

- **Sustainable communities**

Greater awareness of the long-term impacts of human activity on the environment is translating into demand for a greater understanding of how rural communities impact the environment, and how to reduce or mitigate adverse environmental impacts through reduced use of non-renewable resources as well as restoration and development of natural systems. For example, water quality and contamination issues affect many rural communities in the North Central region. Communities are also under stress of population decline; involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including those who do not usually participate in decision-making processes, is important to reverse long term decline and assure sustainability into the future. Further, in the face of demographic pressures, rural leaders must also develop sustainable local government fiscal systems. In this context, maintaining public infrastructure and viable housing are also a challenge. Rural areas may also be interested in developing their share of green jobs and otherwise reinventing their manufacturing base as a way of sustaining the local economy.