

Call for Participation

Rural Wealth Creation and Livelihoods

A National Conference and Conversation For Practitioners, Researchers and Policymakers

Convened by: USDA Economic Research Service and Ford Foundation

October 3- 5, 2011 / Washington, DC

Fostering **wealth creation that leads to improved livelihoods** in rural America is a current top priority for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A host of local, regional and state action and research initiatives across the country are also exploring how innovative approaches and strategies can generate wealth that sticks in rural areas.

IT'S HIGH TIME FOR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE DOING THIS WORK TO GET TOGETHER. The **practitioners** doing the on-the-ground work of rural and regional development, the people who make the **policy** that affects the work, and the **researchers** who study its design and impact are all too rarely in useful conversation with each other. Because of that, we lack a shared, common understanding of:

- What do “wealth” and “wealth creation” mean?
- What works, where, and why – or why *not* – to promote wealth creation that improves rural livelihoods?
- How can regional policies and programs contribute to wealth creation *that sticks* in rural areas?
- How can we measure rural wealth creation progress, maintenance and outcomes?

To cultivate shared understanding, and to begin developing a practical results-relevant dialog and community of practice focused on rural wealth creation and livelihoods, the Economic Research Service of USDA and the Ford Foundation are convening ***Rural Wealth Creation and Livelihoods: A National Conference and Conversation***, to be held at a conveniently located hotel in Washington, D.C. on **October 3rd -5th, 2011**.

Who may participate – and how do I get invited?

The conference aims to create a **practical** and **action-focused** conversation that produces insights, information and action ideas useful to everyone who attends. The gathering will bring together a wide range and balanced mix of rural practitioners, researchers and policymakers from across the country – along with a selection of intermediaries and funders who assist them. This rich assortment of participants will help fertilize learning across different perspectives, disciplines and experience. So if you are a young *or* seasoned community or economic development practitioner focused on improving rural livelihoods, a policymaker who seeks positive impact on rural places within regions, or a university or private researcher (including students) who focuses on rural development and wealth creation issues, this conference is for you. The same is true if you work in government, a foundation, or a regional or national intermediary and address rural equity, livelihood and development. But...

If you wish to participate, you must first express your interest by responding to this *Call for Participation*.

The conference will be limited to **no more than 150 participants**, both to encourage exchange and to allow for a significant number of partial scholarships. The Conference Organizing Committee will review all the responses to this **Call**, and then compile a final invitation list and issue invitations to meet the goal of ensuring a good balance of participants, taking into account a range of experience, background and geography.

To respond to this Call, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/WCConference>

Your Request to Participate is due by May 15th.

Conference Objectives

The **objectives** for the Rural Wealth Creation National Conference and Conversation are:

- Increase understanding about what wealth is, and how wealth is created and maintained to expand livelihood opportunities and sustain rural communities.
- Improve understanding about how policies and practices contribute and interact to create and sustain wealth in varying rural community contexts.
- Surface questions and situations related to rural wealth creation that merit new or deeper research and/or improved program or policy approaches.
- Begin to develop a shared framework and vocabulary around rural wealth creation that can connect research, practice and policy.
- Open a practice-relevant dialogue and launch an ongoing community of practice – including practitioners, researchers and policymakers – around rural wealth creation.

Focus Questions for Exploration and Exchange

The conference seeks to initiate a dialog and improve understanding on a set of key questions. These **Focus Questions** will frame the topical exchanges at the event. They will be referenced in your **Request to Participate Application**.

1. What constitutes “wealth” in rural communities? What forms of wealth are essential for rural communities to prosper and improve livelihoods? Why and in what way is each essential?
2. How can different types of wealth be created and maintained and interact to best sustain rural livelihoods and communities?
3. How can rural wealth be measured, both to see progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs that seek to promote it?
4. What differing aspects of local economic, institutional, governance and social contexts most influence the wealth creation process, and the policy and practice approaches to address it?
5. How can regional policy and program approaches generate regional benefit and result in wealth that sticks in rural areas? (“Regions” include rural, suburban and urban areas.)

Final Invitations

Once all the **Requests for Participation** are received – **deadline May 15th** – the Organizing Committee will use them to construct the agenda and the final participation list. Invitations to the conference will go out **no later than June 30th, 2011**.

Any Financial Support Available?

Yes! A limited number of scholarships are available on a competitive basis to applicants residing outside the Washington DC metropolitan area. Priority will go to applicants who can make a strong contribution to the objectives of the conference who would not otherwise be able to attend. Some scholarships will cover travel and lodging; others will cover only lodging costs.

If you wish to be considered for a scholarship, please indicate that in your **Request to Participate Application**. Applicants will be notified whether and what scholarship assistance they are being offered along with the response to their Request to Participate – no later than June 30th, 2011.

Organizing Committee and Sponsorship

This project is supported by Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grant no. 2011-67023-30087 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and by the Ford Foundation. The Organizing Committee includes:

- Shanna Ratner, *Yellow Wood Associates*
- J. Matthew Fannin, *Louisiana State University*
- Janet Topolsky and John Molinaro, *Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group*
- Thomas Johnson, *University of Missouri / Rural Policy Research Institute*
- Wayne Fawbush, *Ford Foundation*
- Bruce Weber, *Oregon State University*
- John Pender and Alexander Marré, *USDA Economic Research Service*

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