Rewriting the Rural Narrative

*Speak softly and carry statistics*

Benjamin Winchester
Senior Research Fellow
Extension Center for Community Vitality
People keep leaving rural America. According to U.S. Census figures from 2010, just 16% of the country's population lives in rural areas, down from 20% in 2000, and down dramatically from 72% about a hundred years ago. Behind the stories, both of the people who left their rural homes and the small percentage of Americans who still live in the nation. There are stories, too, of people who've left for myriad reasons. We want to know those stories.

From Breadbasket to Basket Case

In the 1980s, rural Americans faced fewer teen births and lower divorce rates than their urban counterparts. Now, their positions have flipped entirely.

Rural Minnesota is in trouble. Young people are fleeing the farms and forests of the Gopher State, and the residents left there are aging. And they're dying. While populations in Twin Cities area, especially the suburbs, We became kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, and any time somebody wanted to do a story about poor people, we were the first stop.
The slow, agonizing death of the small US town

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America

When death comes to a small town, the school is usually the last thing to go. A place can lose its bank, its tavern, its grocery store, its shoe shop. But when the school closes, you might as well put a fork in it.
THE NARRATIVE

• There’s a brain drain
• We live in the middle of nowhere
• We are a sleepy town
• Everyone knows one another
• Nobody lock their doors

• What we had
• What we don’t have
• What we wish we had
• What we could have had…
Deficit Approach

Fixing things that can’t or shouldn’t be fixed
NO MORE ANECDATA!

**anecdote** (noun). *information which is presented as if it is based on serious research but is in fact based on what someone thinks is true*
1900-1950

• Mechanization of agriculture

• Roads and transportation

• Educational achievement and population loss

• Church closings (Delafield)
1950+

- Main street restructuring
- School consolidations
- Hospitals closings
The rural idyll
Who are you going to find in a small town when you travel to small towns in morning and afternoon?
RURAL IS CHANGING, NOT DYING

• Yes, things are changing
• Small towns are microcosms of globalization
  • Many of these changes impact rural and urban areas alike (not distinctly rural)
  • Yet more apparent in rural places
• Survived massive restructuring of social and economic life
• Research base does NOT support notion that if XXXX closes, the town dies
  • In Minnesota only 3 towns have dissolved in past 50 years
Rural Rebound

- Since 1970, rural population increased by 11%
  - Relative percentage living rural decreased

1970
- 203,211,926
  - (53.6m rural)

2010
- 308,745,538
  - (59.5m rural)
Rural Data

Population figures reduced by formerly rural places now designated as urban (since 1974)

- Iowa 473,312
- Kansas (12 counties, 417k residents reclassified – 15%)
- Minnesota 352,224
- Nebraska 170,855
- North Dakota 181,639
- South Dakota 207,790

Urban areas have grown WIDER, not TALLER
Total Population Infatuation

2000-2010

Percent Change

- Loss
- Gain 0-10%
- Gain 11-25%
- Gain 11-25%
- Gain >25%

University of Minnesota Extension
Total Population Infatuation

Wait, what?

### Comparison Historical Population from 1960 to 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UMVRDC Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>19,428</td>
<td>19,367</td>
<td>22,026</td>
<td>20,088</td>
<td>19,846</td>
<td>20,039</td>
<td>3.14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMVRDC Region</td>
<td>69,063</td>
<td>61,806</td>
<td>59,822</td>
<td>50,845</td>
<td>50,011</td>
<td>45,190</td>
<td>-34.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Stone County</td>
<td>8,954</td>
<td>7,941</td>
<td>7,716</td>
<td>6,285</td>
<td>5,820</td>
<td>5,269</td>
<td>-41.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chippewa County</td>
<td>16,320</td>
<td>15,109</td>
<td>14,941</td>
<td>13,228</td>
<td>13,088</td>
<td>12,441</td>
<td>-23.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lac qui Parle County</td>
<td>13,330</td>
<td>11,164</td>
<td>10,592</td>
<td>8,924</td>
<td>8,067</td>
<td>7,259</td>
<td>-45.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swift County</td>
<td>14,936</td>
<td>13,177</td>
<td>12,920</td>
<td>10,724</td>
<td>11,956</td>
<td>9,783</td>
<td>-34.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Medicine County</td>
<td>15,523</td>
<td>14,415</td>
<td>13,653</td>
<td>11,684</td>
<td>11,080</td>
<td>10,438</td>
<td>-32.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census Bureau
Smaller Household Size

Kids graduate
Population: -2
Households: NC
Spouse passes
Population: -1
Households: NC

Single senior passes
Population: -1
Households: NC
Mobility

Households Moving Between 1995 and 1999:

44%  Iowa
46%  Kansas
   Minnesota
   North Dakota
   Wisconsin
47%  Nebraska
49%  United States
IF NOBODY EVEN MOVED IN OR OUT...

2000

20-24

Age

30-34

2010
BUT IN REALITY PEOPLE DO MOVE...

Age 20-24

Moving out - 4

Moving in + 6

2000

Age 30-34

2010
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change

Rural Recreational County
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change

Core Metropolitan County

-10.8% 55-59
-10.6% 50-54
-13.6% 45-49
-18.5% 40-44
-22.4% 35-39
-17.5% 30-34
25-29 11.9%
20-24 19.5%
15-19 1.6%
-11.1% 10-14

University of Minnesota Extension
Buffalo Commons Research
Dr. Randy Cantrell and Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel
University of Nebraska
Newcomers: Why?

- Simpler pace of life
- Safety and Security
- Low Housing Cost
Newcomers: Who?

- 36% lived there previously
- 68% attain bachelors degree
- 67% household incomes over $50k
- 51% have children in household

May be leaving their career or underemployed

Yet, Quality of Life is the trump card
Cohort Lifecycle

Avg. American moves 11.7 times in lifetime
(6 times at age 30)
CHOOSING RURAL

• Brain Gain: migration to rural age 30-49
  • Also 50-64 but not as widespread
  • Brain drain is the rule, not the exception
  • Happening since the 1970s

• Newcomers look at 3-5 communities
  • Topical reasoning (local foods regions)
  • Assets vary by demographic

• Employee recruitment must get past “warm body” syndrome
Rewriting the Rural Narrative: The Demand for Leadership in Rural America
In towns he was amazed at how associations rise up to meet a challenge and then dissipate.
SOCIAL LIFE IS DYING!

• First question: How many people do we need to run our town?

• We have numerous leadership programs currently training leader supply, but are we keeping up with the organization demand?
DEMAND TRENDS
LEADERSHIP DEMAND

• How do we measure the demand that organizations make upon the resident population?

• In the US, there are 90,052 governmental units
  • These government units include counties, cities, townships, school districts, and “special districts” such as those providing oversight for cemeteries, highways, water/sewer systems, and soil/water conservation areas.

• We also have a vibrant nonprofit sector…

Social Life is **Not Dying**

Nonprofit Growth: 1995-2010

### U.S. Number of Nonprofits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995-2000</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2005</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2010</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau*
Social Life is Not Dying
Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

Kansas: Population  + 6%
       # Nonprofits  +18%

The most rural counties
Population  - 10%
# Nonprofits  +22%  !!!

This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

*National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau*
Social Life is **Not Dying**

Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

The U.S. gained 10% in population and gained 32% in the number of nonprofits.

- The most rural counties experienced a loss of 1% in population, yet the number of nonprofits increased 15%.

This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

*National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau*
Nonprofit Change: 2000-2010

Percent Change
- Gain <15%
- 15-25%
- 25-35%
- 35-45%
- 45-55%
- >55%
Nonprofit Change: 2000-2010
There are also gains and losses between these time periods, losses (or gains) don’t mean just losses (or gains).
There are also gains and losses between these time periods, losses (or gains) don’t mean just losses (or gains).

### Phillips County, Kansas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># Nonprofits</th>
<th>Gov't Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2000-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Nonprofits</th>
<th>Gov't Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phillips County</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUPPLY TRENDS
Social Organizations

- Diversification of rural life socially, too

- Reflect the social interests at any given time

- Today is not 25 (or 50, or 100) years ago!

- The people today seem unable to “connect” with the existing social infrastructure
All of this has happened before...
and it will happen again...
Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (historical)

- Place-based
- Broadly focused
- Word of mouth

Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*
Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (present)

- Cover wide geographic area
- Narrowly focused goals/self-interest
- Diverse social interests
- Technological – social media

The people today are challenged in “connecting” with the existing social infrastructure.

Green & Haines. 2007. Asset Building and Community Development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National</th>
<th>1995-2016*</th>
<th>% change 1995-2016</th>
<th>Size of Sector, 2016</th>
<th>Sector Share of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A - Arts, Culture &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>43,652</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>116,965</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - Education</td>
<td>85,546</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>210,144</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C - Environment</td>
<td>14,608</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>35,078</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D - Animal-Related</td>
<td>18,489</td>
<td>237%</td>
<td>27,301</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E - Health Care</td>
<td>10,572</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>44,962</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - Mental Health &amp; Crisis Inter</td>
<td>6,099</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>17,069</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G - Voluntary Health Association</td>
<td>13,071</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>30,336</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H - Medical Research: Medical Res.</td>
<td>1,872</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>4,246</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - Crime &amp; Legal-Related</td>
<td>7,254</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>20,856</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J - Employment</td>
<td>-8,581</td>
<td>-19%</td>
<td>32,818</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K - Food, Agriculture &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>5,357</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>17,999</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L - Housing &amp; Shelter</td>
<td>12,430</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>33,525</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M - Public Safety, Disaster Prea.</td>
<td>9,677</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>23,140</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N - Recreation &amp; Sports</td>
<td>60,928</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>123,007</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O - Youth Development</td>
<td>17,997</td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>32,765</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P - Human Services</td>
<td>48,523</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>98,055</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q - International, Foreign Affairs &amp;</td>
<td>10,219</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>21,228</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R - Civil Rights, Social Action &amp;</td>
<td>2,597</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9,352</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S - Community Improvement</td>
<td>10,008</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>122,656</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T - Philanthropy, Voluntarism &amp;</td>
<td>47,970</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>108,684</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U - Science &amp; Technology</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10,392</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V - Social Science</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>2,575</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W - Public &amp; Societal Benefit</td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>70,596</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X - Religion-Related</td>
<td>157,482</td>
<td>156%</td>
<td>277,181</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y - Mutual &amp; Membership Benefit</td>
<td>-11,016</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>66,231</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z - Unknown</td>
<td>10,240</td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>4,454</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>578,838</strong></td>
<td><strong>54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,561,616</strong></td>
<td><strong>22%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IMPLICATIONS
POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE

Definition: Number of people each organization has available to them to locate a positional leader.

- Yes, people serve on multiple boards.
- Assumption of 3 per board is conservative.
- Age 18+ includes many age groups that are less active.
POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE, 2010
## Supply and Demand, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Demand: Total Public Orgs</th>
<th>Supply: Pop Age 18+</th>
<th>Pop Per Org</th>
<th>Pop Per Org Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>31,637</td>
<td>2,318,362</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>22,578</td>
<td>2,126,179</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>38,415</td>
<td>4,019,862</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>16,070</td>
<td>1,367,120</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>8,780</td>
<td>522,720</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>9,078</td>
<td>611,383</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>110,393</td>
<td>18,279,737</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

• New residents are more than warm bodies
• Younger people (Millennials age 18-34)
  • Decentralized approaches to leadership
  • Simplified methods of communication
• Generational interests change yet organizations do not
• Start with a small request
• Engagement before leadership
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAMMING?

• Increased competition for
  • Leaders
  • Volunteers
  • Donations

• Clear the slate for newcomers

• Leadership summit amongst nonprofits
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAMMING?

• Programming
  • Connecting organizations
  • Rebuilding a sustainable social infrastructure

• Solutions
  • Expand base of leaders (human capital)
  • Merge organizations (social capital)
  • Dissolve groups
Among those who say they'd like to move, urban residents most likely to choose a different type of community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Type</th>
<th>Urban Residents</th>
<th>Suburban Residents</th>
<th>Rural Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban area</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban area</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.

Reframing Rural Migration

- National societal preferences to live in small towns and rural places (low-density)

- Not everyone is leaving small towns
  - It’s a lot of work to make this move but people are doing it

- Not everyone is flocking to the city
  - Most urban have gotten wider, not taller

- A new urbanity is found in formerly rural places
MIGRATION AND THE NARRATIVE

• Migration patterns open the door to discussing the narrative

• There are varied reasons for people to move to small towns and rural places
Prepare for one of the largest demographic changes to rural America since 1930
75% of rural homeowners are Baby Boomers and older.

30% over 70 today!
Narrative Matters

You’re not really from here....
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

• Consider resident recruitment as a possible outcome in your marketing efforts
• Learn about newcomers in your community
• Consider that some visitors might be looking for this information already…make it easy to find when they arrive
The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

• Creating groups, building their community
• Diversifying the economy
• Buying/starting businesses, working from home
• Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
• More than warm bodies (employee recruitment)
The Rural Choice: Opening New Doors and Welcoming New Neighbors

The bottom line is people WANT to live and move here for what you are today and will be tomorrow, not what may have been!

Rural Revitalization is Upon Us!
Brain Gain Landing Page
http://z.umn.edu/braingain/

Reddit: Rural By Choice
/r/ruralbychoice

Rural Issues and Trends Webinars
http://z.umn.edu/ruralwebinar/

benw@umn.edu