

I. Ohio Catholic Rural Life Priorities



1. Develop staff structure/plan to coordinate community activities and raise funds for OCRLC.
 - a) Develop survey instrument (similar to the Migrant project) that includes interviews with our Catholic constituents regarding Rural Life issues and offers recommendations to the OCRLC Board regarding the following:
 - 1.) Strategic planning ideas for linking urban, suburban and rural concerns
 - 2.) Needed Church based programs addressing rural life concerns
 - 3.) Possible organizational structures and/or staffing ideas (14)
2. Develop and implement a communications plan emphasizing Catholic Social Teaching.
 - a) Utilize media/outreach tools such as “Plowshares” and websites.
 - b) Develop and e-mail network for action alerts, information sharing and web utilization. (8)
3. Develop bicentennial educational and awareness raising activities regarding Ohio’ rural life heritage and value. (7)
4. Develop and Implement projects to promote farmland preservation and small to moderate sized farming.
 - a) emphasize funding mechanisms, farmers markets, smaller farm production, alternative agriculture practices. (6)
5. Develop annual gatherings (regional) of ministry formation personnel.
 - a) Include personnel from seminaries, universities/colleges, campus ministry offices, religious education offices, deaconate programs, lay ministry formation offices, and social action/justice offices. (4)
6. Develop structure/plan for receiving input from Catholic rural life “stakeholders” (such as producers, growers, farmers, parish leaders, community leaders)
 - a) Develop and implement rural life stakeholder conferences and/or regional onvenings. (2)
7. Develop and distribute materials for adult/youth education utilizing the “Resource Guide”. (1)
8. Develop statewide training models for local church leaders regarding urban/rural linkages, successful food awareness, gardening, alternative food production, etc. (0)

II. Strengths and Successes of Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference

1. Offer strong, viable, and consistent leadership to Catholic Conference of Ohio.
 - a) Strive to be a common, united voice for rural life values, morally just practices and policies, and respectful treatment of workers.
 - b) Helped dioceses make connections about the broader moral issues surrounding food and life on the land. Where and how our food is grown (raised), processed, marketed and distributed as an urban issue as well as a rural issue.
 - c) Increased integration of rural justice issues within various diocesan structures such as education, social action, and religious education offices.
 - d) Beginning efforts in modeling interdiocesan efforts such as the “Mobile Missionary” project.
 - e) Through consistent gatherings and networking have developed close “relational” ties and high trust levels among board members.
 - f) Have dedicated members and board officers who have taken “ownership” for maintaining The Rural Life Committee.
 - g) Helped raise awareness among church leadership (including the Ohio Bishops) of rural life issues and helped position the Ohio Bishops to be a voice of concern, awareness, and prophetic witness regarding life on the land.

2. Have sponsored, developed, and/or fostered helpful programs, projects, and statements.
 - a) “Life on the Land” and “Parched Land” statements, educational resource booklet.
 - b) Forefront of the Migrant worker study; the “We Gather and Stand Together” project; God’s Welcoming Presence” statement.
 - c) Set stage for the formation of the Ohio Family Farm Coalition
 - d) Ministry Formation conference; Maria Stein Statewide Conference (1997); Appalachian Conference; Rural Life Days/Masses; ;OCEAA presentations and display.
 - e) “Plowshares”

3. Have developed “relationships” (in-roads) with influential rural life leaders and organizations.
 - a) National Catholic Rural Life Conference uses our structure as a model for other states.
 - b) Strong working relationships with Ohio Council of Churches.
 - c) Ohio Department of Agriculture is aware of our structure and responds to our meeting requests. Successful meetings and consultations have occurred with Director Dailey and other Department staff including Larry Adams, Jim Bucky, Fred Shimp, Joe Hainer, Howard Wise, Joe Daubenmire, Kevin Elder, Mark Wilson.
 - d) Had successful farm visits (Buckeye Egg, Mercer County, Case Farms, park Farms, Dawson Pork, Amish farm).

4. Have established a “legislative presence” at the Ohio State House, particularly around the issue of CAFO regulations.

III. Areas for Improvement Ohio Catholic Rural Life Board

1. Improve Educational Outreach regarding rural life issues.
 - a) More consistent publication of “Plowshares”
 - b) Better utilization of print media, such as editorials, op-eds, letters to editors, articles in Catholic publications and community newspaper.
 - c) Prepare responses, articles, media releases, and dialogue forums defending and promoting rural life by being the voice of and for smaller rural parish and community development.
 - d) Better implement usage and distribution of the “Sustaining Life on the Land” Resource booklet.

2. Develop and implement a realistic strategic plan for the Catholic Rural Life Board.
 - a) What is unique about our Rural Life Mission? Consider areas that are underserved or under addressed by other groups.
 - b) Partner closely with social justice programs (mini-social justice offices within the rural communities).
 - c) Consider strengths and limitations of board members and Rural Life Conference resources. Selectively design programs, structures, and activities that reflect our role as “leaven” and “salt”. We cannot do all, but we can do some things.

3. Improve program follow-up.
 - a) Rural Life Resource Manual utilization
 - b) Appalachian Conference
 - c) Rural Life Conference(s)
 - d) Ministry Formation dialogue and training
 - e) Ohio Bishop Statements regarding rural life
 - f) Dialogue, networking with agribusiness leaders (Farm organizations, processors, associations)

4. Improve communication, networking among diocesan programs.
 - a) Better sharing of events and activities
 - b) Better usage of e-mail, websites

5. Improved programming with increased focus on parish utilization.
 - a) Usage for both rural and urban parishes, promoting linkages, partnerships and Catholic Social teachings.
 - b) Need small parish models that reflect limited staffing, integration into existing structures, and realistic action requests. (See Report #13, Mary Kay Hummel)
 - c) Foster better sense of ownership within rural parishes of Catholic Rural Life program suggestions and advocacy concerns.
 - d) Consider ways to “celebrate” rural life and our Catholic heritage in Ohio food production. (Ohio’s bicentennial is 2002)

IV. Emerging Rural Life Issues

Over the course of the next three years, participants identified rural life issues that would impact Rural Catholic parishes, rural communities, and political and/or policy actions.

- A. Trends Impacting Rural Catholic Parishes in Ohio.
1. Continued closure and/or emerging of rural parishes
 - a) Fewer pastors and/or staff
 - b) Declining attendance
 - c) Aging of parishioners (many “burned out” and/or tired)
 - d) Growth of the suburban parishes
 - e) increased mobility of parishioners and increased “parish shopping” (choosing to attend parish outside geographical boundaries for various reasons)
 - f) less identification with parish for “community life” (parish not necessarily center of social life, moral guidance, and needed social services)
 - g) Declining financial resources
 2. Continued suburbanization of Catholic parishes.
 - a) Selling of farmland for development and growth of subdivisions will continue to create new high-density areas for parishes and schools. Many Catholics will continue leaving city and rural parishes and move to new suburban areas.
 - b) Suburban parishes will have growing resources to provide services to parishioners. Additional attention from diocesan structures to help meet these needs will most likely occur.
 3. Continued emphasis on lay ministry formation and interdepartmental collaboration.
 - a) Diocesan offices will continue the difficult task of breaking down “silos” and work on ways to provide more integrated services.
 - b) Urban, suburban and rural parishes and schools will attempt shared programs and enhanced culture exchanges such as “rural plunges”.
 - c) Lay leadership will be relied upon to maintain viable urban and rural parishes. Delegation of tasks, increased parishioner ownership, and “team” strategies that empower and affirm the parish community will be needed.
- B. Political and Public Policy Trends impacting Ohio’s rural communities.
1. Majority of Ohio’s elected officials support job development and agribusiness expansion throughout rural communities.
 - a) Promotion for “rural enterprise zones” will continue
 - b) The Ohio Farm Bureau and Ohio State agriculture department leaders believe continued growth and expansion to larger “economy of scale” farms and businesses is necessary for profitable enterprises.
 - c) Continue to be little political support for small to moderate sized farm operations and/or alternative agriculture ventures.
 2. Farmland Preservation will continue to be a controversial and hotly debated issue.
 - a) Land developers and realtors will continue to push for development over farmland preservation.
 - b) Funding and local buy-in for preservation purposes will remain very sporadic and under funded.
 - c) Local zoning will remain a “political football”. For example, legislative and agribusiness leaders will promote local zoning and local control in election campaigns but oppose allowing local communities to vote regarding expanding or creating Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.
 3. Controversy will continue over the impact Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO’s) will have on the environment and the viability of family farmers.

- a) Standardized regulatory rules will be implemented in the year 2002 for CAFO's over 10,000 animal units. Monitoring of their effectiveness and value will need to occur.
- b) "Best Practices" will be promoted for CAFO's under 10,000 animal units.

IV - 2

- c) Ohio Department of Agriculture will be primarily responsible for oversight and compliance (along with ODNR's Soil and Water division, Ohio EPA, USEPA, and various Departments of Health) to assure environmental safety.
- d) Agribusiness leaders will continue to stress that operations "properly run" will have little, if any, adverse effect on environment.
- e) Citizen groups and environmental groups will continue to monitor and question issues involving CAFO's.
- f) Manure management will continue to be an issue. More operations will explore ways to dry, package, field inject and market their manure.

4. Food safety issues will continue to surface.

- a) Biosecurity practices will significantly increase especially in livestock operations.
- b) Reliance upon chemicals and pesticides will continue despite increasing concerns over chem.-trials, toxic runoffs, and health questions.
- c) Genetic engineering will increase with questions raised over issues such as terminator seeds, health considerations, and fertility lines.

5. Food production costs will continue to rise, however, U.S. commitment to "cheap food" will keep payments to farmers low.

- a) Increased energy costs (gasoline) will raise production expenses.

6. Ohio's school funding crisis will drain public dollars from other programs making programs such as "First Time Farming" grants and support for alternative farming grants vulnerable.

- a) Funding for human service programs such as those providing health care social services, and safety services (fire, police, EMT) in rural and Appalachian areas will be vulnerable.

7. Immigrant/Migrant workers issues will continue to surface as more and more immigrants are recruited to work in rural communities.

- a) Amnesty and guest worker issues will emerge at the National level. Mexican President Fox will be in the forefront of promoting ways Latino workers can be granted some degree of legal status.
- b) "We Gather and Stand Together" project will continue to expand.
- c) Efforts will continue towards a statewide legislative study regarding this issue.
- d) Legislation introduced in Ohio concerning "clean Ohio", wetlands, mining, landfills, tax cuts, prescription drug costs, faith based public/private partnerships, and solid waste disposal.

C. Trends Impacting Ohio Rural Communities

1. Decreases in the number of small/moderate sized farms and farm communities will continue.

- a. Control of food production will continue to be concentrated among fewer farm families and farm corporations.
- b. Housing and Business development will expand bringing "Wal-Mart's" and subdivisions to small towns and rural communities.
- c. Efforts will continue, however, to promote tourism and cottage industries particularly in Lake Erie, Amish areas of Ohio.

2. Costs of maintaining "infrastructure" services within rural communities will continue to increase

- a) Many young adults are not staying within their rural communities to raise their families.
- b) Resources to maintain roads and safety services are declining.
- c) Access, quality and availability of health care services will continue to be problematic.

3. Rural Communities will continue to be impacted by the same social ills affecting U.S. society.

- a) Crime and violence

- b) Substance abuse
- c) Disenfranchised youth
- d) Decrease in number of two parent households.
- e) Decline in “family values” and community “trust” levels.
- f) Decline in membership and/or involvement within farm organizations.

IV - 3

- g) Domestic violence
- h) Racial bias and racial profiling increasingly evident toward Latino immigrants and Dutch dairy farmers.

4. Rapid changes will continue within Ohio food production.
 - a) Livestock industry will continue an overall production decline, however, fewer owner/operators will have bigger, more concentrated operations.
 - b) New growth in dairy will be attributed to Dutch farmers setting up new facilities in Northeastern Ohio. Many current dairy operators are leaving due to costs, time consumption, and the choice by younger family members not to continue.
 - c) Tobacco farms in Southern Ohio will continue to see declines due to contract cutbacks and declining markets.
 - d) Niche markets will continue to be explored such as “organic foods”, farmers markets, and specialty products.
 - e) Poultry and egg production will continue to be large industries, however, the outcome of the lawsuit regarding Buckeye Egg could have an impact on total production number.
 - f) Corn and soybean production will remain high. The issues surrounding to usage, marketing, and environmental safety of ethanol (using corn) will impact future production.
 - g) Food production will continue to be “vertically integrated” with control decisions being given to transnational corporations.

5. Labor shortages will continue throughout rural communities.
 - a) Rural unemployment rates are generally higher than in urban areas.
 - b) Agribusiness will continue to rely upon immigrant workers, many undocumented, to harvest produce, process eggs poultry, and milk, and work at landscape nurseries.

V. Ohio Catholic Rural Life Mission Statement

Participants reviewed the following 1994 Mission Statement.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference exists to preserve, protect and articulate the unique values and contributions of rural Catholics their parishes, communities, families, farms, businesses, institutions and organizations.

We wish to support rural people and their rural culture, namely:

- Their sense of stability to a specific geographical place and people;
- Their continuity of life-style and relationships;
- The historical memory that connects and nurtures these relationships.

We seek to provide a forum to address and resolve problems affecting the rural Catholic community, i.e., those things which interfere with living the faith and proclaiming the Kingdom of Jesus Christ to the surrounding secular society.

These problems include social, political, ecclesiastical, economic, agricultural and environmental issues.

We seek to provide an organizing tool that gathers and unifies our rural Catholic communities in this common mission.

1. Mission statement should be expanded and updated.
 - a) Incorporate words and concepts such as justice, mediators, net workers, Catholic Social Teaching, solidarity, empowerment, education, conscience raising, and integration.
 - b) Keep the sense of “broader rural life” and the section on “rural culture”.
2. Mission statement should reflect capability with the four “goal” areas of “education”, “programming”, “networking”, advocacy”, and “ownership.”
3. Mission statement should consider ideas about “relationships”, “parish viability”, and “facilitation” and “Eucharist.”
 - a) “Rural Life is about community and the connecting relationship between land and people.”
 - b) “To survive as rural parish and to maintain rural parish viability.”
 - c) “Respecting the heritage of rural living we will aim to facilitate opportunities for the interchange of values that enrich and empower Christian Living.”
 - d) “Link common urban /rural issues that challenge church as Eucharist and celebration.”

VI. Goals and Objectives for Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference

Participants brainstormed, and then prioritized goals and objectives for years 2001, 2002, and 2003. The following are the four “goal” areas: Education, Networking (Advocacy), Programming, and Ownership.

A. Education

The Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference will promote, develop, influence and distribute materials for use on Rural Life education.

1. Utilizing the “Resource Guide”. Adapt and distribute materials for adult and youth education regarding rural and/or small town justice issues. The materials should empower teachers and speakers to confidently integrate Catholic Social Teachings related to rural life issues. (6)
2. Develop and implement a “communication plan” emphasizing Catholic Social Teachings and utilizing media/outreach tools (“Plowshares”, websites, Catholic publications). (5)
3. Influence curriculum in lay ministry formation programs. (2)
4. Develop a catechetical association related to Catholic Rural life issues. (2)
5. Influence curriculum throughout the Catholic school system.
6. Influence curriculum in seminaries, houses of formation and religious formation programs. (0)

B. Networking, Convening, Advocacy

The Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference will develop stronger working relationships with church leaders, parishioners, farm laborers, elected officials, and farm organization representatives through networking, convenings, and public policy advocacy.

1. Develop an annual gathering of diocesan ministry officials to dialogue on rural life issues. (7)
2. Develop an e-mail network on issues advocated by the OCRLS. This includes “action alerts” and the creation and maintenance of a OCRLC website. (4)
3. Develop a strategic plan to link urban, suburban, and rural parishes. (3)
4. Convene leaders of farm organizations for dialogue, problem solving and relationship building. (1)
5. Develop ways to have a Catholic voice/input on existing rural life groups. (For example, have Catholic representation, OCRLC, on Ohio Department of Agriculture (AFO rulemaking committee and more involvement with the Ohio Appalachian office).(0)
6. Establish a rural Catholic network of parishes (dues, membership). (0)
7. Meet with Ohio legislative rural life leaders (House and Senate Agriculture committee members, and Ohio Department on Agriculture officials).
8. Convene farm representatives from Canada, Mexico and Ohio to dialogue on NAFTA. (0)

C. Programming

The Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference will develop and implement programs promoting, celebrating, and advocating issues related to rural life.

1. Develop a statewide training program for local church leaders regarding urban/rural linkage programs and successful food awareness projects such as gardening, farm markets, and alternative food production. (6)
2. Develop a bicentennial educational and awareness-raising program. Catholic rural heritage in Ohio would be celebrated and acknowledged. (4)
3. Develop a project to promote farmland preservation (include recommendations for funding opportunities). (4)
4. Develop a Catholic rural stakeholder conference inviting Catholic legislators, public officials, representatives from growers, workers, processors, rural life associations, and Catholic rural life leaders. (3)
5. Develop a public policy action plan to advocate for farm relief from the estate tax and fair and workable permit and best practice regulations for CAFOs. (3)
6. Develop and/or share “immersion experience” programs targeting urbanites moving into rural communities (new subdivisions). Such programs would emphasize diversity and farm owner dialogue. (1)
7. Develop a statewide awards/recognition program for rural life programs, individuals and organizations. (0)
8. Develop a survey/study of parish/diocesan practices related to urban sprawl. (0)
9. Imitate a study on Appalachian issues similar to the Immigration Study. (0)
10. Sponsor a statewide legislative gathering on rural life issues (invite Bishops and legislative leaders). (0)
11. Develop public policy action plans to advocate for the following:
 - a) statewide legislative rural immigrant study, b) enhanced environmental protection/land stewardship, and c) local/county infrastructure issues such as roads, land use and zoning that need statewide advocacy. (0)

D. Ownership

The Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference will promote actions that will increase the ownership in rural concerns and participation in OCRLC activities.

1. Develop a fundraising plan for OCRLC and a staff structure to coordinate goals and objectives. (5)
2. Develop a survey with interviews (similar to the immigrant project) of our Catholic constituents (parishes, small town, growers, workers, etc.) regarding church response to rural issues. Recommendations should address structures, staffing and network potential). (5)
3. Develop a structure/plan for receiving input from Catholic Rural stakeholders and workers regarding issues being considered by the OCRLC board. (4)
4. Establish a rural/urban land use subcommittee.(0)
5. Expand OCRLC board membership to better represent the larger Catholic Rural Community.
6. Develop a rural ministry internship program to help coordinate statewide OCRLC programs (0).

VII. Recommendations regarding Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference Board structure.

1. Increase membership on the board to more fully represent Catholic involvement in the various aspects of rural life.
 - a) ORLC be expanded to 30 members; four (4) from each diocese and six (6) at-large.
 - b) Members should demonstrate association and/or collaboration with diocesan or Catholic Conference of Ohio rural life programs. They should view their involvement as representing the Catholic view of the “common good” and not self-interest.
 - c) Expanded membership may reflect representation from groups such as CAFO’s, alternative farming, small town leadership, farm organizations, forestry, grain farming, processing and pastoral leadership.
 - d) Expanded membership may want to reflect skills helpful toward meeting the prioritized goals and objectives for enhanced communication, educational programming, and survey administration. Names surfaced include: Tom Berg, communication director, diocese of Columbus; Tom Hertsfeld, poultry producer/processor, diocese of Toledo; Sr. Katherine Ladd, Appalachian project, diocese of Columbus, Steubenville; Rachael Barber, Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

2. Develop an administrative plan clarifying the role and term for officers, as well as future meeting times, dates, and locations.
 - a.) An executive committee should consist of an elected chair, vice chair, and recording secretary. A representative of the Catholic Conference of Ohio would serve as an ex-officio member.
 - b.) The officers would serve 2-year terms. The OCRLC should serve as a committee of the Catholic Conference of Ohio’s Department on Social Concerns. A representative from the ORLC should serve on the Department of Social Concerns advisory board.
 - c.) The next three meeting dates were set for: September 24, 2001 (discussion, overview of strategic plan); November 19, 2001 (actions to adopt strategic plan); January 28, 2002 (voting for new officers).