

STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

Working Together for Success...
And Getting Results

2007 UPDATE

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

ontario.ca/rural

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario government's Rural Plan reflects the aspirations of rural Ontarians.

The goal of the plan is to ensure rural Ontarians have the opportunity to succeed.

That's why the Ontario government is investing in our economy, education and health care. For Ontario to be at its best, we need every Ontarian to be at their best.

Every Ontarian has a stake in developing a strong economy, promoting better health and enabling success for students. These are shared aspirations. They contribute to strong communities. They cross rural and city boundaries.

The solutions, however, often need to be tailored to local circumstances. That's why the Ontario government has a specific plan — *The Rural Plan* — to build prosperous opportunities for rural Ontario — because rural Ontario is important.

Through a combination of province-wide programs, regional initiatives and community projects, rural Ontario has accomplishments to be proud of. This annual report — *The Rural Plan Update '07* — is a summary of what was done in 2006.

Ontario is competing in a global economy. We know that the best jobs go to the places that invest in their people. That's why Ontario took major steps to help students achieve better results at school and make more places available at colleges, universities and in apprenticeship programs.

Investing in people also means investing in health. In 2006, we supported innovative, community-based efforts to attract more health-care professionals to train, live and work in rural Ontario. We expanded our medical schools to train more Ontarians for careers in medicine and we initiated strategies that will help us certify more foreign-trained doctors.

We know that jobs and prosperity are essential to attracting people to rural Ontario and building healthy communities. We also know that our rural economy can be invigorated through diversification and innovation.



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Ontario's farming and food processing sector is significant to the Ontario economy. With sales over \$30 billion and 700,000 jobs, it's the second largest, goods-producing sector. The Ontario government supports this important sector with investments in food safety, market development, skills training and farm income stabilization.

Ontario expanded its manufacturing base in rural Ontario. Toyota and Linamar, for example, announced total investments of more than \$1.1 billion to build automotive facilities which will create 5,000 new jobs in rural areas. The Ontario government is a financial partner in these and other plans for rural economic diversification.

The foundation of rural prosperity is the infrastructure that supports communities and businesses. The Ontario government's five-year plan is investing \$3.3 billion in rural roads, bridges, schools and hospitals.

Since 2004, under the five-year \$900-million COMRIF program, the governments of Canada and Ontario have been working together with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and local partners to enhance and renew Ontario's public infrastructure. Our provincial commitment through COMRIF is not only to improve the quality of the environment and protect the health and safety of citizens, but also to ensure that the projects support long-term economic growth and build prosperous, sustainable rural communities.

We've also made a commitment to safer communities and taken steps to ensure this outcome is available to all Ontarians.

The Rural Plan sets out specific goals. It has a comprehensive vision for rural Ontario that sees communities that are strong, healthy and prosperous. It identifies strategies to reach our goals and it supports the principle that rural development is a partnership that brings people, government, business and educators together.

Throughout this update, the strength of teamwork and co-operation is evident. Municipal governments are partners in this progress. Rural communities are working hard and working together with us to create opportunities and fulfill aspirations. We have made progress and we will continue to do so together.



JOBS AND PROSPERITY

The Ontario government's economic strategy puts people first. The best jobs go to the places that invest in their people.

That starts with education and training. It means building roads from rural Ontario to the world's marketplaces. It's about attracting investment like the new Honda engine plant in Alliston and the Kellogg plant in Belleville. It is also about stimulating innovation such as new rural wind farms generating green power. Above all, it means working together. In 2006, the Ontario economy generated 95,000 new jobs.

Economic success is best pursued through a mixture of large and small, urban and rural projects. This government knows that it needs to contribute to a diverse collection of incentives and investments which will keep our economy strong. Since 2003, the Ontario government has been partnering with Ontarians to build home-grown successes and attract investment from abroad.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Successful rural economic development starts with a big-picture perspective. That's why the Ontario government works closely with communities to bring resources and market intelligence to local doorsteps. It's also an effective way of sharing experiences between communities which allows good ideas to be replicated.

Building rural Ontario's economy takes many avenues. We helped existing businesses expand. We helped innovative ideas become new businesses. We developed export markets and we attracted off-shore companies to set up shop in rural Ontario. In 2006, the food processing sector alone invested more than \$400 million in facilities throughout rural Ontario and bought over 70 per cent of the food grown by Ontario's farmers.

We've also helped many rural communities assess their strengths and opportunities so they can focus their economic development efforts where they have the greatest potential and biggest return. For some towns, that meant focusing efforts on waterfront revitalization or brownfield redevelopment . . . for others, it was taking advantage of their proximity to Highway 401. In the City of Stratford, it was turning a historic school next to the Festival Theatre into a tourist attraction.

GOAL:

- Local economies that are diversified, innovative and support well-paying, high quality jobs

STRATEGIES:

- Support community revitalization
- Promote economic development in Northern Ontario and Aboriginal communities
- Promote diversification and strengthen innovation capacity
- Encourage sustainable resource-based industries including economically viable agriculture, mining and forestry sectors
- Promote sustainable resource use and maximize the potential of tourism as an economic driver

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OUR PROGRESS:

- Thirty-nine economic development projects were initiated through the Rural Economic Development (RED) Program in 2006. These 39 projects received \$11.1 million in provincial support. Funding was provided in support of a broad range of economic development initiatives, such as strategic planning, community asset appraisal, tourism development and support for the creation of niche markets. Innovation in agriculture was also recognized and supported, through assistance to new and alternative on-farm technologies. Since 2004, the RED program has provided a total of \$28.2 million to help communities complete local projects.

When Ferrero Canada built its new chocolate and confectionary plant, the City of Brantford became host to the largest facility of its kind in North America. As Ferrero ramps up employment, it will need 1,200 specialized workers. The Ontario government's Rural Economic Development Program is contributing \$1.7 million to the recruitment and specialized training of Ontarians for these careers.

- Recognizing the economic development needs of rural Ontario, the government announced \$9.6 million in additional funding support for local projects in 2006.
- Agriculture and the green economy got a major boost when Canada's largest ethanol plant opened in Sarnia with support from the Ontario government.
- Forestry contributes \$9 billion to our exports and an equal amount to sales within Canada. In 2006, \$140 million in energy rebates were established by the province to help our forestry sector cut energy costs by 15 per cent over the next three years. We also reduced stumpage fees and helped build forest access roads with a three-year investment of \$220 million.
- Farmers' Markets bring Ontario-grown food to local consumers and they make shopping a fun experience the whole family can enjoy. The Ontario government is helping Farmers' Markets Ontario develop new markets and upgrade our existing ones through a three-year grant of \$270,000.
- Getting innovation to market can be a financing challenge even after the hard work of developing new technologies is done. With a \$2 million grant for job creation and skills training from the Rural Economic Development Program and a repayable loan of \$3 million under the Advanced Manufacturing Investment Strategy, Proctor and Gamble completed a \$30-million expansion of their Brockville facility, which secures 720 jobs, and they trained staff at their Belleville plant for new product lines.
- In support of our mining industry, we've invested \$10 million in the new Centre for Excellence in Mining Innovation at Laurentian University and we're investing \$15 million in a Far North geological mapping project.
- \$110 million has been added to the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program to provide transitional funding as we move to a better method of valuing inventory and continue the Self-Directed Risk Management Program for many producers of edible horticulture products in 2006 and 2007.

JOBS AND PROSPERITY

The Chippewas of Georgina Island have been working on a strategy to increase tourism. In 2006, their plan got a boost from an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of \$193,000 over three years, which will help them establish a management structure to develop, manage and market tourism initiatives.

Ingersoll challenged itself to give new life to a three-story downtown school that the school board no longer needed. Due to its location, the historic building became part of the town's downtown revitalization strategy. Under a new name, the Thames Centre, the former school became a multi-tenant facility which is home to the Fusion Youth Centre, day programs for the elderly and a strategic cluster of social service agencies who benefit from proximity to both age groups. The Fusion Centre is a teen's dream-come-true. It has a robotics class thanks to local auto maker CAMI (Suzuki), as well as a dining room where the chef teaches you how to cook. If you want help with your homework, that's on-site too. The town received more than \$547,000 in support through the Rural Economic Development Program to help fund the initiative.

- To help our farmers, we changed land transfer taxes. Now family farms can be transferred to our next generation of young farmers more easily.
- Today's young farmers are important to Ontario's future. That's why we have assistance like the Farm Business Assessment Service, which helps new farmers assess their business and financial plans.
- In eastern Ontario, the provincial government helped four communities develop a joint marketing and branding campaign to improve their appeal to visitors. The towns of Marmora and Lake, Stirling-Rawdon, Tweed and Centre Hastings have also begun rejuvenating their picturesque downtowns under the marketing campaign. The province contributed \$100,000 to the campaign.
- On-the-job experience and coaching is the goal of the First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program. The five-week program is funded by the Ontario government and the forestry industry. *"It opened my eyes to a whole new world of careers. I really look forward to coming back next year,"* said one of the program's 33 participants.

STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP:

Leadership builds the capacity of a community and cultivates a "roll-up-our-sleeves" approach to turn ideas into tangible results.

The Ontario government recognizes the contributions of local leadership. That's why we have invested in programs and facilities which help develop rural leadership.

We also support the development of local leaders by making tools available to get the job done. We're proud of the comprehensive way we've provided communities with programs and partnerships to support their aspirations and build their futures while building community pride and a unique sense of place.

GOAL:

- The capacity to develop vibrant local economies through strong leadership



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STRATEGIES:

- Provide tools and resources to build local community and economic development capacity
- Provide employment opportunities and leadership development to youth in rural areas
- Build the capacity of the voluntary sector
- Provide support to municipal staff and enhance the fiscal capacity of municipalities

OUR PROGRESS:

- Sharing ideas is fundamental to building strong communities. That's why Ontario's Rural Development Conference was an effective meeting of minds in 2006. The 3-day event in Collingwood brought innovative community development ideas to the doorsteps of our rural leaders. More than 320 people participated in the conference entitled "*Community Building through Innovation: Celebrating Today's Rural*" which was a partnership between the Ontario and Canadian governments and The Ontario Rural Council (TORC).
- In 2006, the Ontario government invested \$152,000 in the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) which is dedicated to developing rural leaders. Leaders benefit from training and mentoring. AALP brings rural leaders together to learn, explore and test their abilities.
- The First Impressions Community Exchange Program provided the vehicle to bring rural community leaders and volunteers together in 30 different towns and villages to take stock of the *first impression* their community makes on tourists, potential investors and people looking for the right place to put down roots. For many it's the spring board to community improvement initiatives.
- In partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, we established the Agricultural Management Institute – a \$5-million business management and skills development initiative for farm families, managers and advisors.
- The 2006 Outlook Conference brought the ideas of the world to the doorsteps of Ontario's leaders in the agriculture and food sector. The conference advanced innovative ideas for Ontario's economy.
- Small and rural communities benefited from 760 grants valued at \$50.2 million through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. These grants went to help small municipalities, libraries and not-for-profit community-based organizations.
- In 2006, the Business Retention and Expansion Program (BR+E) equipped rural community leaders with information about issues and challenges faced by their local businesses. Following training sessions, 29 rural communities initiated BR+E projects. The Greater Peterborough Area was one community which used the program to build a community-based team and develop a local economic strategy.

"See More than the Leaves" was the message shared across the province thanks to a tourism marketing campaign in the fall of 2006. The \$290,000 Great Fall Drives Campaign was a partnership between the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation and 33 Destination Marketing Organizations from across the province. Together with industry partners, the Destination Marketing Organizations developed a variety of day and overnight experiences from autumn paddling daytrips to outdoor art classes and overnight culinary harvest getaways.

Developing volunteers is the goal of a collaborative project in Eastern Ontario. The Health Centres in North Leeds and North Lanark are working together on a variety of volunteer recruitment and management strategies. They are receiving \$140,000 over three years from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to help them with this project.

JOBS AND PROSPERITY



The Premier's second annual Summit on Agri-Food brought leaders together to focus on the future of agriculture and food in Ontario. *"Our agri-food sector is a key contributor to our economy, a huge employer of people and exporter of goods, and an anchor in our smaller communities. It's important that we look beyond today to ensure that the sector — and the people in it — are positioned for long-term success,"* said Premier McGuinty.

- Ontario's libraries are community hubs for literacy. In 2006, the Ontario government invested \$15 million in the Library Family Literacy Initiative, the Ontario Digital Library and the Northern Ontario Public Library Technology Initiative. More than 550 rural, northern, francophone and First Nations libraries serving small communities benefited from the Library Family Literacy Initiative.
- Cultural resources benefit economic development and community building. In 2006, we continued holding municipal cultural planning forums across the province to showcase the possibilities and promote cultural planning.
- Summer employment provides a learning environment for youth. That's why the Rural Summer Jobs Service was offered again in 2006. The program helped more than 3,600 students, aged 14 to 24, gain valuable experience and work skills from community employers.
- Leaders lead by example. In 2006, the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence was created to showcase these examples and share new ideas across the industry. \$2.5 million is being provided for this program over five years.

Thunder Bay Testing and Engineering Ltd. believes in providing opportunities for employment and leadership development to youth. Thanks to their participation in the Northern Ontario Youth Internship and Co-op Program, Adam Rose was able to put his civil engineering degree into practice right after graduation and he was coached by experienced engineers at the company. Adam has done so well that he'll help to oversee the construction of a 55-kilometre road in 2007.

- The new Aboriginal Youth Work Exchange Program gives Aboriginal youth the opportunity to work with the Ministry of Natural Resources in their local communities. The program established 18 work assignments in Northern Ontario which will span a three-year period.
- In many cases, success starts with a strong community network which mentors our young people. In 2006, the Ontario government announced funding for renovations to 19 Indian Friendship Centres which assist young Aboriginal people in small cities and towns. These centres are venues to help build a strong community fabric through youth interaction and community engagement.
- Hands-on business training and mentoring — together with awards of up to \$3,000 — are hallmarks of the successful Summer Company Program which helped young entrepreneurs set up student-run businesses in 2006.

Two new green-fuel plants started construction in Ontario with support from the Ontario Ethanol Growth Fund. The new plants in Aylmer and Hensall are a boon to jobs, green energy, healthier living and agriculture. "The Ontario Ethanol Growth Fund is exactly what our industry needs," says Tom Cox, Chair of the Integrated Grain Processors Co-operative.

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- In 2006, rural communities received \$464 million in Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund and transitional support — more than half of the total funding province-wide. This funding will help rural municipalities address their local challenges and respond to policing and social program costs.
- The province invited its municipal partners to undertake a wide-ranging review of the provincial-municipal relationship. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the City of Toronto joined this initiative to improve the delivery and funding of services for Ontarians.

A SKILLED WORKFORCE:

The best jobs go to the places that invest in their people ... rural and urban.

A strong labour market in Ontario requires workers with the right skills to do their jobs well.

That starts by helping more teenagers earn their high school diplomas. It means restoring up-front grants to help young people further their education and training. It means recognizing the particular access challenges that exist for rural colleges and universities in Ontario. It means working with employers like the Eastern Ontario Manufacturing Consortium to connect job opportunities with people interested in obtaining apprenticeships and certification in skilled trades. It means helping Ontario's workforce to continuously upgrade and supporting community-based labour market partnership initiatives.

The Ontario government is doing all of these things and more to give Ontarians a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

GOAL:

- Skilled workers able to take advantage of diverse employment opportunities

STRATEGY:

→ Invest in skills development

OUR PROGRESS:

- Ontario's new integrated employment and training system, Employment Ontario, was launched on November 6, 2006. Employment Ontario will benefit rural communities by providing comprehensive training, apprenticeship and labour market services to more people in more places. Service locations will grow from approximately 470 at present to 1,200 in all regions of the province.

GE Canada and the Ontario government teamed up in 2006 to develop a Centre for Manufacturing Innovation in Cobourg that will turn polymer discoveries into marketable technology. The facility will keep the local workforce at the cutting edge of new science-based product development.

The government created training and pre-apprenticeship opportunities for communities in the James Bay Lowlands area to help people gain the skills they need to be successful in apprenticeships and to be eligible for work at the new De Beers Victor Diamond Mine.



JOBS AND PROSPERITY

Each year we celebrate success stories through the Apprenticeship Employer Recognition Awards. In 2006, three rural-based companies were honoured for their outstanding participation in the apprenticeship training system: Harvan Engineering of Woodstock; Benedict Electrical Contracting of Owen Sound; and 401 Trucksource of Maidstone.

- The new Youth Entrepreneurship Partnerships Initiative was launched in 2006 to help Ontario's youth build essential entrepreneurial skills. Three rural groups from central and northern Ontario obtained funding for projects.
- The Ontario government created close to 800 pre-apprenticeship spaces across Ontario in 2006 to help people qualify for skilled trades training. The career path for today's skilled trades often begins with pre-apprenticeship training which helps Ontarians develop technical and academic skills they need to succeed in an apprenticeship.
- The new Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit rewards employers who invest in their people. Employers can obtain tax credits of up to \$15,000 over three years if they hire and train an apprentice in designated skilled trades. In 2006, we held 45 information sessions in rural Ontario and attracted more than 750 business owners interested in apprenticeship opportunities.
- During 2006, the Ontario government worked with Navistar to bring the company's hi-tech, \$270-million Research & Development Centre to Chatham and retain more than 500 production jobs on-site as well. Overall, Ontario's auto strategy has leveraged almost \$7 billion in investment since 2003. Skills training is an important component of this investment.
- Six skills-training projects, valued at \$23.25 million, were initiated in 2006 through the Rural Economic Development Program with \$4.26 million in provincial support.
- The communities of Simcoe, Brantford and Cayuga launched an ambitious workforce development strategy for the food processing industry in their region in 2006. With financial assistance from the Rural Economic Development Program, business, educators and community leaders are developing a forward-looking plan to develop and attract the skills needed to advance local industry.

The world is a stage and leaders in Stratford know that they are investing in their stage's future and in their arts and culture community when they train directors, designers and artisans. In 2006, Stratford's efforts were supported with a new investment of \$106,000 from the Sector Initiative Fund, to begin the process of establishing apprenticeship programming for theatre workers. "This program provides individuals who are young in their careers with a chance to learn alongside the Festival's accomplished and talented artists," says Antoni Cimolino, General Director of the Stratford Festival of Canada. The Stratford Festival has used this funding to develop and pilot five professional development programs.

MODERNIZED INFRASTRUCTURE:

Infrastructure is critical to every Ontarian's health and prosperity. Safe roads, bridges, and water are foundations for every walk of life and business that we want to encourage in our communities. Modern hospitals and schools are an investment in everyone's future.

Improving access to affordable housing is part of building the social capacity of our communities.

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In partnership with local municipalities and the federal government, we launched an ambitious program in 2004 to upgrade rural infrastructure with the \$900-million Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF). In the spring of 2006, the commitment continued with concrete examples throughout rural Ontario.

Recreation and cultural facilities have also been improved in rural Ontario to add to our quality of life and help rural communities attract new residents and tourists alike.

Our rural heritage is often reflected in the historic buildings which grace our streetscapes. In 2006, we continued to work alongside citizens committed to preserving our rural heritage.

Taking care of the environment is also part of the infrastructure strategy in Ontario. Green infrastructure investments such as wastewater treatment, alternative power facilities and recreational trails say a lot about the values of Ontarians.

GOAL:

- Up-to-date and well-maintained infrastructure

STRATEGIES:

- Improve water quality and upgrade sewage treatment and waste management infrastructure
- Improve local roads and bridges
- Improve northern highways
- Provide municipalities with innovative financing tools to help fund infrastructure projects
- Repair and improve arts, culture, sports and recreation infrastructure
- Improve access to affordable housing

OUR PROGRESS:

- Eighty-eight communities started work on rural infrastructure projects worth \$341 million in the spring of 2006 through the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund. These rural communities are pushing ahead on 19 new water and wastewater projects, eight waste management projects and 61 road and bridge projects. Since its inception in 2004, COMRIF has enabled rural communities to get building through a cost-sharing arrangement which sees the province and the federal government paying for two-thirds of the cost of approved building projects.

The Town of Lakeshore in Essex County is keen to upgrade the Belle River Maidstone Water Pollution Control Plant. The cost of the new plant, estimated at close to \$6.5 million, will be shared by all three levels of government. The province and the federal government have allocated more than \$4.2 million under COMRIF. "This is a very important project for the Town of Lakeshore," says Tom Bain, Mayor of the Town of Lakeshore. "We look forward to working with our federal and provincial partners to make these upgrades to our water pollution control plant."



JOBS AND PROSPERITY

Seniors in Bonnechere Valley now have 24 units of affordable housing. Construction of the units got the go-ahead through local fundraising efforts, municipal support and the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program. The project is sponsored by the Eganville and Area Long Term Care Corporation which is involved in planning for the needs of seniors in their community. "This project is a reminder to everyone that great things are possible through partnerships," says Bob Sweet, Renfrew County's Warden in 2006.

- At the beginning of 2007, more COMRIF projects were announced. Seventy-two communities will be able to start construction of infrastructure valued at \$139 million.
- At the International Plowing Match in September, the province announced an additional \$70 million investment to support more infrastructure building under the Rural Infrastructure Investment Initiative. Funding is being directed to local roads and bridges, clean water and wastewater treatment, solid waste management, sports, recreation and cultural facilities and community energy projects.
- Roads take people to services, goods to market and tourists to destinations. In 2006, the province announced the Southern Ontario Highways Program which will invest \$3.8 billion in highway construction over the next five years. The program has already invested \$762 million in its first year to build 29 kilometres of new highway and three new bridges as well as repairing 34 bridges and 408 kilometres of highway.
- The Northern Highways Program is a five-year, \$1.8 billion investment in highway construction across Northern Ontario. Since its launch in 2006, \$357 million has been invested to repair 420 kilometres of highway and 43 bridges including work on Highways 11, 17, 144 and 69 in the northeast and Highways 11-17 and 584 in the northwest.
- Local roads are an important part of the province's transportation system. In 2006, our Move Ontario Program provided rural municipalities with \$188 million to assist with road and bridge maintenance and construction projects.
- Sometimes communities need access to secure, low-cost financing. That's why the Ontario government assists in long-term financing for municipal infrastructure through Infrastructure Ontario's loan program. In December, we expanded this program to provide financing for all capital infrastructure expenditures by municipalities and universities.



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- Agriculture needs up-to-date science. That's why the government provided \$25 million to the University of Guelph to enhance the province's ability to prevent and respond to animal disease threats.
- Affordable housing is an asset to our communities. During 2006, we funded 224 new affordable housing units, as part of 14 projects in rural communities.
- When the province launched its ambitious ReNew Ontario Strategy, the average age of hospital buildings was 40-plus years. Our plan to modernize health facilities is a \$5 billion commitment by 2010. We are moving forward with more than 100 hospital projects to serve Ontarians where they live. Rural projects were undertaken in places like Grimsby, Woodstock, Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay and other centres.
- As we move forward on infrastructure renewal, we need a reliable way to manage our assets, both financially and physically. That's why we instituted the Asset Management Program under COMRIF in 2006. Ontario and Canada will collectively invest up to \$5.96 million to help eligible municipalities and Local Service Boards with asset management planning.



BETTER HEALTH

We can't take health for granted. As a government we know this. That's why we've taken action to keep you safer, healthier and treated properly when you need attention.

Our public health-care system is one of Ontario's competitive advantages when it comes to attracting jobs and investment. It's also a defining characteristic of our way of life. We take care of each other.

In 2006, we focused our health-care investments on helping people stay well and making sure people get the care they need, when and where they need it. That meant making improvements in both wellness and health care.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is an example of our focus on improving wellness. We want to reduce smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke. At the same time, we set up programs to assist tobacco farmers and their communities with diversification efforts.

New and redeveloped health-care facilities in rural communities such as Grimsby, Woodstock, Mattawa, Sioux Lookout and Peterborough speak to our commitment to improve health care. More than 100 hospital projects all across Ontario are now moving forward.

In the past year, we worked together with rural communities to expand access to doctors and nurses. We worked with hospitals and clinics to reduce wait times for important procedures – and we did it the Ontario way – for everyone.

Better health also involves individual lifestyles. That starts in youth and continues through life. That's why the Ontario school curriculum now includes more physical fitness. We've also doubled our investment in student nutrition programs to ensure 315,000 elementary and secondary students receive healthy breakfasts, lunches and snacks to help them be ready to learn and succeed.

BETTER ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE:

Ensuring better access to health care is a goal for all of us. It starts with expanding medical schools, training more health-care professionals and certifying more foreign-trained doctors. But that is just the start.

It also involves community strategies to attract and retain medical professionals. A three-year strategy in Huron East/Seaforth, for example, has already developed and tested recruitment and retention strategies which are being shared with other rural communities.

Taking steps to avoid preventable diseases and ailments is fundamental to Ontarians. In 2006, three vaccines for chicken pox, meningococcal disease and pneumococcal disease were newly included in the province's health strategy and 1.2 million kids are better off because of it.

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Helping Ontarians to recover from illness is equally important. In 2006, we delivered a record \$1.54 billion into home care to help an additional 95,700 Ontarians with short-term acute care in their homes. We are also supporting innovative research to rehabilitate stroke survivors.

Putting more money into rural hospitals and other health facilities is a fundamental pillar of our approach as well.

Then there is the special attention being directed to wait times for medical procedures. As a result, Ontarians are spending less time waiting for MRI and CT scans. Hip and knee replacements are scheduled faster and the same is true for cataract surgery, cancer treatment and cardiac treatments.

GOAL:

- Improved access to health-care services

STRATEGIES:

- Increase the number of health-care professionals in rural areas
- Increase access to primary health care by enrolling more Ontarians in Family Health Teams
- Improve access to health-care services that reflect the needs of rural communities
- Invest in the infrastructure of health-care facilities

OUR PROGRESS:

- Forty-four Family Health Teams have been approved in rural communities since we reported to you last year. The teams will improve and expand access to comprehensive primary care for Ontarians.

Remember when doctors had time to make house calls? The Brockville Community Family Health Team does. They're doing it with Nurse Practitioners. The team of two new Nurse Practitioners perform annual check-ups and other treatment duties from a mobile clinic. "It's a very innovative way of providing health care and it means better access for our communities," says Ruth Kitson of the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Victorian Order of Nurses.

- Since the launch of the Wait Times Strategy, the Ontario government has invested more than \$611 million to perform 138,800 more cataract surgeries, hip and knee joint replacements, cardiac procedures and cancer surgeries. We've also done 365,000 more MRI exams and 234,500 additional CT scans.
- The HealthForce Ontario Strategy, unveiled in 2006, is a comprehensive plan to get the right number and mix of health-care professionals to maintain our world-class health-care system. The strategy already has plans to create a one-stop centre for internationally educated health-care professionals and a guarantee of full-time jobs for Ontario nursing graduates starting in 2007. A HealthForce marketing and recruitment centre will also help rural and underserved communities.

BETTER HEALTH

- Community Care Access Centres received \$43.3 million in extra support to help them provide acute home care, end-of-life care and chronic home care services.
- In 2006, the Ontario government invested an additional \$50 million to assist communities with land ambulance services as part of a \$300 million investment over three years to achieve the goal of 50:50 provincial-municipal funding for this service.
- To improve access to doctors, we're increasing the number of first-year medical spaces by 23 per cent by 2008 and we're creating four new satellite medical education campuses closer to rural areas.
- We'll be congratulating the first 56 graduates from the new Northern Ontario School of Medicine in just a couple of years. The school received an additional investment of \$6.7 million from the province in 2006 to match money raised through the Northern Ontario School of Medicine Bursary Fund.
- Six health-care projects, valued at \$2.77 million, were initiated in rural communities through the Rural Economic Development Program in 2006. These initiatives improved health-care access and service.

Once a new doctor is trained in Ontario or immigrates from abroad, he or she has an important life decision to make. *Where do I want to live and raise my family?* Beautiful rural Ontario has strong appeal but we know that appeal has to be bundled with professional considerations. In 2006, we helped communities who wanted to actively recruit health-care professionals. Through the Rural Economic Development Program we've helped towns like Delhi build turnkey health clinics which are appealing to new doctors because they reduce overhead costs and administrative tasks while providing a Family Health Team opportunity for support.

- Another way we are helping rural and northern Ontario attract doctors involves education incentives. Our programs provide training incentives in exchange for selecting an under-serviced community in which to set up practice. Over 500 soon-to-be licensed doctors are currently in the program.
- Nurses are essential to better access to health care for Ontarians. The Ontario government has created more than 4,200 new nursing positions and innovative programs are helping men and women fill these jobs. Special tuition support, for example, is available to nursing students wanting to work outside of urban centres.
- The Grow-Your-Own-Nurse Practitioner Program is helping rural Registered Nurses train to become Nurse Practitioners and provide more health-care services in their hometowns. The program, announced in 2006, helps cover salary and education expenses during the training period.





A new six-station dialysis unit is being located at the Leamington District Memorial Hospital. "We are so pleased that dialysis patients in our area will now be able to receive this service without having to travel to Windsor or Chatham for treatment," said Warren Chant, President and CEO of the Leamington District Memorial Hospital. The government committed \$825,000 towards the \$1.7 million project.

HEALTHY LIVING:

You've heard your parents say it: *If you don't have your health, little else matters.* Many lifestyle decisions are individual decisions but there are things we can do to encourage positive choices. In schools, we can substitute healthy snacks for junk food. On the job and in public places, we can protect you from second-hand smoke. In your community, we can create recreation opportunities.

Being safe on the job is a major concern of the Ontario government. In 2006, we extended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include farming operations. We also protected vulnerable workers by ending the 60-hour work week.

The food we grow and process in Ontario is often referred to as the best in the world and we want to keep it that way for every Ontarian. That's why we have programs like HACCP Advantage (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) to help food processors safeguard the food supply while meeting customer demands.

Staying active is essential to healthy living and that's why Ontario launched its Trails Strategy in 2006.

GOAL:

- Communities that promote healthy living and protect public health and the environment

STRATEGIES:

- Develop strategies for reducing tobacco use, preventing obesity and increasing physical activity
- Provide tools and resources to meet government policies and regulations that protect the environment
- Build community partnerships with law enforcement officials to develop local crime prevention strategies

The Ontario Trails Council and the Ontario government are committed to supporting health promotion and active living. In 2006, the two parties unveiled the Ontario Trails Strategy and so far, the government has invested \$412,000 to help volunteers with 17 trail projects and encourage Ontarians to be more physically active.

BETTER HEALTH

“Journey to Your Good Health” will be a bigger feature at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair thanks to a \$973,800 grant from the Rural Economic Development Program. The educational exhibit will help children discover how food and exercise affects health.

“Above-and-beyond the call of duty” would start to describe the many reasons why OPP Constable Mark Gaudet was recognized for his work in the community of Sioux Lookout in 2006. As Officer of the Year, Constable Gaudet worked tirelessly on community policing committees and is a strong advocate for youth programs, including a recreational program called “Fun with Cops” and the Student Safe Grad Committee.

OUR PROGRESS:

- The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is an example of our focus on improving wellness. It protects you from second-hand smoke. We've expanded the bans on smoking in enclosed public spaces and workplaces and restricted the promotion and display of tobacco products in stores.
- We opened recreation facilities that promote healthy lifestyles for people of all ages in places like Niagara Falls, Cornwall and Beausoleil First Nation.
- *'You are what you eat'* is probably how you would describe the motivation behind Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living. The \$10 million plan makes advice from a dietician just a telephone call or e-mail away. It is also supporting the Northern Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Program which provides nutritious — and often Ontario-grown — foods to children in northern schools.
- Ontario's Food Safety Strategy is enhancing Ontario's already strong food safety systems by updating standards and inspection programs, and by using new science and technologies to minimize risks to both public health and the economy. Our vision is a science-based system that links the food chain from “field-to-fork.”
- The Meat Plant Assistance Program is helping provincially licensed meat operations comply with more stringent food safety regulations. The \$25.4 million program is being delivered over four years and is designed to help industry with education, training, technical and business decisions, and facility and operation upgrades.
- Communities in Action is a provincial government fund that invests in community sport and physical activity. In 2006, \$1.5 million worth of projects were supported in rural Ontario through groups like 4-H and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.
- Ontario's Drinking Water Stewardship Program, announced as an integral part of the recently passed Clean Water Act 2006, will help farmers and rural businesses keep local sources of drinking water safe. Initially, \$7 million will be available in 2007/08 for projects that protect land and water surrounding municipal wells and surface water intakes as well as local education and outreach related to source protection planning.
- Source water protection is a government commitment. In 2006, 193 municipalities initiated scientific studies as part of efforts to identify potential threats to drinking water sources. The Ontario government made \$10 million available to support these studies as part of a \$67.5 million commitment for source protection planning.
- We've hired 33 new full-time water inspectors and investigators to help municipalities ensure the integrity of their water systems.
- Under the province's Safer Communities — 1,000 Officers Partnership Program we have hired 970 new police officers. The remaining 30 are expected to be hired in early 2007. Many rural and northern communities have benefited from this initiative including Brantford, Caledon, Peterborough and North Bay.



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- The OPP Youth Summer Camp in Orillia lets rural youth attend camp with OPP officers as counsellors. The annual camp is yet another way that community partnerships are built with law enforcement officials to develop local crime prevention strategies.

SOUND LAND-USE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING:

How we use, protect and monitor our natural environment is central to our good health and the generations who will follow. That's why we have taken action to clean up the air we breathe, safeguard the water we drink, and protect greenspace.

Ontario is now a Canadian leader at promoting clean, renewable energy. The Ontario Ethanol Growth Fund will help all of us drive cleaner vehicles. Similarly, investments in new bio-energy research at Atikokan's generating station or the Erie Shores wind farm illustrate Ontario's commitment to green energy and cleaner air.

Ontario's farmers and rural landowners are good stewards of the land. We know that. The Environmental Farm Plans prepared by our farmers are a testament to that commitment.

GOAL:

- The capacity to make planning decisions that balance ecosystem health, social well-being and economic activity

STRATEGIES:

- Develop tools and resources to implement planning reforms
- Support alternative and renewable energy opportunities
- Strengthen the province's agricultural sector by acting on advice from the Agricultural Advisory Team



The community of Lakefield has a vision. It plans to build Ontario's first outdoor speed skating oval. Using green technology, a geo-thermal heat pump will make the ice and heat an adjacent recreation building. The community project received \$849,968 from the province to help with this green energy initiative and encourage active, healthy living.

BETTER HEALTH

In 2006, the Ontario government provided funding to help conservation groups acquire natural heritage lands through the Natural Spaces Program. Nineteen natural heritage properties were acquired totalling more than 2,500 acres.



OUR PROGRESS

- In August 2006, Ontario announced improved Minimum Distance Separation formulas for rural land-use planning. The formulas, which recommend separation distances between livestock farms and other land uses, help livestock farmers and their neighbours by providing clearer, more consistent rules.
- Through 2006, more than 7,300 farmers completed new Environmental Farm Plans which help them identify environmental risks and ways to reduce them.
- More than 8,000 environmental projects were approved to improve the water, soil and wildlife habitat on farms. The projects were allocated about \$35 million under federal-provincial programs.
- To support farmers' efforts to protect the environment, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation put \$2.8 million toward projects to improve the environment on farms within the Greenbelt and on the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- We've invested \$23.7 million over three years to help 600 livestock farmers make environmental improvements to meet the Nutrient Management Act requirements.
- The Ontario government added 400,000 acres to the provincial parks and protected areas system in 2006 to preserve world-class canoe routes, wildlife habitat, eagle nesting sites and significant landscapes.

Cattle went green in 2006. Bio-gas from manure will be converted into heat and electricity by the University of Guelph thanks to two new anaerobic digesters. The green power plan received financial assistance of \$292,500 from the Rural Economic Development Program.

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- Green energy was given a huge boost in 2006 when the Premier announced a standard offer contract for renewable energy. This means the province guarantees a base price of 11 cents per kilowatt-hour for electricity purchased from wind, biomass or small hydroelectric sources in Ontario. By 2007, we want to generate five per cent of our electricity from renewable sources and ten per cent by 2010. Green energy and rural leaders lauded this new program. According to Dr. David Suzuki, "*This announcement revolutionizes the market for clean, renewable energy in North America and lays the groundwork for a healthier, brighter future.*"
- Five new water-power projects received preliminary permission to explore development on Crown land in 2006. The sites are located near Timmins, Englehart, Washago and Kakabeka Falls.
- We're investing \$60 million over six years to clean up abandoned mines to protect the environment.
- Staying on the leading edge of wind energy projects is the goal of a planning initiative launched in 2006 by Countryside Energy Co-operative Inc., TREC WindShare Co-operative Inc. and the province. The project will work with existing community partners to develop a strategic plan for building sustainable wind energy projects in rural Ontario.

The windy shores of Lake Erie offer the perfect setting for one of Ontario's newest wind farms, which opened in 2006. With 66 turbines, the new site generates enough green power for 25,000 homes. The Erie Shores project joins three others already in operation near Shelburne, Goderich and on the Lake Superior shoreline. These and other projects in the works have come about through the Province of Ontario's Renewables Request for Proposals process. "*Ontario is rapidly becoming a leader in wind energy production in Canada,*" according to Robert Hornung, of the Canadian Wind Energy Association. The Erie Shores farm is one of 19 renewable energy projects the province has supported since 2004.



SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS

Ontario families want the best public education for their children.

The Rural Plan's goal is to ensure rural Ontarians have the opportunity to succeed. The plan equips and encourages our youth to pursue meaningful and rewarding futures.

Our Best Start Plan for child care, early learning and healthy development is helping more children arrive in Grade 1 ready to learn.

In elementary schools, test results were up in 2006 and new programs were initiated to help those students who could benefit from extra assistance.

As we achieve higher graduation rates, we need more post-secondary opportunities. The Ontario government responded with the most significant investment plan for post-secondary education and training that this province has seen in 40 years. At the same time, apprenticeship and training programs have created many new opportunities for both rural and urban youth.

Working with business to ensure the success of our students does just that. It works. The government's \$70-million investment in a new, rural-based Toyota factory will help build a state-of-the-art technology training facility for workers and help create 2,500 jobs.

Rural schools help bind smaller communities together and when our kids finish their school day, school boards keep the schools open for community groups. We know this is a community service and we've invested \$20 million annually since 2003 to help school boards budget for community use of schools.

QUALITY EDUCATION:

The word, "*quality*", says it all. Education in rural Ontario isn't just about getting a passing grade. It's about being ready for the future and having every reason to be optimistic about your future.

We have 300,000 rural students spread out from Lake-of-the-Woods to Amherstburg and that means we need programs that work in very different circumstances. One such initiative is a web-based forum called YouthConnect.ca which allows young people to access services, information and resources to help them make good choices and achieve success.

We have continued the Student Success Lighthouse Program and channelled \$12 million into 159 innovative programs across the province, all aimed at helping kids stay in school through to graduation.

GOAL:

- Quality education close to home

STRATEGIES:

- Respond to the needs of rural schools



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- Provide opportunities for access to education and information resources
- Develop a comprehensive early learning and child care plan
- Increase access to schools for community groups

OUR PROGRESS:

- In addition to more teachers, we are also supporting over \$100 million in new capital projects to create new classrooms needed in rural schools.
- Test scores are up. Sixty-four percent of Grade 3 and 6 students are meeting or exceeding provincial standards for reading, writing and arithmetic.
- Funding was increased by \$1,800 per pupil for rural school boards. That's a 24 per cent increase.
- The government made a commitment to raise the graduation rate to 85 per cent of students by 2010-11. We are already seeing progress. The graduation rate rose three percentage points to 71 per cent in 2004-05.
- Our Best Start Plan for healthy development, early learning and child care has created nearly 15,000 new child care spaces of which 8,552 are in schools. The Best Start Networks in rural communities tailor the implementation of the plan to meet local needs. Enhanced funding has been provided for initiatives like the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program, Pre-school Speech and Language Program, and the Infant Hearing Program.

The communities of Lambton and Chatham-Kent and the District of Timiskaming have been chosen as demonstration sites to implement the full Best Start vision at an accelerated pace. To attract and retain qualified early childhood educators, for example, the District of Timiskaming has developed education grants for local students registered in recognized Early Childhood Education Programs at post-secondary institutions. The communities of Lambton and Chatham-Kent hosted a Summer Institute in 2006 which brought together early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers and children's services providers to examine the integration of child care and JK/SK programs with the goal of helping children make an easier transition to Grade 1.

- The Good Places to Learn initiative is funding \$255 million worth of repairs, renovations and new construction in schools in rural Ontario over two years. Of this total budget, \$85 million was allocated in 2006.
- A \$1.12-billion School Foundation Grant has been created to guarantee every school is funded for a principal and secretary, regardless of the school's size.
- We've improved the way rural youth get to school by investing \$12 million more in student transportation in 2006.

SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS



Lots of new training equipment moved into Ontario colleges during 2006. Loyalist College in Belleville upgraded its culinary lab and built a new lab to train apprentice bakers. Cambrian College in Sudbury modernized its equipment used to train apprentice welders and millwrights. In all, eight colleges upgraded through the Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund.

- We're increasing funding to northern and rural colleges through the Reaching Higher Plan to provide greater access to high-quality programs. We want northern and rural students to have a strong local choice for post-secondary studies. In 2006-07, an additional \$20 million was provided to improve access to high-quality programs in rural and northern communities.
- The Contact North/Contact Nord network provides access to education and training in small, rural communities to support local economic and social development. In 2006, we provided \$1.5 million so that 20 additional communities could access the network's more than 570 college and university courses.
- The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program provides opportunities for First Nation youth to apprentice in trades while earning credits toward their Ontario Secondary School Diplomas.

Chesley District High School has developed a pilot agri-business program that builds on two locally developed courses: animal science and horticulture. The program prepares students for a variety of destinations following graduation. Students have the opportunity to work with farm animals and plants on-site in an updated barn and greenhouse facility. The program also involves co-op placements in the agriculture sector.

- We launched Parents Reaching Out grants with \$1 million in 2006 to help school councils develop projects that help parents get involved with their children's education.
- E-Learning is another pilot project aimed at increasing the choice of courses and resources available to students, which is particularly beneficial for those living in rural areas. Currently, over 50 school boards have signed on to participate in the program. In all, 29 credit courses and more than 3,000 digital resources are available electronically.

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- Schools are important centres of activity in rural communities. Through the Community Use of Schools Program, the Ontario government has kept school doors open to community groups. For each of the past three years, the province has provided \$20 million to school boards to reduce or eliminate fees for community use of school space.



- To engage the creativity of secondary students, we have allocated \$1,000 per secondary school to support student-led activity focused on creating healthier schools.

At the District School Board of Niagara, 20 students enrolled in the construction major, made possible under the Specialist High Skills Majors, are building homes with Habitat for Humanity for low income families. Students are bringing their classroom knowledge to the construction site and making a difference in their community. "Students earn valuable experience through hands-on learning ... construction companies get a future skilled labour force and families in need gain a fresh start in life," said Warren Hoshizaki, Director of Education for the District School Board of Niagara.



CONCLUSION

The Ontario government believes that every Ontarian deserves an opportunity to succeed.

The Rural Plan puts people first.

The Ontario government believes a comprehensive vision is essential for rural Ontario. That's why our goals and achievements involve jobs and prosperity, health and success for students.

We know that investing in people is what builds communities. Those investments take many forms. In this Rural Plan Update, we've talked about programs that help local communities achieve their aspirations. We've talked about initiatives that are making communities stronger. We've seen how innovative rural Ontarians can be when given the right tools and opportunities.

Rural Ontario is a wealth of ideas, opportunities and energy. You see it everywhere you go.

Your Ontario government is steadfast in its commitment to rural development. We believe in partnerships that bring people, government, business and educators together with one goal ... getting results for rural Ontario.

For more information about Ontario's Rural Plan contact:

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
One Stone Road West
Guelph, Ontario
N1G 4Y2

Toll free: 1-888-588-4111

Fax: (519) 826-4328

ontario.ca/rural

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INDEX OF WEB ADDRESSES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Advanced Manufacturing Investment Strategy
http://www.ontariocanada.com/ontcan/en/progserv_amis_en.jsp
- Agricultural Management Institute
http://www.adaptcouncil.org/current_programs/ami.asp
- Best Start
<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/BestStart/default.htm>
- Business Retention and Expansion Program
http://www.reddi.mah.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_6_20252_1.html
- Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund
<http://www.comrif.ca/eng/default.asp?id=0>
- Employment Ontario
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/etlanding.html>
- Family Health Teams
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- First Impressions Community Exchange Program
http://www.reddi.mah.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_6_21811_1.html
- Forest Sector Prosperity Fund and Loan Guarantee Program
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- Good Places to Learn
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/learn/>
- Infrastructure Ontario's Loan Program
<http://www.infrastructureontario.ca/en/loan/index.asp>
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<http://www.mndm.gov.on.ca/nohfc/>
- Ontario's Food Safety System
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<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/apprenticeship/skills/oyap.html>
- ReNew Ontario
<http://www.pir.gov.on.ca/english/infrastructure/renew.htm>
- Renewable Energy Standard Offer Program
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- Sector Initiative Fund
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- Summer Company Program
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- Wait Times Strategy
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/wait_times/wt_strategy.html