

December 2007

Newcomers to the Nebraska Panhandle: How Do We Keep Them Here?

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CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

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Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	12/7/07
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.....	\$86.35	\$92.17	\$92.91
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.....	114.74	117.83	119.77
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.....	105.31	112.06	110.71
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.....	142.53	139.78	148.33
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.....	60.91	46.84	54.38
Feeder Pigs, National Direct 50 lbs, FOB.....	54.81	36.74	36.71
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.....	65.83	58.72	59.00
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Wooled, South Dakota, Direct.....	*	90.12	92.25
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.....	254.27	261.55	265.18
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.....	4.48	7.05	8.82
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	3.33	3.66	4.01
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Omaha, bu.....	6.23	9.79	10.80
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.....	5.30	6.68	7.12
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN, bu.....	2.73	*	2.90
<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.			

A lot of media attention over the years has been given to the steady decline of population in rural areas across Nebraska. However, there is another side to this story. Research using the 2000 U.S. Census shows that significant numbers of people do move in and out of rural regions within our state. Unfortunately, very little is really known about the new residents' motivations for moving to the region, and reasons why they choose to remain or consider leaving their new community.

To bridge the information gap a group of UNL researchers, funded by a 2006 grant from the USDA- National Research Initiative (NRI), has begun to look at the characteristics and motivations of new residents in the eleven counties of the Western Nebraska Panhandle region (Figure 1). One aspect of the on-going project included a mail survey to a sample of new resident households within the region. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to the new residents' background, reasons for moving, decision-making tools used and views of their current community. Two aspects of the survey, their consideration of other relocation sites and their willingness to remain in the community, will be highlighted in this article. [Note: further information on the scope of the project, research methodologies and survey results can be found at: <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo/>]

Communities *Do* Have Competition for New Residents

The research showed that more than half (55%) of new residents considered other locations before choosing their current location (Figure 2). However, a significant portion (45%) only considered their current location in Western Nebraska. Persons moving from the largest distance are the group most likely to say they considered only their current location. Forty-seven percent of persons moving from other states not adjacent to Nebraska considered only their current location in the Nebraska Panhandle. Forty percent of persons moving from other parts of Nebraska, a slightly smaller number, considered only their current location. Persons moving from non-adjacent states are also the group, though,

most likely to have considered locations in other states. Just over one quarter (27%) considered other locations in other states, compared to ten percent of persons moving from states adjacent to the Panhandle. Persons moving from elsewhere in Nebraska are most likely to have considered other locations in the state. Twenty-two percent of persons moving from Eastern Nebraska considered other locations in the state, compared to ten percent of persons moving from other states not adjacent to Nebraska. Persons moving from adjacent states are most likely to have considered other locations in both Nebraska and other states (29%).

A Majority Stay *But* Many Do Leave

Over one half (60%) of new residents say they *probably or definitely will* be living in their current community five years from now (Figure 3). Eighteen percent say they *probably or definitely will not* be living there, and 22 percent don't know. Thus, a sizeable proportion of newcomers are not planning to stay or are not sure.

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to be planning on living in their current community five years from now. Sixty-five percent of persons age 65 and older say they probably or definitely will be living in their current community five years from now. Less than one half (46%) of persons age 19 to 29 have plans to live there five years from now.

Persons who have lived in Nebraska before are more likely to be planning to stay in their community five years from now, than persons who have not. Approximately two thirds (66%) of persons who have lived in Nebraska before are planning on being in their community five years from now, compared to 53 percent of persons who have not lived in Nebraska before.

The expectation of staying in their current community is also related to how they rate or perceive community and life factors in their new residence. In a list of 29 factors the top five were: a feeling of belonging in the community, suitable housing and neighborhoods, clean environment, job security, and available job opportunities. However, the strongest relationship is with the feeling of belonging in the community (Figure 4). The majority (86%) of persons who rate the feeling of belonging in their community as excellent are planning to remain in their community five years from now. But, only 16 percent of persons who rate the feeling of belonging in their community as poor plan to stay.

What Was Learned

Communities have competition for new residents. Most considered other locations before choosing their current community. This suggests that active recruiting by a community can influence the decision to move to the Panhandle. By better understanding what drew new residents here, communities can develop targeted marketing campaigns designed to draw more new residents to the area.

Many new residents are either not planning to stay in their current community or aren't sure of their plans. The numbers of persons planning to leave or who are unsure are higher for younger persons. This means that communities must work hard to implement or improve retention strategies to keep these new residents in their communities.

Even though persons who have lived in Nebraska before are more likely than persons who have never lived in Nebraska to be planning on living in their community five years from now, a majority of persons new to Nebraska are planning to stay. This is a very encouraging finding.

The feeling of belonging in the community has the strongest relationship with the expectation of staying in the community. Communities must recognize the need and work to integrate new residents into community life, organizations and leadership opportunities in order to increase the odds that they will remain in the Panhandle. These actions, perhaps taken for granted in the past, should be deliberately planned if the retention rate of new residents is to increase.

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



NRI Grant Funded Research

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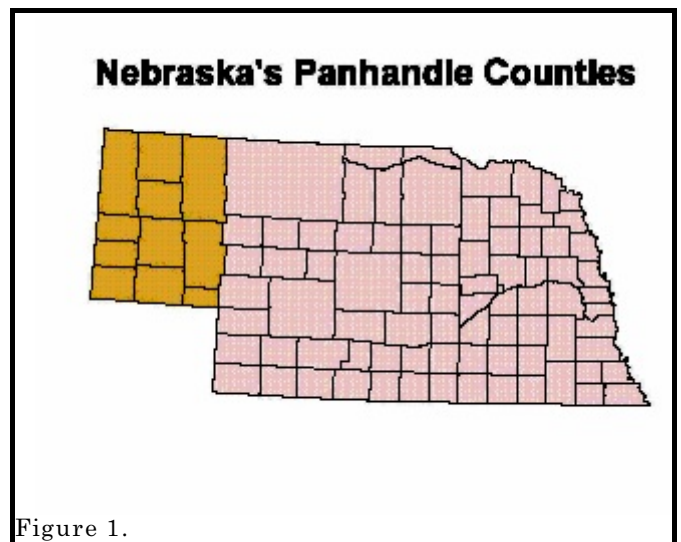


Figure 1.

