

## **The Role of the Rural Church in Sustaining Rural Communities Summary**

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Main address at the International Christian Rural Association

Brandon Canada July 2007

Ikerd is an Agricultural Economics professor with the University of Missouri

He has a website with many public papers listed dealing with the Sustainability of farming and the sustainability of rural communities in the USA. The issues are very relevant to Australia because he is talking about global issues/corporations that are driving economies and nations. <http://web.missouri.edu/~ikerddj> or do a google search for Ikerd

I believe Dr Ikerd's ideas are urgently needed to be discussed and I present a summary of some of the issues raised in this paper. For copies of the full paper contact the rural office at [bomrural@bigpond.net.au](mailto:bomrural@bigpond.net.au) or ph 6361 4224

Rural people are losing control over their communities, as corporations use their economic and political powers to dominate local economies and governments. These corporations have no commitment to the future of rural areas; they are only interested in extracting their wealth.

Rural people are being told that they are being left behind by the rest of society\_ economically and socially- and corporate investments from outside are the only means by which they can catch up. Economic colonisation of rural areas has been aimed at exploiting the wealth of the regions: wildlife, timber, minerals and now corporate farming to create wealth for corporate investors and shareholders. There is no consideration for long term sustainability of: the environment, the soil, water or the people.

What can rural communities and churches do?

Rural communities must be encouraged to choose strategies consistent with Sustainable economic development.

Sustainable development must be capable of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future; it must be capable of maintaining its productivity and value to society indefinitely. Sustainable development is fundamentally different from industrial development.

The principles of sustainable community can be derived from the principles of ecological, social and economic integrity. Everything is interconnected.

Relationships among the diverse elements must be mutually beneficial.

For human relations this means trust, caring and courage. For economics this means value, productivity and sovereignty. For community it means ecological, social; and economic integrity.

The church must teach that there is a choice to choose permanence rather than blindly pursue our individual economic self interest.

People must have faith to believe in the inherent goodness of things, love a life that is good and have a hope that our priorities and values will survive and sustain communities and the world.

Rural churches must reject the arrogance, intolerance, selfishness and pride that permeates our society and even our churches. We cannot excuse sitting back without challenging the destruction of God's creation as a matter of economic necessity, the exploitation of rural people to maintain cheap food prices.

Rural churches must support community and farming movements that advocate sustainability. The pursuit of narrow, individual self interest does not result in societal good.

Most rural communities are still places where people have a sense of belonging, where people know and care about each other, where crimes are fewer and people feel safe, such values are becoming rare and increasingly valuable. Ecological, social and economic integrity has great potential value. God created us as social beings. God created us as ethical and moral beings. It is not a sacrifice to care for the earth.

The most important role of the rural church is to practice, teach and preach a message of faith, love and hope