Changing Rural Population: The Long View

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One of the first things you notice in this graph is that the trend for rural migration is very consistent over the decades – the trend lines for each decade mirror each other. The second striking factor is that the 1950’s were not a very good time for rural in-migration. In fact, that decade, compared to the others, saw the most consistent outflow of rural residents in all age groups.

What other things do we see? The decades of the 1970’s, 90’s and 2000’s were times when 30-39 year olds were coming into rural areas across the U.S. and the 90’s and 2000’s were decades where we saw an inflow of adults age 55-65. You might also notice a flattening out or dipping of the migration numbers for those between the age of 40 and 55.

So what does this mean? Research done in the Nebraska panhandle has shown that some young adults, especially young families, are looking to relocate from metro areas to nonmetro areas. They want to live in family-friendly communities to raise their children. They also need a way to support themselves so employment opportunities are critical. Employment must be there or in some cases, they bring an opportunity with them. Jobs and quality of life issues are parts of a “package” that young families are looking for as they contemplate relocation. For early retirees, the pull of quality of life and being in reasonable proximity to family and friends seem to be important factors in relocation at this age. Again, it is the “package” of opportunities that bring new residents into an area with each age group having a slightly different set of wants and needs.

For more information:


Marketing Hometown America. (2014). An online magazine of rural migration research, marketing and community resources. Available at: http://tinyurl.com/marketing-hometown