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## Review of *Changing Rural Institutions: A Canadian Perspective* Edited by Richard C. Rounds

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**Changing Rural Institutions: A Canadian Perspective.** Edited by Richard C. Rounds. Brandon, Manitoba: Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation, 1997. ix+248 pp. Figures, tables, references. \$C29.95 paper (ISBN 1-895397-53-7).

In seventeen independently-developed chapters this book provides a multi-dimensional examination of the restructuring of rural institutions and institutional systems in Canada. Though not stated in the book narrative, it appears the chapters were written for the Seventh National Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation/Canadian Agricultural and Rural Restructuring Group Conference held in the City of Grande Prairie, Alberta. No information on the conference dates or other circumstances is provided. The editor acknowledges financial support by a relatively large number of organizations, public sector units, and private sector businesses, as well as the efforts of the conference staff and volunteers. The latter are recognized as having made the book possible, though no interpretation of that recognition is provided.

The book contains seventeen chapters organized in four parts: "Concepts and Theories," "Institutional Restructuring," "Sectoral Institutions," and "A Broader View." In the Foreword, editor Richard C. Rounds has provided a short summary of each chapter. As content descriptions resembling abstracts, these summaries enable the reader to quickly identify content of special interest. A majority of the chapter authors are affiliated with Canadian academic institutions; the co-authors of Chapter 17 are European academics. Other authors work in provincial agencies or private sector firms. No affiliation information is provided for the authors of chapters 9, 10, and 13.

The differing perspectives of the planner, the sociologist, the economist, the geographer, and the private sector writer are evident in the inconsistent definitions of terms and in reporting on the driving forces of change. Some chapters appear to postulate cause and effect relationships closely linked to political agendas though this non-Canadian reviewer cannot conclude with certainty that the appearance reflects reality. Reference lists vary in length from about 40 cited sources to none with most chapters having reference lists containing 10-12 citations.

The chapter authors appear to share a belief that rapid, pervasive, and irreversible change is underway throughout Canada. This pattern of irreversible change is linked to similar patterns in other countries—"globalization" (undefined) is frequently cited as a major causal factor. To varying degrees, the resulting alterations in existing institutions and institutional systems are cited as reducing the well-being of rural people. Innovations in institutions and institutional systems are prescribed to solve existing and foreseeable problems inherent to ongoing institutional change.

The book is relatively easy to read, but generates little excitement. It is not easy to identify the audience most likely to benefit from studying the chapters that lie between its covers. A person well-versed in the study of institutions may find the differing disciplinary perspectives useful. The graduate student or other researcher seeking ideas and inspiration for future research could benefit from the content of the chapters and from the reference lists. The person with intense interest in social change in Western societies may find it a useful source of information and insights. Perhaps more than anything else, the 17 chapters demonstrate the intractable nature of evolutionary change in social organizations, associations, and government, and make evident our limited capacity to usefully reshape institutions and institutional systems. **Paul H. Gessaman**, *Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.