Regional Innovation Policy: Approaches Which Ensure A Commitment to the Rural-Urban Continuum

Presented to the

"Economic Development in Underserved Communities: Where Research and Practice Meet" Conference

Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City

Kansas City, Missouri

September 10, 2010

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Enhancing a More Innovating Policy to Address Rural Underserved Communities, via a Rural-Urban Continuum Approach

Three Considerations

I. Two Great Challenges for Regional Innovation Policy

- "Rural" and "Nonmet" Definitions: An Anachronism for Economic Policy Targeting
- The Impact of the Global Recession on Rural Governments

II. Emerging Opportunities to Advance Regional Policy Innovation

III. Recommendations for Further Policy Action

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“Official” Definitions of Rural Aren’t Perfect

- OMB designations of Core Based Statistical Areas are based on urban centers and the commuting relationship with those centers.
- “Metropolitan” doesn’t equate with “urban,” and “nonmetropolitan doesn’t equate with “rural.”
- Over half of all “rural” people live in “metropolitan” counties.
- Many large micropolitan areas have larger populations than small metropolitan areas.
- 60% of the nonmetropolitan population live in micropolitan regions, which contain an urban center of 10,000 to 50,000.
- Difficult to find a good middle ground that describes the continuum.

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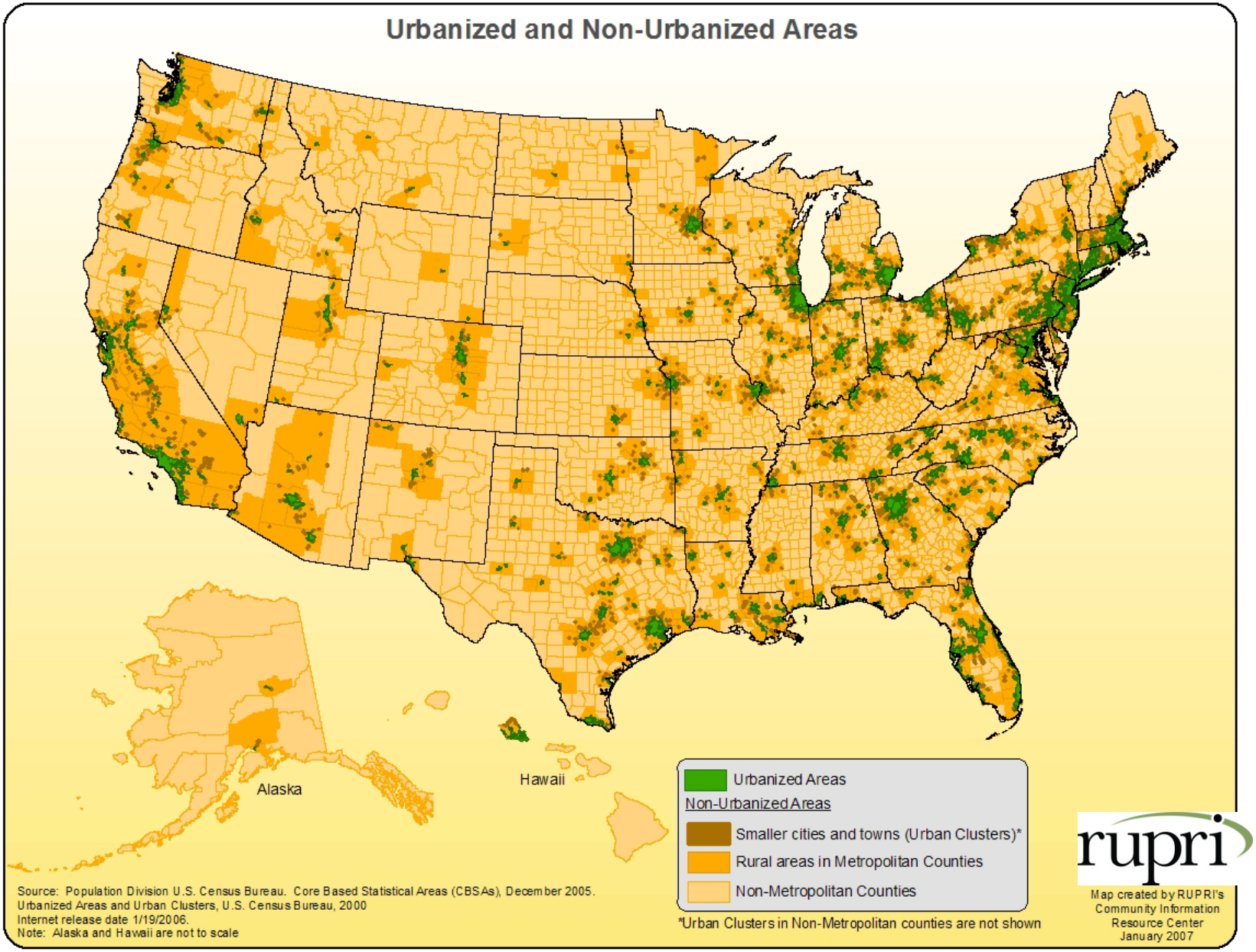
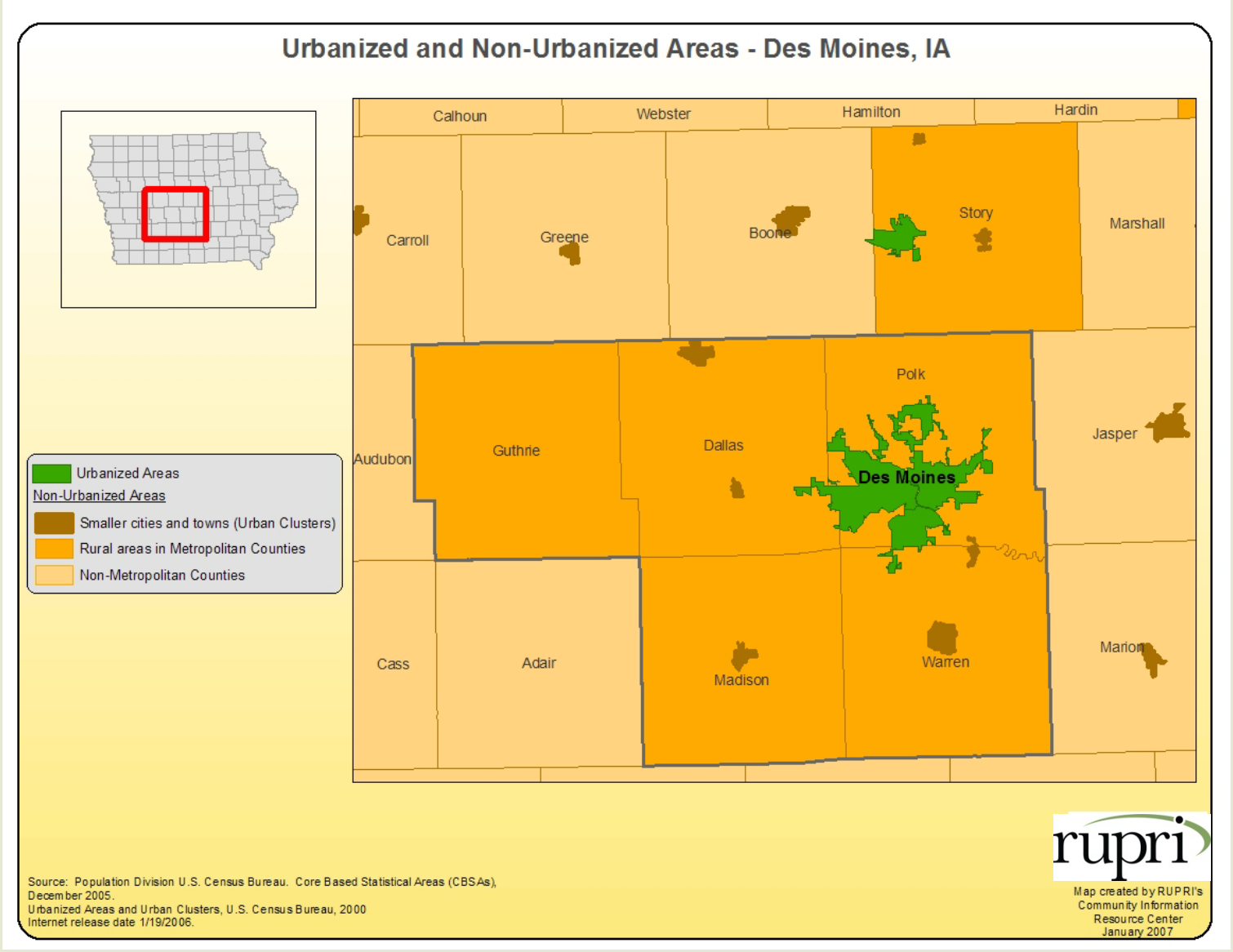
Metropolitan Areas are both Urban and Rural

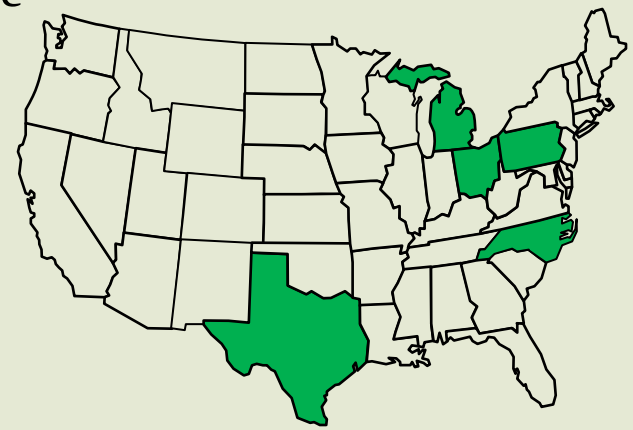


An Example: The Des Moines Metropolitan Area: Guthrie County is 100 percent Rural

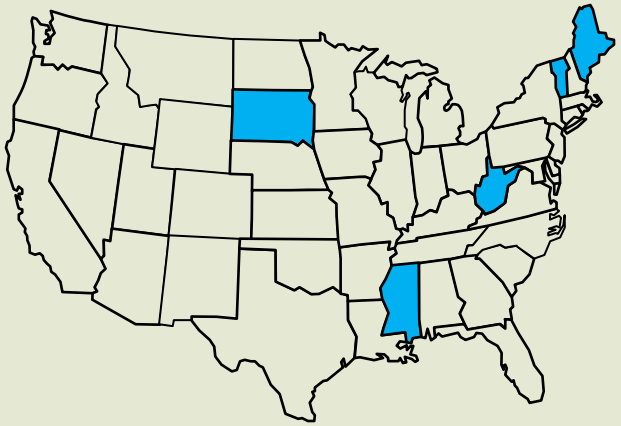


Where are all the rural people?

- 5 states account for 25 percent of all rural people
  - Texas (3.6m)
  - North Carolina (3.2m)
  - Pennsylvania (2.8m)
  - Ohio (2.6m)
  - Michigan (2.5m)



- The “most rural” states only account for only 6.7% of rural population
  - Vermont (61.8% rural)
  - Maine (59.8% rural)
  - West Virginia (53.9% rural)
  - Mississippi (51.2% rural)
  - South Dakota (48.1% rural)



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Distribution of Population

	Urban 50K +	Urban Under 50K	Rural	Total
Metropolitan	192,064,228	10,338,988	30,176,724	232,579,940
Micropolitan	255,305	14,976,437	14,299,972	29,531,714
Noncore	18,588	4,704,763	14,586,901	19,310,252
Total	192,338,121	30,020,188	59,063,597	281,421,906

Percent of the Population that is:	
Non-Urbanized	31.7%
Rural	21.0%
Small Urban	10.7%
Nonmetropolitan	17.4%
Percent of the rural population residing in metropolitan counties	51.1%

Sources Urban and Rural Population Census 2000; CBSA status December 2005

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Local Government Fiscal Challenges

- Impacts of the global recession will continue to create challenges in state and local governments
  - Total budget shortfalls of $260 billion for 2011 and 2012
  - ARRA funds have lessened state cuts and tax increases, but these funds will not be available for future shortfalls.
- Local governments face challenges of decreasing tax revenues, declines in state and federal support, and expanding service needs, particularly social services
- A particular challenge in rural governments, which were already struggling with limited capacity, diseconomies of scale, and high service delivery costs.

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II. Emerging Opportunities to Advance Regional Policy Innovation

- The Obama Administration's Place-Based Policy Innovation
- USDA Secretary Vilsack's Regional Innovation Initiative
- Other Federal Regional Innovation NOFAs
- Moving from Specific Rural and Urban Regional Approaches to a Rural-Urban Regional Continuum
- The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant
- Other Considerations for Regional Policy Targeting

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III. Recommendations for Further Policy Action

- Exploiting the current fiscal challenge facing state and local governments
- Finding avenues to actually align the emerging federal place-based programs
- Furthering federal place-based efforts and similar state, regional, and local ones, via strategic alignment
- Creating program and funding commitments which advantage micropolitan and small-urban mayors crafting regional innovation alignment with contiguous rural regions

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III. Recommendations for Further Policy Action (cont'd)

- Moving beyond rhetoric, to the actual building of rural-urban linkages
- Utilizing a regional innovation framework has great promise in both rural health and rural human services delivery
- Moving Farm Bill Rural Development discussions beyond the futile and trivial search for a "rural" definition
- Finding creative approaches to support bridge builders, new intermediaries, and new rural governance models

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