

Rural Initiative Web site details economic and demographic data of Nebraska counties

LINCOLN, Neb. – The population of people under the age of 20 is declining across much of rural Nebraska, and those losses are large in some counties, according to a University of Nebraska rural sociologist. All but seven counties in the state have declined in this population demographic during this decade, said Randy Cantrell, of the University of Nebraska's Rural Initiative. One of the largest losses was reported in Cherry County, which saw an estimated 20 percent drop in the numbers of young people under age 20 during the years 2000 and 2007, he said.

Cantrell put together profiles and a summary of demographic and economic trends of all Nebraska counties for the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative. These reports can be found at <http://www.ruralinitiative.nebraska.edu/development>. The Web site includes a state map which allows users to click on individual counties to get a profile of demographic and economic information for each county.

"I wanted to make available something that was reasonably current and easy-to-read, and offers insight on how one area of the state compares to another," Cantrell said. While the information is available to anyone, Cantrell believes it will be of particular interest to community leaders, economic and political decision makers and grant writers.

Cantrell attributed the population losses of people under age 20 to a declining birth rate. A declining population of those aged 30 to 49 (individuals born between 1958 and 1977) in virtually all of non-metropolitan Nebraska can partially be attributed to a declining birthrate as well. Cantrell explained that out-migration, likely for economic reasons, is also to blame for population losses.

Meanwhile, the baby boomer generation is still influencing the demographics of the state as the population of people aged 50 to 64 is growing in absolute numbers and size. "As they reach retirement age over the next decade, their absence will be felt in the labor force and their presence felt in the service sector," Cantrell said.

While many Nebraska counties are experiencing majority (white/non-Latino) population declines, primarily as a result of out-migration, 60 of Nebraska's 93 counties are experiencing growth in the size of their minority populations. Of 20 counties that saw their overall estimated populations grow between 2000 and 2007, 11 can attribute that growth entirely to increases in

the size of their minority population.

Much of the minority population growth is attributed to Latino's moving to counties that have meat processing plants, according to Cantrell. In areas where the manufacturing base includes food processing, minorities commonly exceed 30 percent of the county population and are a majority in several communities.

Another interesting fact revealed in the data is the growth in the number of people holding multiple jobs, Cantrell said. "Nebraska is routinely among the top two or three states in the U.S. in the proportion of workers holding multiple jobs, and also among the leaders in female labor force participation, early labor force entry, and delayed retirement."

Cantrell believes most of these additional jobs are in the form of independent contractor-type work. A decline in the number of wage and salary jobs has contributed to the increase in contractual labor, he said. Rather than have permanent employees do the work, some companies are opting to save money by using contractors. "Over the last five years, this growth in self-employment by providing contractual labor has explained essentially all job growth in rural Nebraska."