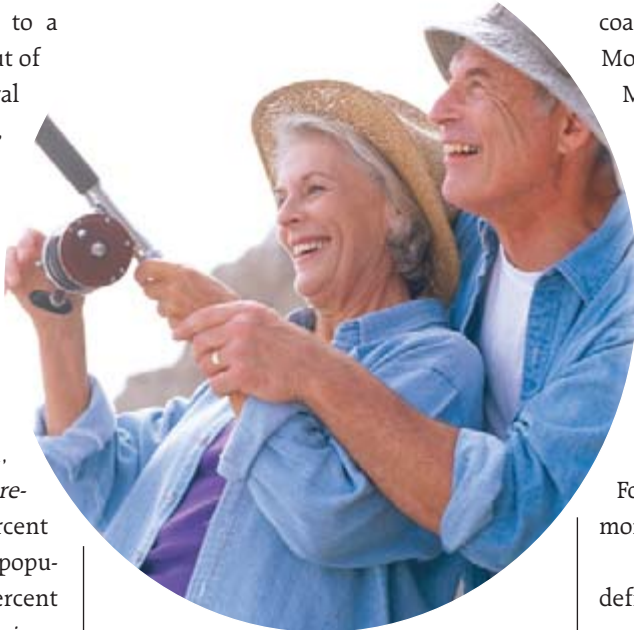


Rural America as a Retirement Destination

Most Americans do not move to a new community when they retire, but of those who do, many settle in a rural area or small town. During the 1990s, a half million more persons who were age 60 or older in 2000 moved into nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) counties than out of them. However, not all nonmetro counties are as attractive to retirees as others.

In cooperation with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ERS has identified 277 *nonmetro retirement destination counties* (13.5 percent of all nonmetro counties) where the population age 60 and older grew by 15 percent or more in the 1990s through net immigration. In contrast, only 36 nonmetro counties qualified as retirement areas during 1950-60, when data were first available.

Today's retirement areas are widely scattered across rural America. Warm winter areas have their appeal, but so, too, do



many counties in the cold winter climate of the Upper Great Lakes, or the uplands of the Ozarks and the southern Blue Ridge Mountains, especially around dam reservoirs. Other destinations are the Texas Hill Country, both the Atlantic and Pacific

coasts, and many parts of the inland Mountain West from Montana to New Mexico. With an estimated net in-movement of 17,900 older people from 1990-2000, Mohave, AZ, had the highest increase of all counties. Sussex, DE, and Citrus and Sumter Counties, FL, also had retiree in-movement of 10,000 or more each. The most rapid relative increases by far took place in Sumter, FL, and Nye, NV, where the population age 60 and older rose by 125 percent through in-movement. Fourteen other counties had increases of more than 50 percent.

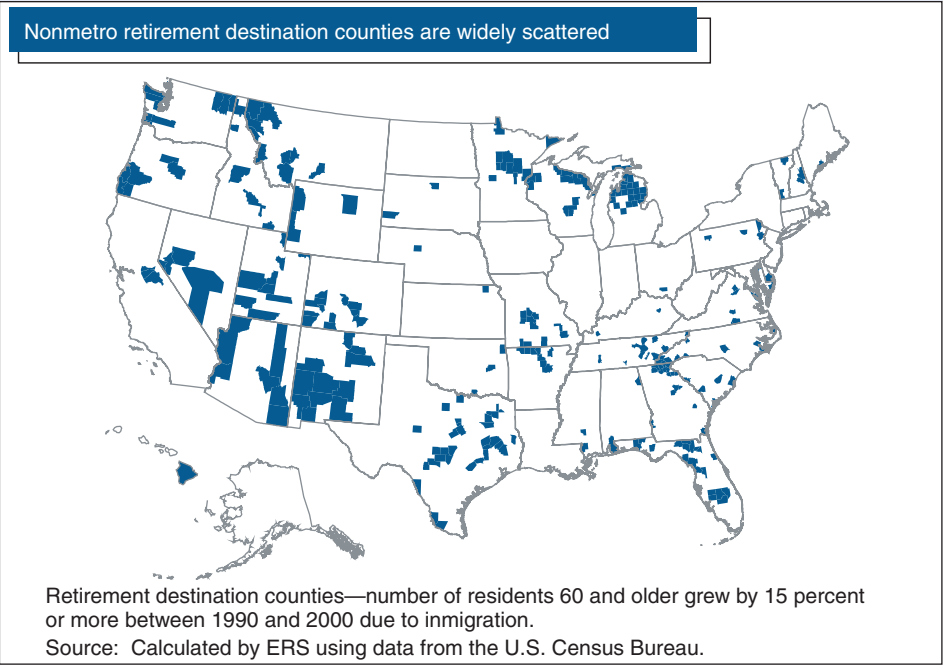
Although retirement counties are defined only by the growth of their older population, they also tend to have high overall population growth. From 2000 to 2003, their total population grew by 4.8 percent, three times as fast as total U.S. nonmetro population growth and faster than any other type of nonmetro county.

The high net movement of older people to 277 nonmetro counties came despite the fact that persons reaching age 60 during the 1990s were the survivors of the low birth rate years of the 1930s. Today, in contrast, members of the much larger birth cohorts of the 1940s are now entering their sixties. Thus, the prospect is for greater retiree movement to rural and small-town locales and an increase in the number of counties that can fairly be termed retirement counties. \forall

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For more information . . .

The County Typology Codes chapter of the ERS Briefing Room on Measuring Rurality: www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/typology/





Most Low Education Counties Are in the Nonmetro South

In today's economy, workforce education is increasingly viewed as a potential catalyst for local economic and community development. Rural America now has twice the share of college graduates as a generation ago. Despite these overall gains, educational attainment varies widely within rural areas.

ERS's recently revised county typology classifies *low education counties* as those where at least one of every four adults age 25-64 has not completed high school. In 2000, ERS identified 622 low education counties in the United States, with 499 (80 percent) in nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas. Nearly 9 of 10 low education counties are located in the South, including a majority of southern counties with historically large shares of Blacks and Hispanics. Similarly, low education counties in the West are concentrated in areas with large ethnic minority populations, such as California's Central Valley and portions of Arizona and New Mexico.

More than half of all nonmetro low education counties are persistently poor or have low rates of employment. In fact, the geographic concentration of rural low education counties is similar to that of persistent poverty and low employment counties, from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta to the Rio Grande Valley. This

geographic association reflects the difficulty that adults without high school diplomas have in finding and retaining jobs that pay enough to place them above the poverty line. It also underscores the difficulties faced by low education counties in attracting good jobs and keeping highly educated residents.

Nearly half of the remaining nonmetro low education counties—neither persistently poor nor low employment—are dependent on manufacturing. Their relative prosperity is due largely to the presence of factory jobs that provide less-educated workers with stable work at family-sustaining wages. The long-term decline in manufacturing, however, may present a significant challenge to the future economic well-being of this group of low education counties.

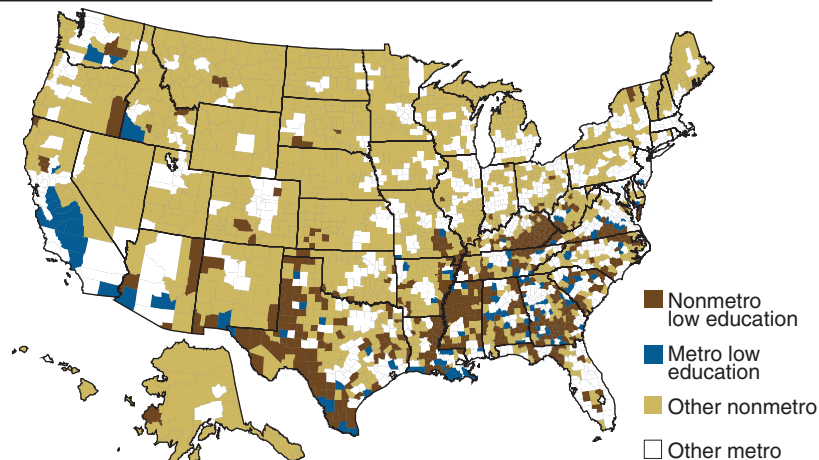
Population and employment in nonmetro low education counties grew more slowly than the nonmetro average during the 1990s due in part to the reliance of these counties on older industries. The South, with a long history of low educational attainment, low-skill economies, and low rates of labor force participation, epitomized this trend. Low education counties in the South had 13.5 percent employment growth in the 1990s, compared with the nonmetro average of 18.0 percent. Yet in the Midwest, the 27 nonmetro low education counties outperformed other counties in both employment and earnings-per-job growth. This more rapid growth was due largely to Hispanic and Asian workers with limited formal education. Such regional differences in the causes and consequences of low education populations suggest that local context is crucial when planning economic development strategies with a human capital focus. ∞

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For more information . . .

The County Typology Codes chapter of the ERS Briefing Room on Measuring Rurality: www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/typology/ and the Rural Education chapter of the ERS Briefing Room on Rural Labor and Education: www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/laborandeducation/ruraleducation/

Low education counties are concentrated in the South and Southwest



Low education counties—25 percent or more of adults 25-64 years old in 2000 had not completed high school.
Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.