

**THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA**

**Report by - LINDA DUFFY - 2003 Churchill Fellow**

**"To investigate effective mechanisms for promoting sustainability within regional communities"**

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Signed:

Dated:

*Linda K. Duffy*

*20th February 2005*

## CONTENTS:

	<u>Page:</u>
1. Introduction and Acknowledgements	3
2. Executive Summary	4
2.1 Highlights	4
2.2 Major Lessons	4
2.3 Conclusions	5
2.4 Dissemination and Implementation	5
3. Programme	5-6
4. Churchill Fellowship and Lessons Learnt	7-10
5. Conclusions	10-11
6. Recommendations	11
7. Bibliography	12

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

In my work as Rural Financial Counsellor, servicing rural communities in New South Wales over the last 10 years, I have seen that the demise of rural communities and the effect on rural people is critical and difficult to address. My objective was to identify projects that could quickly and effectively be adapted and implemented in Australia, and to discuss problems and issues encountered by countries with measures and programs already in place. I investigated projects and met with researchers in the United States of America, and the United Kingdom - England and Scotland in August, September, October 2004.

Intrinsically linked to trying to inject rural communities with confidence and to sustain population and opportunities and thus some balance in age groups and generations, are issues, of:

- business confidence, management and sustainability
- services and access to services
- transport
- affordable housing
- land tenure and management such as succession planning issues peculiar to family farms - intergenerational transfer

I particularly wanted to investigate linking and mentoring systems in place in the USA and UK.

## **Acknowledgements:**

The undertaking of my Churchill Fellowship would not have been possible without:-

- the fantastic financial support of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
- my employers - the Management Committee of the Central West Rural Financial Counselling Service Inc, Orange NSW
- the support of my referees - Patrick Gaynor, State President of the NSW Association of Rural Financial Counselling Groups; Marie Russell, Grazier from Tilpa NSW & Co-Chair of the NSW Rural Women's Network; Sue Gorst, Director NSW Department for Women
- Geoff Tually, University of Melbourne for providing contacts in USA & UK

In addition, my study trip was augmented by the very kind support and assistance of all those in the USA and UK who gave up their time to meet with me, offer encouragement and gave so much of their own experiences and research. I am especially grateful to:-

\* in Sacramento, California:

- Sarah Mora, California Farm Bureau Federation; Judith Redmond & Nance Woodbury, California Alliance for Family Farms

\* in Des Moines & Ames Iowa:

- John Baker, Beginning Farmer Centre; the Hommel family

\* in the United Kingdom:

- Jay Talbot, CEO, Community Council of Devon, Exeter; Dr Matt Lobley, University of Exeter, Devon; the Turner family, East Halton, North Lincolnshire.

## **2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

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### **Fellowship Objective Project Description:**

<b>"To investigate effective mechanisms for promoting sustainability within regional communities"</b>
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I set out: "To study methods successfully used overseas to link rural community members, by retaining existing members, attracting new members to foster vigorous & vibrant rural communities and stem the exodus from rural areas. To view in-situ effective mechanisms the UK & USA have in place to ensure long-term survival of sustainable systems and return to Australia to distribute via my Australia-wide professional networks". *2003 Churchill Fellowship Application*

### **2.1 Highlights:**

California, USA, farm visit to President of California Alliance Family Farms - Judith Redmond on her organic property "Full Belly Farm" near Sacramento; California Young Farmers & Ranchers and the California Farm Bureau Federation; Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), St Paul, Minnesota; Iowa State University and the Beginning Farmer Centre in Des Moines, Iowa; Hommel family.

In the UK highlights included attending the Community Council of Devon (CCD) Active Rural Communities conference, and the Sustainable Food and Farming Event (Devon Rural Network); meeting up with 2004 Churchill Fellow Charlotte Finch in Oxford; visiting the birthplace of Winston Churchill - Blenheim Palace, Woodstock near Oxford; the Centre for Rural Research, University of Exeter, Devon; the Turner family farm "Baysgarth farm" in North Lincolnshire; the Arkleton Institute, Aberdeen University, Scotland..

### **2.2 Major Lessons:**

- Both the USA & UK are experiencing the challenge of halting decline of rural communities and providing services to rural communities
- loss of youth from rural communities and provision of services to ageing population, retirees and socially excluded are similar to problems being experienced in Australia
- working toward sustainable rural communities is an on-going, continual process
- holistic approach required - CCD mission statement: "helping communities help themselves"
- ad-hoc government funding may alleviate problems short-term but exacerbate problems by not allowing worthwhile schemes to continue, potential overlap of programs. Commitment of long term funding and strategies are required
- importance of consultation and input of all sectors of communities and districts
- both the USA & UK have positive outlook to the future of rural communities
- importance of fostering development of new generation
- identify and capitalise on skills of in-migrants (eg. retirees from professional careers) as well as of traditional rural skills already existing in rural communities

### **2.3 Conclusions:**

- rural communities require government assistance to initialise incentives for retention of services to maintain vibrant rural communities
- access to measures must be linked to experience and expertise of the applicants

Programmes that could be transposed to Australia:

- Cornwall "Fresh Start" pilot program beginning in January 2005 addressing all sectors of rural community
- Mentoring: successful programs linking younger & older farmer by system of mentoring such as "Farm-On" Iowa, California Farm Link, NY Farm Link

### **2.4 Dissemination and Implementation**

- presentations to local and state rural financial counselling groups including presentation to NSW State Association, April 2005
- presentation June 2005 to State Advisory Committee of Rural Women's Network of NSW
- distribute report & give presentations to rural community groups and government agencies as appropriate
- farmer and rural group meetings
- encourage young and potential beginning farmers to lobby their position to government to ensure an on-going sustainable vibrant future for all age groups in rural Australia

## **3. PROGRAMME**

United States of America - August/September 2004:

- Sacramento, California:  
meetings Sacramento area:
  - California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF)
  - CFBF Young Farmers and Ranchers Association, Sacramento met with: Sarah Mora, Program Director, Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R) Leadership Farm Bureau; Jamie Johansson, YF&R State Committee Chairman; John Gruber Jr, YF&R State Committee; Robyn Raymond
  - Nance Woodbury, California Alliance Family Farms
  - Judith Redmond on-farm visit "Full Belly Farm" sustainable/organic farm
  - Mark Cady, California Alliance Family Farms, Davis
  - telephone link-up with Steve Schultz, California FarmLink
- Great Falls, Montana
  - USDA office
  - "For Women Only" Event
- Shelby, Montana
  - USDA office
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
  - Helene Murray, Executive Director MISA (Minnesota Institute Sustainable Ag), University of Minnesota, St Paul Minneapolis

- Des Moines, Iowa. (Kind hospitality of John & Vicky Baker, Minburn Iowa)
  - John Baker, Beginning Farmer Centre, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa
  - Chris Beyerhelm, Farm Service Agency (USDA) Des Moines, Iowa
  - Dave, Tim & Lauren Hommel, family farm, Iowa
  - Iowa Mediation Service, Directors Board Meeting, Urbandale, Iowa
  - Jeff Ward, Iowa Agricultural Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa
  - Mike Bobst, Vice President, Raccoon Valley Bank, Minburn, Iowa
  - Neil Hamilton, Director Agricultural Law Centre, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa
  - Loren Book, Beginning Farmer Centre, Iowa State University, Ames
  - Michael Duffy, Professor in Charge, Beginning Farmer Centre, & Associate Director, Leopold Centre, Iowa State University Ames, Iowa
  - Jeri Neal, Leopold Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

England - October 2004:

- Oxford:
  - Sarah Gillett (for Dr Anna Lawrence) - Human Ecology & Social Change, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford
  - Exhibition - Winston Churchill, Blenheim Palace, Woodstock (nr Oxford)
- Devon:
  - Devon Rural Network Sustainable Food & Farming Event Conference, Merton Village Hall, near Hatherleigh
  - Community Council of Devon Annual Conference, Okehampton : "Active Rural Communities Encouraging Social Inclusion"
  - Ian Hutchcroft, Sustainable Prosperity Manager, Devon County Council, Exeter
  - James Morrish, South of England Development Officer, Rural Stress Information Network, Devon
  - Jay Talbot, Chief Executive, Community Council of Devon, Exeter
  - Dr Matt Lobley and staff, Centre for Rural Research, University of Exeter
- North Devon:
  - met with Ann Burnham, ex-farmer now establishing B&B, Ashford near Barnstaple (Ann's daughter now farming in Australia)
- Cirencester:
  - Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester
- North Lincolnshire:
  - George & Ruth Turner "Baysgarth Farm" East Halton, Immingham, North Lincolnshire
- Aberdeen, Scotland:
  - Dr Rob Burton, Arkleton Institute, Aberdeen University
- travel to Edinburgh, Scotland - end of Churchill Fellowship

## **4. CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP AND LESSONS LEARNT**

**Fellowship Objective: "To investigate effective mechanisms for promoting sustainability within regional communities"**

Study in both the USA & the UK confirmed that as in Australia, rural communities are intricate systems giving rise to complex issues in attempting to analyse needs and future direction. Vagaries such as the seasonal conditions, terms of trade, isolation, uncertain government funding, affordable housing, access to services - education, health, transport, all intertwine. Intrinsic to many issues encountered, was the exodus of younger generations from rural areas, and the changing needs of the changing face of the community. In both countries various programmes were being sourced, assessed, underway, reviewed to seek positive outcomes for the changes in rural communities.

Repeatedly themes included: losing farming land to development, linked with very high land prices, affordable housing, access to services, loss of youth to urban centres, education, health, transport. Research in the USA & UK confirmed that despite the challenges, rural people were keen and positive about maintaining a rural lifestyle.

### **United States of America:**

#### **California:**

##### **Sacramento:**

meetings Sacramento area:

- California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF) and Young Farmers and Ranchers, Sacramento: key learning: encourage from a young age training and education including the opportunities for career in rural pursuits. On-going support and education in the roles of negotiation, marketing, business meetings to be business savvy and redress old stereotypes of red-neck rurals
- Judith Redmond, President of California Alliance Family Farms (CAFF) and farmer, on-farm visit "Full Belly Farm" sustainable/organic farm: key learning: community supported agriculture programmes, importance of community in overall sustainability, enormous range of possibilities for integrated organic farming, supporting and supported by community such as weekly delivery to aged persons, farmers markets, use of internet unlimited in expanding business, holistic approach to farm/community/business
- Nance Woodbury & Mark Cady, California Alliance Family Farms (CAFF), Davis: key learning: importance of support for rural producers and rural communities by provision of training, field days, marketing opportunities, publications, encouragement of vitality and diversity in rural communities, "buy fresh buy local campaign" - regional branding, including getting local food into schools for lunches
- Steve Schultz, California FarmLink: key learning: farmers prosperity key to survival of rural communities; not necessary for beginning farmers to own land but to obtain opportunity, support, mentoring and training to undertake their chosen profession by linking with similar person with existing farmland, experience and skills

## Minnesota

### Minneapolis/St Paul:

- Helene Murray, Executive Director, Minnesota Institute Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), University of Minnesota, St Paul Minneapolis: key learning: changing face of USA rural communities away from traditional farmers, migrants choosing agrarian lifestyle, farmers markets. Research, information and resources for rural communities - the significant publication "Building a Sustainable Business A Guide To Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses" - took 6 years to finalise and is very successful as training and management tool. Land Stewardship project.

## Iowa

### Ames & Des Moines:

- John Baker and Loren Book, Beginning Farmer Centre, Ames, Iowa: key learning: 3 areas: (1)"Farm On" -pool of existing farmers - link with young people, (2) AgLink Seminar - rural family training sessions (2 x 2 days per year) for junior & senior college students and their families - discussion includes succession planning, (3) Major Research piece annually - eg. survey of management, small business and farmers attitudes to retirement. In conjunction with/addition "Iowa Concerned" hotline
- Chris Beyerheim, Farm Service Agency (FSA) US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Des Moines, Iowa: key learning: programs have been successful but may need to re-evaluate over time to progress. Government funded incentives have included: low interest loan programme, conservation programme, price support programme, price adjustment programme, in addition to rural development programme for housing and community facilities in small towns
- Tim, Dave & Lauren Hommel, family farm, Iowa: key learning: difficulties facing young families in rural areas - lack of contemporaries, facilities, transport. Importance of inter-generational transfer & succession planning for successful future of business, management planning, management meetings for function of the business for longevity and viability for future generations
- Mediation Board Meeting, Des Moines, Iowa: key learning: alternative dispute resolution critical and opportunities for positive impact and change
- Jeff Ward, Iowa Ag Development Authority, Des Moines, Iowa: key learning: measures for beginning manufacturers, farmers, low income housing, hospitals etc: integrated measures for whole of rural communities: real estate prices are so high opportunities for new industries or farmers are prohibited even with government incentives
- Mike Bobst, Agricultural Loan Officer, Raccoon Valley Bank, Minburn, Iowa: key learning: even with government incentives the majority of farmers are 64 years or older, problems with mindset - contributing to deterioration of rural communities
- Neil Hamilton, Director Agricultural Law Centre, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa: key learning: changing face of rural communities, importance of education, farmers markets & campaigns such as "buy fresh buy local", inclusion of all types of farms from very small to very large, access.
- Mike Duffy, Professor in Charge, Beginning Farmer Centre For Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University, Ames: key learning: complex issues for Americans include huge

cost of health care, many employers cover the cost of health care so encourages people to seek such employment, mostly offered in city locations, not rural locations - an added disincentive of remaining in rural areas

- Jeri Neal, Leopold Centre, Iowa State University, Ames: key learning: replace government programs with economic incentives and thus buy behaviour

### **United Kingdom:**

#### **Oxford:**

- Sarah Gillett (for Dr Anna Lawrence) - Human Ecology & Social Change, Oxford University: key learning: publications and research encouraging work of volunteers and sustainable approach to rural communities, problems with government funded initiatives/on-going research
- Exhibition - Winston Churchill, Blenheim Palace, Woodstock

#### **Devon:**

- Community Council of Devon (CCD) Sustainable Food & Farming Event, at Merton Village Hall, near Hatherleigh: key learning: sustainable farming & food action plan - importance for survival of rural communities and landscape of Devon. Rural Gateway program
- Community Council of Devon Annual Conference, Okehampton: key learning: "Active Rural Communities encouraging social inclusion. Holistic approach to injecting vibrancy in rural communities such as the "Fresh Start" program in Cornwall approaches including housing, business, farmer mentoring. Rural Strategy: economic and social regeneration, social justice for all, enhancing the value of the countryside. Initiatives can include measures such as a project to loan mopeds and bicycles to 16-25year olds to get to job interviews
- Jay Talbot, Chief Executive, Community Council of Devon, Exeter: key learning: importance of ownership of projects by the community; get the community to change their practice, embrace change, look at the future of the community, eg in Devon critical issues - housing, and demography (young moving out, old moving in), demands on CCD are huge
- Dr Matt Lobley, Centre for Rural Research, Lafrowda House, University of Exeter: key learning: research not in isolation, links with overseas institutions and comparisons of data regarding changing rural communities, survey of attitudes. Rural Stress Review, other projects. Resisters, Adaptors, Embracers of change
- Ann Burnham, Ashford near Barnstaple: key learning: importance of landscape to rural community survival, problems for farmers with EU, links to the land

#### **Gloucestershire:**

- Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester: key learning: education programmes, research projects

### North Lincolnshire:

- George & Ruth Turner "Baysgarth Farm" East Halton, Immingham: key learning: complexity of regulations, impact of EU, BSE and FMD on family farms, importance of involvement of all stakeholders to halt rural community decline

### Aberdeen, Scotland:

- Dr Rob Burton, Arkleton Institute, Aberdeen University: key learning: importance of on-going research, complexity of rural communities - family businesses, social impacts of change in rural communities, identity, expectations, challenges, advantages
- travel to Edinburgh, Scotland - end of Churchill Fellowship

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

- rural communities are intrinsically linked with natural resources, land and people
- successful projects are owned by communities, not imposed on communities
- education on importance of rural land, enterprises and pursuits needs to commence early and be a life-long experience
- success of farming enterprises has direct impact on rural communities
- a whole of community approach is required
- sustainability of rural communities is an on-going, changing issue, with the need for adaptability to change and flexibility in any strategy adopted
- important that communities consult all stakeholders, all generations
- small steps such as Farmers Markets link produce with people, can have an enormous impact on local economies
- In the USA Farmers Markets have led the way in re-thinking how food and fibre are produced, marketed, presented and consumed. This has re-established links with consumers and the land, renewing interest in rural communities linked with lifestyle issues
- even though both UK & USA have systems of subsidies for farmers, problems of maintaining rural communities and opportunities for the next generation being able to take on the family business or farm are similar to Australia, therefore affecting the social dynamics of the districts (& therefore services such as schools transport etc)
- USA & UK both agreed - that affordable housing was a paramount issue in enabling younger people to return to rural areas, both countries were currently attempting to redress this with government funded programs
- affordable housing in rural areas linked to a permanent rental trap and de-housing of locals with lack of affordable rentals, as city dwellers buying up homes/second homes/productive farmland. This exacerbates and delays return of younger generations on completion of education. However Dr Rob Burton of Arkleton Institute Aberdeen, felt this was perhaps just the problem of one generation
- For beginning farmers barriers of raising capital to own land and equipment can be overcome by linking with existing farmers who wish to exit - mentoring and linking system
- where subsidies and funding are provided, uptake in the USA seemed primarily linked to promotion of measures by the agencies and organisations with access to funds, so promotion is vital
- Community Council of Devon's mission: "helping communities help themselves" is apt!

- Need to address the lack of professional career opportunities in rural areas, which forces many of the brightest younger generation to depart rural communities. Investigation and uptake of technology to overcome geographic barriers
- anecdotal evidence in the UK and USA, acknowledged that many with the inspiration and energy to progress successfully in business and farming had taken opportunities overseas or in cities, a phenomenon also troubling Australia which needs to be addressed
- needs to be strategic, planned, co-ordinated efforts to address the issue as in next decade will be thousands of acres worldwide owned by an aged population -so strategies that think outside owning the land, and mentoring system to enable sharing of skills and knowledge such as the FarmLink in USA, Beginning Farmer Centre in Iowa, FreshStart program in Cornwall. Re-thinking of land management/land ownership.

Dissemination: continue to work with links in rural communities to promote research to date and canvass input from grass roots level of community with a view to implementing mentoring and linking programmes in New South Wales.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- mentoring: system linking of BusinessLink and FarmLink to assist those wishing to enter, and link those wishing to exit rural businesses or land management
- education: holistic approach to educating community embracing the importance of rural communities, diversity, land management, environment, issues of land stewardship, importance of individuals contribution to community at any level. education to start early and to continue life-long
- institute a scheme of annual international exchange with rural communities that are facing similar issues and ensure continual exchange of innovation, ideas and research that is not in isolation or competition, monitor programmes, update local programmes and foster innovation to keep this issue alive and active
- critical analysis of potential federal government incentives - federally for consistency ( as opposed to some current state systems such as Queensland and Victoria low-interest loans for beginning farmers, but the absence of same in New South Wales) with a view to long term incentives not constrained by terms of political office such as 3 years, taking into account incentives operational overseas
- systematic mapping of existing resources and research already being undertaken in Australia
- having now made the initial contacts, to continue communication, research and discussion with international researchers, experts, stakeholders and interested parties to move process forward in Australia
- continue to actively participate in dialogue, canvass ideas, promote the importance of vibrant, diverse, healthy rural communities collectively
- promote rural communities as safe and healthy locations to bring up families and children, attracting young families
- monitor the progress of programs such as the Cornwall "Fresh Start" programme, keep in contact with project officers in Cornwall. Assess feasibility and practicability of such a scheme in Australia and lobby for funding and implementation
- I would recommend that Australia audit existing programs and attempt a holistic approach to regional community injection rather than an ad-hoc approach, with a view to instigating programs such as "Fresh-Start" and "Farm On" in Australia

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