

Rural Canadians Identify Priorities for Rural Development

Through the Rural Dialogue, rural Canadians identified the following 11 priorities for the Government of Canada in their work to promote rural development:

- improve access to federal government programs and services for rural Canadians
- improve access to financial resources for rural business and community development
- provide more targeted opportunities, programs, and services for youth, including Aboriginal youth
- strengthen rural community capacity building, leadership, and skills development
- create opportunities for rural communities to maintain and develop infrastructure for community development
- connect rural Canadians to the knowledge-based economy and society and help them acquire the skills to use the technology
- strengthen economic diversification in rural Canada through more targeted assistance
- work with provincial and territorial governments to examine and pilot-test new ways to provide rural Canadians with access to health care at reasonable cost
- work with provincial and territorial governments to examine and pilot-test new ways to provide rural Canadians with access to education at reasonable cost
- foster strategic partnerships within communities, between communities, and among governments to facilitate rural community development
- promote rural Canada as a place to live, work, and raise a family, recognizing the value of rural Canada to the identity and well-being of the nation

operating a commercial fish farm on the site of an abandoned open pit mine, successfully converting an environmental liability into an asset.

Promoting rural development is also one of the objectives of *Gathering Strength*, Canada's action plan for better cooperation with Aboriginal groups — to support strong communities, peoples, and economies. Through the Canadian Rural Partnership's Pilot Projects Initiative, Aboriginal peoples have received help in establishing small rural businesses. For example, the Eel Bar First Nation in New Brunswick has run a pilot project to assess the potential for commercial production of indigenous medicinal and aromatic plant species. Ways of reducing the barriers to Aboriginal involvement in agricultural development are also being examined.

Provincial and territorial governments also have initiatives in place to promote rural development. Alberta Management Insight is a joint venture among the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation; Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; and the Alberta Farm Business Management Initiative. Under this venture, cropping information collected from 15 000 farmers for insurance purposes will be built into an agricultural database and distributed to farmers to help them make cropping decisions that improve their farm economics. Other provincial projects open up new businesses related to farming. In Perth County, Ontario, "Get out of Town" agri-tours bring city people to the country, raising the profile of farming and creating additional farm income.

Community Access Program

Fewer than 20 percent of Canadians have ready access to the Internet from their homes and offices. In rural areas, this share is much lower even though the Internet's capacity to promote social and economic development is particularly important to smaller communities. To address this issue, the Community Access Program was created in 1994 as part of the federal government's Connecting Canadians agenda. The program provides rural Canadian communities with affordable public access to the information highway and familiarizes rural Canadians with how this vehicle can be used for economic and community development, particularly job creation and growth.