

*Developing Rural Economies*

Five of Minnesota's congressional districts center in the Twin Cities area, while three districts are left to cover the vast majority of the state's area. Rural Minnesotans, responsible for most of our exports, (chiefly soybeans, corn, and pork, [Ye}) are represented by less than half of the state representatives. Clearly, the larger congressional districts should be subdivided. However, constitutionally we cannot do this unless the change is representative of a shift in the population. We need more people living in rural areas to better represent rural Minnesotans by re-drawing the districts.

To get people to move into rural areas, we need jobs to support them once they arrive. Working in rural areas should be encouraged by focusing on developing jobs that center around our main exports and giving people attractive reasons to move into rural areas. Tax credits could be offered to farmers who live and work in rural areas for five years or more. In addition to this, the state could offer forgivable equipment loans to new farmers to ease the start-up cost of farming. Such loans could require that the equipment must be used a minimum of five years in active use on a farm. The state could offer grants to farmers or schools that research smarter farming. Increasing productivity increased economic wellbeing.

The *Northwest Minnesota Multi-County Housing and Redevelopment Authority* (NWMnHRA) offers forgivable and low-interest rate loans for first-time homeowners through the *First-Time Home Buyers Program* (Homeownership opportunities). This program is offered in Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, and Roseau counties. The state could match the offers made by the NWMnHRA, in the applicable counties, to increase the effect on the buyer without straining the program. Furthermore, adopting a similar program statewide would greatly benefit rural economies. This program would make it easier for people to live in the country, which would increase economic wellbeing in rural areas.

The *2008 Opportunity Maine Tax credit* allows students and young professionals to receive payment for school loans in exchange for living in Maine (Pesce). Minnesota could adopt a similar policy with the stipulation that participants live in rural areas. It could be further stipulated that participants need to have applicable degrees such as Ag. Science, or a trade certification of some kind. This would provide a larger labor force in rural areas which in turn will stimulate economic growth.

Growth in the economy is achieved by an increase in productivity. I believe the best way for the government to help the rural Minnesota economy is to ease farmers and homeowners into their jobs with low interest or forgivable loans and to attract young professionals to come and start blooming careers in Minnesota. This will help the economy, and with changes made to congressional districts to reflect the disparity of urban vs. rural issues, not only could we improve the economy, but we could better achieve the precept of "one person – one vote!"