



**Canada
Rural
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(C-RERL)**

Policy Brief

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The authors are Professors in the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Saskatchewan.

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Rose Olfert, Mark Partridge and Murray Fulton

Saskatchewan's sense of place is based on the recognition that we are a very small, relatively remote place in a global context, heavily dependent on the export of natural resource-based production, with a widely dispersed population. Our future depends on acknowledging who, where and what we are and building on the opportunities that are available to us. Small population, long-run declines in agricultural and natural resource employment, and our business environment relative to neighbouring Alberta represent some of our challenges. On the other hand, Saskatchewan enjoys a relatively well-educated labour force, has abundant natural resources, and borders on the world's largest market.

This policy brief includes a research-based description of some of the key Saskatchewan realities and suggests an avenue for improved economic vitality and quality of life, focusing on the importance of urban growth. The over-riding conclusion in terms of enhancing long-run provincial prosperity is that continuing on the current trajectory could have dire consequences. Our results and recommendations are summarized in Table 1 (following the concluding remarks).

The Setting

Saskatchewan is in the Great Plains region of North America that has long struggled with the profound restructuring that has occurred in the agriculture sector. As discussed in a previous brief, Saskatchewan's resulting population growth patterns are consistent with widespread patterns ranging from West Texas to the Northern Prairies.¹ The only exceptions are areas of higher amenities—for instance the Black Hills in southwestern South Dakota—and areas surrounding larger urban centres such as Winnipeg, Omaha, Des Moines, and Wichita. Saskatoon also showed a modest population gain in the 1990s. The diversity of government policy environments in the Great Plains leads to the conclusion that there are no simple political solutions to population loss in this region. However, a general pattern, at least in Canada, is that a region requires a metropolitan centre of at least 500,000 people to produce widespread population growth in its surrounding area.² Regions without such "mega" urban centres need to be more creative or possess superior natural amenities to sustain economic growth.

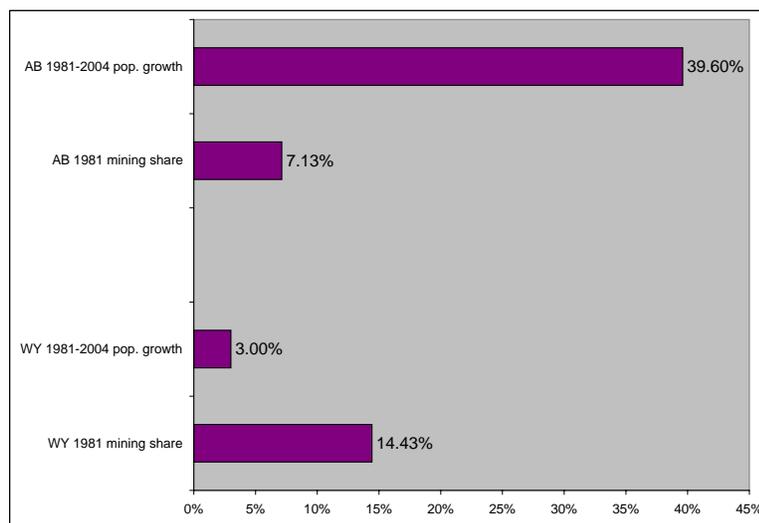
In contrast to the Great Plains region, Alberta and its broader mountain region are characterized by population growth extending from Alberta and lower British Columbia all the way down to the Mexican border. Common features of this region in both Canada and the U.S. are a Western lifestyle, splendid natural amenities, and favorable business climates. To varying degrees, these factors explain why these states and provinces have attracted so many people in recent decades.³

Although there are many reasons why one region experiences faster population growth than another, economists have long stressed that worker knowledge, innovation, and productivity are paramount in assuring long-run prosperity. Numerous Nobel prizes have recognized economists' contributions to our understanding of this complex and varied process, including awards to Robert Solow and Robert Lucas. With respect to the relationship between economic growth and energy resources, economists describe a "natural resources curse" regarding the long-run sustainability of energy economies.⁴ Natural resource prices are currently at very high cyclical levels producing short term government budget bonanzas. Yet these are by no means sufficient to ensure long term prosperity. A great many other conditions need to be met for continuing growth and prosperity. Riches in oil, coal, uranium, or timber are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for economic growth; indeed, heavy dependence on a narrow base subject to wide price fluctuations can be a liability.

The example in Figure 1 illustrates how natural resources, in the absence of other fundamentals like urban centres, do not guarantee prosperity or population growth. At the height of the last natural resource price cycle in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Wyoming appeared poised for long-run prosperity. As Figure 1 shows, it had more than twice Alberta's share of employment in natural resources. Predictably, the collapse of that era's natural resource cycle boom and the lack of large urban centres prevented Wyoming from capitalizing on the boom, and its population growth stagnated. In contrast, the presence of two large urban centres has helped Alberta sustain the long-run population growth that eluded Wyoming (which instead occurred in Colorado). Alberta used its energy revenue windfall in the 1970s and 1980s to invest in infrastructure that supported the growth of its urban centres. Cities as "Canada's engines of growth" is the topic we turn to next.

"...natural resources, in the absence of other fundamentals...do not guarantee prosperity or population growth."

Figure 1: Wyoming on Steroids (Natural Resources are Not Necessarily the Answer)



The Importance of Cities in 21st Century Canada

Within the general pattern of population losses that dominates the Great Plains region, the major cities stand out as exceptions to the rule. Omaha, Des Moines, Wichita and Winnipeg have experienced solid growth. Why are these cities so resilient to broader Great Plains trends?

The spatial proximity of a large number and variety of businesses with easy access to each other can lead to productivity improvements that are collectively referred to as agglomeration economies. Within cities, there are concentrations of specialized services such as consultants, financiers, and attorneys, as well as other inputs that reduce business costs, contributing to higher urban productivity. Also, firms can share the city's public infrastructure including ports, expressways and airports. These same bases for productivity improvements mean that businesses support both forward and backward linkages in close proximity, adding to the spatial concentration. Of course, greater initial concentration of population and firms attracts new firms drawn to the larger "home market" that they represent, reinforcing the local growth process. This process is sometimes referred to as cumulative causation.

Agglomeration economies also arise from access to a large labour supply with the full range of general and specialized skills. Businesses can quickly and easily find the labour skills they need, facilitating expansion and efficient production. Similarly, members of the labour force find it easier to find jobs, switch jobs, and succeed in procuring a good fit with their employer. The benefits of knowledge spillovers are yet another advantage of an urban location. Within knowledge clusters, learning by observing others, imitating successes, sharing ideas, and undertaking joint innovations all contribute to the mutual growth of the involved businesses (Silicon Valley is the classic example). These productivity advantages allow firms to pay higher wages to their workers, while the productivity effects are capitalized into land prices. To paraphrase Nobel Prize winning economist Robert Lucas (1988), why would firms on Bay Street (Toronto) pay those high wages plus rents unless they could get something in return?⁵

Cities also offer urban amenities that require a critical mass of population to support the activity or facility. These amenities include a full array of public services (major hospitals, universities, public transit, etc.) and private or semi-private facilities such as recreation venues, professional sports, up-scale shopping, and cultural events and facilities. The presence of these urban amenities attracts population, which then makes the cities more attractive to employers; and so the feedback loop reinforces the city's advantages. A critical mass of population itself can be a magnet for more population, especially young people in search of potential mates, adventure, and cultural and recreational choices. According to Richard Florida, this could induce and perpetuate the presence of a 'creative class.'⁶

Canada's economic geography appears to ensure that Canadian cities play a critical role. Population is concentrated along the U.S. border, meaning that settlement is along a narrow several thousand kilometer "line." Conversely, the U.S. population is more evenly spread throughout a "rectangle." Along the "line," there are only nine Canadian mega centres with metropolitan populations exceeding 500,000. In the "rectangle," there are more than 90 such U.S. mega centres. If (say) Calgary was removed from the Canadian scene, there would be profound implications across Western Canada and the entire country. In sparsely populated Canada, each mega centre takes on a magnified role in the economy. Conversely, removing (say) Oklahoma City (about the same size as Calgary) from the American urban system would produce much smaller repercussions—surrounding mega centres in the rectangle such as Dallas-Fort Worth, Tulsa, and Wichita would surely fill in some of the functions.

Recent U of S research supports the notion that Canadian cities serve as engines of growth.⁷ The results show clear evidence that mega centres—defined as metropolitan areas greater than 500,000—are engines of growth. Specifically, rural communities and especially non-mega urban centres benefit from being closer to mega centres. This is consistent with regional attractiveness being enhanced by closer proximity to higher-ordered services and amenities found in the mega centres. It is shown that population-supporting spillovers of these large cities extend further than what economists commonly attribute to urban spillovers. In addition to the favor-

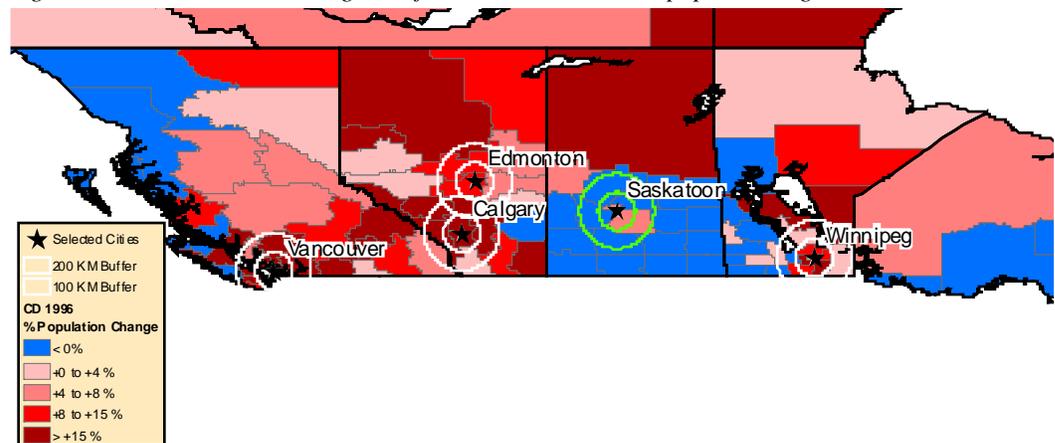
"...knowledge spillovers are yet another advantage of an urban location,,,(where) learning by observing others, imitating successes, sharing ideas, ...contribute to the mutual growth of businesses."

able impact of being more proximate to mega centres, rural communities benefit by simply being nearer to *any* urban centre, which likely relates to commuting and general business linkages (though rural communities benefit the most if they are closest to a mega centre). Cities, especially those with populations over 500,000, then, are not only self-sustaining, but support and contribute to the growth and vitality of the regions around them and thus the entire country.

Figures 2 and 3 show the spatial distribution of Canada's cities of 500,000+ population. The circles centred on the cities are drawn at 100 and 200 kms from the urban core. In western Canada they are readily associated with population growth both in the cities and in their surrounding areas. In Manitoba, for example, growth is highly concentrated within 200 kms of Winnipeg, while in Alberta the influence of Edmonton and Calgary creates growth throughout the corridor between the two cities. In central Canada the influence of cities extends more or less continuously due to their close proximity. Yet growth quickly tapers off outside of the mega-centre growth shadows. Although population growth in 21st century Canada is highly urban-centric, it is not a zero-sum game for rural communities. Nearby rural communities benefit from urban growth as well – growing urban centres are not stealing rural vitality.

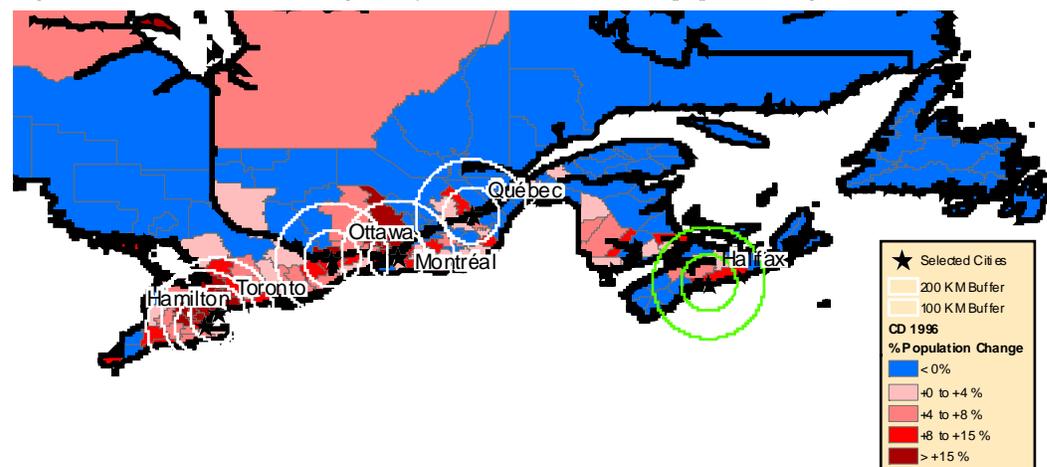
"Cities...over 500,000 are not only self-sustaining, but support and contribute to the growth and vitality of the regions around them..."

Figure 2: Western Canada's Engines of Growth -- CMA's with populations greater than 500,000



NOTE: Although Saskatoon (Figure 2) and Halifax (Figure 3) do not have populations in excess of 500,000, they are shown here as “contender” engines of growth due to their local prominence.

Figure 3: Eastern Canada's Engines of Growth -- CMA's with populations greater than 500,000



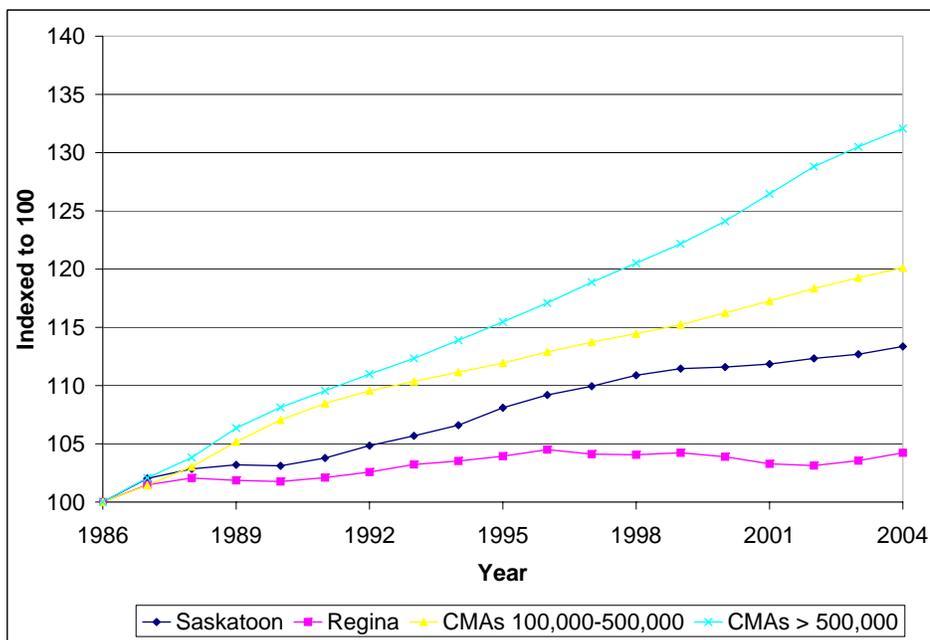
Growing Saskatchewan

So what lessons does this offer for growing Saskatchewan? While Saskatchewan does not have a mega centre of 500,000+, Saskatoon shows some strength, as shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 also illustrates the broader influence of the city, showing that the surrounding area has participated in the population growth. Figure 3 shows that Halifax—another non-mega urban centre—is one of the bright spots in Atlantic Canada with growth extending out into its surrounding rural areas.

Given the general population decline in the Great Plains, can we rely on our cities to be our engines of growth in the provincial context? How do they compare with other cities on the national scene? It is important to distinguish between CMAs—Census Metropolitan Areas with an urban core of 100,000+, and CAs—Census agglomerations with an urban core of 10,000-99,999, as the growth potential is very different for cities of different sizes.⁸

Figure 4 shows the time trend of all of Canada’s CMAs, compared with Saskatoon and Regina, Saskatchewan’s two CMAs. We subdivide CMAs into those 100,000 to 500,000 and those over 500,000 to permit us to compare Saskatchewan’s two CMAs with those in roughly the same size category across the country. All CMAs are indexed to their 1986 population levels to facilitate a comparison of growth rates. Clearly the 500,000+ group has experienced the fastest growth and the gap between this group and the smaller CMAs appears to be increasing over time. Saskatoon and Regina have experienced growth well below that of the 500,000 group, but also well below the average of the 100,000 to 500,000 group that may be considered their peer group. Saskatoon’s growth rate (slope of the line) has approached that of the peer group from time to time, and is consistently superior to that of Regina.

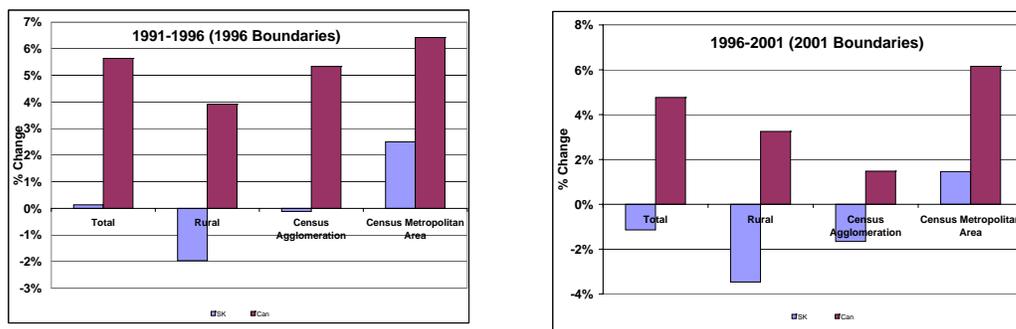
Figure 4: Census Metropolitan Growth Rates 1986-2001, Saskatchewan and Canada



"Saskatoon's growth rate...is consistently superior to that of Regina."

Figure 5 provides another perspective on the same phenomenon, this time focusing on a comparison of Saskatchewan's growth experience with that of Canada in 1991-1996 and 1996-2001. Growth rates of the provincial population (compared with Canada) are shown along with a comparison of rural areas, CAs and CMAs. Rural here is defined as all parts of the province (Canada) that are neither in a CA or CMA. A consistent pattern appears. Saskatchewan's total population growth, as well as its subcomponents, is well below the national rate in both time periods. Our urban centres, Saskatchewan's potential engines of growth, are growing well below the national rates, apparently worsening in the second period. Indeed Saskatchewan's secondary cities (CAs) experienced a net decline throughout the 1990s while those in Canada experienced robust growth in the early part of the decade, though markedly slower growth in the latter part. Clearly the consistent weakness of Saskatchewan's secondary cities is worrisome. Continued declines will result in them successively falling below population thresholds which would set off further population losses in their broader regions (including their dependent rural neighbours). Saskatchewan's CMAs also experienced a *relative* decline during the second-half of the decade. (See Appendix Table A1 for a complete list of Saskatchewan's CAs and CMAs.)

Figure 5: Population Growth Rates in Saskatchewan and Canada, total, Rural, CAs and CMAs, 1990s



Saskatchewan is clearly not holding its own in the national context, suggesting the need for urgent changes. Our engines of growth—our nine urban centres—are collectively struggling and rural Saskatchewan is in serious decline. Obviously a trend line out 20-30 years is very unattractive. What can be done? Saskatchewan has a limited number of potential growth points with which to start. Indeed, only Saskatoon has exhibited anything close to the consistent growth that would be expected of CMAs. Growing Saskatchewan is likely dependent on a better performance of the growth points we have. How could growth in Saskatoon and Regina, for example, be better supported?

Transportation access to the large and lucrative markets to the south would seem to be essential. The efficient and cost-effective movement of the production of our resource-based economy, as well as manufactured products that may be produced, requires state-of-the-art highway corridors. Figure 6 shows the U.S. interstate system and the major Canadian highways. It illustrates that Saskatchewan does not have direct ties into the US interstate network despite there being close linkage points directly south of Regina. Through modern transportation links, there is the potential to make all of the urban centres much more attractive locations for business investments related to the development of resources and the manufacturing sector.

Attracting or retaining business in the province's urban centres, indeed in all of Saskatchewan, requires a competitive business climate. Capital is highly mobile and will be attracted to the location where the difference between gross returns and costs are highest. On the cost side,

"Saskatchewan is clearly not holding its own in the national context, suggesting the need for urgent changes."

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Growing Saskatchewan in an Urban Age

Figure 6: Major North American Highway Network



governments can ensure that tax rates are conducive to investment and business retention. Saskatchewan's commissioning of the Business Tax Review Committee illustrates the importance attached to creating a competitive tax environment. To illustrate the differences relative to Alberta, for example, the basic corporate tax rate is 17% in Saskatchewan compared to 11% in Alberta. Fuel taxes are considerably lower in Alberta—9 cents/litre vs. 15 cents/litre. In a global economy, with capital being moved at the touch of a button, these tax differentials suggest that *before-tax* returns in Saskatchewan must be significantly higher than in Alberta (let alone anywhere else) to justify investment. This is an onerous requirement for the province.

Growing Saskatchewan will require not only making it attractive for business, but also for labour. Indeed the presence of the right quantity and quality of labour is essential for business success. Competitiveness is therefore also required in personal tax rates both in terms of individual investments and in attracting knowledge workers that are essential for sustainable 21st century growth. Using the comparison with Alberta again, Saskatchewan's personal tax rates range from 11% to 15% while Alberta has a flat 10% personal tax rate. Especially troubling for attracting high-skilled knowledge workers is the fact that the 15% bracket kicks in at below \$70,000. Saskatchewan competes with jurisdictions throughout the world for knowledge workers and new investments that attract these workers. With the existing relative taxes, Saskatchewan will need to offer advantages (in the form of quality of life, for example) to residents or potential migrants sufficient to offset the higher tax rates. Still, attracting knowledge workers and the businesses that employ them to the province could be facilitated by competitive marginal personal income taxes.

But, making Saskatchewan an attractive place to live requires more than jobs and a competitive tax environment. Natural and urban amenities, as well as the quality and accessibility of public services are important determinants of the quality of life. In terms of undiscovered natural jewels, the province has opportunities to expand its tourism sector. In addition to transportation services, health and education access is essential for a growing population. Urban amenities

such as cultural, sports, and recreational venues are necessary to attract and retain population, especially youth. Cultural, artistic, and recreational amenities in major urban centres can be a powerful draw for population and the competitiveness of our urban centres on this front is critical. Good governance and security improve the attractiveness of rural and urban areas alike.

Furthermore, institutional innovations will also be necessary for an efficient and targeted pursuit of economic growth and employment in the province. As is apparent from Figure 4, rural Saskatchewan is in distress, a result of the declining labour force requirements in agriculture combined with insufficient new employment opportunities to offset this decline. Among the responses that are required to address this problem is a new form of rural governance, one that is able to marshal the critical mass of people, capital, public services, and entrepreneurial ability to effectively pursue rural economic development or to find a way to participate in urban-based growth. The new governance structure must be innovative, while addressing the urgent problems.

Finally, Saskatchewan has, at the current time, a unique opportunity to make some strategic decisions. As was pointed out earlier, natural resources do not necessarily create economic growth. Nevertheless, the resource revenue windfall that Saskatchewan will enjoy over the next few years presents a unique opportunity to support and encourage activities that build on our strengths, and to improve our competitiveness in those areas where we have some discretion.

The conditions for growing Saskatchewan noted above—improved transportation access, competitive business and personal tax rates, attractive urban amenities, and good governance—may be necessary conditions for growing Saskatchewan. However, they are neither individually nor, even in combination, sufficient. But improvements on these fronts will substantially improve our probability of growth and prosperity.

Concluding Remarks

In addition to the prominence of cities in economic and cultural vitality, cities are gaining importance on the political landscape as well. As Tom Courchene has outlined, Ottawa is increasingly circumventing the provinces to deal directly with Canadians and with cities in areas typically viewed as falling under provincial jurisdiction.⁹ Cities in turn, are increasingly taking on many of the roles played by the provincial governments – a good example is social policy (e.g., housing). The result is that provinces find themselves squeezed in the middle in what Courchene calls hourglass federalism. The growing political power of the cities underlines the importance of providing them the support that is required for growth.

Saskatchewan's reality includes many challenges to its future growth, including its location in the Great Plains region. Knowledge and innovation are the keys to economic growth in the 21st century. The knowledge economy is concentrated in urban centres, which play an especially important role in Canada. Though Saskatchewan cannot change its geographical location, it does have control over its own policies and institutions. Strategically, Saskatchewan's most realistic chance for widespread prosperity (urban and rural alike) is through growth in its urban centres. Policy recommendations include streamlining our tax structure and building modern transportation corridors to the south. As well, Saskatchewan needs to think clearly about how it can wisely invest the resource revenues that will be generated during the current upward price cycle in the energy industry. Again, Table 1 summarizes our key observations and policy recommendations.

*"..the resource
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Our key findings:

- Saskatchewan, like its Great Plains neighbours, has experienced pervasive and widespread population losses.
 - Economic growth requires productivity improvements and innovation. Throughout the world, natural resource led growth has generally not been sustainable. Whether the province should engage in (say) more potash or uranium mining is an open question, but a substantial increase in these activities will not have a tangible impact on overall provincial population trends.
 - Urban centres are sources of economic growth and vitality—especially in Canada. This is particularly true for urban centres with population in excess of 500,000. In Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, though a small CMA, portrays some strength.
 - Cities derive their advantage from higher productivity due to agglomeration economies that attract businesses, and urban amenities that attract population.
 - Saskatchewan's cities, as well as its rural areas, have not fared well relative to their Canadian counterparts. Secondary cities in the province were in absolute decline in the 1990s, which has negative ramifications for the regions they anchor.
 - The growth created by cities positively affects the rural areas surrounding them. Urban growth is not a zero-sum game.
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Our key recommendations are:

- Our urban centres should be seen as the best potential sources of economic growth for the province, including its rural areas.
- Tax rates relative to other Canadian provinces, especially neighbouring Alberta, as well as US states, should be competitive to make Saskatchewan an attractive location for investment and growth. This extends to both personal and business tax structures.
- Better transportation access to the U.S. market should be pursued.
- Cultural, artistic and recreational amenities and quality of life must be enhanced for population retention and attraction.
- Governance innovations to ensure the participation of rural areas in economic growth must be sought. Further delay puts the very survival of small Saskatchewan communities at risk.
- Wise investment of the resource revenues that will be generated during the current upward price cycle in the energy industry must be undertaken for long term pay-offs.

End Notes

¹ Fulton, Murray, Rose Olfert, and Mark Partridge. *Population Growth—Double or Nothing?* Canada Rural Economy Research Lab Policy Brief, September 8, 2005, available at <http://www.crerl.usask.ca/policy.php>. The map is available at www.crerl.usask.ca.

² In the Canadian context, a study by Mark Partridge, M. Rose Olfert and Alessandro Alasia find that a community or city's growth prospects greatly improve the closer it is to a metropolitan area of at least 500,000 people. See *Agglomeration or Amenities: Canadian Cities as Engines of Growth*, Canada Rural Economy Research Lab research working paper, available at www.crerl.usask.ca.

³ Partridge, Mark D. *It is Time to Slay the Energy Myth in Describing Alberta's Prosperity*. Canada Rural Economy Research Lab Policy Brief, July 8, 2005, available at <http://www.crerl.usask.ca/policy.php>.

⁴ Partridge, Mark D. *It is Time to Slay the Energy Myth in Describing Alberta's Prosperity*. Canada Rural Economy Research Lab Policy Brief, July 8, 2005, available at <http://www.crerl.usask.ca/policy.php>.

⁵ Lucas, Robert E. Jr.. 1988. *On the Mechanics of Economic Development*. *Journal of Monetary Economics* 22(1): 3-42.

⁶ Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

⁷ Partridge, Mark, M. Rose Olfert and Alessandro Alasia *Agglomeration or Amenities: Canadian Cities as Engines of Growth*, Canada Rural Economy Research Lab research working paper, available at www.crerl.usask.ca.

⁸ Statistics Canada forms CMAs and CAs from one or more adjacent Census Subdivisions centred on an urban core (du Plessis, V., R. Beshiri, R.D. Bollman, and H. Clemenson. 2002. Definition of "Rural." Statistics Canada Agriculture and Rural Working Paper Series Working Paper No. 61 (series 21-601-MIE).). The population of an urban core must be at least 10,000 to form a CA and at least 100,000 to form a CMA. To be included in the CMA or CA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows (Statistics Canada. 2004. *2001 Census Dictionary Internet Version*. Ottawa. Accessed online at: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Reference/dict/index.htm>).

⁹ Courchene, Thomas J. .2005. *Citistates and the State of Cities: Political Economy and Fiscal-Federalism Dimensions*. IRPP Working Paper Series No. 2005-03, June. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Appendix Table A1: Saskatchewan Cities' Growth Rates, Constant Boundaries, 1991-2001

Saskatchewan CAs	1991 (1996 Boundaries)	1996 (1996 Boundaries)	1996 (2001 Boundaries)	2001 (2001 Boundaries)	% Chg 91-96	% Chg 96-01
Estevan (Sask.)	12,178	12,656	12,656	12,083	3.90%	-4.50%
Lloydminster (Alta./SK.)	7,241	7,636	7,636	7,840	5.50%	2.70%
Moose Jaw (Sask.)	35,552	34,829	34,829	33,519	-2.00%	-3.80%
North Battleford (Sask.)	18,455	17,987	17,987	17,512	-2.50%	-2.60%
Prince Albert (Sask.)	41,257	41,706	41,706	41,460	1.10%	-0.60%
Swift Current (Sask.)	16,429	16,437	16,437	16,527	0.00%	0.50%
Yorkton (Sask.)	18,023	17,713	17,713	17,554	-1.70%	-0.90%
Total	149,135	148,964	148,964	146,495	-0.10%	-1.70%
Saskatchewan CMAs						
Saskatoon	210,949	219,056	219,056	225,927	3.80%	3.10%
Regina	191,692	193,652	193,652	192,800	1.00%	-0.40%
Total	402,641	412,708	412,708	418,727	2.50%	1.50%
Saskatchewan Total	988, 928	990,237	990,237	978,933	0.10%	-1.10%
Canada CAs						
Canada CAs	4,353,038	4,585,209	4,476,095	4,542,160	5.30%	1.50%
Canada CMAs	16,787,118	17,864,646	18,178,597	19,296,926	6.40%	6.20%
Canada Total	21,104,902	22,410,772	22,615,609	23,801,140	6.20%	5.20%



C-RERL's mission is to inform public policies designed to stabilize and enhance rural communities throughout Canada, and in Saskatchewan in particular.

C-RERL is directed by Mark Partridge, the Canada Research Chair for the New Rural Economy at the University of Saskatchewan.

Mike St.Louis is the manager of C-RERL and an experienced GIS specialist capable of performing complex spatial analysis.

C-RERL is open to partners in research and clients from the provincial government. Individuals or groups are invited to explore the capabilities of the facility and to utilize the services available through joint projects, contract research, or on a fee-for research basis. Demonstrations of the features of the lab are available upon request and questions regarding its use and potential are welcome.

For more information, please visit the CRERL website at <http://www.crerl.usask.ca>.

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