

Introduction

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Change is a constant and the one thing that is assured in life. The changes that have impacted rural America in recent decades are profound and include significant economic structure changes and calls for justice by disadvantaged populations. To thrive in a changing world, it is essential that individuals and communities be able to adapt to the inevitable changes around them.

The Western Rural Development Center and our partners seek to provide accurate and timely information to help individuals and communities make informed decisions as they seek to adapt to our rapidly changing world. Each of the articles in this issue of Rural Connections provide extremely helpful information about important changes that have occurred or for which awareness has recently grown. The articles also provide ideas about how to address these changes.

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Paul Hill from Utah State University Extension describes how recent technological changes have created growing opportunities for people to work remotely. He then describes how remote work benefits both families and society. This is especially true in rural communities as it is increasingly less necessary for people to live near where their employment is located. This means that more and more people are in a position to live where they choose since many may choose to live in a rural community.

Jennifer Rogerson Cook and Bradley J. Cook of Snow College discuss growing awareness of problems related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). These problems are especially troubling in rural areas because programs are limited. Recently developed programs and efforts to increase awareness have been advanced to help rural communities provide better services.

The growth in the number and the proportion of elderly people in the U.S. is another dramatic change impacting our communities. Leacey E. Brown and Gene Fennell of South Dakota discuss the housing concerns this change presents to rural communities. A number of studies have found that elderly people do better when they are able to ‘age in place.’ Unfortunately, many homes in rural communities are not conducive to aging in place. Problems associated with rural housing are complicated because many rural communities lack the capacity to remodel homes to make them more conducive for the elderly. Ways to address these housing concerns are discussed.

Another important change is the increasing number of people who identify as LGBTQ+. Many LGBTQ+ youth and adults are struggling with severe mental health problems, and attempted suicide is common. Dani Castillo-Davalos (Oregon), Paul Lachapelle and Deborah Albin (Montana) describe the 2021 *Virtual Rainbows Summit* which provides an opportunity for people to come together and learn.

The Braceros Program operated in the U.S. from 1942 until 1964. These programs consisted of Bracero workers from Mexico coming to the U.S. to work in agriculture. After the work was complete, workers would return to their homes in Mexico. Over the years, thousands of people participated in the program. Policy changes and changes in labor requirements have resulted in significant adjustments in how agriculture labor needs are met. Our nation still struggles with developing a coherent immigration policy and addressing labor issues. An article by Refugio I. Rochin (University of California-Davis), describes the Bracero Program and the consequences for the lives of the persons involved.

All of these articles provide exceptional insights on difficult issues and should be of benefit to colleagues everywhere. I greatly appreciate the exceptional work of Betsy Newman, Rural Connections editor, in bringing this issue of Rural Connections together promoting our efforts to benefit the residents and communities of rural America. ✱