

# CHANGES IN RURAL AREAS

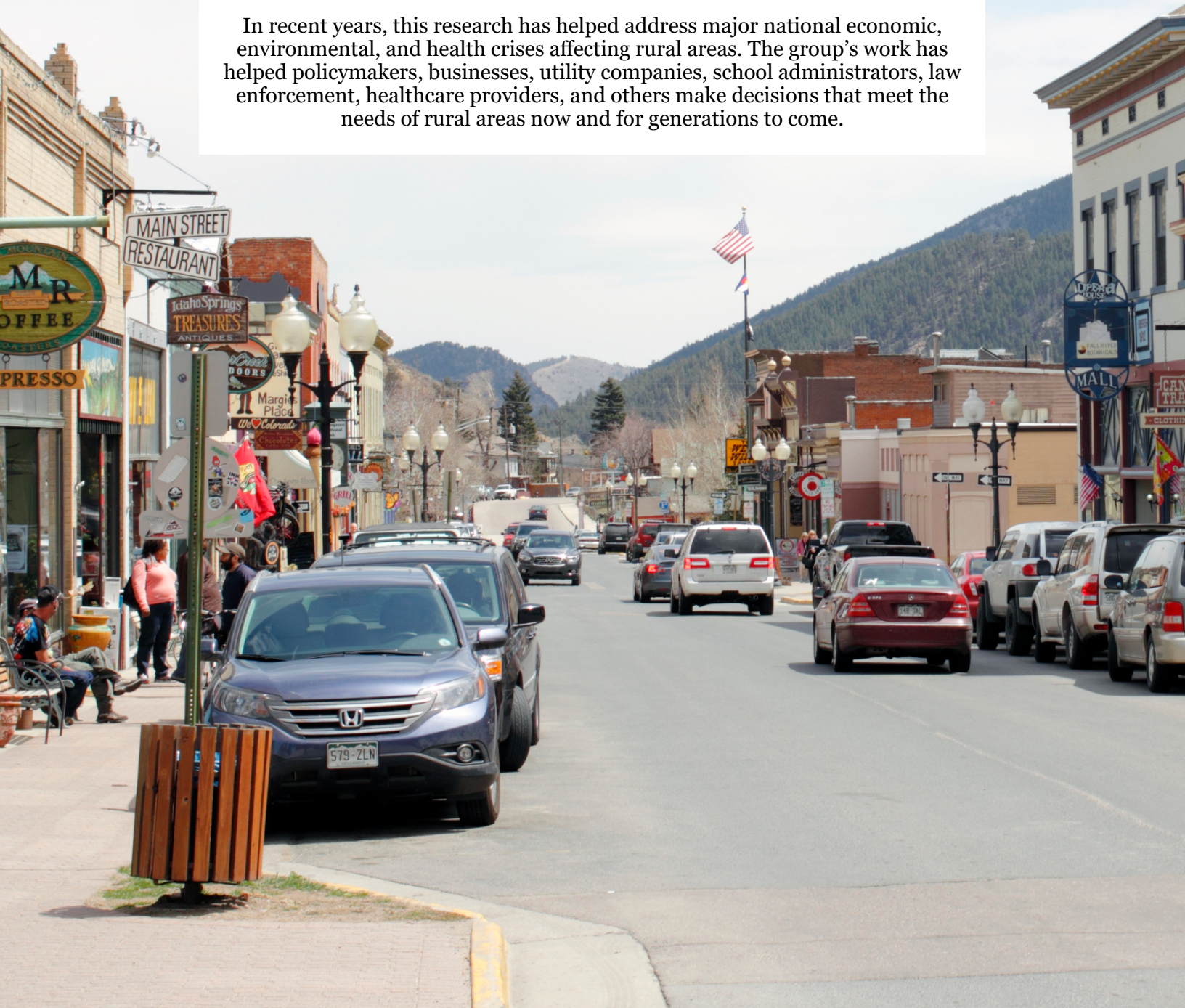
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Rural areas make up 72% of the nation's land area, house 46 million people, and are essential to agriculture, natural resources, recreation, and environmental sustainability. Rural areas are constantly changing. Today, many rural areas face challenges, such as limited access to healthcare, education, and jobs and events like the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic, which have disrupted the environmental, economic, and social wellbeing of rural communities.

Researchers from land-grant universities across the U.S. are working together to understand the causes and consequences of rural population change.

Over the last three decades, this project has pioneered a data-intensive, multidisciplinary approach to rural population research. As a collaborative effort, the group is able to draw on a wide range of skills and familiarity with diverse rural settings. Project members also work closely with public and private institutions, government agencies, and other partners.

In recent years, this research has helped address major national economic, environmental, and health crises affecting rural areas. The group's work has helped policymakers, businesses, utility companies, school administrators, law enforcement, healthcare providers, and others make decisions that meet the needs of rural areas now and for generations to come.





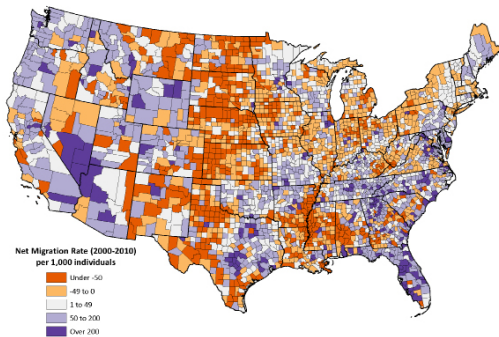
# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Studies showed that rural populations are shrinking due to young adult outmigration, fewer births, and increased mortality. These findings were included in the President's Agricultural and Rural Prosperity Task Force 2017 report to guide policy and programs that reflect current and projected trends.

Research also informed policymakers about changing service needs as rural populations age and retirement destinations evolve.



Other research showed that diversity and tolerance can create social capital and economic prosperity in rural areas, providing evidence for policies that help marginalized groups, such as disabled, minority, and LGBTQ residents.



Project members created a database ([www.netmigration.wisc.edu](http://www.netmigration.wisc.edu)) that details age-specific, county-level net migration trends. Hundreds of thousands of regional planners, school districts, housing developers, healthcare organizations, and others have used the data, maps, and charts to understand rural needs, inform development, and allocate resources. For example, migration estimates led Iron County, Wisconsin, to develop new strategies to retain and attract young adults.

In 2020, outreach helped state governments prepare for the census and get accurate counts. Accurate counts are key to fair political representation, allocation of federal resources, and local decision making.



This project has provided essential information about the COVID-19 pandemic in rural communities, including vulnerabilities related to age and chronic disease prevalence, disparities in testing and case and death counts, the spread of misinformation, and economic impacts. Researchers also developed COVID Crush, a user-friendly model of disease transmission. This information has been used to develop policies for social distancing, testing, reopening, and allocating resources to protect rural people and businesses.



This project was the first to identify rising rural opioid overdose rates and explanations for those trends. For example, studies showed that higher opioid abuse among rural adolescents is partly due to greater reliance on emergency rooms, where opioids are more often prescribed. This information shaped national legislation and led to rapid resource allocation. Researchers also designed an interactive data visualization tool that helps communities assess and respond to the overdose crisis.



Studies showed there are more barriers to healthcare access for Hispanics in rural communities with historically small, but rapidly growing Hispanic populations.



Research guided the training and placement of community health workers after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, resulting in enhanced preparedness and capacity.



Research helped communities understand how changes in the coal and new shale oil energy industries impact poverty, income inequality, employment growth, demographics, and wellbeing.

Research-based recommendations encouraged the Governor of Michigan to explore alternative energy options to address population decline and energy needs.



Studies showed that subprime lending has been more common in rural than urban areas. In Minnesota, research findings helped address problems with foreclosure.

After examining the way poverty is measured, project members recommended a shift in focus from unemployment to underemployment. Measuring poverty helps local leaders understand how they can promote socioeconomic wellbeing.

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