

## **An Exploratory Analysis of the Growing Ruralpolitan Population**

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An outmigration from urban centers is occurring in this country as people are moving from to rural locations seeking a lifestyle that is characterized by a desire for more space and “peace & quiet.” This group of rural residents, often referred to as ruralpolitans, “represents a relatively new area of study that researchers are just now examining the needs, wants, behaviors, and attitudes of this population segment” (Doerfert, Carr, Burris, Baker, 2007, p. 3). This study examined sought to describe these ruralpolitan residents with the intention that agricultural marketers will be better able to address their needs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Kim (1983) reported that since the early 1950s, the farm-to-city movement in the United States has grown continuously creating a heavy concentration of population and urban-based industries in most urbanized areas. Kim (1983) also speculated that a portion of this new migration stream is composed of individuals for whom employment is not a particularly compelling force, but who hope to achieve a higher quality of life in a rural area such as environmental and site characteristics or amenities. Rudzitis (1999) found “more people are moving to rural areas for reasons that have nothing to do with employment” (p.9). McGranahan and Sullivan (2005) believed that young adults with children or older adults will not flock to rural areas for higher income. Instead, they seek a higher quality of life which encompasses schools, community life, pleasant landscapes, and opportunities for outdoor recreation, all of which will contribute to the economic vitality of the area.

### **Methodology**

This was an exploratory correlational study designed to describe ruralpolitan residents in West Texas. Three contiguous West Texas counties were chosen with ruralpolitan residents residing on five to 100 acres of land identified as the target population. A researcher-designed questionnaire was mailed to 464 residents selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure that the proportion of the ruralpolitan residents within the three counties were sufficiently represented. A Likert-type scale (1 = not important, 5 = critical) was used with 22 rural amenity statements to determine which were perceived as important to the residents overall quality of life. One hundred fifty-one usable responses were received (32.5% response rate).

### **Results**

An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine which factors or components among 22 amenity statements were regarded by ruralpolitans as important to their overall quality of life. The factor analysis identified four factors from the 22 statements, which helped the researcher identify subgroups within the sample data. The determinant was also selected in this matrix. This option was vital for testing for multicollinearity or singularity. The determinant value in this research was 3.78E-005 (which is 0.0000378), which is greater than necessary value

of 0.00001. Therefore, multicollinearity was not a problem for this data. As a result, there was no need for the researcher to delete any statements. A rotation was performed to improve interpretability and maximize the loading of each variable on one of the extracted factors while minimizing the loading on all other factors (Field, 2002). The following results were determined by the factor analysis and represent the reasonably distinct factors of the lifestyle characteristics collected. The statements represented in the table below signify the dominating aspects ruralpolitans seek as related to the four factors: physical health, mental health, education, and outdoors. The numbers indicate the highest importance, desired by the ruralpolitans, within those stated factors.

*Factor Analysis of Lifestyle Characteristics*

Statement	Physical Health	Mental Health	Education	Outdoors
Rapid response by fire and rescue	.807			
Rapid response by police	.758			
Nearby access to medical services	.703			
Space (I don't feel crowded)		.815		
Slower pace		.797		
School is near to my home			.806	
High quality schools			.771	
Good quality of drinking water				.750
Clean air				.676

Implications

The results of the factor analysis indicate that there are potentially four distinct segments with the ruralpolitian population. While additional research is recommended to confirm these findings, the factors represent unique segment which may also require different education and communication methods to address identified needs effectively.

References

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