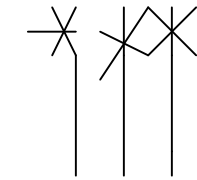


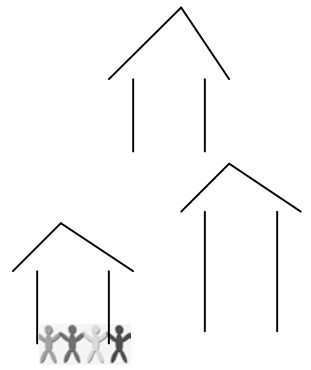
Platform

for

Rural Communities



ALTERNATIVE ENERGY



HOUSING

COMMUNITY CENTER
CULTURAL CENTER



SMALL BUSINESSES
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

RADIO-TV STATION
NEWSPAPER



Introduction

The “Platform for Rural Communities” is a series of statements on issues developed by a network of rural community builders and activists who are part of the Rural Development Leadership Network.

RDLN, founded in 1983, is a national, multicultural social change organization that supports community-based development through hands-on projects, education, leadership development, and networking.

Dialogue is an ongoing action in our Network. The process of drafting the Platform has been inclusive and methodical – taking place at our Rural Development Institutes at the University of California, Davis; at our National Network Assemblies in rural areas, at other gatherings and project events, on conference calls, and during formal and informal visits.

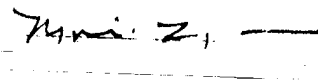
During our last two Assemblies, Network members recommended stronger participation in the civic arena, and at our Rural Leadership Summit last year, the project of reviewing a range of issues emerged as a way of mobilizing our Network, honing our thinking, developing a process to share with other community people at home, holding political candidates and office holders accountable, articulating our objectives and helping to realize our vision.

After statements were drafted on the series of issues, the drafts were circulated back to those involved and to others concerned with the same issues so that their comments could be incorporated into revised versions of the text.

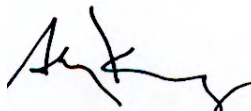
The document is still a draft and will continue to be a work-in-progress. The individual statements that compose the Platform have been posted on our website on our new online RDLN Forum, where all Network members have the opportunity for further comment, input, and dialogue. Others do not have access to the Forum, but that may change, and we look forward to a wide range of people continuing to develop the statements, which can be particularly useful during this election year. We hope that you will be among them. Please write or call to give us your thoughts.

The cover of our “Platform for Rural Communities” portrays some positive elements of a healthy community. But other important components are missing. Where is “Water?” Where are the words “Natural Resources” represented by the trees in the upper left? Where are the intangible elements that make for a good life? How do we know from looking at the cover who has access to the resources and institutions depicted? Who owns them? Who controls them? Who works in them? How do we know what the atmosphere is -- whether talent is nurtured, justice supported, the environment respected, or newcomers welcomed? How do we know if planning, creativity, development and decision-making come from the top down or are community-based?

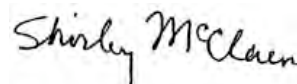
While the pictures on our cover may not answer these questions, we hope that our Platform itself will help to do so.



Moises Loza
Board Chairman



Starry Krueger
President



Shirley McClain
Issues Coordinator

PLATFORM FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES



Land-Based Communities

We support the right of people to have land upon which to build their lives, their cultures, and their economies. In particular, we support the efforts of groups who have historically been removed from their land base and natural resources to acquire and retain land.

Similarly, we support efforts by historically exploited groups to receive reparation compensation for discriminatory and/or unjust removal from their land and natural resources. Examples include the right of historically recognized tribes to retain or regain recognition, the law suit of Cobell v. Kempthorne to redress government misuse of Native American trust accounts, efforts by Hispanics to regain land grant lands and just awards for minority farmers who have been discriminated against by agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We support access to land for those who may never have had it and full access to title and services for those living in colonias, for example.

Natural Resources

Natural resources tend to be located in rural areas. The extraction of natural resources by outside owners who use workers as disposable commodities and leave communities scarred physically, economically, and emotionally is deplorable. It exemplifies the ongoing abuse of nature and people that characterizes uncontrolled capitalism.

We need to use more renewable energy sources such as wind, and solar power and reduce our reliance on coal burning power plants and on oil. We urge automobile makers to develop cars that go farther on less oil and gasoline.

We urge the government to fund research to help make alternative energy affordable.

Use of water should be regulated, especially in drought-prone areas, and public education campaigns should be initiated teaching us how to conserve and keep safe this precious resource.

Agriculture

Because of the legacy of slavery and discrimination, farm workers, fisher workers, forest workers, women and ethnic minorities continue to face barriers in obtaining equitable treatment from state and federal agricultural institutions. Some of the issues include: discrimination within USDA in the implementation of programs, dissemination of competitive grants, and the election process for Farm Service Agency Committees; lack of access to credit and capital; loopholes in commodity programs that allow certain farmers to abuse them and obtain unfair subsidies; corporate conglomeration and concentration; unfair trade agreements; and lack of regulations covering farm workers.

We support and encourage the following policies and regulatory recommendations:

- Increase minority and limited resource producers' access to credit, capital and technical assistance.
- Enforce payment limits and close loopholes in commodity payment legislation (Change the "three entity rule")
- Enforce anti-trust laws, which help protect consumers against unfair pricing of products and services.
- Establish a council on farm workers in the Office of Civil Rights.
- Increase support for local farmer markets.
- Encourage school systems to educate urban and rural youth about farming and agriculture options.
- Support the Diversity Initiative Proposed by the Farm and Food Policy Initiative, which seeks balance in United States food policy.
- Increase pesticide health and safety standards and related training for farm workers and farm owners.
- Support H.R. 558 (the African American Farmers Benefits Relief Act of 2007) because it will provide a second chance for persons who filed claims in the Pigford Case (the Black Farmers Class Action Lawsuit) whose claims were never heard and adjudicated and will enable others to get their petitions and claims heard, including the approximately 71,000 people who were denied hearings and the thousands of others who never received adequate notice of the case.
-

Environment

Our environment is the only one we have. We must begin to make wise decisions today if we want future generations to inherit a world of clean air, pure water, and rich soil. To this end, we encourage our governments adopt the following laws and regulatory actions.

The United States should sign the International Kyoto Agreement.

States should stop the practice of placing toxic waste dumps in people of color and low-wealth communities.

Governments should stop the proliferation of corporate controlled chicken, and hog farms that contaminate surrounding communities' ground water.

Governments should stop logging, strip mining and forestry practices that damage pristine waters and land.

States and other governmental agencies should implement transportation choices such as light rail, buses, bikes and safe walking places to help reduce air and water pollution, save energy, reduce traffic, and make our communities more livable.

We should stop the destruction of our wetlands and rainforests for they help filter our water and protect our homes by storing floodwaters.

We should reduce emission from vehicles and make cars more energy efficient, and manufacture more energy efficient appliances.

We should increase funds for more research for alternative energy such as wind and solar.

The government should enforce pesticide laws.

Food Security

We encourage the development of local food systems to ensure that all areas have a degree of food self-sufficiency. We support diversified family farms that help protect the land and local people.

The federal food programs, WIC, Food Stamps, School Breakfast, School Lunch, and Summer Food programs, which are on the front line against hunger in America, are not fully utilized because of barriers. Therefore, we support the expansion of access, the simplification and streamlining of regulations and procedures, and an increase in the

benefits these programs provide. We further support the renaming of the Food Stamp Program so as to reflect the reality of what the program represents today.

We support efforts to make our food safe by supporting the Country of Origin labeling on all meats and fresh produce.

We support efforts to promote community gardens to contribute to the availability of fresh produce and the inclusion of such food in meals for local consumption.

Trade

We believe that all trade agreements should be fair and should benefit America's economy and workers. These agreements should contain provisions that prohibit wage and other labor abuses, especially in regard to children. Any trade agreements should contain enforceable provisions to protect the environment. We support fair trade that supports the internal economies of the countries involved.

Existing free trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA should be reformed by Congress. The ability of the President to fast-track trade agreements should be abolished.

Disaster Preparedness

We support institutions, programs, and practices that help prepare citizens for disasters especially in rural and remote areas.

We encourage and support the governmental funding of community-based organizations for disaster planning, rescue, and recovery efforts because they are at the forefront and know their communities best. We encourage large organizations like the American Red Cross to distribute funds to local community-based organizations during times of disasters.

Energy

We support the development of alternative energy and reduction of our dependence on oil. With this in mind, we propose the following: maintain the protected status of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northern Alaska, which contains substantial supplies of oil and gas.

We support federal government funding to research solar power, wind power, wave power, and other alternative energy sources. Businesses should increase the production of renewable biofuels, which naturally have lower emissions.

United States should sign the Kyoto Agreement.

Coal is a major source of creating energy in America. EPA needs to set stricter standards on mining practices to prevent pollution of the air and of surface and underground water; support ongoing efforts toward conservation by using more energy efficient appliances and vehicles; ask Americans to voluntarily restrict their use of energy and provide tax credits to individual households that show a substantial reduction in their energy usage.

Human Rights

We believe in the inherent value and dignity of all human beings and their right to be protected by law. We support policies that help those who have been oppressed, including people of diverse cultural backgrounds. We urge the United States to sign on to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), etc.

Health

We believe that health care is a human right. We encourage states and the federal government to make this right a reality.

We support funding for universal health care insurance.

We support the removal of the profit motive from the healthcare delivery system.

We support the strengthening of existing local health care institutions in rural areas and the availability of top quality care within a reasonable distance.

We support preventive care, including making screenings like mammograms, bone density testing, blood pressure testing, and diabetes testing widely available. Examples of other preventive measures include possible Department of Health funding for rural mobile snack kitchens that can help teach families healthier ways to prepare foods and funding by the health industry to community-based organizations to encourage regular exercise.

We encourage promotion of availability of locally grown food, and community education that supports appropriate diet and exercise.

We encourage funders to give direct support for health prevention to community-based organizations, rather supporting health care institutions and universities for these activities because of such institutions' difficulty in crossing cultural and class lines to reach community members.

We encourage incentives to health care professionals to locate in rural areas, including forgiveness of student loans.

We also encourage the strengthening of educational systems that lead to the full training of community people as health care professionals.

Mental health support should be included in health care benefits, as should treatment for substance abuse.

Regarding violence against women, we support more education on this topic, the establishment of standardized policies and protocols for sexual assault victims within emergency rooms, and the provision of more funding for safe houses in rural areas.

Cultural health practices and dietary rules should be respected and incorporated into health treatment. Health workers should reflect the culture and language of the people being served to the extent possible.

Education

We believe that all rural students should have access to high-quality public education from early childhood through college and graduate school. Disparities in regard to race and ethnicity must be eliminated. We support culturally appropriate, learner-centered and community-focused curriculums.

Personnel in the education system should reflect the culture of their students. Teachers should be well qualified in their subject areas and should receive cultural sensitivity training in cases where they do not reflect the culture of their students.

Obtaining high quality teachers will require an increase in teachers' pay, better health benefits, and better retirement benefits. Tax relief and/or student loan forgiveness should be provided for teachers in high need areas. Lower prescription drug costs should be provided for current and retired teachers.

We support making schools more parent and family friendly, reducing student-teacher ratios, equipping all students with home computers, and ensuring safety and order in schools in order to increase quality of education.

More adult literacy programs are needed, as are more alternative education programs, including practical education in areas like forestry, carpentry, brick masonry, and landscaping etc. We can help close the achievement gap by increasing Perkins funds to support secondary and technical education programs and securing full funding for rural education programs.

We should keep local schools open and reverse the practice of consolidating schools. If schools are declared unusable and cannot be returned to the system, the buildings should

be made available at a nominal cost to community groups for youth activities, business incubation, and other development purposes.

Housing

We believe that safe, decent, affordable housing should be available to everyone, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, or gender. People should have the opportunity to reside in neighborhoods and communities of their choice. Resources from all levels of government -- federal, state and local -- should be deployed to provide needed housing and to make communities and housing safe and healthy. Restrictions that discriminate or limit families' housing choices, ownership or rental, should be abolished. Rural areas with their unique and varied housing needs must be respected and people should have a say in the development of housing that they will occupy. Predatory lending and other abusive practices must be stopped and laws must be enacted that protect families from such abuses.

Immigration

Immigration over the years has helped make America a diverse and great nation. Recent efforts to change our laws regarding non-citizens in this country have created much controversy.

We offer the following principles to help guide immigration policies and practices: Everyone needs to be recognized and treated as a human being. We oppose attracting people here for jobs and then denying them humane treatment. Both legal and illegal immigrants need protection from labor and wage abuses. We support making citizenship available to those who have already lived and worked here for many years. Anyone born into a family living in the U.S. should have citizenship. We should continue bilingual education in schools. We should secure our borders by using more border personnel and more technology, and we should remove incentives for illegal entry. The best way to do this is to discontinue policies that encourage migration from the home country by undercutting the local economy, such as the current free trade agreements.

Media

We support diversity and decentralization of media and provision of funds to startup community-based and alternative media efforts, including television, radio, newspapers, and Internet broadband. We support increased funding for public broadcasting through PBS and NPR.

We believe it a dangerous practice to limit local low power radio stations that reach a few miles. These LPFM stations are noncommercial and reach a small broadcast area. We

urge FCC to award more licenses to groups like schools, churches, civil rights organizations.

We urge media to include information, images, and opinions that reflect the diversity of the country. The media's role should be to bring us closer to the truth, not to divert us from it.

Arts

We support more funding for arts education in public schools and in community-based nonprofit organizations, especially in rural and minority communities. We need to ensure that rural residents have access to all forms of art. The arts should be recognized as a key component of educational curriculums.

Criminal Justice and Corrections System

The high rate of incarceration of U.S. residents, with a high concentration of people of color and low wealth, is a sign of our failure in social and economic development and suggests discrimination in the criminal justice system. Social and economic development would cost the country less than incarceration in the long run. We support efforts to provide positive development opportunities, education, and employment and to discourage criminal activity among all people.

We support justice for victims of crime.

We oppose mandatory sentencing that imposes unduly harsh punishment, without consideration of specific circumstances in specific cases. We support Senate Bill S.3725, which proposes to reduce the disparity in punishment between crack and powder cocaine offenses. We recognize the overcrowded dockets of drug courts and support funding for to help alleviate the crowding of these courts.

More training, education and counseling inside prison are needed to help reduce recidivism. We support making Pell grants available again for higher education opportunities for prisoners. We support efforts to rehabilitate offenders and programs to provide support to those leaving prison and re-entering society through legislation like the Second Chance Act of 2007 (H.R. 1593).

We oppose use of prisoners for economic benefit, including the exploitation of prison labor.

Former prisoners should have full access to financial aid for education, welfare benefits, housing, food stamps, employment, etc., like any citizen. After prisoners have paid their debt to society, we support restoration of citizenship rights, including the right to vote.

We oppose the building and operation of prisons as an “economic development” strategy in rural areas, without consideration of social implications.

We oppose the deliberate placement of prisoners in sites far from their homes.

We oppose the exorbitantly high cost of telephone calls made by prisoners to their family and friends in many states, and we encourage the implementation of laws like New York’s Family Connection Bill (A.7231-D) in other states.

We oppose the death penalty. At minimum, we believe that there should be a moratorium on the death penalty because it does not affect all races equitably.

Taxes

We support a tax system that is fair and adequate to provide needed government services. We support tax incentives that encourage money to be generated and circulated in the local community; encourage the development of locally owned businesses and small scale agriculture; and encourage the employment of local people and the provision of services for people.

We do not support tax incentives that encourage businesses to leave U.S. rural communities or those that attract businesses into a rural area without guarantees of local employment and other benefits to local people.

We support continuation of the estate tax and the earned income tax credit and enactment of the proposed child tax credit. We also support an Earned Income Tax Credit at the state level.

Transportation

A key feature of rural areas is their distance from centers of power, capital, markets, media, and services, including health care. Most often there is no public transportation to cover the distances. Gas costs have become prohibitive. Adequate funds to pay for the development of local community-controlled transportation systems are needed to enable local people to get to doctors’ appointments, work sites, and other destinations, at least until these needs can be met in the local community.

We support immediate investment in our aging rural infrastructure such as levees, bridges, tunnels, and railroads, including our underground utilities infrastructures.

Rural America needs to be assured that roads, bridges and other surfaces are safe for driving. More state and federal funds are needed for inspections, inspectors, repairs and new structures.

The mobility needs of rural America's aging population needs to be taken into consideration. We encourage more telecommuting when possible, more investment in light rail, more use of car sharing, carpooling, and vanpooling, and biking. Streets and other areas must be made safe for walking.

Technology

We support programs to increase computer literacy and widespread distribution of computer equipment, computer training, and affordable broadband high speed Internet access to people in rural areas. This could be modeled after rural electrification in rural America during the 1940s and 1950s.

While there is still a digital divide and many rural people not only do not have computers or access to broadband, but cannot read and write, we question requirements by governments and charitable organizations that interactions take place on the Internet and that specific hardware and software be purchased for this purpose.

Wealth Development

All people in this country, including rural residents, should have a fair chance to achieve the American dream. These dreams should be made possible in part by removing barriers to obtaining credit and capital from banks and credit unions.

We support economic development strategies that build on local strengths and may incorporate local culture.

We support and promote the following practices: Banning banks, insurance companies, credit unions, mortgage companies and other financial institutions from redlining; monitoring banks for compliance with the Community Reinvestment Act; elimination of predatory lending practices; ending unfair credit card practices; providing more financial literacy by promoting Life Smart and Jump Start courses; avoidance of sub prime loans and mortgages, and increasing the number of banks and CDFI's, including community development credit unions, in low-wealth communities to serve the underserved and the unbanked.

In cases where people have been misled by unscrupulous lending practices, we advocate government intervention, such as requiring renegotiation of mortgages for those facing foreclosure because of sub prime loans.

Culture

We affirm the value of indigenous culture in rural areas and support the protection and preservation of expressions of culture, such as: practices and tradition, art and artifacts, language, sites that are sacred or historically significant, original teachings, and, history. We believe that the elements of culture should be controlled by those whose people created that culture. Funds should be made available to support the retention of culture, including the culture of American Indians, African-Americans, Hispanics/Latinos/ Chicanos, Asian Americans, immigrants, and worker groups.

The protection of culture extends to the cultural identity of human beings, in life and after death. For example, we support the enforcement of the Indian Child Welfare Act, which states that tribes are to be notified by states about removal of a child from parental custody so that there is a chance for the child to be raised in the tribal area, perhaps with relatives, rather than being absorbed into a state foster system, sometimes far away. We recommend the development of a national database to register such children, to help foster compliance with this proposition.

Similarly, human remains should be culturally cared for by families and/or tribes, rather than removed to museums by scientists or archeologists.

We urge the United States to sign the Indigenous Rights Treaty, affirming the Declaration of Indigenous Rights adopted by the United Nations.

We recognize the importance of treasured Elders, Wisdom Keepers, Medicine people, and children and grandchildren in helping us look seven generations ahead to judge the impact of our actions.

World Affairs

The United States of America is the richest country in the world. We have the mightiest military of all. Yet our international policies at times threaten our national security. We believe the following actions and policies would help us retain our leadership in the world and make us a more secure nation.

We believe the US should not play the role of dominant leader in the world but should work more multilaterally with allies on challenges like terrorism.

We believe that the US should work more closely with the United Nations and pay our dues to strengthen this international body.

We need to continue to support the International Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty.

We believe that USA should intervene unilaterally when genocide is occurring in places such as Darfur.

We support the timely and responsible deployment of American troops from Iraq through a strategy developed with other countries.

We encourage fulfillment of our commitment to provide a fair share of financial aid to developing countries.

We encourage the signing of the International Environmental Kyoto Agreement.

We support continuous aid for Africa.

We believe that our international trade policies should do no harm to America's workers or economy or to other nations' workers and economies.

Youth

We support programs to prevent juvenile delinquency and those that promote the well being of our young people.

For young people who live in rural America, we urge the establishment of programs and facilities to promote constructive use of their energies.

We support the organizing of Youth Commissions governed by youth in all schools.

In rural and remote areas, we support job creation, small business development, and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people.

We support efforts to develop and implement programs and activities to decrease the incidence of obesity among young people.

We support educational teenage pregnancy prevention programs.

We support diversion programs for youthful offenders who commit misdemeanors. For this population, we support the expunging of misdemeanor charges and convictions records. We oppose charging or sentencing youthful offenders as adults.

Policies should be put in place to govern the presence of military recruiters on rural public school campuses.

Women

Historically, women have been legally and financially subordinate to men. They continue to bear a heavy economic and social burden. Rural women because of their isolation have fewer opportunities and support networks than those in metropolitan and suburban areas. We are for the availability of full health care services and education for women, livable wages and equity in all areas, including pay, housing, and social security. We urge the United States to sign on to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). We need legislation that prevents trafficking in women in the USA.

Workers

Americans have a long history of struggle to obtain workers' rights, winning many victories over the last 110 years. We offer our support for the following:

We support all workers' (including farmworkers') right to collective bargaining and their right to form a union.

We support workers right to work in a safe and hazard-free workplace.

We support Living Wage initiatives and Minimum Wage Provisions that are indexed to inflation.

We support government enforcement of labor rights.

We urge our government to support labor rights in NAFTA and CAFTA countries.

We support increased protection of domestic workers, older workers, migrant workers, youth workers, and foreign workers.



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