

## Iowa's Changing Rural Communities

Paul Lasley  
Department of Sociology  
Iowa State University

Rural Culture = Farming = Livestock

Farming was synonymous with rural culture; and farming generally included livestock

Rural Culture

Non farm communities

Agriculture

Farm dependent communities

## Changes in Rural Communities

Communities in Transition

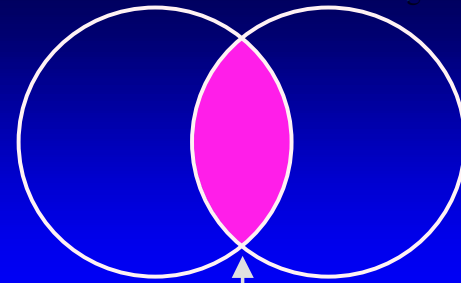
- Population mix
- Industrial base
- Occupational shifts
- Lifestyle choices
- Linkage to urban places

## Changes in Production Agriculture

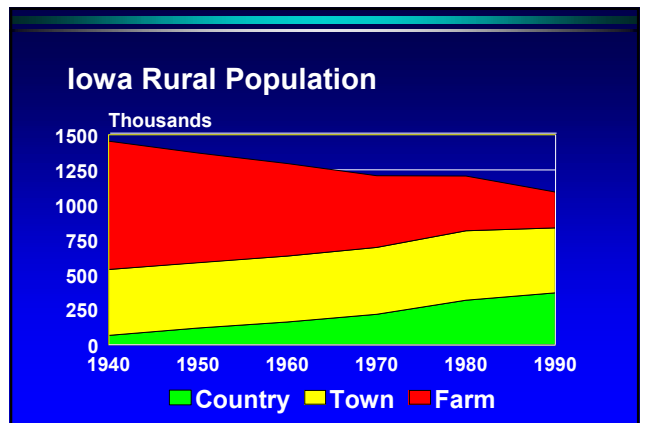
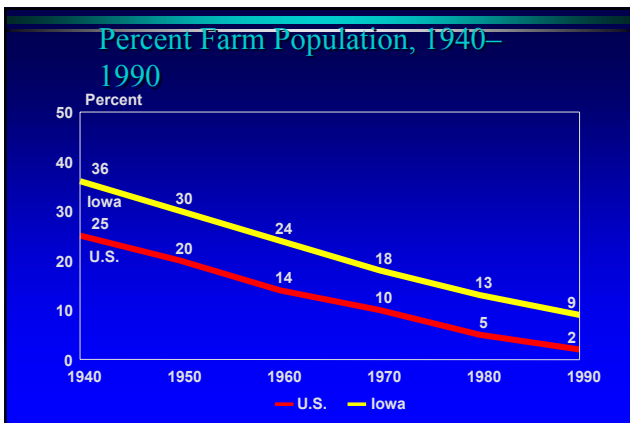
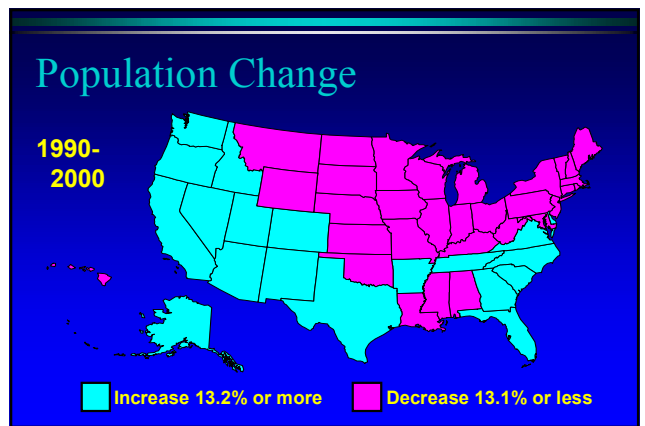
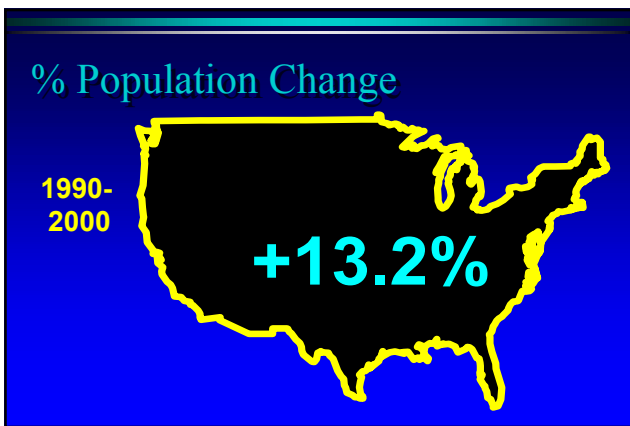
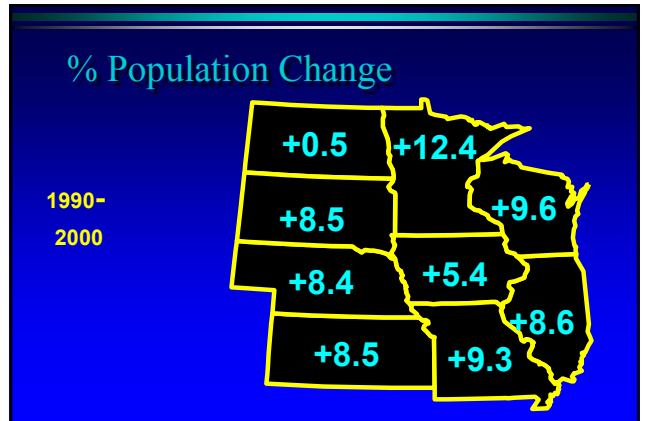
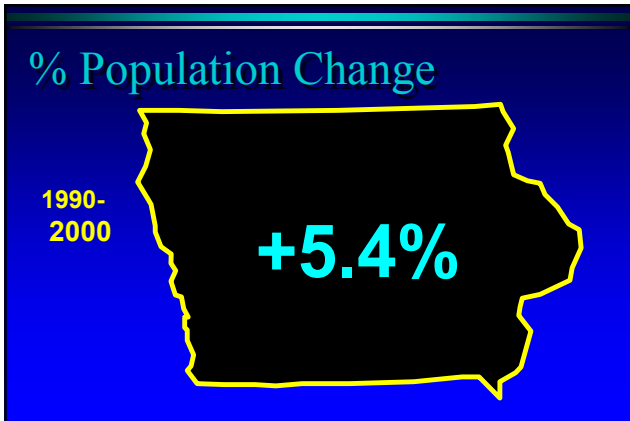
- Decline in farm numbers
- Increased size of farms
- Increased coordination (vertical integration)
- Value added processing
- Dual agriculture
- Local processing

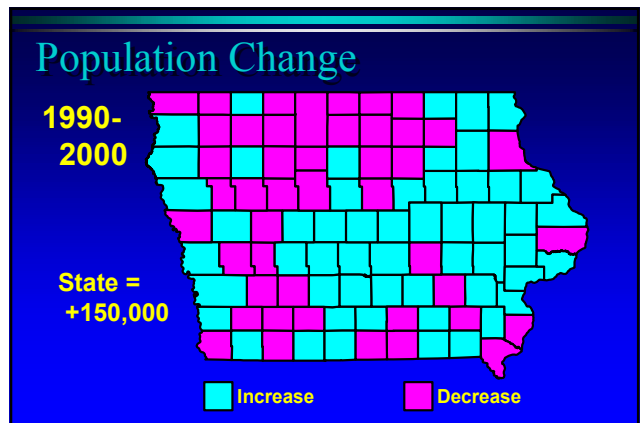
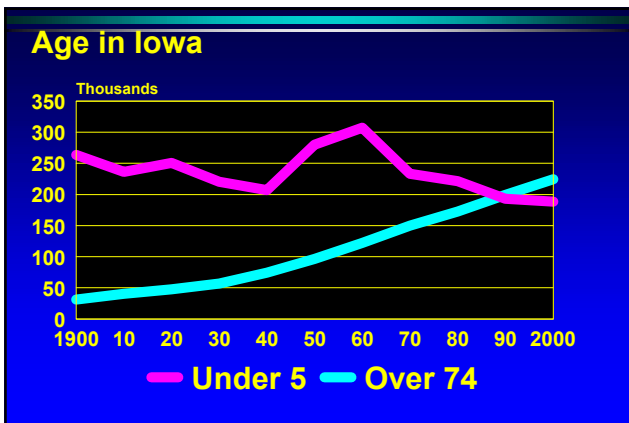
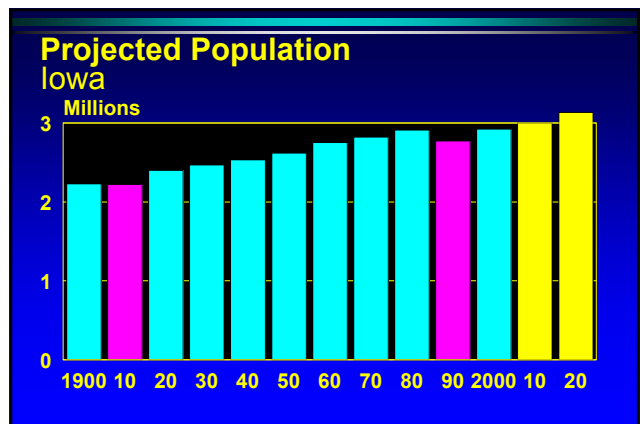
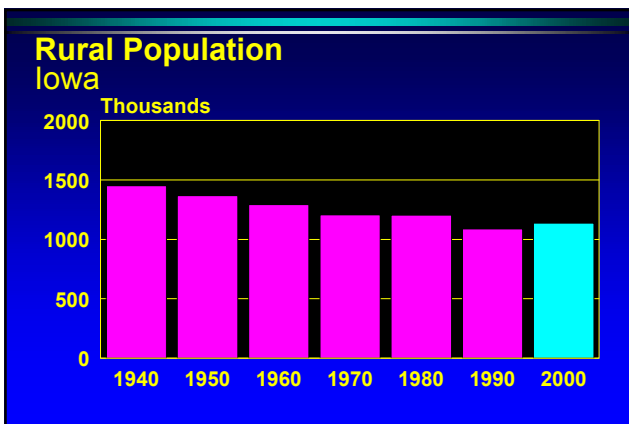
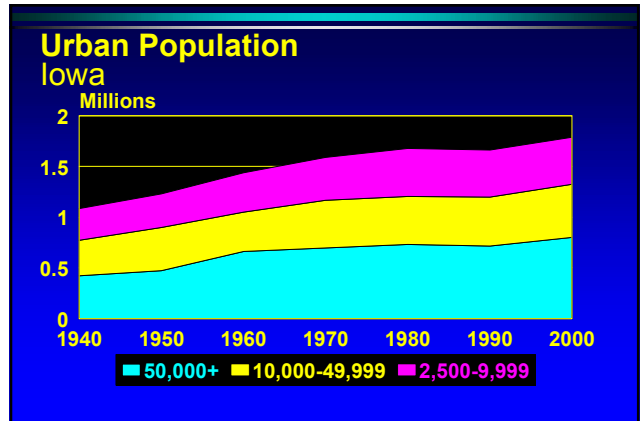
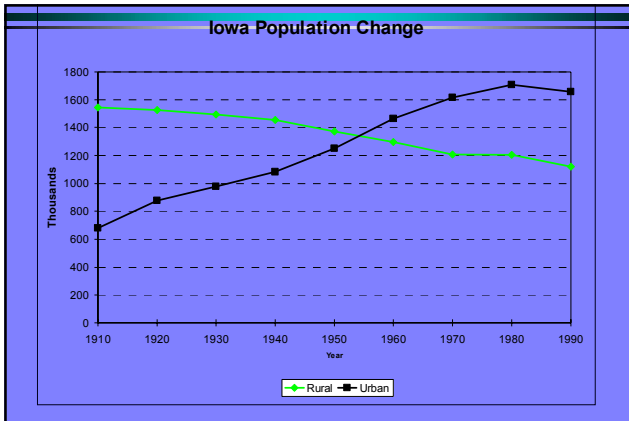
Agriculture in Transition

Rural Communities    Production Agriculture



Rural Community/Production Agriculture Interface





## Off-Farm Work

	1989	1994	1997
Males	29%	41%	35%
Females	44%	58%	51%

Source: 1989, 1994, 1997 Farm Polls

## Threats to Small Communities

	% Severe Threat
Closing of small businesses	51
Loss of family farms	39
Lack of jobs	35
People moving out	29
Indifference about community	26
Failure of people to work together	22
Loss of community spirit	22
Lack of leadership	22

## Changes in visiting patterns of Iowa farmers in the past 10 years:

	Year	Declined	Remained the Same	Increased
Do you feel that neighbors visiting each other over the past 10 years has	1996	86	14	1
	1990	82	16	2
Over the past 10 years, how has your level of visiting other neighbors changed?	1996	51	44	5
	1990	50	45	5

## Changes in visiting patterns of Iowa farmers in the past 10 years: (continued)

	Year	Declined	Remained the Same	Increased
Do you feel that neighbors helping each other over the past 10 years has	1996	76	24	1
	1990	70	28	2
Over the past 10 years, how has your level of helping other neighbors changed?	1996	37	56	7
	1990	34	59	7

## Community life scores for 1984 and 1996 (continued)

	Year	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
		----- percent -----		
I'm so busy nowadays I don't seem to have time to visit with my neighbors	1996	62	8	30
	1984	64	5	31
About the only time I see my neighbors is when they drive past my farm	1996	59	6	35
	1984	54	3	43

## Community life scores for 1984 and 1996 (continued)

	Year	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
		----- percent -----		
It is difficult to get people to volunteer to help on community projects	1996	59	19	22
	1984	62	12	27
I'm not as active in community affairs as I should be	1996	61	13	26
	1984	65	10	25

## Emerging Traits and Characteristics

### 1. Turbulence

- Rapid changes
- Social and economic change is never equal in its impact; produces gains for some and losses for others
- Externally driven social changes → powerless
- As losses mount → grief → anger → reaction

### 2. Anxiety

- Fear of the future, because the past has produced so much change (losses)
- Are rural people more anxious?
  - Fear of additional losses
  - Fear of prosperity

### 3. Weaken social institutions

Social institutions brings people of dissimilar interests together (unlike special interest groups)

- Local government, schools, hospitals, libraries, etc.

### 4. Decline in civility

- Less tolerant
- Less respect
- Unyielding positions
- Divided communities

### 5. Widening gaps between groups/sectors

- Age, income, generational differences
- Race or ethnic background
- Local versus state versus federal regulations
- Commodity interests
- Rural–Urban
- Newcomers versus long–term residents

## 6. Consolidation of business enterprises

- Production
- Processing/Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Banking
- Retailing

## 7. Occupational changes

Moving from a nation of self-employed entrepreneurs, business persons to one of hired managers and employees

## 8. Callousness

- Indifference
- Erosion in community and trust
- Blaming the victim
- Orientation to individual rather than group or collective needs

## Are these trends creating a distrustful culture?

- Where people no longer trust each other
- Where extreme individualism is primary
- Where people no longer know each other
- Diminished respect, communication and cooperation

## Traits of a distrustful culture

- Legal representation
- Formalized contracts
- Fear of liability
- Less personal contact
- Formal communication
- Suspiciousness
- Negative attitudes

- Loss of community
- Erosion in ethics
- Culture of distrust
- Rural social problems
  - School dropouts
  - Crime
  - Divorce
- Institutions/organizations struggling to survive
- Teenage pregnancies

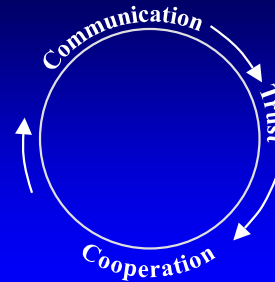
Is it possible that we are creating a rural culture, where no one wants to live?

## The Lack of Neighboring Results in

- Less “knowing”/Less communication
- Less trust
- Less willingness to work together
- Erosion in community

## Need to Restore the Practice of Neighboring

Neighbor as a verb  
versus  
Neighbor as a noun



## Indicators of Successful Communities

- Community Pride
- Emphasis upon quality of business and community life
- Willingness to invest in the future
- Widespread participation in community decisions
- Cooperative community spirit

## Successful Communities

- Vision of the future
- Appreciation for the environment and natural resources
- Active economic development program
- Shared decision making with particular attention to the inclusion of women, youth and minority groups

## Successful Communities

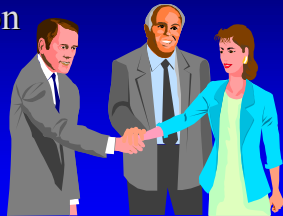
- Presence of strong social institutions, esp churches and schools
- Attention to sound and well maintained infrastructure
- Prudent use of fiscal resources
- Willingness to seek assistance from outside
- Cooperation with other communities

## Community Development

- Historically community development was about building things, schools, roads, hospitals, industrial parks, etc. Now it appears that it is equally important to build social capital (teams, partnering, cooperation, collaboration, etc)

## Building Social Capital

- Communication
- Trust
- Cooperation



**Thank you**