



Summary of Libro Professor News Stories

July 2024 – June 2025



ruraldev.ca

Libro Professor of Regional Economic Development

The Libro Professor of Regional Economic Development was established in 2016 through the generous donations from Libro Credit Union, the Klosler family, and the Roberts family. Together, a \$1 million gift was created to serve as a catalyst for enhancing regional economic development in Southwestern Ontario. Details of research activities, graduate student engagement, online resources emerging from the Libro Professorship can be found at www.ruraldev.ca.

School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph

The School of Environmental Design and Rural Development brings together major academic fields concerned with creating strong communities in Canada and around the world. The four highly respected units that have come together to form the School share many common goals but approach them in different and complementary ways. This model reflects the imperatives in building authentic communities where planners, leaders, communicators, landscape architects, the citizens, and politicians all play important interdependent roles in strengthening communities. For more information, visit www.sedrd.uoguelph.ca.

Authors: Damilola Oyewale and Ryan Gibson

Introduction

This report presents a comprehensive summary of news stories published on the [RuralDev.ca](https://ruraldev.ca) website from July 2024 to June 2025. This website serves as the online platform to promote activities of the Libro Professor of Regional Economic Development at the University of Guelph.

The stories captured in this report span a wide range of rural development topics including rural workforce development, knowledge mobilization and translation, rural philanthropy and intergenerational wealth transfers, migrant agricultural worker housing, rural transit, farmland preservation, local government entrepreneurialism, and graduate student achievements. All content has been sourced directly from the [RuralDev.ca](https://ruraldev.ca) website. Stories are presented in chronological order from July 2024 through June 2025.

Rural Ontario Research Shared at North Atlantic Forum

July.3, 2024



Rural Ontario research was on full display at the recent North Atlantic Forum in Letterfrack, Co. Galway, Ireland. Graduate students and faculty from the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph showcased new and emerging rural development knowledge related to agri-food systems, housing, work force development, economic development, and rural transit:

- Sara Epp & Regan Zink – Rural Communities, Agri-Food Systems, and Planning in Transition
- Damilola Oyewale – Building Sustainable Communities Through Immigration and Housing: A Review of Ontario International Agricultural Workers

- Ryan Gibson, Heather Graham, & Paul Sitsofe – Addressing Workforce Development Through Innovative Approaches: Perspectives from Rural Canada
- Joshua Barrett – Rural Local Governments: Building Economic Development Capacity through Entrepreneurialism
- Calum Jacques, Lucas Berek, Damilola Oyewale, Hannah Main, Sarah-Patricia Breen, & Ryan Gibson – Analysis of Ontario Transit Projects Supported By Federal Funding

The North Atlantic Forum is a "collegial assembly" of community development practitioners, leaders, government, students, and researchers from across the North Atlantic region. The North Atlantic Forum facilitates the sharing of research and best practices in regional development and governance, island studies, place-based identity and culture and supports community, industry and government exchanges across the North Atlantic region for increased collaboration and partnership. Learn more about the North Atlantic Forum at <http://northatlanticforum.org/about/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/sustainable-rural-livelihoods-north-atlantic-forum/>

Transferring Knowledge from North Atlantic Forum to Rural Ontario

July 16, 2024



Rural development practitioners are at the front line of facilitating prosperous rural communities, places, and environments across Ontario. Ensuring rural development practitioners have access to the most up to date knowledge is critical to facilitating decision-making on the future of rural places.

Leading rural development organizations, community innovators, elected officials, students, and researchers gathered at the North Atlantic Forum in Letterfrack, Ireland from June 17–21, 2024, to share new rural development knowledge. The North Atlantic Forum was established as "collegial assembly" to further public policy, regional development, place-based development and expanding the importance of identity and cultural development. Further information about the 2024 North Atlantic Forum can be found at <http://northatlanticforum.org/about-conference/>. To facilitate knowledge sharing in rural Ontario a series of research summaries are being created by graduate students on innovative approaches to sustainable rural livelihoods. Knowledge shared from the conference will focus on the themes of economic development, food security, heritage conservation, housing, policy proofing and lenses, and solar power.

The summaries will be available in August 2024 from <http://ruraldev.ca/connecting-international-research-to-rural-ontario-communities-and-practitioners/>. Stay tuned for more information.

The 2024 North Atlantic Forum was supported in Canada by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/transferring-knowledge-from-north-atlantic-forum-to-rural-ontario/>

New Project – Pathways to Practice

July 18, 2024



We are excited to share a new knowledge translation and transfer initiative has been funded titled Pathways to Practice: Bridging Knowledge, Practitioners, and Students. The new initiative will build bridges between graduate students, rural economic development officers, and rural community leaders to connect knowledge, ideas, and networks. The project focuses on creating an in-person forum for facilitating these connections, creating a series of new knowledge outputs, and training/mentorship. The outcome of the initiative will create new knowledge outputs, new training, and new networks to support agricultural and rural communities throughout Ontario.

This initiative is a partnership between the Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity, Economic Development Council of Ontario, and Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health.

Learn more about this new initiative – <http://ruraldev.ca/pathways-to-practice/>. This initiative is funded through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-project-pathways-to-practice/>

Rural Labour Shortages: Findings from Ontario Survey

July 23, 2024



The future of rural businesses and communities is dependent on appropriate and effective workforce development strategies. Rural businesses and communities are confronted with challenges in accessing relevant human capital to support, maintain, and grow their operations. Without deliberate and place-based strategies, rural businesses and rural economies will be negatively impacted.

Researchers at the University of Guelph and Selkirk College are interested in enhancing our understanding of innovative rural workforce strategies, plans, and policies to address current and future labour gaps. pandemic. Over 50% of respondents indicated businesses in their region are experiencing difficulty in finding new employees with retail, accommodations and food services, construction, and health care and social assistance experiencing the most difficulties.

All respondents indicated the level of difficulty being experienced has increased since the COVID pandemic, sometimes by as much as 20% more than before the pandemic. The key challenges in attracting and retaining labour were difficulty in locating housing for employees, difficulty in accessing transportation for workers, and difficulty in attracting workers to rural communities.

Source:<https://ruraldev.ca/rural-labour-shortages-findings-from-ontario-survey/>

Barrett Successfully Defends PhD Dissertation

August 15, 2024



Congratulations to Josh Barrett for successfully defending his PhD dissertation titled "A New Localism for Newfoundland and Labrador? An Exploratory Study of Rural Local Government Entrepreneurialism." Members of the examining committee were Dr. Rob Greenwood (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador), Dr. Audrey Jamal (Lang School of Business and Economics, University of Guelph), Dr. Kelly Vodden (Grenfell Campus, Memorial University), and Ryan Gibson (University of Guelph).

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/barrett-successfully-defends-phd-dissertation/>

Knowledge Mobilization at National Geography Conference

August 16, 2024



Four members of the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development shared rural research at the recent 74th annual Canadian Association of Geographers national conference in St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. With a conference theme of Edges, students and faculty contributed research on rural health, rural economic development, northern veterinary service provision, and rural workforce development. Presentations shared at the conference included:

- Josh Barrett (PhD in Rural Studies candidate): Placed on the edge: Innovation transitions from path dependent rural economies in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Leith Deacon (Associate Professor): Rural Mental Health: The Need to Rural Proof Policy.
- Sara Epp (Assistant Professor and Latonnell Professor in Environmental Stewardship): Exploring the Crisis: Factors Affecting Large Animal Veterinary Services in Northern Ontario's Rural Regions
- Ryan Gibson (Associate Professor and Libro Professor of Regional Economic Development): Finding and Retaining Workers: Innovative Approaches to Addressing Labour Force Challenges in Rural Ontario

The presentations emerge from research supported through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/knowledge-mobilization-at-national-geography-conference/>

Congratulations to Recent Graduates

August 29, 2024



Congratulations to everyone who completed their academic program of study at the conclusion of the summer 2024 semester:

- Jennifer Aikman, Master of Planning
- Joshua Barrett, PhD in Rural Studies
- Ken Chew, Master of Science (Planning)
- Mohammed Jalabi, Master of Science (Planning)
- Niju Mathew, Master of Science (Planning)
- Kalind Patel, Master of Planning
- Geetanjali Rana, Master of Planning
- Andrea Torok, Master of Science (Planning)

We wish all graduates success in their future endeavours.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/congratulations-to-recent-graduates/>

September 2024 Updates for Current Graduate Students

September 3, 2024



Welcome to the Fall 2024 semester! The September 2024 newsletter contains information for graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic programs, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source:<https://ruraldev.ca/september-2024-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Welcome to Fall 2024 Semester

September 4, 2024



A warm welcome to everyone joining a graduate program in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development in Fall 2024. We want to welcome the following individuals who are joining a graduate program working with Prof. Ryan Gibson this fall:

- Jayden Cote, Master of Science (Planning)
- Adu Hayford, Master of Science (Planning)
- Hilary Fotheringham, Master of Science (Planning)
- Seyedeh Mahtab Ghaderi, Master of Science (Planning)
- Tahsin Rahman, Master of Science (Planning)

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/welcome-to-fall-2024-semester/>

Barrett's PhD Available Online

September 9, 2024



Josh Barrett's PhD dissertation titled *A New Localism for Newfoundland and Labrador? An Exploratory Study of Rural Local Government Entrepreneurialism* is now available in the University of Guelph's Atrium.

The dissertation examines how the roles and responsibilities of local governments are changing. Historically, the expectation of service delivery was focused on areas such as garbage collection, street paving, and sewage services. However, rural local governments in Newfoundland and Labrador are increasingly adopting entrepreneurial strategies to support economic development and community resilience.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/barretts-phd-available-online/>

Gathering Insights on Attracting and Retaining Workers in Rural Ontario

September 10, 2024



Businesses across rural Ontario are confronted with challenges and opportunities in attracting and retaining workers. On September 18, 2024 (Wednesday), researchers from the University of Guelph were in Seaforth to speak with businesses to better understand these local issues related to attracting and retaining workers. All businesses are invited to share their perspectives in a brief 5-minute discussion. Researchers will be visiting businesses in the downtown core of Seaforth.

Questions will focus on:

- Challenges business owners experience in finding new staff
- Supports that would be useful to assist in finding new staff
- Success stories of approaches in finding new staff

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/businesswalkruralontario/>

Rural Research Summary – Farmland Preservation and Urban Expansion in Ontario

September 17, 2024



Farmland preservation is critical to the future of rural Ontario. The Connecting the Dots initiative is excited to share the first Rural Research Summary – Farmland Preservation and Urban Expansion in Ontario. This summary sheds light on the challenges and strategies associated with balancing farmland preservation amidst growing urban development pressures, providing implications and practical recommendations for policymakers, planners, and community stakeholders.

Source:<https://ruraldev.ca/rural-research-summary-farmland-preservation-and-urban-expansion-in-ontario/>

Understanding Challenges in Finding Workers

September 19, 2024



On September 18, 2024, five graduate students set out to collect information from business owners in Seaforth, Ontario to better understand the realities of attracting and retaining employees. Paul Sitsofe (Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development student), Paul Anim (Master of Science in Capacity Development and Extension student), Lucas Berek (Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development student), Calum Jacques (Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development student), and Damilola Oyewale participated in the business walk. Questions focused on the challenges business owners experience in finding new staff, supports that would be useful to assist in finding new staff, and success stories of approaches in finding new staff. Thank you to the businesses in Seaforth for sharing their insights!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/understanding-challenges-in-finding-workers/>

Transferring Rural Research: From Letterfrack to Rural Ontario

September 19, 2024



Researchers, policymakers and practitioners recently gathered in Letterfrack, Ireland for the 2024 North Atlantic Forum. The Forum focused on sustainable livelihoods and sought to engage new ideas in rural development, policy practice, and the social economy.

To facilitate knowledge mobilization, a series of rural research summaries were created by graduate students on innovative approaches to sustainable rural livelihoods. The summaries highlight key research presented at the 2024 North Atlantic Forum and identify the implications and applications for rural Ontario.

The rural research summaries include:

- The Reality of Unaffordable Housing in Rural Ireland (Lucas Berek)
- Heritage Tourism and Local Livelihoods in Inishbofin, Ireland (Eliza MacLauchlan)
- SABRI: Reinvesting in the Region to Expand the Economic Base (Natasha Pennell)
- From Colonial Challenges to Community Solutions: Transforming Food Insecurity in Ktaqmkuk (Avery Velez)
- A Case Study of Community-Led versus State-Led Solar Projects in NunatuKavut (Christine Miller)
- Searching for Entrepreneurialism in Rural Newfoundland (Lucas Berek)

The rural research summaries are available at <http://ruraldev.ca/connecting-international-research-to-rural-ontario-communities-and-practitioners/>.

The 2024 North Atlantic Forum was supported in Canada by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/transferring-rural-research-from-letterfrack-to-rural-ontario/>

Prof. Gibson Elected to the UofG Senate

September 30, 2024



Congratulations to Prof. Ryan Gibson on recently being elected to the University of Guelph Senate! The University of Guelph Senate was established through the University of Guelph Act, 1964 and is responsible for academic programs, regulations and policies. The Senate is responsible for activities such as:

- Controlling, regulating, and determining the educational policy of the University
- Determining the courses of study and standards of admission to the University
- Directing the staff in matters which relate to the academic programs
- The Senate is comprised of elected and ex-officio members. For more information on the Senate visit <https://www.uoguelph.ca/secretariat/office-services/senate>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/prof-gibson-elected-to-the-uofg-senate/>

October 2024 Updates for Current Graduate Students

October 1, 2024



Welcome to October! The October 2024 newsletter contains information for graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. The newsletter shares information about academic programs, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source:<https://ruraldev.ca/october-2024-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Help Wanted: Innovative Approaches to Workforce Development

October 8, 2024



How are rural and northern Ontario businesses attracting and retaining workers? Ryan Gibson, Heather Graham, Paul Sitsofe, Niju Mathew, and Sarah-Patricia Breen share insights on this question in a recent publication in the Y Magazine of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute. The article, titled Help Wanted: Innovative Approaches for Workforce Development in Rural and Northern Ontario, identifies the key challenges rural and northern businesses face in attracting and retaining workers and examines innovative strategies being employed to address labour shortages.

The article can be found in the Ontario Professional Planners Institute's Y Magazine – <https://ontarioplanners.ca/publications/y-magazine>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/help-wanted-innovative-approaches-to-workforce-development/>

Congratulations to Fall 2024 Graduates

October 15, 2024



Congratulations to everyone who graduated in the fall 2024 convocation ceremonies. Congratulations to:

- Jennifer Aikman, Master of Planning
- Joshua Barrett, PhD in Rural Studies
- Ken Chew, Master of Science (Planning)
- Mohammed Jalabi, Master of Science (Planning)
- Niju Mathew, Master of Science (Planning)
- Kalind Patel, Master of Planning
- Geetanjali Rana, Master of Planning
- Olassayil Sancy Sebastianpillai, Master of Planning

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/congratulations-to-fall-2024-graduates/>

Review: 2024 Rural Symposium

October 21, 2024



Throughout the week, the Rural Planning and Development social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn, and X/Twitter) are sharing reflections and contributions from the 2024 Rural Symposium. Presentation and poster contributions from the 2024 Rural Symposium can be found online – <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/ruralReview>.

Details about the 2025 Rural Symposium are forthcoming – stayed tuned.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/review-2024-rural-symposium/>

Passport to Practice – R2R 2024

October 21, 2024



Economic development practitioners, health practitioners, and researchers shared their insights and experience on twelve critical topics to the future of rural communities and regions at the Rural Talks to Rural Conference last week. The interactive session allowed conference participants to learn more about current best practices, learn about existing programming, and to hear about current research.

The session had twelve stations including: workforce development, rural broadband, downtown development, rural housing, rural transit, rural health, rural tourism, international agricultural workers, rural philanthropy, rural immigration, local government, and rural economic development.

The Rural Talks to Rural Conference is an annual event hosted in Blyth, Ontario. The conference brings together rural practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to share ideas and best practices for rural development across Ontario.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/passport-to-practice-r2r-2024/>

New MOU With Gateway Centre for Excellence in Rural Health

October 30, 2024



Gateway and SEDRD Renew Partnership

The School of Environmental Design and Rural Development recently signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health. The MOU will facilitate opportunities for joint research, knowledge mobilization, and student engagement between the two organizations.

The Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health is based in Goderich, Ontario and focuses on improving the health and wellbeing of rural communities. The Centre conducts research, develops partnerships, and provides education and training to support rural health.

This MOU builds on an existing history of collaboration between SEDRD and the Gateway Centre. Previous joint activities have included graduate student placements, co-authored publications, and shared knowledge mobilization initiatives.

For more information on the Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health, visit <https://www.gatewayruralhealth.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-mou-with-gateway-centre-for-excellence-in-rural-health/>

November 2024 Updates for Current Graduate Students

November 1, 2024



The November 2024 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. The newsletter shares information about academic programs, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/november-2024-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

New Project: Bridging Rural Insights

November 5, 2024



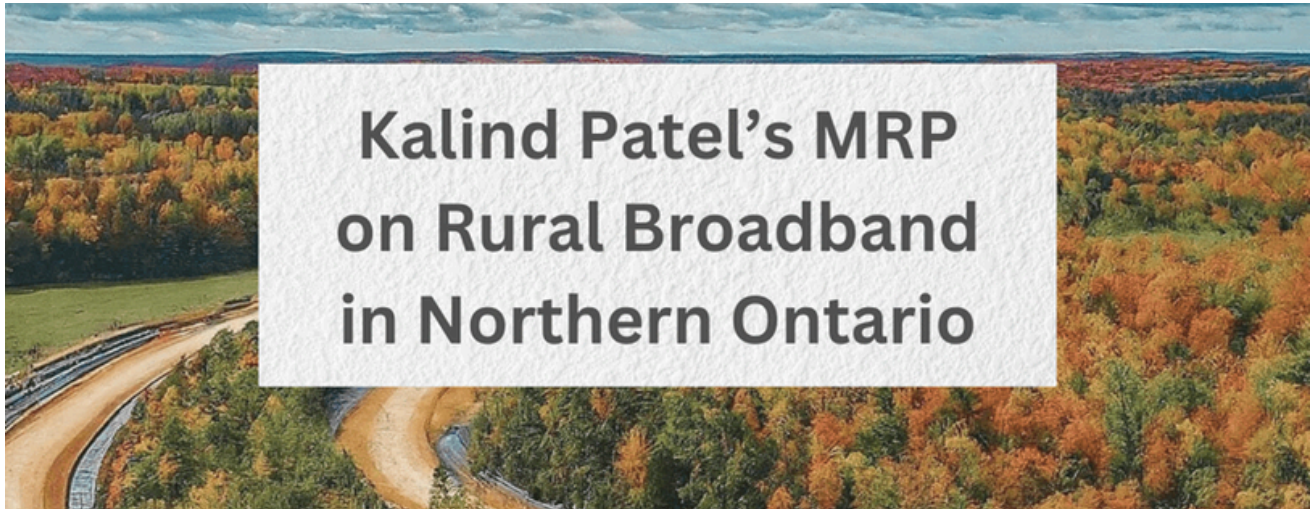
We are excited to announce a new funded project titled "Bridging Rural Insights: Integrating Research, Policy, and Development". The funding will support knowledge translation through the 2025 Rural Symposium and the Rural Review: Ontario Rural Planning, Development, and Policy. The Rural Symposium is an opportunity for University of Guelph graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to showcase their rural research to Government of Ontario staff, rural communities, and practitioners. The Rural Review is an open access, online journal that publishes oral and poster presentations from the Rural Symposium. The journal provides an opportunity for graduate students to share their research with a wider audience.

This initiative is funded through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-project-bridging-rural-insights/>

Rural Broadband in Northern Ontario

November 5, 2024



Check out Kalind Patel's major research paper titled "Rural Broadband in Northern Ontario: Investigating the Status of Connectivity and the Role of Planners." A brief outline of Kalind's research can be found below:

This research investigates the current state of broadband internet access in Northern Ontario and explores the role of planners in facilitating its development. The motivation behind this study stems from the critical need for reliable internet connectivity in rural and northern communities. The study aims to understand the role of planners in facilitating broadband development and offer planners, policymakers, and communities a better understanding of the current state of broadband in Northern Ontario.

Kalind's major research paper is now available through the University of Guelph's Atrium – <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/rural-broadband-in-northern-ontario/>

World Town Planning Day at Guelph

November 6, 2024



November 8 is World Town Planning Day! Planners and communities all over the world come together to celebrate how good planning improves the lives of people and benefits society at large, creating places to live, work, and play together. World Town Planning Day serves as a call to action to create inclusive, resilient spaces that meet the diverse needs of present and future generations. World Town Planning Day is celebrated in 30 countries on four continents. The Rural Planning and Development program at the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph trains the next generation of planners to work in rural communities. For more information, visit <https://www.uoguelph.ca/sedrd/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/world-town-planning-day-at-guelph/>

New Publication: Assessing the Effectiveness of Agricultural Advisory Methods in Ontario

November 26, 2024



How effective are agricultural advisory methods in Ontario by different stakeholders? A new publication was recently released in The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension examining this question. The publication by Ataharul Chowdhury, Khondokar H. Kabir, Nasir Abbas Khan, Ryan Gibson, and Mike McMorris examines the effectiveness of extension and advisory services (EAS) for farm success and rural well-being in Canada. The publication examines the effectiveness of various advisory methods used by different stakeholders in the Ontario agricultural sector. Extension and advisory services (EAS) are crucial for farm success and rural well-being in Canada.

This study examines the effectiveness of EAS from the perspectives of farmers, advisors, and extension organizations in Ontario. The study found that face-to-face advisory methods are perceived as most effective, while digital methods are gaining in importance. The publication is available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/1389224X.2024.2394567>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-publication-assessing-the-effectiveness-of-agricultural-advisory-methods-in-ontario/>

December 2024 Updates for Current Graduate Students

December 2, 2024



The December 2024 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, profiles an RPD alumna, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/december-2024-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Translating Place to Wealth

December 12, 2024



Prof. Ryan Gibson recently delivered a presentation titled Translating Place to Wealth: Experiences from Place-Based Endowments in Rural Canada. The presentation was delivered at the Folk, Place, and Knowledge Conference in Singapore. Prof. Gibson's presentation focused on recent research in philanthropy, rural development, and wealth building.

Rural communities are at a critical turning point. As populations age and younger generations move to urban centres, significant wealth is increasingly mobile. Without deliberate strategies, much of this wealth could leave rural areas permanently. The presentation explored how place-based endowments and philanthropic strategies are being used to anchor wealth in rural communities and to support long-term rural development.

The presentation explored how place-based endowments and philanthropic strategies are being used to anchor wealth in rural communities and to support long-term rural development. Examples from rural Canada were shared to illustrate how communities are developing innovative approaches to wealth building and retention.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/translating-place-to-wealth/>

January 2025 Updates for Current Graduate Students

January 2, 2025



The January 2025 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source :<https://ruraldev.ca/january-2025-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Helps' PhD Available Online

January 5, 2025

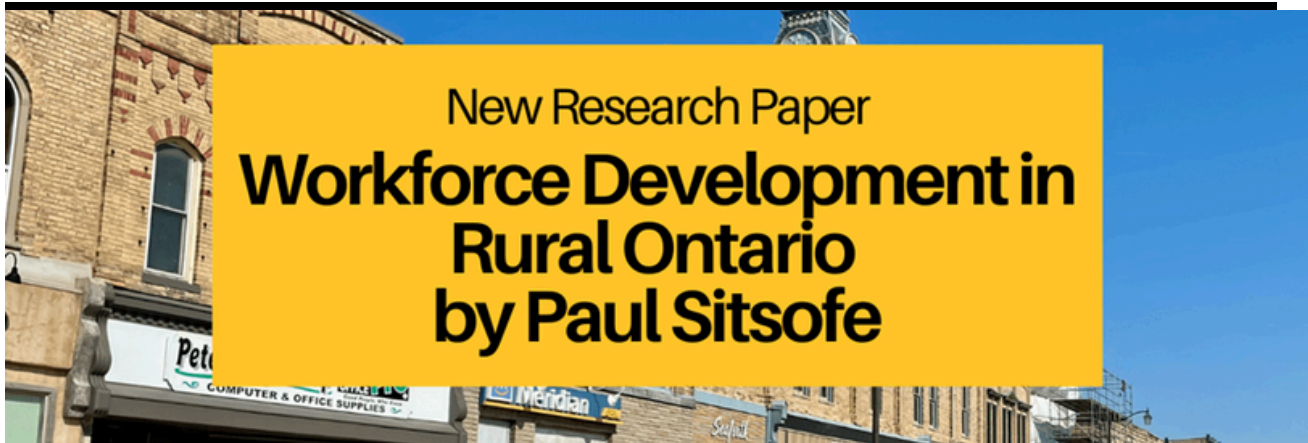


Louis Helps' recently defended Rural Studies PhD dissertation titled "Migrant Stories, Industry Narratives: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Migrant Labour in Canadian Agriculture" is now available! Take a read. This dissertation offers a critical discourse analysis of how migrant labour in Canadian agriculture is represented across multiple text types—including industry advocacy documents, government policy, media coverage, and academic literature. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, the dissertation examines how dominant narratives about migrant agricultural workers are constructed, maintained, and contested. Louis' PhD dissertation is available through the University of Guelph's Atrium – <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/helps-phd-available-online/>

Paul Sitsofe Publishes Research on Workforce Development

January 7, 2025



Congratulations to Paul Sitsofe for successfully completing his major research paper as part of his Master of Science (Planning) degree! Paul's research paper titled "Workforce Development in Rural Ontario: An Examination of Experiences and Strategies" is now available online through the University of Guelph's Atrium. A brief overview of Paul's research can be found below: This study examines workforce development strategies in rural Ontario to address skills and labour shortages. It explores the perspectives of economic development organizations, businesses, and workers on the challenges and opportunities associated with workforce development in rural Ontario. The study identifies innovative strategies being used to address workforce development challenges and provides recommendations for improving workforce development in rural Ontario.

Paul's major research paper is available through the University of Guelph's Atrium – <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/paul-sitsofe-publishes-research-on-workforce-development/>

Congratulations to Jayden Cote

January 23, 2025



Congratulations to Jayden Cote for receiving the Canadian Institute of Planners/L'Institut canadien des urbanistes (CIP/ICU) Student Trust Fund Award! The CIP/ICU Planning Student Trust Fund (CIP-PSTF) is the Canadian planning profession's national charity, providing a scholarship, bursary, and award program to students in accredited planning programs in Canada. Jayden is a Master of Science (Planning) student in the Rural Planning and Development program in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph. Jayden's research focuses on rural economic development in Ontario. Congratulations to Jayden on receiving this award!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/congratulations-to-jayden-cote/>

February 2025 Updates for Current Graduate Students

February 3, 2025



The February 2025 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/february-2025-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

COVID Impact on Migration in Rural Ontario

February 18, 2025



Check out the recent Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health lecture on the Urban Exodus. The presentation features Sara Epp (University of Guelph), Chris Fullerton (Brock University), Ellen Sinclair (Rural Ontario Institute), Scott Taylor (County of Grey), and Ryan Gibson (University of Guelph). The presentation shares recent research on findings from a province-wide survey of municipal governments regarding the impacts of the COVID pandemic.

Key findings from the Urban Exodus project include:

- Rural communities experienced significant population growth during and following the COVID-19 pandemic as urban residents relocated to rural areas.
- The pandemic-related migration to rural Ontario has created both opportunities and challenges for rural communities, including increased demand for housing, infrastructure, and services.
- Rural municipalities are adapting their planning and economic development strategies to respond to the new demographic realities created by the urban exodus.
- The Urban Exodus project is led by Dr. Sara Epp (University of Guelph) in collaboration with Dr. Chris Fullerton (Brock University) and Dr. Ryan Gibson (University of Guelph). For more information on the Urban Exodus project, visit <https://www.saraepp.com/urbanexodus>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/covid-impact-on-migration-in-rural-ontario/>

March 2025 Updates for Current Graduate Students

March 3, 2025



The March 2025 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/march2025updates/>

Economic Development Field Trip to Elora

March 18, 2025



On March 17, graduate students in the Economic Development class (RPD*6370) at the University of Guelph explored rural economic development in Centre Wellington. Students met with staff at the Community Futures Wellington Waterloo to learn about the regional economy, their programs, and their achievements. In the afternoon, students discussed the economic development opportunities and challenges with Centre Wellington Economic Development staff.

The field trip is a part of the Rural Economic Development course (RPD*6370) taught by Prof. Ryan Gibson in the Rural Planning and Development program at the University of Guelph.

The course examines theories and practices of economic development with a focus on rural and regional economies.

Thank you to Community Futures Wellington Waterloo and Centre Wellington Economic Development for hosting the visit and sharing your insights with our students!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/economic-development-field-trip-to-elora/>

New Publication – Hidden Treasures

March 20, 2025



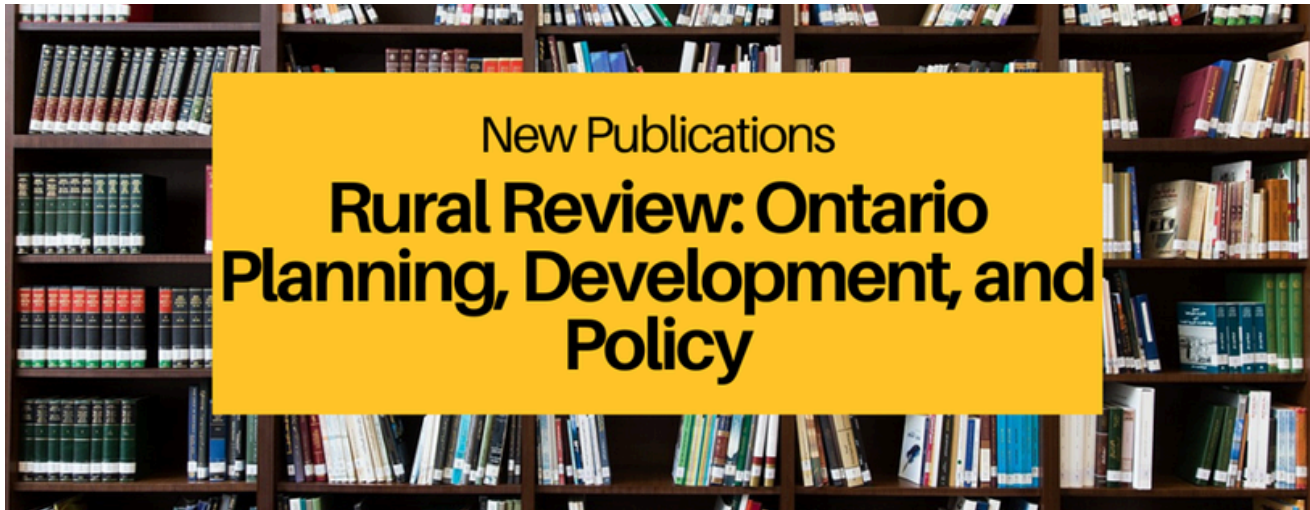
A new publication from Alex Petric and Ryan Gibson was published in *Regional Studies, Regional Science*. The publication is titled "Hidden Treasures? Estimating Intergenerational Wealth Transfers in Rural Canada." A brief overview of the publication: This study estimates the scale of intergenerational wealth transfers that will occur in rural Canada over the next two decades. Drawing on Statistics Canada data, the study estimates that significant wealth will be transferred in rural communities across Canada. Without deliberate strategies to retain this wealth in rural communities, much of it could leave rural areas as inheritors relocate to urban centres.

.The study provides estimates by province and by rural-urban typology and explores the implications for rural economic development. The publication is available in *Regional Studies, Regional Science*.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-publication/>

Read the Latest Issue of the Rural Review

March 26, 2025



The latest issue of the Rural Review: Ontario Rural Planning, Development, and Policy is now available! This issue showcases graduate student, postdoctoral fellow, and community researcher led initiatives on a wide variety of topics related to rural environments, rural economies, Indigenous development, and rural peoples. The oral presentations and poster presentations were shared at the 2025 Rural Research Symposium on March 26, 2025. The Rural Review is an open access, online journal. To read the latest issue visit <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/ruralReview>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/read-the-latest-issue-of-the-rural-review/>

April 2025 Updates for Current Graduate Students

April 1, 2025

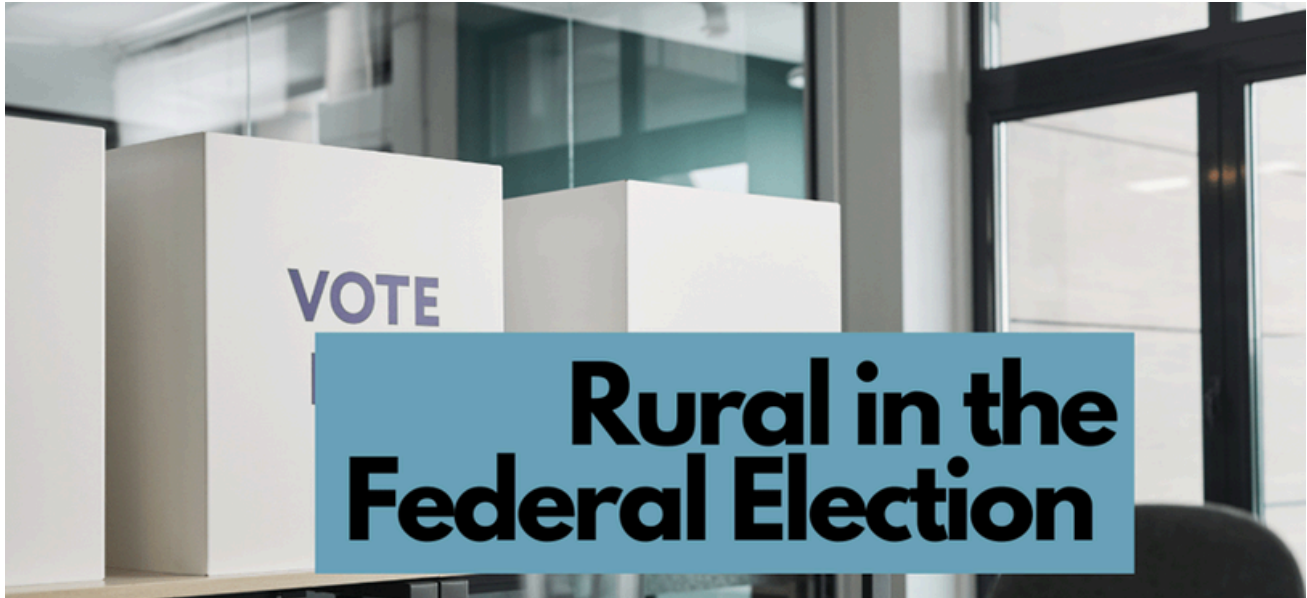


The April 2025 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/april-2025-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Where is Rural in the Federal Election?

April 7, 2025



Rural communities are critical to the country's economic success, yet they remain underrepresented and poorly understood in federal policies. Sarah-Patricia Breen, Heather Hall, Kyle Rich, and Ryan Gibson explore this question in the latest publication in The Conversation. The article, titled "In Canada's 2025 federal election, is anyone paying attention to rural communities?", calls for stronger, evidence-based rural development programs to address the unique needs of rural communities. The article highlights how rural areas contribute significantly to Canada's economy through agriculture, natural resources, and manufacturing – yet these contributions are often overlooked in federal election campaigns.

Read the full article in The Conversation – <https://theconversation.com/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/ruralfederalelection/>

Successful Thesis Defence – Lucas Berek

April 17, 2025



Congratulations to Lucas Berek for successfully defending his Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development thesis titled "The Living Room of a Rural Community: Economic Development in New Tecumseth, Ontario."

Thank you to members of Lucas' examination committee: Prof. Sara Epp, Prof. Silvia Sarapura-Escobar, and Prof. Nadia Amoroso. Stay tuned for access to Lucas' thesis – coming soon!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/successful-thesis-defence-lucas-berek/>

May 2025 Updates for Current Graduate Students

May 1, 2025



The May 2025 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/may-2025-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Successful Thesis Defence – Calum Jacques

May 2, 2025



Congratulations to Calum Jacques for successfully defending his Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development thesis titled "Agriculture as an Amenity: A Case Study of Peri-Urban Farmland in Tokyo, Japan."

Thank you to members of Calum's examination committee: Prof. Sara Epp, Prof. Silvia Sarapura-Escobar, and Prof. Nicolas Brunet. Stay tuned for access to Calum's thesis – coming soon!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/successful-thesis-defence-calum-jacques/>

New Thesis: Rural Economic Development in New Tecumseth

May 6, 2025



Lucas Berek's newly published Master of Science (Planning) thesis, *The Living Room of a Rural Community: Economic Development in New Tecumseth, Ontario*, offers a timely and nuanced exploration of how rural communities are adapting to rapid change. Using New Tecumseth as a case study, Berek investigates how towns with deep rural roots are responding to rising affordability pressures, shifting demographics, and post-pandemic recovery challenges—all while sitting at the interface between urban and rural Ontario. Lucas' MSc thesis is now available through the University of Guelph's Atrium – <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-thesis-rural-economic-development-in-new-tecumseth/>

Weathering the Storm

May 9, 2025



How can rural communities weather the current economic uncertainty? What can we learn from previous economic downturns that might provide insights for future strategies and activities? On May 7, 2025, Ryan Gibson shared research insights on these topics as part of Dufferin County's Tariff Response and Business Resources. The Weathering the Storm? Strategies for Rural Stability and Growth in Uncertain Times session took a closer look at Dufferin County's rural economy, drew on historical examples of rural community resilience, and shared strategies for navigating economic uncertainty.

For more information on Dufferin County's Tariff Response and Business Resources, visit <https://www.dufferincounty.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/weathering-the-storm/>

Reflections on the Rural Futures Initiative

May 12, 2025



As part of the 2025 Knowledge Translation and Transfer Conference, Ryan Gibson shared reflections on the Rural Futures: Mobilizing Knowledge and Sustaining Partnerships initiative. The Rural Futures initiative ensured rural knowledge and experiences within the university were translated and mobilized to rural partners in local government, community-based organizations, charities/nonprofits, Indigenous communities, all levels of government, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Key reflections from the Rural Futures initiative include:

- The importance of sustained partnerships between researchers and rural communities.
- The value of plain-language research summaries and researcher profiles for connecting academic knowledge with rural practitioners.
- The Rural Symposium as a key vehicle for knowledge translation and transfer.
- The need for ongoing investment in knowledge mobilization infrastructure to support rural development.

For more information on the Rural Futures initiative, visit <https://ruraldev.ca/rural-futures-mobilizing-knowledge-and-sustaining-partnerships/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/reflections-on-the-rural-futures-initiative/>

Analysis of Federal Funding for Transit in Rural Canada

May 13, 2025



Sarah-Patricia Breen (Selkirk College), Ryan Gibson (University of Guelph), and Hannah Main (Dalhousie University) recently published a new article in Canadian Public Policy. The article examines the distribution of federal public transit funding, highlighting a significant urban-rural disparity. The authors argue that current federal funding mechanisms predominantly favour urban centres, leaving rural and remote communities underserved. This imbalance not only affects the quality of life for rural residents but also hinders rural economic development and social inclusion.

The article calls for a more equitable approach to federal transit funding that recognizes the distinct needs of rural and remote communities and provides the necessary support to develop accessible transportation options in these areas. The article is available in Canadian Public Policy – <https://www.utpjournals.press/journals/cpp>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/analysis-of-federal-funding-for-transit-in-rural-canada/>

New Thesis: Agriculture as an Amenity in Tokyo

May 14, 2025



Calum Jacques recently published his Master of Planning (Science) thesis, *Agriculture as an Amenity: A Case Study of Peri-Urban Farmland in Tokyo, Japan*. A brief overview of Calum's research can be found below: This research examines how small-scale farming continues to exist within Tokyo's expanding urban landscape. Unlike many North American cities where urban development often displaces agriculture, Tokyo has managed to preserve pockets of farmland. The research explores the multifunctional role of urban agriculture in Tokyo, including food production, education, recreation, and disaster preparedness.

Calum's MSc thesis is now available through the University of Guelph's Atrium – <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/new-thesis-agriculture-as-an-amenity-in-tokyo/>

Intergenerational Transfers of Wealth – Impacts for Rural Places

May 15, 2025



On May 15, 2025, Ryan Gibson shared insights at a lunch-and-learn session co-hosted by the Community Foundation of Grey Bruce and Brightshores Health Systems Foundation. The event brought together over 30 lawyers and professionals to explore how rural areas are places of wealth and to understand that this wealth is increasingly mobile. Without careful consideration, much of it could leave rural areas as younger generations move to urban centres.

- Rural Canada is home to significant wealth accumulated over generations.
- As the baby boom generation ages, a significant intergenerational wealth transfer is underway.
- Place-based philanthropic strategies can help retain wealth in rural communities.
- Community foundations play an important role in facilitating local philanthropy and wealth retention.

For more information on the Community Foundation of Grey Bruce, visit <https://cfgb.ca/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/intergenerational-transfers-of-wealth-impacts-for-rural-places/>

Newspaper Article: A Message to Our Urban Friends

May 16, 2025



Take a read of a recently published article by Lucas Berek in the Orangeville Citizen titled "A message from rural Canada to our urban friends." The article focuses on a recent presentation delivered as part of the Team Dufferin – County of Dufferin Tariff Response and Business Resources initiative.

In the article, Berek highlights how rural communities across Canada contribute significantly to the country's economy and quality of life through food production, natural resources, and manufacturing. The article calls on urban Canadians to better understand and support rural communities as they navigate the economic challenges created by trade uncertainty.

Read the full article in the Orangeville Citizen – <https://www.orangeville.com/>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/newspaper-article-a-message-to-our-urban-friends/>

Reflection: National Housing Standard for Migrant Agricultural Workers

May 20, 2025



The May 9, 2025, press conference of the National Housing Standards for Migrant Agricultural Workers at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo provided important insights for planning researchers focused on rural communities. The Coalition for National Housing Standards for Migrant Agricultural Workers (CoNaMi) led by Dr. Susana Caxaj, successfully brought together a diverse mix of voices, including seasoned researchers, passionate advocates, and community members who have seen or learnt of these housing problems. The panel discussion highlighted the troubling realities that many migrant workers face, including overcrowded living spaces, compromised privacy, and housing conditions that falls far below acceptable safety standards. What made this gathering particularly significant was its focus on a critical regulatory gap in Canadian policy. Although migrant workers are essential to maintaining Canada's food security, the lack of federal housing standards has enabled substandard living conditions to persist across provincial lines. The housing consensus document unveiled at the event—shaped by the insights of 29 experts with deep knowledge of the issues—offers a practical, rights-based framework grounded in principles of human dignity, safety, and equity. The initiative supports fieldwork findings that consistently point to the urgent need for standardized enforceable regulations in land use planning. The discussion went further from immediate housing concerns to critical questions raised about the role and responsibility of planning professionals in advocating for marginalized populations whose opinions are too often absent from policy conversations. The #RaiseTheBar campaign deserves the full backing of the planning community as a vital step toward housing justice and more equitable community development. Catch the conversation, follow CoNaMi on X/Twitter at <https://x.com/CoNaMi12378> and explore additional resources at <https://farmworkerhousing.ca/national-housing-standards/>

Mobilizing Economic Planning Knowledge for Rural Ontario

May 22, 2025



The Ontario Professional Planners Institute recently published a story titled "Mobilizing Economic Planning Knowledge for Rural Ontario" that emerges from research conducted by graduate students and faculty. Take a read of the story based on research by Lucas Berek, Eliza MacLauchlan, Christine Miller, Damilola Oyewale, Natasha Pennell, Avery Velez, and Ryan Gibson.

The story examines how economic planning knowledge can be mobilized to support rural economic development practitioners in Ontario. The research draws on a series of plain language summaries and research reports produced by graduate students as part of the Libro Professorship's knowledge mobilization activities. Read the full story in the Ontario Professional Planners Institute's Y Magazine – <https://ontarioplanners.ca/publications/y-magazine>.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/mobilizing-economic-planning-knowledge-for-rural-ontario/>

RPD Students, Alumni, and Faculty Share Research at CAG Conference

May 23, 2025



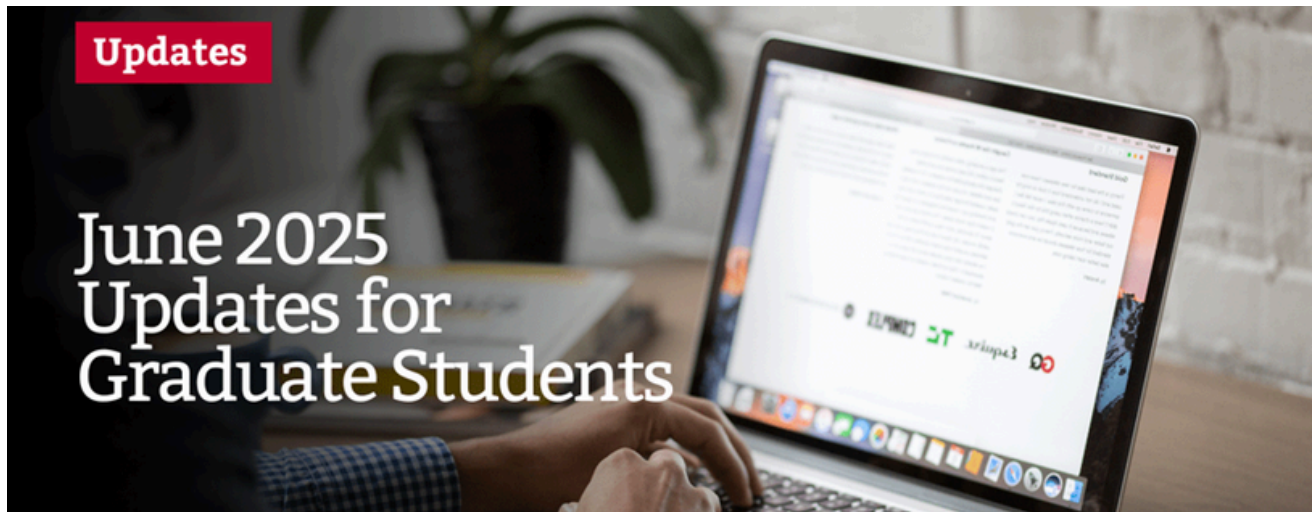
Rural Planning and Development students, alumni, and faculty shared findings from a number of research projects at the 2025 Confluence Conference.

- Ferdous Huq – Community Gardens and Food Justice: Exploring Access, Equity, and Effectiveness
- Ben Tobias-Murray – Examining Local Food Procurement Practices: Costs, Strategies and Benefits of Purchasing Local Food in Long-term Care Homes
- Lucas Berek – Growth on the Edge: Economic Development Challenges and Opportunities in New Tecumseth
- Sara Epp – The Urban Exodus: Understanding the Impacts of COVID-19 Migration in Rural Ontario
- Damilola Oyewale and Ryan Gibson – Navigating the Policy Quagmire: Housing Challenges for International Agricultural Workers in Rural Ontario

The Confluence Conference was hosted by the Canadian Association of Geographers Conference took place in Ottawa, Ontario from May 20–23, 2025. Learn more about the Canadian Association of Geographers Conference at <https://www.cag-acg.ca/cag-2025-home>

June 2025 Updates for Current Graduate Students

June 2, 2025



The June 2025 newsletter contains updates to graduate students working with Prof. Gibson and recent alumni. This newsletter shares information about academic program updates, celebrates recent achievements, and shares insights on upcoming events.

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/june-2025-updates-for-current-graduate-students/>

Berek Awarded CIP-PSTF Outstanding Graduating Student Award

June 6, 2025



Congratulations to Lucas Berek for receiving the CIP-PSTF Outstanding Graduating Student Award! The CIP-PSTF Outstanding Graduating Student Award is bestowed upon one graduating student from each accredited planning program in Canada who has demonstrated an outstanding contribution to their future profession. This contribution is assessed through a wide range of contributing factors, including academic and extracurricular contributions.

Lucas Berek is a graduating student in the Rural Planning and Development program in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph. Lucas' research focuses on rural economic development in New Tecumseth, Ontario.

Congratulations to Lucas on receiving this prestigious award!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/berek-awarded-cip-pstf-outstanding-graduating-student-award/>

Congratulations Recent Graduates

June 12, 2025



Congratulations to graduates of the Rural Planning and Development programs who convoked during the spring/summer ceremonies at the University of Guelph:

- Ajibola Agebjobi, Master of Science (Planning)
- Calum Jacques, Master of Science (Planning)
- Greg McLeod, Master of Planning
- Heather Douglas, Master of Science (Planning)
- Lucas Berek, Master of Science (Planning)
- Sarah Lyons, Master of Planning
- Taylor Wilson, Master of Science (Planning)

Good luck to all graduates in the next chapter of their lives!

Source: <https://ruraldev.ca/congratulations-recent-graduates/>

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