

Migration Away From Rural Minnesota

As the census gets closer, rural communities are struggling. People are moving out of rural communities to more metropolitan areas, and this has many wondering what rural representation and financial decisions will look like. Lack of academic and economic opportunities as well as shifting industries are two of the primary reasons for this migration from rural areas. Although there are some policies in place to encourage movement into rural communities, increased efforts are needed in order to change this pattern.

The debate about moving the census responses to the internet poses a serious problem to the rural communities with limited or no internet access. People in rural communities are twice as likely not to use the internet as urban or suburban Americans. If the census changes to internet responses, could the rural population be underrepresented? A policy needs to be put into place to provide a wider internet outreach to rural communities. It would be best if the cost was equal to that of a city, so families do not have to worry about financial repercussions. An online census could allow the census to have a higher response rate, but only if people from rural areas are easily able to access the survey. This would also result in better representation of rural information.

Throughout the United States, there are over 300 federally-funded programs that rely on census data to distribute over \$90 billion to states and local communities. Many of these programs target rural communities. We need policies in place to provide incentives for young adults and families to stay in rural areas. Some ways to do this would be to fund rural outreach programs such as local radio stations, health clinics or 4-H Clubs. Providing financial support for school systems in the rural areas is another important option. Good schools would allow and encourage families with kids to feel more comfortable and secure with the decision to stay in a more rural area.

In many rural communities, agriculture is a key industry. Farming is a big source of income for many families. Farming, especially small farms, are struggling to stay afloat financially. Over the last decade, the United States has lost over 17,000 dairy farms. In 2018, the agriculture industry was negatively impacted by a 21% federal budget cut. These cuts have had huge effects all over the country, and the cuts are expected to keep coming. Increasing the agriculture budget again would not only help the industry as a whole, but would allow families to keep their farms, continue to earn a living, and stay in the rural areas. Census representation from rural areas would help underscore the importance of these programs and funding.

Overall, there are many important reasons regarding the importance of rural representation and responses within the census. I have presented just a couple of those reasons to keep people in rural areas and help them feel good about the decision to do so.