

The W.Va. Rural Development Council

The Council's mission is to help rural communities improve their quality of life by facilitating collaboration among local, state and federal governments and the private sector, by supporting locally developed initiatives, and by sharing successful development strategies.

Community Support and Technical Assistance

- On June 27-28, 2001, the WVRDC co-sponsored one of 10 regional USDA Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) workshops at the Charleston Holiday Inn. More than 65 people from six states participated in the workshop.
- On August 28, 2001, a follow-up workshop "EZ/EC Tax Incentives" was held at W.Va. State College. WVRDC, USDA and the W.Va. Development Office co-sponsored the session — 55 participants attended.

Rural Community Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

Since June 2000, West Virginia has participated in the Rural Entrepreneurship Initiative (REI), sponsored by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. The WVRDC coordinates the work of the West Virginia team. The team consists of approximately 30 representatives from small business and business networks, state and federal government organizations, banking, investment institutions, universities and nonprofit organizations. During 2001, the following was accomplished:

- Held quarterly W.Va. Rural Entrepreneurship Initiative (WVREI) team meetings in Elkins (January), Canaan Valley (May), Romney (July) and Wheeling (November).
- Received a \$20,000 grant from the Kauffman Foundation and \$20,000 from the Benedum Foundation to continue its work.
- The Education Working Group compiled resource directory of entrepreneurship education programs in West Virginia.

- The Capital Working Group has undertaken a gap analysis of venture capital availability in West Virginia.
- A WVREI page was developed on the WVRDC website.
- Work is underway, through the WVREI Team, the W.Va. Small Business Development Center and the WVCDP initiative, to facilitate the creation of a W.Va. Microlenders Association.
- A statewide conference on entrepreneurship planned for May 2002.

Rural Leadership and Community Building

The WVRDC is a founding member of Community Collaborative, Inc., a consortium of public and private organizations committed to enhancing the skills, knowledge and connections of community leaders in West Virginia. The WVRDC provides management services and other resources to support the Collaborative's training initiatives. During 2001, the Collaborative:

- Completed the fourth year of the Sustainable W.Va. Communities Program in April, 2001.
- Received a \$75,000 grant from the Benedum Foundation to continue Sustainable W.Va. Communities Program for a 5th consecutive year. Teams from Gilmer, Webster, McDowell and Wayne Counties are participating in the 2001-2002 program. Training sessions were held on October 25-26, in Charleston and November 30 to December 1 in Flatwoods.
- Designed the FOCUS (For our Communities' Ultimate Success) initiative, a new and more intensive on-site training and technical assistance project, to begin in Pocahontas County.