

and other related services in these communities?

Changes in the Labour Market

Both urban and rural Ontario have seen an increase in the participation of women in the labour force. More women are working outside the home, and many rural households now comprise dual income families. Participation rates³ for women in rural and small town Ontario increased from 50% to 57% between 1981 and 1986. Over the same period the rates for men dropped from 77% to 75%. Participation rates for women in rural areas are generally slightly below those in urban areas, although in the rural areas, participation rates are higher for farm women than for non-farm rural women. A particular challenge facing rural women, especially those in more isolated locations, however, is in arranging affordable and accessible child care facilities to enable those who wish to work outside the home to do so.

To many people, "rural" is still primarily equated with agriculture; though, in reality, agriculture is no longer a major contributor to the creation of employment in the rural economy. In rural areas and small communities of less than 5,000 people, only 16% of the labour force was in agriculture in 1971, and by 1986 this figure had fallen to 11%.

Historical trends in the agriculture sector have seen increased capitalization, efficiency and productivity, and a resultant increase in corporate concentration and fewer and larger farms. The owner operated family farm, however, continues to be the dominant form of farm enterprise in the province. In 1971, there were close to 95,000 farms in Ontario, by 1986 the number was just over 72,000.

Despite the economic problems facing the industry, many are still attracted to farming as an occupation. This is shown by the fact that although over 29,000 operators left farming between 1981 and 1986, over 20,000 entered the industry in this same period. However, off-farm employment, whether in agriculture or another industry, has become an economic necessity for many Ontario farm families. The agri-food industry is still a major contributor to the Ontario economy; although it is recognized that the farm-based economy needs to be supplemented with employment alternatives

to provide a choice of economic activities for farm families in rural areas.

The need for alternative economic activities and employment opportunities is a challenge facing other primary resource dependent communities in Ontario: especially forestry and mining communities. This is particularly the case for small communities in Northern Ontario, many of which are more remote and isolated from urban centres. Here the need for diversification and alternative employment opportunities to revitalize a community can be compounded by isolation and problems of remoteness.

It is not expected that primary resource based industries - whether agriculture, forestry or mining - will generate large demands for increased labour in the future, as these industries continue to become more technology dependent and more capital intensive. Future employment growth in rural and small town Ontario will mainly come from new industry. Since 1971, the major growth industry in rural areas, as in urban, has been services. While the labour force in agriculture decreased from 16% to 11% from 1971 to 1986, the labour force in service industries (in rural areas with a population of less than 5,000) grew from 18% to 25%.

Technology has enabled further integration of urban and rural areas. Television and radio are now accessible everywhere; telephone and FAX machines are more available; and, personal computer technology has permitted home offices in rural areas linked to offices in urban centres. The challenge now facing many rural communities is the ability to access and use high technology to advantage to minimize location and market size differences.

Land Use Changes

Though in many areas of Ontario, particularly in Southern Ontario, farming is still the most visible activity on the rural landscape, the farmland base of the province is decreasing. Data for 1981 show Ontario's farmland area as just under 15 million acres; by 1986 the corresponding figure fell below 14 million. Prime agricultural land comprises only 8% of Ontario's land base, and there is ongoing concern about the continuing loss of farmland to urban expansion and other competing land uses.

Resolution of land use issues are as complex as the human and cultural issues

in rural areas. Strong public concern for the environment is now emerging as a key focus in land use planning with implications for the farm community, for the preservation of wildlife and natural habitat, and for recreational, industrial, residential and other uses of rural land. Environmental considerations are destined to play a major role in future rural resource management and will help shape the future landscape of rural Ontario.

1. Statistics Canada's definition of rural comprises all territory lying outside of urban areas; those areas with a population of less than 1,000 and a population density below 400 per square kilometre.
2. The dependent population is defined as the population not in the work force who are less than 15 years of age and over the age of 65.
3. The participation rate represents the labour force expressed as a percentage of the total population age 15 or more.
 - Data in this article was provided by Ray Bollman, Agriculture Division, Statistics Canada.

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