Rural Pulse™ 2013
A research study commissioned by the Blandin Foundation

Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA
Since 1941, Blandin Foundation has been witness to real communities being built through hard work.

The hard work of leadership, of genuine inclusion, of reaching across boundaries and building lasting connections. That is the fertile soil from which we see resilient, vibrant communities growing.

How are rural Minnesotans experiencing their communities? What are their priorities? How are they weathering storms? We conduct the Rural Pulse periodically to find out.

The 2013 Rural Pulse is the largest and deepest poll we have ever undertaken. For the first time, we also tapped the opinions of urban residents and looked deeper for racial and cultural perspectives.

The bottom line? Minnesotans across the board remain very optimistic about their futures. We also share a belief that rural communities offer tremendous quality of life and that Minnesota is stronger when rural voices are heard and differences are appreciated. Threatening optimism, however, are very real concerns – still – about the economy.

Minnesota communities are not unlike the ecosystem of the state itself – a network of mutual interdependence in which even the smallest towns play their own vital role. Cities, suburbs and exurbs are linked to the communities, villages and townships of rural Minnesota in complex and profound ways.

Blandin Foundation stands with rural community leaders as they design and claim ambitious, hopeful futures that benefit all residents. Rural Pulse 2013 helps us to see where Minnesota still has some work to do.

- Dr. Kathleen Annette, Blandin Foundation president
What is Rural Pulse?

Rural Pulse™ is a research study that has been commissioned by the Blandin Foundation since 1998 to gain a real-time snapshot of the concerns, perceptions and priorities of rural Minnesota residents. In March 2013, more than a thousand Minnesotans residing in communities under 35,000 participated in the project. A separate study was again completed with community leaders across the state.

New to Rural Pulse this year, the Blandin Foundation partnered with the Minnesota Community Foundation to survey residents in urban Minnesota (cities with a population of more than 35,000). Also new for 2013, research was conducted within rural Minnesota racial and cultural groups to gain deeper insights about their perspectives.

Most Critical Community Issue
(Rural and Urban)

- **Attracting new, high-quality jobs**: 33%
- **Educational opportunities**: 18%
- **Maintaining and growing existing local businesses**: 12%
- **Healthcare opportunities**: 8%
- **Controlling crime**: 8%
- **Adequate housing**: 5%
- **< 3%**

Most rural Minnesotans believe the economy has remained unchanged since 2010. Concern about jobs continues in both rural and urban Minnesota.

- While 22% of rural residents feel their local economy has improved over the last year, more than half believe it has stayed the same and 20% say that it is worse. Urban Minnesota residents are nearly twice as likely to feel their local economy has seen improvement over the past year.

- The need for attracting new, high-quality jobs continues to be the top priority for rural Minnesotans – more than twice as important as education. Urban dwellers also consider attracting new, high-quality jobs and educational opportunities to be top priorities.

- Nearly three in five rural residents and 41% of their urban neighbors feel that there are inadequate living-wage job opportunities in their community.

- While a third of rural Minnesotans say that their income has increased over the past year, many households (21%) are still struggling with a decrease in wages.

- Across the board, rural residents with lower incomes appear to be hardest hit by the economy.
Rural Minnesotans feel their community is vibrant and believe in their ability to make a positive impact.

- Three in four rural Minnesotans believe their community is a vibrant place to live and work. An even greater percentage believes their community is strong, resilient and able to recover from difficult situations.
- 85% of rural Minnesotans feel that people like themselves are able to make an impact and improve local quality of life.
- Nearly seven in 10 rural Minnesotans feel quality of life will improve over the next five years, though urban Minnesotans (83%) have an even more positive outlook for improvement.
- Younger residents are the most likely to believe their community is vibrant and strong, and are most likely to feel they are able to make a personal contribution to their area.

While the majority of rural Minnesotans believe their community is able to work together effectively, there are still some concerns about their community’s ability to work across differences.

- One in five rural and urban residents do not feel their community works together cohesively.
- Three in four rural Minnesotans believe their community is able to work across differences.
- Rural Minnesotans with lower incomes lack confidence in their ability to affect change and impact their community as a whole.

Both rural and urban Minnesotans believe that the rural voice is not being heard.

- When asked if the needs and well being of rural Minnesota communities are as important to legislators and policymakers as those of metropolitan cities, 34% of rural Minnesotans and 26% of urban residents are of the opinion that they are not.
- 92% of rural Minnesotans and 87% of metro area residents say it is important to support political candidates who actively address rural issues.

While asked where they learn about local issues, rural Minnesotans say that they rely heavily on family, friends and neighbors to keep them updated about their local area. Other top information sources include the news media, information received from local schools and the Internet.

While Minnesota continues to diversify, many believe leadership roles are not always inclusive.

- About half of rural residents and two-thirds of those in urban areas say their community’s ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years.
- 18% of rural residents and 11% in urban areas do not feel their community is welcoming to people of varying backgrounds and perspectives.
- 37% of rural residents and 21% of urban residents feel that local community leadership is not comprised of people from different backgrounds.
Rural Minnesotans believe their community is addressing most local needs.

- 87% of rural residents believe that their community offers equal access to essential services.

- Transportation is a concern for 31% of rural Minnesotans, while adequate healthcare is seen as an issue for one in four.

- Availability of adequate cultural and arts opportunities is a concern for 36% of rural Minnesota residents, with only 59% feeling local needs are being met.

- Rural and urban residents give the lowest community ratings to attracting new businesses that provide ample living-wage jobs.

- When asked who they feel is responsible for ensuring that quality educational opportunities are available in their community, parents and the government are seen as most responsible by rural and urban residents alike.

Who is responsible for ensuring adequate, quality educational opportunities? (Rural and Urban)

- 59% Parents
- 56% Government
- 28% Local residents without school-age children
- 22% Businesses
- 3% Unsure

Migration Motivators

The economy may be driving some migration toward metro Minnesota, while quality of life is the force behind metro resident relocation to rural communities.

- 15% of rural Minnesotans and 17% urban residents have considered leaving their community for a different locale within the past two years.

- Of those who have considered a move, about half of rural residents say it would be to pursue job opportunities, while a desire for greater quality of life is the main factor for urban residents contemplating such a move.

- 13% of rural Minnesotans and one in five urban area residents say they do not expect to be living in their current area five years from now.
Community Leadership Perspectives

For 26 years, the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) and Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program (BRCLP) have been helping rural leaders develop and enhance the skills, knowledge and relationships they need to build and sustain healthy communities – in times of challenge and opportunity. As an important dimension of Rural Pulse 2013, program alumni – who represent community leaders across the state – were polled for their opinions on these important topics. A few observations include the following:

- Leaders are much less likely than rural residents at large to feel the community works together effectively to maintain and grow opportunities.
- Leadership Program alumni are more than twice as likely as rural Minnesotans at large (49% vs. 22%) to feel their community’s economy has improved compared to a year ago, but they also believe there are insufficient jobs that pay household-supporting wages.
- Leadership Program alumni are far more likely than other rural residents (44% vs. 18%) to feel their community is not a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and perspectives, and that leadership roles within their community are not filled by people from different backgrounds.
- More than four in five (77%) Leadership Program alumni feel quality of life will improve over the next five years, showing slightly higher confidence compared to rural residents at large (69%).

Blandin Foundation stands with rural Minnesota communities as they imagine and claim ambitious, vibrant futures. The Foundation offers charitable grants and scholarships, trains community leaders, brings together rural people around issues, and helps amplify the voices of rural Minnesota.

To read the full Rural Pulse™ 2013 report, visit www.ruralpulse.org or the Blandin Foundation website at www.blandinfoundation.org.

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