEADER)
 - However, economic trade decisions are not independent of community and social implications
 - This means we should be particularly concerned with who will be around the table when deals are developed and when challenges are brought to initiatives. For example, the capacity to sue governments is understandable, but the adjudication of those challenges is problematic when they are in-camera and all relevant parties do not have access.
 - Environmental concerns are one example, but so are Indigenous Peoples' concerns, health, education, and the well-being implicated in many of these challenges. Who speaks for them? In what venues?
 - This suggests that our policies will be strongest when we develop procedures where all the relevant partners are around the table.
 - Research in community development is relevant here – since it makes very clear that integrating those other voices early, regularly, and in the long term is the best way to do this. Short term consultations are not enough since it means that the participants don't have the opportunity to work through the compromises that must inevitably be made – they only perceive that their suggestions weren't followed – with the inevitable mistrust and disengagement that emerges.
- (*)2. Urban domination of policy agendas means that we must
 - Look to urban interests when considering positioning agriculture or rural issues.
 - Form alliances with urban organizations and people
 - Make visible the (often indirect) interdependence of rural and urban
 - We don't have to convince urban people about the importance of food, water, and the environment – all of them closely associated with agriculture
 - But we need to make clear how their quality is linked to support for agriculture: through prices, education, and other choices.
 - This is particularly challenging with commodity agriculture since the link between shipping grain meat to the USA or China in order to pay for the iPhones, clothing, and other consumer items is not always obvious to urban people (or many rural ones, for that matter).
 - This is why the current interest in farmers markets, local food, and farm vacations is such an important development – not just as a new source of markets, but as strategic loci for education and alliance-building.
- (*)3. Prepare for a more mobile rural and northern population
 - Build and encourage the many ways in which newcomers are informed, trained, welcomed and integrated.
 - Recognize how informal organizations and venues play important roles in this: faith communities, recreation groups, ethnic groups, legions, businesses, families, and public spaces (community halls, theatres, coffee shops)
 - Here is another way in which rural communities matter to agriculture. If they do not have the capacity or interest in new people, agriculture sustainability will fail – especially where off-farm work opportunities are so important for the survival of farms.
 - It means working with those in rural communities to overcome resistance and prejudices against newcomers.
 - Regional contexts are important (e.g. Indigenous populations)

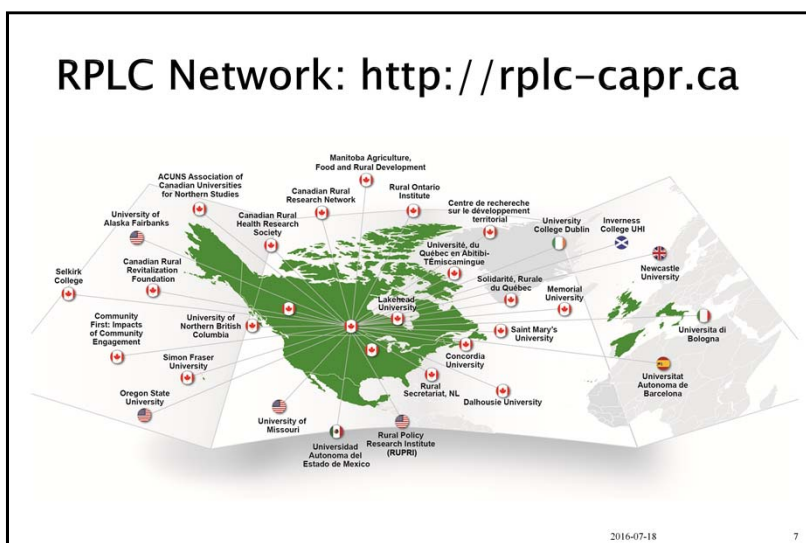
What does this imply about strategic policies for the CFA – 2?

- ▶ More complex trade environment
 - Requires broader range of partners
- ▶ Urban domination
 - Look to urban interests
- ▶ Greater mobility
 - Enhance training and community supports
- ▶ Greater unpredictability
 - Increase knowledge; Build diversity
 - Rebuild broad-focused research institutes and tools
- ▶ Sectoral entrenchment
 - Create multiple venues for collaboration



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- 4. Greater unpredictability – economic, political, social, and environmental
 - Inform ourselves about the fundamental drivers of our choice options – we shouldn't get distracted by the symptoms in our analysis
 - For example, scaling up a farm to produce a greater quantity of commodities is likely to simply transform the farmer's role into that of a manager for corporations and markets beyond their control – and not create sustainable conditions for either farm, farm family, or community.
 - Using our skills and assets to diversify into other sectors is more likely to open up new opportunities for these families and communities
 - Like the pig farmer in QC who expanded the software he developed for managing his farm to create a new business in the service industry.
 - Or the farmer in Alberta who uses the tools in his barn to build custom-made pickup truck tool boxes and markets them throughout North America.
 - More sustainable and diverse communities can also help here by providing greater flexibility for dealing with surprises. By providing:
 - Labour
 - Jobs (Rural manufacturing remains strong)
 - Pluri-activity opportunities
 - Housing
 - Social capital (social support, information, networking connections)
 - Conditions for innovation
 - Quality of life attractions for newcomers, youth, retirees
 - Consider competitive rather than comparative advantage
 - Community development theorists and practitioners have learned that an "asset-based" approach to local and regional development is most effective in building that community.
 - Identify the local assets in the region and consider ways in which they might be reorganized for markets – often niche markets
 - Don't bother trying to compete with goods and services that are easy to come by in other locations. Instead identify those that are relatively unique to your region (individually or in combination)
 - E.g. Cap-a-l'Aigle: where a local liliac club created conditions for a festival that now attracts international participation and supports the local B&B enterprises.
 - Awano, Japan: where an interest in herbs served as the basis for a french restaurant that attracts urban clients.
 - It's the department of agriculture in Japan that contributed to the policies that made these other sector initiatives possible.
 - It also means searching for opportunities for import substitution
 - Like the Hutterite colony in Alberta that manufactured their own kitchen equipment and now sell it to others in the province
 - Redevelop a research and education infrastructure that goes beyond the market and business limitations of the current policies
 - Need these in order to answer questions like the following
 - How effective are our current policies?
 - How do the policies in other sectors, departments, and organizations enhance or inhibit the objectives and policies in agriculture and agri-food?
 - What are the unintended outcomes of various policy options?
 - Don't need to do it ourselves. There are many others around the world who are working on these types of questions and those related.
 - This is a principle of the RPLC
- (*)5. Most important – collaborate and form alliances across sectors, departments, and interests to counter the sectoral entrenchment that has proliferated.
 - Issues are complex and unpredictable
 - Proactive collaboration has been shown to be the best strategy – early in the process of policy development, and in a sustained fashion.
 - This means including those concerned with environment, water, consumers, health, education, food processing, Indigenous peoples, urban leaders and groups, new Canadians, etc. in addition to the range of people within the agriculture sector.



- This is also the vision of the Rural Policy Learning Commons
 - An international partnership of (at present) 90 partners and participants
 - Convinced that systematic investigation in a comparative and collaborative context is the best way to address the many complex and important issues we face in rural and northern places.
- Some examples of the agriculture-related activities of our partners.
 - Food waste-related issues: University of Bologna, Italy “Energy footprint of dairy farms in Missouri and Emilia-Romagna” (matteo.vittuari@unibo.it)
 - International labour mobility: University of Highlands and the Islands, Scotland (Philomena.delima@inverness.uhi.ac.uk)
 - Impact of alternative agricultural and environmental policies on Irish farmers: UCD, Ireland (james.breen@ucd.ie)
 - Food-energy-water-climate nexus: OECD preconference, Memphis (JohnsonTG@missouri.edu)
 - Food and Beverage Processing Industry: RDI, Brandon, MB (ashtonw@brandonu.ca)
- I invite you to explore our site, let us know if there is something of interest there, propose an initiative if you don't find it, or let us know how we might help you in your own deliberations.

Questions

- ▶ In what ways are local and regional communities critical for your operations and sustainability?
- ▶ What rural community or regional-focused policies unnecessarily limit agriculture's ability to thrive?
- ▶ What policy issues or proposals hold the greatest promise for mutual enhancement of agriculture and rural vitality?
- ▶ How can we help you?

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- Finally, I would like to open up the discussion to hear from you.
- Here are a few of the questions that are part of community and regional development concerns – and one to which your responses are critical.
 - In what ways are local and regional communities critical for your operations and sustainability?
 - What rural community or regional-focused policies unnecessarily limit agriculture's ability to thrive?
 - What policy issues or proposals hold the greatest promise for mutual enhancement of agriculture and rural vitality?
 - How can we help you?

My Support Networks

Guelph Oct 12-15

- ▶ CRRF: Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (<http://crrf.ca>)
- ▶ NRE: New Rural Economy project (<http://nre.concordia.ca>)
- ▶ RPLC: Rural Policy Learning Commons (<http://rplc-capr.ca>)

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- I will rely on a number of sources for this presentation
 - Usual academic and policy materials that are part of my research and teaching occupation.
 - From agriculture point of view:
 - Look at the Growing Forward 2 materials
 - Since we have had a significant shift in government: focus on the Letter from the Prime Minister to Minister MacAulay outlining the political agenda for Agriculture and Agri-Food
 - CFA's Standing Policy Document – 2015
 - CAPI (Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute) Final report on its 2015 Forum
 - Multiple encounters and knowledge I have gained from policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens I have met in my 45 years of activities related to rural and remote issues
 - Particularly facilitated by
 - (*) CRRF: 28 years of collaboration among researchers and practitioners
 - (*) NRE: 11-year research and education project working with 32 rural communities across Canada (2 in Japan)
 - (*) Most recently: RPLC: an international network/collaboration of people interested in rural and northern issues
- I encourage you to investigate and connect with people in all these groups.
 - Invite you particularly to participate in the conferences, workshops, webinars of CRRF and the RPLC
 - (*) For example, in October CRRF will be holding its annual conference in Guelph (Oct 12-15) – an excellent opportunity to connect with researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and community people with a common interest in rural and northern issues. [2017 in Nelson, BC]
 - I also encourage you to suggest initiatives that support your work to the RPLC – including research, exchanges, internships, training, and communication activities.
 - This partnership of over 90 organizations and participants is specifically designed to facilitate collaboration, knowledge mobilization, and capacity-building with individuals and organizations like the CFA. We would welcome your interest and participation.