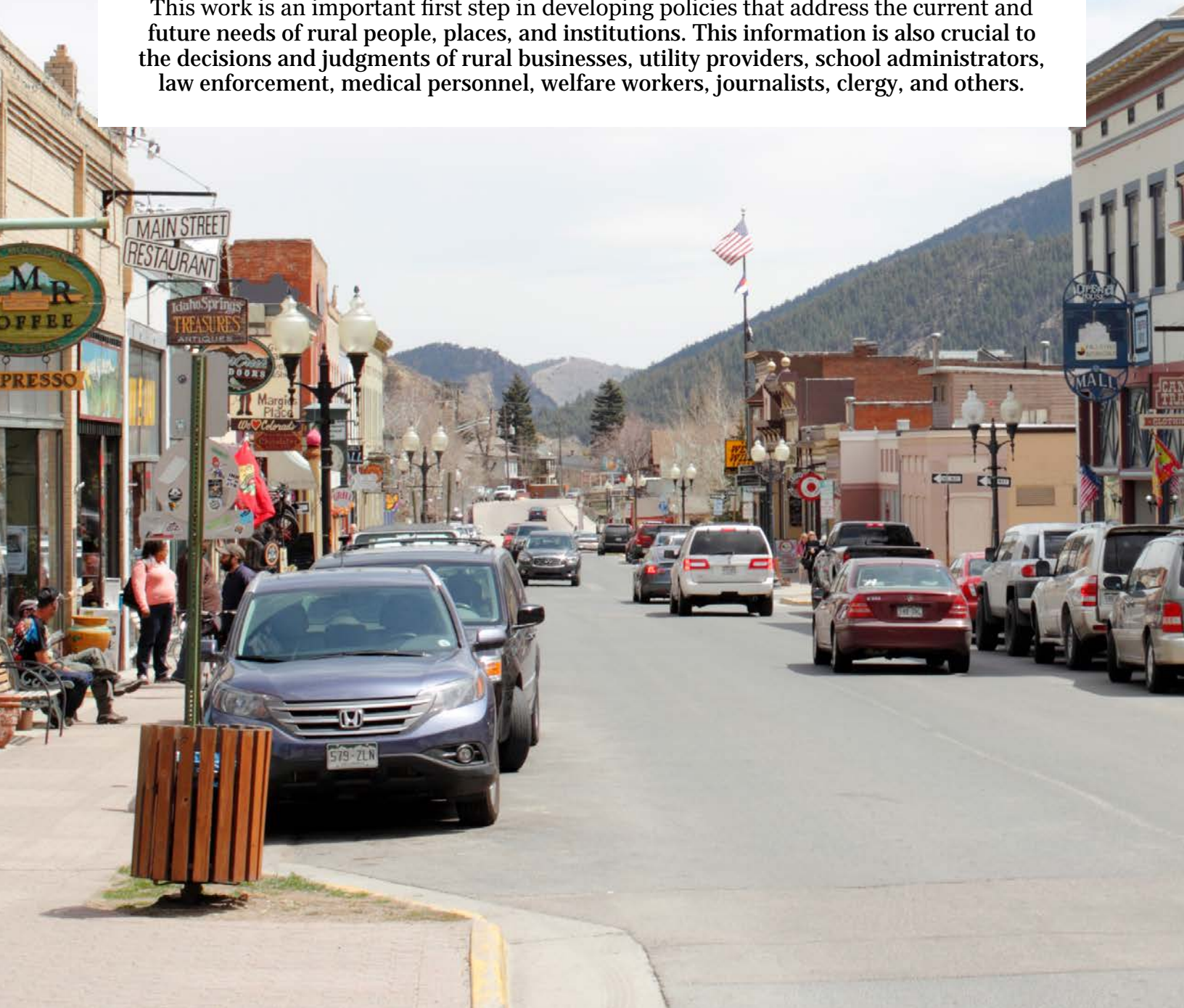


RURAL POPULATION CHANGE

Rural areas comprise 72% of the nation's land area and 46 million of its people. Rural America includes counties bordering suburbs, remote areas, agricultural regions, and areas that depend on manufacturing or tourism. Today, these areas are changing rapidly.

The Great Recession brought the collapse of the stock market, high foreclosure rates, falling housing prices, rising unemployment, and dramatic shifts in rural population trends. Land-grant university researchers and Extension are working with other universities, the USDA-Economic Research Service, and the U.S. Census Bureau to create a comprehensive picture of rural changes before, during, and after the Great Recession. They are also teaching rural residents, community leaders, government agencies, and non-profits how to access and use population data.

This work is an important first step in developing policies that address the current and future needs of rural people, places, and institutions. This information is also crucial to the decisions and judgments of rural businesses, utility providers, school administrators, law enforcement, medical personnel, welfare workers, journalists, clergy, and others.



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

As a collaborative multistate effort, this group is able to draw on diverse skills and is familiar with rural settings across the nation. During its first year, the group conducted surveys, organized a workshop, and held consultations and focus groups with policymakers, community groups, and other stakeholders to identify key challenges and research priorities. Over the past five years, researchers gathered data and shared their findings with communities and policymakers via conferences, briefings, fact sheets, journal articles, book chapters, and interviews with media.



Researchers examined 126 measures of working poverty. Their work emphasized the need to shift focus from unemployment to underemployment and policies that invest in education and attract skilled industries and workers. Knowledge on the distribution of poverty in rural areas will help local leaders understand how they can improve household incomes, reduce unemployment, and promote socioeconomic wellbeing.



Multiple studies examined subprime lending was more common in rural than urban areas, with lenders targeting remote areas with high minority populations, population loss, low housing values, and lower education levels. In Minnesota, research findings helped address problems with foreclosure. In Nevada, researchers taught the Reno Housing Authority about benefits and harms of dispersed low-income housing.



Project members launched an NSF-funded Twitter Initiative, collecting and managing geo-tagged Twitter user demographics in real-time. This project revealed population gains and losses of specific ages and race groups. Age-specific migration estimates led local planners in Iron County, Wisconsin, to develop strategies to retain and attract young adults by engaging them in planning the community's future.



Rural population is shrinking due to outmigration of young adults, fewer births, increased mortality among working-age adults, and an aging population. These findings were included in the President's Agricultural and Rural Prosperity Task Force 2017 report to guide policy and programs that reflect current and projected trends.



Return migrants play a critical role in slowing population loss, rejuvenating the population base, generating jobs, and increasing human capital in rural areas.



Diversity and tolerance can create social capital and economic prosperity. This finding could help marginalized groups, such as disabled, older, and LGBTQ residents. For example, explanations for lower returns on education for Hispanics could guide policies that improve educational attainment.



Research helped communities understand how changes in the coal and new shale/oil energy industries impact poverty, income inequality, employment growth, demographics, and wellbeing.



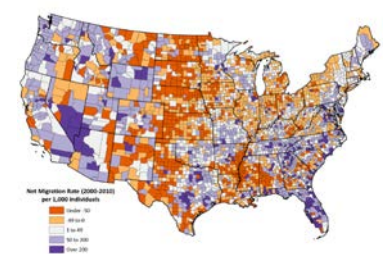
Studies showed that higher opioid abuse among rural adolescents is partly due to greater reliance on emergency rooms, where opioids are more often prescribed. This and other research informed the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime's international model for drug use prevention and treatment in rural settings and is informing the USDA Office of Economic Development opioid vulnerability index.



Studies on health outcomes showed there are more barriers to healthcare access for Hispanics in rural areas with historically small, but rapidly growing Hispanic populations.



Research informed policymakers about changing service needs as rural populations age in place and retirement destinations evolve. Demographers found that the availability of services declines after a place becomes extremely old, but the negative impacts of population aging can be buffered by adopting innovative cooperative arrangements between communities and across levels of government.



Detailed net migration data, maps, and charts created by this project have been widely used and have provided a readily accessible, visual look at migration from county to county over the past 60 years. The website (www.netmigration.wisc.edu) has over 300,000 users.