

CRRF Resolution to Renew Support of the Rural Secretariat – Background Information

The Rural Secretariat was formed in 1996 and operated within the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada until 2013. It was tasked with coordinating “the federal government’s focus on rural issues”¹, as well as developing programs and advocating for rural policy. The role of the Secretariat was to bring government departments together around “rural issues and priorities and promoting dialogue between rural Canadians and the federal government”².

From this report³ the following challenges and successes were noted:

Challenges

- The Rural Lens was created in 1998 as a tool to assist policy makers from all federal departments to review policy and program ideas. This tool was intended to help policy makers determine the relevancy and potential impacts to rural communities, prior to drafting policies and programs. Many departments ignored the rural lens, or applied it to a policy or program only after the policies or program had already been drafted. At this stage, the Rural Lens unit could provide a report on how the policy or program could be improved to reflect rural realities, but there was no obligation on behalf of the department proposing the policy or program to implement the recommendations.
- Lack of funding prevented long term planning which in turn had a negative impact on the political importance of the Secretariat and the use of the Lens.

Successes of the Rural Secretariat

- The Rural Lens led to the development of some targeted programs for rural communities such as dedicated funding for rural infrastructure, establishment of the Office of Rural Health, an increased number of Service Canada locations and Industry Canada’s Broadband for Rural and Northern Development pilot project. As well, the Community Futures program received additional investment and provided for additional Community Futures Development Corporations in more rural communities.
- The Secretariat provided financial support for the publication of the Rural and Small Town Analysis Bulletins (Statistics Canada) which resulted in over 60 publications that provided critical rural data analysis and discussions on rural issues, trends, opportunities and challenges.
- The Secretariat provided support for the Community Information Database, a web-based tool that contained community-level social, economic and demographic indicators.
- The Secretariat Initiated the National Rural Research Network in conjunction with CRRF as a forum to bring together stakeholders in rural policy and research.
- The Secretariat established Rural Teams throughout Canada that were responsible to bring rural stakeholders together with provincial and federal government departments to discuss and collaborate on rural issues unique to that province or group of provinces.

¹ Hall, H., and Gibson, R., *Rural Proofing in Canada: An Examination of the Rural Secretariat and the Rural Lens*, as part of the report, *Rural social policy and rural proofing – in Finland, Norway, Great Britain and Canada*, August, 2016.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.