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Newcomers to the Nebraska Panhandle: Why Did They Move Here?

Key Findings

- New residents rated the high cost of living and urban congestion as the top reasons for leaving their previous community.
- The top rated reasons newcomers move to their current communities involve community quality of life amenities: to find a simpler pace of life, to find a less congested place to live, and to be closer to relatives. Other reasons for moving to the Panhandle include the decreased cost of living, the quality of the natural environment and to find a higher paying job.
- Families cite the better environment in which to raise children and better quality schools as reasons for moving to the Panhandle.
- Job-related considerations are important factors in the decision to move, but community quality of life amenities can be the factors that ultimately lead persons to choose to move to the Nebraska Panhandle.

Introduction

Even though much attention has been focused on the depopulation of rural areas across the country, the 2000 U.S. Census figures show that new residents are moving to the Nebraska Panhandle. This is an encouraging finding. Additional new residents can be recruited to move to the region if the reasons why people move here are better understood. So, why do new residents choose to leave their previous community? What drew them to the Panhandle? What job considerations influenced their move? This paper will address these questions.

About the Study

The primary objective of this study, funded by a USDA CSREES NRI grant, is to identify potentially successful strategies for

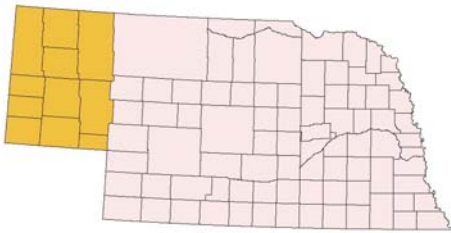
residential recruitment and retention in sparsely populated rural areas. This will be accomplished through the compilation and analysis of detailed information from households that have chosen to relocate to one of Nebraska's most rural regions: the eleven county western Panhandle. This study includes four components: GIS analyses of secondary data in the region, a household survey of new residents to the Nebraska Panhandle, focus groups of new residents and a multi-staged Delphi Survey of economic development practitioners in Nebraska and its neighboring states. The following results are based on data collected from the household survey as well as the focus groups of new residents. For more information about this study, including the survey questionnaire, visit the Web site at <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo>

Survey Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in May and June to approximately 1,050 households in the Nebraska Panhandle using mailing lists designed to identify households that were new to the area in the last five years. Responses from those who had moved within the Panhandle and those who moved more than five years ago were excluded. Our return rate for usable surveys was 33-percent. A total of 321 new movers to the Nebraska Panhandle region since 2000 are the basis for the following summary.

The eleven counties included in the sample were Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to the new residents' background, reasons for moving, decision making tools used and views of their current community.

Nebraska's Panhandle Counties



Why Did They Leave Their Previous Community?

The high cost of living and urban congestion are rated as important reasons for leaving their previous community by 39 and 37 percent, respectively, of the new residents. Other factors cited by at least one quarter of the new movers include: being too far from relatives (34%), lack of job opportunities (31%), and fear of crime (29%).

The primary reasons for leaving their

previous community differ by age. Urban congestion was more likely to be reported as an important factor for leaving their previous community by older persons than by younger persons. Almost one half (49%) of persons age 50 to 64 say urban congestion was an important reason for leaving their previous community, compared to 22 percent of persons age 19 to 29.

Both high state and/or local taxes as well as having a long commute were important reasons for moving for 36 percent of persons age 40 to 49. But high taxes in their previous location were noted as an important reason for moving for only seven percent of persons age 65 and older. Approximately 16 percent of persons age 50 and older say that having a long commute was an important reason for moving. Persons age 40 to 49 are also more likely to say poor schools were a reason for leaving their previous community. Almost one quarter (24%) of persons in this age group cite poor schools in their previous location as a reason for moving, compared to five percent of persons age 65 and older.

Persons age 30 to 39 are more likely than other persons to say that a lack of outdoor recreational opportunities was an important reason for leaving their previous community. Twenty-four percent of persons in this age group say this was an important reason for leaving, compared to seven percent of persons age 65 and older.

The youngest persons are the age group most likely to say being too close to relatives was an important reason for moving. Sixteen percent of persons age 19 to 29 say being too close to relatives was an important reason for moving, compared to seven percent of both persons age 30 to 39 and persons age 65 and older.

The belief that their previous location was a poor place to raise children was an

important reason for moving among approximately one quarter of persons under the age of 50. Only 10 percent of persons age 65 and older say this reason was important.

Some differences in the ratings of these factors also occur by family structure. Both single parent households and couples with children are the groups most likely to say that poor schools and the belief that their previous location was a poor place to raise children were important reasons for leaving.

Differences also occur by the type of county from which the new residents moved. High cost of living, fear of crime, urban congestion, high state and/or local taxes, long commutes, poor schools, unsafe places to live, and quality of the natural environment were all more important reasons for leaving for persons moving from a metropolitan county than for persons moving from a non-metropolitan county. Persons from non-metropolitan counties are more likely to say a lack of job opportunities, few cultural opportunities, and a lack of outdoor recreational opportunities were important reasons for leaving their previous community. Forty-one percent of persons moving from a non-metropolitan county rate lack of job opportunities as an important reason for leaving their previous community, compared to one quarter (25%) of persons moving from a metropolitan county.

High state and/or local taxes, a lack of outdoor recreational opportunities and a lack of job opportunities were more likely to be rated as important by persons moving from other parts of Nebraska than by persons moving from outside the state. Almost one third (32%) of persons moving from other regions of Nebraska say high taxes were important in their decision to leave, compared to 10 percent of persons moving from adjacent states. A lack of job

opportunities was an important reason for leaving for one half (50%) of persons moving from other parts of Nebraska, compared to 25 percent of persons moving from adjacent states.

Why Did They Move to Their Current Community?

At least one-half of new movers to the Panhandle cite the desire to find a simpler pace of life (53%), to find a less congested place to live (50%), and to be closer to relatives (50%) as important factors in their decision to move to their current community. Other reasons that were important to at least one-third of newcomers include: to lower the cost of housing (48%), to lower the cost of living (45%), to obtain a higher paying job (39%), to live in a desirable natural environment (37%), to find a safer place to live (36%), to obtain a job more in line with their skills (35%), and the belief that this (new) community shares my (our) attitudes/values (34%).

Reasons for Moving to Community

<i>% of Respondents Indicating Important or Very Important</i>	
Simpler Pace of Life	53%
Less Congested Place	50
Closer to Relatives	50
Lower Cost of Housing	48
Lower Cost of Living	45
Higher Paying Job	39
Desirable Natural Environment	37
Safer Place to Live	36
Job that Better Fits Skills	35
Community that Shares Values	34
Better Place for Kids	32
Closer to Friends	32
Lower Taxes	22

The importance of some of these factors differs by age. Persons under the age of 40 are more likely than persons over 40 years of age to rate finding available and affordable childcare as an important reason

for moving to their current community. This group was also most likely to rate to obtaining a higher paying job as an important factor for moving to their community. Persons under the age of 50 are more likely than persons over 50 to rate a better environment for raising children as an important factor. This group is also most likely to rate to obtaining a job more in line with their skills and the opportunity to secure a better job for a spouse/partner as important factors in their decision to move to their current community.

Differences also exist by family structure. Single parent households are more likely than other family structures to say that being farther from family and relatives was an important reason for moving to their current community. Twenty-one percent of single parent households say this was a reason for moving to their current community compared to two percent of single adults. Single parent households are also the group most likely to rate finding available and affordable child care as an important reason for moving to their community (39 percent compared to one percent of couples without children).

Single parent households and couples with children are the groups most likely to rate finding better quality schools as an important reason for moving to their community. Approximately 39 percent of these two groups rate this reason as important, compared to seven percent of single adults.

More than one-half (61%) of couples with children rate finding a better environment for raising children as an important factor in their decision to move to their current community. Only 11 percent of single adults rate this reason as important. And, over one-third (37%) of couples with children rate securing a better job for a spouse/partner as a reason for moving,

compared to six percent of single adults. Persons moving from other parts of Nebraska are more likely than persons moving from other states to rate to finding more outdoor recreational opportunities as an important factor in deciding to move to their current community. Forty-six percent of persons moving from elsewhere in Nebraska rate this reason as important, compared to 18 percent of persons moving from adjacent states. This group was also most likely to rate obtaining a higher paying job as an important reason for moving – 56 percent compared to 33 percent of persons moving from adjacent states.

A better environment for raising children, finding a less congested place to live, finding a safer place to live, a lower cost of housing, lower taxes, finding a simpler pace of life, seeking a community that shares my (our) attitudes/values, and a lower the cost of living were more important factors for persons moving from metropolitan counties as compared to persons moving from non-metropolitan counties. As an example, two-thirds (66%) of persons moving from metropolitan counties rate the desire to find a simpler pace of life as important, compared to 34 percent of persons moving from non-metropolitan counties. However, finding arts, entertainment and cultural activities was more important to persons moving from non-metropolitan counties. This was an important reason for 21 percent of persons moving from non-metropolitan counties. Only 10 percent of persons moving from metropolitan counties rate this factor as important in deciding to move to their current community.

What Job-Related Considerations Influenced Their Move?

Over one-third (36%) of newcomers moved to the Panhandle in order to accept employment by a new employer. Twenty-four percent of their spouses/partners moved

for this reason. Just over one-quarter (26%) of the respondents moved to look for new work/job while 25 percent of the spouses/partners were looking for new work after their move. Ten percent of newcomers and eight percent of their spouses/partners were transferred by their current employer. Eight percent of newcomers and five percent of their spouses/partners moved to start/take over a business. Only one percent of both newcomers and their spouses/partners moved because of a military transfer.

Just under one-half (45%) of persons below the age of 40 moved to accept employment by a new employer. Persons between the ages of 40 and 49 are the age group most likely to move to start/take over a business (18% compared to 2% for persons age 65 and older).

Persons moving from other parts of Nebraska are more likely than persons moving from other states to accept employment by a new employer. Over one-half (51%) of persons moving from other regions of Nebraska moved to accept employment by a new employer, compared to approximately 32 percent of persons moving from other states.

Summary

The high cost of living and urban congestion were the top rated reasons for new Panhandle residents to leave their previous community. Other important reasons include being too far from relatives, lack of job opportunities and fear of crime. These complement the top reasons newcomers move to their current communities: to find a simpler pace of life, to find a less congested place to live, and to be closer to relatives.

Other reasons for moving to the Panhandle involve a decreased cost of living, the quality of the natural environment and finding a higher paying job.

The reasons for moving to the Panhandle differ by age, family structure, distance of move and type of county from which they moved. Families cite a better environment in which to raise children and better quality schools as reasons for moving to the Panhandle. These are attributes that can be highlighted when marketing Panhandle communities to young families.

Persons moving from metropolitan counties are looking for a less congested place to live, a safer place to live, a simpler pace of life, and a lower cost of living. Marketing efforts aimed at larger metropolitan areas should emphasize these amenities.

Job-related considerations are also important factors in the decision to move. So, job creation and business retention and attraction strategies remain important to new resident recruitment strategies. However, as noted above, community quality of life amenities can be the factors that ultimately lead persons to choose to move to the Nebraska Panhandle.



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