Small Towns/Big Trends:
Demographic Insights on Living, Working and Thriving in Rural America

March 18, 2022

Panelists:

Dr. Kenneth Johnson
University of New Hampshire

Dr. Shannon Monnat
Syracuse University

Dr. Mildred Warner
Cornell University

Dr. Leif Jensen
Pennsylvania State University

Dr. John Green
Southern Rural Development Center

Dr. Timothy Slack
Louisiana State University

Dr. Jessica Ulrich-Schad
Utah State University

Moderated by:

Dr. Marta Tienda
Princeton University
Recent Rural Demographic Trends

Kenneth M. Johnson
Andrew Carnegie Fellow
Senior Demographer, Carsey School
Professor of Sociology
University of New Hampshire

Supported by Hatch Multi-State Regional Project W-4001 through joint funding of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S.D.A. and New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station, University of New Hampshire under award number 1013434.
How is Rural America Defined?

- County based OMB metropolitan classification
- 1,976 Nonmetropolitan (rural) counties have 46 million residents and 68% of the U.S. land area
- 1,167 Metropolitan (urban) counties have 285 million residents and 32% of the land area.

The classification of counties as metro or nonmetro is not static.
- Since 1970, 25% of counties and 22% of population were reclassified.
- The metro population was 67% of US total in 1970, now it is 86%.
- This proportionate growth is entirely due to the reclassification of counties from nonmetropolitan to metropolitan.
The Great Recession and Its Aftermath Had a Significant Impact on Rural Demographic Trends

Impact of the Great Recession on U.S.
• Reduced fertility rates to record lows
  • Fewest births in 33 years
• Most deaths in history.
  • Up 16% since 2010
• Domestic migration at record lows
  • People economically “Frozen in Place”
• Immigration diminished

Implications for rural areas
• First overall population loss in history
• Reduced natural increase
• Less migration gain to rural areas
• Less immigration
Population Loss was Widespread in Rural America, but Some Regions Gained Population

Population loss more widespread in rural areas
• 33% of nonmetro counties had population gains
• 72% of the metro counties had population gains

Modest regional variation in rural growth patterns
• 25% of Northeast rural counties grew
• 29% of Midwest rural counties grew
• 26% of Southern rural counties grew
• 63% of Western rural counties grew

USDA ERS, 2013
Rural America is not Monolithic—Many Areas Declined, but Some Grew

- Micropolitan gains because natural increase offset migration loss
- Other counties lost because of outmigration and natural decrease

- Farm and Manufacturing loss due to migration loss
- Recreation and Retirement growth due to migration gains
The Rural Population is Significantly Older than the Urban Population

Rural aging has demographic implications
- More rural residents at high mortality risk
- Fewer rural women are of child-bearing age
- Net result: more rural deaths and fewer births
- Deaths exceeded births in 43% of rural counties
- COVID will increase rural natural decrease
Diversity is Growing in Rural America, with Children in the Vanguard

Under 18
32% Minority

18 and Over
22% Minority

Racial Diversity of Nonmetropolitan Population, 2020

Minority: U.S. 42%; Metro 46%; Nonmetro 24%

Source: US Census 2020
A Growing Minority Population Fueled Long-Term Population Increase in Rural America

Minorities accounted for the entire rural gain 1990-2020
• Hispanics: 9% of pop., gained 2.6m (162%)
• NH Minorities: 15% of pop., gained 2.3m (50%)
• NH Whites: 76% of pop., declined 550,000 (-1.5%)

Concerns about the accuracy of the 2020 Census, changes to definitions of race/Hispanic origin, and the impact of the Census Bureau's Differential Privacy algorithms on the quality of small area data from the 2020 Census remain unresolved.
Rural Population Health in the Context of Drug Overdoses, COVID-19, and Longer-Term Mortality Trends

Shannon M. Monnat
Lerner Chair for Public Health Promotion and Lerner Center Director
Associate Professor of Sociology
Syracuse University

Acknowledgements: Monnat is supported by the Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging (National Institute on Aging - R24AG065159), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (U01DA055972); the Center for Aging and Policy Studies at Syracuse University (NIA P30AG66583), the USDA Agricultural Experiment Station Multistate Research Project (W4001), and the Syracuse University Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion
The Rural Mortality Penalty is Wide and Growing

• Mortality rates started to diverge in the 1990s, and the gap has widened over time.
• Driven by larger metro declines and both nonmetro stagnation and increases.
• The increasing gap is driven by working-age adults (ages 25-64). In 2019:
  • Nonmetro male rate was 26% higher than metro male rate.
  • Nonmetro female rate was 40% higher than metro female rate.
• Rural working-age mortality rates were higher in 2020 than they had been in over 40 years for both males and females.

*Data Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death Files, 1990-2020; rates are age adjusted*
Mortality Changes Have Varied Across the U.S.

- Large declines since 1990s in urban coastal cities;
  - Especially for ages 45-64
- Large increases in America’s heartland and other places that were once hubs for secure working-class jobs;
  - Especially for ages 25-44
- Rural America not monolithic
  - Large increases in central Appalachia, New England, Industrial Midwest, Central U.S.
  - More favorable trends in Mid-Atlantic, some parts of the South, Mountain, and Pacific

Data Source: National Vital Statistics System. Rates are age adjusted.
Nearly Every Major Cause of Death Contributes to the Rural Mortality Penalty

Cause-Specific Mortality Rates in the 2010s (2010-2019) for ages 25-64 by Metro Status and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males ages 25-64</th>
<th>Females ages 25-64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths per 100,000 population (age adjusted)</td>
<td>Deaths per 100,000 population (age adjusted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coronary Heart Disease</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Accidents</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Poisoning</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung Cancer</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory Diseases</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes &amp; Metabolic Diseases</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Induced</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenable Cancers</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertensive Heart Disease</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Denotes higher rate

Data Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death Files, 2010-2019
The U.S. Drug Overdose Crisis is Not Disproportionately Rural, but Some Rural Places Have among the Highest Rates in the U.S.

Data Source: National Vital Statistics System. Rates are age adjusted.
COVID-19 Has Worsened the Existing Rural Mortality Penalty

**COVID-19 Mortality Rates by Metro Status**

As of 03/04/22
- Metro: 265.4
- Nonmetro: 360.1

Data Source: USAFacts

**Adult COVID-19 Vaccination Rates by Metro Status (had at least 2 doses)**

As of 03/04/22
- Metro: 73.6%
- Nonmetro: 59.2%

Data Source: CDC


Challenges and Opportunities of an Aging Rural Population

Mildred E. Warner and Xue Zhang
Cornell University

Shifting the Framework:
• An *All Ages* Approach
  • Children, families, singles, older adults
  • Build common vision
• Address differences across the urban - rural divide
• Link Planning, Design and Services

Funding Support from USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (# 2019-68006-29674), Multistate Hatch W4001 by Cornell Ag. Exp. Station, and Engaged Cornell
7 Domains of Age-Friendly Communities

- **Housing**: Affordability and access
  - They say home is where the heart is—and the same holds true for the Livability Index. Housing is a central component of livability.

- **Neighborhood**: Access to life, work, and play
  - What makes a neighborhood truly livable? Two important qualities are access and convenience.

- **Transportation**: Safe and convenient options
  - How easily and safely we’re able to get from one place to another has a major effect on our quality of life.

- **Environment**: Clean air and water
  - Good communities maintain a clean environment for their residents. Great communities enact policies to improve and protect the environment for generations to come.

- **Engagement**: Civic and social involvement
  - A livable community fosters interaction among

- **Health**: Prevention, access and quality
  - Community conditions influence health behaviors.

- **Opportunity**: Inclusion and possibilities
  - America was built on opportunity—and our nation’s many thriving communities are no different.

**AARP Livability indicators**: https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/
Rural counties lag in health, neighborhood, transportation; Lead in engagement

AARP Livability indicators 2018, All US Counties
Community Plans - Only half address the needs of children or seniors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Plan Addresses the needs of:</th>
<th>Emergency Plan</th>
<th>Transportation Plan</th>
<th>Comprehensive Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families with children</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multi-generational Planning Approach
Design + Services + Engagement

Early Life | Adult Life | Older Age
--- | --- | ---

Full Capacity in an Enabling Environment

Improved Capacity

Average Capacity

Informal Networks Engagement

Formal Service Provision

Inclusive Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved Capacity</td>
<td>Average Capacity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Leads to Change?

• **Engagement** of seniors and families with children
• **Community Leadership** and Cross-Agency Collaboration
• **Planning** – comprehensive planning, zoning and building codes

Local Government Leadership  
Institutional Change  
Outcomes

Leadership  
Engagement  
Seniors, Children  
Cross-Agency Collaboration  
Plans  
Aging, Children  
Zoning  
Services for Children and Elders  
Better Built Environment  
Broader Housing Choices

Poverty and Economic Livelihoods among Rural American Households

Leif Jensen
Distinguished Professor of Rural Sociology and Demography
The Pennsylvania State University

Acknowledgements: Support is provided by the NIA-funded Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging (R24-AG065159), the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Multistate Research Project #PEN04623 (Accession #1013257), and the Population Research Institute at Pennsylvania State University funded by NICHD (5P2CHD041025-19).
Persistent poverty befalls many rural counties


Persistent child poverty counties are those where 20 percent or more of county related children under 18 were poor, measured in the 1980, 1990, 2000 censuses, and the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

Note that county boundaries are drawn for the persistent child poverty counties only.

Income inequality grew, 1970-2016
While it remains higher in rural America, the urban increase was greater

Underemployment as a rural challenge

What is underemployment?

1) Adequately employed

2) Underemployed

   • Discouraged: Those who would like to be employed but have given up searching due to discouragement with prospects.

   • Unemployed: Those who are out of work but are actively searching or are currently on lay-off but expect to be called back.

   • Low-hours: Those employed less than 35 hours/week only because they cannot find full-time work.

   • Low-income: Those employed 35+ hours/week for at least 48 weeks in the previous year with earnings at or below 125% of the individual poverty threshold.

3) (Truly) not in the labor force
Underemployment as a rural challenge

Findings from a 50-year profile

- Underemployment higher in rural areas, but gap has narrowed
- Underemployment is countercyclical
- Whites have much lower rates of underemployment (lower left)
- Rural black workers persistently high underemployment compared to whites and urban blacks
- Hispanic workers have witnessed a residential reversal, with underemployment more pronounced in urban than rural areas

Informal work as a rural livelihood strategy

Background on informal work

• Apart from regular jobs, rural households make ends meet in other ways

• From Janet Fitchen’s Poverty in Rural America (1981)

“There are also important unofficial ways in which people devise substitutes and supplements for employment income and public assistance. They constantly draw on their resources of personal ingenuity and social contacts to obtain small, irregular cash income, goods, and services. The amounts for each transaction might be small ... but it provides extra money now and then....”

• What is informal work?
  • Activities that generate cash, or that are done in exchange for other things of value or to reduce expenditures, that are not regulated or taxed by the government.

• Informal work may be more prevalent in rural areas because:
  • Lack of good jobs, childcare, services, etc., creating a need for informal alternatives
  • Strong social networks and norms of self-help and reciprocity
  • Access to natural resources needed for some informal activities

A National Survey on Informal Work

• With NSF funding, Jensen, Tickamyer and Slack (2019) studied informal work through a national survey of 1800+ U.S. households

• How we measured informal work
  • After survey questions about formal employment and self-employment, we asked about “additional kinds of work – other than the more formal types of employment we’ve already discussed – that many people do to make ends meet”
  • Asked about 18 common kinds of informal work:

- Grow or produce food products
- Home repair or improvement
- Repair vehicles, appliances, or other mechanical work
- Personal service
- Hold or contribute to garage sale/flea market
- Reuse/fix things others had discarded
- Sell or trade clothes, makeup, scrap metal, etc.
- Hunt, fish, or gather from land
- Landscaping, snow removal, etc.
- Provide blood or blood products (e.g., plasma)
- Crafts, collectibles, or sew/do alterations
- Other informal work not mentioned
- Accounting or computer work
- Give lessons (e.g., music, language, sports)
- Breed, board, or tend non-farm animals
- Clerical work (e.g., typing)
- Take in boarders
- Bartending or catering
- Street vending/roadside sales
Informal work as a rural livelihood strategy

Table 3
Percent engaging in informal work by type and residence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Non-Metro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Micro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any informal work</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>66.0**</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow or produce food products</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home repair or improvement</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair vehicles, appliances, or other mechanical work</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal service</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold or contribute to garage sale/flea market</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.3*</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse/fix things others had discarded</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell or trade clothes, makeup, scrap metal, etc.</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>14.5**</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, fish, or gather from land</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.5**</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscaping, snow removal, etc.</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>11.9*</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide blood or blood products (e.g., plasma)</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts, collectibles, or sew/do alterations</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other informal work not mentioned</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting or computer work</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give lessons (e.g., music, language, sports)</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breed, board, or tend non-farm animals</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical work (e.g., typing)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take in boarders</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartending or catering</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street vending/roadside sales</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of activities reported</th>
<th>Mean overall</th>
<th>Mean among those engaged in 1 or more</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any informal work</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Metro/nonmetro difference significant at p < .05. ** Metro/nonmetro difference significant at p < .01.

Public support is critical for rural Americans in need

UNH’s Carsey School of Public Policy (2019) reports that:

• “Five key government programs combined – social security, disability benefits, federal and state cash assistance, the EITC, and SNAP – keep 11.5 percent of rural and 7.6 percent of urban residents out of poverty.”

• “Social Security is especially important, without it, poverty would increase by 4.4 percentage points in urban places and by 7.6 percentage points in rural places.”

In the same vein, Jennifer Warlick (2017) shows the relative reduction in (SPM) poverty from safety net programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social security</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refundable tax credits</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAP</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing subsidies</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UI</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child support received</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lunch</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF/GA</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Delta Population Change has Implications for Weathering the Future

John J. Green
Director, Southern Rural Development Center
• Understanding variability in population change is important for adaptive approaches to environmental shocks and stressors.

• The Delta Region, rich in agriculture and natural resources, is also plagued by such challenges (e.g., flooding).

• Population shrinkage intensifies challenges with fewer fiscal resources for current and future needs.

• There were differences in population change from 2010 to 2020 in Delta states.
  - Losses and increases in both non-Delta and Delta areas
  - General pattern of less growth/greater loss in the Delta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Population Change 2010 to 2020</th>
<th>Non-Delta</th>
<th>Delta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>-17.5</td>
<td>-36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Counties</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 2: Median County-Level Percent Population Change 2010 to 2020 *(Data Source: Census 2010 and 2020)*

- Median change in metropolitan counties was positive in the non-Delta and negative in the Delta.
- Non-metropolitan counties in both areas tended to have decline, yet changes were particularly stark in the Delta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Status</th>
<th>Median Perc. Pop. Change 2010 to 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metro 1 Mill+ (ND=69, D=16)</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro &lt;1 Mill. (ND=115, D=52)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Metro Urban 2,500+ (ND=199, D=127)</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Metro Urban &lt;2,500 (ND=85, D=57)</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A substantial share of counties in the Delta experienced domestic net out-migration most of the years between 2010 and 2020.
- Most Delta counties (57.6%) did so for 8 or more years.

### Figure 3: Annual Domestic Net Out-Migration in the Delta, 2010 to 2020 *(Data Source: Census Bureau Pop. Est. V. 2020)*

- A substantial share of counties in the Delta experienced domestic net out-migration most of the years between 2010 and 2020.
- Most Delta counties (57.6%) did so for 8 or more years.
Better understanding population change is important for community development planning, especially in disaster prone areas.

Population shrinkage/depopulation is critical.

Example: The fiscal base necessary to support maintenance and improvements of systems originally created for larger populations.

Disregarding these issues may lead to further deterioration and exacerbate depopulation across the rural-urban continuum.

Policy implications include:

- Considering multi-dimensional population change in making programmatic decisions and addressing fiscal needs
  - Rural to Urban and
  - Delta to Non-Delta
- Using regional approaches that transcend state and rural-urban divides and unite community leaders from across a region
Land Loss is an Immediate Threat to Coastal Louisiana Communities

Tim Slack
Professor of Sociology
Louisiana State University
The Problem

• Rapid land loss is being driven by **sea level rise** and **subsidence**.

• Louisiana has lost over 2,000 sq. mi. of land since the 1930s.
  • An area roughly the size of Delaware.

• The state is projected to lose over 4,000 sq. mi. more land by 2050.

• Rural and small-town areas are on the front line today, but increasingly a **rural-urban interface issue**.
  • Half (50.5%) the state population and nearly all population growth is in the Coastal Zone.
Fig. 1. Sea Level Rise Projection for 2050

Note: This map shows coastal Louisiana land loss in 2050 with 2 feet of sea level rise, an intermediate-low rise scenario. Data: NOAA and NASA. Source: The Advocate.
The Population Policy Challenge

• Land loss means increasing risk from hurricanes and non-storm flooding.

• Louisiana has a “working coast” of national economic significance.

• Petrochemical industrial complex is disproportionately located in the Coastal Zone, increasing risk of “natech” disasters.

• Paradoxically, transition to low-carbon economy to mitigate climate change poses economic threat to the region.

• Big policy questions around managing resilience, relocation, migration, and economic change.
Population Growth & Natural Hazard Exposure in the Rural Western U.S.

Jessica Schad
Associate Professor of Sociology & Director of the Community and Natural Resource Institute
Utah State University
Population Growth in the West

Figure 1. Percentage of Rural Counties in the Western U.S. That Gained Population 2010-2020, by County Economic Type

*Data Source: U.S. Census and USDA Economic Research Service*
Droughts and Wildfire in the West
Natural Hazards & Migration in Rural U.S. West

• Americans will increasingly live in the driest areas of the country

45%
Projected growth in Mountain Division 2010-2040

• Americans are increasingly living in high wildfire risk areas

2X
The number of people living in the wildland-urban interface 1990-2010