



## CENSUS BRIEF 3:

# POVERTY ON THE GREAT PLAINS

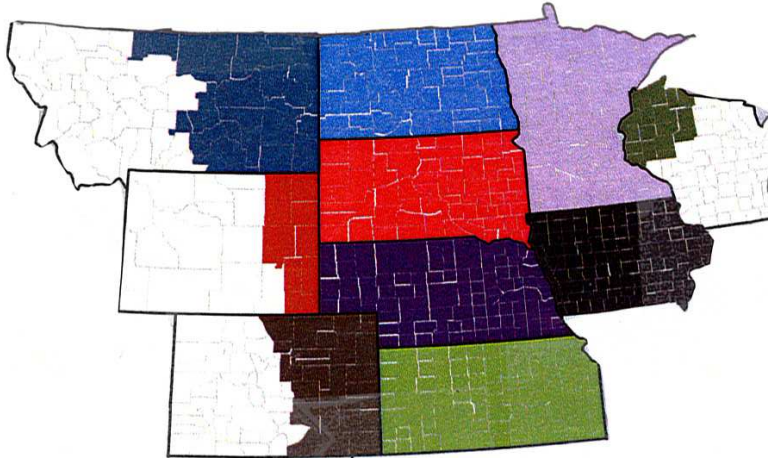
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***Rural Research and Analysis Program***  
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**CENTER *for***  
**RURAL AFFAIRS**  
Lyons, NE 68038      Population 963

This Brief is part of a series examining socio-economic aspects of the 2010 Census for the Great Plains and parts of the Midwest.

This is the third in a series of briefs examining data from the 2010 Census. Since the 1980 Census, the Center for Rural Affairs has analyzed Census data for a multi-state region.<sup>1</sup> For the 2010 Census analysis, selected counties in Colorado, Montana, Wisconsin and Wyoming have been added to obtain a broader view. The region of this analysis is shown in the map below.



Data included herein is on the county level for each of the 10 states in the region. Data is broken down for three county types: metropolitan, micropolitan and rural. Definitions of each are in the box below.

**Metropolitan:** Any county designated as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) based on the 2010 Census. Each MSA must have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants.

**Micropolitan:** Counties based around a core city or town with a population of 10,000 to 49,999. A micropolitan area may consist of more than one county depending upon economic, social and cultural connections.

**Rural:** Counties with a population center of less than 10,000 inhabitants and not included in either a metropolitan or micropolitan area.

## Rural Areas Have Higher Poverty Levels than Urban Areas and the Region as a Whole

The chart on the following page outlines each of the county types described above and the 2010 poverty rate for each. The percentage figures represent the percentage of the population in each county type (all ages) at or below the federal poverty level in 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> Funk, Patricia, *A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of the Middle Border*. Center for Rural Affairs, 1989; Strange, Marty et. al., *Half a Glass of Water: State Economic Development Policies and the Small Agricultural Communities of the Middle Border*. Center for Rural Affairs, 1990; Funk, Patricia and Bailey, Jon, *Trampled Dreams: The Neglected Economy of the Rural Great Plains*. Center for Rural Affairs, 2000; Bailey, Jon and Preston, Kim. *Swept Away: Chronic Hardship and Fresh Promise on the Rural Great Plains*. Center for Rural Affairs, 2003.

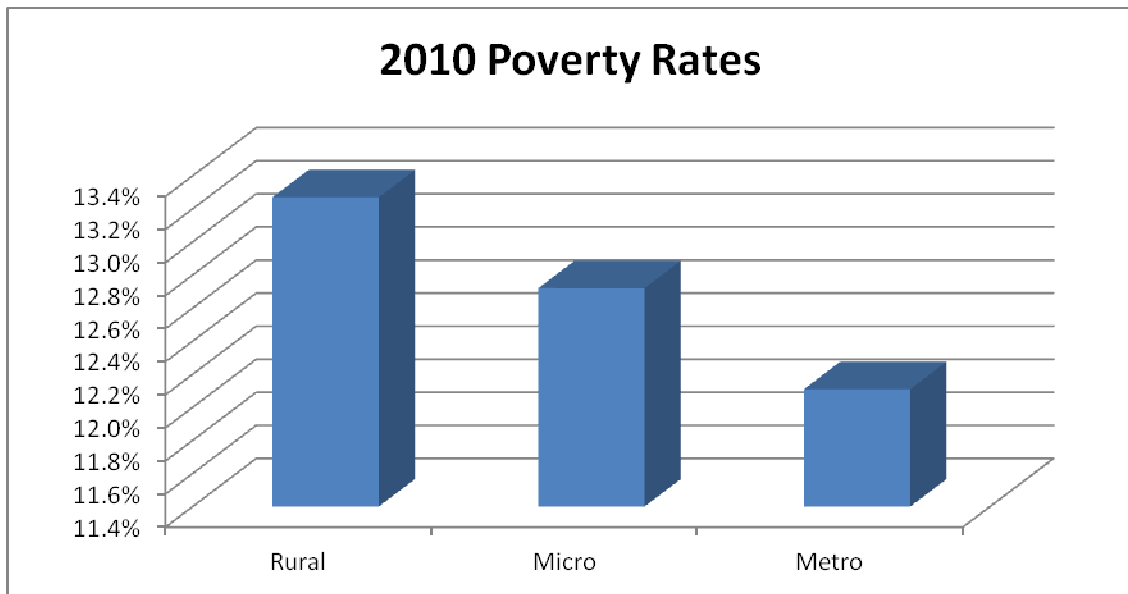


Chart 1. 2010 Poverty Rates by County Type

Source: 2010 Poverty and Median Income Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Estimated Branch

The regional rural 2010 poverty rate is 13.3 percent, more than a full percentage point higher than the regional metropolitan poverty rate of 12.1 percent. The regional micropolitan 2010 poverty rate is between the two—12.7 percent.

While portions of metropolitan areas of the region are likely to have among the highest poverty rates in the region, the data presented here is county level data that in many cases contains both high poverty and low poverty areas within a county or metropolitan area.

The overall 2010 regional poverty rate is 12.4 percent. In total, nearly 2.5 million residents of the region were at or below the poverty level in 2010.

Table A below outlines poverty rates for each county type for each state of the region. In five states (Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska and Wyoming) rural counties had lower 2010 poverty rates than at least one other type of county. Only in Iowa did rural counties have the lowest 2010 poverty rates of all county types.

**TABLE A**  
State Poverty by County Type

Regional **Rural** County Poverty Rates

State	Total Population (2010)	People in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
Colorado	101,648	17,187	16.9%
Iowa	798,282	90,395	11.3%
Kansas	412,972	53,916	13.1%
Minnesota	655,339	79,708	12.2%
Montana	106,084	18,883	17.8%
Nebraska	350,620	42,842	12.2%
North Dakota	192,832	26,638	13.8%
South Dakota	218,821	44,973	20.6%
Wisconsin	232,159	33,660	14.5%
Wyoming	52,524	6,129	11.7%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>3,121,281</b>	<b>414,331</b>	<b>13.3%</b>

Regional **Micropolitan** County Poverty Rates

State	Total Population (2010)	People in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
Colorado	50,868	6,981	13.7%
Iowa	526,359	69,202	13.1%
Kansas	491,017	74,638	15.2%
Minnesota	677,035	79,081	11.7%
Montana	16,096	2,899	18.0%
Nebraska	404,353	48,529	12.0%
North Dakota	154,341	16,966	11.0%
South Dakota	226,317	28,301	12.5%
Wisconsin	No Counties	-	-
Wyoming	46,133	3,117	6.8%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>2,592,519</b>	<b>329,714</b>	<b>12.7%</b>

Regional **Metropolitan** County Poverty Rates

State	Total Population (2010)	People in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
Colorado	4,141,095	535,708	12.9%
Iowa	1,721,714	209,368	12.2%
Kansas	1,949,129	246,126	12.6%
Minnesota	3,971,551	436,697	11.0%
Montana	147,972	18,671	12.6%
Nebraska	1,071,368	133,164	12.4%
North Dakota	325,418	37,571	11.5%
South Dakota	369,042	41,524	11.3%
Wisconsin	374,531	45,033	12.0%
Wyoming	91,738	10,849	11.8%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>14,163,558</b>	<b>1,714,711</b>	<b>12.1%</b>

	Total Population (2010)	People in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>19,877,358</b>	<b>2,458,756</b>	<b>12.4%</b>

Source: 2010 Poverty and Median Income Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Estimates Branch

## Food Insecurity

A sign of living in poverty may be food insecurity. Food Insecurity is defined as USDA’s measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members or limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. A food insecure household may not experience insecurity throughout the year. Any time one has to make a choice between adequate food and other expenses, such as medical bills, a household is considered to be food insecure.

Using 2009 data, the most recent available, Feeding America<sup>2</sup> recently released food insecurity rates for both children (age 0-18) and total population in all United States counties. Chart 2 provides a comparison for each county type in the region. This report uses 2010 U.S. Census Data for population and 2009 Feeding America’s food insecurity data. Children are separated from total population by age 0-18 for Feeding America and 0-19 for the U.S. Census. Chart 2 shows food insecurity in the region is higher in rural counties, both for the total population and for children.

<sup>2</sup> Feeding America’s “Map the Meal Gap” project found food insecurity rates across the United States. A full, interactive map can be found at <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>.

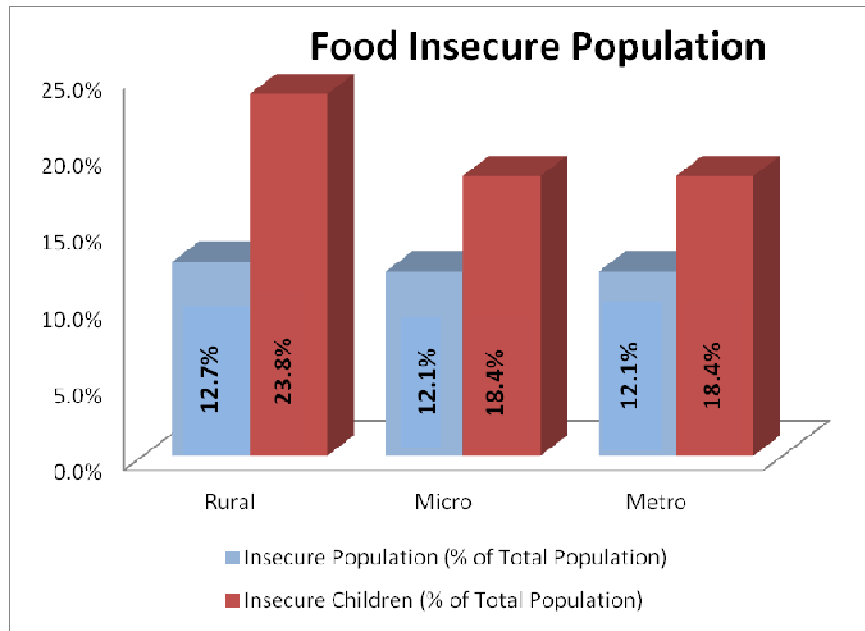


Chart 2. Percent of population considered to be food insecure.

**TABLE B**

Regional **Rural** County Food Insecurity

State	Food Insecure Population (% of Total Population)	Food Insecure Children (% of Total Population)
Colorado	15.1%	23.3%
Iowa	12.8%	34.6%
Kansas	13.1%	19.9%
Minnesota	12.8%	19.4%
Montana	13.5%	21.7%
Nebraska	11.5%	18.9%
North Dakota	8.9%	14.6%
South Dakota	14.0%	22.5%
Wisconsin	14.6%	23.8%
Wyoming	10.9%	17.6%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>12.7%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>

Regional **Micropolitan** County Food Insecurity

State	Food Insecure Population (% of Total Population)	Food Insecure Children (% of Total Population)
Colorado	12.5%	20.4%
Iowa	13.8%	20.4%
Kansas	14.1%	21.3%
Minnesota	11.6%	17.6%
Montana	13.4%	19.0%
Nebraska	11.5%	19.6%
North Dakota	6.3%	9.0%
South Dakota	10.9%	13.6%
Wisconsin	No Counties	-
Wyoming	8.4%	14.4%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>18.4%</b>

Regional **Metropolitan** County Food Insecurity

State	Food Insecure Population (% of Total Population)	Food Insecure Children (% of Total Population)
Colorado	13.8%	19.7%
Iowa	12.1%	16.6%
Kansas	14.0%	17.4%
Minnesota	10.6%	15.4%
Montana	10.8%	16.2%
Nebraska	11.4%	17.2%
North Dakota	7.1%	9.1%
South Dakota	10.2%	15.6%
Wisconsin	11.7%	17.9%
Wyoming	11.5%	17.9%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>

Source: 2010 Feeding America’s “Map the Meal Gap” project

### Childhood Poverty

Childhood poverty in the region tracks the general regional poverty rate. Childhood poverty in the region is higher in rural areas, and by a larger margin than the general poverty rate. Variations between types of counties, however, do differ by state. In most states of the region rural childhood poverty rates are highest. In Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota and Wisconsin other county types have the highest childhood poverty rates. In Iowa, Kansas and Minnesota micropolitan counties—small city counties—have the highest childhood poverty rates. In Iowa and Kansas that corresponds to the general poverty rate. In those two states micropolitan counties have the highest general poverty rate. Table C below outlines childhood poverty rates for each county type for each state of the region.

Chart 3 below shows that while childhood poverty rates in the region are highest in rural counties, childhood poverty increased at a larger rate from 2000 to 2010 in both micropolitan and metropolitan counties.

**TABLE C**

Regional **Rural** County Children in Poverty

State	Total Population Under 19 (2010)	Children in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
Colorado	24,716	5,581	22.6%
Iowa	209,395	30,953	14.8%
Kansas	113,361	18,808	16.6%
Minnesota	211,304	27,495	13.0%
Montana	29,722	7,336	24.7%
Nebraska	91,162	14,851	16.3%
North Dakota	48,694	8,990	18.5%
South Dakota	63,578	17,304	27.2%
Wisconsin	76,624	11,621	15.2%
Wyoming	13,018	1,917	14.7%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>882,475</b>	<b>145,065</b>	<b>16.4%</b>

Regional **Micropolitan** County Children in Poverty

State	Total Population Under 19 (2010)	Children in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
Colorado	14,922	2,682	18.0%
Iowa	138,335	22,591	16.3%
Kansas	136,682	26,529	19.4%
Minnesota	179,084	25,300	14.1%
Montana	4,840	1,108	22.9%
Nebraska	17,601	113,818	15.5%
North Dakota	39,607	5,024	12.7%
South Dakota	60,080	7,741	12.9%
Wisconsin	No Counties	-	-
Wyoming	14,227	1,132	8.0%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>700,694</b>	<b>109,499</b>	<b>12.9%</b>

Regional **Metropolitan** County Children in Poverty

State	Total Population Under 19 (2010)	Children in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
Colorado	114,675	170,295	14.9%
Iowa	42,780	62,187	13.2%
Kansas	560,601	83,670	14.9%
Minnesota	1,040,823	137,203	13.2%
Montana	38,650	5,916	15.3%
Nebraska	307,492	45,442	14.8%
North Dakota	83,634	9,317	11.1%
South Dakota	103,082	13,691	13.3%
Wisconsin	79,253	12,783	16.1%
Wyoming	24,805	3,589	14.5%
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>3,855,795</b>	<b>544,093</b>	<b>14.1%</b>

	Total Population Under 19 (2010)	Children in Poverty (2010)	Percentage
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>5,438,964</b>	<b>798,657</b>	<b>14.7%</b>

Source: 2010 United States Census, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, US Census Bureau

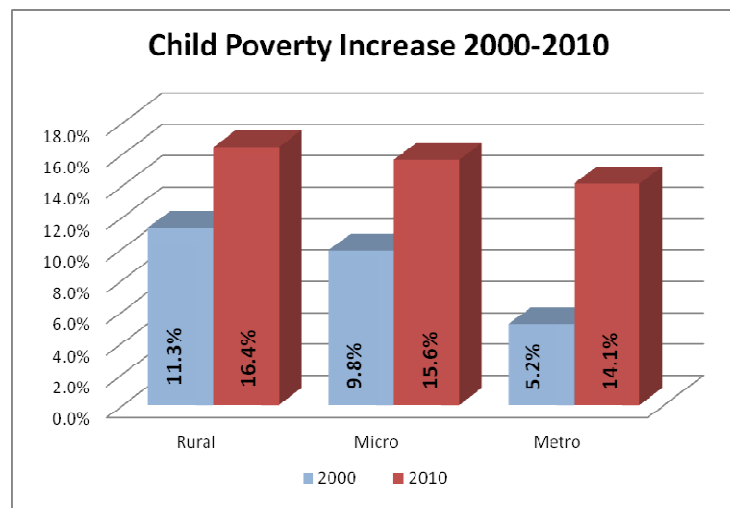


Chart 3. Child Poverty, 2000-2010

Source: 2010 and 2000, U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder

## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

This is a publication of the Rural Research and Analysis Program of the Center for Rural Affairs. Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jon Bailey is Director of the Rural Research and Analysis Program at the Center for Rural Affairs. Jon has undergraduate and law degrees from Creighton University and a Masters in Public Policy from the College of William and Mary.

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Jon and Kim have authored previous reports and studies affecting rural America, including *Swept Away: Chronic Hardship and Fresh Promise of the Great Plains* and *Fresh Promises: Highlighting Promising Strategies of the Rural Great Plains and Beyond*.

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