

# First Impressions



# Coldwater, KS

K-State Research and Extension



#### The Process

- Coldwater asked for First Impressions, Udall agreed to be its partner; 2 hour and 20 min drive.
- Volunteers in both communities were trained.
   Photos of Coldwater were taken July 17, 2024.
- 3 visitors visited on May 9, 2024.
- Results presented on 4/23/2025.
- Coldwater uses the results for further discussion and action plans.



### Why: First Impressions?

#### Feedback:

How does a first-time visitor view my town?

- Evaluate successes.
- Set goals and priorities for next steps.

#### If you don't agree with the observation:

- Be curious, Why does the visitor see it this way?
- Is the observation worth considering?
- What can we do to change it— or the perception?

Curiosity: A strong desire to know or learn something.

-Oxford Living Dictionary



# Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN We need to change the narrative about rural.

- Rural is changing, not dying.
- Brain Gain (30-49 year olds moving to rural) is a "new trend" that has been happening since the 70's.
- People research a number of places before they move to a rural town.
- Rural is in the middle of *everywhere*. You live one place, work another and play another. With transportation and internet, it's all accessible to you.



#### Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

- In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons they come are:
  - Simpler pace of life,
  - Safety and security,
  - Affordable housing,
  - Outdoor recreation,
  - Quality schools
  - "A job" isn't in the top 10 reasons.
- Communities can work together to attract newcomers and create quality of life for everyone.





- "In small towns everyone knows each other." false
- Get to know each other, invite them to a newcomers' meal.
- If you bring 7 people to a 700-citizen town every year in 10 years, you'll have a 10% increase. It matters! It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
- We are our own worst enemies. We have to monitor our customer service and what we say. It matters.
- Don't say, "You have to live here twenty years to be an insider." And don't act like it either.



- 75% of rural homeowners are Baby Boomers and older. 30% are over 75.
- Housing will be freed up as the baby boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
- Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.- Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, University of Minnesota



Ben Winchester was our guest on the **First Friday Call.** 

See the recording at:

https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/

• 2023 KS Certified Population: 673 | 18.71% since 2010

• 2020 U.S. Census: 687

• 2010 U.S. Census: 828

• Median household income: \$45,625 \$68,925

• High school or GED 92.5% 91.6%

• At least a B.S. Degree 13.7% 34.4%

• Median Age: 56 years 37.6 years

• Persons 65 and Over 38% 17.2%

Blue: Kansas Comparison Data

Knowledge forLife





 Moved since Last Year (2022/23):

16.3% **14.6%** 

Poverty rate

(% of people below poverty line)

4.8% 12%

#### Race/Ethnicity

White: 93% American Indian: 0%

Black: 0% Native Hawaiian/Other

Asian: 0% Pacific Islander: 0%

Other: 0% Two or more races: 4%

Not Hispanic or Latino: Hispanic or Latino: 3%

97%





#### **Web Presence**

- Coldwaterks.org provides interesting information about the size of its park near the city limits. Good for RVers.
- Utilities are easily identified, same with healthcare and housing.
- News tab has not been updated since 2021. Minutes are up to date.





#### **Web Presence**

- There are great pictures on the site and information about things of interest in the community. "The website makes me excited to see the town!"
- It's a nice homepage with a basic summary of what's here.
- It's hard to tell from a general web search what businesses and attractions are open vs permanently closed. Some of the business and attraction sites are very basic and not appealing, so not really enticing to draw people in. Others are good. The city's website shows there's a lot to offer.



Coldwater was first a dream of a group of men from Harper County who wanted to start the county seat. C. M. Cade, one of the founders, related the story of the town's beginning in the Western Star in 1921:

"In the spring of 1884, there assembled in the office of Sam Sisson, George Vickers, Tim Shields, J. Paul Grove and myself. We decided to go through on the Kansas line by Kiowa to a centrally located point east and west of Comanche County, where we would get a corner and survey north and locate a town near the center of Comanche County. Our party had a little grub, a shotgun to kill game, the necessary medicine for snake bites, and a



5. Golf Cart Lake License. Agreement + Annual Permit \$50 No Discount

Options 1 through 3 include driving in the park, sightseeing, swimming, fishing, picnicking, and non-powered boats or boats under 10 horse power.

Fees for additional vehicle Permits

\$10 for 2nd & 3rd vehicle

\$15 for 4th vehicle

\$10 for 5th vehicle, etc.

6. Camping Fees: \$28.00 per night with electric, water & sewer hookups



### **Web Presence**

#### Suggestions about the website from visitors:

- Have a current list of businesses that are in town, including the theater and museum, on the website and available at city hall.
- Give hours and a location of the city building and list of services it offers.
- Post a map on the lake page of where to get lake passes (and hours) and where cabins and boat ramps are. It would be nice to see pictures of the cabins inside.
- Update the city news page.
- Post the date range the pool will be open.
- Post more information about the police and fire departments training, numbers to call, whether they need volunteers.
- Post how much it costs to play golf for one day if someone comes to town just for the day – plus where is the course, where do you pay, bathroom availability, what rentals are available.
- Post pictures of the inside of the library and activities to draw people to it.
- Try to remove the old Coldwater website if possible to avoid confusion if they find it, like some visitors encountered (Coldwaterks.com)









- Amazingly wide streets.
- More open businesses than expected. A real lumber yard, attorneys, accountants, abstract work.
- Some felt driving through town was a bit confusing.
   There were numerous businesses they saw, but not easy to see if they were open or closed, or closed for good.







- Signs talking about the Eagles were noted, only saw reference to Timberwolves otherwise (visitors found out later what that was about).
- No signs seen pointing to the hospital, and not clear on how to get to the lake or golf course until signs were encountered on the south side of town.





- Much of town is a mix of old and new – residential and commercial, well maintained and poorly maintained – all mixed together. The south and east sides appeared to be the areas lacking maintenance and were more overgrown.
- Downtown is nice looking.
- Lake was very pretty with clear water. Camping areas were mowed with bathrooms and storm shelters available.
- Fairgrounds were small and reasonably well maintained.











- High school, hospital, clinic, pool, assisted living, and apartments all looked neat and well maintained as was the courthouse.
- Many commercial areas around town, east of 183 and south of Main especially, had random stuff everywhere, tall grass and the appearance that they hadn't been maintained for a while. This hurt the appeal of the city.
- Looks to be some dilapidated houses and garages while driving through neighborhoods. Overgrown lawns and junk vehicles were noted.
- Did see some evidence of 4-H being active.









- Signs pointing to major attractions didn't stand out.
   Visitors said they even missed Dave's Pizza sign until
  they were out of their vehicle and walking down the
  street they commented on the angle which made it
  difficult to see from 183.
- The streetscape was nostalgic.
- Buildings along 183 were a mix of older and newer.
- Plenty of parking was available.











#### Knowledge forLife

#### **Downtown Business Area**

- Sometimes it's hard to tell what businesses are open.
   The windows are tinted and there's a lack of OPEN signs.
- Some business signs were not obvious or faded. Easier to read when walking in the area compared to driving.
   Some were prominent and in good condition.
- Most buildings are in decent condition and appear to be 1800s-1900s architecture.



#### **Downtown Business Area**

 Great variety of businesses within walking distance of each other. The downtown area looked like it was being used and is taken care of.







#### **Downtown Business Area**

- Businesses/locations observed include:
  - City building, post office, library, bank.
  - Movie theater.
  - Restaurants.
  - Attorneys and accountants.
  - Pharmacy.
  - Gift store.
  - Two hair salons.
  - Ozzie Bakes wonderful!
    - Nice selection of desserts very well decorated and appetizing.
    - Nice selection of products from other small businesses.





### **Downtown Business Area**

- Customer service downtown was really good. People were friendly and helpful.
- The lumber yard asked what visitors were looking for and showed them a few items they had available.
- Ozzie Bakes offered a very friendly greeting. Did not have to ask for assistance – extremely helpful and positive! Super service!
- Main Street Pharmacy/Gift Store greeted visitors right away. They
  provided assistance in contacting someone to allow them to see the
  theater and sent visitors to the accounting office (Johnita's) to ask
  about the museum. Much appreciated!









### **Public Amenities Downtown**

- The memorial benches were great what a wonderful way to honor others and provide a comfortable seat. Benches in front of pretty much every business.
- Trash cans were available at convenient distances on the main street.
- Not sure if there were public restrooms downtown.
- The only public water fountain found downtown was at the library, but there wasn't enough water coming out to get a drink.
- The library did have public wi-fi access.







### **Downtown Parking and More**

- Streetscape downtown was neat, open looking and welcoming. Felt alive.
- Not a single place was observed where visitors felt they would have difficulty parking.
- The sidewalks were bad. Two out of the three visitors tripped and almost fell. Most of it is unlevel and has parts that stick up and catch your feet as you walk.





### Other Retail Shopping Areas

- There's a great grocery store located on the highway toward the lake. Very adequately stocked for locals and lake goers alike. The owner and his wife were very helpful with information about the area. The cashier was also very outgoing.
- The gas station Snappy Stop. Bathroom was clean and had toilet paper, paper towels and soap. Store was also clean. The cashier was friendly and helpful and there was a selection of food drinks, lottery tickets that you'd find in most convenience stores.
- The retail shopping area on 183 feels more disorganized and less tidy looking than downtown. The businesses don't look as appealing to stop at until the south side of town. All businesses had

easy access.





## Other Retail Shopping Areas

The lumber yard appeared to have a good selection of wood.
It had garden tools, hand tools, battery powered tools, paint,
screws, and about anything else you'd need. They even do
carpet and windows. Salesman was knowledgeable and very
helpful.





### Industrial Parks/Commercial

 A drive-by is not how industry will find you, check with your local Eco Devo director to make sure your site is listed on LocationOne @ Kansas Department of Commerce.

#### **Observation:**

- "Entrepreneurs who choose to start their small businesses are responsible for 63 percent of net new jobs created in the United States every year."
- Global marketing makes your town accessible to purchases all over the world.





## **Industrial Parks/Commercial**

 No industrial park was identified from what visitors saw or heard.





#### **Health Care Services**

- Visitors knew from the website that a hospital existed but had quite a time finding it.
- The city is very lucky to have the hospital and clinic! People encountered said very positive things about them both.
   There's an adequate number of doctors and nurses and the services provided locally were good quality.
- Some people in town did mention if a patient had something more serious, like a bad car accident or cancer, that they

would go to a bigger hospital.

#### **Comanche County Hospital**

Health Care is very important to this small community. Coldwater is proud to have a beautiful updated hospital, with a staff willing to assist you with your medical needs. The hospital completed a complete face lift in 2008, now boasting new patient rooms and updated medical equipment. The doctors are prouf to be able to offer the best care possible. If the patient needs any special care, helicopter service is just a phone call away.

Coldwater also offers a health department, a medical clinic, a dentist, as well as chiropractic services.



 $Website: comanchehospital.org/\\ Address$ 

- · 202 S Frisco St
- · Coldwater, Kansas 67029

Phone (620) 582-2144









Medical Cl

mergency Room

Knowledge for Life



### **Health Care Services**

- The architecture of the hospital and clinic was very nice looking as was the landscaping.
- Visitors did not see any dental offices or optometrists.
- There was an assisted living/care home facility (Pioneer Lodge) located close to the hospital. The town is very fortunate to have that. It looked like a nice facility with building and grounds in good condition.







- Only a few houses were on the market and they appeared to need some work.
- For housing stock there are a few mobile homes mixed with traditional stick-built housing. No designated mobile home park was found.
- There were some larger, very nice homes on various side streets.





- Much of the housing appears to be older, early 1900s. There were some that may have been built in the 1970s or around there.
- There were new houses by the lake.
- The local market does not have enough housing that would appeal to all income levels.



- Of the houses for sale, some were less than \$40,000 and old, fixer-uppers. Others were "crazy expensive" for what they are \$250k to \$422k. Not much in the middle price range.
- The main challenge would be trying to find house flippers to fix up the old houses so they look appealing, have utilities and appliances updates, and nice landscaping – or to find land to add new, more affordable houses to.



- No visible "For Rent" signs. The post office staff indicated it took her six months to find a rental.
- There appears to be a waiting list for rentals.





### **Housing Data**

Kansas

Occupied Housing Units: 377
 1.15m

• Owner Occupied: 65% 65.3%

• Renter Occupied: 35% 34.7%

Vacant Housing Units: 107
 124k

- For rent: 18

- For sale: 11

- Sold, not occupied: 0

- Seasonal/recreational: 25

- All other vacants: 53

Average Household Size: 2

#### Blue = Kansas Comparison Data

Data Source: Census.gov

& ACS 5-year Narrative Profile (Household Size), MySidewalk



### **Housing Data**

Kansas

Average Travel Time to Work:

9 mins

19.6 mins

Households without

a computer\*:

49 (13%) 45k (3.8%)

Households without

an internet subscription:

66 (17.5%) 108k (9.2%)

\* Includes smartphones, tablets, other wireless devices

Knowledge

Blue = Kansas Comparison Data

Data Source: Census.gov ACS 1-Year Estimates



#### **Resources & Grants**

- Kansas Housing Corporation is a resource to find out about housing grants and other tools for homeowners and renters.
- Also has some resources to address homelessness.

https://kshousingcorp.org/





## **Schools**

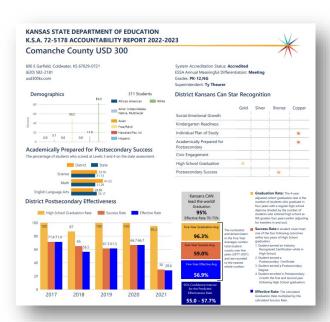
- Visiting with residents helped visitors determine there was a K-8 school in Protection and the 9-12 high school was in Coldwater.
- The high school seems large and in great condition South Central High School.
- The parking lot and school size look great for the number of students.
- The building is brick and well maintained and the grounds are nice looking.
- The football field looks decent.





## **School Information**

- There wasn't a lot of information about the quality of education found online or in person.
- While test-based performance results for the high school weren't listed on the school district website (or easily found if they were), there were quite a few achievements listed for students and teams.
- Kansas State Department of Education had performance level reports. The district appears to perform better than the state, but the high school itself doesn't.





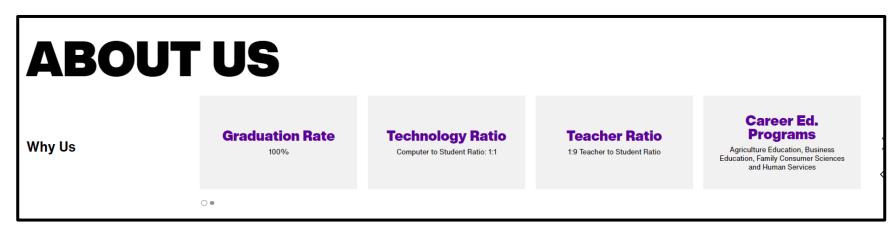


# **One Good Example**

"Potential Students" are an audience for your website.

- This is Mound City, MO:
- "Why choose us" info on home page.







### **Childcare**

#### **Comments:**

- No visible signs or buildings to indicate childcare is available.
- Locals know, but visitors or those considering Coldwater as a place to live do not. Be proud of the services you offer in the community and let people know!

#### **Comanche County Data:**

- Extent Desired Capacity meets Potential Childcare need 34%
- Contact ks.childcareaware.org to access local childcare specialists.
   785-823-3343





# Faith/Religion

- There were several churches in the area.
- One church building was apparently empty, but while walking visitors were greeted by the sound of bells. They thought it was beautiful to hear. The Presbyterian church did not look used – shingles were coming off, sign unreadable.
- Four denominations were noted: First Christian, Assembly of God, Holy Spirit, United Methodist. All buildings well maintained, grounds were nice, signs easy to read.
- No evidence of faith-based community services was seen.







- Visitors said the city needs a senior center, or if one exists, it needs to be more visible.
- Someone mentioned there were Meals on Wheels available through the end of May. Maybe a church or other organization could pick that up?
- 4-H is obvious with the fairgrounds and signs. When visitors asked people about clubs and civic organizations like Lions, senior groups, etc., only 4-H was mentioned.
- No one mentioned the VFW even though there was a nice park to honor veterans.
- No signs for other organizations to indicate meeting times and places. No evidence of civic organization activities.



- Sidewalks outside of downtown were hit and miss. Randomly placed, sometimes on one side of the street, sometimes both, sometimes not at all. Most of the sidewalks through town were very uneven and many overgrown with grass.
- The lake was well equipped with restrooms and storm shelters.
- Street signs on almost all corners and intersections in the residential areas.
- Streets were paved and smooth, and wide. They did have dips for drainage most likely. Dirt streets were acceptable.







- Traffic signs throughout town were easy to see. Business signs not as easy to see on 183 due to sign size, angle, fading or bad condition.
   More signage or larger signage would be nice on the north side showing where the hospital, lake, and golf course locations are.
- Parking was adequate everywhere.
- Some streetlights were seen, but they were a block apart, so not sure how much light they would provide.





- Landscaping at the parks was pleasant and created a peaceful atmosphere. The places to sit at the parks were shaded and the structures were in good condition.
- There was some trash in the bushes of the war memorial park in numerous places.
- The road at the lake was smooth and signage was easily visible and adequate in numbers.
- Good amount of picnic tables at the lake.
- Bathrooms were clean and had updated sinks, shower heads, paper towel dispensers and toilets – and well stocked with supplies.



- Visitors appreciated there was a number to call if there were problems observed with the bathrooms.
- A bathroom at Section H had a broken skylight on the men's side that would allow rain in and the wall between the men's and women's side is moldy and should be replaced.
- The large structure on the west side would be super for family, organization, or other types of gatherings.
- The road to the golf course was a bit bumpy.
- Courthouse area parking is not convenient for those who might need handicapped parking.





# **City Hall**



- Visitors felt they might have made city staff nervous when all three of them came in. They found the visit helpful and got the information they were looking for.
- Some felt the encounter was less than enthusiastic and people they talked to in town and at the lake seemed to know more about what kinds of events, things to see, and active clubs there were than city hall.



# City Hall

- Pamphlets on the information desk should be updated more to provide accurate information.
   The pool fundraiser flyer, for example, had a deadline of January 31, 2013.
- The Coldwater brochure mentioned no less than 10 sit-down eating establishments and says the population is 1,060. People in town told visitors there's virtually no place to sit down and eat here.



# Fire, EMS and Police Services

Kansas Insurance Commissioner

- No one encountered in town mentioned EMS when asked about healthcare.
- Visitors were told the fire department was really good. They
  were also told the department is frequently called upon by
  other nearby departments and Oklahoma departments for
  assistance.

• The city clerk mentioned there is currently no local law enforcement.

Sheriff patrols at times.







# Library



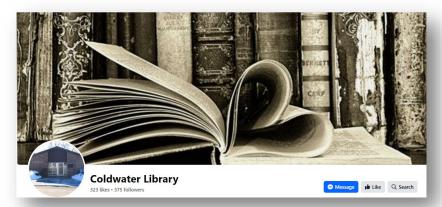
- The library is located in a nice brick building. The director was friendly and immediately talked to the visitors. They exchanged ideas on increasing patronage.
  - The director mentioned hopes of showing movies. Maybe the library and theater could work together on a "Read the book, watch the movie" project.
- There was a nice arrangement of shelves with prominent labeling – easy to find things.
- Adorable children and toddlers area and a nice area in the back for larger chairs.



# Library

- Good selection of books.
- Four computers available for use.
- The animal mural on the wall was cool looking.
- The library's website is a bit plain, unlike the city's, and maybe some better marketing in that area would increase interest.

  The last entry on their news area of the site was from 2022.
- They do have a good Facebook page, but not everyone uses Facebook or sees those results in the first pages of a Google search.







# **City Parks**

- Visitors really enjoyed Memorial Heritage Park honoring soldiers and all service members.
- The pool and playground were modern and well maintained. Good equipment at the playground.
- All parks were mowed and had pleasant, peaceful landscaping.
- Structures where people could go to be in the shade, eat, or out of the rain were observed.









#### Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- The lake facility is well promoted and it's easy to understand why. It absolutely brings in camping from all over the area.
- Visitors were not aware of a slogan that capitalizes on the lake as an attraction.
- No one mentioned any significant events the town is known for and no signs indicated such.



#### Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- The golf course is impressive, although small, but well kept. The course is 100 years old according to the museum.
- The museum was nice and some thought well organized. Others thought
  maybe it could use a different organization structure by age, genre, etc.
   Also no regular hours and some improvements needed outside.
- Ozzie Bakes is a definite draw! Amazing desserts, outgoing personality and good selection of other items.
- The county fair might be a draw.
- The historical theater.
  - Are there summer movie passes? Old time movies, maybe bands or plays?
- The lake, definitely is a draw for its amenities.
  - Visitors wonder if there are ever fishing tournaments (adults or kids).





#### Visitor's Center

 There is not. There should be a central location of updated information regarding events, services, businesses available.





### What would bring you back?

- Ozzie Bakes delicious food and friendly, helpful staff.
- Visitors would like to come back to try Dave's Pizza.
   They heard about it but were unable to try it during their visit.
- Maybe come to see a movie in the theater.
- The lake.



## **Most Positive Observations**

- Everyone seems eager to answer questions about the community. They are proud of what they have and should be – even though it's very rural there is still a lot offered.
- Close-knit community. People take care of each other and help when it's needed.
- The schools.
- The lake.
- The hospital.
- Different kinds of businesses.
- Several fun things to do. "They are so lucky!"





# Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- The town could really use a successful restaurant to help with locals and visitors wanting to eat out. Some residents even suggested going to the next town to have lunch.
- The town needs to advertise what they have to offer more. Maybe more websites or more information on current websites.
- Lack of housing rentals or to purchase. Some conversations mentioned property prices have gone up due to competition from hunting companies/seasonal hunters.



### **6 Months from Now**

### What will you remember?

- Welcoming individuals.
- The lake.
- Ozzie Bakes.
- How friendly most people were.
- The theater.
- The nice looking downtown.
- The city building staff could have been more welcoming.



### Recommendations

Visitors spent a total of \$65 while in town.

No one can do everything,

but everyone can do something.





# Follow Up

#### Thank you to our volunteer visitors.

#### **Set Next Steps:**

 Start talking! Find ways to discuss what you heard in small groups of every kind.

#### Contact us if you need resources or have questions:

Cindy Snyder Jan Steen

Family & Community Wellness Agent Community Vitality Specialist

K-State Research and Extension Comanche Co. K-State Research and Extension

620.582.2411 785.532.5840

<u>cjsnyder@ksu.edu</u> <u>jmsteen@ksu.edu</u>



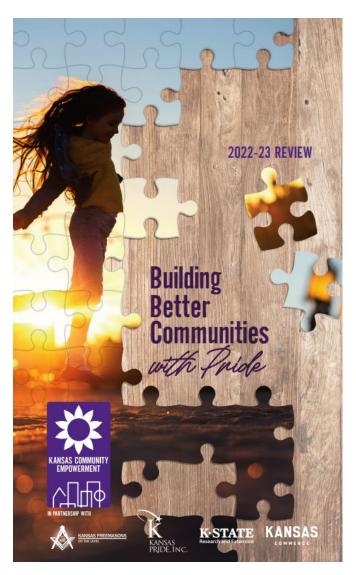


### **KSRE** Resources

### **Kansas Community Empowerment**

http://kce.k-state.edu

Local communities
 identify what they
 would like to preserve,
 create, or improve for
 their future and
 volunteers pull together
 to create their ideal
 community future.





### **KSRE** Resources

#### Youth Community Perceptions <a href="https://bit.ly/ks-ycp">https://bit.ly/ks-ycp</a>

Youth-Based Community Assessment.

Gives communities insights on how youth see their community.

 Creates opportunities for youth voices in the community.

Allows youth to become involved in local government and community process

















### **KSRE** Resources

### **Grant Writing Classes and Support**

**Contact** 

KSRECV@ksu.edu

to participate.









### **Small Business and Community Development**

• First Friday e-Calls 9:30-10:30 am Connecting small businesses and communities with the resources to make them successful.

- Register here: <a href="https://ksre-learn.com/ecall">https://ksre-learn.com/ecall</a>

Previous calls are recorded at https://ksre-learn.com/entrepreneurship



### **Remote Work**

- Now people have a choice, and millions of them are planning to move.
- "The pivot to remote work is the biggest, fastest transformation of the labor market since the World War II mobilization."
- Major cities will see the biggest out-migration: 20.6% of those planning to move are currently based in a major city.
- **People are seeking less expensive housing**: Altogether, **more than half** (52.5%) are planning to move to a house that is significantly more affordable than their current home.
- People are moving beyond regular commute distances: 54.7% of people are
  moving over two hours away or more from their current location, which is beyond
  daily or even weekly commuting distances for most.

UpWork October, 2020 <a href="https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move">https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move</a>, retrieved from Internet 12-12-20, UpWork October, 2020





## **Remote Work Certification**

- Kansas Remote Online Initiative
  - Certified Remote Work Professional
  - Certified Remote Work Leader
- Certification in 4-weeks
- Monthly Classes: <a href="https://kansasremotework.com/">https://kansasremotework.com/</a>







### Rural Grocery/KS Healthy Food Initiative

- Goal: Increase access to affordable, healthy food and to improve the health and economic development of Kansans and their communities.
- Technical assistance and financing to develop new or renovate fresh food retail in underserved communities throughout Kansas.

http://kansashealthyfood.org/







# What will we do?

