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Cornhusker Economics

Cooperative Extension

Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources
Department of Agricultural Economics
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Nebraska's Rural Population: Is the Glass Half Empty or Half Full?

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	11/30/01
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Average Prices for Week Ending</u>			
Slaughter Steers, Ch. 204, 1100-1300 lb Omaha, cwt	\$72.78	\$65.46	\$66.71
Feeder Steers, Med. Frame, 600-650 lb Dodge City, KS, cwt	94.13	87.95	86.90
Feeder Steers, Med. Frame 600-650 lb, Nebraska Auction Wght. Avg	97.78	92.18	93.35
Carcass Price, Ch. 1-3, 550-700 lb Cent. US, Equiv. Index Value, cwt	111.03	102.89	105.57
Hogs, US 1-2, 220-230 lb Sioux Falls, SD, cwt	38.50	37.50	34.50
Feeder Pigs, US 1-2, 40-45 lb Sioux Falls, SD, hd	*	*	*
Vacuum Packed Pork Loins, Wholesale, 13-19 lb, 1/4" Trim, Cent. US, cwt	*	*	98.10
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., 115-125 lb Sioux Falls, SD, cwt	67.42	43.52	56.62
Carcass Lambs, Ch. & Pr., 1-4, 55-65 lb FOB Midwest, cwt	149.00	*	124.80
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Cash Truck Prices for Date Shown</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Omaha, bu	3.22	2.89	3.09
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Omaha, bu	1.93	1.78	1.96
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Omaha, bu	4.84	4.09	4.30
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Kansas City, cwt	3.48	3.34	3.62
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN, bu	1.15	2.23	2.37
<u>Hay,</u>			
<u>First Day of Week Pile Prices</u>			
Alfalfa, Sm. Square, RFV 150 or better Platte Valley, ton	110.00	115.00	115.00
Alfalfa, Lg. Round, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton	75.00	77.50	77.50
Prairie, Sm. Square, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton	100.00	105.00	105.00
* No market.			

Those interested and concerned about rural Nebraska often focus on population data. In recent months, the media have been very active in focusing on this issue, largely because of the release of the 2000 U. S. Census numbers. For the most part, media reports and analysis have painted a fairly bleak picture of what happened in rural Nebraska during the decade of the 1990s. In this short article we summarize how the recent Census data can be used to paint such a bleak picture and refer to this as “the glass is half empty” story. We then provide an alternative perspective that has received little attention, referring to it as “the glass is half full” story.

The glass is half empty. According to the 2000 U. S. Census, Nebraska's six metropolitan counties (Dakota, Lancaster, Cass, Douglas, Sarpy and Washington) all gained population during the decade of the 90s. Total population increased by 14.3 percent (or nearly 113,000 persons). By contrast, 53 of Nebraska's 87 non-metropolitan (or “rural”) counties lost population during the 1990s. As a consequence, population in rural Nebraska increased by only 2.6 percent (or less than 20,000 persons).

The glass is half full. The “glass is half empty” story summarized above uses metropolitan Nebraska as the benchmark for assessing or judging rural Nebraska. That is but one benchmark. Another benchmark is the 1990 Census data for rural Nebraska. When these data are compared to the 2000 Census data, the picture of rural Nebraska that emerges is much more encouraging. Specifically, three important conclusions can be drawn when using the 1990 Census figures as a benchmark.

1. During the decade of the 1980s, non-metropolitan Nebraska experienced a population decrease of 6 percent (or a loss of over 50,000 persons). In the following decade, the number of person living in rural Nebraska grew by nearly 20,000 persons, or 2.6 percent.



2. During the 1980s, only four of Nebraska's 87 non-metropolitan counties gained population (Table 1). Subsequently, 30 rural counties that lost population during the 1980s gained population during the 1990s. For example, Loup and Gosper Counties lost 20.5 percent and 9.9 percent of their population during the 1980s, but gained 4.2 percent and 11.2 percent, respectively, in the 1990s. In short, the percentage of rural counties that gained population increased from less than 5 percent during the 1980s to nearly 40 percent during the 1990s.

3. While 53 of Nebraska's rural counties lost population during **BOTH** decades, the rate of decline for these counties slowed dramatically during the decade of the 1990s. Specific indicators and examples that substantiate this important finding follow:

☎ Forty-three of these 53 counties had a slower rate of population decline in the 1990s than in the 1980s. Examples include the following: Frontier (from -15.0 percent to -0.1 percent); Grant (from -12.3 percent to -2.9 percent); Harlan (from -11.2 percent to -0.6 percent); Kimball (from -15.9 percent to -0.5 percent); and Knox (from -16.8 percent to -1.7 percent).

☎ The median percentage decline among these 53 counties was -10.8 percent during the 1980s, compared to -5.5 percent in the 1990s.

☎ During the 1980s, all 53 counties experienced a population decline of at least 4 percent and only nine experienced a decrease of less than 8 percent (Table 2). In the subsequent decade, 17 of these same counties had a decrease of 4 percent or less and an additional 19 counties experienced a decrease of less than 8 percent. At the other extreme, 44 of the 53 counties experienced a decrease in excess of 8 percent during the 1980s, with 9 of the counties experiencing a loss of greater than 15 percent. In the 1990s, only 17 counties had declines in excess of 8 percent and only one county had a population loss that exceeded 15 percent.

A final note. Often, news articles referencing population decline either state or imply that out-migration is occurring, i.e., more people are moving out of the county than are moving in. This is not necessarily the case, because another component of population change must also be considered. This second component is the relationship between births and deaths. In fact, a county may be losing population and simultaneously experiencing significant in-migration. This is most likely to happen when a large percentage of the population is elderly, which is often true in many rural counties. The following hypothetical example, illustrates such a situation.

Deaths	-25
Births	+5
Persons moving in to the county	+30
Persons leaving the county	-15
Population at the end of the decade	95

In this example, population decreased by 5 percent during the decade, although twice as many people were moving in as were moving out (30 compared to 15). Recognizing this type of situation is important because of the tendency to automatically conclude that Nebraska's 53 counties that experienced a population decline must also be experiencing out-migration. That may not be the case. In fact, it is quite likely that at least some of the 53 rural counties that lost population were experiencing net in-migration, not out-migration. Census data will become available later to determine which of these 53 counties experienced net in-migration or out-migration.

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Table 1. 2000 Population and 1980-90 and 1990-2000 Population Change, Nebraska's Non-metropolitan Counties

	2000 Population	Percentage Population Change	Percentage Population Change
		1980-1990	1990-2000
All Non-metropolitan Counties	811,425	-6.0	2.6
Counties Gaining Population in Both Decades			
Buffalo	42,259	7.6	12.9
Hall	53,534	2.6	9.4
Madison	35,226	4.1	7.9
Platte	31,662	3.4	6.2
Counties Losing Population in 1980s but Gaining in 1990s			
Adams	31,151	-3.4	5.2
Butler	8,767	-7.8	1.9
Cheyenne	9,830	-5.6	3.5
Colfax	10,441	-7.6	14.2
Cuming	10,203	-13.3	0.9
Dawes	9,060	-6.1	0.4
Dawson	24,365	-10.6	22.2
Dixon	6,339	-13.9	3.2
Dodge	36,160	-3.8	4.8
Gage	22,993	-6.8	0.9
Gosper	2,143	-9.9	11.2
Hamilton	9,403	-4.7	6.1
Howard	6,567	-10.6	8.5
Kearney	6,882	-6.0	3.8
Keith	8,875	-8.3	3.4
Lincoln	34,632	-10.8	6.5
Loup	712	-20.5	4.2
Merrick	8,204	-10.1	2.0
Morrill	5,440	-10.9	0.3
Otoe	15,396	-6.1	8.0
Phelps	9,747	-0.6	0.3
Pierce	7,857	-7.7	0.4
Saline	13,843	-3.2	8.9
Saunders	19,830	-2.3	8.4
Scottsbluff	36,951	-6.0	2.6
Seward	16,496	-2.1	6.8
Stanton	6,455	-4.7	3.4
Thurston	7,171	-3.5	3.4
Wayne	9,851	-5.0	5.2
York	14,598	-2.5	1.2
Counties Losing Population in Both Decades			
Antelope	7,452	-8.2	-6.4
Arthur	444	-9.9	-3.9
Banner	819	-7.2	-3.9
Blaine	583	-22.1	-13.6
Boone	6,259	-9.8	-6.1
Box Butte	12,158	-4.1	-7.4
Boyd	2,438	-14.9	-14.0
Brown	3,525	-16.4	-3.6
Burt	7,791	-10.7	-1.0
Cedar	9,615	-10.9	-5.1
Chase	4,068	-7.9	-7.1
Cherry	6,148	-6.7	-2.5

Clay	7,039	-12.1	-1.2
Custer	11,793	-11.6	-3.9
Deuel	2,098	-9.1	-6.2
Dundy	2,292	-9.8	-11.2
Fillmore	6,634	-10.3	-6.6
Franklin	3,574	-10.0	-9.2
Frontier	3,099	-15.0	-0.1
Furnas	5,324	-14.4	-4.1
Garden	2,292	-12.2	-6.8
Garfield	1,902	-9.4	-11.2
Grant	747	-12.3	-2.9
Greeley	2,714	-13.2	-9.7
Harlan	3,786	-11.2	-0.6
Hayes	1,068	-9.9	-12.6
Hitchcock	3,111	-8.1	-17.0
Holt	11,551	-7.0	-8.3
Hooker	783	-19.9	-1.3
Jefferson	8,333	-10.8	-4.9
Johnson	4,488	-11.6	-4.0
Keya Paha	983	-20.9	-4.5
Kimball	4,089	-15.9	-0.5
Knox	9,374	-16.8	-1.7
Logan	774	-10.7	-11.8
McPherson	533	-7.9	-2.4
Nance	4,038	-9.8	-5.5
Nemaha	7,576	-4.6	-5.1
Nuckolls	5,057	-14.0	-12.6
Pawnee	3,087	-15.7	-6.9
Perkins	3,200	-7.4	-5.0
Polk	5,639	-10.2	-0.6
Red Willow	11,448	-7.2	-2.2
Richardson	9,531	-12.2	-4.1
Rock	1,756	-15.3	-13.0
Sheridan	6,198	-10.5	-8.2
Sherman	3,318	-12.0	-10.8
Sioux	1,475	-16.0	-4.8
Thayer	6,055	-12.5	-8.7
Thomas	729	-12.5	-14.3
Valley	4,647	-8.2	-10.1
Webster	4,061	-11.9	-5.1
Wheeler	886	-10.6	-6.5

Table 2. Percentage Decreases Associated with Nebraska's 53 Counties that Lost Population During both the 1980s and 1990s.

Percentage Range of Population Losses	1980 - 1990	1990 - 2000
	----- Number of Counties -----	
0.0 - 4.0%	0	17
4.1 - 8.0%	9	19
8.1 - 15.0%	35	16
Greater than 15.0%	9	1
Total	53	53