

Introduction

The issues illustrated in a snapshot of rural Iowa are somewhat different from those of our sister states of Illinois and Wisconsin. Iowa has often been the focus of regional studies because of its few natural barriers to travel, its relatively uniform distribution of mid-sized cities, and the lack of a dominant metropolitan center. In the 1980s, three fundamental economic shifts effected how these regional communities operate and significantly impacted the main streets of the great majority of Iowa's rural communities:

1. The mid-American farm crisis profoundly affected the economic well-being of small, agriculturally-dependent communities. The restructuring of the agricultural sector simply could no longer economically support existing populations.
2. Regional mall development was taking place at the same time in many of Iowa's metropolitan and micropolitan communities. Retail sales shifted from towns of 500 and 1,000 to regional centers.
3. Walmart entered Iowa in 1983. As these discount stores were opened in both rural and urban locations, they created intense competition for Iowa's main streets never before seen.

Rural Iowa in many ways continues to represent the legacy of the 1980s. Resulting outmigration continues to impact labor availability. Employment, media, health systems, and banking all became more regionalized. The economic fortunes of communities often became tied to sub-state regional economies.

One major demographic change since the 1980s has been the increasing diversity found in rural Iowa, especially with Latino immigration. Iowa's rural Latino populations tend to be concentrated in approximately three dozen communities. Latinos within these communities are especially noticeable within K-12 schools, as Latinos present within these population cohorts tend to be much higher than in adult or senior cohorts.

Given this background, this snapshot will focus on population change, population diversity, and the two major economic sectors of rural Iowa—agriculture and manufacturing.

Population Distribution

Much of Iowa's population centers and growth can be defined by what Iowa State University sociologist Willis Goudy use to refer as Iowa's "C." When looking at county maps and looking at the state demographically, think of two Iowas. Start north of Dubuque, continue along the border with Minnesota to the last tier of counties in western Iowa, then head east toward the Illinois border along the bottom two tiers. Many of the counties within the "C" have been losing population since 1890. Many are in the

demographic state of natural decline. The western tier of counties and the middle of the "C" (think Quad Cities to Dubuque and then west toward Ames/Des Moines) tend to show a different, and consistent pattern, with moderate to strong population growth. There is a definite geospatial pattern to the economics and demography of Iowa that does not always fit the Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (RUCC).

Population growth is definitely within the middle of the "C." All the counties with RUCCs of 2 or 3 are either within the interior of the "C" or are along the western I-29/western Iowa corridor. Virtually all of Iowa's growth between 2010 and 2014 can be found within these within these two areas.

Map 1. Iowa Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (2013)

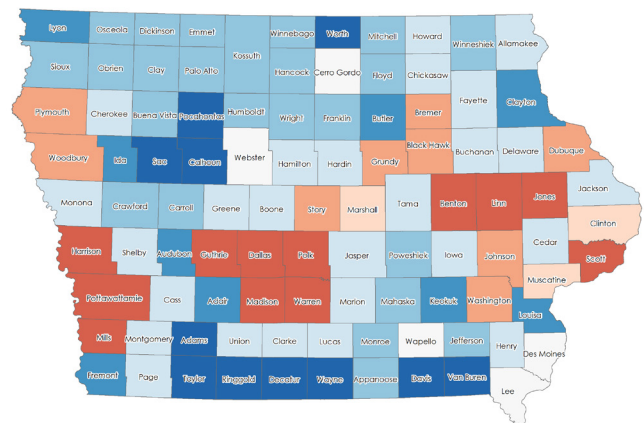
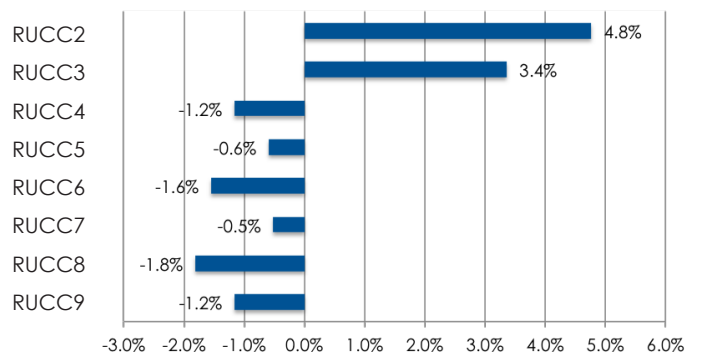


Figure 1. Iowa Population Change by RUCC (2010–2014)



Source: US Census Bureau

Major Rural Economic Sectors

This snapshot focuses upon the two traditional export employment sectors of rural Iowa—manufacturing and agriculture. Due in part to the Great Recession, both sectors declined in total employment over the past decade. In general, agricultural employment remained strong in Iowa’s most rural areas with slight increases in the most rural counties of the RUCC. Declines in employment within this sector were most noted in the urban counties.

However, there was a major geospatial difference in rural counties within the growth of this sector. The most rural counties along the southern two tiers of counties tended to see declines in agricultural employment, while northern Iowa tended to grow. This is especially true in rural northwestern counties. (It should be noted, however, that Avian Flu has hit this part of the state the hardest among poultry and egg operations.)

Map 2. Percent Change in Farm Employment by County (2003–2013)

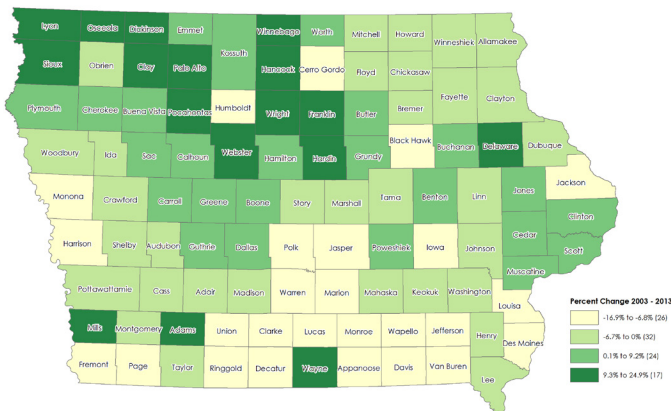
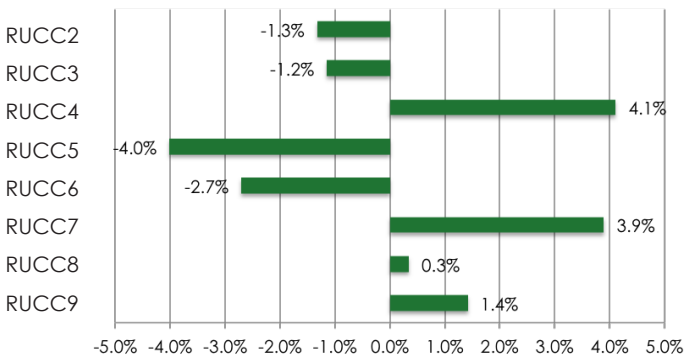


Figure 2. Percent Change in Farm Employment by RUCC (2003–2013)



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

The second major sector effecting Iowa’s rural economy is manufacturing. In general, manufacturing declined during the Great Recession in Iowa’s micropolitan and rural counties (see figure 3). The one exception was the Non-metro Completely

Rural (RUCC 2) with a 1% increase. These numbers are small (averaging less than 300 manufacturing jobs per county) and are susceptible to significant change. It should be noted, however, that manufacturing in urban Iowa appears to be recovering at a more rapid rate from the recession than rural Iowa.

In looking at the geospatial distribution of manufacturing employment post Great Recession, only four metropolitan counties saw a decline (Woodbury, Muscatine, Jasper and Marion). The later two counties are mostly likely related to the loss of jobs associated with the closing of Maytag in Newton during this period.

While some rural counties saw significant gains in manufacturing employment during this period, almost twice as many of Iowa’s rural counties lost manufacturing jobs to those that gained them. Please keep in mind that in Iowa’s smallest counties, the difference between growth and decline is often represented by very small numbers.

Map 3. Percent Change in Manufacturing Employment by County (2003–2013)

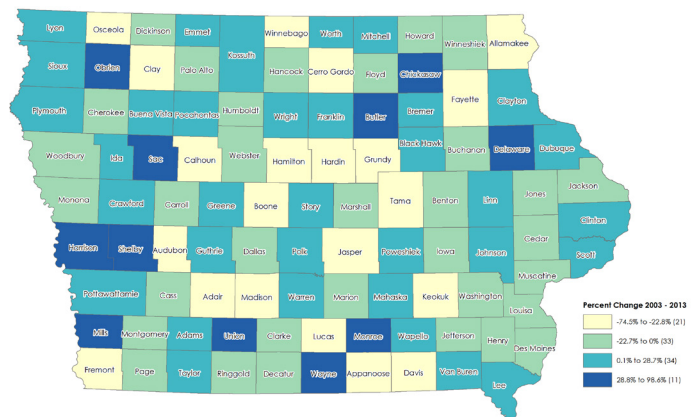
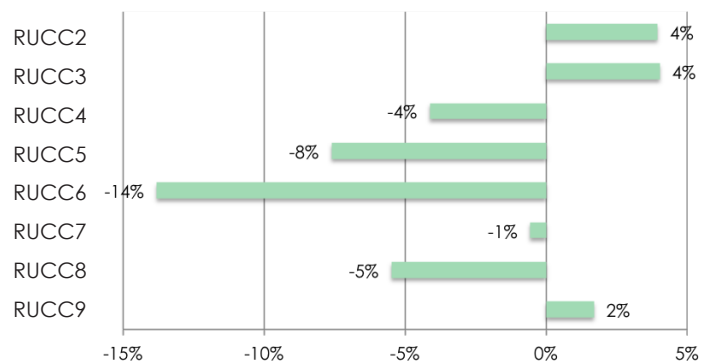


Figure 3. Percent Change in Manufacturing Employment by RUCC (2003–2013)



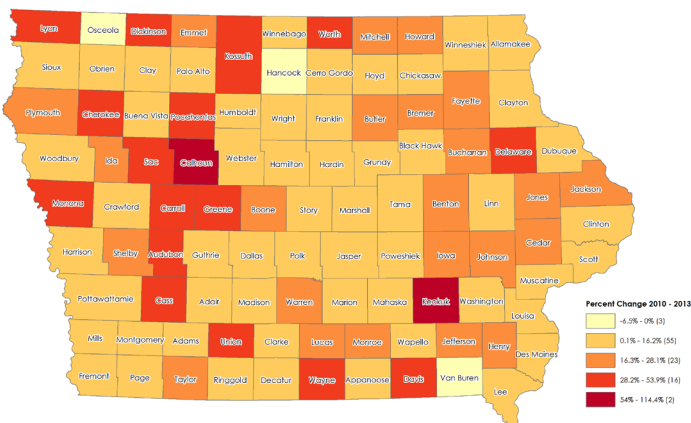
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

New Iowans

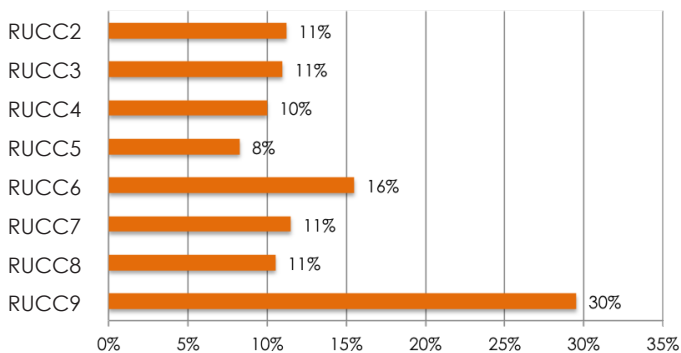
If one were to exclude Latino immigration into Iowa over the past 25 years, the state's population growth would be negligible. Today the Latino population represents more than 5% of the total population and almost 10% of the population 18 and under. Rural places such as West Liberty, Postville, Perry, Storm Lake, and Columbus Junction have Latino populations representing from 25% to more 50% of the total population. Immigration aside, these populations are growing as Latino households typically are younger and larger. As shown in figure 4, the distribution of this growth is both rural or urban in Iowa with the largest percentage increase coming in Iowa's most rural counties in the last four years. To put this into perspective, the total population of Iowa grew by 2% during the past four years. Latino population growth within the RUCC cohorts ranged from 8% in RUCC 4 to 30% in RUCC 9.

The distribution of this increase is apparent in map 4. Only three counties in Iowa saw a decline in Latino population from 2000 to 2014. More than 41 counties saw an increase of 16% or more. All of Iowa is becoming more diverse. In the context of this of conference, a rural "Healthy Iowa Community" may well be multicultural.

Map 4. Percent Change in Latino Population by County (2010–2013)



Map 4. Percent Change in Latino Population by RUCC (2010–2013)



Source: US Census Bureau

Conclusion

Like parts of Wisconsin and Illinois, a significant number of Iowa's counties are in a state of natural decline (more births than deaths). The lack of the availability of labor in many rural communities has become an impediment to economic development. The growth or decline of regional hubs is becoming more significant to local rural economies. Designing a "Healthy" Iowa Community" will likely not be a one-size-fits-all proposition.

For More Information

Most of the data aggregated for this paper was obtained through the Iowa State University Iowa Community Indicators Program (www.icip.iastate.edu) maintained by the Iowa State University Department of Economics.

Contact Information

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
Community and Economic Development
2321 North Loop Drive, Suite 121
Ames, IA 50010-8218
515-294-8397
Fax 515-294-1354
www.extension.iastate.edu/communities

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/ISU.Extension.CED> and Twitter @ISUExtensionCED

Created by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach on June 30, 2015.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach programs are available to all without regard to race, color, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a US veteran. Inquiries can be directed to the Director of Equal Opportunity and Compliance, 3280 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-7612.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture. Cathann A. Kress, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.