

# Rural Advantages

Rural Communities Appear To Offer A Lower Quality Of Life, But There Is Much More To The Story

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

There are only so many amenities that St. Helena, Neb., can offer with a population of 95. Or Creighton, Neb., with 700 people. Or even Yankton with a population of 14,591 for that matter.

But quality of life isn't necessarily tied to town population, according to a recent study by the University of Nebraska in Lincoln (UNL) and the Rural Futures Institute, also located in Lincoln. The 19th annual Nebraska Rural Poll was sent to 6,813 households in 86 counties and had a response rate of 1,943.

At first glance, the poll's results don't appear complimentary to rural communities-but there is more to this story.

More than half of respondents said that for any community to have a high quality of life, it must possess: a sense of personal safety, a school system, job opportunities, medical services, affordable housing, well-maintained streets, effective community leadership and churches. But fewer respondents reported that their community actually has these amenities.

In particular, the greatest gaps between what is desired and what is real are in the areas of jobs, affordable housing, well-maintained streets, effective community leadership, medical services, a sense of personal safety and the presence of a school.

"It's problematic," said Cheryl Burkhart-Kreisel, community vitality specialist for UNL Extension in Lincoln. "If you think these things are essential and they're not there, it could be frustrating. Obviously, other characteristics are also very important to them."

What appears to be happening is a gap in perspectives between age groups. Older residents were more likely to say their communities offered a high quality of life, while younger residents reported that their communities offered a lower quality of life. For example, for the same town, older residents were more likely to describe their town as having a strong church community, while younger residents were more likely to describe the church community as lacking.

After years of struggling against an exodus of young people from rural communities, population records now show that rural communities are experiencing an in-migration of people ages 30 to 49, the typ-



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Small rural communities like St. Helena, Nebraska, have a lot more to offer than many surveys suggest.

ical age for families of school-aged children. Rural towns, which might have once been represented by an overly high proportion of older residents, are now being increasingly represented by younger residents as well. However, there is a lack of cohesion among younger and older residents, at least in terms of what each age group is looking for in their hometown.

This difference in perception was seen in which amenities were reported as critical to a high quality of life. Younger residents are more likely to be seeking jobs, a sense of personal safety, schools, affordable housing, childcare services, a lack of traffic congestion, colleges and recreational opportunities.

By comparison, older residents are more likely to be seeking medical services, churches, well-maintained streets, effective community leadership, cleanliness, friendly people, a sense of community among residents, a local newspaper, acceptance to newcomers, a senior citizen program, leadership opportunities, public transportation and close proximity to relatives.

Not surprisingly, there is also a gap in perception in residents of small versus larger communities. Residents of larger communities or more are more likely to report more amenities. However, residents of larger towns are also less likely to report friendly people as a characteristic of their community. Residents of towns smaller than a population of 500 are more likely to name friendly people as an essential reason for their choice of location.

Residents of larger communities are more likely to report the need for these amenities: public transportation, jobs, recreational opportunities, leadership opportunities, information technology, affordable housing, low cost of living, effective community leadership, a local

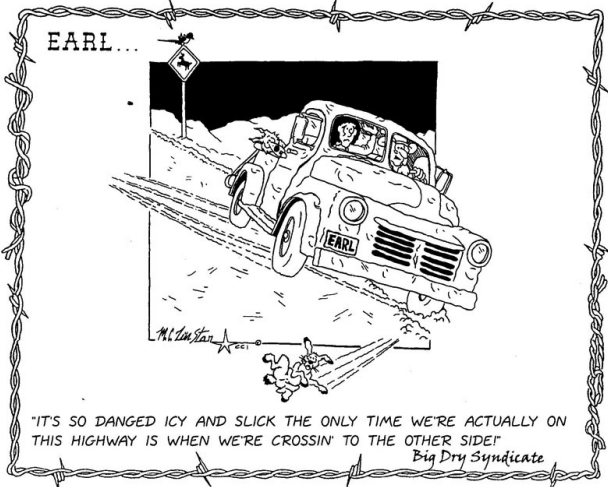
newspaper, acceptance of newcomers, well-maintained streets, cleanliness, schools and a sense of personal safety.

Residents of smaller communities are more likely to report that these amenities are essential: a senior citizen program, access to college classes, medical services and churches.

There were also marked differences between what respondents of the 2002 Nebraska Rural Poll, the last of the annual poll to offer these same questions, saw as critical community features and what respondents report in 2014. In 2002, job opportunities, affordable housing and information technology were not rated as highly as they are now. But, in 2002, cleanliness, friendly people, a sense of community among residents, a local newspaper, a senior citizen program and post-secondary education were ranked higher by rural Nebraskans than there were this year. Though, it is to be noted that friendly people and proximity to relatives were among markers that still had significant merit in 2014 results.

The 2014 Nebraska Rural Poll concluded that there are different ways that communities can strive to appeal to younger or older residents. Towns wanting to attract younger people need to work on improving job opportunities, a sense of personal safety, affordable housing, childcare services, recreational opportunities and access to college classes as well as ensuring less traffic congestion. Towns with a community K-12 school have an advantage.

Towns that appeal more to older people are those with medical services, churches, a senior citizen program, effective community leadership, a sense of community among residents, friendly people, cleanliness, acceptance of newcomers and well-maintained streets.



## Economist To Speak In Yankton, Tyndall

Dave Swenson, associate scientist from the Iowa State University Department of Economics, will speak in Yankton and Tyndall on Tuesday, Nov. 25. Swenson will speak at the Yankton Community Library at 1:30 p.m. and at the Tyndall Community Center at 7 p.m.

Swenson's presentation "The Rationale, Rewards and Risks of Using Property Tax Based Tax Incentives in Rural Areas," is a "very timely concerning the proposed conglomerate Cargill/Aggex grain facility proposals for Yankton and Bon Homme Counties," said former longtime state legislator Frank Kloucek.

Swenson has testified before the Iowa Legislature on the merits of tax increment financing. Swenson said, "Rural economic development faces special challenges. Tax-based incentives may produce regional economic gains, but public officials need to be mindful of both the potential rewards and the risks of leveraging rural tax bases to underwrite economic development."

## Ag Marketing Specialist Set For Yankton

An Iowa State University farm and ag business management specialist will speak at seminars in seven South Dakota cities, including Yankton, Dec. 2-9.

Steve Johnson will be the featured speaker at the GrowingOn 2015 meetings sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America and the South Dakota Corn Growers Association.

In his presentation, "Leveraging Risk Management Tools to Manage Revenue," Johnson will give a crop price outlook and discuss marketing strategies and tools, farm bill programs and regulations, crop insurance strategies and 2015 crop cost estimates.

FDSA specialists will discuss crop insurance options and how to minimize risk. Admission is free and includes a meal.

A form will be held at Yankton's Best Western Kelly Inn/Minerva's on Friday, Dec. 5, at 9:30 a.m.

There will also be a forum at the Highland Conference Center in Mitchell at 6 p.m. Dec. 4, and at the Sioux Falls Convention Center at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 9.

Register at [cropinsurancespecialists.com](http://cropinsurancespecialists.com) or call 800-884-FARM or 605-334-0100.

## Cattle Workshop Slated For Mitchell

BROOKINGS — To help producers explore alternatives that would allow them to maintain or grow their cowherds in cases where pasture acres are a limiting factor, SDSU Extension is sponsoring a program Changing Mindsets: More Cows, Less Grass, at the SDSU Extension Regional Center in Mitchell on Dec. 8.

"Availability and affordability of pasture is a significant obstacle to the growth of the South Dakota cowherd, in spite of much stronger cattle market conditions recently," said Jim Krantz, SDSU Extension Cow/Calf Field Specialist.

A focus group of producers and stakeholders has played a key role in providing direction and input into the planning of this event. The objective of the program is to expose producers to successful practices to support cow/calf production that don't rely exclusively on permanent pasture.

The program will begin with registration at 9:30 a.m. Registration for the meeting and noon lunch is available online at [iGrow.org](http://iGrow.org) or at the door.

For more information please contact Krantz, Jim.Krantz@sdstate.edu at the Mitchell Regional Extension Center at 605-995-7378.

## Commentary

# Be Proud Of Your Rural Hometown

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent



Rita BRHEL

I live on the edge of a community with a population of about 400 people. I've lived here for five years and hope this to be my permanent residence, mainly because moving gets harder and harder each time, especially now that I have three children, but mostly because the oldest of those children are now in school.

Through the years, I've lived in small communities of about 600 people and a little larger communities of about 2,000 people. And I've lived in cities of a quarter million. And I grew up on a farm near an unincorporated town of maybe 50 people.

So I've experienced a wide range of community types. For the most part, as the least surprising result of the 2014 Nebraska Rural Poll shows us, yes, the larger the community, the more amenities. But also, with the larger communities, there are tends to be a loss of a sense of community among residents.

Yet, small towns don't necessarily gain in this area. It really depends on the town. Some small towns tend to have a lot of cliques. Others may be very welcoming to newcomers but yet they can't seem to get past the superficial chit-chat that marks the conversations of strangers. Still, so much of how a person feels in any community comes down to not only the town's amenities but also that person's personal sense of contentment. Why do you live

where you live?

So why did I choose this community of 400 people? To be honest, I was looking for an acreage and this was the one that

most matched the features I was seeking and was in my price range. I do happen to like that while I live on acreage, it is at the edge of town and so the street outside my property is paved and the gas station, restaurant and other services are less than a mile away. And the consolidated school district's facilities lie out in the countryside just two miles from town, and us. That makes for a short bus ride for the kids, and is quite convenient should I need to pick up or drop off something at the school.

But when I think about what I like about this community, what comes to mind is peace and quiet. I do feel safe here, even though we don't have a town policeman. It is quiet and clean. It does provide a low cost of living. There are some essential services in town, but for those that it doesn't have, it's only a 10-minute drive to get to the next nearest town to have access to the rest of the essential services. And for "big town" shopping, well, that's only a half-hour drive. And if I want

to escape to an even less-populated area? It's about 10 minutes to the southern county line and the next county down is truly sparse in both towns and people.

However, how much of what I like about living here has to do with what "should" be in a small, rural community, and how much is because it's a good match for my personality? I think it would be more the latter. I like it here, not because it's good for a rural community to be a certain population or to have certain services or be a certain distance from the neighboring town, but because this community offers what I find important for my quality of life: mainly peace and quiet.

I think it's good to have surveys like the Nebraska Rural Poll to help law- and policymakers, as well as small communities, zero in on what is working or not working for rural Nebraska, and it is good to have community leadership to find ways to appeal to people, but I think even the smallest of towns — like St. Helena, Neb., with a population of 95 — are always going to be attractive to certain people, not because they do or don't offer something, but because they are simply a good match for a

segment of the state population that likes, for instance, peace and quiet.

And, I guess, I would encourage small towns to be proud of what they offer, no matter their size.

**Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**  
**1-6:00 p.m.**  
Yankton Summit Activities Center

**Attention Parents...**  
**Here's How It Works:**

- Parents ~ Pick up your ticket at Services Center Federal Credit Union
- 9am-5pm Monday-Friday or 9am-Noon thru December 6th.
- Present ticket on Sunday Dec. 7th at the Summit Activities Center.

**Pool, Slide & Gym Use is Free! 1:00 - 6:00 p.m.**

Snacks for the kids served during breaks. Rules of Summit Activities Center apply: 8 yrs. & younger MUST BE SUPERVISED BY SOMEONE 14 YRS. & OLDER

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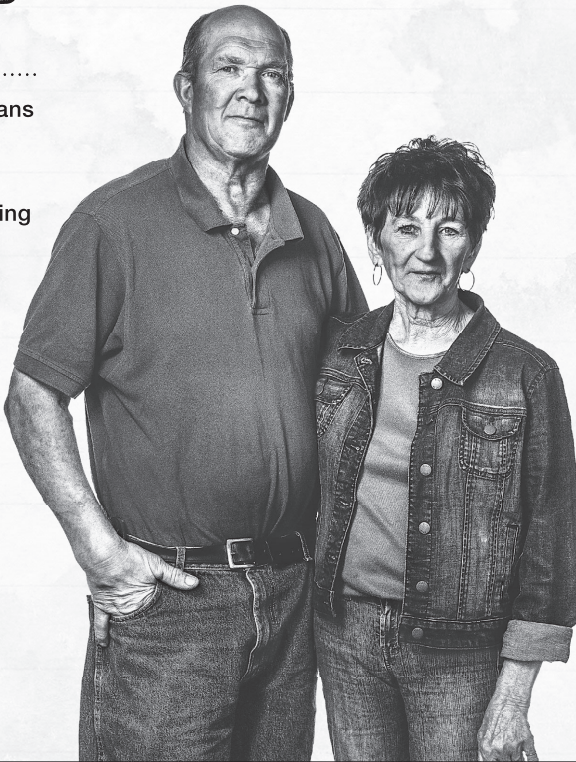
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