



# Our Shared Fate

***Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide  
Creates New Opportunities  
for Prosperity and Equity***



## Our Shared Fate – 2008 Report

- Summarizes the findings of a gathering of key thinkers about the future of American communities
- Sponsored by the California Endowment
- Published by The Aspen Institute
- Prepared collaboratively by representatives of
  - Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change
  - Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group
  - The California Endowment
  - Humboldt Area Foundation
  - Southern Rural Development Initiative



## Seven Common Issue Areas Where Rural and Urban Agendas Meet

*Our Shared Fate* identified **seven key policy areas** where urban and rural agendas have common cause:

- The persistence of poverty
- Economic restructuring
- Public education
- Health care
- Immigration
- Political voice and civic capacity for poor communities
- Environmental health and "Smart Growth"



## Changing spaces: Throwing out old assumptions about place

- What is "rural" in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America?
- What is "urban?"
- Who lives in urban? ...in rural?
- Prevailing perceptions:  
***50 years out of date***
- Today, at every level:

***Traditional concepts of urban and rural no longer apply***

## The US now has an overwhelmingly metropolitan population

- **53%** of the nation's population lives in a metro county of **over 1 million in population**
- **82.6 %** of the nation's total population lives in a metro county

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## Rural People Aren't Always Where We Think They Are . . .

- Slightly more than half of the nation's "rural" population (as defined by the Census Bureau) lived in a Metropolitan county at the time of the 2000 Census count.
- Here in North Carolina, it is a bit less than that, around 48 percent

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Source: OMB 05-05-05

CALIFORNIA METROPOLITAN, MICROPOLITAN, AND NON-CORE COUNTIES

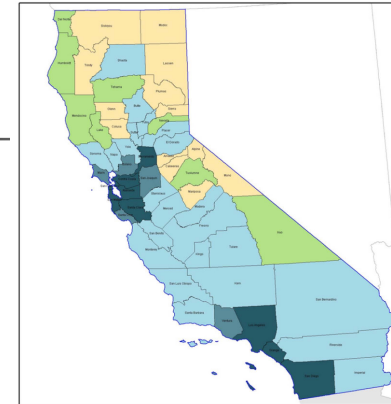


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CALIFORNIA METROPOLITAN, MICROPOLITAN, AND NON-CORE COUNTIES						
Defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)						
Code	Description	Counties	2000 Pop	% of State Pop	% of Class that is Rural	Rural Pop
	Metro	37	33,075,450	97.6	4.3	1,473,137
	Micro	8	519,117	1.5	41.1	213,254
	Non-Core	13	277,081	0.8	68.7	190,362

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CALIFORNIA RURAL-URBAN DENSITY SORTED BY METRO/NON-METRO



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CALIFORNIA RURAL-URBAN DENSITY SORTED BY METRO/NON-METRO						
Dr. Andrew Isserman/OMB						
Metro counties:						
Code	Description	Counties	2000 Pop	% of State Pop	% of Class that is Rural	Rural Pop
	Urban	9	21,961,995	64.8	1.2	269,573
	Mixed Urban	5	2,214,228	6.5	6.7	147,993
	Mixed Rural	23	8,899,227	26.3	11.9	1,055,571
	Rural	0	0	0.0	0.0	0
Non-Metro counties:						
	Mixed Urban	0	0	0.0	0.0	0
	Mixed Rural	8	519,117	1.5	41.1	213,254

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## Regional Convergence

- Non-Metro America's population is close at hand to Metro regions
- 65.6 percent of the nation's non-metro population lives adjacent to a metro county



## Much of rural America is about small towns

- Of the 55 million people in non-metro America, almost **20 million, 36 percent** live in towns with populations between 2,500 and 50,000.
- Yet there remain numerous small towns of under 5,000 that are within or near metro regions



## Urban Neighborhoods/Small Towns

- Both inner city neighborhoods and small town America are deeply engaged in recreating or preserving quality places that can prosper, and be places that one's children would want to live in or return to.
- ***Similar communities – often the same people!***



## A Shifting Landscape: *New drivers yield new results*

- **Economic restructuring**
  - ***Shifting jobs and wealth*** from urban and rural towards suburbs and overseas
- **Immigration and migration**
  - Changing patterns of ***growth, decline and change*** from immigration, migration, regional development, gentrification
- **The Results**
  - ***Economic dislocation***
  - ***Community degradation***
  - ***Economic and political disadvantage compared to suburbs***

## Systematic Interdependence

*We're linked more tightly than ever*

- Rural and urban are inextricably linked
  - **Socially**
  - **Politically**
  - **Economically**
- Linked systems include:
  - **Natural resources, especially water & energy**
  - **Land use and development policy**
  - **Transportation policy**
  - **Education funding**

## Strategic Alliances

*Essential to a better future*

- Urban/rural futures are shaped by state policies
- Concentrated suburban influence often takes precedence in state policy-making
- Working together, rural & urban places can:
  - **Counterbalance suburban influence**
  - **Promote equitable allocation of resources**

## A Regional Response

*Struggle alone or prosper together*

- Many parts of local economies now work at regional scale
- Employment, transportation, development, and resource allocation strategies often work best when addressed regionally

***A rural-urban alliances can add value by addressing issues more effectively than communities can address them alone***

## People, Place, Prosperity

*Shared issues, shared interests*

- **People issues and interests**
  - e.g., education, healthcare, immigration
- **Place issues and interests**
  - e.g., environmental health, natural resource allocation
- **Prosperity issues and interests**
  - e.g., economic revitalization, infrastructure



## ***Shared Interest in "People"***

### ***Public Education***

- Low income urban and rural schools both fail their children at rates that far exceed suburban schools
- This threatens the quality of our future workforce and our economic prosperity
- Everyone – urban, suburban and rural – shares the cost when schools fail their students



## ***Advocating for Shared Interests: Educational Equity at the State Level***

- Public education funding is 94% state and local
  - State legislatures ultimately control the allocation and flow of resources
- Working together can help rural and urban advocates secure needed education resources
- Progress has already been made through such alliances in Arkansas and Nebraska



## ***Shared Interest in "Place"***

### ***Environmental Policy***

- Both urban and rural areas face high demand for land and water
- Urban and suburban development, agriculture and extraction industries strain and threaten everyone's interests
- Urban/rural coalitions can serve the interests of both



## ***Advocating for Shared Interests Strategies on the Environment***

- "Smart Growth" channels and directs growth around cities to preserve the environment and quality of life
- Smart Growth works in rural areas too
  - Preserving shared resources
  - Reducing wasteful consumption of land and water
  - Maintaining environmental quality for those who live there and those who rely on rural resources and amenities



## ***Shared Interest in "Prosperity"***

### ***Globalization and Jobs***

- Economic restructuring & globalization have reduced employment in urban and rural communities alike
- Manufacturing, agriculture, and extraction industries have reduced labor forces and exported jobs



## ***Advocating for Shared Interests Rural-Urban Alliance for Employment***

- Urban and rural areas are hardest hit by globalization
- Employment markets are regional
- Effective strategies require regional cooperation and urban/rural alliances
- Targeting specific issues together, urban and rural places can increase economic opportunity for both



So if urban and rural advocates  
can accomplish more together...

***What are the five most  
critical strategies for  
urban-rural cooperation?***



## ***Strategy 1 Redefine Rural, Urban, and Suburban into Meaningful Regions***

- Census Bureau definitions of urban and rural are inaccurate and deceptive
- County lines are an outdated divider of rural and urban areas
  - ***They leave out millions of "rural" people who live in "urban" areas***
  - ***They accentuate differences not connections***
  - ***They dilute the influence of urban/rural partnerships***
- Today's technologies allow more useful distinctions:
  - Modern data collection and processing capabilities allow more and better definitions of the things that matter most
  - For example, "laborsheds" reflect our common interests – not our divisions

## Strategy 2

### *Develop New Champions and Nontraditional Leadership*

- Over the last two decades, both rural and urban areas have lost civic capacity and political power to the suburbs
- Tomorrow's effective rural and urban leaders will be those who see – and capitalize on – the systemic interconnections among places and issues

## Strategy 3

### *Build on Rural/Urban Partnerships that Work*

- Rural and urban leaders have worked together successfully on issues that affect both
- We must develop, support, learn from, and disseminate lessons from these partnerships
- In addition to important lessons, this will validate these partnerships' power and legitimacy

## Examples:

### *Rural-Urban Partnerships*

- **Water** – New York City partners with rural landowners and communities to preserve water supplies
- **Public Education** – Nebraska rural and urban advocates have joined together to promote greater equity in school funding across the state
- **Immigration** – Leaders in both rural and urban areas have built linkages to address common issues
- **Local Foods** – Rural producers and urban consumers are joining forces to provide healthier food for urban families and better incomes for farmers

## Strategy 4

### *Build a Rural-Urban Advocacy Agenda Around Policy Opportunities*

- Policy opportunities can bring rural and urban advocates together and demonstrate the merits of partnership.
- Examples:
  - Taking on common interests in the Farm Bill
  - Supporting mutually beneficial community development and housing programs
  - Jointly addressing common transportation and infrastructure challenges

## Strategy 5

### *Test and Disseminate the Power of the Rural-Urban Framework*

- Develop deliberate strategies to:
  - Reach out to advocates and practitioners
  - Support their work
  - Distill lessons
- Three types of efforts create momentum:
  - Convening practitioners
  - Convening advocates
  - Prototyping rural-urban collaboration

## *...one final thought*

***Energy and the environment will be defining issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.***

***All solutions to energy and environmental issues revolve around the intersection of urban and rural interests.***

***Urban and rural people must learn to work together or our children and grandchildren will pay an unbearable price .***

## *...questions?*

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