

Building 21<sup>st</sup> Century rural communities requires adoption of strategies that look not only within a community for defining its strengths and opportunities, but to regions where one community can compliment and draw upon the resources of another. I am Dallas Tonsager, Under Secretary for USDA Rural Development, and I believe we can revitalize rural America by adopting seven strategies:

Working with **Strategic Partners**- those people who care about rural America, and are willing to work with us to help achieve goals.

Working to achieve access to **Capital Markets** for all rural citizens is challenge enough living at a distance from large communities, but getting capped with small communities requires extra effort.

**Regional Food Systems** make a lot of sense. Our local food systems and the systems we grew up with had people growing their own food locally, and providing them to the local community.

**Regional Collaboration** – simply getting people to work together again instead of competing with each other. Rural Communities are very small, and they need to work with each other to help build their own opportunities.

**Building Local Communities**- simply making sure that the pieces exist where we can work together in a community to achieve common goals.

**Alternative Energy** is the basis for our new economy. We must work together to achieve the development of local energy production facilities that provide not only the energy for our local communities but energy for all of America.

**Broadband and Continuous Business Creation** means that we have to build access to Broadband networks that allow our local businesses to thrive economically. Rural America has tremendous entrepreneurs, and we have to give them access to this world wide web.

Each of these strategies, which I will discuss in further detail, support community capacity building: leveraging human, capital and community resources, all working together to build effective economic and community strategies.

The adage that there is strength in numbers holds especially true when you build strong and strategic alliances. USDA Rural Development works closely with many partners to help rural residents and businesses.

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I'm Dallas Tonsager, Under Secretary for Rural Development at USDA— our mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans.

One of the greatest partnerships in rural America started 75 years ago – through the creation of the Rural Electrification Act. This Act established long-term partnerships with America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities. It leads the way for the strategic partnership with an estimated 900 rural electric cooperatives – each working to improve access to electric and telephone services, and each working to improve their local economy.

Other examples of strategic partnerships include working closely with tribal, state and local governments, and non-profit organizations to finance the construction of critical access hospitals, so that residents have easy access to high-quality health care. Or, expanding lender access to our single-family housing underwriting system – a system that has expedited the ability of lenders to provide home loans to their customers.

One of our biggest partnerships, though, is with rural residents themselves. Whether it's helping neighbors build their own homes through our self-help housing program, or working with local first responders to secure the vehicles and equipment needed to keep residents safe and secure. Rural Development is an active member of the community.

As we move forward in developing more strategic partners, USDA Rural Development will expand its outreach to other strategic partners, such as national foundations, who are willing to invest in rural areas to increase the resources and partnerships to support local economic and community development. Our goal is to build strong partnerships to best serve these regions and communities.

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