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Newcomers to the Nebraska Panhandle: How Do We Keep Them Here?

Cheryl A. Burkhart-Kriesel
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, cburkhartkriesel1@unl.edu

Randolph L. Cantrell
Nebraska Rural Initiative, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rcantrell1@unl.edu

Bruce B. Johnson
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, bjohnson2@unl.edu

Charlotte Narjes
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, cnarjes1@unl.edu

Rebecca J. Vogt
Center for Applied Rural Innovation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rvogt2@unl.edu

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Relocation to the Buffalo Commons Research Brief

cari.unl.edu/buffalo/

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Newcomers to the Nebraska Panhandle: How Do We Keep Them Here?

Key Findings

- Most new residents considered other locations before choosing their current location.
- Most new residents view their new communities as friendly, trusting, and supportive.
- Many new residents are involved in their new community, but are not as engaged as they were in their previous community.
- Many new residents are either not planning to stay in their current community or aren't sure of their plans.
- Younger persons are more likely than older persons to be planning to leave or to be unsure of their plans.
- The feeling of belonging in the community has the strongest relationship with the expectation of staying in the community.

Introduction

Even though much attention has been focused on the depopulation of rural areas across the country, the 2000 U.S. Census figures show that new residents are moving to the Nebraska Panhandle. This is an encouraging finding. However, it is important to keep these new residents in the Panhandle. Did new residents consider other locations before choosing their current location? How do they view their current community? How likely are they to be living there five years from now? This paper will address these questions.

About the Study

The primary objective of this study, funded by a USDA CSREES NRI grant, is to identify potentially successful strategies for residential recruitment and retention in sparsely populated rural areas. This will be

accomplished through the compilation and analysis of detailed information from households that have chosen to relocate to one of Nebraska's most rural regions: the eleven county western Panhandle. This study includes four components: GIS analyses of secondary data in the region, a household survey of new residents to the Nebraska Panhandle, focus groups of new residents and a multi-staged Delphi Survey of economic development practitioners in Nebraska and its neighboring states. The following results are based on data collected from the household survey as well as the focus groups of new residents. For more information about this study, including the survey questionnaire, visit the Web site at <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo>

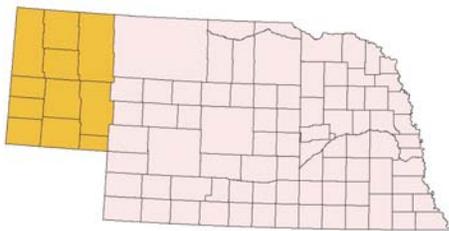
Survey Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in May and June to approximately

1,050 households in the Nebraska Panhandle using mailing lists designed to identify households that were new to the area in the last five years. Responses from those who had moved within the Panhandle and those who moved more than five years ago were excluded. Our return rate for usable surveys was 33-percent. A total of 321 new movers to the Nebraska Panhandle region since 2000 are the basis for the following summary.

The eleven counties included in the sample were Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to the new residents' background, reasons for moving, decision making tools used and views of their current community.

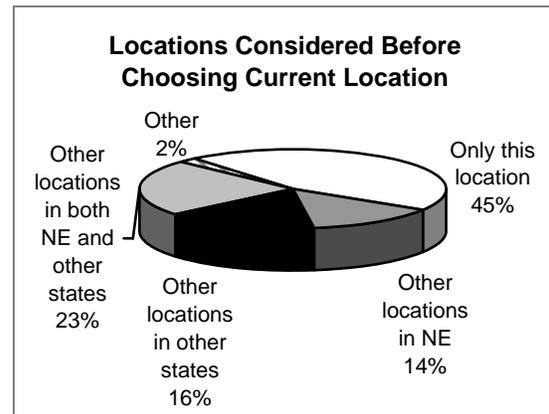
Nebraska's Panhandle Counties



Other Locations Considered

Communities have competition for new residents. More than one-half (55%) of new residents considered other locations before choosing their current location. Forty-five percent considered only their current location. Fourteen percent considered other locations in Nebraska, 16 percent considered locations in other states and 23 percent considered both locations in Nebraska as well as in other states.

Persons moving from the largest distance are the group most likely to say they considered only their current location. Forty-seven percent of persons moving from



other states not adjacent to Nebraska considered only their current location. Forty percent of persons moving from other parts of Nebraska considered only their current location. Persons moving from non-adjacent states are also the group, though, most likely to have considered locations in other states. Just over one quarter (27%) considered other locations in other states, compared to 10 percent of persons moving from states adjacent to the Panhandle. Persons moving from elsewhere in Nebraska are most likely to have considered other locations in the state. Twenty-two percent of persons moving from eastern Nebraska considered other locations in the state, compared to 10 percent of persons moving from other states not adjacent to Nebraska. Persons moving from adjacent states are most likely to have considered other locations in both Nebraska and other states (29%).

Views of Their Current Community

The majority of new residents view their current community as friendly (82%), trusting (69%) and supportive (68%). These positive views were consistent across all age groups, family structure types, and previous locations.

New residents also rate many other aspects of their community high. At least one quarter of new residents rate the following community and life factors as excellent:

living near family and relatives (32%); natural, scenic or recreational amenities (30%); and environment for children (27%). At least two thirds rate the following factors either good or excellent: environment for children (83%), fire protection (78%), clean environment (75%), senior living/services (69%), job security (68%), and opportunities to join local organizations (67%).

However, new residents are less satisfied with other aspects of their community. Factors receiving at least one quarter of new residents rating them as poor include: state taxes (52%), property and other local taxes (52%), retail shopping (37%), entertainment (31%), and available job opportunities (26%).

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to express dissatisfaction with state taxes. Persons age 30 and over are more likely than persons under the age of 30 to rate state taxes as poor.

Persons under the age of 40 are more likely than persons age 40 and older to be satisfied with job security. At least one third of persons under the age of 40 rate job security as excellent, compared to 13 percent of persons age 50 to 64 and 12 percent of persons age 65 and older.

Almost one half (49%) of persons age 19 to 29 rate their police protection as either fair or poor. In contrast, only 18 percent of persons age 65 and older rate police protection as fair and none rate it as being poor.

Forty-two percent of persons moving from states adjacent to the Panhandle rate their police protection as either fair or poor. In comparison, only 27 percent of persons moving from nonadjacent states rate it as fair or poor.

Couples with children are more likely than

other family structure types to be satisfied with their household income. Over one half (55%) of couples with children rate their household income as either good or excellent, compared to 20 percent of single parent households.

Persons moving from other parts of Nebraska are more likely than persons moving from other states to express dissatisfaction with affordable housing in their community. Over one half (59%) rate affordable housing as fair or poor, compared to 35 percent of persons moving from states adjacent to Nebraska.

Persons moving from metropolitan counties are more likely than persons moving from non-metropolitan counties to give high ratings to affordable housing in their community. Approximately two thirds (66%) of persons moving from metropolitan counties rate affordable housing as either good or excellent, compared to 47 percent of persons moving from non-metropolitan counties.

Persons moving from other parts of Nebraska are most likely to give high ratings to the natural, scenic or recreational amenities in their community. Over three quarters (78%) rate these amenities as either good or excellent. In comparison, 57 percent of persons moving from adjacent states rate these amenities as good or excellent.

Persons moving from non-metropolitan counties are more likely than persons moving from metropolitan counties to rate the entertainment in their communities as good or excellent. Approximately one third (34%) rate their entertainment as good or excellent. In comparison, 21 percent of persons moving from metropolitan counties rate their community's entertainment as good or excellent.

Most newcomers think communities are assimilating people who move there. The majority (79%) think a person is a newcomer for less than three years when they move to their community. Just under one third (29%) believe a person is a newcomer for less than one year and one half (50%) say a person is a newcomer for 1 – 3 years. Thirteen percent say it takes 4 – 9 years before a person is no longer a newcomer and eight percent think it takes 10 years or more.

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to think a person is quickly assimilated into their community. Over one half (52%) of persons age 65 and older think a person is a newcomer in their community for less than one year. However, approximately 23 percent of persons age 30 to 64 think a person is a newcomer for less than one year. Persons age 50 to 64 are the group most likely to think it takes ten years or more before a person is no longer considered a newcomer. Fifteen percent of this age group believe a person is a newcomer in their community that long.

Persons moving from states outside the area (non-adjacent states) are the group most likely to think a person is a newcomer in their community for less than one year after they move there. Persons moving from other places in Nebraska are the group most likely to think a person is a newcomer for 10 years or more.

The majority of newcomers would encourage all types of people to move to or remain in their community. Seventy-four percent would somewhat or strongly encourage their close personal friends to move to or remain in their community. Seventy-one percent would encourage their children to move to or remain in their community and 70 percent would encourage their grandchildren to live there. The proportions encouraging other groups to

move to or remain in their community include: Nebraskans from other areas of the state (74%), elderly persons (72%), young adults/young families (71%), other relatives and in-laws (66%), out of state residents (64%), single parent households (60%) and members of ethnic minorities (56%). Persons moving from either eastern Nebraska or from an adjacent state are the groups most likely to encourage their close, personal friends to move to or remain in their community. Seventy-nine percent of these two groups would encourage their friends to live in their community, compared to 65 percent of persons moving from nonadjacent states. This same pattern occurs when asked about encouraging single parent households to live in their community. Persons moving from non-metropolitan counties are more likely than persons moving from metropolitan counties to encourage both their close, personal friends and elderly persons to live in their community.

New residents are becoming involved in their community. Over one half (53%) belong to a group or organization in their local community or have donated money to a local organization, charity or cause (57%). Forty-three percent have volunteered their time. Just under one quarter (22%) have held a leadership role in their community and three percent have held a public office or served on a government board or committee.

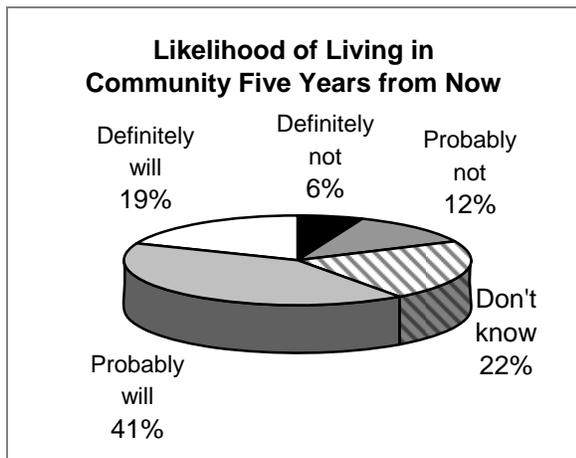
However, most new residents were more active in their previous community. Most (72%) who donated money in their previous community have done so in their new community. Sixty-two percent of persons who belonged to a group or organization in their previous community currently belong to a group or organization in their current community. Just over one half (54%) of persons who had previously volunteered their time have done so in their current

community. A larger difference occurs when examining persons holding leadership roles. Only 39 percent of persons who held such a role in their previous community have done so since moving to their current community.

Couples with children are the family structure type most likely to have belonged to a group (65%), to have volunteered in their community (54%) or donated money in their local community (65%).

Will They Stay?

Over one half (60%) of new residents say they probably or definitely will be living in their current community five years from now. Eighteen percent say they probably or definitely will not be living there and 22 percent don't know. Thus, a sizeable proportion of newcomers are not planning to stay or are not sure.



Older persons are more likely than younger persons to be planning on living in their current community five years from now. Sixty-five percent of persons age 65 and older say they probably or definitely will be living in their current community five years from now. Less than one half (46%) of persons age 19 to 29 have plans to live there five years from now.

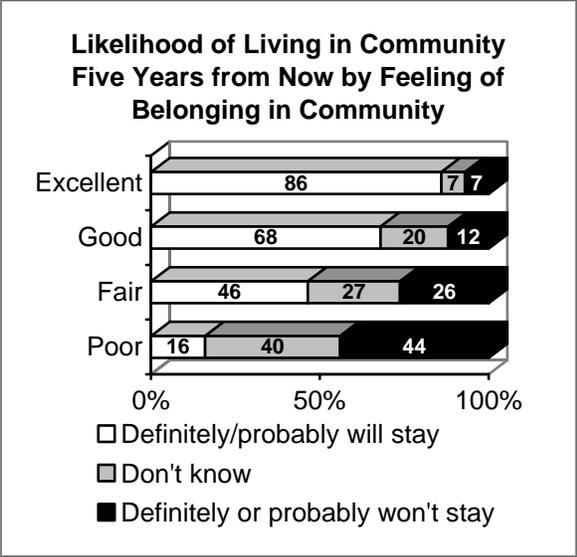
Persons who have lived in Nebraska before

are more likely than persons who have not to be planning to stay in their community five years from now. Approximately two thirds (66%) of persons who have lived in Nebraska before are planning on being in their community five years from now, compared to 53 percent of persons who have not lived in Nebraska before.

Persons who rate their communities as both friendly and trusting are more likely than persons saying their communities are unfriendly and distrusting to be planning on living in their community five years from now. Sixty-five percent of persons who rate their community as friendly plan to live in their community five years from now, compared to only 29 percent of persons who view their community as unfriendly.

The expectation of staying in their current community is also related to their ratings of the following community and life factors: feeling of belonging in the community, suitable housing and neighborhoods, clean environment, job security, available job opportunities, leadership opportunities, opportunities to join local organizations, police protection, fire protection, health care services, school system, living near family and relatives, living near friends and acquaintances, educational opportunities, entertainment, retail shopping, standard of living, environment for children, local government, natural amenities, community appearance and household income.

However, the strongest relationship is with the feeling of belonging in the community. The majority (86%) of persons who rate the feeling of belonging in their community as excellent are planning to remain in their community five years from now. But, only 16 percent of persons who rate the feeling of belonging in their community as poor plan to stay.



Summary

Communities have competition for new residents. Most considered other locations before choosing their current community. This suggests that active recruiting by a community can influence the decision to move to the Panhandle. By better understanding what drew new residents here, communities can develop targeted marketing campaigns designed to draw more new residents to the area.

Most new residents rate their communities high on its social attributes. Most view their new communities as friendly, trusting and supportive. Many also rate their communities as good or excellent in the following areas: environment for children, fire protection, clean environment, senior living/services, job security, and opportunities to join local organizations. New residents are more negative about state taxes, property and other local taxes, retail shopping, entertainment, and available job opportunities. These are areas communities can work to improve, other than state taxes which they do not directly control.

Many new residents are involved in their community, but are not as engaged as they were in their previous community. It takes

time for new residents to become engaged in the community. And, some new residents may be looking to become less involved than they were in the past. However, many assets (especially leadership assets) are not being utilized in the current community. It may be that newcomers are not aware of the opportunities to volunteer and hold leadership roles in their new communities. Or, maybe they haven't been given the opportunity by other community residents to participate. Communities need to embrace new residents and give them opportunities to become more involved in their community.

Many new residents are either not planning to stay in their current community or aren't sure of their plans. The numbers of persons planning to leave or who are unsure are higher for younger persons. Thus, communities must implement or improve retention strategies to keep these new residents in their communities.

Even though persons who have lived in Nebraska before are more likely than persons who have never lived in Nebraska to be planning on living in their community five years from now, a majority of persons new to Nebraska are planning to stay. This is an encouraging finding.

The feeling of belonging in the community has the strongest relationship with the expectation of staying in the community. Communities need to work to integrate new residents into community life, organizations and leadership opportunities in order to increase the odds that they will remain in the Panhandle.



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Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, Department of Agricultural Economics
 Randolph Cantrell, University of Nebraska Rural Initiative
 Bruce Johnson, Department of Agricultural Economics
 Charlotte Narjes, Center for Applied Rural Innovation
 Rebecca Vogt, Center for Applied Rural Innovation