In 2002, Jean Coleman, CR Planning, lead a team including Tom Daniels, Suzanne Rhees and Matt Mega in the development of rural area policies and implementation strategies for the update of the Metropolitan Council’s regional plan, Blueprint 2030. The Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities is the planning and coordinating agency for the seven-county metropolitan area. The Council advocates Smart Growth for vital communities and a competitive region.

Expanding urban areas and the recent strong regional economy are increasing pressure to develop the region’s 700,000 acres of prime agricultural and rural lands, particularly those at the urban edge. There is a growing sense that the tools historically used by the state and region to protect agricultural and rural lands will not be sufficient to withstand development pressures. In response, the Metropolitan Council hired our team to work with the Rural Issues Work Group to develop policies and tools to maintain rural areas.

For policy development, the rural area was conceptually divided into four policy areas: Rural Settlements; Permanent Agricultural Area; Diversified Rural Area; Rural Residential Area. The Rural Issues Work Group also considered policies to preserve and protect natural resources in the rural area.

Highlights of the implementation plan include:
- Cost estimates and a plan to pursue funding for a purchase of development rights program to permanently protect prime farmland
- Promoting the development of rural population centers while limiting the development of non-farm rural residences outside of rural centers
- Investing in utility infrastructure in rural centers
- Targeting transportation improvements to serve rural centers and not spur development of other rural areas

The rural policy section of Blueprint 2030 can be viewed at: www.metrocouncil.org/planning/blueprint2030/ BPAppendixF_RuralPolicy.pdf