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New Rural Residents: Insights into their Decision to Stay or Leave

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CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

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Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	12/5/08
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.....	\$92.91	\$92.58	\$85.27
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb....	119.77	106.60	101.74
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb....	110.71	101.73	93.63
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.....	148.33	146.87	148.18
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.....	54.38	51.45	54.19
Feeder Pigs, National Direct 50 lbs, FOB.....	36.71	43.38	52.28
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.....	59.00	57.69	60.41
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Wooled, South Dakota, Direct.....	92.25	96.37	95.50
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.....	265.18	265.45	263.79
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.....	8.82	4.91	4.18
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	4.01	3.64	2.98
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	10.80	9.00	7.76
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.....	7.12	4.84	3.55
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN, bu.....	2.90	*	1.97
<u>Feed</u>			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.....	135.00	202.50	202.50
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.....	85.00	77.50	77.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Premium Nebraska, ton.....	*	73.00	75.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture, Nebraska Average.....	147.00	130.00	130.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture, Nebraska Average.....	47.75	45.50	42.00
*No Market			

What brought new residents to the Nebraska Panhandle? For many, it was the image of a small town environment, which they described as a family and faith oriented community, safe and free of traffic and congestion and often located closer to family.

This insight was one of many identified through twelve regional focus group interviews conducted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln faculty as part of a research project funded by the United States Department of Agriculture-National Research Initiative.

While a number of individuals were pleased with the small town atmosphere, others found that their image of the community did not match reality. Several situations influencing satisfaction impacted the focus group participant's perception of the new community. By sharing examples of these situations it is hoped that community leaders will identify ways for their community to not only meet, but exceed new resident satisfaction in the future.

Situations Influencing Satisfaction

Individuals had a desire to be connected to their community, and many expressed that they wanted their new residence to succeed and survive. Through the interviews, the new residents identified both positive and negative situations that have impacted their overall satisfaction with the move. Positive people experiences, transitioning to the community, services available and small business struggles, housing, job opportunities, availability of information and socio-economic issues were all themes that represented a category of 'situations influencing satisfaction.'

Positive people experiences were described by many of the participants, and in turn increased their satisfaction with the new community. A new resident from a neighboring state said, "[we] were pleasantly surprised with just how friendly people are here." Another person from the East Coast said, "There is a general caring attitude." While focus group participants shared heart warming experiences, others struggled with the **transition of moving** to the community. A number of participants described people as being friendly but distant. Others said it took time to understand the community and the culture. For those moving from the metro area, it took a while to understand that people wanted to talk to them and learn their story. Many new movers said that they were questioned why they moved to the community. One

woman in her 40s said, “Whenever I said that I had just moved here - somebody would say “Why? Why?” And, I couldn’t understand why they would say that because [state moved away from] was getting so crowded and congested ... where you have to wait in traffic for an hour just to get anywhere. Maybe you like that.”

The limited number of **business services** available was a challenge for some. It is an adjustment when stores are not open in the evenings and on weekends, or to not be able to find services such as plumbers and electricians. The participants shared surprise at the helpfulness of those providing service and at the same time a frustration that a service provider may not show up at a designated time.

Many of the new residents expressed that it was difficult to find out **information** regarding activities, entertainment, service changes and school activities. Businesses may or may not be listed in the yellow pages or on the Chamber of Commerce web sites. Organizations to join are not listed. As one new resident explained, “We’ve got this little phone book that is very incomplete, and a lot of things I’ve tried to find don’t exist in the phone book.”

Individuals that moved to communities with a population of under 3,500 had more positive comments about the **housing opportunities**, while those moving to communities of 5,000-10,000 felt lucky to find a house. As one said, “finding a place to rent - it is near impossible.” Others added, “didn’t get what I really wanted...best deal...some of the houses are so bad the basements are crumbling on them.”

For those who moved to live near family or followed a spouse that took a position in the area, **job opportunities** were critical. Others moved for a certain position only to find that it was not what they wanted. The new residents indicated that they found positions but they often were low paying. One man who moved from a city to be nearer family support said, “I had a little culture shock, about the wages.” Another man in his late 30s said, “The first thing you have to have is opportunities. People, no matter what, they want to live somewhere they can make a living.” Related to searching for job opportunities were examples of where the community helped in finding alternative employment. A woman who followed her husband for employment, who then sought a different position, said “people genuinely ask how you are doing and whether he has found a job.”

Socio-economic concerns were not identified consistently throughout the focus groups, but for those that did express this issue, they were passionate. A small number of participants **felt** they would not be accepted since they were from a different race than the majority of the population; however, no concerns were expressed that individuals of a different race **were not** accepted by the community. Other socio-economic concerns include economic-race issues, social responsibilities and drug and alcohol issues, particularly the lack of services to help those in need. A number of participants followed family members to the rural community to rid themselves of drug or alcohol issues, only to find that these same issues were in their new community.

Recommendations

In the study, new residents identified specific situations that influenced their overall satisfaction with the move. To increase the likelihood of new residents being satisfied and thus remaining

in the community, community leaders should carefully look at these situations with a fresh set of eyes and ask some basic questions:

- ✓ Positive people experiences and transition of the move: Are there ways for the community to facilitate positive social interactions with current and new residents? For instance, could we organize a community picnic once or twice a year and invite new residents to help them get connected?
- ✓ Availability of services: Do we provide a functioning “welcome” packet for new residents that contains this information, perhaps when they sign up for their utilities or when they purchase property?
- ✓ Availability of Information: Do we provide information in our community about ways to become involved in activities and organizations and who to contact to become involved, perhaps through a website, newspaper, radio, etc?
- ✓ Housing: Is our community working with builders to rehab units or encouraging builders to offer moderate income housing? Are we providing the necessary infrastructure?
- ✓ Job opportunities: Are we doing all we can to help businesses publicize job openings and recruit talent? Are there workforce training programs to allow people to increase their earning capacity?
- ✓ Socio-economic concerns: Do we offer services locally for those needing help with childcare, alcohol or drug addiction? Are there things we can do to help people of different races and cultures feel more a part of the community?

It is through critical examination and asking tough questions, like those listed above, that communities will improve new resident satisfaction and ultimately retention.

The complete research project included a demographic study, mail survey to new residents, an iterative three-phase survey process to community development practitioners and twelve focus group interviews with new residents. For further information about this research project, visit <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo/>.

Research team members include: Dr. Randolph Cantrell, University of Nebraska Rural Initiative; Dr. Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel and Dr. Bruce Johnson, Department of Agricultural Economics, UNL; Charlotte Narjes and Rebecca Vogt, Center for Applied Rural Innovation, UNL.

Source:

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