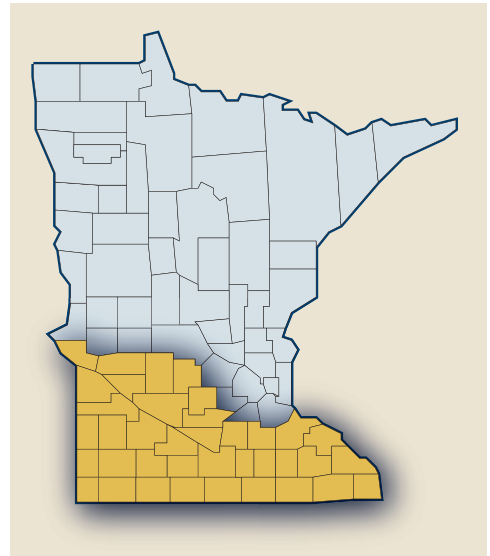

The Power of the Possible
Voices on Southern Minnesota's Economic Future



FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2009



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**DR. ANN BODE,
THE HORMEL INSTITUTE**

The Regional Competitiveness Project provides an opportunity that is critical to the future of Southern Minnesota because we recognize that globalization has changed and will continue to change local, regional and national economies. As indicated in the findings from the local roundtables, Southern Minnesota is clearly an elite athlete of the global economic race, poised to win the race because of our unique ability to join forces and unselfishly share our strengths as a region. Southern Minnesota is extremely fortunate to have so many assets that are recognized around the world as real strengths. With our tremendous resources we can enjoy incredible opportunities to become world leaders in our areas of expertise, which include medical care, medical research, life sciences, technology, agriculture, wind energy and more.

Minnesota might not be able to boast of warm climates or low state taxes, but we can easily brag about the University of Minnesota—one of the top universities in the world; Hormel Foods Corporation and its leadership in the food industry; the leadership of Mayo Clinic and its unmatched reputation in the world of medical care and research; the entrepreneurship of IBM in developing the world's fastest computers; the agricultural industry that produces food for the world; the new campus of the University of Minnesota Rochester and its innovative Biomedical Informatics and Computational Biology program; and, of course, the achievements of The Hormel Institute over the past 67 years. By combining these assets and other strengths, we will create even greater opportunities as we continue to collaborate even more and speak with a single voice from Southern Minnesota.

To seize this crucial opportunity and develop the maximum potential, we absolutely must continue to establish and nurture firm relationships with one another so that we become increasingly knowledgeable about existing and future assets and continue to support each other through collaborative work and partnerships. The Hormel Institute is a recognized leader in the scientific research field, showing that small molecules and dietary factors modulate vital cellular signal transduction pathways in cancer development.

The long-term goal of the International Center of Research Technology (ICRT), currently being developed by and housed in The Hormel Institute, is to provide the most cutting-edge tools of technology available today to researchers working at biobusinesses, medical centers, colleges and universities throughout Southern Minnesota and regionally. Working with its collaborative partners, the ICRT is developing new technologies to accelerate discovery and facilitate comprehensive study of human disease by combining analyses of protein structure/function with advanced methods of data management and drug screening. The net result will be a greater understanding of biological systems for improving the quality of life in Minnesota, the nation, and the world and a dramatic, positive impact on economic development in bioscience and biotechnology in Southern Minnesota, statewide, and regionally.

**JON KNOCHENMUS,
PRESIDENT**

RALCO NUTRITION, INC.

Jim Rogers was quoted in an article in the March 9, 2009 “Business Week” as saying, “Stock brokers will be driving taxis. The smart ones will learn to drive tractors because they will be working for farmers.”

This was a response to a series of questions regarding our economy and what the government is doing to deal with the current economic crisis. Jim Rogers gained his renown and experience as one of the founders of the legendary Quantum Fund on Wall Street. He is also the creator of the Rogers International Commodities Index. The basis of his thinking and prediction lie in the fact that when government prints huge amounts of money or spends money they don't have, it leads to higher inflation and higher prices. I do agree and share his views in this area. Therefore, in an agricultural business in the heart of agricultural production, I believe that there are great opportunities for those of us living in Southern Minnesota.

Rogers also stated, “The people who produce real things will be on top.” The Southwest Initiative Foundation and the strategic opportunities that they have outlined are focused on these “real things,” which will be the drivers of our nation's economic engine. As I have traveled the world on business, this has been an often heard comment and compliment that the rest of the world pays our country. They look to us for innovation and technology to help drive their own economies more efficiently. America has always been the leader in developing new technologies, going as far back as the steam engine, the assembly line concept that Henry Ford developed, John Deere tractors (a company that started in rural America with a one-bottom steel plow), world-renowned medical technology and health care through the Mayo Clinic, and many others.

I believe that Southern Minnesota's greatest assets are its people and its work ethic. We have a rich heritage of hard-working people who immigrated into a new world with many challenges, as well as many opportunities, and survived their circumstances through ingenuity and hard work. I have a Greek friend who often reminds me that knowledge without action is dead knowledge. Our ability to gain new knowledge and use it in innovative ways to meet the world's ever changing needs will continue to help Southern Minnesota grow into the potential that it truly has.

**GARY NOBLE,
PRESIDENT/CEO**

DIASERVE, INC.

Why is this strategic opportunity critical to the future of Southern MN?
Why does Southern MN have a compelling opportunity in this economic niche?
What can Southern MN do to seize its full potential in this strategic opportunity?

It has been an honor and pleasure to be involved with this project. The Southern MN area should be proud to have organizations like Southern and Southwestern Minnesota Initiative Foundation sponsoring this effort and to bring in RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness. The facts and data show we have unique assets within our region providing for an opportunity to grow substantially. However, the region has areas where the negative performance gap is growing and if not addressed with a focused effect of correction, the gaps will negatively impact our ability to fully utilize these unique assets.

Seizing these strategic opportunities will take foresight and teamwork. Not seizing these opportunities is just not acceptable to those of us in the region. The State of Minnesota and Federal government has put an emphasis on nearly all of these opportunity assets. Many global companies have put emphasis on utilizing products and services from these unique assets. Can we within the region recognize what we have and what needs to be done to fully accomplish the potential for the region!

As an entrepreneur with my partners, we see the value in bio materials and have invested our time and money to differentiate ourselves, and accomplish our goals within one of “Six Strategic Opportunities.” The combination of technology, skilled labor and continuous innovation is needed to be a leader within the strategic opportunities. However, capital investment is the key. A company will need either government subsidies or support (as seen with the ethanol industry) to bridge funding during transition from a cash user to cash generator as most venture capital or traditional lending institutions will not financial support initial startups. Long-term, sustainability is critical for the company to be a viable investment for any investor, government to private.

We need to understand why the investment capital seems to go outside our region and state. If we want to fully utilize these unique assets and grow the regional wealth, we will need to improve on the performance gaps and the legislative groups will need to be pro-business to be pro-regional. Many of the “Six Strategic Opportunities” are in Minnesota to stay. But, we need to keep the entrepreneurial support, the manufacturing, and the services that support the “Six” in order to gain significant economic growth.

**JAMES A SIEBEN,
PRESIDENT**

**MINNWEST
TECHNOLOGY CAMPUS**

In these difficult economic times the need for sustainable economic growth is paramount. The opportunities are many and the challenges are great but together we can create what one cannot. I grew up on a large dairy farm in central Minnesota, with a big catholic family of 16 children, and hard work was normal. My mother had only an 8th grade education but she was wise with her simple words, so I would like to quote her here, “Many hands make small work.”

The people in the Upper Midwest have a work ethic that is second to none. In addition, our schools and colleges provide cutting-edge education to give students a competitive advantage in today’s workforce and to ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle challenges in areas of high-technology, sciences, medical services and many other key industries. This, combined with the entrepreneurial spirit, persistence and dedication of the people in our area is an almost certain recipe for success for anything that our region’s population sets out to accomplish. Our community can and should be proud of the excellence in people and the resource potential available in Minnesota.

The vast sources of renewable energy options in Southern and West-Central Minnesota also present an enormous opportunity for our region. With the convergence of agriculture, high technology, and science we can create collaborative efforts and businesses that will embrace a unified focus to solve some of the challenges our nation currently faces when it comes to renewable energy.

Several cities in MN focus on nurturing and cultivating these new businesses as they emerge. Elk Run, in the Southeastern MN area, Worthington in the Southwestern MN area, and the MinnWest Technology Campus in the West-Central MN area are focused on assisting with the growth of these companies. In addition, facilities such as the Mid-Central Bioscience Center in Willmar, MN will be encouraging collaboration between the private sector, the University of Minnesota and the MNSCU system, and thus, creating a gateway on the MinnWest Technology Campus to accomplish this partnership and to tackle difficult projects in different key areas (such as renewable energy) with a combined effort and a unified focus.

Overall, Southern Minnesota possesses the capability, resources, facilities, and the technology to bring opportunities in areas of renewable energy, high-tech and manufacturing to fruition. If we do not seize these opportunities, our neighboring states will – so let’s be proactive in developing a strategic plan and implement the activities that need to occur in order to keep MN on the map as one of the nation’s top areas for economic growth and innovation.

Some difficult questions need to be answered: How do we make this happen? What kind of commitment will this take from all parties involved, and are we willing to invest dollars in areas that we claim to support? Great ideas and initial discussions are only the beginning and are one step in the process. Since it will take a major financial commitment to realize these big undertakings for our state, who will actually provide the necessary funds to start and support these endeavors short and long-term? If the combined effort of our communities is to succeed, our State, our counties, our cities, our banks, our economic development groups and our businesses must unify their support and exhibit it by their actions and their financial commitment.

JOE SWEDBERG

HORMEL FOODS

The timing could not have been better for the Southern Minnesota Competitiveness Project, based on the current economic climate. This project provides a roadmap for the region that is focused, actionable and will ultimately provide economic growth and prosperity. Through the strategic planning process incorporated in the project, a diverse group of knowledgeable and engaged citizens helped to frame the opportunities for the future of southern Minnesota – based on the region’s strengths and potential to compete in a global economy.

The study brought to light that Southern Minnesota is uniquely poised to not only meet the challenges of today, but also to compete into the future with a diverse and successful base of competencies. One of the key components the study revealed is the opportunity for partnerships between private and public entities. The collaboration between the Hormel Institute, Mayo Clinic and IBM is but one of the prime examples of what can be done and is leading to major discoveries in fighting cancer.

We are also uniquely positioned with food production and agriculture as one of the key cornerstones for continued growth. Hormel Foods Corporation has a 119-year history in Southern Minnesota of innovation and investment. As the project unfolds, we look forward to being a partner in the advancement of the opportunities presented.

By collaborating together, looking for partnerships and taking timely action as a region, southern Minnesota can serve as a shining example of what can be done to set the pace for world-class economic development.