U.S. Rural Demographic and Economic Trends

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* The views expressed are those of the presenter and may not be attributed to USDA or the Economic Research Service.
What is “Rural”?  

We treat “rural” as synonymous with “nonmetro” – outside of areas within or with strong commuting ties to a large urban center (≥ 50,000). 

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.
The rural population declined for the first time during 2010-15

- Significant declines occurred in parts of the South, especially in agricultural and rural manufacturing areas.
- Growth occurred in other parts – especially near growing urban areas and in recreation/retirement areas.
Rural population loss is due to net outmigration and aging of the rural population, especially outside of retirement destination areas.

As a result of aging of the population and outmigration of young people, rural areas with natural decrease in population (deaths > births) are expanding.
Demographic Trends Affected by Industry Specialization

Rural areas differ in their economic specializations – farming, mining, manufacturing, recreation, government-dependence, and non-specialized. Much of the rural South is dependent on manufacturing, government, or is non-specialized.

Nationally, rural recreation and mining counties have had the most population growth since the Great Recession, while population declined in farming and manufacturing counties.
Poverty Levels and Trends Vary Across Regions and by Industry Specialization

Most persistent poverty counties – with 20% or more in poverty since 1980 – are in the South.

Nationally, poverty rates grew in all rural county types during and after the Great Recession, but have begun to decline. Poverty rates are lowest in recreation counties and declined the most in mining counties.
Questions?

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Thank You!