

# Rural employment lagging

NEWARK, DE — After a boom in the 1960s and 1970s, rural employment in the U.S. is lagging behind that of urban areas, and projections for the future do not favor rural economic expansion. Any upswing in the economy is likely to benefit urban industries more strongly than rural ones. However, according to University of Delaware extension community resource development specialist Dan Kuennen, America's rural communities are in better position to help themselves than they were the last time they suffered an economic decline.

Economic analysts predict that rural areas will experience slow employment growth through the

remainder of the 1980s. One reason is that industries concentrated in rural areas are slowing down. Another is that nearly one-third of all rural jobs are located in the country's depressed north central region.

Based on recent trends, the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture forecasts rapid growth in the construction and service industries for the rest of the decade. Durable goods manufacturing (such as cars and equipment) and government operations should experience moderate growth, while non-durable goods manufacturing (food processing, lumbering, dairy processing, grain milling and the

like) are projected to experience approximately zero growth. Natural resource industries (agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining) can expect to see negative growth.

"Because rural areas depend more on natural resource industries and those that manufacture non-durable goods, their employment growth will probably lag behind growth in urban areas," Kuennen explains. "These are only projections based on past trends," he adds, "and can't account for major shocks to the national economy. But past performance may help us understand the rural employment picture."

Rural employment suffered a serious slowdown in the 1940s and 1950s because technological changes in agriculture and natural

resources resulted in job losses that could not be offset by developing markets in manufacturing, construction and government. As a result, the 1950s saw a great rural-to-urban migration that swelled the nation's cities.

By the 1960s, gains in manufacturing employment had balanced out natural resource employment losses, helping to stimulate the well-publicized upsurge in rural population. Between 1969 and 1973 rural areas greatly outpaced urban areas in employment growth.

"Some observers attribute that boom to a plentiful rural labor supply, favorable rural business climate, increased influx of retirees, the effect of government programs, modernization of rural life, and the stabilization of natural

resource industries," Kuennen says.

That experience illustrates the way in which industry mix can change to meet the needs of society. And it may hold the key to recovery for hard-pressed rural communities. Today, rural and urban economies are more closely tied, with changes in employment growth more similar than in the past.

"One great benefit of the last rural industry expansion was that rural areas gained a larger stake in federal and state policies," Kuennen says. "As a result, these areas now have a stronger voice regarding federal tax and expenditure levels, monetary policies, industrial revenue bonds, tax incentives for manufacturing and high-tech industries, and incentives for small business."

## Blair Farmers meet

BY BETSY STITT  
Staff Correspondent

WILLIAMSBURG — The Blair County Farmers Association met recently at the Williamsburg School for their annual fall meeting and banquet.

Several awards were presented to outstanding members for their meritorious services. Mel Eckhaus, director of field services for PFA, congratulated Blair County

membership. He also presented a plaque to Eli Rhodes, who did an outstanding job as last year's membership drive chairman.

The Outstanding Service to Agriculture Award was given to Don Brumbaugh of Curryville.

Named as new directors were Jay Metzker of Duncansville; Robert Brubaker and Mike Biddle, both of Williamsburg.

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