

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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This GIS map is based on aerial photographs of Franklin County in Vermont. Land-use and land-cover data was laid over the photograph, allowing a conservation board and Vermont legislators to understand farm size and proximity, and consequently to secure funding.

Definition

Rural land is characterized by agriculture and farming, low population density, low concentrations of structures, nonurban lifestyles and values, and large open or undeveloped areas.

Description

While the population of the world's cities continues to increase sharply and spread outward, a substantial number of people continue to live in rural settlements. This is especially so in developing countries, where weak infrastructure, few services, and toxic technologies contribute significantly to the degradation of living conditions. Decreasing employment opportunities in rural areas increases as the rate of rural-to-urban migration increases, causing employment opportunities in rural areas to decrease, further complicating the problem and creating yet another of unsustainability's vicious circles.

Another grave consequence of urban expansion is the transformation of forests, wildlands, and wetlands into agricultural land and human settlements, in effect (and often literally) paving over natural filtration and cleaning systems, decreasing biodiversity, and altering the ways and means of Earth's maintenance of itself.

Urban and rural areas are interdependent economically, socially, and environmentally, making their reconciliation and mutual welfare one of the most important themes in the sustainability movement.

Bibliography

The Habitat Agenda: Goals and Principles, Commitments, and Global Plan of Action. United Nations Conference of Human Settlements (Habitat II). Istanbul, Turkey, 3–14 June 1996.

Web sites

www.futureharvest.org

Future Harvest commissions research, promotes partnerships, and sponsors projects that bring the results of research to rural communities, farmers, and their families in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

www.attra.org

Introduction to permaculture—appropriate technology transfer for rural areas. Concepts and resources—alternative farming systems. Good primer and collection of links on permaculture (sustainable farming).

www.foundation.novartis.com/atoz/agriculture_links.htm

Online agricultural and rural development directories and resources from around the world.

indigo.ie/~word

W.O.R.D. Online. Wexford Organization for Rural Development.

Further reading

Anderson, Teresa, Alison Doig, Dai Rees, and Smail Khennas. 1999. *Rural Energy Services: A Handbook for Sustainable Energy Development. Intermediate Technology.* Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

Flora, Cornelia, ed. 2001. *Interactions Between Agroecosystems and Rural Communities.* Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press.

Shepard, Andrew. 1997. *Sustainable Rural Development.* New York: Palgrave Publications.