

Manitoba Planners Conference Feb 23-25, 2012
“Beyond Surviving: Planning To Thrive”

Title of presentation: New Direction for Manitoba’s Rural Economy
(Rural Life and Agriculture)

Presented by: Laura Rance

Date: February 23rd, 2012

Overview

- There is a distinct shift away from agricultural production within rural areas
- The average age of the farmer is fifty-one
- This is a distinctly aging farm population
- 80% of MB population is urban
- 23% of farm income comes from farm activities
- Subsidies contribute 55% of income for farm families
- As global water levels rise the displacement effect could be beneficial if we accept immigrants
- The question is do we want to feed the world or invite it over for dinner?
- As prices rise more farmers will look for solutions to the fuel and fertilizer cost problem

This presentation was an excellent example of why the planning conference is a place for new ideas. I have never before experienced a talk that was as polarizing for the audience as this one. The audience was comprised of planners, academics, and farmers, and it was the farmers that were most offended, with one member claiming that the presenter was lying about her figures. When presented with the data and an invitation to see the source document the farmer calmed down a little but was still visibly upset. The thing that was most controversial was the

presenter's assertion that it was not an economically sound model to continue to pay into massive agricultural bailouts year after year for an industry that was clearly not producing profit. While at the same time Laura was claiming that these bailouts take up an important place within society as they ensure that Canada will have enough food to feed itself should the need arise. However the thing that I found most interesting was her appreciation of the global impact of climate change. 2010 has been recognized as the hottest year ever on record and while the doom and gloom forecasted by scientists may not be entirely true it is foolhardy to not recognize the amount of water that is melting on the polar ice caps and the impact to the world that this may have. It was completely unexpected for me that in Brandon Manitoba a conference would be tackling such difficult issues with global implications. "Invite the world to dinner", indeed Laura made the case that with our relatively low population density Canada is in a perfect position to take advantage of the displaced populations of the world as water levels continue to rise. I was impressed by the candor with which Laura spoke and by the honesty with which she delved into a topic that she was sure to raise some eyebrows.

Summarized by:

Matt Grills

Department of Rural Development

mattgrills@gmail.com