



20 states look at "What Works"

Burlington Vermont was the destination for representatives from agencies, businesses and organizations working in the rural economic development arena.

Lynn Adams, SWICO coordinator and Steve Adams, Extension to Community and Economic Development, Iowa State University, traveled to Vermont and attended the "What Works" conference on developing rural economies. Participants and presenters from 20 states shared insights from national and regional studies and projects in order to provide tools and guidance for others involved with development in rural areas. The conference validated the regional activities underway in southwest Iowa.

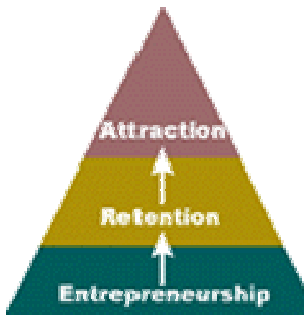
The Adams' presented some of the findings at the October 2005 SWICO meeting in Red Oak.

A conclusion drawn from research and observation and presented by representatives from national, rural issues organizations was the importance of regional collaboration. Regional identity can be aggressively promoted and collaboration provides for the more effective utilization of the critical resources necessary to build capacity that leads to sustainability. With increased vitality comes the increased value to policy makers so that rural quality of life issues become a right and not a discretionary privilege.



In the meantime, presenters pointed out that a key component to achieving the overall objective was to have at work grassroots, regional organizations that convey messages to state and Federal decision makers in order to influence policy and secure resources. And, while it takes a blend of economic development components (large, small and micro-business), rural communities need to foster and nurture their local entrepreneurs who can engage themselves in business starts.

Much of the resources currently in many states are focused on the retention and attraction of large industry and business. Keynote speaker, Brian Dabson of the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) likens a healthy, rural economic development approach to pyramid and not the commonly depicted of a three-legged stool' analogy. The stool image is one which, as he suggests, emphasizes the separateness of the development components; attraction, retention and entrepreneurship.



Dabson suggests that entrepreneurship is the critical base that establishes and increases economic viability, which gets channeled into community betterment. This in turn, aids in retaining businesses. With the increased capacity from entrepreneurship and retention communities are then positioned to more successfully attract new and relocating businesses.

A review of the numbers of micro-enterprises found on the Association for Enterprise Opportunity's Web site (www.microenterpriseworks.org) revealed that, within just the SWICO membership counties alone, addressing micro-business start needs is valid:

- There are 19,463 micro-businesses in SW Iowa
- 25,974 residents in SW Iowa are employed by micros
- Micro-Business employment accounts for an average of 23.3% of the total employment within counties in SW Iowa
- 7% of all State Employment is Through SW Iowa Micro-Businesses

Drs. Stephen J. Goetz & David Freshwater: State-Level Determinants of Entrepreneurship and a Preliminary Measure of Entrepreneurial Climate analyzed data to begin to evaluate the entrepreneurial climate by state and assess the actual activities in that area. Information can be found on the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (www.ruralship.org) Web site.

Each of the 50 states was ranked, with one being the highest, for an "entrepreneurial climate." Iowa's "climate" is relatively positive with a ranking of 17. However, this positive climate does not transfer into actual activity as seen in its low 35th ranking. Further fieldwork is necessary according to the Rural Center in order to fully identify why this transfer is not occurring.