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CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

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University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension

Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources
Department of Agricultural Economics
<http://www.agecon.unl.edu/Cornhuskereconomics.html>

Community Recruitment and Retention of New Residents

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	1/11/08
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.....	\$87.03	\$91.64	\$89.07
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.....	116.06	117.28	116.22
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.....	*	100.00	*
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.....	152.50	147.70	149.24
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.....	56.67	54.58	47.09
Feeder Pigs, National Direct 50 lbs, FOB.....	*	45.33	47.23
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.....	62.33	58.93	56.19
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Wooled, South Dakota, Direct.....	*	89.50	86.63
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.....	240.44	261.87	262.65
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.....	4.50	9.29	8.54
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	3.65	4.19	4.69
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	6.66	10.97	11.94
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.....	6.07	7.38	8.43
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN, bu.....	2.88	2.96	3.35
<u>Hay</u>			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.....	135.00	135.00	135.00
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.....	87.50	87.50	85.00
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton.....	82.50	*	*
* No market.			

Traditionally, RECRUITMENT in community development circles has implied recruiting businesses and jobs. As for people, the idea was: “*build it (provide jobs) and they (the people) will come.*”

While there is still some truth in that old idiom, times are changing. Decades of population decline and out-migration of young people in rural areas has often led to not only too few people to support critical community services, but also an insufficient work force for the encouragement of new and expanding business activity. In short, people need to be there to attract business activity just as much as available jobs need to be there to attract people. Already, there are rural areas running work-force deficits; and given current population trends, this situation will only be compounding in the foreseeable future.

Increasingly, rural communities are waking up to the fact that their development strategies must also emphasize the recruitment of people—particularly younger family households—which actively participate in the local economy and contribute to its work force.

As part of our ongoing research grant from USDA’s National Research Initiative (NRI) to study new-resident patterns in Nebraska’s Panhandle region, we conducted an electronic survey of community development practitioners across Nebraska and the neighboring states in 2007. Using an iterative three-phase survey process (Delphi Technique), we were able to glean important insight into the current and emerging practices for new-resident recruitment and retention. Analysis is underway, but the following is a brief summary of our initial findings.

1) Nearly three out of five survey respondents (59%) reported their communities/regions engaged in some activity directed specifically at recruiting new residents. However, only eight percent said the extent of effort was considerable. Clearly, the process of new-resident



recruitment efforts in some organized fashion is still relatively new.

2) As to why new-resident recruitment is rather limited, the community practitioners who were responding to our survey generally said their communities were not giving them a strong mandate to do so. In fact, there appears to be a rather “cool” response to this type of community development activity. The reasons most cited for this were: *fear of change to community culture; fear of ethnic diversity; and expected increases in crime and disruption associated with growth*. In sum, the issue of change and peoples’ perceptions of consequences to change, may be inhibiting many rural areas from meaningful population growth.

3) Where new-resident recruitment has been done, more than 80 percent of the communities have used “targeted recruitment” of certain types of potential newcomers. Highest on the list of targeted groups were: a) home-town high school alums, b) younger family households, and c) people much like the current culture of the community. Interestingly, these groups could probably be seen as assimilating well into the community culture without changing it greatly.

4) While many communities reportedly are recruiting high school alums to move back to their hometowns, the community practitioners responding to our survey reported mixed success to this strategy. While some could actually identify a few new households recruited in this manner, most could not.

5) As for younger family households, survey respondents overwhelmingly saw this group as important to the: *future of the community* (96%); *local workforce supply* (95%); and *flow of new ideas and leadership skills into the community* (92%).

6) There are numerous factors that help to recruit younger family households, and most respondents said their communities were making strong efforts in: *assuring a quality school system* (88%); *access to quality medical services* (88%); *providing a family-friendly child rearing environment* (79%). However, far fewer reported their communities making a strong effort in: *accessible and affordable entry-level housing* (46%); *quality day-care and other child-care services* (46%); and *good employment opportunities for the spouse/significant-other adult wage earners in the household* (29%). To be sure, there often appears to be significant gaps in the “recruitment packages” that communities are offering prospective young family households.

7) In today’s electronic world of communication, prospective new residents are increasingly using the internet as a key information source in their relocation decisions. Various levels of “screening” are done via

internet; while brochures and other hard-copy promotional materials are no longer as useful. Communities are recognizing this in their development and recruitment efforts, with virtually all respondents to our survey indicating their communities want to greatly improve their “internet presence.” As one reporter commented, “the website is the front door.” However, when asked to assess their own community’s current internet presence, only a minority of reporters could rate them high in terms of: *effectiveness in new-resident recruitment* (22%); *the community’s commitment of resources to its website* (35%); and *website’s degree of user-friendliness for potential new residents* (38%). The bottom line: most communities are not effectively marketing themselves via the internet.

8) Our community development practitioners strongly believed that a “multiple contact strategy” is essential to effectively recruiting prospective new residents. The deliberate interest shown by several community representatives with initial contacts and follow-up; the opportunity to gather information in greater depth; and the opportunity for initial networking into the community, are all positive aspects of an effective recruitment program. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of community practitioners could report that this is currently being done by their communities (27%). However, of those respondents from communities without this, nearly all of them (94%) anticipated their respective community developing a coordinated multiple contact and follow-up process in the future.

9) Finally, while new-resident recruitment is clearly taking on a new importance in the community development field, we can’t forget its *cousin*—new resident-RETENTION. Our survey respondents were quick to agree that retention is also important, but efforts to contribute to the satisfaction of new residents within the community, and their retention, were ranked very low. Less than 10 percent rated their community strong in terms of deliberate retention efforts. Fortunately, a strong majority (81%) expected greater community efforts at retaining new residents in the future.

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