This bulletin summarizes current demographic, economic, and social trends in rural Iowa between 2006 and 2016. It is modeled after the United States Department of Agriculture’s *Rural America at a Glance*. Current year data are presented along with changes from last year and five years ago. Data are reported for Iowa’s metro, micropolitan, and rural areas. **Metropolitan** includes central counties with an urban center over 50,000 people, plus outlying suburbs linked by commuting patterns. **Micropolitan** counties have an urban center of at least 10,000 people, plus surrounding suburbs. **Rural** counties (technically non-core) have no urban center of 10,000 or more.

### Key Findings

- Net farm income fell by half last year. North central Iowa was hit hardest by losses. Micro and metro farm incomes sank to low levels.
- Earnings in rural Iowa fell sharply last year driven by farm losses, while micro earnings were slightly lower. Metro earnings grew last year.
- Non-metro income growth was flat last year, but it is still higher than five years ago. Poverty ticked down slightly and is much lower than in 2012.
- Non-metro Iowa recovered jobs lost during the recession. However, job counts are back to 2006 levels – a lost decade of job creation. By contrast, the metro job market is booming.
- Rural Iowa has a worker shortage, with low unemployment and high labor force participation. Micros have a job shortage with higher unemployment and lower participation.
- Both violent and property crime is high and growing in micropolitan counties. By contrast, crime is low and falling in rural Iowa.
- Non-metro populations continue to decline, losing people under 55 years of age but also elders over 75 years. Senior population booming in metropolitan counties.
Rural and micropolitan populations continue to decline. Both lag behind metropolitan Iowa and the United States.

**Rural Iowa**
- 25.0% of population in 2016.
- Down ↓0.4% from 2015, down ↓1.5% since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 15.7% of population in 2016.
- Down ↓0.3% from 2015, down ↓0.8% since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 59.3% of population in 2016.
- Up ↑0.9% from 2015, up ↑4.2% since 2012.

Source: Population Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

*U.S Average: up ↑0.5% from 2015, up ↑2.9% from 2012.*

Population and Change by County
Non-metro Iowa continues to lose people under 55 years of age.
Growth in those near or in early retirement.
Senior boom in metropolitan counties.

Rural Iowa
- Fewer children (↓2.7%), but stable high school/college populations (0.3%).
- Fewer young working age adults ages 25-34 (↓1.9%) and 35-44 (↓1.6%).
- Sharp loss in 45-54 year olds (↓14.3%), but gain in near retirement ages 55-64 (↑5.3%).
- Sharp gain in seniors ages 65-74 (↑10.3%), but loss in elders ages 75 and older (↓2.2%).

Micropolitan Iowa
- Fewer children (↓2.0%) and high school/college populations (↓2.1%).
- Little change in young working age adults ages 25-34 (0.2%) and 35-44 (↓0.7%).
- Sharp loss in 45-54 year olds (↓12.2%), but small gain in 55-64 year olds (↑2.6%).
- Sharp gain in seniors 65-74 (↑15.3%), but a small drop in elders 75 and over (↓0.8%).

Metropolitan Iowa
- Growing numbers of children (↑2.9%) and high school/college populations (↑3.5%).
- More numbers of young working age adults ages 25-34 (↑2.5%) and 35-44 (↑4.3%).
- Small drop in 45-54 year olds (↓3.3%), but a jump in 55-64 year olds (↑6.9%).
- Massive gains in seniors ages 65-74 (↑21.3%) and elders 75 and older (↑5.5%).
State is less diverse than the nation.
Fewer minorities in rural Iowa, but this demographic is growing.

**Rural Iowa**
- 7.2% minority in 2016.
- Up ↑0.2 of a point from 2015, up ↑1.1 since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 12.1% minority in 2016.
- Down ↓0.8 of a point from 2015, but up ↑0.7 since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 16.6% minority in 2016.
- Up ↑0.6 of a point from 2015, up ↑1.7 since 2012.

Minority populations include those of a non-white race or Hispanic ethnicity.
Rural and micropolitan income growth flat last year.
Metropolitan incomes high and growing.

**Rural Iowa**
- $53,410 per household in 2016.
- Stable since 2015, but up ↑4.6% from 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- $51,710 per household in 2016.
- Up ↑0.6% from 2015, up ↑6.4% since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- $61,213 per household in 2016.
- Up ↑3.1% from 2015, up ↑6.7% since 2012.

**Median Household Income and Change by County**

*Household income includes wages, self-employment, capital gains, and transfers (retirement, Social Security, and welfare).*
**Poverty rates falling statewide.**

**Sharp drop in micropolitan Iowa.**

**Rural Iowa**
- 11.1% in poverty in 2016.
- Down ↓0.2 of a point from 2015, down ↓0.9 of a point since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 12.5% in poverty in 2016.
- Down ↓0.3 of a point from 2015, down ↓1.7 points since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 11.8% in poverty in 2016.
- Down ↓0.6 of a point from 2015, down ↓0.8 of a point since 2012.

**U.S. Average:** 14.0% in 2016, down ↓-0.7 from 2015, down ↓-1.9 from 2012.

*Source: Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau*

**Poverty and Change by County**

*Poverty rate is the percent of people whose incomes fall below the federal poverty level. In 2016 the federal poverty level was $11,880 for one person and $24,300 for four people.*
Rural labor market is tight with high and growing job participation rates. Slack labor market in micropolitan counties with lower and flat rates.

**Rural Iowa**
- 68.1% participation in 2016.
- Up ↑0.2 of a point from 2015, up ↑2.7 points since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 64.9% participation in 2016.
- Stable since 2015, but up ↑1.5 points from 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 67.6% participation in 2016.
- Down ↓0.8 of a point from 2015, down ↓0.9 of a point since 2012.

![Labor Force Participation Rate](image)

**U.S. Average:** 60.6% in 2016, up ↑0.2 since 2015, down ↓0.8 from 2012.

**Source:** Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Labor force participation is the percent of people 16 years and older that have a job. It is a broad measure because it includes those not seeking work such as the unemployable, discouraged workers, and those not in the labor force.
Unemployment

Micropolitan unemployment higher than in rural and metropolitan areas. Rates stable following sizable post-recession declines.

**Rural Iowa**
- 3.6% unemployed in 2016.
- Stable since 2015, but down ↓1.3 points from 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 4.4% unemployed in 2016.
- Stable since 2015, but down ↓1.5 points from 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 3.5% unemployed in 2016.
- Down ↓0.2 of a point from 2015, down ↓1.4 points since 2012.

Unemployment rate is the percent of people not having a job that are actively looking for one. It is a narrow measure because it excludes the unemployable, discouraged workers, and those not in the labor force.
Rural and micropolitan Iowa recovering jobs lost during the recession. Metropolitan job market booming.

**Rural Iowa**
- 23.8% of jobs in 2016.
- Up ↑0.2% from 2015, up ↑1.9% since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 14.8% of jobs in 2016.
- Up ↑0.3% from 2015, up ↑2.4% since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 61.4% of jobs in 2016.
- Up ↑1.1% from 2015, up ↑5.4% since 2012.

*U.S. Average: Up ↑1.7% from 2015, up ↑8.1% from 2012.*

Source: Regional Economic Accounts, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

**Jobs and Change by County**

*Job numbers are a total of both full-time and part-time positions, including self-employed, for all economic sectors (private, government, and farm).*
Most non-metropolitan jobs are in the services sector. Goods-producing jobs rebounding from the recession. Government jobs in decline.

**Professional-Related Services (private)**
- 29.4% of jobs in 2016 (vs. 41.6% in metros).
- Up \(\uparrow\) 0.3% from 2015, but down \(\downarrow\) 3.5% since 2012.
  *Includes professional, finance, real estate, telecom, business, and health services.*

**Personal-Related Services (private)**
- 25.5% of jobs in 2016 (vs. 28.1% in metros).
- Up \(\uparrow\) 1.2% from 2015, up \(\uparrow\) 2.5% since 2012.
  *Includes entertainment, recreation, lodging, food, and personal services, plus retail trade.*

**Goods-Producing (private)**
- 23.1% of jobs in 2016 (vs. 15.3% in metros).
- Stable since 2015, up \(\uparrow\) 4.9% from 2012.
  *Includes manufacturing and construction.*

**State and Local Government (includes public education)**
- 12.4% of jobs in 2016 (vs. 13.2% in metros).
- Stable since 2015, but down \(\downarrow\) 1.3% from 2012.
  *Includes state agencies, city and county government, and public education (K-12 to higher education).*

**Farm**
- 9.6% of jobs in 2016 (vs. 1.9% in metros).
- Down \(\downarrow\) 1.0% from 2015, but up \(\uparrow\) 2.2% since 2012.
  *Includes farm proprietors and farm workers.*
Sharp drop in rural earnings driven by farm sector losses. Micropolitan earnings down following years of steady growth.

Rural Iowa
- $43,060 per job in 2016.
- Down ↓5.9% from 2015, down ↓5.1% since 2012.

Micropolitan Iowa
- $48,010 per job in 2016.
- Down ↓1.1% from 2015, but up ↑4.1% since 2012.

Metropolitan Iowa
- $52,850 per job in 2016.
- Up ↑0.7% from 2015, up ↑4.1% since 2012.

Source: Regional Economic Accounts, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Earnings include wages and salaries, plus self-employment income, from employment in all economic sectors (private, government, and farm).
Farm earnings in steep decline.
Non-metropolitan earnings highest in goods-production and government.
Personal services jobs are the lowest paid.

**Goods-Producing (private)**
- $69,030 per job in 2016 (vs. $76,090 in metros).
- Up ↑1.4% from 2015, up ↑12.9% since 2012.
  *Includes manufacturing and construction.*

**State and Local Government (includes public education)**
- $55,660 per job in 2016 (vs. $66,310 in metros).
- Up ↑1.0% from 2015, up ↑9.8% since 2012.
  *Includes state agencies, city and county government, and public education (K-12 to higher education).*

**Farm**
- $39,820 per job in 2016 (vs. $30,240 in metros).
- Down ↓41.2% from 2015, down ↓53.7% since 2012.
  *Includes farm proprietors and farm workers.*

**Professional-Related Services (private)**
- $37,070 per job in 2016 (vs. $54,120 in metros).
- Up ↑1.1% from 2015, up ↑5.9% since 2012.
  *Includes professional, finance, real estate, telecom, business, and health services.*

**Personal-Related Services (private)**
- $23,310 per job in 2016 (vs. $27,800 in metros).
- Up ↑1.9% from 2015, up ↑3.7% since 2012.
  *Includes entertainment, recreation, lodging, food, and personal services, plus retail trade.*

Source: Regional Economic Accounts, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
Net farm incomes cut nearly in half last year. Micropolitan and metropolitan farm incomes low.

**Rural Iowa**
- $43,770 farm income in 2016.
- Down ↓46.6% from 2015, down ↓54.6% since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- $29,180 farm income in 2016.
- Down ↓47.5% from 2015, down ↓65.3% since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- $28,530 farm income in 2016.
- Down ↓43.0% from 2015, down ↓56.6% since 2012.

Farm income is farm proprietors’ net income from agricultural production and related activities.
Violent crime jumped in metropolitans and micropolitans last year. Rural Iowa has very low rates.

**Rural Iowa**
- 1.4 violent crimes per 1,000 people in 2016.
- Down ↓1.5% from 2015, but up ↑14.4% since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 3.5 violent crimes per 1,000 people in 2016.
- Up ↑9.1% from 2015, up ↑12.2% since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 3.2 violent crimes per 1,000 people in 2016.
- Up ↑7.9% from 2015, up ↑5.9% since 2012.

**U.S. Average:** 3.9/1000 in 2016, up ↑3.4% from 2015, down ↓-0.4 since 2012.

*Source: Uniform Crime Reports, Iowa Dept. of Public Safety and Federal Bureau of Investigation*

Violent crimes include murder/manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Reported as crimes known to city, county, and state police agencies.
Property crime up in micropolitans last year.
Rural Iowa has very low rates.

**Rural Iowa**
- 8.4 property crimes per 1,000 people in 2016.
- Down ↓4.0% from 2015, down ↓0.5% since 2012.

**Micropolitan Iowa**
- 23.6 property crimes per 1,000 people in 2016.
- Up ↑6.3% from 2015, but down ↓7.9% since 2012.

**Metropolitan Iowa**
- 24.2 property crimes per 1,000 people in 2016.
- Up ↑0.4% from 2015, but down ↓11.7% since 2012.

*Property crimes include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Reported as crimes known to city, county, and state police agencies.*
Summary

Rural and micropolitan populations have continued to decline over the past ten years. Rural Iowa has experienced the steepest declines, while micropolitans are in the process of slow population loss. Non-metropolitans lost people in nearly every age group under 55, with the largest drop in 45-54 year olds. Offsetting losses were gains in near-retirement (age 55-64) and early-retirement (age 65-74) residents. By contrast, metropolitans saw gains in every age group, especially children and those 65 years and older. This suggests a shift of seniors from non-metropolitan areas into the state’s largest cities, likely driven by the need for specialized care and a desire to be near family.

Non-metropolitan median household income growth was flat in 2016, but steady gains over the past five years places incomes higher than in 2012. Stalled non-metropolitan income growth is likely caused by falling populations and a struggling farm economy. Conversely, incomes in metro Iowa are much higher and growth has continued apace. Poverty rates have fallen sizably since the recession across Iowa. While micropolitan rates are slightly higher than in the rest of Iowa, the gap has narrowed considerably since the recession. Income and poverty conditions are better in northwest Iowa, while they are worse in the state’s southern tier of counties.

Rural Iowa has a tight labor market caused by a shortage of workers. Rural unemployment is low and stable, while labor force participation is high and rising. This means most people who want a job have one; and most of the available workforce is currently being utilized. On the other hand, micropolitans are experiencing a slack labor market caused by a shortage of jobs. High unemployment coupled with low and flat labor force participation means there are sizable segments of the population that cannot find a job, or have become discouraged and stopped looking for work altogether. Northwest Iowa has favorable employment conditions, while the east and southeast regions of the state are less favorable with higher unemployment and lower job participation. At present, a tight rural labor market is the greatest threat to job creation in rural Iowa.

Rural and micropolitan counties have generally recovered jobs lost during the recession and are back to 2006 levels, although micropolitan jobs have not yet fully recovered. However, one can also interpret this as a lost decade of job creation in non-metropolitan Iowa. By contrast, the metropolitan job market is booming and currently accounts for over 60 percent of jobs in the state. Counter to what one would expect, over half of non-metropolitan jobs are in the services sector, with nearly 29 percent in professional-related services (principally healthcare) and 26 percent in personal-related services (most in retail trade, accommodation, food, and personal services). Traditional rural jobs in goods-producing (manufacturing and construction) account for 23 percent, while farm employment is low at just under 10 percent. At present, sluggish job creation is the greatest threat to economic recovery in micropolitan Iowa.

Earnings in rural Iowa fell sharply in 2016 driven by farm losses, which is the third straight year of contraction in rural counties. Micropolitan earnings are down slightly, but on a positive note earnings have been steadily growing since 2010. The northern one-third of the state has seen the worst loss in earnings, while central and southeast Iowa have had stable or growing earnings. The best-paid jobs in non-metropolitan Iowa are in the goods-producing sector (around $69,000 per job) and in government / public education (about $56,000 per job). On the other hand, the lowest paid jobs are in personal-related services and retail (only $23,000 per job).
As stated previously, the farm economy in Iowa experienced three straight years of losses between 2014 and 2016. **Net farm income** was cut by half in 2016 in rural, micropolitan, and metropolitan Iowa. The largest losses occurred in a few metropolitan counties and across a large swath of north central Iowa. Farms in northwest Iowa fared slightly better as they weathered moderate losses to come out with relatively higher net farm incomes. By contrast, metro farms and operators in north central Iowa saw steeper losses resulting in much lower farm incomes. In 2016, 14 counties had net farm incomes below $10,000 (with five counties posting losses); and 38 counties saw incomes fall by over 50 percent or more between 2015 and 2016 (13 had losses of over 75 percent). It is clear that a struggling agricultural sector has impacted farm incomes, rural earnings, and rural household incomes. At present, a declining farm economy is the greatest threat to rural prosperity in Iowa.

**ISU Extension and Outreach Resources**

Iowa Community Indicators Program | [www.icip.iastate.edu](http://www.icip.iastate.edu)

*General socioeconomic information for Iowa.*

Iowa Concern Hotline | [www.extension.iastate.edu/iowaconcern](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/iowaconcern)

*Assistance with legal, financial, stress, and crisis issues for families.*

Ag Decision Maker | [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm)

*Farm financial planning, crop and livestock outlooks, and business development.*

Community and Economic Development | [www.extension.iastate.edu/communities](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities)

*Programs on local economies and government, civic engagement, and diversity.*

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**For more information contact**

David J. Peters  
*Associate Professor and Extension Rural Sociologist, Department of Sociology*

dpeters@iastate.edu  |  515-294-6303

[www.soc.iastate.edu](http://www.soc.iastate.edu)

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Appendix – Data and Methods

County data are aggregated into metropolitan (counties with an urban center over 50,000 people, plus outlying suburbs linked by commuting patterns), micropolitan (counties with an urban center of between 10,000-49,999 people, plus outlying suburbs linked by commuting patterns), and rural/non-core (counties having no urban center of 10,000 or more) areas based on 2013 Core-Based Statistical Areas delineated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Rural and non-core are used interchangeably, but rural has a specific definition not used in this bulletin (rural officially defined as places under 2,500 people or the countryside). Income data between 2006 and 2016 are inflation-adjusted to real dollars using the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis personal consumption price indexes.

Population and age counts are intercensal estimates between the official decennial censuses. Minority is the population self-identifying with a non-white race or Hispanic ethnicity regardless of race, taken from one-year American Community Survey estimates. Source: Population Estimates and American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

Median household income includes wages, self-employment, capital gains, transfers (retirement, Social Security, welfare) and all other income from persons in the household; and is reported as the income at the 50th percentile of households (median). Medians are used instead of means because they are less affected by very high incomes. Source: Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

The poverty rate is calculated as the percent of people living in households whose income (from earnings, capital gains, and transfers) falls below the poverty income line for their household size. It excludes people living in institutions or group quarters such as prisons, military bases, nursing facilities, and college dormitories. In 2016 the poverty income line was $11,880 for a single person, $16,020 for two people, and $24,300 for four people. Source: Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

The labor force is the number of people available for work, counting those employed plus those jobless but looking for work. The labor force participation rate used in this publication is the labor force divided by total the population 16 years and older. It measures the percent of people participating in the job market, and by extension the broader economy. It is similar to the unemployment rate except it includes those not seeking work such as the unemployed, students, homemakers, and retirees. Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed divided by the labor force (those employed plus the jobless who are looking for work). The unemployment rate measures the percent of people not having a job that want one; and is a narrow measure of unemployment because it does not count the unemployed, discouraged workers, and those not in the labor force. Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Jobs include both full-time and part-time positions such as wage and salary jobs, farm and non-farm proprietors, and general partners for all economic sectors (private, government, and farm). It measures jobs, not employed persons, so one person may have multiple jobs. Earnings include wages and salaries, supplements to wages/salaries, and proprietors’ income earned from jobs as previously defined. Economic sectors are defined using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The farm sector includes farm proprietors and farm workers. The goods-producing sector includes construction and manufacturing. The professional-related services sector includes information/telecom, finance and insurance, real estate and rentals, professional services, management of companies, administrative support services, private educational services, and private healthcare and social services. The personal-related services sector includes entertainment and recreation services, accommodation and food services, repair and maintenance services, other personal services, and retail trade. The state and local government sector includes state agencies, city and county government, public K-12 education, and public higher education. Net farm income is farm proprietors’ net income from agricultural production and ancillary activities. Source: Regional Economic Accounts, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Violent crimes include incidents of murder and manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault know to law enforcement. Property crimes include incidents of burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson known to law enforcement. Incidents are aggregated to the county from reports by local and state jurisdictions. Crimes are reported as rates per 1,000 population served by the law enforcement agency. Source: Uniform Crime Reports, Iowa Department of Public Safety and Federal Bureau of Investigation.