



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ELECTRIFY THE ECONOMY

BY BRIAN DEPEW, BRIAND@CFRA.ORG

A report from the Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project got me thinking about the rural development potential of transforming the energy sector.

The report outlines pathways to reduce carbon pollution between now and 2050. The goal is to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius. Meeting the benchmark is feasible and even affordable with technology already available,

—SEE [ELECTRIFY THE ECONOMY](#) ON PAGE 2.



The transition of our economy from a reliance on fossil fuels will come with many challenges, but the opportunities - especially for rural people - are significant. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

IMMIGRANTS AND LATINOS BRING POPULATION GROWTH TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

BY BRIAN HANSON, BRIANH@CFRA.ORG

Unfortunately, in the rancor of the presidential primary season, discussion of the benefits immigrants bring to rural communities and states has gotten lost.

Both population growth and economic growth from new Americans comprise a two-fold boost to rural communities.

Towns and cities in the nation's midsection have struggled to find ways to maintain their population and tax base. Yet small towns and rural communities with growing immigrant populations have sustained, or even increased, their population.

Parts of rural America suffer from stagnant or shrinking population numbers due to an aging popu-

lation. The "brain drain," in which young people leave their hometowns, attracted by opportunities in urban areas, is also a factor. Kenneth Johnson, a demographer who studies rural America, has found that one in three U.S. counties are "dying."

Immigrants are helping to avert the losses. Using recent U.S. Census data, Johnson discovered that, where there is growth in rural areas, minorities account for 83 percent. The Hispanic population in nonmetropolitan areas grew at the fastest rate of any racial or ethnic group during the 1990s and post-2000 time period.

—READ MORE ABOUT [POPULATION GROWTH](#) ON PAGE 7.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2 Note from the Editor

4 Beginning Farmer and Rancher Farm Bill Priorities

7 Colorado Farm Opportunity

3 Hilda Considers Farm to School

5 Local Food Trucks Dish Out a Rumble

8 Improving Food Systems, Enhancing Lives



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Since its inception, the Center for Rural Affairs has chosen to advance a set of values that reflect the best of rural America.

One is: “We value genuine OPPORTUNITY for all to earn a living, raise a family and prosper in a rural place.”

Throughout this edition, you will see this value in action: op-

portunities in business, farming and rural development; opportunities for new immigrants; opportunities for fresh, nutritious food; and even an opportunity to own your own land.

Our values are carried through all of our work, we hope you enjoy reading about just a sample of what we are up to.

ELECTRIFY THE ECONOMY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

according to the report.

Deep decarbonization will require large scale transformation of our energy sector. This transformation is underway, but significant work lays ahead.

One finding of the research is the need to decarbonize transportation as well as heat in our buildings. This is achieved – in large part – by electrifying these sectors.

Electrifying transportation and heat will help reduce carbon pollution because the electric grid is getting cleaner each year.

This represents a huge opportunity for rural economic development. Most renewable energy is, and will be, generated in wide open spaces outside of dense urban centers.

New job opportunities come with every new megawatt of wind or solar built in rural areas. In the wind industry, new jobs mean solid middle class incomes, with an average salary of \$46,077. Renewable energy also increases the tax base and provides direct payments to landowners.

The opportunity for clean energy sector growth is significant.

U.S. consumers spent over \$200 billion on gasoline in 2015. When you consider that in the context of moving transportation toward electric fuel, this translates into a \$200 billion rural economic development opportunity.

To reach this level of clean electricity production, we will need wind and solar at all scales. We need public policy to drive forward the boom in home-, farm- and business-scale solar. We also need models that better support community-scale renewable projects.

And, we must continue the transformation of utility-scale electricity production from fossil fuels to renewables. This will mean additional utility-scale wind farms and solar projects, and the transmission infrastructure to carry these renewables from rural areas to urban markets.

The Center will continue our work on siting utility-scale projects in ways that respect landowner concerns, maximize opportunity and protect our natural resources.

Additional opportunities are outlined in the deep decarbonization report. Biofuels will play a

role in the transportation sector and biogas will play a role in the heating sector. Both can spur additional rural development.

Finally, because we have already released too much carbon pollution into the atmosphere, holding global warming to 2 degrees Celsius will require that we use climate-smart agriculture and land use management to capture and sequester some carbon in our soil.

The transition of our economy from a reliance on fossil fuels will come with many challenges, but the opportunities – especially for rural people – are significant.

The introduction of new technology in rural areas used to mean one less job for a son or daughter. The purchase of a larger tractor meant one less job for the next generation. The intensification of animal agriculture further reduced farm labor needs.

But introducing new technology to the rural landscape no longer must mean putting the next generation out of a job. Instead, renewable energy technology means there will be new opportunities for the next generation.

PAPER & E-NEWS

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. To receive it online, sign up at the Center’s website, cfra.org, or email us at info@cfra.org.

You may also correct your mailing address and fax the back page to 402.687.2200, or call the Center for Rural Affairs at 402.687.2100.

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Hilda Moreno wanted better, fresher food so she decided to produce it herself. Her family now raises chickens, pheasants, geese, goats, sweet corn, serrano peppers, potatoes, musk melon, watermelon and tomatoes. A future goal is to diversify their market, so Hilda recently attended a Farm to School training hosted by the Center for Rural Affairs. | Photo by Lucia Schulz

HILDA CONSIDERS FARM TO SCHOOL

BY LUCIA SCHULZ, LUCIAS@CFRA.ORG, AND SARAH SMITH, SARAH@CFRA.ORG

Once full of tall grasses and pine trees, an acreage surrounded by corn on the outskirts of Fremont, Neb., now offers a food oasis.

Hilda Moreno and her husband, Carlos Alvarado Vega, are beginning Latino farmers. The couple purchased the farm two years ago and, at the request of their sons, started a small-scale poultry business focused on egg production.

They wanted better, fresher food, so Hilda took the challenge to lead the change toward better food by growing it themselves.

A little hard work - clearing the brush like a modern-day pioneer - was all it took to transform their jungle. Carlos has been transplanting pine trees to create windbreaks, and has planted a mix of pear, apple, plum and peach trees.

On Los Dos Potrillos, they raise chickens, pheasants, geese and goats. There is an 80-foot by 40-foot plot of sweet corn, and another 40-foot by 60-foot plot with serrano peppers, potatoes, musk melon, watermelon and tomatoes. Future goals include bringing in bees and hives for honey, selling goat meat and expanding the vegetable operation.

Another future goal is to diversify their market, possibly tapping into the school market.

Hilda recently attended a Center for Rural Affairs Farm to School training held at the Nebraska School Nutrition Association conference in Kearney, Neb., to learn more about what it will take to get their

products into schools.

She joined a panel of food producers alongside her Center interpreter, Lucia Schulz, to share her farming story with almost 50 school food service staff.

Hilda agreed she may need to adjust production plans to meet school needs and desires, and she dove in with thoughts on the diverse products they could offer and their ability to scale up current production.

This is a story of opportunity. However, Hilda is not the only farmer with a communication barrier. Contact us for resources for schools and farms interested in engaging and exploring these kinds of local food procurement conversations. Asking the types of questions our resources suggest will open doors that may have previously been closed.

The responsibility lies in the hands of school food service staff and administrators, and our local farmers to explore opportunities that will benefit communities, kids and farmers equally.

Hilda's next steps include connecting with local food distributors to learn about options for distributing their products and making the school connection.

We look forward to 2017 and seeing how Los Dos Potrillos grows to meet local food demand. There will be many lessons we can learn from this diverse and courageous farm business.

BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER FARM BILL PRIORITIES

Ask your congressperson to make policies even stronger

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM - TRANSITION INCENTIVES PROGRAM

- Help beginners start as strong stewards
- Peace of mind for retiring farmers
- Increase beginners' access to land



Increase funding to **\$50 million**

Strengthen **conservation** language

Allow **land transfer** to eligible **family** members

BEGINNING FARMER & RANCHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

- Ensure access to training
- Reduce barriers for socially disadvantaged groups and veterans



Increase funding to **\$25 million** per year

Continue focus on **under-served farmers**

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

- Includes Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program
- Help beginners start as strong stewards



Increase **set-asides** for beginners and socially disadvantaged farmers



Increase mandatory funding levels and **avoid cuts** during annual appropriations

LOAN PROGRAMS

- Increase access to land
- Increase economic opportunity for beginners
- Reduce barriers for socially disadvantaged groups and veterans



Reduce direct farm ownership loan experience requirement to **two years**



Increase funds available for USDA - Farm Service Agency beginning farmer loans



Offer **tax credits** for selling or leasing land to a beginner

CROP INSURANCE

- Increase beginners' access to risk management
- Help beginners start as strong stewards
- Increase economic opportunity for beginners



Design a program for beginners with a **higher subsidy rate**



Require Risk Management Agency to name Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation practices as **good farming practices**



Cap premium subsidy; **incentivize conservation** with higher subsidy level

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As we look toward a 2018 Farm Bill, here are some topics you can raise with your congressperson in the coming year. Goals are on the left, solutions are on the right. Please let us know if you have any questions. If you would like to work with us in grassroots activities, such as writing a letter to the editor, testifying or visiting your congressperson, we would love to have you. Contact John Crabtree at 402.687.2100.



Taqueria Gonzalez is just one of seven food trucks that converged onto downtown Norfolk, Neb., for a rumble. Each truck represents an individual small business - some have worked with our Rural Enterprise Assistance Project. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

LOCAL FOOD TRUCKS DISH OUT A RUMBLE

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Tacos vs. smoked ribs. Frozen treats vs. salads.

Hundreds flocked to downtown Norfolk, Neb., on a warm Friday evening in late July for a taste of local food and local music.

The focus? Food Truck Rumble.

The goal? Sample until you were stuffed, then vote on your favorite cuisine. At least, that's what our goal was.

Seven food trucks, each an individual small business from the area, competed in the rumble. And, some of the businesses have worked with the Center for Rural Affairs' Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP).

The business? Food trucks are new in Nebraska and are regulated under the Nebraska Department of Agriculture through the Food and Dairies Division. Food trucks get inspected even more than restaurants; inspectors visit when they go to county fairs or celebrations.

Juan Sandoval, REAP's Latino Business Director, is also a member of the Norfolk Area Small Business Resource Team. He had seen a similar food truck competition in Grand Island, and thought the event would fit Norfolk.

"While we can compare the size

of both cities, the opportunity to provide exposure among city residents made this idea extremely attractive," Juan said. "We want to promote the trucks and highlight their food. They seem to be the best secret in town and some don't know about them."

AND NOW FOR THE RUMBLE

With a ticket, individuals were able to visit all seven food trucks for a feature item.

We picked up barbecue three ways at Uncle Jarrol's Pub-B-Que, a frozen mango dessert at The Ice Shack, and authentic tacos at La Cocina del Mariachi before we were full, and didn't dare try any more in the summer heat.

Other trucks with food that looked tasty were Taqueria Gonzalez, WolfenDitters, Taqueria Don Nico and Taylormade Catering.

When done sampling, people voted for their favorite truck.

This was the first ever event, and it brought out crowds that surpassed organizers' expectations. Approximately 350 tickets were sold, and around 200 people were turned away.

"We were expecting a smaller crowd and I believe the food truck owners were thinking like us,"

Juan said. "We were concerned about the food trucks' capacity since they don't have large refrigerators or a place to keep a lot of food."

At the end of the day, WolfenDitters and residents of Norfolk came out victorious. The winning truck is owned by Adam Wolfe and Brent Ditter, and they feature barbecue cuisine.

GREAT FOR SMALL BUSINESS, RURAL COMMUNITY

Juan said organizers received positive feedback.

"Food truck owners were extremely grateful," Juan said. "Some of the local restaurants in the Norfolk downtown district were so busy they had to stay open after hours."

Food trucks were also able to sell menu items. One food truck owner said they did better at this event than at the largest event in Norfolk.

And the ticket holders were happy.

"People had a great attitude about the event," Juan said. "People wanted to have a great experience and we were able to provide an event that was fun in our community."

IMPROVING FOOD SYSTEMS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

"I'm so happy about my vegetables. I honestly didn't believe they'd grow. If it wasn't for Suzi [French] and your program, I wouldn't be at this point."

Sharon and other members of the Omaha and Santee Sioux Tribes are working hard to improve access to fresh, nutritious food grown in their own communities, often in their own backyards. And the Center for Rural Affairs is working alongside them.

In each community, Center staff has provided demonstrations with garden tilling, seeds and starter plants, and supported new farmers' markets. They regularly make garden visits throughout the growing season.

I joined Suzi French, community food specialist, on one of those visits to Sharon's place. When we stopped by, we took a look at the plot, finding a ripening tomato and a pepper. We pointed the veggies out to Sharon, and Suzi let her know they were ready to be picked.

"That tomato is going to be only mine, I can't wait to eat it," Sharon said.

She wishes to pass on the knowledge of gardens to her grandchildren. When more produce is ready, she intends on making dishes with fresh vegetables.

"We have to get the kids back to healthy snacks," Sharon said. "I want my grandchildren to learn instead of going to the store - it's expensive."

Sharon started out with a handful of plants provided by the Center, and purchased a few plants on her own - large tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers, watermelon and rhubarb.

Before we left, Suzi gave Sharon advice on what plants were weeds, and encouraged Sharon to keep watering and tending to the garden. Suzi said the ground in the plot is hard this year, but they will fertilize and lay down cardboard at the end of this growing season so it will be better next year.

"Next year I want to do a lot more," Sharon said. "This is an experiment more than anything."

Center staff work in the communities year-round, also assisting and training food preparation and preservation techniques.

When we visit each community, it's not hard to find the impact of our garden and market projects over the past three years. Gardens can be spotted in several yards, with more than 50 in Santee, and 100 in Macy, Walthill, Rosalie and in between. And farmers' markets are held regularly in Macy, Walthill and Santee.

"We are doing it! We are growing our very own fresh food," Suzi said. "We are eating it, sharing it and some are selling it. We are teaching our children about growing food. We are changing our food system."



Community Food Specialist Suzi French (left) guides Sharon Freemont on identifying which plants are vegetables and which are not. Center for Rural Affairs is working with Sharon and other members of the Omaha and Santee Sioux Tribes to improve access to fresh, nutritious food grown in their own communities. | Photo by Rhea Landholm



Sharon Freemont and two of her grandchildren are just a sample of those impacted by the Center's community food project. The project has been developed with funds from USDA Rural Development, USDA Marketing Service and Newman's Own Foundation. | Photo by Rhea Landholm



Economists have found that, nationwide, rural counties with larger proportions of Latino populations tend to be better off economically than those with smaller Latino populations. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

POPULATION GROWTH, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Johnson describes the dynamic in rural communities this way: “Young people leave and older adults stay in place and age. Unless something dramatic changes – for instance, new development such as a meatpacking plant to attract young Hispanics – these areas are likely to have more and more natural decrease.”

The Pew Charitable Trust found that immigration has slowed or even overcome population decline on the county level across central United States since 1990. Foreign-born population growth has countered native-born loss to slow overall population loss.

Meanwhile, some counties have experienced foreign-born population growth that has overcome native-born losses to create net growth in overall county population. Much of this change has taken place in rural counties across the nation’s midsection, stretching from Texas to the Dakotas.

LATINOS AND IMMIGRANTS ALSO BRING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Latinos and immigrants are not only bringing population growth to rural America, they are also bringing economic growth. (The great majority of foreign-born rural residents in the U.S. come from Latin America.) Economists have found that, nationwide, rural counties with larger proportions of Latino populations tend to be better off economically than those with smaller Latino populations.

Rural counties with higher proportions of Latinos

tend to have lower unemployment rates and higher average per capita incomes. A 2013 study by economists Dennis Coates and T.H. Gindling found that the income growth that tends to accompany Latino population growth in rural counties is even greater where native-born, non-Hispanic populations have otherwise been shrinking.

Immigrants contribute significantly to the economies of the states of Iowa and Nebraska. According to research from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, immigrants benefit their communities both through their spending at local businesses, and by paying sales, income, property and gasoline taxes.

In 2010, immigrants’ spending in Iowa contributed about \$2.8 billion in total production to the state’s economy and created over 22,000 jobs. In Nebraska, immigrants’ spending generated over \$2.15 billion total output and over 17,000 jobs in 2010.

The study also found that immigrants’ tax contributions to state governments were greater than what they took out in public benefits (similar to native-born residents). Furthermore, removing immigrants from Iowa and Nebraska’s labor force would come at a cost of \$12 and \$18.15 billion, respectively, in total production.

These losses would represent 4.2 percent of total production in Iowa and 10.7 percent in Nebraska. In terms of jobs lost, this represents losses of 47,000 and 82,000 jobs in Iowa and Nebraska, respectively.

COLORADO FARM OPPORTUNITY

A retiring farmer and longtime friend of the Center is seeking a beginner farmer interested in living and working in scenic southwest Colorado. For a full description of this opportunity, please visit cra.org/colorado-farm-opportunity.





IMPROVING FOOD SYSTEMS, ENHANCING LIVES

BY RHEA LANDHOLM, RHEAL@CFRA.ORG

Sharon Freemont sits on a stool in the evening, weeding the garden. Sometimes her three grandchildren join her.

The garden is surrounded by high grass, and beyond that, fields, shaded in the evening by a lone tree.

“It’s nice in the evening, I sit, relax and meditate,” Sharon said. “We sit and look at what we’ve done, it’s something we did all by ourselves.”

The family has a small garden at their home three miles outside of Walthill, Neb., on the Omaha Reservation.

Sharon grew up in the area, eating vegetables from her parents’ and grandparents’ gardens. Her parents were also raised with gardens.

“We had a big, big garden, that’s what we lived on,” Sharon said. “My aunt did tomatoes, and we froze corn.”

For 20 years, she has wanted a garden, and with a little help from the Center for Rural Affairs, she finally has one.

“I didn’t know what I was doing,” Sharon said.

—SEE [IMPROVING FOOD SYSTEMS](#) ON PAGE 6.



Sharon Freemont’s granddaughter, Maddy, shows off a ripe tomato in their garden. Sharon gardens outside of Walthill, Neb., on the Omaha Reservation. | Photo by Rhea Landholm