The Development of Rural America

Brinkman, George

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Introduction

In the last decade, rural development emerged as one of the prominent challenges facing the United States. Strong support for rural development is now found in both major political parties and at federal, state, and local levels. President Nixon gave early recognition to the urgency of rural problems and commitment to solutions for them in his first State of the Union message:

We must create a new rural environment which will not only stem the migration to urban centers but reverse it. If we seize our growth as a challenge, we can make the 1970s a historic period when by conscious choice we transformed our land into what we want it to become.

The growing support for rural development today results in great part from the fact that despite unprecedented growth, both urban and rural areas in the United States are greatly deficient in many aspects of quality living conditions. On the one hand, the nation's cities are slowly strangling themselves, jamming together people and industry, and spawning pollution, transportation paralysis, housing blight, lack of privacy, and a crime-infested society. Rural areas simultaneously suffer from the other extreme—lack of sufficient employment opportunities, outmigration and depopulation, and too few people to support services and institutions. The migration from rural areas contributes to the problems of both the city and the countryside, by depopulating rural places at the expense of overcrowded cities. Solutions to rural problems consequently will benefit both rural and urban people and will give America a new lease on life.

This book, The Development of Rural America, is about rural-development processes, problems, and solutions. It should provide valuable guidelines for policies to benefit both rural and urban areas. Although the title contains the word "rural," the content of the book focuses on the development of both (a) the open country and small towns, and (b) smaller cities (up to fifty thousand population). The book consists of seven papers written as original contributions by prominent agricultural and regional economists,
demographers, and administrators. The book also has been care­fully edited to provide continuity throughout. It is prepared in three parts:

Part 1: The Nature of Rural Development (2 papers)
Part 2: The Social and Economic Condition of Rural America (2 papers)
Part 3: Rural Development Alternatives (3 papers)

Part 1 is designed to provide an understanding of the general nature of rural development. The two papers in this section focus on the community and area (multicounty) aspects of rural development. These two approaches are largely overlapping rather than mutually exclusive, and both area and community efforts may be integrated with individual actions to provide effective development. The first paper, “The Philosophy and Process of Community Development,” is written by J. Carroll Bottum, Hillenbrand Distinguished Professor of Agricultural Economics at Purdue University and lifelong practitioner of community development. This paper examines community development as a group decision-making process and looks at the organization of citizens committees for community development. The second paper in Part 1, “The Emergence of Area Development,” written by Richard Hausler, examines the evolution and characteristics of present and proposed development programs. Richard Hausler has served as administrator to several federal area-development and antipoverty agencies, and was executive director of the National Area Development Institute at Lexington, Kentucky, at the time his paper was written.

Part 2 provides a summary of the social and economic conditions of small cities, towns, and the open country throughout America. This section begins with “Trends in the U.S. Rural Population,” written by Calvin Beale, rural population specialist of the Department of Agriculture. This paper analyzes current 1970 census data to summarize recent patterns of rural population growth and decline, migration, and the effects of population change. The fourth paper “The Condition and Problems of Nonmetropolitan America,”
by George Brinkman, formerly of Kansas State University and now Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada), examines rural employment and income opportunities in agricultural and nonagricultural jobs, and summarizes the relatively poor condition of rural health care, education, and housing.

Part 3 examines some rural-development alternatives, including national development programs, the development and use of natural resources, and policies for dealing with rural poverty. "Systems Planning for Rural Development" is the first paper in this section. It is written by Luther Tweeten, Regents Distinguished Professor of Agricultural Economics at Oklahoma State University. This paper presents a framework for national planning on the basis of the cost effectiveness of programs, and analyzes the effectiveness of many of the federal government’s programs. Emery N. Castle, Dean of the Graduate School and former chairman of the department of agricultural economics at Oregon State University, is the author of the sixth paper, "Natural Resource Use in Community Development." This paper examines some implications of developing natural resources on the options that communities may use for their individual development and on the distribution of income through resource-development projects.

The final paper is "Rural Poverty and Urban Growth: An Economic Critique of Alternative Spatial Growth Patterns," by Niles M. Hansen, Director of the Center for Economic Development and prominent regional economist at the University of Texas. This paper analyzes the problem of rural poverty and relates its solution to investments in growth centers and intermediate-sized cities (250,000 population) rather than investments in infrastructure in lagging rural areas. Niles Hansen also recommends greater investment in human-resource development through education and training, so that residents of lagging areas will be able to migrate more successfully to intermediate centers for jobs and better living conditions. Since Hansen’s recommendations are oriented toward moving peo-
ple out of rural areas rather than promoting development within these areas, his proposals are controversial. It is hoped that this paper will lead to greater interest in finding effective solutions to rural poverty.

These papers have been carefully selected and edited to provide an integrated approach to rural development, rather than just a series of readings. The material on developmental processes, rural conditions and problems, and development alternatives should be beneficial reading to serious students of rural development and to interested laymen alike.

George L. Brinkman