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Newcomers to the Nebraska Panhandle: Who Are They?

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Relocation to the Buffalo Commons Research Brief

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Newcomers to the Nebraska Panhandle: Who Are They?

Key Findings

- New residents bring many assets to the Panhandle region: high levels of education, children, professional occupation skills, entrepreneurial backgrounds, and volunteer and community leadership experience.
- New residents come from many different locations, arriving from 38 different states.
- Most new residents come from other parts of Nebraska or from the adjacent states of Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota and Kansas.
- The majority of new residents moved to the Panhandle from a metropolitan county.
- While one quarter of new residents moved to the Panhandle alone, most brought either a spouse/partner or children with them.
- A slight majority (54%) of new residents had lived in Nebraska before, almost one-third (32%) had lived in their current county before and just over one-third (38%) had lived in their current community before. Still, many new residents (46%) moved to their new locations without any prior experience with the Nebraska Panhandle.

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, not much is known about these new residents. Who are they? Where did they come from? Who did they bring with them? What skills or entrepreneurial interests do they have? How active were they in their previous community? 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

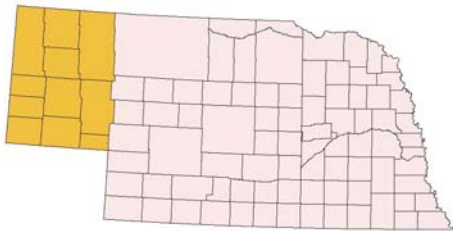
residential recruitment and retention in sparsely populated rural areas. This will be accomplished through the compilation and analysis of detailed information from households that have chosen to relocate to one of Nebraska's most rural regions: the eleven county western Panhandle. This study includes 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



Demographic Profile of New Residents

Almost one-half (47%) of the new residents moved to the Panhandle in 2006. Thirteen percent each moved this year (2007) or two years ago (2005).

New residents to the region bring many assets to the region. On average, they are younger and better educated than current Panhandle residents. The average age of new residents in the Nebraska Panhandle is 46 years. Forty-one percent of new

residents are between the ages of 20 and 40, compared to 23 percent of current Panhandle residents.

Ninety-seven percent have at least a high school education, with 81 percent having some college education. Among newcomers, 40 percent reported having attained at least a bachelors degree, compared to an average of only 18 percent for the region.

One-third (33%) of new residents have household incomes under \$30,000 while just under one-half (48%) have household incomes of \$50,000 or more. In comparison, 47 percent of current Panhandle residents have household incomes under \$30,000 and 28 percent have household incomes of \$50,000 or more.

The new residents have an average of 1.8 adults in their household and 0.9 children. Twenty-one percent of new residents live alone. Just over one-third (34%) live with another adult and 35 percent are living with another adult and have children in the household. Forty-three percent of new residents have children in their household, compared to 33 percent of current Panhandle households.

Ninety-five percent of new residents are white, one percent are American Indian and three percent are Hispanic or Latino. Eighty percent of new residents have an employed person in their household. Twenty-seven percent of employed respondents report working in a professional or related occupation. Fifteen percent of employed respondents are working in management, business and financial operations and 13 percent are employed in transportation and materials moving.

Where Did They Come From?

New Panhandle residents come from many

different locations, arriving from 38 different states. However, as expected, most come from other parts of Nebraska (20%) or from the neighboring states of Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota and Kansas (42%). But, 37 percent come from places that might not be expected, including Arizona, California, Florida, Nevada and Texas. Over one-half (61%) moved to the Panhandle from a metropolitan county.

The new residents had lived in their previous community for an average of 12.6 years. Many (23%) left a community they had lived in for over 20 years. Most (56%) were home owners in their previous community.

Who Did They Bring?

One quarter (25%) of new residents moved here alone while approximately two-thirds (67%) moved here with a spouse/partner. Over one third (37%) brought children with them. This is a higher percentage of households with children than is found in the Panhandle on average (32.8%). Four percent moved here with other related adults and one percent moved with other unrelated adults.

Both the oldest and youngest new movers are most likely to have moved alone. Forty-four percent of persons age 19 – 24 and 40 percent of persons age 65 and older moved here alone. Over half of persons age 30 to 49 moved here with children.

Familiarity with Area

Only a slight majority of new residents to the Panhandle had lived in Nebraska before. And, some had lived in their current county or community before. Fifty-four percent of the respondents and 50 percent of their spouses/partners had previously lived in Nebraska. Just under one-third (32%) had lived in their current county before. Just

over one-quarter (26%) of the spouses/partners had lived in their current county before. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents and 32 percent of the spouses/partners had lived in their current community before.

Single parent households are more likely than other household structures to have lived in their current county before. Sixty-three percent of single-parent households had lived in their current county before, compared to 26 percent of couples with children.

Skills and Interests of New Residents

Many new residents report having professional and related occupation skills (44%) as well as management, business and financial operations skills (41%). Other skills possessed by at least 20 percent of newcomers include: sales and related skills (28%), office and administrative support skills (24%) and agriculture skills (23%).

New residents were also involved in their previous community. A majority of new residents had belonged to a group or organization in their previous community (72%) or donated money to local organizations, charities or causes (70%). Many also volunteered in their previous location (58%). Approximately one-third (34%) had held a leadership role in their previous community. Seven percent had held a public office or served on a government board or committee.

Some new residents have entrepreneurial backgrounds. Twenty-one percent had owned a business, farm or ranch in their previous community. Fourteen percent had operated only a business while an additional three percent had owned and operated both a business and a farm or ranch.

Eighteen percent of newcomers currently

own and operate a business, farm or ranch. Seven percent own and operate only a business and three percent own and operate a business as well as a farm or ranch. Eight percent own and operate a farm or ranch.

Sixteen percent of new residents have an interest in starting a new, expanded or additional business in their current community. Just under a third (30%) don't know if they have such an interest.

Persons age 25 to 39 and persons age 50 to 64 are the age groups most interested in starting a business. Approximately 20 percent of persons in these age groups are interested in starting a business. In comparison, only four percent of persons age 65 and older and six percent of persons age 19 to 24 are interested in starting a business.

Summary

New residents bring many assets to the Panhandle region. On average, they are younger and better educated than current Panhandle residents. They also are more likely than current residents to have children in their household. Thus, they are contributing to stabilize, and in some cases increase, the population of the area. In addition, the majority of the newcomers are in their prime earning years, so they are increasing the labor force in the region. Many new residents possess professional occupation skills and business, management and financial operations skills. Many were also involved in their previous community, thus bringing volunteer and leadership experience to their new location. Some new residents have entrepreneurial backgrounds and have an interest in starting a business in their current community. It is important that communities and the region as a whole tap into these assets that newcomers are bringing.

New residents come from many different locations, arriving from 38 different states. As expected, though, most come from other parts of Nebraska or from the adjacent states of Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota and Kansas. The majority came from larger places as they had previously resided in a metropolitan county. Many were long-term residents in their previous community. While one quarter of the new residents moved here alone, most brought either a spouse/partner or children with them. Although a slight majority of new residents had lived in Nebraska before, many new residents moved to the Nebraska Panhandle without any prior experience in the area. This creates an opportunity for communities to explore what attracted these movers to the region. Communities can learn from the new residents and use that information to recruit other potential movers to the area.



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