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Don E. Albrecht, WRDC Executive Director

Introduction

By Don E. Albrecht
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Our country is in the midst of at least three significant crises, each of which is having major impacts on individuals and communities. They include:

1. **The COVID-19 pandemic.** At the time of this writing, more than 34 million people have tested positive worldwide, and at least 1 million people have died. In the United States alone, more than 7 million people have tested positive, with over 200,000 deaths.
2. **A climate crisis** that is having growing impacts throughout the world. These impacts are especially evident in the western United States with increasingly severe weather events and destructive wildfires.
3. **Racial unrest.** Throughout our nation's history, minority people have experienced significant discrimination. Continuing unfair treatment is resulting in anger and frustration, which recently exploded in demonstrations and protests throughout the country.

The Western Rural Development Center continues to work with our partners to address these and other concerns. One way we do this is by sharing scientifically sound information intended to help individuals and policymakers make wise choices. In this issue of Rural Connections, we continue this tradition by sharing articles that address each crisis mentioned above.

Four articles are included on the COVID-19 pandemic. First, my colleagues and I have written about how rural communities can benefit economically, in the long run, from the coronavirus pandemic. This can be achieved by first taking advantage of the desire of millions to live in rural areas, a desire that has increased because rural areas have been relatively safe from COVID-19. Second, by using modern information and communication technology, many individuals can now live where they wish, rather than where their job is located.

In the second article, Jessica Schad, Jennifer Givens, and Connor Wengreen present results of a statewide survey of Utah residents on their perceptions of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their health and economic security. Third, Extension specialists from Washington State University describe how their Policy, Systems, and Environmental Framework is a useful approach for resilient adaptations by aligning the shared goals of different organizations and agencies. This framework can be used to help communities recover from the current pandemic. Finally, Extension professionals and their colleagues from Colorado argue that in our recovery planning for rural America that we not return to the status quo. Rather, that we make the dynamic transformations necessary to emerge even better.

As for the climate crisis, Paul Lachapelle describes how climate change is perhaps the greatest threat humanity has ever faced. In an effort to address this threat, the National Extension Climate Initiative (NECI) has been organized. Among the goals of NECI is to improve climate literacy and expand collaborative efforts to link professionals working on climate issues.

Lastly, Extension professionals from the University of Idaho describe ways to have dialogue on racial and ethnicity issues with a racially homogenous audience. These skills are needed to improve racial understanding in many western communities that lack racial diversity.

The message emerging from these articles is that we use this opportunity to change our communities in ways that make them more resilient moving forward. Wouldn't it be great if we didn't just survive these difficult times, but rather emerged even better than before? I look forward to working with our partners as we strive together to achieve this goal. *