Iowa Rural Summit: Growing Better Together

PATRICK WOODIE
Our Time Together

- NC Rural Center – Who we are
- Understanding Rural North Carolina – A rapidly evolving state
- NC Rural Center – Why we do what we do
- Reclaiming the Rural Narrative
- 10 Factors Driving our Rural Future
RURAL CENTER MISSION STATEMENT

The NC Rural Center’s mission is to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. We serve the state’s 80 rural counties, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources.

501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit & somewhat unique among state focused rural economic development centers.

Find us at [www.ncruralcenter.org](http://www.ncruralcenter.org) & [www.threadcap.org](http://www.threadcap.org)
NC Rural Center – Evolution of a statewide nonprofit

• Four distinct periods
  • 1987-1990 – Research & Demonstration; rural economic development think tank
  • 1990-2003 – Gradual transition to Supplemental Funder, particularly water/sewer
  • 2004-2013 – Expansion of Funder Role
  • 2014-2019 – Transition from Funder to Chief Advocate
NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES

- Rural Counties
  80 counties with an average population density of 250 people per square mile or less.

- Regional City and Suburban Counties
  14 counties with an average population density between 250 and 750 people per square mile.

- Urban Counties
  6 counties with an average population density that exceeds 750 people per square mile.

*Densities calculated by the Rural Center based on 2014 U.S. Census population estimates.*
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NC REMAINS A “PERSISTENTLY RURAL STATE”

• 2\textsuperscript{nd} largest rural population in the nation with 4.2 million people

• 2\textsuperscript{nd} largest number of small towns <10,000 in the nation

• Urban centers less dense and more dispersed - 26 of 80 rural counties are within Metropolitan Service Areas (MSAs)

• Rural communities more dense

• 80 (of 100) counties & 415 (of 532) towns
Ties that Don’t Bind as Much

4.3 million - 43% of North Carolina residents were born-out-of-state

A Different Perspective of Rural Metropolitan & Non-Metropolitan Counties

Data Source: Office of Management & Budget, 2013
FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES RURAL COMMUNITIES FACE

• Leadership

• Capacity

• Scale

• The extent to which local leaders can directly address & mitigate these three challenges will be directly related to economic success in rural communities.
WHAT DO WE DO?

LEADERSHIP

LENDING

RESEARCH

ENGAGEMENT
WHAT DO WE DO?

LEADERSHIP

LENDING

RESEARCH

ENGAGEMENT
LOAN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
NC RURAL CENTER
WHAT DO WE DO?
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Rural Counts – Policy Framework

- Reclaiming the rural narrative
- Shifting political power
- Speaking with a united rural voice
- Training advocates – who are they?
- Developing policies that impact rural lives
- Connecting with leadership at local, state, and federal levels
Rural Counts – 10 Strategies for Rural North Carolina’s Future

• Foundational
  • Education
  • Healthcare
  • Broadband
  • Water & Sewer Infrastructure
  • Transportation
  • Natural Gas
Rural Counts Strategies

• Opportunities
  • Entrepreneurship & Small Business
  • Homegrown Manufacturing
  • Agriculture & Natural Resources

• Leadership/Capacity/Scale
  • Regional Collaboration
  • Rural Development Technical Assistance & Capacity Building
Rural Road Trip

1 year
1,600 people
8,457 miles
2019 Priorities

- Expand Accessible, Affordable High-Speed Broadband
- Stabilize & Transform Rural Health
- Invest in Stronger Entrepreneurship & Small Business Development Systems
2019 Additional Priorities

- Workforce Development – educational attainment levels
- Water & Sewer Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Public School Construction
- Housing
Reclaiming the Rural Narrative

- Rural-Urban Divide
- Urban is ascendant and thriving. Rural is poor and declining. Last one out turn out the lights.
- *Hillbilly Elegy* – a memoir, not the defacto expression of what rural is.
- “If we don’t tell our own story, somebody else will, and they’ll get it wrong.”  
  - 19 year old Derek Cummings, Growing Change Participant, 2017 NC Rural Assembly
#RuralDay2019        #RuralCounts        #CelebrateRural

Facebook: ncruralcenter  
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@ruralcounts  
Instagram: @theruralcenter
There's not enough money—it's not profitable enough—to lay fiber and go into all these areas. In the rural areas, the government is not coming to help you. The big companies are not coming to help you. You have to help yourself.

- Susan Myers, co-founder, Eastern Carolina Broadband, Lenoir County
New from the Rural Center: Profiles of Innovative Rural Leadership

Visit www.ncruralcenter.org this week to read Randolph Keaton’s REDI profile and stay tuned as we release more of our REDI alumni success stories over the coming weeks.
The 2019 Drivers of Rural North Carolina’s Future

- Rural life, culture, and economy has always been dynamic
- Technology-induced job loss will accelerate
- Global interconnectivity will increase
- Rural NC will be more diverse, but diversity will not be evenly distributed by geography or age
The 2019 Drivers of Rural North Carolina’s Future

• Rural health is critical now and will be more so in the future
• We are becoming an urban/metropolitan nation & state
• Education is a life-long endeavor
The 2019 Drivers of Rural North Carolina’s Future

- Climate change will bring a harsh reality to much of rural, particularly eastern NC
- The pace of economic change will accelerate
- Geography really does matter
“Let’s do something excellent, because we are capable. Do not let your location determine the quality and reach of your work.”

–Vivian Howard, Chef & the Farmer