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Community Images: What They Communicate to New Residents

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CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

Community Images: What They Communicate to New Residents

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	4/13/12
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	\$119.09	\$126.30	\$122.64
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	151.50	193.36	182.97
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	136.30	157.54	153.83
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	188.89	191.24	177.79
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.	91.57	85.52	79.27
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.	95.90	83.53	78.22
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Woolled, South Dakota, Direct.	182.50	150.00	148.63
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.	396.22	376.90	371.29
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	7.26	6.28	5.48
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.	7.25	6.66	6.20
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.	13.24	13.31	13.83
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	11.91	11.48	10.45
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN , bu.	3.83	3.62	3.43
<u>Feed</u>			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	140.00	225.00	225.00
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	72.50	145.00	145.00
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	*	97.50	97.50
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture, Nebraska Average.	215.50	220.00	229.25
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture, Nebraska Average.	79.00	76.50	76.75
*No Market			

Images are undeniably powerful communication tools. When part of a rural community web page, images can help to quickly convey the desired message and showcase the community's "brand," the specific amenities the community has to offer to new residents. Using images to depict this brand can be much more effective than trying to describe it using facts or words. For example, instead of listing crime statistics to portray your community as safe, using a picture of unattended and unlocked bicycles in front of the community swimming pool can more effectively convey that message.

Research(http://cari.unl.edu/community_marketing/focus.shtml#Key) has shown that many new residents to rural areas are looking for specific attributes, such as the availability of quality family time, a less congested place to live, job opportunities, a simpler pace of life and an environment for children. While this research has just begun to shed some light on rural image research, findings provide some preliminary insights and some guidelines for communities interested in using images in their community marketing efforts.

For instance, the images chosen to showcase a community must be authentic and should demonstrate a full range of options for each theme. Images of families participating in activities were viewed positively for several themes. Participants responded favorably to images that people can relate to, such as everyday activities like grocery shopping, children walking to parks and fathers mowing their yard. The absence of diversity in age, gender and ethnicity were viewed negatively, suggesting the importance of illustrating community diversity.

The results of the focus groups suggested that captions for images can help guide the viewer. Pictures

may say a thousand words, but not necessarily the same thousand words to everyone. A person's background and experience influences how an individual views community images. The use of captions can help the viewer understand what the community is trying to depict.

Finally, a community needs a well-designed, well defined message that they are trying to portray with the image. As an example, quality of life is a fairly vague concept that can mean many things to different people. A community should clearly define what defines quality of life in their community, and then use key phrases such as quality time with family or low crime to clearly articulate the desired theme. The more specific the concept, the easier it is to find images that clearly illustrate that concept.

For the economic development practitioner, rural community image research should not be considered a daunting process. Much can be gained from even a modest focus group effort.

Inviting a small group of new residents to sit around a table and discuss images used in various promotions will produce an abundance of information. The

simple process of listening to new residents' perceptions can create significant new insights. When the results are shared, one should almost expect to hear longtime residents saying, "I had no idea someone would interpret it that way." And, "They see it as being a community asset while I just take it for granted."

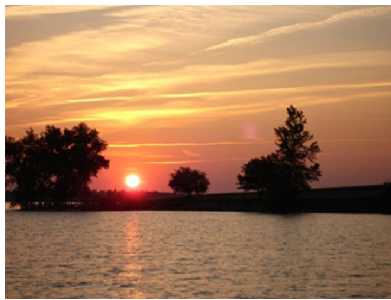
This is precisely why rural community marketing research is so important, perhaps more than ever. New residents will be critically important to a rural community's future workforce. Communities must know what potential new residents are looking for as they shop for a new location. They must also identify the amenities and characteristics of

their community that meet potential new residents' needs and desires. Using authentic images to convey and communicate what their community has to offer can be a valuable marketing tool for communities looking to recruit new residents for their workforce. That is what marketing is all about – a way to bring the new resident "consumer" and the community "product" together.

Note: Faculty research team members include: Randy Cantrell, Becky Vogt, Charlotte Narjes, Bruce Johnson and Connie Hancock from the

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