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Moving to the Nebraska Panhandle: A Broad Picture of the Decision Process

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Moving to the Nebraska Panhandle: A Broad Picture of the Decision Process

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	11/7/08
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.....	\$92.17	\$91.57	\$92.58
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.....	117.83	108.11	106.60
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.....	112.06	103.48	101.73
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.....	139.78	152.27	146.87
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.....	46.84	61.98	51.45
Feeder Pigs, National Direct 50 lbs, FOB.....	36.74	44.76	43.58
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.....	58.72	69.60	57.69
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Woolled, South Dakota, Direct.....	90.12	94.50	96.37
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.....	261.55	271.37	265.45
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.....	7.05	5.27	4.91
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	3.66	4.01	3.64
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	9.79	8.78	9.00
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.....	6.68	5.48	4.84
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN, bu.....	*	*	*
<u>Feed</u>			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.....	135.00	190.00	202.50
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.....	87.50	77.50	77.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Premium Nebraska, ton.....	*	85.00	75.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture, Nebraska Average.....	*	147.50	130.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture, Nebraska Average.....	41.50	57.00	45.50
*No Market			

New residents to the Nebraska Panhandle compared and researched rural communities before making their decision to move. This was one of the themes that emerged in a qualitative study conducted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture CSREES National Research Initiative Grant program. The new movers not only compared communities, but they had choices, as one individual stated, “We spent about six months looking at different communities ... we developed a formula ... 50 percent job ... 25 percent community, 25 percent school.”

Thirteen questions were asked to 78 new residents that participated in twelve focus groups conducted in the region. From the analysis of the data, a model was created that provides a broad picture of themes that influenced individuals in moving to a rural community (see Figure 1, on next page).

Considering a Move

Participants in the study were considering a move for three general reasons, life cycle changes, healthier quality of life and being pushed away. Life cycle changes refer to the times in a person’s life that individuals reflect on their current situation and determine whether they want to make a change such as starting a family, taking care of aging parents, a retirement, a death, divorce or attending or graduating from college. A healthier quality of life is a broad reason that includes safety, quality time for family, simpler life and climate. One participant simply said, “Our lifestyle was not, it wasn’t family.” Being pushed away is the third broad reason focus group participants identified that they were considering a move. This reason primarily described individuals that indicated their previous community changed and they became dissatisfied. As one person said, “...it was a farming community. It is not a farming community any more.”

The focus group participants identified situations that occurred that caused them to begin considering a move. Three dominant opportunities help identify the reasons individuals began looking at their new location.



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Opportunity to Move and Size of Community

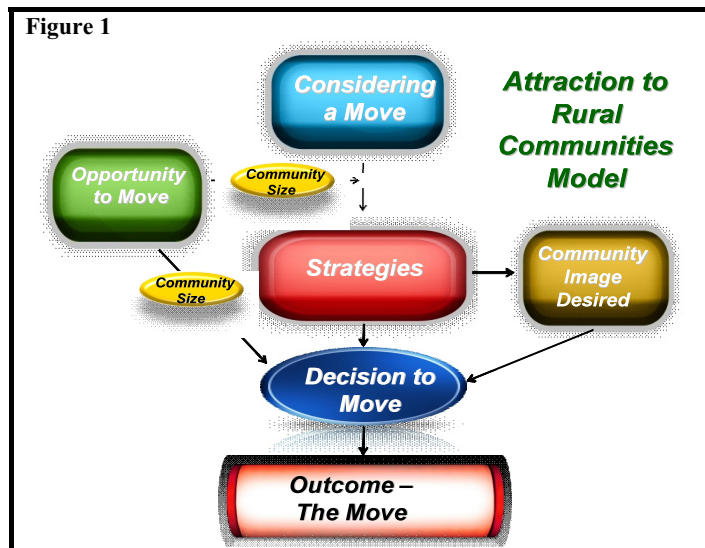
Job opportunity (47.4%), family (17.9%) and location (34.6%) were the three dominant opportunities individuals gave for moving to the Nebraska Panhandle. Job opportunities or the desire to be near family do not need further explanation, with many respondents sharing “it was the job” or “to be closer to family.” Location represents individuals who specifically sought the region to purchase property or other environmental factors, as this person said, “the climate...humidity, bugs and pollen.”

Comparing the opportunities to move (a job, family and location) with the population size of the community an individual moved to and from, brought some interesting findings. Location was the dominant reason for those moving from a farm or ranch to the Nebraska Panhandle, as well as for 89 percent of those moving to a farm or ranch. For those moving to a community under 3,500, location (45%) and job opportunities (50%) were the dominant reason, and only one individual was moving to be with family. For communities with a population of 5,000–9,999, there was a higher percentage that moved for job opportunities (67%), compared to the total sample (47.4%). Fewer people than the sample moved to these communities due to the location (7% compared to 34.6%), while those moving for family (26%) is somewhat higher than the sample (17.9%). For those moving to communities with a population of 10,000 or greater, location was similar to the sample (36% compared to 34% for the sample). There were fewer people moving to larger communities for job opportunity (36% compared to 47.4% for the sample), and more moving for family (27% compared to 17.9% for the sample). New residents moving to the Nebraska Panhandle from cities larger than 100,000 were more likely to move for a job opportunity than the sample (59% compared to 47.4% for the sample), and less likely to move for family (9% compared to 17.9% for the sample). Those moving for location from cities larger than 100,000 was relatively the same (32% compared to 34.6% for the sample). Table 1 (at end of article) summarizes the comparison of the dominant intervening conditions by the size of the community.

This suggests that the population size of a community may be a consideration for individuals considering a move. While there may be one dominant reason, the majority of individuals indicated there were many factors that needed to be considered. The new residents had an image in their mind of the community in which they wanted to live.

Community Image Desired

The new residents to the Nebraska Panhandle looked at a variety of factors when deciding to move to their new community. The majority of the new residents in this study had expectations of the community. Safety, family oriented, a small town atmosphere and faith oriented communities were key to the decision, as well as a community free of congestion. Many of the new residents also had expectations of a friendly and welcoming community with small town values. One individual from an eastern state expressed, “Frankly, I never knew much about Nebraska at all. But, I got a good job offer and checked out the town and liked it. I did like the idea of a small town, it sounded like a good place to raise kids ... I like the Rocky Mountains.”



Action/Interaction Strategies in Learning About the Rural Community

Action/interaction strategies in this study refer to the way in which people learned more about the community. Family, friends and a job opportunity were the answers provided by some of the participants. Others lived in the region before or in neighboring states. Still others discovered the community through the Internet, and even those that were familiar with the community used the Internet to find additional information. The four strategies identified by individuals in discovering and finding information about the community described during the focus group are: family/friends, previously lived in region (including neighboring states within 50 miles), visits to the community and surfing the Internet.

The final strategy that emerged in the focus group data is called advice to communities. New resident advice included creating a vision and an open-minded attitude. While the new residents acknowledged that job opportunities were essential to attract and retain residents, only 8 percent of the comments were specifically related to employment. As one new resident shared, “it is much more complex planning than simply saying we have jobs.” Fifty-nine percent of the comments were related to marketing, with half of these comments encouraging communities to ‘know who they are’ and create a vision. A previous Cornhusker Economics article, [Community Vision is Important to New Residents](#) (5-28-08), focused on the new resident advice.

Conclusion

Rural communities across Nebraska are making efforts to market their communities to potential new residents. For example, a number of communities received funding to develop activities to attract new residents through the Building

Entrepreneurial Communities Act (BECA) administered by the Nebraska Rural Development Commission. Key points that emerged from this study that may help communities in their marketing strategies are:

- New residents research their communities and have choices. *What will new residents learn about your community?*
- The image of the community is a factor in deciding to move to a rural community. *If someone visits your community, will they find a friendly and welcoming community? What image does your community portray?*
- Know your community and then market to potential new residents. *What marketing efforts is your community using to attract new movers?*
- Consider your community population size and location in your marketing strategy. *What assets does your community have related to population size and location?*

As communities create their marketing strategies, new residents also encouraged honesty in the portrayal.

This focus group study is part of a UNL research project funded by a 2006 grant from the USDA-National Research Initiative (NRI), looking at the characteristics and motivations of new residents in the eleven counties in the Nebraska Panhandle. The research project included a demographic study, a mail survey to new residents, an iterative three-phase

survey process to community development practitioners and a focus group of new residents. For further information about this research project, visit <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo/>.

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Source:

Narjes, C. (2008). “*Understanding the Motivations of People Moving to the Nebraska Panhandle: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study.*”

Table 1. Intervening Conditions Compared to Size of Community To and From

Population/ Size of the Community Moved To	Number of People	Job Opportunity		Family/Friend		Location	
		Number of People Indicating	Percent (%)	Number of People Indicating	Percent (%)	Number of People Indicating	Percent (%)
Farm or Ranch	9	1	11	0		8	89
<3,500	20	10	50	1	5	9	45
>5,000	27	18	67	7	26	2	7
>10,000	22	8	36	6	27	8	36
Moved From							
Farm or Ranch	5	0		0		5	100
<3,500	14	5	36	5	36	4	28
>5,000	3	2	67	0		1	33
>10,000	22	17	50	7	21	10	29
>100,000	34	13	59	2	9	7	32
Total Sample		37	47.4	14	17.9	27	34.6

n = 78

Note: Gering/Scottsbluff is only area over 10,000. There are not any communities in the Nebraska Panhandle in the 3,500-5,000 population range.