

Agribusiness Monthly â€™ June 2015

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This month, Peoples Company Land Agent and REALTOR Scott Kelly presents a Q&A with Sue Cosner of Iowa Area Development Group. Have an idea to share with us for a guest blog post or Agribusiness Monthly interview? [Email Scott today.](#)

1. Tell us about your background and what brought you to IADG. Until I came to [Iowa Area Development Group](#) in 2007, I had spent my career in local government focused on city management, land use planning, redevelopment, and economic development. I also worked for two professional associations serving local government, namely the Iowa League of Cities (ILC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). So when I came to IADG, I had worked in local government in one way or another for 24 years. I had just returned from Washington, D.C., which was my home base from where I travelled to international destinations to educate local government professionals and deploy best management practices in countries like South Africa, Albania, India, and Russia, to name a few.

2. Tell us more about IADG and what your role has been there. As I mentioned, I joined IADG in 2007 when, with program funding from Iowa Network Services (INS), we developed an economic development initiative for Iowa's rural telecommunication companies, the shareholders of INS. At that time, IADG had been delivering business and community development assistance to the rural electric cooperatives for nearly 25 years. We duplicated those services for the telecoms, and have energized our programs with engaged telecom partners interested in the future and vitality of rural Iowa. I help to put financial packages together for development initiatives with USDA rural development financing, market available properties to prospects, and assist with other community development and betterment projects.

3. Give us your thoughts on the recovering economy and how rural communities are doing. Luckily Iowa did not suffer the pains of the recent recession as many other states did, but as you know there was still a serious downturn in the state. The rural communities we serve have prepared themselves well by being very proactive. They have assembled land, developed business parks, and built spec buildings. This activity has attracted successful small manufacturing firms and helped them to expand.

4. Tell us what you see coming down the pipeline for rural communities, rural telecommunications and RECs. Rural Iowa communities have to strike a careful balance, they need to conduct internal economic gardening to grow and promote their existing businesses; attract and recruit new businesses, all while tending to their workforce needs, housing supply, healthcare infrastructure, and other services. Communities can never stop working at achieving all of these.

5. What advice do you have for rural communities trying to attract businesses? Be prepared, community preparedness can never be underestimated. We help our communities inventory their assets, determine what they need to be in a ready position to respond to development prospects when they present themselves. If a community's inventory does not include a business park, available land and buildings, they must carefully analyze the risks, advantages, and disadvantages of developing them. And finally, they need to engage with all their development partners – locally, regionally, and state and federal agencies.