

# **Rewriting the Rural Narrative**

***Speak softly and carry statistics***

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***Minnesota Extension***



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**EXTENSION**

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People keep leaving rural America. According to U.S. Census figures from 2010, just 16% of the country's population lives in rural areas, down from 20% in 2000, and down dramatically from 72% about a hundred years ago. Behind the numbers are the stories, both of the people who left their rural homes and the small percentage of Americans who still live in rural America. There are stories, too, of people who've stayed. They've left for myriad reasons. We want to know those stories and tell.

Sociologists Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas spent two years in a small town in Iowa trying to find out why so many young people are leaving rural America. What they found was that many small towns are playing a role in their own demise, by pushing the best and brightest to leave and under-investing in those who stay.

## From Breadbasket to Basket Case

In the 1980s, rural Americans faced fewer teen births and lower divorce rates than their urban counterparts. Now, their positions have flipped entirely.

Rural Minnesota is in trouble. Young people are fleeing the farms and forests of the Gopher State, and the residents left there are aging. And they're dying. While population is growing in the Twin Cities area, especially the suburbs, it's dropping in rural areas.

We became kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, and any time somebody wanted to do a story about poor people, we were the first stop.

# Fighting for an American Countryside

## The Decline of Rural Minnesota

THU SEP 20, 2012 AT 09:04 PM PDT

The slow, agonizing death of the small  
US town

## HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

*The Rural Brain Drain and  
What It Means for America*

When death comes to a small town, the school is usually the last thing to go. A place can lose its bank, its tavern, its grocery store, its shoe shop. But when the school closes, you might as well put a fork in it.

## Survival of Rural America

Victories and Bitter Harvests



Richard E. Wood



# ***Deficit Approach***

*Fixing things that can't or shouldn't be fixed*



# No More Anecdotal!

**anecdotal** (noun). *information which is presented as if it is based on serious research but is in fact based on what someone thinks is true*

# 1900-1950

- Mechanization of agriculture
- Roads and transportation
- Educational achievement and population loss
- Church closings (Delafield)



# 1950+

- Main street restructuring
- School consolidations
  - MN 432 districts in 1990 to 337 in 2010
- Hospitals closings



# The rural idyll



*“Agriculture is no longer the mainstay of the rural economy.”*



# The Media Idyll Persists

Who are you going to find in a small town when you travel to small towns in morning and afternoon?



<http://www.dailyyonder.com/speak-your-piece-just-say-no-to-poverty-porn/2016/12/02/16407/>  
Photo by Denise Peterson

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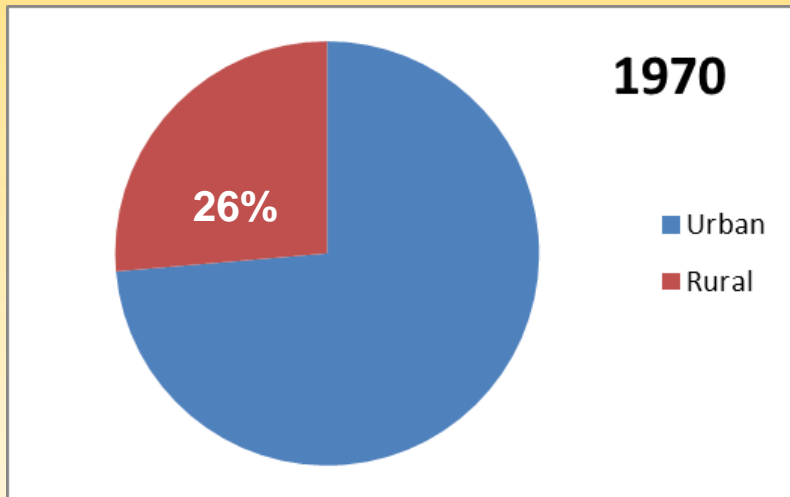
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# Rural is Changing, not Dying

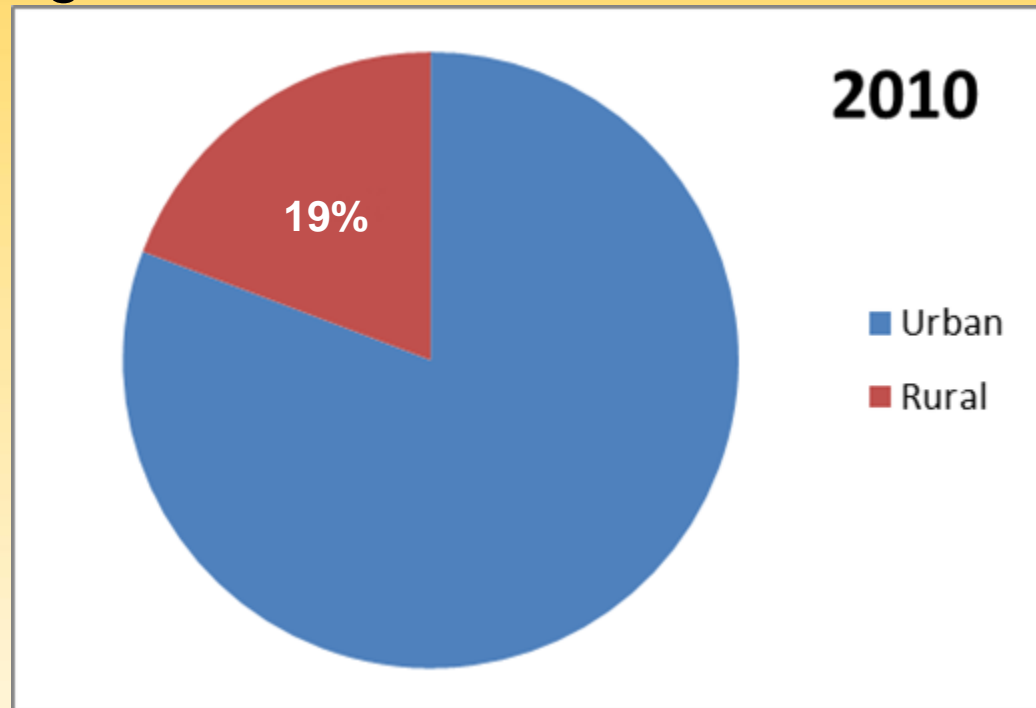
- Small towns are microcosms of globalization
- Survived massive restructuring of social and economic life
- Research base does NOT support notion that if XXXX closes, the town dies
  - In Minnesota only 3 towns have dissolved in past 50 years

# Rural Rebound

- Since 1970, rural population increased by 11%
  - Relative percentage living rural decreased



203,211,926  
(53.6m rural)



308,745,538  
(59.5m rural)

# Rural Data

## Rural Populations Continue to Shrink

Is Rural America Struggling? provides an excellent summary of the economic and population issues facing rural America. Key quote:

... rural America's job growth is stagnant and the population is in decline. In fact, it's the first time such a population decline has been recorded in the nation's rural counties.

Population figures reduced by formerly rural places now designated as urban (since 1974)

- Iowa 473,312
- Minnesota 352,224 rural residents now classified urban
- Montana 120,261
- Nebraska 170,855
- North Dakota 181,639
- South Dakota 207,790

Urban areas have grown WIDER, not TALLER





# Mobility

## Households Moving Between 1995 and 1999:

44% Iowa

**46% Minnesota**

North Dakota

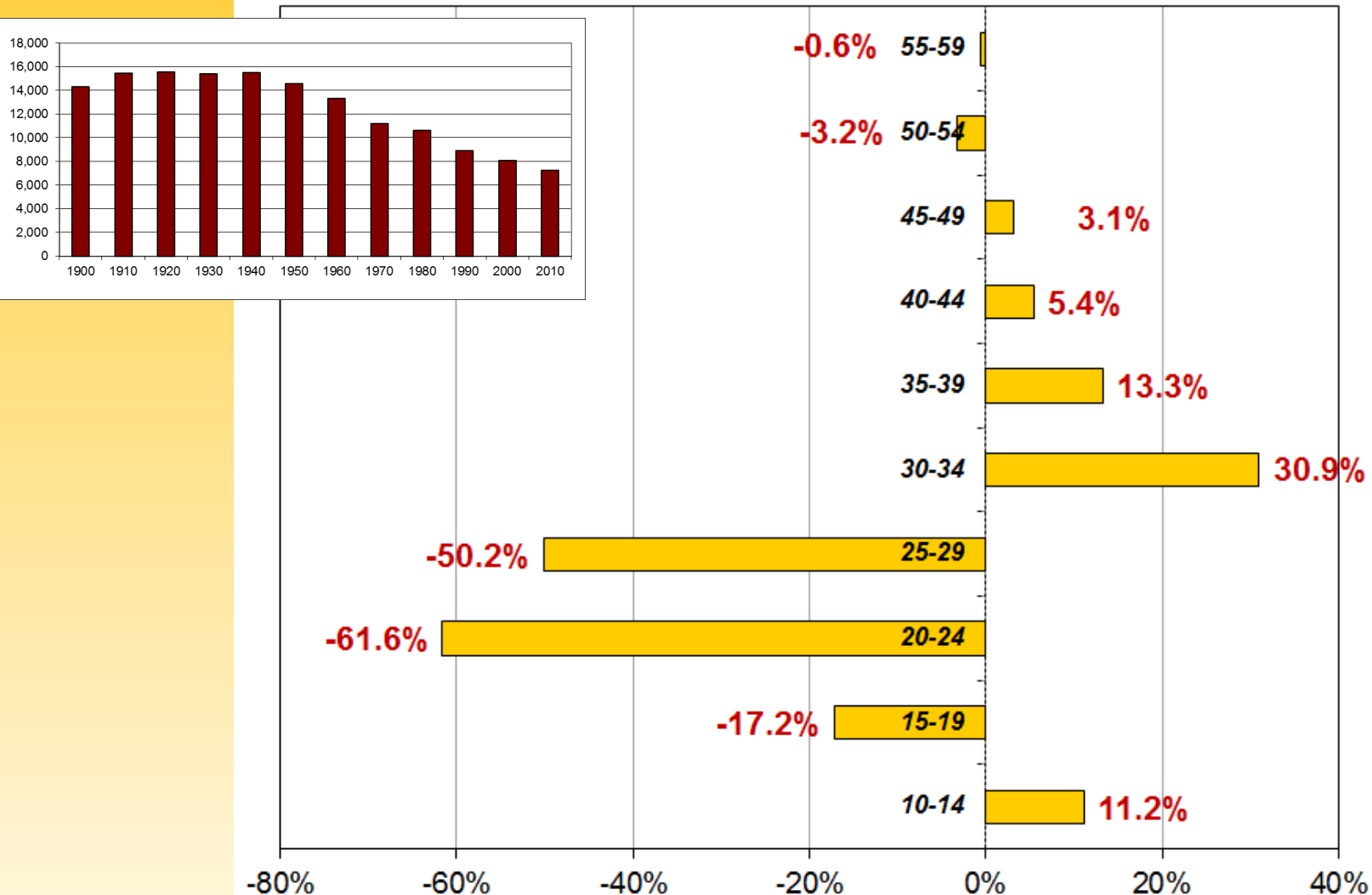
Wisconsin

47% Nebraska

48% South Dakota

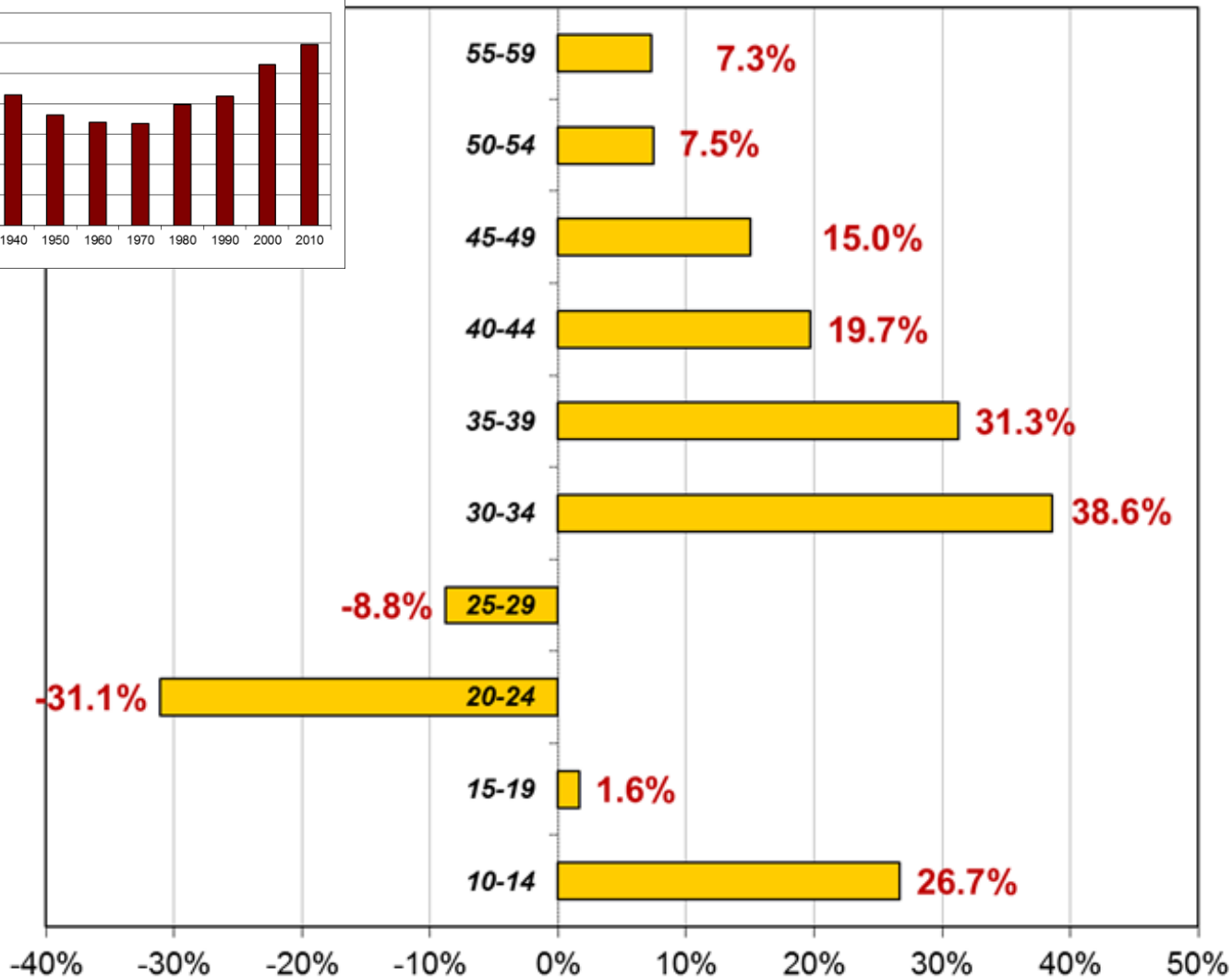
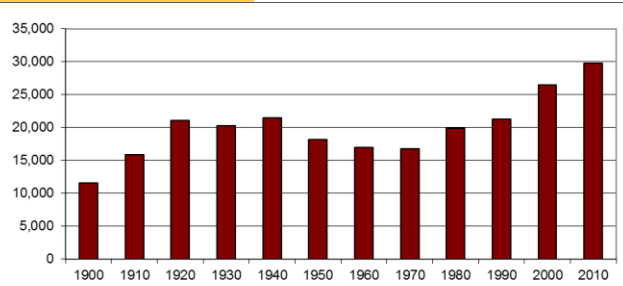
**49% United States**

## 2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



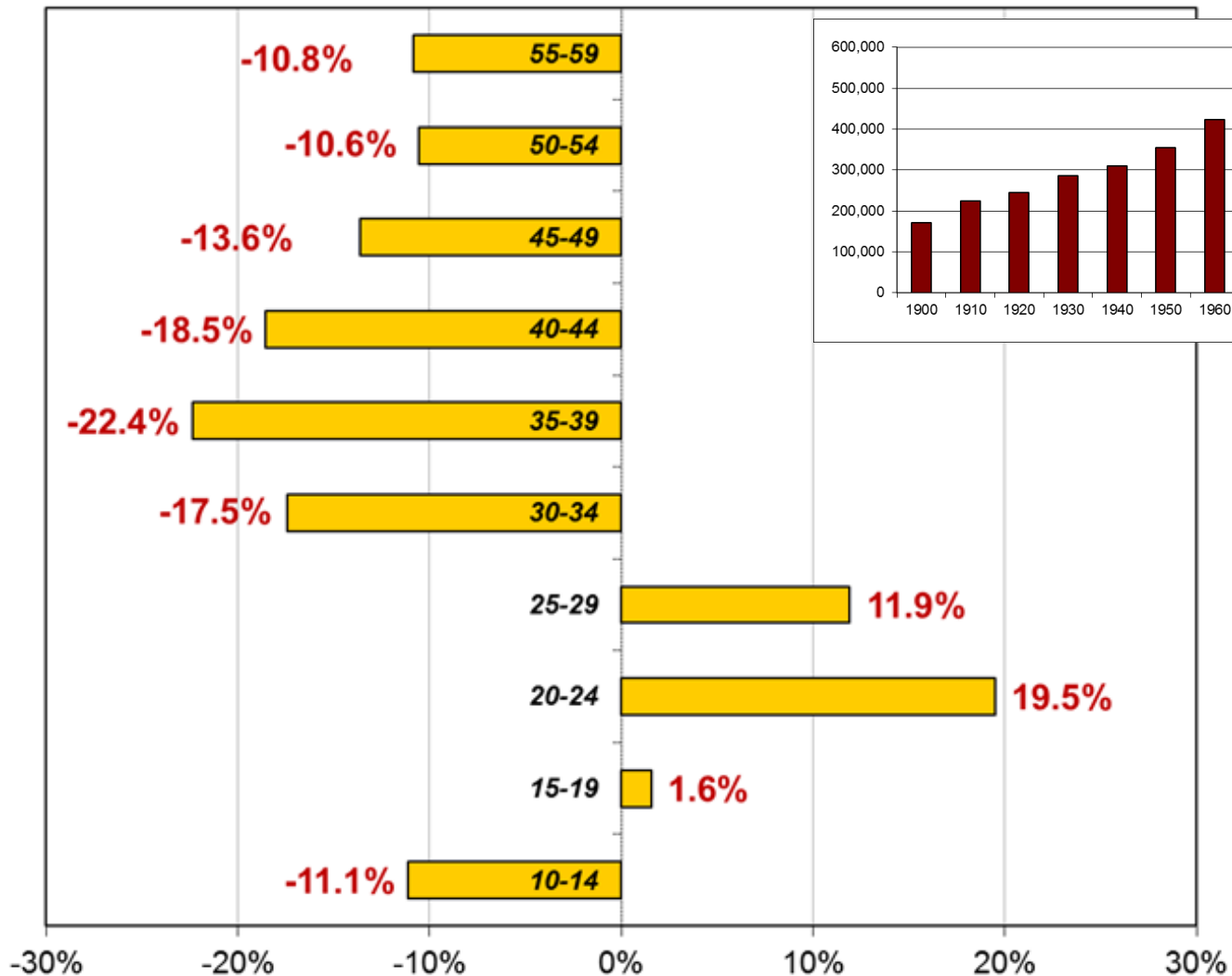
## Rural Prairie County

## 2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



## Rural Recreational County

## 2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



## Core Metropolitan County



# Buffalo Commons Research

Dr. Randy Cantrell and Cheryl  
Burkhart-Kriesel  
University of Nebraska





# Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost





# Newcomers: Who?

- 36% lived there previously
  - 68% attain bachelors degree
  - 67% household incomes over \$50k
  - 51% have children in household
- 
- May be leaving their career or underemployed
  - Yet, Quality of Life is the trump card

# Cohort Lifecycle



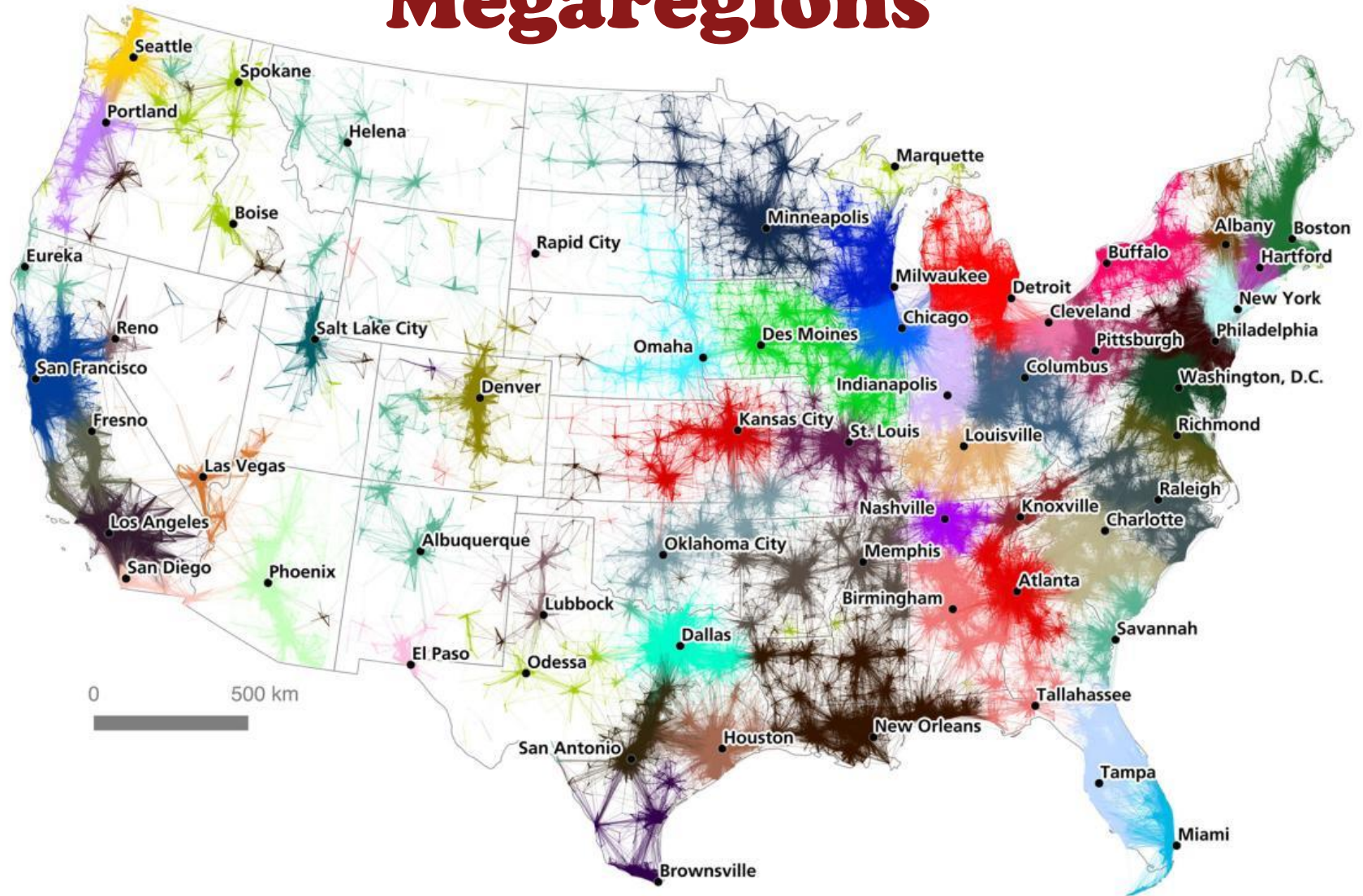
*Avg. American moves 11.7 times in lifetime  
(6 times at age 30)*



# Choosing Rural

- Brain Gain: migration to rural age 30-49
  - Also 50-64 but not as widespread
  - Brain drain is the rule, not the exception
  - Happening since the 1970s
- Newcomers look at 3-5 communities
  - Topical reasoning (local foods regions)
  - Assets vary by demographic
- **Employee recruitment must get past “warm body” syndrome**

# Megaregions



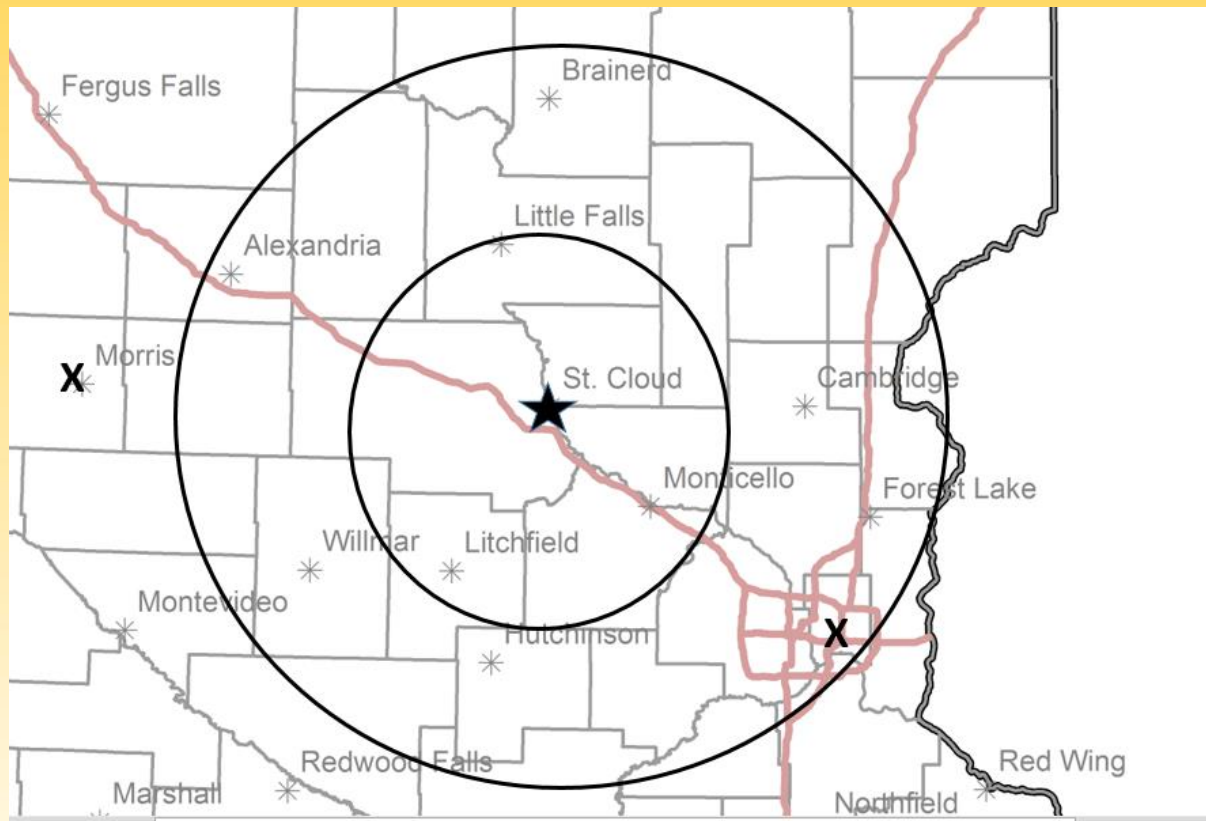
<http://discovery.dartmouth.edu/megaregions/>

# Living in the Middle of Everywhere

- ★ where you live
- X where you work

Circle around:

1. Shop / eat out
2. Play / recreate

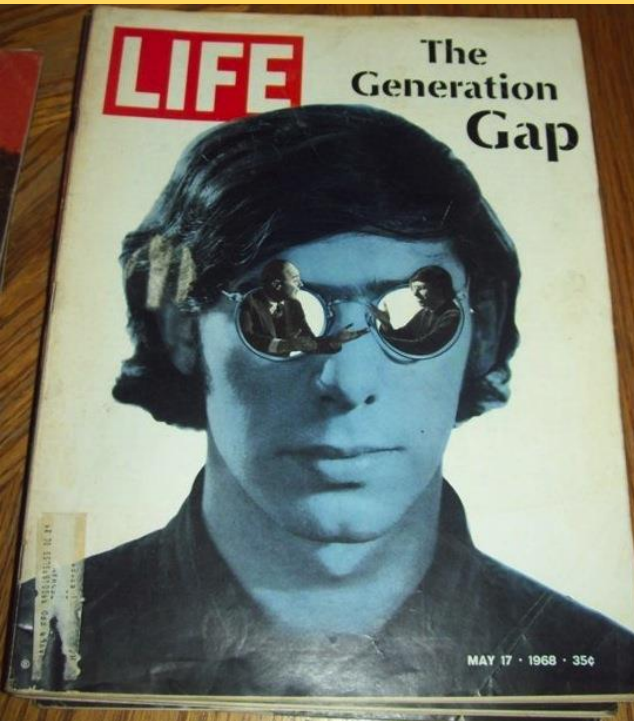


# The New Economic Narrative

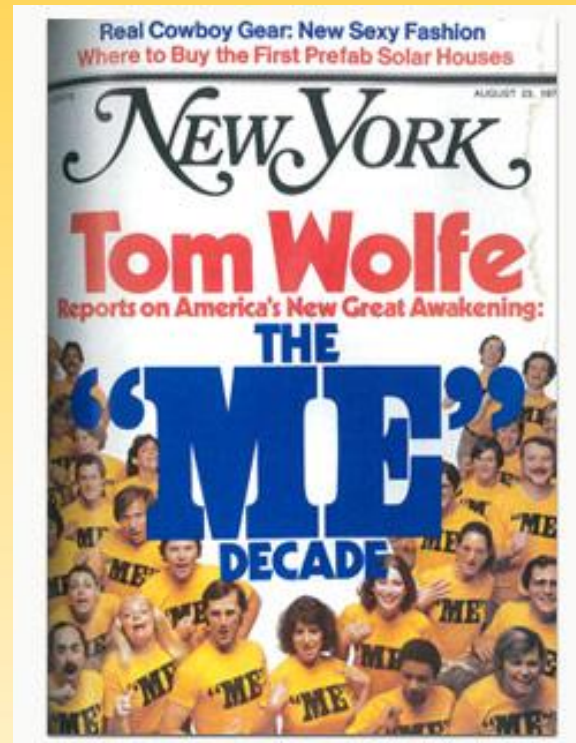
- Brick and mortar is less indicative of local economic success
- People-focused (self-employment, 1099)
- Self-employment, multiple-job holding
- **Warm-body Syndrome**
  - Recruitment is more than just the job and work-related benefits, work-life balance
  - Especially in tight labor markets



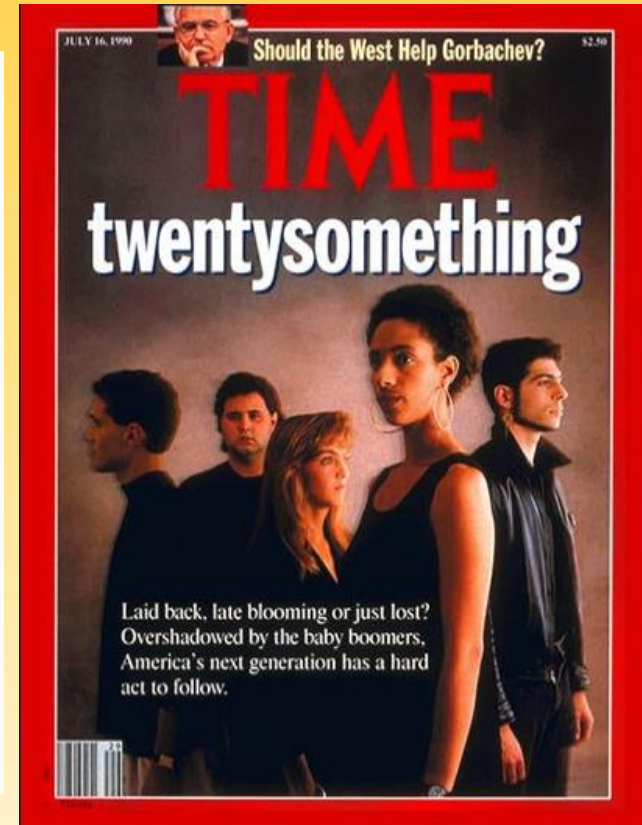
# All of this has happened before...



1968

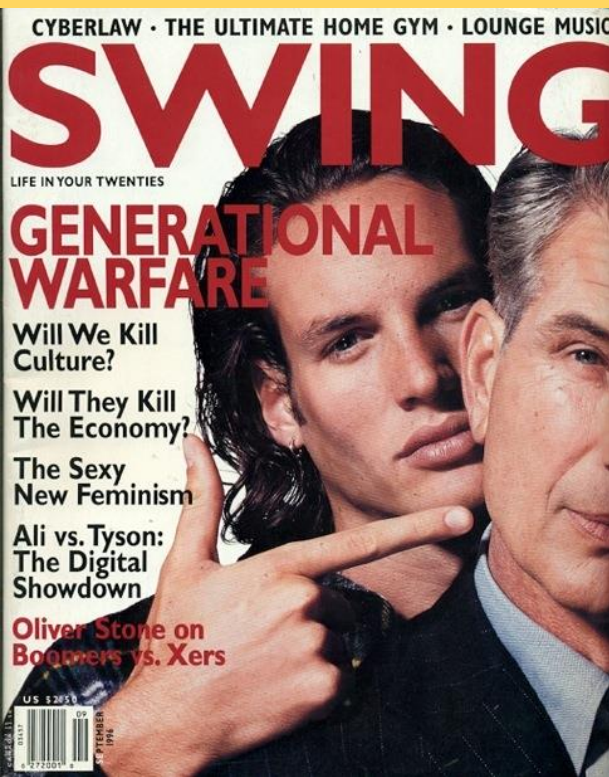


1976



1990

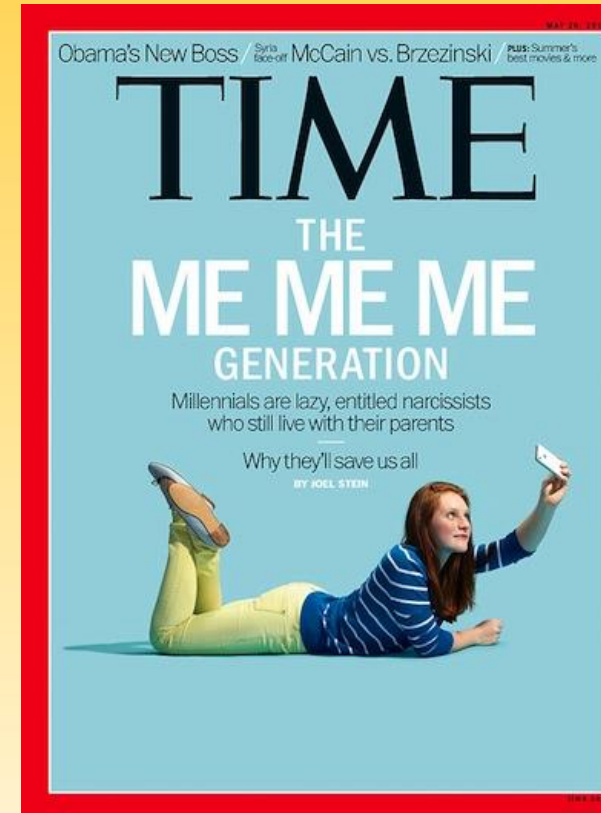
# and it will happen again...



1996



2007



2013

# **Rewriting the Rural Narrative: The Demand for Leadership in Rural America**



# Context

- How many people do we need to run our town? (demand)
- How many leaders are available? (supply)
- We have numerous leadership programs currently training **leader supply**, but are we keeping up with the **organization demand**?



# DEMAND TRENDS





# Leadership Demand

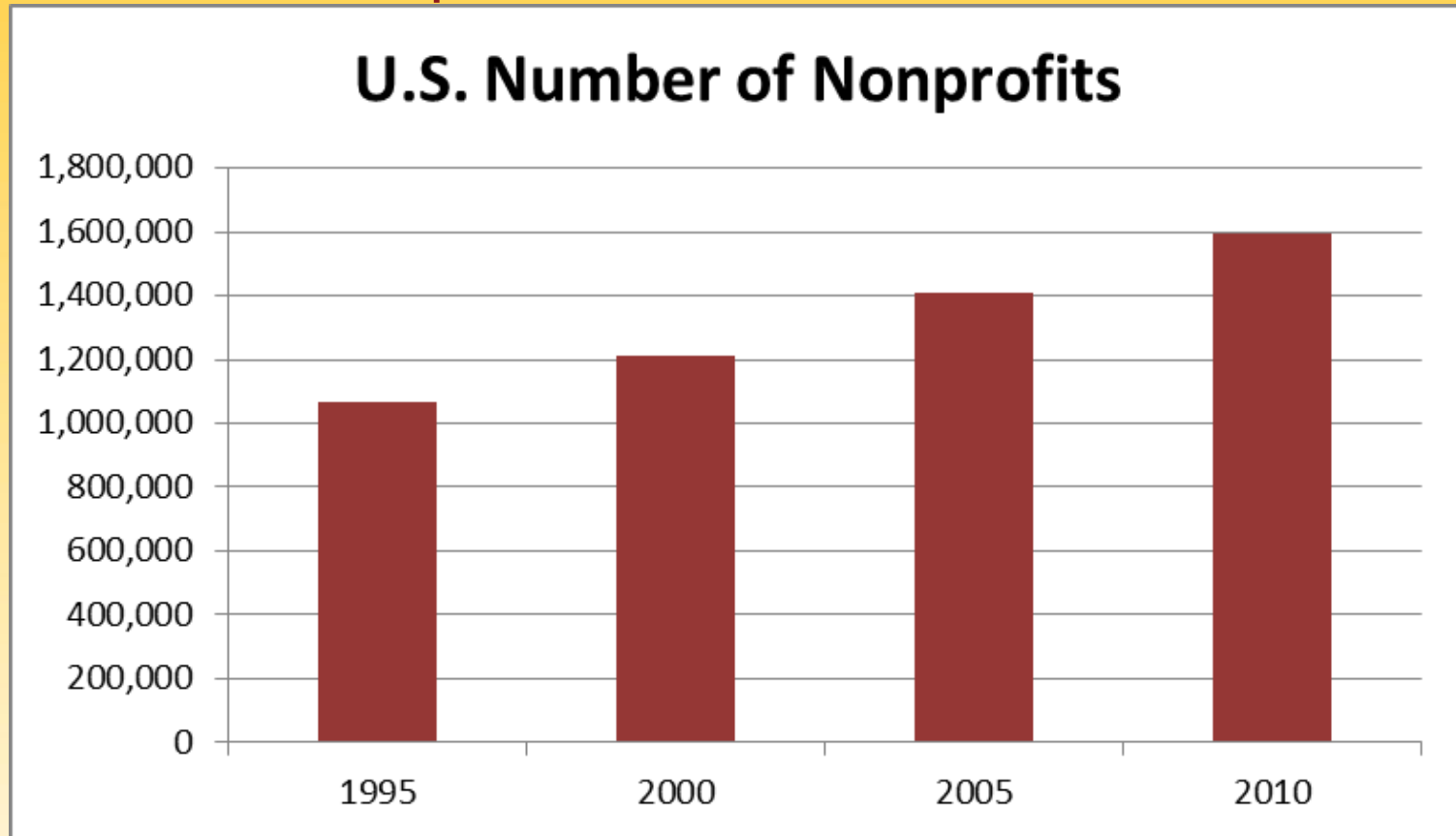
- How do we measure the demand that organizations make upon the resident population?
- In the US, there are 90,052 governmental units
  - In Minnesota, there are 3,672 governmental units – about one for every 1,500 persons.
  - These government units include counties, cities, townships, school districts, and “special districts” such as those providing oversight for cemeteries, highways, water/sewer systems, and soil/water conservation areas.
- We also have a vibrant nonprofit sector...

*U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Government Integrated Directory.*



# Social Life is Not Dying

## Nonprofit Growth: 1995-2010



1995-2000	13.6%
2000-2005	16.3%
2005-2010	13.1%

*National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau*

# Social Life is Not Dying

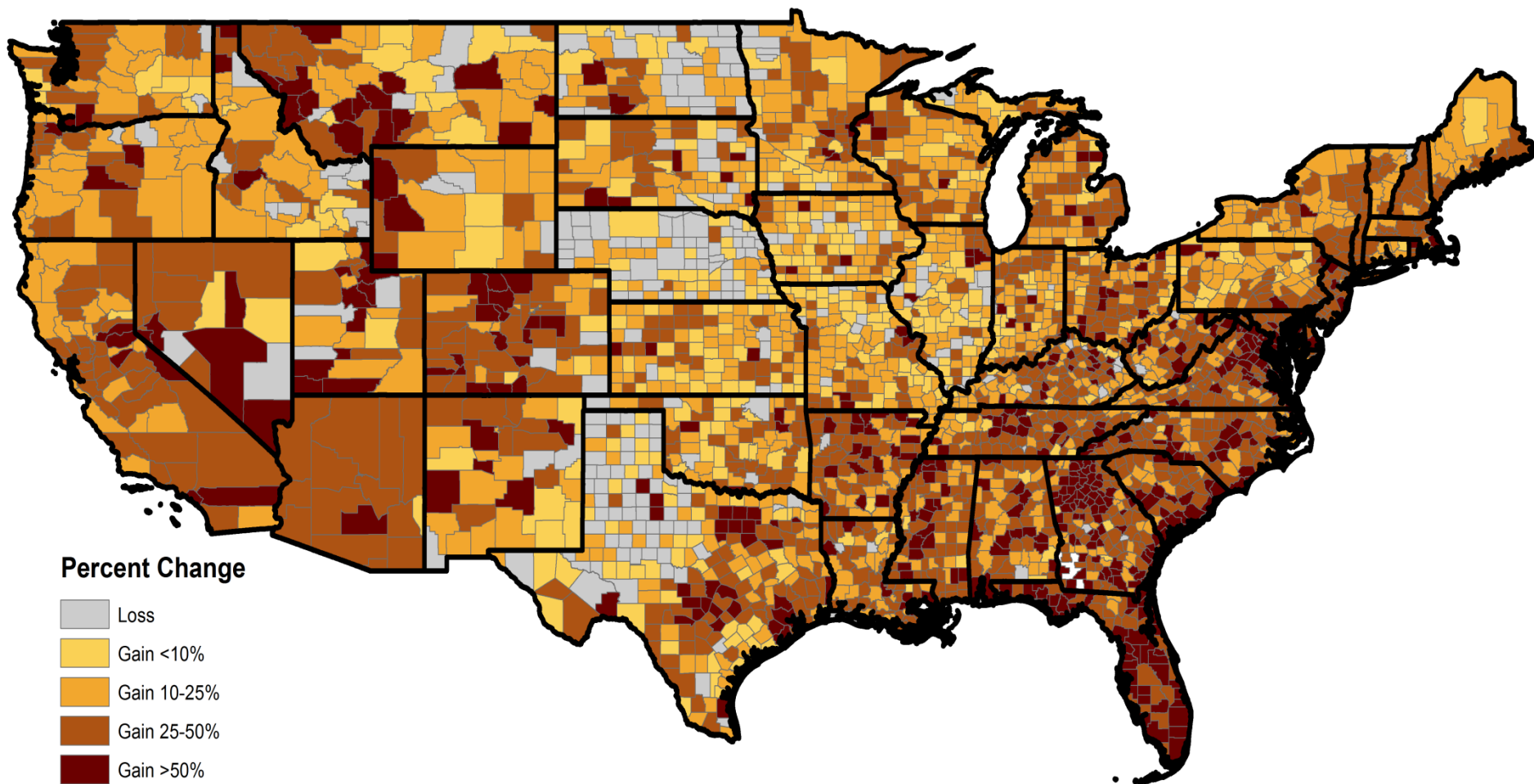
## Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

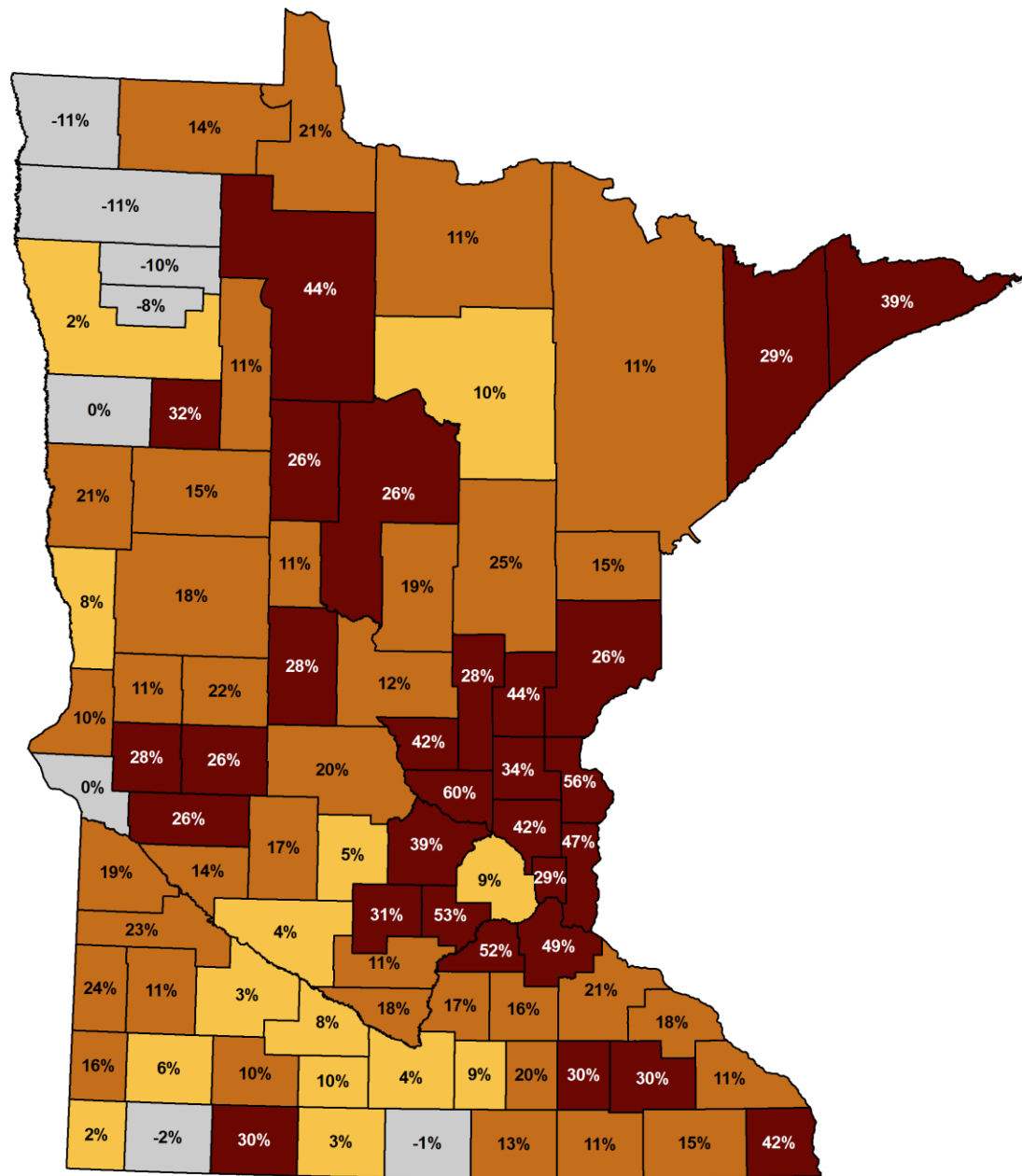
- Minnesota gained 8% in population and gained 19% in the number of nonprofits.
  - The most rural counties experienced a loss of 5% in population, yet the number of nonprofits increased 14%.
- This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

*National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau*



# Nonprofit Change: 2000-2010



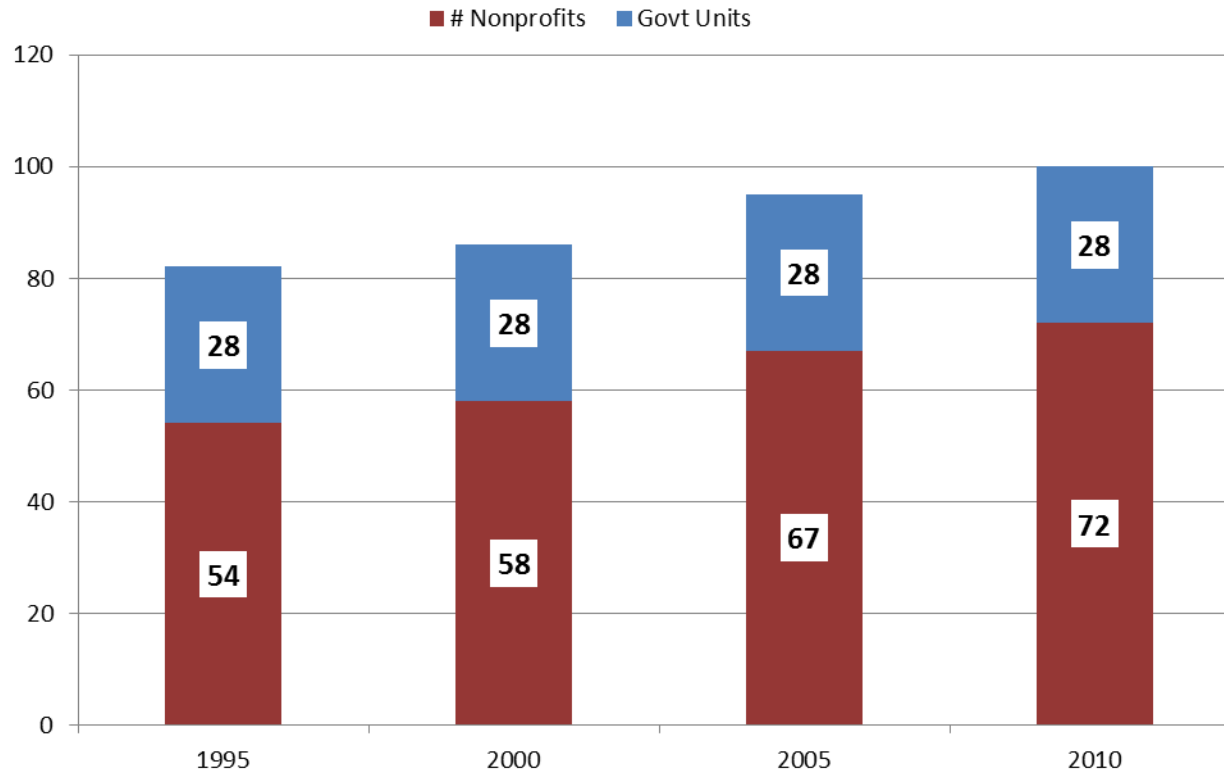


## Nonprofit Change 2000-2010





# Lincoln County, Minnesota



	<b>2000-2010</b>		
	Population	Nonprofits	Gov't Units
<i>Lincoln County</i>	-8%	24%	0%
<i>Minnesota</i>	8%	19%	5%
<i>United States</i>	10%	32%	3%

# Selected characteristics

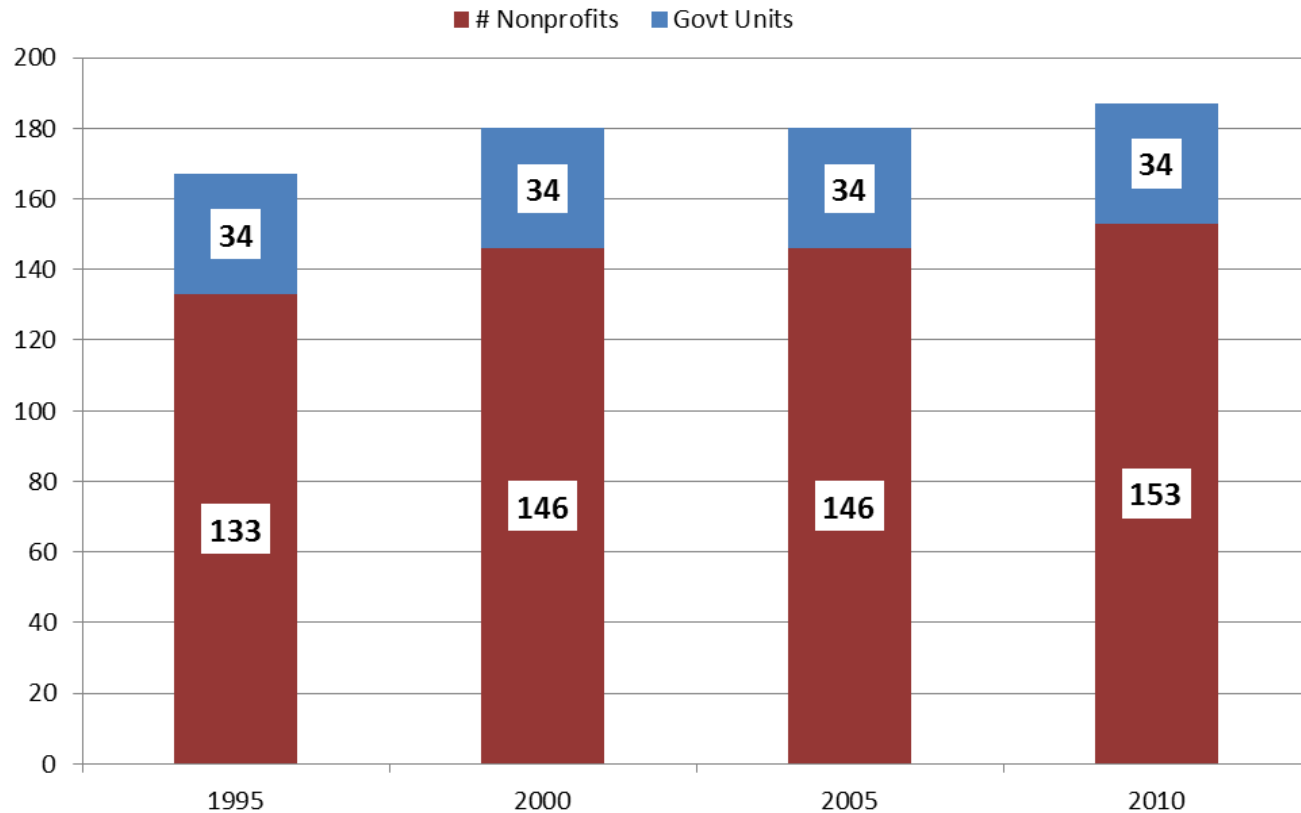
	<i>Lincoln County, MN</i>			
	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b><i>Number of Nonprofits</i></b>	54	58	67	72
<b><i>Number Filing 990</i></b>	15	19	20	42
<b><i>Revenue (of Filers)</i></b>	\$16,647,103	\$20,697,391	\$30,922,545	\$38,362,137
<b><i>Assets (of Filers)</i></b>	\$26,388,811	\$32,061,691	\$40,367,549	\$45,350,743
<b><i>Governmental Units</i></b>	28	28	28	28
<b><i>Total Organizations</i></b>	82	86	95	100
<b><i>Population, Total</i></b>		6,429		5,896
<b><i>Population Age 18+</i></b>		4,904		4,580
<b><i>Groups per 1,000 people</i></b>		13.4		17.0
<b><i>Revenue per Organization</i></b>	\$308,280	\$356,852	\$461,531	\$532,807
<b><i>Revenue per Person</i></b>		\$72.77		\$116.33
<b><i>Population per Organizational Role</i></b>		19		15

*Note: The “Number filing 990” generally indicates filing by organizations with gross receipts of \$50,000 or more.*



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# Meeker County, Minnesota



	<b>2000-2010</b>		
	Population	Nonprofits	Gov't Units
<i>Meeker County</i>	3%	5%	0%
<i>Minnesota</i>	8%	19%	5%
<i>United States</i>	10%	32%	3%

There are also gains and losses between these time periods, losses (or gains) don't mean just losses (or gains).

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# Selected characteristics

	<i>Meeker County, MN</i>			
	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b><i>Number of Nonprofits</i></b>	133	146	146	153
<b><i>Number Filing 990</i></b>	41	50	53	84
<b><i>Revenue (of Filers)</i></b>	\$12,467,958	\$15,009,623	\$19,665,561	\$24,637,694
<b><i>Assets (of Filers)</i></b>	<b>\$24,341,594</b>	<b>\$30,679,457</b>	<b>\$43,047,383</b>	<b>\$65,915,811</b>
<b><i>Governmental Units</i></b>	34	34	34	34
<b><i>Total Organizations</i></b>	167	180	180	187
<b><i>Population, Total</i></b>		22,644		23,300
<b><i>Population Age 18+</i></b>		16,535		17,380
<b><i>Groups per 1,000 people</i></b>		7.9		8.0
<b><i>Revenue per Organization</i></b>	\$93,744	\$102,806	\$134,696	\$161,031
<b><i>Revenue per Person</i></b>		\$6.22		\$9.27
<b><i>Population per Organizational Role</i></b>		31		31

*Note: The “Number filing 990” generally indicates filing by organizations with gross receipts of \$50,000 or more.*



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# SUPPLY TRENDS



# Social Organizations

- Diversification of rural life socially, too
- Reflect the social interests at any given time
- Today is not 25 (or 50, or 100) years ago!
- The people today seem unable to “connect” with the existing social infrastructure

# Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (historical)

- Place-based
- Broadly focused
- Word of mouth



Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*

# Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (present)

- Cover wide geographic area
- Narrowly focused goals/  
self-interest
- Diverse social interests
- Technological – social media



*The people today are challenged in “connecting”  
with the existing social infrastructure.*

Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*



<i>Minnesota</i>	1995-2016*	% change 1995-2016	Size of Sector, 2016	Sector Share
<b>A - Arts, Culture &amp; Humanities</b>	694	41% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 2,536	<div><div></div></div> 8%
B - Education	452	15% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 3,677	<div><div></div></div> 11%
C - Environment	263	62% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 689	<div><div></div></div> 2%
<b>D - Animal-Related</b>	363	211% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 495	<div><div></div></div> 1%
E - Health Care	191	23% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 1,053	<div><div></div></div> 3%
F - Mental Health & Crisis Intervention	59	24% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 328	<div><div></div></div> 1%
<b>G - Voluntary Health Associations &amp; Services</b>	227	62% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 593	<div><div></div></div> 2%
H - Medical Research: Medical Research	35	95% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 74	<div><div></div></div> 0%
I - Crime & Legal-Related	55	19% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 376	<div><div></div></div> 1%
J - Employment	-105	-10% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 958	<div><div></div></div> 3%
K - Food, Agriculture & Nutrition	118	33% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 478	<div><div></div></div> 1%
L - Housing & Shelter	136	23% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 792	<div><div></div></div> 2%
M - Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness & Response	192	38% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 685	<div><div></div></div> 2%
<b>N - Recreation &amp; Sports</b>	1,524	77% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 3,866	<div><div></div></div> 11%
O - Youth Development	359	131% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 647	<div><div></div></div> 2%
<b>P - Human Services</b>	711	55% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 2,052	<div><div></div></div> 6%
Q - International, Foreign Affairs & National Security	267	148% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 454	<div><div></div></div> 1%
R - Civil Rights, Social Action & Advocacy	-152	-59% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 203	<div><div></div></div> 1%
<b>S - Community Improvement &amp; Capacity Building</b>	-412	-14% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 2,705	<div><div></div></div> 8%
<b>T - Philanthropy, Voluntarism &amp; Grantmaking</b>	384	29% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 1,812	<div><div></div></div> 5%
U - Science & Technology	12	8% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 164	<div><div></div></div> 0%
V - Social Science	23	105% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 44	<div><div></div></div> 0%
W - Public & Societal Benefit	-120	-6% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 2,166	<div><div></div></div> 6%
<b>X - Religion-Related</b>	2,636	92% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 5,232	<div><div></div></div> 16%
Y - Mutual & Membership Benefit	-484	-27% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 1,470	<div><div></div></div> 4%
Z - Unknown	-528	-274% <div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div> 82	<div><div></div></div> 0%
<b>Total</b>	6,900	28% <div><div></div></div>	33,631	

# SUPPLY & DEMAND TRENDS

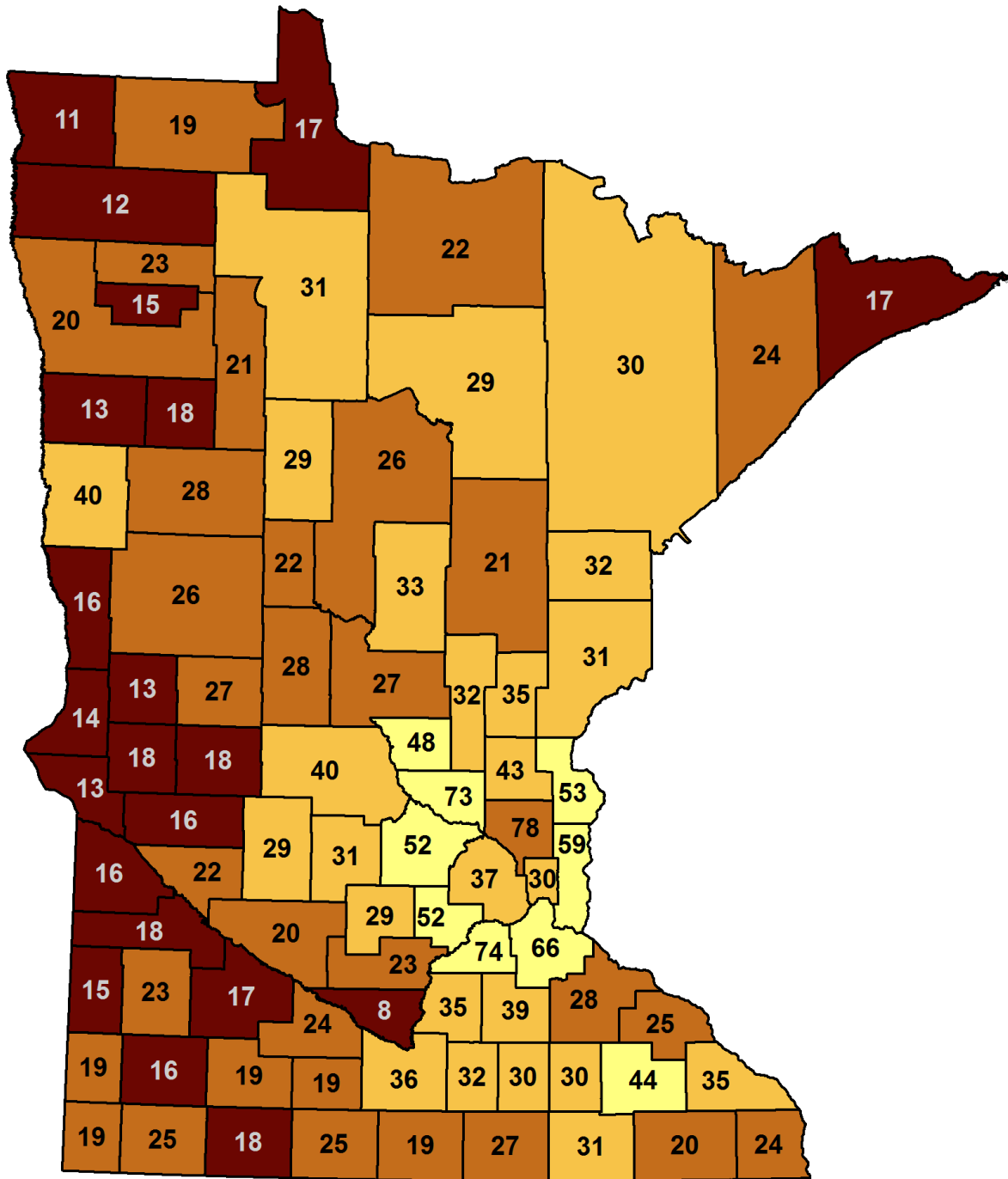


# Population Per Organizational Role

*Definition: Number of people each organization has available to them to locate a positional leader.*

- Yes, people serve on multiple boards.
- Assumption of 3 per board is conservative.
- Age 18+ includes many age groups that are less active.

# Population per Organizational Role, 2010



# IMPLICATIONS





# Opportunities for Engagement

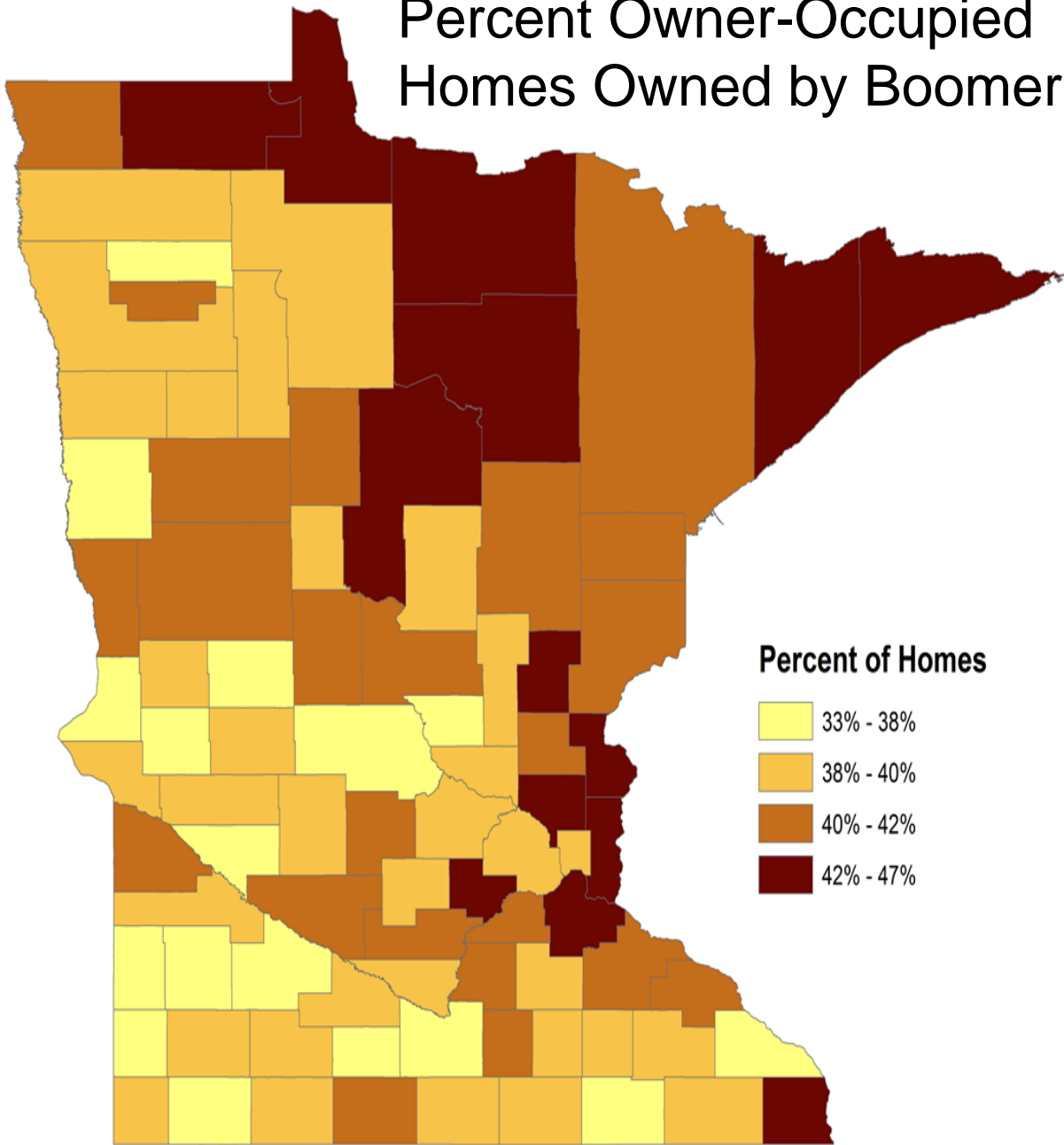
- **New residents are more than warm bodies**
- Younger people (Millennials age 18-34)
  - Decentralized approaches to leadership
  - Simplified methods of communication
- Start with a small request
- Engagement before leadership



So, is your community  
**WELCOMING?**



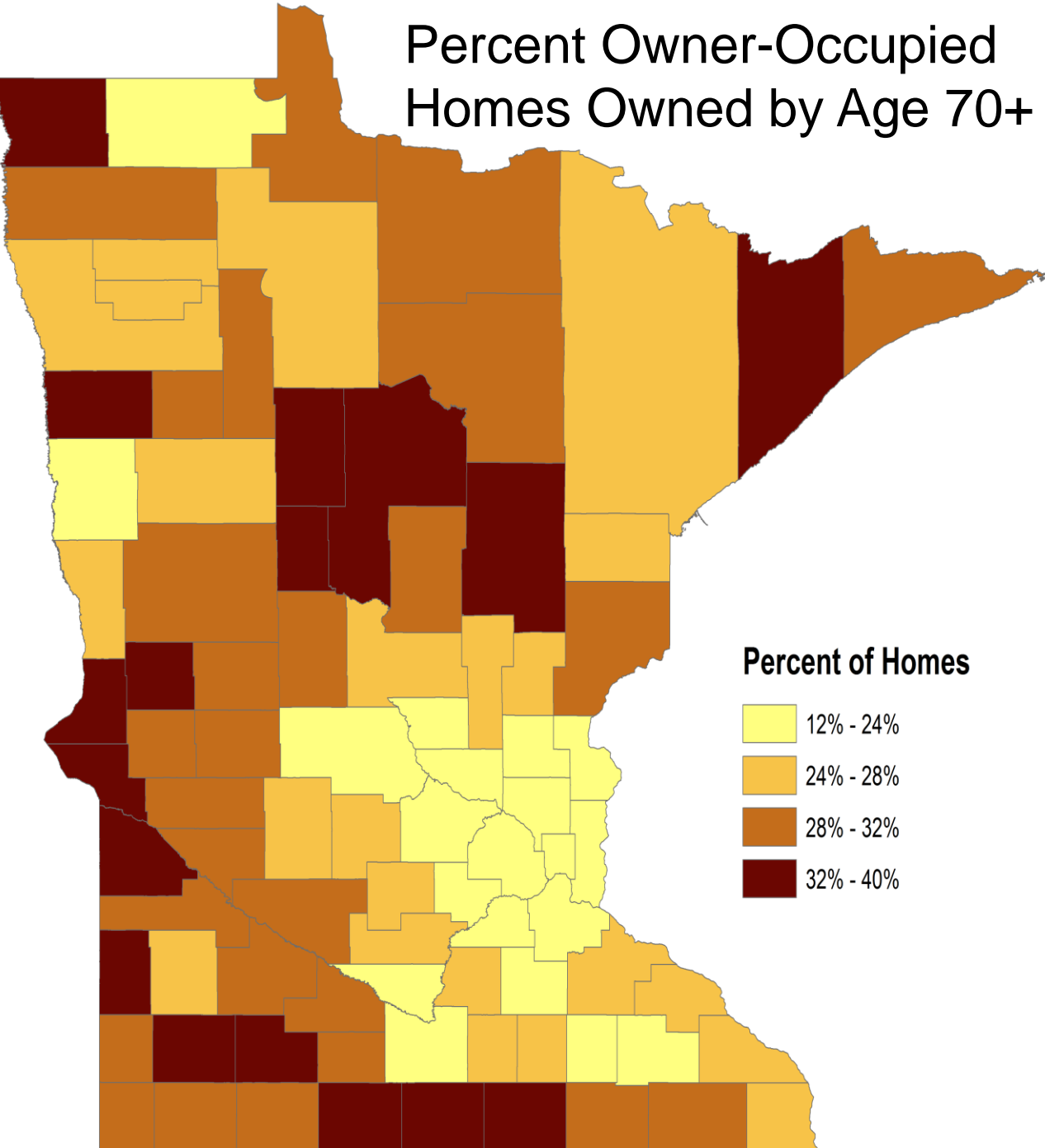
# Percent Owner-Occupied Homes Owned by Boomers



47.0% Cook  
46.8% Lake o' Woods  
44.9% Washington  
43.9% Anoka  
43.7% Carver

33.1% Blue Earth  
34.5% Stevens  
35.5% Benton  
35.6% Clay  
35.8% Lyon

# Percent Owner-Occupied Homes Owned by Age 70+



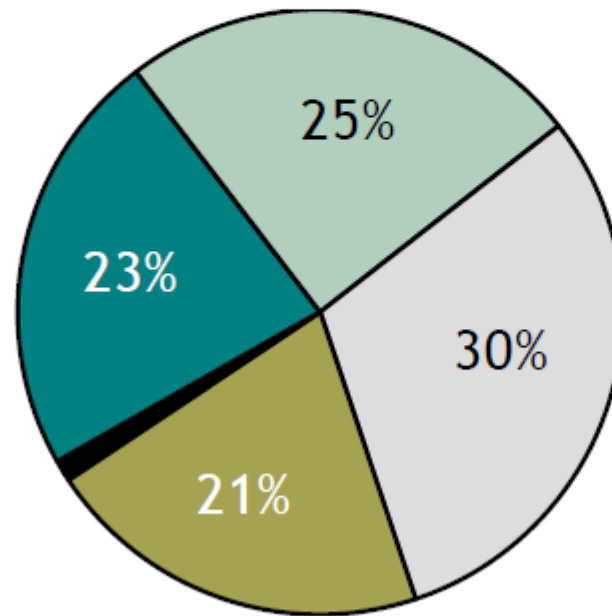
40.2% Aitkin  
38.8% Traverse  
36.0% Big Stone  
34.7% Lincoln  
34.6% Faribault

17.2% Dakota  
16.2% Wright  
13.8% Sherburne  
13.6% Carver  
12.8% Scott

# Where We Live and Where We'd Like to Live

by community type

■ City      ■ Suburb  
■ Small town      ■ Rural area



PewResearchCenter

Source: "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else". Pew Research Center

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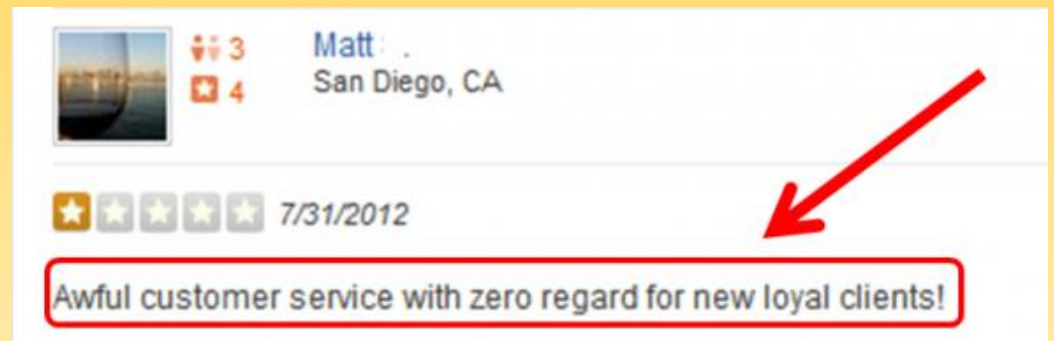


# Migration and the Narrative

- Migration patterns open the door to discussing the narrative
- There are varied reasons for people to move to small towns and rural places
- Our “rural” means more and more (network study)

# Negative Narratives

- Would we allow this negative language to permeate a product or service we were selling?
- Why do we do it?
- Cannot continue to portray rural success as the exception



VANISHING POINT; Amid Dying Towns of Rural Plains, One Makes a Stand

# The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- Creating groups, building their community
- Diversifying the economy
- Buying/starting businesses, working from home
- Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
- More than warm bodies (employee recruitment)

# *The Rural Choice*

The bottom line is people WANT to live and move here for **what you are today and will be tomorrow**, not what may have been!



## **Nebraska Buffalo Commons**

<http://agecon.unl.edu/communitymarketing/buffalo-commons-survey>

## **Minnesota Brain Gain**

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/Community/brain-gain>

(IA) Homebase Iowa <https://www.homebaseiowa.gov/>

(KS) <http://www.getruralkansas.org/>

(KS) Rural By Choice PowerUPs <http://www.ruralbychoice.com/>

(ND) Find the Good Life <http://findthegoodlifeinnorthdakota.com/>

(NE) Nebraska Rural Living <http://www.nebraskaruralliving.com/>

(NE) Norfolk Now <http://www.norfolknow.org/>

(NE) Wayne Works <http://www.waynetworks.org/>

(SD) South Dakota Rural Enterprise <http://www.sdrei.org/bringbak.htm>

(SD) Dakota Roots <http://www.dakotaroots.com>

(SD) South Dakota Seeds <http://www.dakotaseeds.com/>



## Rural Issues and Trends Webinars

<http://z.umn.edu/ruralwebinar/>

