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Rural Minnesotans build community solutions to climate change

Minneapolis, MN – The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and the Jefferson Center, today, released a report detailing two years of work in Greater Minnesota to build community solutions to climate change.

Minnesota’s rural communities face disproportionate risk from climate change. Despite their importance, rural communities have too often been overlooked in climate conversations, and policy discussions have tended to emphasize urban and suburban perspectives. The report comes after a statewide meeting of rural Minnesota citizens, state agency representatives, and nonprofit organizations last September in St. Paul.

Participants strategized together to better connect state agency program offerings with rural needs and priorities. The Rural Climate Dialogues State Convening was the culmination of Rural Climate Dialogues in Stevens, Itasca, and Winona Counties. These dialogues all identified the need to strengthen connections between local community efforts and state agencies and programs to take action on climate resilient rural infrastructure. Participants will now begin the process of implementing these policies and practices in their communities.

“Thus far in climate policy we have seen an approach that fails to effectively incorporate rural community concerns. The Rural Climate Dialogues and State Convening are an effort to move past stand-alone initiatives in order to contribute to improved quality of life and reduce economic inequities and costs for rural citizens,” said Anna Claussen, Director of Rural Strategies at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

The State Convening strengthened relationships between rural residents and state agencies as rural participants identified and presented their shared climate action priorities while hearing presentations by state agency staff on a number of key climate issues for rural Minnesota. Topics included clean energy and energy efficiency, climate-friendly agriculture, resilient transportation infrastructure, and health impacts of climate change on rural citizens who work mostly outdoors.

Rural citizens and state agency staff strategized together on key priority next step actions within existing programs in the areas of land use (e.g. soil health, water quality, ecotourism), infrastructure (e.g. storm water, transportation planning), and energy (e.g. clean energy, energy efficiency). The State Convening also identified areas where change is needed, including building a state program navigator for local government officials, encouraging more rural-focused research on climate resilience, sharing best practices between rural communities, and creating an ongoing space for state agency staff to engage constructively with rural citizens.

“What we’ve learned through these partnerships,” says Kyle Bozentko, Executive Director of the Jefferson Center, “is not only that rural voices and perspectives can and should factor into broader conversations about climate and energy policy in Minnesota, but also that rural residents are ready to step forward and tackle these challenges in their own communities when state programs are not readily available to support their goals or address their needs.”

To read more, access the full report of proceedings, findings, and next steps at:

<http://www.ruralclimatenetwork.org/content/rural-climate-dialogues-state-convening-final-report>