Thank you for this invitation to speak on a topic that surely gives a demagogue the license he might dream of. Rural development is as broad in scope as life itself -- and even much more perennial. Virtually all you have discussed at these meetings and much more can be subsumed under "rural development." Dedicated individuals, committees, and commissions on rural development and related topics typically come up with Christmas lists of research needs that would stupefy the most doting parent. Similarly well-meaning people outside the research community can claim that virtually everything they do contributes to rural development, as well it may. So what's new? Unless we can find ways to sharpen our focus on rural development problems, the answer is likely to be a big fat zero.

I'll try to sketch some background, add some comments on the environment for relevant research, and highlight what I see as some emerging points of common interest that may be fruitful foci for rural development research. I do not answer the questions implied by the title but try to provide more of the framework needed to enable these answers to be found. I hope to provoke some productive debate.

joint task force report

We already have a basic reference for researchers in the field of rural development. This report by a joint task force of researchers from state agricultural experiment stations and the U.S. Department of Agriculture is entitled "A National Program of Research for Rural Development and Family Living." 1/ This Task Force, one of 32 looking into research needs, looked at these twin research goals (1) raise the level of living of rural people, and (2) improve community services and the environment. They further identified these six problems areas: (1) Improvement of economic opportunities for rural people, (2) causes of, and remedies for, poverty among rural


people, (3) improvement of rural community institutions and people, (4) housing needs of rural families, (5) the communication process in rural life, and (6) individual and family adjustment to change.

Other reports highlight the breathtaking scope of this work. Just one of these categories (causes of, and remedies for, poverty among rural people) was the full-time commitment of the President's Commission on Rural Poverty. As most of you know, this considerable and sustained effort resulted in a report with 146 recommendations and voluminous supplementary papers on many topics. Ample scope remains for followup.

President Nixon's Task Force on Rural Development recommended substantially increased Hatch Act funds for human resources and community development. They pointed out that only 1½ percent of these research funds presently go toward this work and a further 2 percent for studies on diet and nutrition.

The top priority research needs cited by this Task Force comprise a broad array of research and information on "how to make community institutions in rural areas more vigorous." Examples of research items cited are:

-- cost efficiencies through local government consolidations
-- financing local government services
-- equitable taxation in rural areas
-- low-cost housing for farm and rural areas
-- how people are motivated to work together to tackle projects and responsibilities in rural development and related problems of leadership development
-- how off-farm income of farm people is used; its effect on influencing people to stay in farming, or leave farming; and its influence on farm people's residential location, participation in community activities and leadership.
-- how can excess cropland be better used for all people


what makes one rural town a viable, growing center and another a moribund declining area

pollution control, weather modification and desalination of water and soils

assessing the economic and social effects on individuals and communities of establishing new industries in rural areas

The Questions at Issue

Such an abundance of recommendations and research categories can be mildly beneficial or even dangerous. By reassuring everyone that what he is doing is very important and should be pursued more vigorously, they tend to delay further convergence on relevant research. One implication is that so much is known and being done and the individual's contribution is so slight that he had best quit. We might term this the paralysis of discovery. A second extreme implication is that everything is interrelated to everything else and so complicated that we must take a time out for several years to figure it all out -- what Don Paarlberg has referred to as the "paralysis of analysis."/1/

The need emerges, then, to provide a more red-blooded hookup of research and action. The words may differ. Some say research on rural development must be more relevant. Others accuse researchers of writing papers to one another in a virtually closed system of self-adulation. Actually, researchers' contributions to understanding and facilitating development have been considerable. However, sharpened focus on this work would enable both greater recognition of these contributions and mobilization of further relevant research efforts.

A first need is to agree on the central questions at issue. Let me draw on comments in the press, comments of researchers, politicians, program managers and others and try to guess what some of these questions are. Where and how will Americans live in the decade ahead, and how can technology and resources best be harnessed to upgrade life in all communities for all people? How can the Nation be constituted of areas or communities that better enable all residents to contribute more to national growth and to have increasingly wider choices of how to live and work and how to spend their respective incomes to attain greater satisfaction? How can the best of town and country be melded into communities that evolve generally preferable ways of living and working? I am confident that we can all agree on the central importance of these questions, although you may wish to rephrase them, and add some more. You may also protest that these questions offer simply

a coward's way of avoiding practical problems by hiding under vacuous
generalities.

An Emerging National Set of Areas
as a Common Reference Framework

Before you press this point, let me suggest that these questions have been and always will be with us. Further, we shall always be seeking answers. Only recently however, has there been a suitable framework for seeking these answers. For the first time in 1971, as a result of state initiatives and the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-95, we have a virtually national system of generally multicounty state-delineated or endorsed districts for overall development and planning purposes (Fig. 1). Georgia has long since made such delineations, has established commissions for such areas and has gone a long way toward integrating plans for such districts into an overall State development plan that is expected to relate directly to changes in major state programs. Other States are similarly striving toward taking the initiative in trying to upgrade various substate areas.

From the Federal side, pragmatic evolution of these areas began with the work of the National Resources Planning Board of the Thirties.1/ The public works approach to area development has remained strong even through the Area Redevelopment Administration of the early 1960's and has climaxed in the Local Development Districts of Appalachia and the Economic Development Districts, over 100 of which have already been established or authorized under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. Federal-state cooperative efforts have resulted in several other series of generally multicounty areas or districts for fundamental development planning and programming purposes. The Department of Housing and Urban Development and its predecessor agencies have sponsored so-called "701" areas. The Department of Agriculture has sponsored Resource Conservation and Development Projects and has participated in providing area agents for community development and in other multicounty development efforts. Recent statutes provide for funding and other assistance for law enforcement, control and abatement of environmental pollution and other consolidated local development activities.

Various social science research staff and planners have made significant inputs, many of them indirect, into the delineation of most of these districts. Moreover, researchers have preached the virtues of an adequate resource base to enable provision of adequate services and facilities to citizens of various communities.

The emergence of this virtually national set of areas is evidence of the practical recognition of the need for joint planning and programming for

LEGEND:
- Counties not participating in districts.
   (Some non-participating townships in Connecticut and Massachusetts not shown.)
- Tentative
- "Option" counties in Oklahoma that may participate in different districts for different programs.
- Boundaries of sub-state districts as approved by the governor, legislature, or state planning agency. In Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire these follow township rather than county boundaries.
town and country -- and of the need to de-emphasize unproductive dichotomies such as rural vs. urban, farm vs. nonfarm and metropolitan vs. nonmetropolitan. It emphasizes the need to end what I call the sick game of curing rural development problems by definition. If a rural area is depressed, the cure is to urbanize it. That unhelpful and often irrelevant response comes from researchers as well as others all too often.

For a national set of areas quite similar to that in Figure 1, a further analysis by population density1 provides added perspective. A set of 512 such districts for all States except Alaska was classified according to population density and percent urban, according to the Census definition. The first of five such classes was the major metropolitan area. That includes areas with more than 500 people per square mile or more than 100 per square mile and at least 85 percent urban according to the Census definition. Second were the minor metropolitan areas which were the other areas with 100 to 500 people per square mile; third, the isolated urban with less than 100 per square mile and at least 50 percent urban by Census definitions; fourth, the dense rural with 50 to 100 per square mile and less than 50 percent urban, and fifth, the sparse rural with less than 50 per square mile. Applying this classification to a preliminary set of areas, it turns out that some four-fifths of all the areas in the U.S. are nonmetropolitan. Two-fifths are sparse rural, over one-tenth are dense rural, over one-fifth are isolated urban. Moreover, in examining population projections through to the year 2,000 I conclude that the overwhelming majority of these areas will probably be classified the same way then.

A regional breakdown of these various types of areas, as shown in Table 1, reveals significant regional differences in the distribution of types of areas. The sparse rural areas are the most numerous in all regions

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Bluestone (personal communication) has updated the classification in AER-183 and concluded that 14.8 percent of counties in the coterminous United States changed in urban orientation between 1960 and 1970. Counties increasing in urban orientation outnumbered counties decreasing, three to one. These changes, combined with relative stability of the classification for multicounty areas, add further incentive for research on "growth centers."
Table 1

Distribution of Five Types of Area by Region —
Coterminous U.S. and Hawaii 1/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Types of Area</th>
<th>Major Metro: More than 500 per sq. ml. or more than 100 per sq. mile</th>
<th>Minor Metro: 100-500 per sq. mile</th>
<th>Isolated: 0-85% urban</th>
<th>Dense: 50-100 per sq. mile</th>
<th>Urban: 100 per sq. mile</th>
<th>Rural: Less than 50 per sq. mile</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Plains</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>512</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1/ Alaska is considered separately in 6 districts.
4/ Minn., Wisc., Mich., Iowa, Mo., Ill., Ind., Ohio.
except the Northeast. Moreover, in the Great Plains and the West, there are no densely settled rural areas at all and in these two regions plus the Northwest many sparsely settled areas adjoin one another. These sparsely settled areas have generally had little public support for development planning and related analysis of development instruments. By and large, they are not the poorest areas in the Nation. They include the bulk of the commercial farmland and their residents have enjoyed per capita incomes and levels of educational attainment that exceed those of the densely settled rural areas.

While the chances that areas will change in type by the year 2,000 are far from strong, the possibility of a few such changes looks most promising in the Southeast. Apart from some remarkable population turnarounds reported in the 1970 Census, the Southeast has the advantage of a relatively even distribution of types of areas -- 30 minor metropolitan areas, 16 isolated urban, 46 densely settled urban and 50 sparsely settled urban -- and the further advantage that these areas seem to be relatively interspersed. And, of course, continued buildup of population in parts of the West Coast may change the type of a few areas there also.

Area Development

What is area development? There is less explicit agreement on this than on the acceptance of an emerging national set of areas. Nonetheless, there is emerging recognition that area development is a continuing process that involves overall upgrading of economic and related social opportunities for all actual and potential residents of an area. This upgrading occurs when visible, generally measurable progress is made toward attainment of a broad set of area development goals, articulated and generally agreed upon by area citizens with adequate staff support.

Whether an area is now generally depressed or generally prosperous and irrespective of residents' particular persuasions of party politics and industrial and ethnic mixes, certain minimum goals it has in common with all other areas can be listed. These are a minimum guaranteed package for all citizens as follows:

1. Opportunity to increase money income, with commensurate participation in the labor force, and access to a socially acceptable guaranteed minimum income or its equivalent.

2. Opportunity for both children and adults to earn a generally acceptable high school diploma.

3. Access to adequate medical, dental and other health services -- at least those normally provided by general practitioners in medicine and dentistry but including those of pediatricians, obstetricians and gynecologists, orthopedic surgeons, orthodontists, X-ray and normal supporting laboratory diagnostic and treatment services plus pharmaceutical services.
4. Access to a clean, safe, reliable water supply and related sewerage and waste disposal, preferably on a community basis, and adequate protection from other hazards of environmental pollution.

5. Adequate communication, at least a telephone or two-way radio.

6. Adequate housing, including running water, at least one bathroom and a normally equipped kitchen and power (through individual or community supply) for heating, lighting and cooling.

7. Minimal nutrition and clothing or the income required to provide them.

8. Adequate access, by normal mode under normal travel conditions, to supplementary community facilities and services that are widely accepted as part of modern living, such as restaurants and retail stores customarily providing a wide range of goods and services.


10. Adequate access to outdoor recreation facilities and services -- at least sufficient to ensure all children can learn to swim.

11. Adequate public safety services and facilities, including police, fire, ambulance and disaster services such that all residents enjoy security of person and property.

12. Adequate access to public information, including both the press and magazines, and continuing objective information on local economic and social conditions, employment and training opportunities and needs in relation to national conditions and those in other adjoining areas and other like areas.

13. Adequate freedom and opportunity to worship and to participate in normal democratic processes of government, including voluntary organizations.

14. Opportunity to live in a community and in a work environment that is increasingly satisfying from an esthetic viewpoint, including the development or preservation of an area identity that involves some unique positive attributes.
What Makes An Area Develop?

Two recent literature surveys 1/ and much supplementary literature attest to the lack of an overall theory of the development of local areas of the kind I have spoken about. These surveys note the continuing dearth of behavioral hypotheses and related research. They further suggest that a local economy is most aptly portrayed as a general equilibrium system inherently more complex in its internal functions and relations to other economic and political entities than is the national economy. I see no reason to contest these findings. If they are accepted, what are the implications for research?

Minimal Implications for Research Management and Support

So far as the research community undertakes studies of particular areas and projects, it would seem highly desirable to select area boundaries that conform to officially delineated areas. This does not mean that studies would be made only for such areas and none other. It may mean that parallel studies would be made for partially co-extensive areas, perhaps one less than the officially delineated boundaries or one overlapping these boundaries.

When studies involve an assessment of costs and benefits or when a particular, limited number of variables is of central concern to a researcher, it might be well to broaden the listing of costs and benefits to be considered and extend the list of interrelationships investigated.

These steps, together with a continuous broadening and updating of data directly comparable among areas, should provide a more adequate basis for dialogue between citizen leaders, planners and others concerned with a particular area or type of area and researchers who have studied some aspects of the development of that area. Various researchers should then have a more adequate basis for taking account of the findings of their colleagues so that all studies might be modified toward greater relevance. Researchers would also have an evolving richer heuristic vantage point from which to develop needed theories for the practical guidance of area development.

Area Delineation

Given the limited knowledge of what makes an area develop and a well-nigh complete set of politically endorsed local areas, further research with the


central objective of area delineation appears to warrant a very low priority, except as it relates to those few states that still lack such delineations. Compelling reasons for modifying present area boundaries, which are of course as arbitrary as state and national boundaries, are likely to emerge as part of the implications of seminal studies on what makes presently delineated areas or types of areas develop. Further ritualistic massaging of commuting patterns in relation to various sizes of cities, mapping of shopping habits and laborious inventorying of multitudinous multijurisdictional local administrative configurations for this and that offer little obvious help to those concerned with rural or area development. Moreover, others can well undertake these activities, if they are needed.

For the most part, acceptance of these state-delineated multicounty areas poses no serious conceptual problem for the economist. The most notable exceptions arise at state boundaries where commonality of economic and other social interests would dictate the need to analyze some multi-county areas comprised of parts of two or more states. These same economic considerations would likely dictate the need to analyze such a local economy in the context of a national set of similarly delineated local economies. Rand-McNally already has such a set. So does the Economic Research Service (Figure 2). And there may well be a few more. Thus, even if the needs of economic analysis sometimes dictate the use of an alternative delineation to some existing state delineations, in order to support better the activities in state-delineated areas, such sets are already developed that could be expected to meet most program and research needs. The major remaining exception may be a need for more explicit joint analysis of local economies adjoining the Canadian and Mexican borders.

Growth Centers

One of the potentially most productive orientations for research on the area development component of rural development is the role of a growth center and implications for fruitful development strategies and programs. "Growth centers" or "growth areas" of one form or another are written into Federal legislation. They have already been designated under some programs, most notably the development district program of the Economic Development Administration. And they have evoked much interest and controversy from both citizen leaders and program administrators as well as various professionals, including the academic community.

One administrator has aptly summed up the extent of understanding and importance of growth centers with the comment that he didn't know what a growth center was, but he was sure there was one in every Congressional District. At the other extreme, men such as Niles Hansen and Brian Berry have made a significant contribution by overadvocacy and oversimplification of the concept to the point of provocation. Hansen, in particular, advocates a central role for "intermediate-sized cities" in the development of rural areas. Hansen suggests that public programs should encourage the growth of cities of 250,000 to 750,000. He believes these programs should assist
BASIC ECONOMIC RESEARCH AREAS OF THE UNITED STATES

Figure 2
people in surrounding areas to relate to these "growth centers" by public subsidies for education and training assistance -- even relocation assistance -- geared to employment opportunities in these cities.

Following Brian Berry and other urban fundamentalists who quote Berry, Hansen states that in the United States in 1960 "all but 5 percent of the country's population resides within the daily commuting fields of metropolitan centers." Berry's estimates grossly exaggerate the effective radius of socioeconomic influence of metropolitan areas on their respective hinterlands. The commuting fields cited comprise the greatest distance from which anyone commuted to the metropolitan area in question in one particular week as reported by the Bureau of the Census. Moreover, if being within commuting range of a metropolitan area is such an obviously effective device for upgrading depressed areas, why the fuss about ghettos?

On the other hand, while many rural areas continued to lose population in the sixties, part of the Ozarks Region provides an outstanding exception not adequately explained by accessibility to metropolitan areas. A 25-county area in northern and western Arkansas had only two counties that gained population during the 1950's and the area experienced an overall population decline of 9 percent. By contrast, from 1960 to 1970, only two counties lost population and the area had a gain of 19 percent. This notable population reversal, which is of course only suggestive of successful development, extends westward into the Arkansas Valley counties of Oklahoma and northward to some extent into the Missouri Ozarks. Other areas associated with quite small cities have shown economic and population gains in the last decade, as Calvin Beale has pointed out.

Even if Hansen had shown the preeminence of cities of 250,000 to 750,000 as "growth centers," that in itself does not establish the case for further direct public subsidies to these cities. Perhaps the very desirability of these places, if it could be established, hinges on permitting them to grow at rates and in ways that have previously been compatible with national markets for goods and services and key inputs such as labor.

I prefer to hypothesize that cities and towns of various sizes, as well as other places provide employment and living opportunities. Yet whether and when such places are generally beneficial to an area remains to be established. In some instances, it is conceivable that a city has advanced economically and otherwise more at the expense of its hinterland than to its benefit. Firms may encourage employees to live outside the town or county where the business is located so that others bear the burden of financing schools, roads, sewerage and other facilities and services. They may hire workers for limited training periods and expect rapid turnover. They may pollute air and water to the detriment of neighboring communities. While they may provide employment, this employment may offer limited potential for advancement and comprise mainly jobs for women.


As more of these questions emerge, the need to define the appropriate roles of growth centers in area development becomes more insistent. While increased job opportunities, especially nonfarm job slots in all areas are a generally felt need, it is not clear that growth centers should be identified primarily as geographic sites of most local nonfarm jobs. The need for local job creation is itself a short-term symptom of a longer-term need for all areas to be capable of largely self-regenerating adjustments to enable both their product and factor markets to be continually and adequately linked to national markets. And the paramount needed linkage appears to be in the market for skilled, professional, higher-income labor. The continuing ability of each area to attract its needed share of such labor is likely to depend at least as much on the creation and maintenance of an adequate base of residiency services and facilities as on direct job creation.

The enabling population base to meet such residiency needs is not too demanding. Some 15,000 residents with adequate minimum per capita incomes could, on the average, be expected to include about 1,000 high school students and enable two reasonably good high schools each with an enrollment of some 500. This is not too far out of line with J. B. Conant's minimum standard of a graduating class of 100 for an adequate high school.1/ Other studies2/ suggest that a population base of some 15,000 to 30,000 (not necessarily in the one town but merely in an area with reasonable overall access to various facilities) could provide a congenial and continually improving environment needed as the nucleus for area development.

Other Approaches

I cannot explore the subject of growth centers any further today. The topic has the double blessing of being very interesting and challenging from a research viewpoint and highly relevant from an operational viewpoint. There are other such topics even within area development that warrant attention. Besides area development, local or community development,


2/ See, for example:


regional or multi-state development and global aspects at national and international levels all impinge significantly on rural development. The relative efficacy of Federal minimum income payments or child sustenance allowances, irrespective of residence, for example, warrants concentrated attention. Anticipatory research on the possible effects of emerging new technologies on patterns of living and working can scarcely be neglected. A series of conferences would be needed even to explore these possibilities.

Conclusion

To conclude, the potential for research on rural development to contribute to a better life for this and succeeding generations appears to be truly magnificent. The needs for realizing this potential are still being identified and are far from met. First is the need for a suitable research environment. The emerging national set of state delineated areas provides the beginning of a needed reference framework to enable sharper focus of research and the evolution of continuing needed working interrelationships among researchers and between researchers and others on significant public questions and issues. Other such frameworks are needed. Beyond that, an adequate commitment to rural development has yet to be made at all levels. Researchers may decry the trivial level of public funding and, indeed, public reports have adequately documented this dearth of public support. Yet it is also worth asking whether improved focus on and commitment to domestic development research would contribute more to rural development even within present funding constraints.