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Review of *Rural Information Systems: New Directions in Data Collection and Retrieval* by Rueben C. Buse and James L. Driscoll

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For most of us collecting, compiling, and drawing inferences from data are never-ending activities. Some data-based decisions, such as decisions of a driver who observes and responds to a traffic control device, can be readily completed. Others, e.g., decisions that adjudicate streamflow among competing users, can require complex and protracted decision processes. The capability of a society
to make sound data-based decisions is founded on accurate and timely data that
are readily available without undue cost. The presumption that such data are not
presently available to persons working with rural problems, issues, and policies
provides the guiding thesis of this book.

It is the proceedings of a two-day symposium held in July of 1989 and
attended by “Rural social scientists from seven professional associations” (p.
vi). The Economic Statistics Committee and the Information Retrieval Com­
mittee of the American Agricultural Economics Association organized the
symposium. Fifteen major papers (now chapters) by highly-qualified contri­
butors examine the nation’s rural data system from a variety of perspectives.

The authors indicate that, to the extent they exist, data for rural areas are
used in many ways; social science research, rural policy development, public
sector decisions, business management decisions, and numerous other actions
and activities of public and private sector entities are based on available data.
Several emphasize the need for locality-specific, sector-specific, and business-
or household-specific data that will support analysis of the internal dynamics of
rural communities. Research agendas (most are lists of unresolved issues) and
related data needs for agriculture, rural communities, rural institutional systems,
natural resources management, and domestic and international development are
included. Data needs for these research agendas, and examination of alternative
approaches used in collecting, compiling, and disseminating rural areas data,
are recurring topics. Changes in resource allocations and data systems are
advocated to improve the availability and quality of rural data.

Chapters 3 and 4 may be of special interest to readers as they provide
numerous insights on survey methods and technology applications in primary
data collection. Throughout the book, well-written and very readable narrative,
figures and tables clearly convey the authors’ ideas. Both writers and editors
have done well.

Almost any social scientist with interest in the social and economic
viability of rural communities, and those involved in policy decisions affecting
the rural sector of our economy will find at least something of interest in this
volume. For the teacher, it may be particularly helpful as a source of readings
for graduate seminars in research methods, for rural policy courses, or for
business management and marketing courses. It is not intended to be recreational
reading. However, it is good reading for the student, the social scientist, or the
government official with interests including policies and practices affecting
rural areas of the United States. Paul H. Gessaman, Department of Agricultural
Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.