

RURAL BY DESIGN

About

In this initiative, Rural Development Institute (RDI) is building upon its applied research practice and policy implications to include design. At the heart of this initiative is enhancing *rural economic development* in Canada, beginning in Manitoba. Equally important in this initiative is *design*, the element of choice, in particular fostering and following local choices about desired futures. Design means direct involvement and ownership locally, while enabled by government (provincially, federally), by NGOs, and others, including corporations, foundations, and charities. Rural by design means on-going responses to challenges and opportunities which benefit people, culture, environment, and technology. Being future-oriented, this initiative accepts there are many paths by many entities that take rural areas from here to there. Key among this is honouring the past, being cognizant of the present, and having expectancy of the future. Design is about finding commonalities among the stakeholders in action, in planning, and in critical thinking – often all together. Rural and design are about *spaces* between here and there, today and tomorrow, local and provincial, poor and the rich, and using innovation to provoke new habits, new paths, new actions forward. This initiative also means *prototyping* realistic actions with measurable results over multiple years. Rural by design is going beyond surviving and *learning* to thrive, then passing it on to others.

First Initiative 2011-12

The first project of rural by design is an investigation into the role of future-oriented planning and materials used by rural economic development service providers in Manitoba. Specifically RDI is examining the use of scenario planning by a major service provider in rural areas, that being Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives - MAFRI. (A full description is available from RDI).

Rural Economic Development

There have been many efforts to foster economic development in rural areas, many involving substantial public and private investments, yet no actions have emerged that are easily repeated elsewhere with success. There is a pressing and widely recognized need for new approaches to rural economic development, drawing on engagement, learning, and the sources of competitiveness in an increasingly global economy. Attempting to mitigate the generic deficiencies of regions will not be sufficient. Instead, each rural region needs a distinct strategy featuring its unique strengths, and its particular opportunities.

Prototyping

We begin with Tim Brown's work and others.

Learning

Universities and colleges are important contributors to sustaining rural economic development.

