Search for Solutions

The Future of Rural Kansas

Atwood, Sedan & Onaga

Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative Report

Welcome

For more than 100 years, Kansas Farm Bureau has been a champion of rural Kansas and its farm and ranch families. Production agriculture is important to Kansas and its rural communities. Our primary focus at KFB is our members who are tied to land and this industry. But behind every farm, ranch and agricultural business are people and families who need communities that can provide education, health care, churches, shopping and neighbors. KFB has taken on the challenge of rural development out of a deep appreciation for the importance of local communities



to agriculture and its families. At KFB we do not have the answers to rural development, but we have become a partner in Kansas' all- important effort of finding strategies that work.

Steve Baccus, President,
Kansas Farm Bureau

About eight years ago in Hutchinson, Kansas, a young woman approached me and shared her emotional story of the decline of her rural hometown. She shared her deep concern about the loss of access to local schools, health care and even the availability of a gallon of milk. She feared school consolidation and the idea that her kindergarten-age child might spend hours on a school bus each day. As a member of Kansas Farm Bureau, she pleaded with us to do something. It was then that we at KFB began a long and careful search for rural community development solutions. We reached far and wide for strategies that would change the trend lines. This report shares the story of our search for solutions and what we have learned, but our work continues and will never be truly done. Every day, every community in rural Kansas must continue to work to develop a future for itself and its residents. We hope this report honors those who give of their time, energy and talent to develop strong and thriving rural communities.



Harry Watts, Managing Director
of Government Relations,
Kansas Farm Bureau

Special Thanks

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Much of Kansas is rural.

We estimate that there are 353 incorporated rural communities in Kansas in 2010. They are part of America's Great Plains Region. This region was settled relatively late in American history and has been undergoing profound change since the very first communities were established on the prairie.

Back in 2006, Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) began to explore what it could do to stimulate and support rural development. This report summarizes KFB's rural development work. A companion electronic library http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&vie provides more detailed and background information related to this Report.

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Lessons from the Field
Rural Development in Kansas

There is deep experience in rural development in Kansas. There are many respected voices. The following summarizes what our team has learned from our work with the Kansas HomeTown Prosperity and Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiatives. We offer these lessons from the field in the spirit of shared discovery and Kansas' search for rural development solutions.

1 – Local Responsibility.

At the end of the day the primary responsibility for development rests with each community in rural Kansas. The most important factor that determines whether communities thrive or decline is their decision to assume this development responsibility aggressively and over time.

2 – Leadership Development.

If one accepts that primary responsibility of development is local, then the key to success is local leaders with the vision and capability to help their communities find and grow the right strategies to enable development. The work of the Kansas Leadership Center within the Kansas Health Foundation is critical. Development of state, regional and local leadership development resources is foundational to community success.

3 – State Role.

Kansas is active in rural development. Over the years Kansas has been an innovative leader in this field. But Kansas is a partner supporting the initiatives of localities and regions. Kansas should continue to work to be a reliable and supportive development partner with communities.

4 – Community Capacity Building.

Communities like Onaga, Atwood and Sedan must find ways to succeed just as Kansas City, Wichita and Manhattan (with far greater resources and opportunities) must meet this development test. Innovative strategies like HomeTown Prosperity, Main Street Kansas, regional programs and strategic planning resources are offered by KU, KSU and others at work in rural Kansas. These are effective and valuable resources. But investment in foundational community capacity building is limited and inconsistent. It

is strongly recommended that these become a more robust and consistent resource to rural communities in order to help them build the capacity needed to effectively engage in their own development.

5 – Regional Collaboration.

Many rural communities are small and isolated. These two characteristics put rural communities at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to sustainable, effective and efficient rural development. A highly recommended solution to this inherent challenge is to foster stronger regional development organizations. Kansas has such a network, but has often by-passed these organizations, undermining their value. We recommend that Kansas actively work with and through its regional development organizations.

6 – Key Development Strategies.

Most rural Kansas communities have far fewer development options when compared to larger urban communities. Based on our field work we recommend that core development strategies for rural Kansas focus on the following areas:

Entrepreneurs. The most likely way to create greater economic opportunities and development in most rural Kansas communities is to support entrepreneur-focused economic development. Aiding existing rural businesses and supporting new business start- ups can grow more prosperous, diverse and resilient communities.

Finding the financial resources necessary to support "at scale" community economic development is increasingly challenging as main street and government are hard-pressed to cover these investments. At the same time, rural Kansas is experiencing a remarkable intergenerational transfer of wealth. A modest five percent voluntary giveback from this wealth could create endowments across Kansas capable of capitalizing these critical investments both now and in the future.

Branch plant manufacturing and back-office centers as development opportunities for rural communities are declining. There is intense competition for such development and the cost of attraction is reaching record levels. In many cases the benefits of such attraction cannot off-set the actual costs of attraction. Focusing support on growth-oriented local entrepreneurs now represents the prime development opportunity for most rural communities in Kansas. Kansas is fortunate in that it has the resources to grow an entrepreneurial economy through the cutting edge work of NetWork Kansas, the Kansas Small Business Development Centers and USDA Rural Development in Kansas.

People Attraction. Depopulation is a huge development challenge in much of rural Kansas. Reversing chronic and severe population loss is paramount. The second building block to prosperity is rooted in community and centered on people attraction strategies supported at both the state and regional levels.

Youth. Key to realizing success with both entrepreneurship and people attraction is a strong focus on youth engagement, attraction and entrepreneurship. Research suggests that many rural Kansas youth would prefer to return home, but a real or perceived lack of economic opportunities is keeping them away. Youth strategies can be the "keystone" to overall rural development efforts.

Outsourced Workers. More and more Americans are now part of the "outsourced" economy, working as contractors and teleworkers. Research suggests that up to one in four Americans will be working this way in the next two decades. This trend offers huge opportunities for people to choose rural lifestyles while being connected to the national economy. But for this opportunity to be realized, there must be broadband internet access and a state strategy to connect rural residents with outsourced jobs.

7 – Infrastructure for the 21st Century.

The infrastructure needs of the 21st Century economy have changed. For rural Kansas, key infrastructure needs include high-capacity and affordable broadband, mobile phone service, same-day parcel services and core services such as access to local education, health care, and local government and businesses.

Rural Kansas

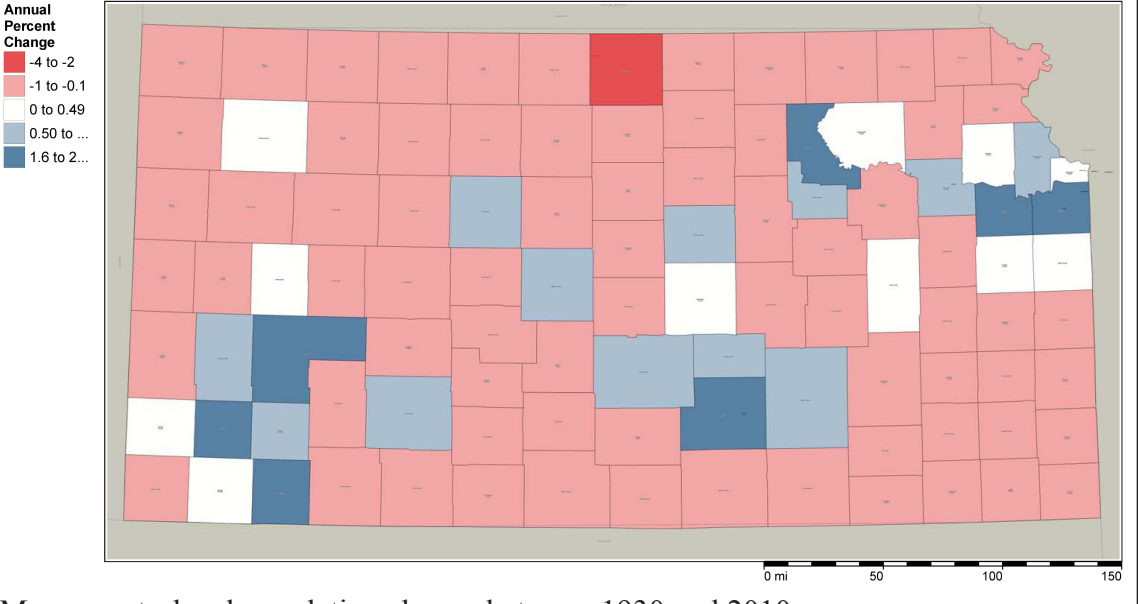


The theme of our Report is Search for Solutions: The Future of Kansas' Rural Communities. This title would suggest that meaningful and even dramatic action is required to ensure the future of rural communities in Kansas.

Our motivation runs deep in our search for solutions to the chronic and severe depopulation occurring in much of rural Kansas. Why should depopulation be a concern? There is little question that Kansas' agricultural lands will be farmed and ranched regardless of the fate of most of our rural communities. The primary focus of Kansas Farm Bureau are thousands of people and families who farm, ranch and provide critical support and services to farms and ranches.

Healthy and vibrant local communities are central to the quality of life of rural Kansans, including farm, ranch and agribusiness families, but perpetual and severe depopulation undermines the viability of local communities. With too few residents, communities can no longer sustain critical services like education, health care and even local grocery stores. Loss of population erodes workforce options and opportunities for economic development and diversification.

Fig. 1



Map: county-level population change between 1930 and 2010.
Source: US Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, The Decennial Censuses of 1930 and 2010.

When young families leave rural communities, school enrollments decline and undermine the future of local education. Eventually many of their parents and grandparents will leave as well to move closer to younger family. With the loss of young people, generations of accumulated wealth leaves and results in lost opportunity for needed community give-back.

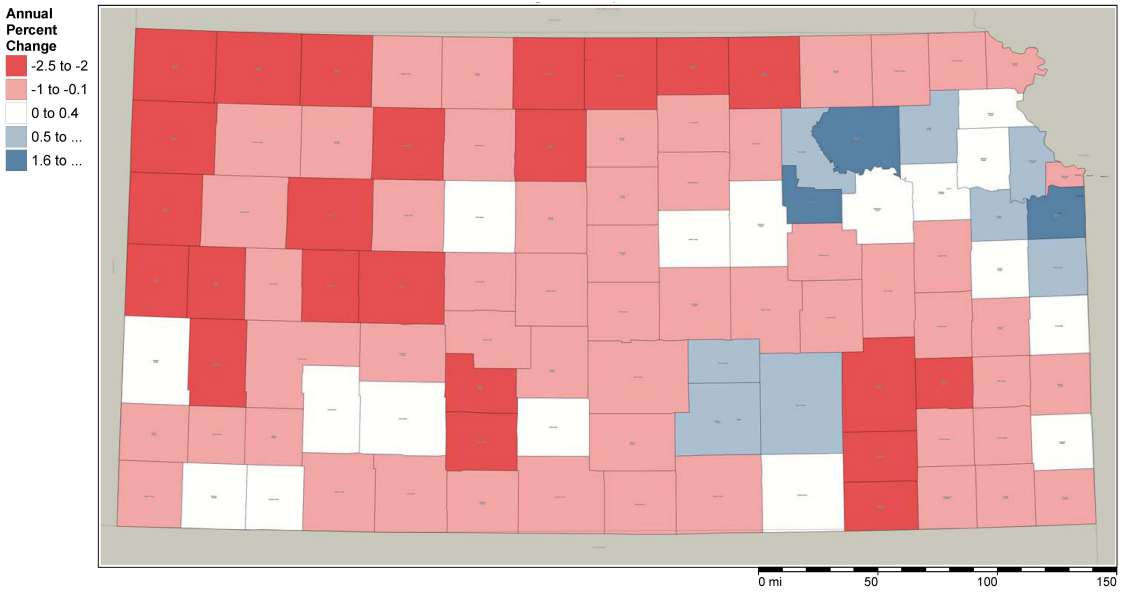
Loss of people also means loss of taxpayers, forcing urban Kansas to sustain important infrastructure like roads, emergency services, water systems and telecommunications.

Finally, when retirees leave, communities lose volunteers, decades of knowledge and connections to past traditions.

If there is any doubt, these three maps provide more than adequate evidence that depopulation is threatening the very future of much of rural Kansas. Between 1930 and 2010 (Fig. 1), vast regions of rural Kansas lost a large number of people. The second map (Fig. 2) highlights population change between 2000 and 2010. The most recent Census findings confirm depopulation is continuing and even deepening in some pockets of rural Kansas. The final map (Fig. 3) projects the future population distribution in Kansas should past trends continue.

We have no illusions that each and every little town in Kansas has a future or should have a future. Landscapes change and so do rationales behind populating an area. Without renewed reasons for existing, many communities will continue to decline, eventually becoming nothing but shadows of their former selves. If depopulation continues and viability of

Fig. 2



Annual county-level population change 2000-2010.
Source: US Census Bureau.

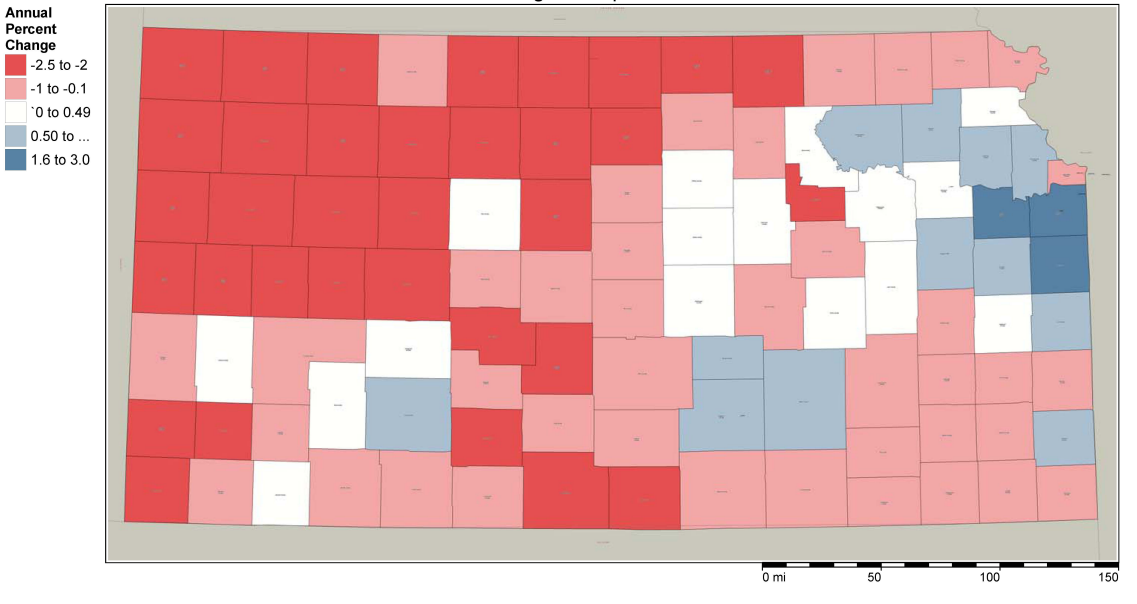
both commerce and the quality of life deteriorates further, the future of rural Kansas will be compromised.

The question, 'How can rural communities with the commitment and drive re-invent themselves in the 21st Century?' is central to our search for solutions. Though the prospects look grim, we now know that reinvigoration is possible thanks to a handful of diligent and thriving rural communities. Because of this evidence, our attention is now focused on gaining insight into the framework and process rural communities can use to undertake this transformation.

As discussed later in this Report, we are convinced that there are two strategies rural Kansas should use to safeguard its future. First, economic development that not only creates jobs but also generates the kinds of careers essential for attracting new residents, and particularly former youth, must be realized. Second, strategies must focus on promoting strategic people attraction. Without addressing depopulation head-on, no amount of economic development will succeed in ensuring prosperous rural communities.

Targeted people attraction coupled with increasing economic opportunities (both jobs and careers) is and can make a real difference in many communities across Kansas.

Fig. 3



Projected annual county-level population change 2010-2030.
Source: Center for Economic Development and Business Research, Wichita State University

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The Voice of Agriculture®

Rural Initiatives Chronology



Pre-2006—Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) has long been active in the development of rural Kansas and rural areas in the United States. But historically KFB's focus has been on policies and programs directly related to production agriculture. Before 2006 KFB was marginally engaged in rural community economic development.

2006 & 2007—Beginning in 2006 and continuing into 2007, KFB began to explore possible roles and missions related to rural community economic development. KFB's search for solutions included a careful review of rural development policies and programs in Kansas and innovative strategies from around the nation. This search for solutions resulted in KFB embracing a development model with origins in Nebraska called HomeTown Competitiveness or HTC. HTC was demonstrating impact in bending rural trend lines and had been endorsed by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative

2008 to Present—In 2008, KFB created and launched the Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative. The Initiative embraced the importance of "community capacity building" as central to strengthening rural communities. Three Kansas communities became early partners (Onaga, Sedan & Chautauqua County and Atwood & Rawlins County) to help test and develop this comprehensive development approach to community building. The Prosperity Initiative was launched in May, 2008 and is now wrapping up as a demonstration project.

Rural Initiatives Chronology

Collaborative Approach Beginning to End—KFB recognized that it had to find its niche and pursue its initiative through collaboration with other rural development interests. So in 2008 and 2009, KFB reached out to other rural development players in Kansas, the Great Plains Region and nationally. This work helped KFB better understand rural development and what strategies were working and why. It also allowed KFB to form deep relationships with key groups that have proved foundational to the Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative.

American Farm Bureau Federation Rural Initiative 2008 to Present—About the time KFB was launching its rural development strategy, the American Farm Bureau Federation prioritized rural community development and established a rural program and office within AFBF.

KFB was an early supporter and continues to partner with AFBF and its national rural agenda.

Kansas Broadband Initiative 2008 to Present—KFB has long recognized the importance of cutting edge telecommunications to the future of both production agriculture and rural communities. A central element within KFB's rural initiative is the Kansas Broadband Initiative. Working with the State of Kansas, Connected Nation and others, KFB advocates accessible and affordable broadband access throughout rural Kansas and rural America

Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative (KECI) June 2010 to Present—As KFB's rural initiative was being defined and developed, America entered its worst economic recession since the Great Depression. The decade of the 1990s were good times in America and Kansas. During this period (1992-2001) more than 39,000 new businesses and more than 366,000 net new jobs were created in Kansas. But the 2000s have proven to be a different story for both the U.S. and Kansas. Between 2001 and 2008 (latest available data) Kansas saw a net decline of nearly 87,000 jobs. *www.youreconomy.org*

Economic losses intensified and continued through 2009 and into 2010 followed by the weak and uncertain recovery now underway.



From Kansas HomeTown Prosperity to KECI—As a result of this game changing event, KFB refined its rural development focus and zeroed in on job creation and specifically entrepreneur-focused economic development. Critical partnerships were formed with NetWork Kansas, the Kansas Small Business Development Centers, USDA Rural Development in Kansas, the Kansas Department of Commerce, and the RURPI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. Out of this collaboration grew the Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative or KECI. This Initiative focuses on two goals. First, it seeks to better articulate all entrepreneurial development resources in Kansas, building on the remarkable work of NetWork Kansas. Second, it introduces a new strategy to help communities and regions grow by supporting area entrepreneurs.

KECI Phase 1—KECI began working with the following partner communities in 2010: Hillsboro, Dickinson County, Scott County, Wichita County, Cheyenne County, Rawlins County and a regional effort anchored by QUAD Enterprise Facilitation in Southeast Kansas. A second group of partner communities is coming on board in Fall, 2011 to expand the reach of this Initiative.

KECI Phase 2—America and Kansas are entering new times with high degrees of uncertainty. The challenges of chronic and severe depopulation continue through much of rural Kansas. Kansas' new Governor and Administration hold a strong interest reversing this trend. KFB cannot predict the future, but based on what we have learned over the years, we believe we have insight into the building blocks and approaches necessary to renew and ensure the future of rural communities throughout Kansas.

The Future—We now believe that the primary answers and effort must come from the "bottom up," or from Kansas' rural communities. With that said, we also believe that state or regional assistance, as demonstrated in the Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative and the Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative, can make a dramatic difference in the ability of rural communities to find the right game plan and succeed.

The United States is unique in the world when it comes to economic development. Unlike most other nations–both developed and developing–economic development in the U.S. is the primary responsibility of localities. Federal and state governments have extensive development programs, but the ultimate responsibility for economic development rests with local communities.

The implications of this reality are huge for rural Kansas and its communities. Tiny Rawlins County less than 3,000 residents must be as effective at economic development as the Kansas City metro area. Despite size, resource and location challenges, rural communities like Atwood, Onaga and Sedan must find ways to ensure their own development future. So how can smaller and more rural communities effectively compete in economic development in the 21st Century?



On the Need for Community Capacity Building in Rural Kansas

When we build a structure of any size, for any purpose, we don't start with roof construction, we build a solid foundation. When we teach our children math, we don't begin with calculus, we introduce basic addition and subtraction. When coaches strive to develop a winning athletic program they don't start with a playbook but instead stress the need for perfecting fundamentals. If our rural development efforts are to be successful, we must first re-build the capacity in our communities of leadership, strategic planning and inclusive decision-making. Minus that "best first step," success will be infrequent and random.

Patty Clark, State Director,
USDA Rural Development, Kansas

Two of the most promising strategies:

Strategy 1 – Regionalism. Rural communities and counties can overcome a lack of size by banding together regionally. In fact, Kansas already has a network of regional development organizations that foster collaborative development. As in much of America, this infrastructure is grossly under-funded and under-supported. Far too often other developmental resources, including federal, state, higher education and foundations, bypass these regional organizations, undermining their value and effectiveness. Embracing regional development is a strategic recommendation of both the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Economic Development Administration for one simple reason: it makes sense.

Strategy 2 – Community Capacity Building (CCB). Like education or leadership development, community capacity building focuses on increasing the ability of local communities to engage more effectively in development. Kansas has assets in this arena including Kansas HomeTown Prosperity. Additionally, there are programs through the State of Kansas, higher education and foundations that are supporting elements of community capacity building, ranging from leadership development to community philanthropy to main street revitalization to community strategic planning.

KFB's focus has been on the community capacity building challenge. In partnership with HomeTown Competitiveness in Nebraska, KFB created Kansas HomeTown Prosperity or KHPI. Through KHPI we sought to achieve several goals:

Goal 1 – Test the CCB Model in Kansas communities. Most importantly we wanted to create a practical framework and process for community CCB in real Kansas rural communities. Partnering with Atwood and Rawlins County, Sedan and Chautauqua County and Onaga we engaged in pilot projects employing the KHPI model.

Goal 2 – Create a CCB Coaching Team. As part of our community work, we created community coaching teams with local talent. These community coaches then became master coaches training others to support community capacity building for more effective economic development.

Goal 3 – Develop Partnerships. Finally, we wanted to explore and build partnerships with other Kansas organizations with the intent of growing stronger resources and capacities to support community capacity building in rural Kansas.

The Kansas HomeTown Prosperity (KHPI) Initiative embraces the need for community capacity building as foundational to sustained community economic development. Core to this strategy is the belief that every community, from metropolitan Wichita to rural Atwood, must take on the responsibility of ensuring its own development. Communities that do not assume this challenge are destined to economic irrelevance and decline over time. KHPI is built upon four pillars of community capacity building. The idea is simple: every community must invest in building these four capacities that enable development, growth and sustainability over the long haul.

Leadership. The research is clear: where you have visionary, hard-working and committed leaders, you typically have a community that has a future. Expanding both the number of leaders and their capacity for leadership is the primary building block of community success. Key attributes of community leadership include vision, inclusiveness, an ability to help the community embrace change and thrive, and the capacity to grow effective development organizations.

Economic Development. The economic rationale for rural communities has changed dramatically over time; from service centers in the early years to large and growing farm populations to a hub for American manufacturing. But



what will the rationale be well into the 21st Century? Those rural communities that have not found the answer to this question are facing economic irrelevance and decline. KHPI communities commit to economic development with a focus on "economic gardening," or supporting area entrepreneurs as core means of growing a new and competitive economy.

Community Philanthropy. The third pillar of community capacity building in the KHPI model is community philanthropy. Traditional sources of community economic development are challenged with declining federal, state and main street support. In KHPI, communities explore how to connect current residents with financial giveback to fund development initiatives. While many rural communities may be challenged, most contain wealth that can be mobilized to create both the short-term and legacy giving necessary to finance expanded development efforts.

Youth. The final, and possibly most important pillar, centers on youth retention. Every community must demographically renew itself. Most rural communities are experiencing chronic and severe depopulation. For decades, a majority of high school graduates left each year and most never returned. This resulted in communities experiencing a demographic form of negative balance of trade. Eventually, these trends can undermine the very viability of a community. Research by Craig Schroeder with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship finds an astonishing one-third to one-half of rural youth would like to return home if they could. Creating pathways for those who want to live the lifestyle of a rural community is a key building block in the KHPI Initiative.

Early Adopters

Nearly a decade ago, Leon Atwell took it on as a personal mission to introduce Nebraska's HTC framework to rural Kansas. He believed Kansas Farm Bureau had a significant stake in the future of rural communities and in 2004 he initiated a dialogue with KFB's Harry Watts. "I believe HTC directly addresses the long-term adaptive challenges that rural communities are facing in a practical way," says Atwell. "The model helps something I care deeply about –rural communities. Being a 4th generation Kansan, I want to see rural Kansas thrive... for my son's sake."

Leon Atwell

Collaboration and assesment work done through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation laid the groundwork for current efforts done through the Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative.

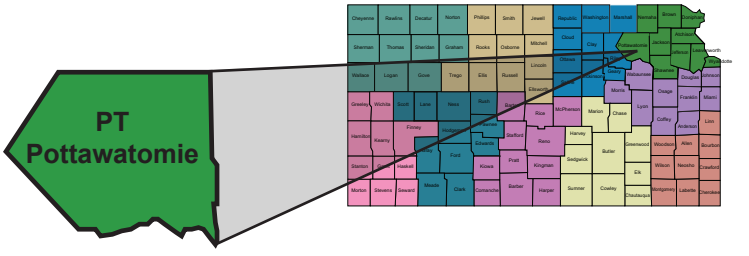
While HomeTown Competitiveness was forming in Nebraska, Leon Atwell was taking a hard look at the HTC development model and comparing it to other development frameworks.

Atwell, based in north central Kansas, attended several HTC events including an academy and field day. He initiated conversations with a number of Nebraska's HTC founders including Don Macke with the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. Through this process Atwell connected with Rick Foster of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Foster and Kellogg were core supporters of HTC work in Nebraska and were interested in expanding it to other states.

Atwell secured planning grants from Foster and the Kellogg Foundation to engage other Kansans in exploring the HTC framework. The Kellogg grant enabled a wider circle of folks in Kansas to explore how to best support community capacity building for economic development. More than 1000 Kansans were introduced to the concept and more than 200 received training based on the framework.

With support from Kellogg and Foster, Atwell initiated the exploration of a stakeholder's collaborative to help advance the framework in the state. The Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative (KHPI) evolved out of this preliminary collaborative dialogue. As KHPI was being developed, Atwell organized the community coaching teams that worked with Atwood, Sedan and Onaga.

Where is Onaga, Kansas?



Bedroom Community in a Growing Region

Onaga can be described as a bedroom community in one of the fastest growing regions in Kansas. Anchored with Kansas City in the east and Fort Riley in the west, a thriving corridor along I-70 has been creating significantly higher levels of economic activity when compared with other regions in Kansas. Nearly 50% of Onaga's residents commute outside of the community for work. Bedroom communities can benefit from available work within commuting distance, but are challenged by typically lower levels of civic engagement.



Community-built playground in Onaga.

Assistance Needed?

Onaga's distinctive record of community building is reflected in main street redevelopment projects, a strong local school system and a clear pattern of community improvements including streetscaping projects, new housing and sewer lines and the new playground pictured on page 24. On the whole, these have largely focused on enhancing quality of life and less on growing the local economy.

Prosperity's Impact

The combined influences of available work being tied to a prosperous regional economy and existing as a bedroom community reduce Onaga's need for more aggressive economic development. Reflecting on the HomeTown Prosperity experience in Onaga, it is clear that there may not have been a driving need for this assistance.

HomeTown Prosperity's Role in Onaga

Of the three original partner communities, HomeTown Prosperity had the most limited impact in the development of Onaga. Possibly the most important KHPI outcome in Onaga is related to the creation of the Granite Hill Fund and community philanthropy. Other pillar areas never really took root or produced results. According to site coach Joyce Webb, Onaga taught us that not every pillar may be right for every community. The KHPI model may work best if a community with limited resources focused on just one or two pillars.

The Staffing Edge Lesson

Resources like Kansas HomeTown Prosperity have the greatest potential impact in those communities that are driven to make fundamental changes in their development efforts. Building community capacity for development takes time and requires both a compelling need for action and committed local leadership. This leadership must have both the ability and dedication to help lead their communities through often painful change. Communities like Onaga, that are largely dependent upon volunteers, are at a distinct disadvantage lacking consistent paid staffing to help keep momentum moving forward and volunteers engaged and productive. This proves the importance of capable staff within the long-term development process.

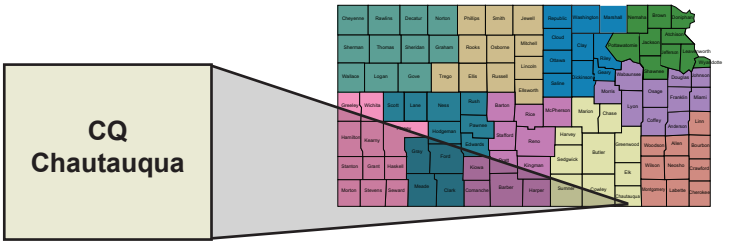
The Challenge of Local Leadership

A key lesson from our work with Onaga is the importance of committed local leadership. The idea for Onaga to be part of KHPI came from outside the community. While initially embraced by strong leaders within the community, the lack of a compelling reason to undergo the work of community development undermined the community's commitment to use the KHPI framework and process to foster community building. We have learned that for any project like this to succeed there must first be deeply committed local leaders who are willing to help their communities move forward. Currently Onaga is doing fine through its role as a bedroom community within the growing I-70 Corridor region.



Native limestone sign that is seen upon entering Onaga.

Where is Sedan, Kansas?



Chautauqua Hills

To understand the role that Kansas HomeTown Prosperity (KHPI) has played in Sedan and Chautauqua County it is important to appreciate a bit of history of this rural place. Running south of Emporia into Oklahoma are the Chautauqua Hills. The geography is better suited for ranching than farming and was more lightly settled than all other parts of eastern Kansas. From the very beginning this area has been less populated, with fewer and smaller towns and below-average economic prosperity.

Chronic Decline, Dealing with Change

The economy of this region remained largely natural resource-based with roots in ranching, farming and some oil production. Economic diversification related to branch plant or local manufacturing was more limited and



Bridge at Butcher Falls, Red Buffalo Ranch, Chautauqua County.

less developed in the Chautauqua Hills Region. Chautauqua County peaked in population in 1920 with about 12,000 residents. Today the County's population is about 3,700, representing a 69% decline. For every birth there are two deaths and the loss of young adults (ages 25 to 34) is very high. Turning the fortunes of this community around, given nearly 100 years of challenges and decline, is daunting.

Real Community Spirit

This Region and particularly Sedan and Chautauqua County have great civic spirit. Over the years, leaders in these communities have applied themselves and engaged in their own search for solutions. In 1988 the community launched a campaign selling engraved bricks to create "The World's Longest Yellow Brick Road" in Sedan. 11,350 bricks were sold as a way to raise community funds and promote the area.

National television personality Bill Kurtis grew up 35 miles east of Sedan in Independence. Kurtis envisioned Sedan as a "tourist mecca" and funded the restoration of 15 historic downtown buildings. He then offered the buildings rent-free for one year to budding local entrepreneurs.

Additional Insights… for Those Willing to Look

There are many other initiatives, programs and efforts to be found in this Region that demonstrate deep commitment and innovative approaches that have been embraced by the community's leaders and residents over the years. But social and economic decline continues to challenge the cultural fabric of this area of Kansas.



Local family enjoys the scenic Red Buffalo Ranch.

More Help is Needed to Change the Trend Lines

There are two clear lessons from our work in Chautauqua County. First, the framework and process provided value in helping this community build capacity. Second, resources like KHPI must be on-going. Chautauqua County has been struggling for more than 100 years; turning the trend lines to positive requires several decades of continued and robust KHPI work. So far the county has employed its framework process and tools actively and effectively. Some of the important early progress includes:

Community Philanthropy

KHPI got residents thinking differently about community philanthropy. It planted the seed that foundations and philanthropic giveback hold the potential for greater and more consistent funding for community betterment.

Renewing QUAD

KHPI is helping renew the QUAD Enterprise Facilitation Program and the Region's commitment to entrepreneur-focused economic development. The total population base of QUAD's original four counties is just under 20,000 people, but since its inception QUAD has served the needs of nearly 600 clients. These clients have created 125 businesses and those business creations have saved or created 359 jobs. QUAD has also helped clients acquire 11 area businesses, as well as aided in the "minor tune ups" of another 71 businesses.

New Regional Business Coaching Strategy

KHPI laid the foundation for the emerging regional business coaching strategy now taking shape in a multi-county region in Southeastern Kansas. This initiative would not have emerged without the earlier work of Kansas HomeTown Prosperity.

Youth Opportunity

The community conducted youth surveys and discovered that 47% of young people saw themselves living in the Sedan area in the future. 44% were interested in a career as entrepreneurs. These findings altered leaders' and residents' view of the continuing loss of young people. A seed was planted that if greater youth engagement and economic opportunities could be created, the youth loss rates could be moderated.

Innovative QUAD Enterprise Facilitation

In 2001, leaders in this Region came together to create the remarkable QUAD Enterprise Facilitation program. This economic development strategy is based on the Ernesto Sirolli Enterprise Facilitation model. QUAD Enterprise Facilitation is one of the most successful and longest running Sirolli programs in the United States.

Lessons Learned for Kansas Rural Policy

Kansas HomeTown Prosperity has not yet altered the course of Sedan, Chautauqua County or the Chautauqua Hills Region, but so far it has created a sense of hope that better times are possible in this struggling landscape. This work also unearthed important insights central to building a more effective rural development policy and program in Kansas. So what did we learn in our work with the people of this community?

Real Commitment

It may be difficult for this community to ensure its own future alone. The magnitude of decline and the size of this challenge may be larger than the local development capacity of this region. There is a need for a large and on-going external commitment to the development of this community. The focus should be regional with strong incentives for local engagement and buy-in. The scale and duration of commitment must be present and comparable to strategies like the Tennessee Valley Authority or the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Real Resources

There must be real resources that are predicable and on-going. Government funding for development (particularly now) is uncertain and often shifting with changes in elected leaders' priorities. But Kansas' government can make a difference by helping capitalize regional community foundations in partnership with regional development organizations to assume the long-term role of partnering with area communities in support of trend-changing development.

Real Staffing

In a region like the Chautauqua Hills in Kansas, so many folks are struggling to make ends meet. The pool of leaders is limited by the size of the population and those able to serve as leaders. This Region has a core group of dedicated and smart leaders, but possibly this leadership pool is too small given the magnitude of the development challenge. Increasing development staffing for both community and economic development is key to any kind of transformational success.

Real Lessons Learned

We believe the Sedan and Chautauqua County story is rich and holds many secrets to our search for solutions. Taking time to dig deeper into this story and the lessons learned can be foundational to both the Region's development efforts and Kansas' desire for more prosperous rural communities.

Leadership Development

Chautauqua County embraced leadership development as very important to the future of its community. Five local residents participated in the Kansas Leadership Center training program and as many as 30 different people are involved in leadership roles at any given time.

Capacity for Change

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Bradford Hotel is one of Sedan's most treasured community buildings. By 2008, the Sedan Area Foundation had managed to restore the first floor lobby to its former glory. Though the community had been trying for years to restore the second and third floors, many obstacles (chief among them a downturned economy) remained in their path.

While the community wanted nothing more than to turn the Bradford Hotel into a real working hotel, Sedan's KHPI mentors saw the building's potential quite differently. KFB's Harry Watts suggested the town apply for economic stimulus dollars and together the KHPI team encouraged the community to turn the hotel into a telecaster. Like a Carnegie Library of the future, the telecaster would feature public, 24/7 internet access, offices for internet start-ups, distance learning classrooms, and telemedicine and teleconferencing capabilities.

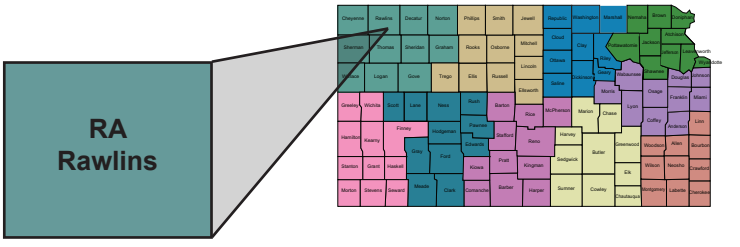
The community rallied around the project and organized the materials to apply for the grant in a very short time. Sedan wasn't awarded the money, but in shifting their focus and trying something new they proved to themselves that they had the capacity for positive change. The Sedan Area Foundation is now considering using the building as senior housing or senior assisted living.

Looking back, Watts sees the Bradford Hotel project as a stepping stone to something much bigger. "It opened up the Sedan Area Foundation to think more broadly about money giving" he said. "In turn, this [with the support of the Legacy Foundation] laid the foundation for the Chautauqua County Legacy Fund." Through its own grants and "stimulus dollars," the CCLF is and will continue to fund economic development projects in Sedan and Chautauqua County for years to come.



The Bradford Hotel

Where is Atwood, Kansas?

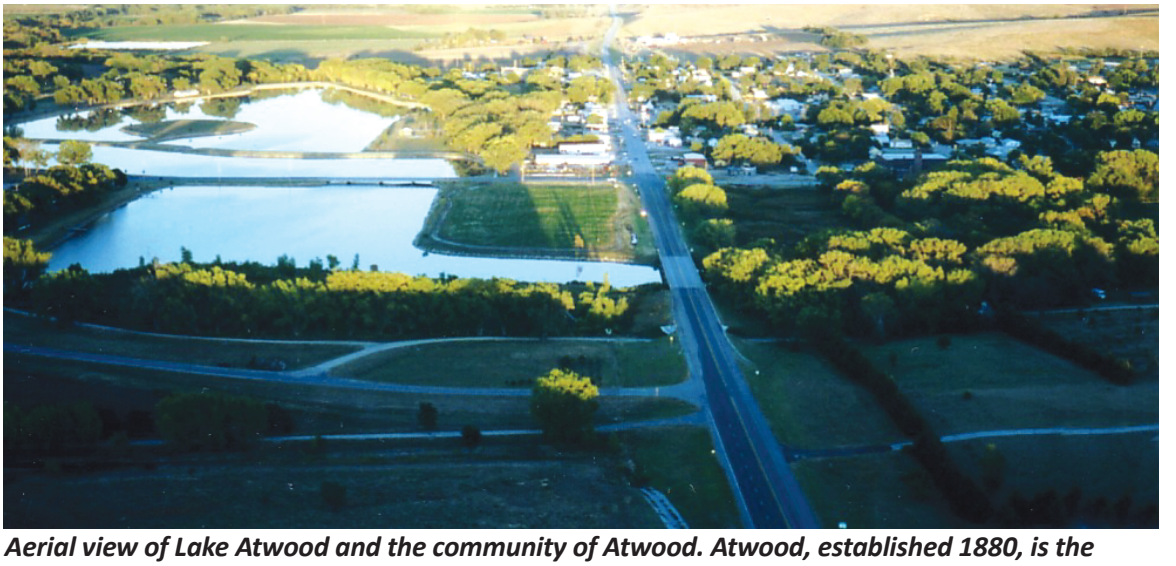


A Can-Do Community

The City of Atwood and Rawlins County is a story of a can-do community demonstrating that it can not only survive in this difficult region, but also thrive. Like others in rural Kansas, this community has been on a quest for solutions leading to renewed prosperity. This search illustrates the dedication of leaders and their hard work to ensure the future of the community they love to call home.

'Hometown' has a special meaning in Rawlins County as it does elsewhere, but it also serves as motivation to seek strategies and make development happen.

Measuring the impacts of any economic development strategy is hard. Determining actual cause and effect is always a challenge. There are so many factors that can enable or undermine development efforts. So the following analysis must be viewed with this caution in mind. With that said, we are convinced there is "cause and effect" going on in Rawlins County with respect to its development efforts. The following analysis and illustrations tell a powerful story of Rawlins County and its efforts to change the trend lines for the better.



Aerial view of Lake Atwood and the community of Atwood. Atwood, established 1880, is the County seat of Rawlins County, with the population of approximately 1,200. Atwood is nestled in the historic and picturesque Beaver Creek Valley at the intersection of KS Highway 25 and US Highway 36.

Bending the Trend Lines

Rawlins County does not want to be held up as a shining star to which other Great Plains communities should compare themselves. However, this community is special in that it has persevered in its search for development solutions. It has evolved a game plan that is already proving it is capable of bending the historically downward-sloping trend lines towards the positive. Just a handful of communities like this exist in the Great Plains. As Rawlins County continues to ensure its future, we would do well to learn from its mistakes and successes as we continue to seek prosperity in the 21st Century.

A Community to Learn From

A hallmark of Rawlins County's success is rooted in its never-ending development efforts. Our study of this community only goes back so far, but 1992 is perhaps an important date in the life of this community.

In 1992, the community began a strategic planning process with help from Kansas State University. Through a new group called the Atwood Economic Development Committee, strategic planning updates were completed in 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2002. According to the Heartland Center for Leadership Development and its widely recognized Clues to Community Survival, communities that strategically plan and envision their future fare better in the long run. Rawlins County has been involved in strategic planning for a long time, which undoubtedly had an impact on its efforts with KHPI.

Quality of Life and Economic Development

A key insight that has become culture in Rawlins County is the connection between quality of life (community development) and expanding economic opportunities (economic development). It is clear that this community has aggressively invested in both community and economic development.

Community Visioning and Strategic Planning

One of Rawlins County's keys to success is its willingness and even enthusiasm to look to other communities for ideas. In Nebraska, a new and innovative development approach called HomeTown Competitiveness or HTC was taking shape in 2003 to 2005. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and others, HTC was proving its potential in communities like Ord and Valley County, Nebraska. Dawn Hampton, Rhonda Argabright and Cathy Domsch of northwest Kansas attended the first Ord HTC Field Day. What they learned from Ord and other HTC communities inspired them and gave them hope. They went back home bringing renewed energy into the on-going swimming pool project and started the ACE Foundation.

Actively Learning from Other Communities

In the summer of 2005, Rawlins County leaders organized to deploy the lessons they had learned from their HTC experiences. They endorsed the hiring of returning native Chris Sramek as the county's newest economic development director. The community then joined up with a new initiative called Ogallala Commons. This included communities from west Texas to Wyoming; it proved to be a rich learning ground focused on an HTC-like system of sustainable development.

Commitment to Development, Investment & Staffing

Rawlins County embraced the importance of local leadership, sound and well-funded development organizations, community philanthropy, youth engagement, attraction and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship as the primary economic development strategy and the important connection between creating local economic opportunities and the critical need for people attraction.

Rawlins County made mistakes, momentum was lost at times and there were conflicts and heartbreak. Sometimes there were feelings that despite their efforts they would never make a real difference. Drought and national economic recessions compounded already challenging conditions, but through all this, the community continued to search, explore and act.

It Begins With Youth

In a survey conducted in Fall 2008, 52% of teens reported that they could picture themselves living in the Atwood area in the future. This shocked adults in the community. It meant that their children were not gone for good when they graduated from high school. If only they

Linked Recruitment

In Rawlins County, when a position opens up or a business needs transitioning, the business doesn't just place an ad in the newspaper, it calls the Chamber of Commerce or the Economic Development office. These groups stay in close contact with alumni and others who, if presented the opportunity, would like to return home.

The trick is "know your youth when they graduate, stay in touch through college and then follow their careers," says Rawlins County Economic Development board member John Buck.

Atwood does this through alumni banquets, letters, an e-mail database, Facebook and the Rawlins County website.

However, all this would hardly be effective if young people didn't see Atwood as an attractive place to live. Thus it all starts with community investment. Young people hear that Rawlins County is a good place to go back to—and they do.

could make Rawlins County a viable option both for having a career and raising a family their youth could be enticed to return.

Rawlins County's first entrepreneurship fair, or e-fair, grew out of work with Ogallala Commons. 40% of the youth entrepreneurship fair participants are back in the area, and several have started their own businesses. Each year groups from as far as two hours away participate in the e-fair and only once has the winner been a resident of Atwood. However, five sustained local northwest Kansas businesses have sprung out of these e-ship fairs. 2011 marked the 6th annual fair and it has come to be a regional event.

High school leadership organizations provide a ready-made avenue for teaching youth about professional development and entrepreneurship success. In Rawlins County, the local FFA chapter plays this vital role. "When I was in FFA (20 years ago) there were 9 guys and 0 girls," said Economic Development Director and Atwood native Chris Sramek. "Today, I think half our school participates in FFA." These youth have already made their own contribution to Atwood's development. They designed, fundraised and built a frisbee golf course around Lake Atwood, mentored by Sarah Goss. The course opened for play in Spring, 2011.



Sierra Lowry, the 1st Place–$1,000 winner of the 4th Youth E-ship Fair with her Rejuvenation Station Beauty Salon business plan. Sierra graduated from Rawlins County High School in 2009 and currently owns and operates the Rejuvenation Station on Main Street in Atwood, KS.

Community Philanthropy

Funding community development projects can sometimes be the most bewildering part of the process. However, sustained funding is the only way to ensure sustained development.

According to a study by Wichita State University, in 2004 Rawlins County households had a net worth of $534 million. WSU estimated that between 2004-2020, approximately $63 million in accumulated wealth would be available for transfer to the next generation. Rawlins County's HTC steering team has set a goal to capture 20% of this wealth transfer by 2020, which would mean $12.6 million for local community foundations. If these foundations' endowments had a payout of only 5% at this level, the community would receive $630,000 each year for community betterment and economic development.

One reason so many rural communities are challenged and struggling is because they have a tradition of grossly underfunding their own development efforts. Rawlins County seems to have recognized the benefits of community giveback. With two endowment funds and a family trust in existence by the late 1990s, current community philanthropy efforts have focused on promoting synergy between these groups as well as encouraging patterns of necessary giveback among patrons.

Atwood's oldest endowment, Second Century, began in the early 1980s with a

focus on traditional development avenues such as community attractiveness and board-designated development efforts. The ACE Foundation was established on the premise of donor-restricted, project-based funds. Its first and most important project was securing the assets needed to build the Atwood swimming pool.

Since 1987, the Obert Family Trust has given $3.5 million dollars to many community organizations, every church, each park and the Jayhawk Theatre. $350,000 has been given in college scholarships and loans to graduates of Atwood and Rawlins County High School.

Rawlins County's philanthropic organizations work particularly well because of a habit of matching funds with community organizations to complete funding on projects. The Atwood Lions, Atwood Ambassador, Atwood Rotary, Masons and the Rawlins County Sportsman Association raise approximated $100,000 annually that many times is matched with monies from the foundations. Current asset levels in the two local foundations and the Obert Trust are $5-6 million.

Leveraging Outside Resources

Rawlins County and Atwood have embraced a diverse range of community development strategies in the same way they have engaged in learning through networking with other communities. They have partnered with programs through the Kansas Department of Commerce, the Kansas Health Foundation (both leadership & philanthropy), NetWork Kansas, Kansas State University and Cooperative Extension, HTC, Ogallala Commons and the list goes on.

HomeTown Prosperity & Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative

Rawlins County was among the first three Kansas HomeTown Prosperity communities. Rawlins County was already a leader in using the HTC framework and process. But engaging in KHPI was an opportunity to renew and energize efforts. When the Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative (KECI) came along, Rawlins County was more than ready to jump on board. This community was already a Network Kansas E-Community and was committed to growing its economy by growing area entrepreneurs. Rawlins County was a partner in an innovative project funded by USDA Rural Development in Kansas along with Chase County in Nebraska. This project began to explore how to employ business coaching and advanced strategies related to youth engagement, attraction and entrepreneurship.

The Value of 'HomeTown'

Rooted in this value is a hope that a community can be established that will be attractive to at least some of the children and grandchildren of current residents. This is a community that is capable of meeting the core needs of its residents, including allowing elders to remain because of sound health care and other necessary services.

A Pattern of Aggressive Quality of Life Investments

Rawlins County is not Denver, Wichita or even Hays, but it is a place with a unique small town quality of life that makes it an attractive place to live. The following is a partial chronology of community developments projects undertaken by the community:

Date	Project/Investment
1997	Pool project begins.
1999	Begin renovations of city water tanks and transmission lines.
2003	Atwood Beautification Committee forms, begins adding new lampposts, benches, planters, trash receptacles and trees.
2003	Rawlins County Heath Center receives a stimulus Community Development Block Grant of $400,000 which contributes greatly to the construction of the front entrance and admission areas of the facility. A $7 million loan from USDA provides funding for the overall facility expansion and renovation. Project to be completed late 2011.
2008	The "Garden Project," a community beautification/lifeskills teaching project, begun.
2008	Lake Atwood lake bed resealed, lake refilled. KS Dept of Parks and Wildlife stocks it with fish in 2009.
2009	Dental clinic brought to Atwood after three years of effort.
2010	Construction begins on a new music room addition at Rawlins County High School
2010	Movie theater renovated, digital projector/ 3D system
2010	"Atwood Boulevard" miscellaneous downtown beautification projects.
2010	Disc golf course built around Lake Atwood spearheaded by Atwood FFA.
2010	Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site committee reorganized and began renovations of trees, shrubs and nature trails.
2011	Pool project completed at a cost of $1.3 million dollars.

How Sound is the Future of Rawlins County?

It is still too early to be definitive, but indications are real and strong that Rawlins County is succeeding in bending its trend lines towards the positive. It is on the doorstep of joining a select group of rural communities in the Great Plains that can make this claim. So let's review the emerging evidence of positive systemic change in Rawlins County.

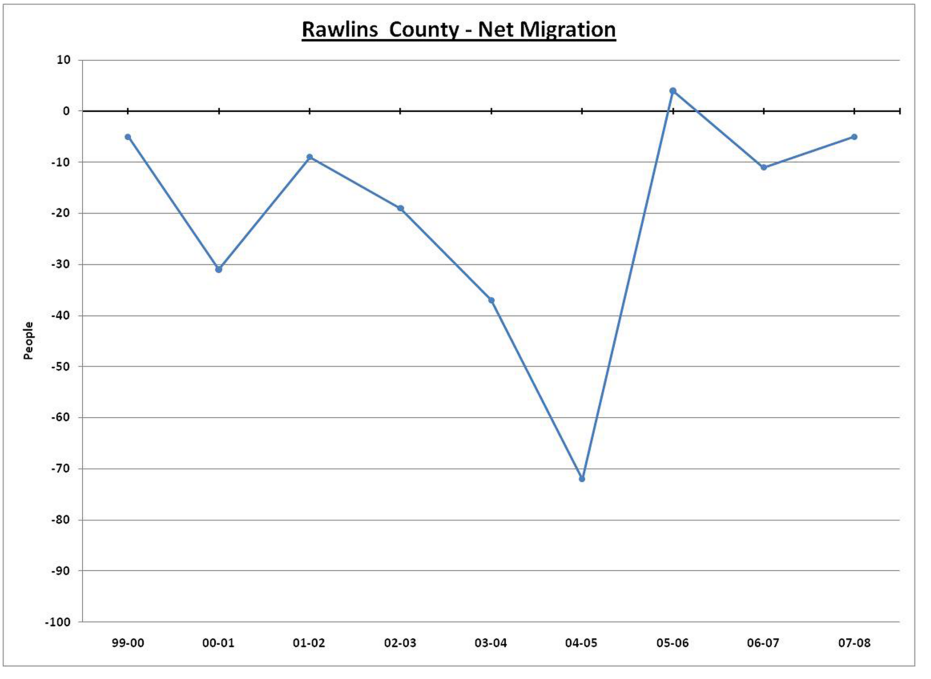


Figure 1 – Rawlins County, Kansas Net Migration
Source: Internal Revenue Service, Statistics of Income, Migration Data

Trends in Growing a More Prosperous Economy

For a rural community like Rawlins County, key components of its economy are "non-farm proprietorships." These are typically locally owned, smaller businesses with a family owner and a few employees. These kinds of businesses make up the mainstay of rural economies in the Great Plains. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis has been tracking these businesses since 1969 and so we can get a "long" view of what has been happening to this segment of Rawlins County's economy.

The Non-Farm Proprietorships chart (Fig. 2) for Rawlins County tracks two trend lines: changing personal income realized by these businesses and the job creation associated with them. We tend to focus more on the income trend line because it is measuring real changes in personal income (adjusted for inflation). The jobs trend line gives us a less accurate picture of what is going on as it measures jobs not workers. The trend in multiple job holding tends to make this trend line look more positive than it really is.

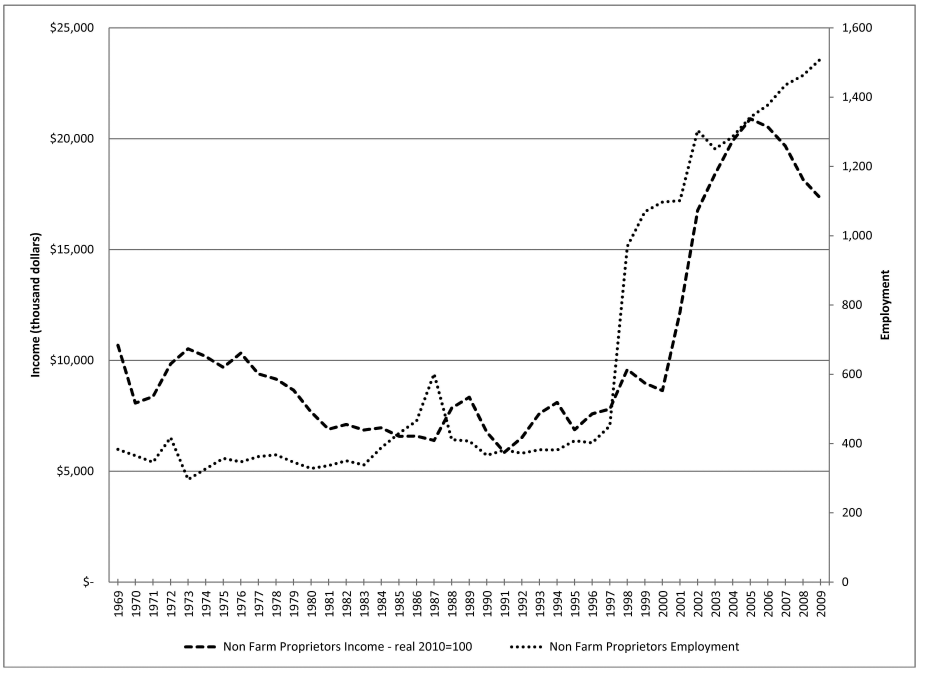


Figure 2 – Rawlins County, Kansas Non Farm Proprietors' Income & Employment
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts

Rawlins County has a very unique set of trend lines. Between 1969 and the early 1990s, personal income generated by these businesses declined from around $11 million to around $6 million. During the 1990s, personal income increased moderately rising from about $6 to $9 million or by one-third – real progress in growing a more prosperous economy.

But beginning in 2000 and continuing until the Great Recession began taking its toll, personal income generated by these businesses in Rawlins County took off, rising to about $21 million or by 133%. This is remarkable and there are only a few counties in the Great Plains with this kind of growth. So this pattern is very unique and sets Rawlins County apart.

Incomes have moderated in the last four years but are still at record high levels. Part of this remarkable improvement is related to lessening drought, better commodity prices and increased farm related spending. But these changes have occurred in counties like Rawlins all across the Great Plains and we have not seen this level of improvement in these other places. So what accounts for these changes? We believe it is the combined development strategies of people attraction and entrepreneurship. Young adults returning to the community are creating an increase in business activity. Conversely, improving entrepreneurial ventures are creating more job opportunities for those wanting to come to Rawlins County. This cycle of development progress is resulting in improved economic opportunity and growth.

Restoring Positive Population Growth

There is no question that Rawlins County and Atwood have earned an "A" for effort and commitment. But the question remains, has all this work made a real difference in the future of this community anchored in the hard environment and economy of the Great Plains?

The second piece of compelling evidence that Rawlins County and its development efforts are generating real change is migration patterns. Looking at the decade of the 2000s, Rawlins County has a typical pattern for Great Plains places –for every new birth there are two deaths and net migration is negative. Declining natural growth and loss of residents to out-migration creates chronic and severe depopulation. This has been the pattern for decades. But something began to change in this decade. Employing very reliable migration data from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service beginning in 2004, we see net-migration beginning to improve. Simply put, more people were moving into the County than leaving.

The most recent and official Census figures are now available for Rawlins County and they confirm the trends indicated by the IRS data. The rate of population decline moderated in 2008-2009 and then turned positive between 2009 and 2010 (Fig. 3). For the first time since the 1930s Census, Rawlins County grew in population. While the rate of improvement is small at just 94 net gain in residents, this data confirm what the migration information was suggesting – Rawlins County was making real progress in stabilizing its

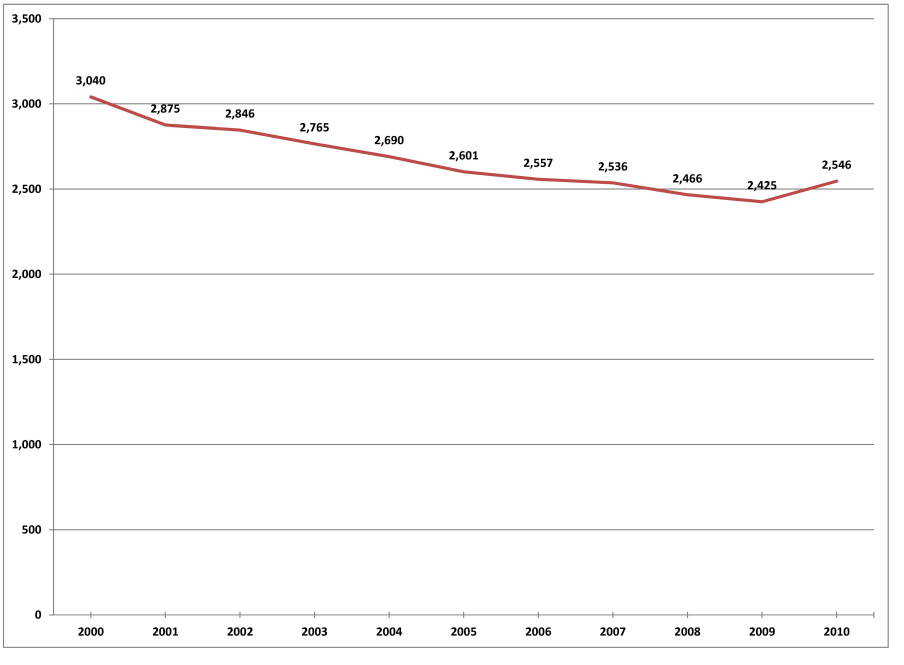


Figure 3 – Rawlins County, Kansas Contemporary Population
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 Population Estimates, Census 2010 and Census 2000

depopulation. From a development standpoint this is huge and very few places in the Great Plains can make this claim. The next chart (Fig. 4) illustrates the longer-term trend line in Rawlins County's population illustrating a slowdown in population decline beginning in the 2000s and tipping positive in 2010.

The challenge of winning the demographic war is huge in rural America and particularly the region in which much of rural Kansas is found. But the story becomes even more interesting and encouraging when we consider what it means for the demographic structure of Rawlins County.

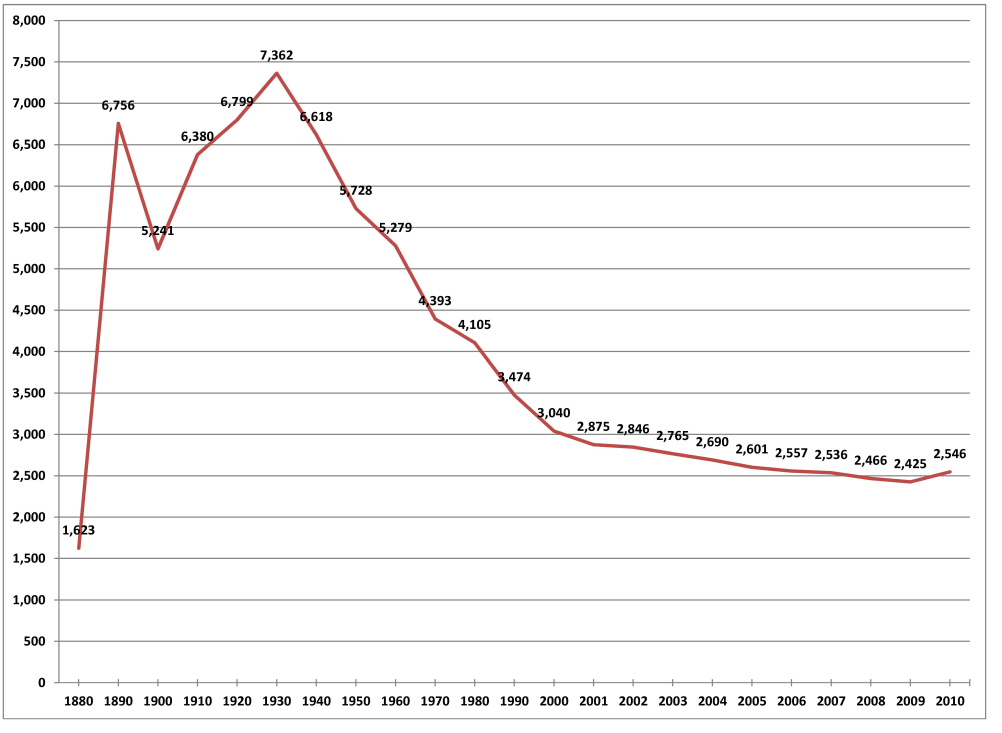


Figure 4–Rawlins County, Kansas Historical Population
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 Population Estimates and Decennial Census of 1880 through 2010

Fighting for Local Schools

The next chart (Fig. 5) tracks school enrollment for USD 105, which serves Rawlins County. Between 2000-2001 and 2007-2008, school year enrollment plunged, dropping by about 34 percent. But beginning with the 2007-2008 school year, enrollment has stabilized and picked up a bit. This trend line indicates that more younger families with children are taking root in Rawlins County. The IRS migration data also supports this conclusion. Higher rates of young family attraction and retention are foundational to slowing and reversing historic depopulation and economic decline.

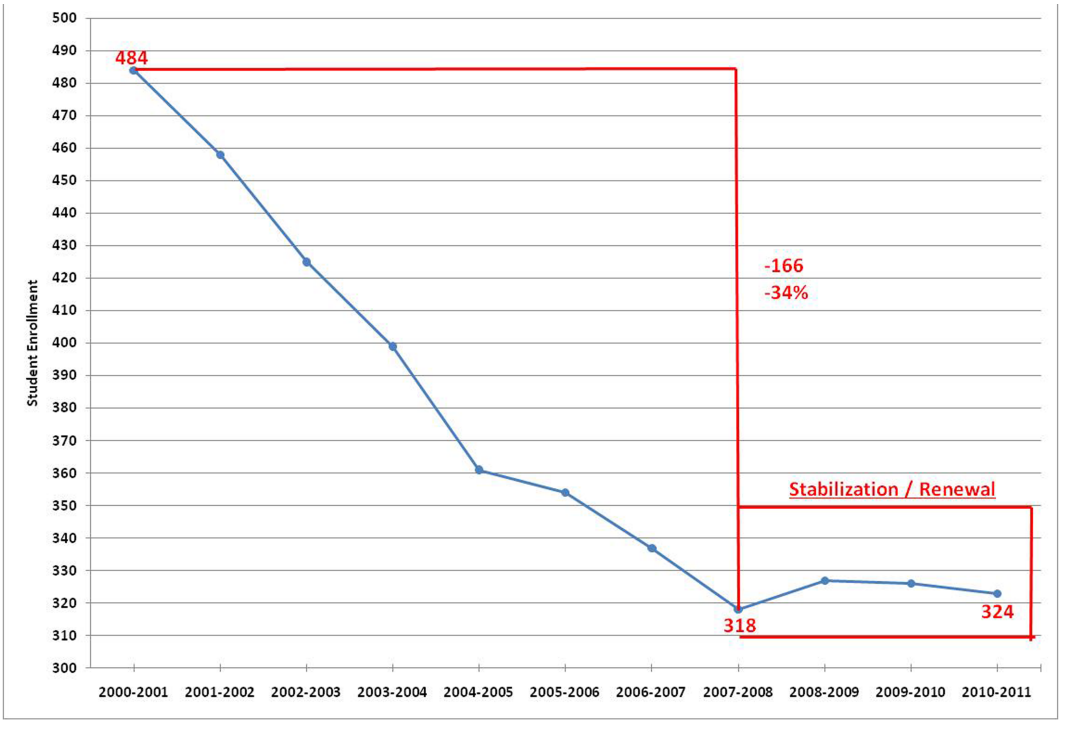


Figure 5–Rawlins County, Kansas USD 105 School Enrollment
Source: Kansas Department of Education & Kansas USD 105, 2010

The Path To Prosperity Remains Steep

Not all is rosy. There are indicators suggesting Rawlins County still has significant development challenges to meet in order to ensure its future. But in today's global economy no community can sit back and assume its future will the prosperous. Even the largest communities with significant capacity and resources must aggressively explore and support their on-going development. The key for Rawlins County is that it continues to work hard, work smart and invest in its future through development. Continued commitment will enable Rawlins County to deepen its progress and continue to bend its trend lines towards the positive.

Women Take the Lead

"Female leadership in this whole process has doubled the past 10 years," said KHPI Site Coordinator Chris Sramek. "Take Atwood FFA for example. Twenty years ago it was completely male dominated. Now it's 50/50 if not more females." Atwood is full of strong female leadership including the former mayor, city council members, the economic development director and the director of the chamber of commerce. Richard Wood's book, "Survival of Rural America," suggests there is a common scene in small rural towns like Atwood: children walking home from school. A sense of safety, security, and community are one of small-town rural America's strongest assets. Sramek says, "Places like Atwood are ideal communities for women, and particularly single mothers, due to low housing costs, good schools, safety and security, and a close sense of community." Women want a safe place to raise their families, and will go to great lengths to find a job for themselves or a spouse or even start their own business to make it happen. Sramek is of the opinion that the "can-do" attitude and people attraction development really kicked into high gear with mothers who just wanted to have a place to take their babies to swim. He said, "I think it's safe to say that because of the swimming pool project, a larger number and more diverse group of people became committed to investing time and money into community betterment."

History of Entrepreneurship as Community and Economic Development Strategy

Innovator in the 1980s

Kansas has a long history of pro-active and innovative economic development. In the 1980's, Kansas was a national leader in building a whole new generation of development initiatives and public/private development organizations . Within Kansas there is a strong group of policy leaders who are very knowledgeable about cutting-edge economic development.

Early Steps Towards Entrepreneurship

Most states have business development programs primarily centered around partnering with the U.S. Small Business Administration and its Small Business Development Centers program. However, Kansas was among the early adopter states to explore state-supported entrepreneur-focused economic development. Innovation in this arena came from two sources covered in the next two paragraphs.

Sirolli's Enterprise Facilitation

The Department of Commerce became interested in a new initiative advocated by Ernesto Sirolli called Enterprise Facilitation (EF). In 2000, the Department of Commerce created one of the first state-wide demonstration programs centered on EF. These regional EF programs continue today and are among the strongest and longest-lived EF initiatives in the United States. However, the EF programs are challenged by under-funding and funding instability. QUAD Enterprise Facilitation is among the oldest programs in Kansas created in the fall of 2001, with Jack Newcomb hired in June of 2002.

Kansas Small Business Development

Under the leadership of Wally Kearns, the Kansas Small Business Development Centers (KSBDC) emerged as the second entrepreneurship innovation. Kearns and the KSBDC began to push the limit on more strategic small business development and expanded access to services. Today, the KSBDC is among the most effective small business systems in the nation. Two particularly important KSBDC initiatives include the introduction of rural outreach centers (increasing access to services) and a focus on growth-oriented entrepreneurs.

Kansas Economic Growth Act & NetWork Kansas

2004 marked a critical turning point with the passage of the Kansas Economic Growth Act (KEGA). KEGA enabled two very important new development initiatives focused on entrepreneurship and promotion of the biosciences as growth areas in Kansas. KEGA created the Kansas Center for Entrepreneurship (2005) which in turn grew into NetWork Kansas in 2006. Within NetWork Kansas the Kansas Community Entrepreneurship Fund was created along with the NetWork Kansas Entrepreneurship Tax Credit Program and the start of "e- communities" later in 2006.

NetWork Kansas is a National Best Practice

NetWork Kansas is proving to be the best practice nationally in entrepreneur-focused economic development. Its management and leadership are entrepreneurial and have created highly effective and efficient programming. NetWork Kansas is helping grow Kansas by helping communities grow local entrepreneurs. The KSBDCs and NetWork Kansas represent strong infrastructure for entrepreneur-focused economic development.

Kansas Home-Town Prosperity to Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative

Lessons from the Kansas HomeTown Prosperity Initiative and the darkening clouds of the Great Recession provided the origins for a new initiative known as the Kansas Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative (KECI). As the HomeTown Initiative wound down, KECI came to life through a remarkable partnership of the Kansas Farm Bureau, NetWork Kansas, KSBDC, USDA Rural Development Kansas, and the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. KECI is focused on growing Kansas out of its Great Recession and into better economic times by more effectively supporting rural Kansas entrepreneurs.

Focused on Growth Entrepreneurs

This Initiative particularly focuses on "growth oriented entrepreneurs" with the motivation and potential for reaching outside markets and creating base economic development including new private investment, job creation and tax base expansion.

Promising Best Practice

Within KECI there are two operating goals;

- First, KECI is seeking to better connect communities with NetWork Kansas and the Outreach Centers of the KSBDC.
- Second, this Initiative is helping communities and regions better organize themselves to identify, target, do outreach and engage with area entrepreneurial talent in rural areas.
- Bottom line, KECI is demonstrating a more complete system of support, connecting even the most isolated rural entrepreneur with the full range of development assistance in Kansas. As illustrated in the QUAD Region and Rawlins County stories, this approach to entrepreneur-focused economic development holds the potential to alter the trend lines in even the most challenged of communities.

KECI Collaborative Partners

Kansas Farm Bureau is the state's largest agriculture/rural advocacy organization. With a volunteer farmer/rancher leadership structure in each of the state's 105 counties, KFB's membership comprises the target audience of the collaboration - men, women and families who have made the conscious decision to build their lives in rural Kansas. KFB's state headquarters is in Manhattan. ***Contact: www.kfb.org. Harry A. Watts,*** *Managing Director-Governmental Relations, wattsh@kfb.org or 785-587-6106*

Partnering with others to create new opportunities for rural Americans is the goal of the Rural Development division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The agency exists to enhance economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans. The USDA Rural Development in Kansas is headquartered in Topeka with offices in Manhattan, Hays, Garden City, Newton and Iola. ***Contact: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/KS_Home.html. Patty Clark,*** *State Director, patricia.clark@ks.usda.gov or 785-221-2777*

The Fort Hays State University-based Kansas Small Business Development Center is a partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Kansas Department of Commerce, and a host of local economic development and educational institutions. The KSBDC provides entrepreneurs with knowledge, tools and resources to enhance their success by identifying their business. ***Contact: www.ksbdc.kansas.gov. Greg Panichello*** *State Director, ksbdc.gpanichello@fhsu.edu or 785-296-6514*

Established by the state legislature in 2004 to further entrepreneurship and small business growth, NetWork Kansas connects aspiring, emerging and established businesses to a wide network of business-building resource organizations in Kansas. NetWork Kansas provides small businesses and entrepreneurs free, easy access to the resources they need to succeed. ***Contact: www.networkkansas.com. Steve Radley*** *President and CEO, sradley@networkkansas.com or 316-218-6304.* ***Erik Pedersen*** *Director of Entrepreneurship Communities, epedersen@networkkansas.com or 316-978-7310*

The mission of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship is to be the national, value-added resource for rural communities, regions, and their states, interested in building more sustainable economic development frameworks around entrepreneurship. Operating out of Lincoln, NE and Chapel Hill, NC, the Center's work focuses on three key concepts - study, learn, and engage. ***Contact: www.energizingentrepreneurs.com. Don Macke,*** *don@e2mail.org or 402-323-7336*