June 16-18, 2025
Wisconsin Rapids, WI

WISCONSIN'S 2ND

CONNECTING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE

Community Economic Development
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

the RURAL LIVABILITY project

Danielle Schmidt, PhD Candidate

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Rural Partnerships Institute
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

What makes a place “livable”?

The Rural Livability Project

WHAT?

- Learn about highly “livable” rural places.
- Translate to places that are facing challenges.

WHY?

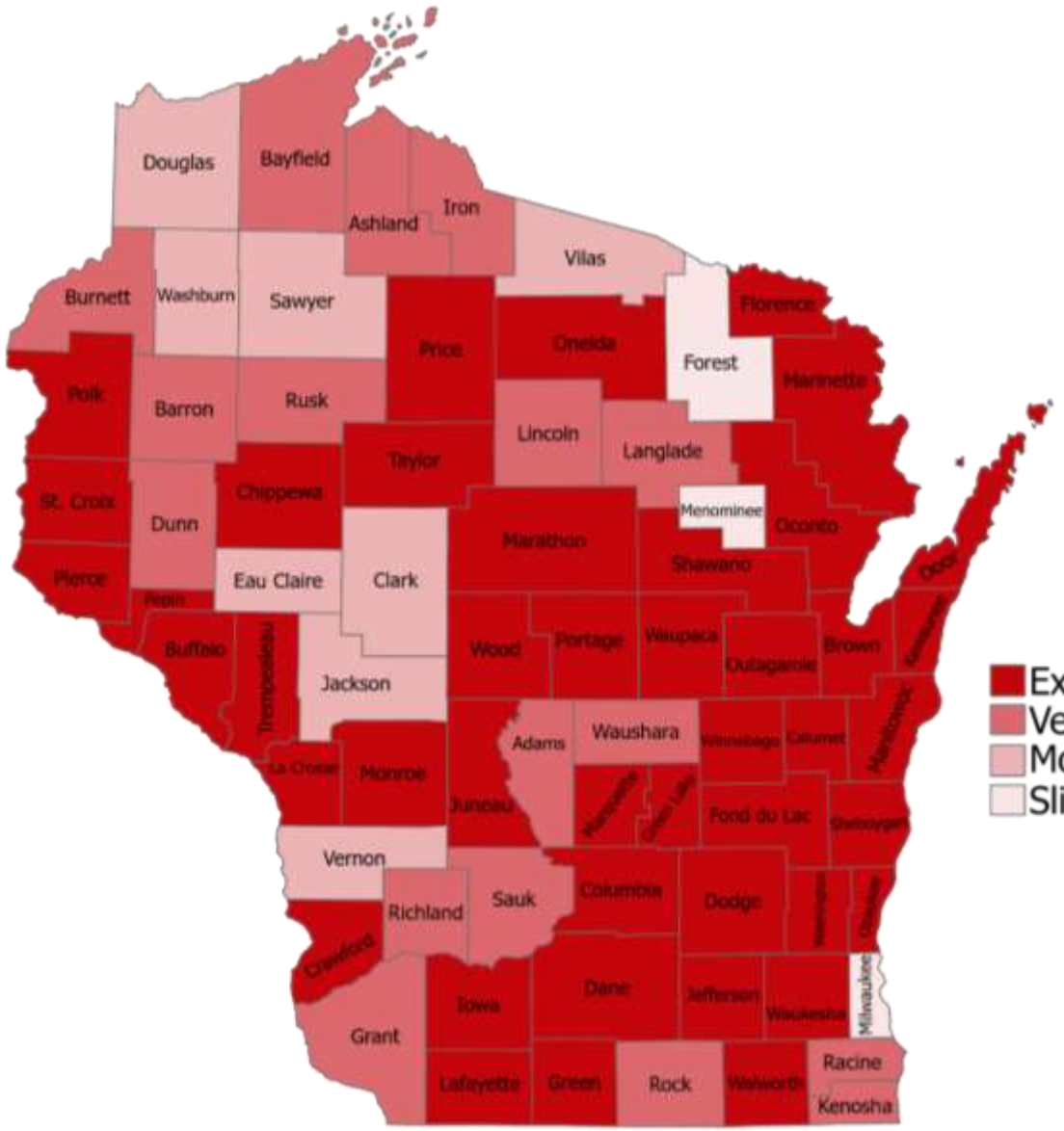
- **Support and sustain rural thriving.**
- Jobs follow people.
- Focus on rural quality of life or “livability”.

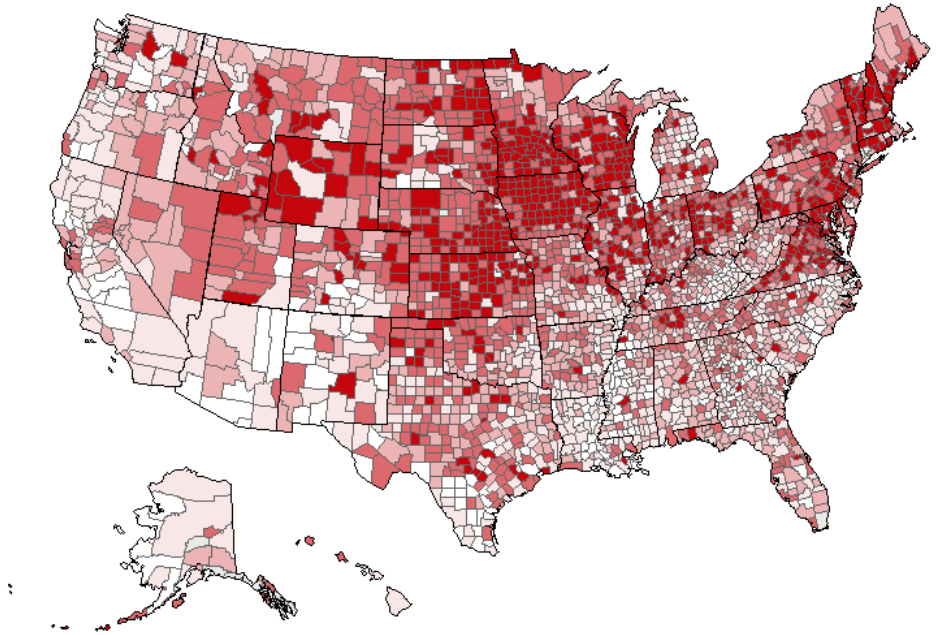
Prosperity in the U.S. and Wisconsin

HOW?

- Jobs: Low unemployment.
- Income: Low poverty.
- Education: Low high school drop out rate.
- Housing: Low housing stress.

Wisconsin is at the center of a prosperity “hot spot”





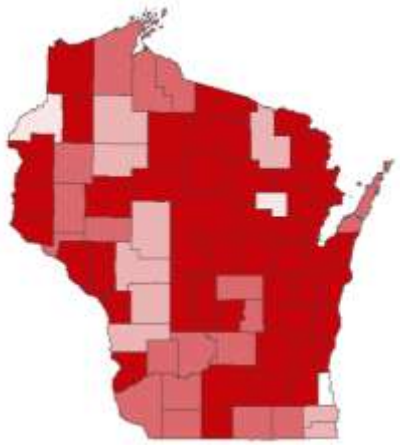
- Extremely Prosperous
- Very Prosperous
- Moderately Prosperous
- Slightly Prosperous

Prosperity is variable, over time and across space

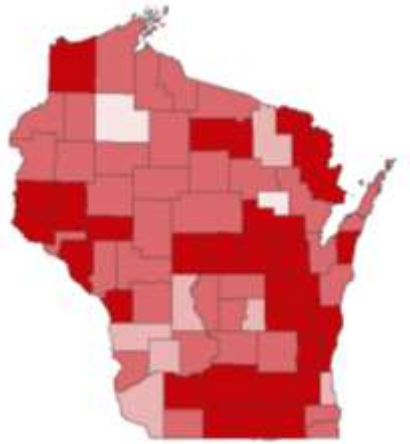
1990

2000

2010



2020



Number/percent of counties scoring better than the national average								
	1990		2000		2010		2020	
Poverty rate	48	67%	64	89%	57	79%	59	82%
Unemployment rate	47	65%	51	71%	66	92%	69	96%
Substandard housing conditions	69	96%	71	99%	68	94%	71	99%
High school dropout rate	67	93%	65	90%	51	71%	35	49%

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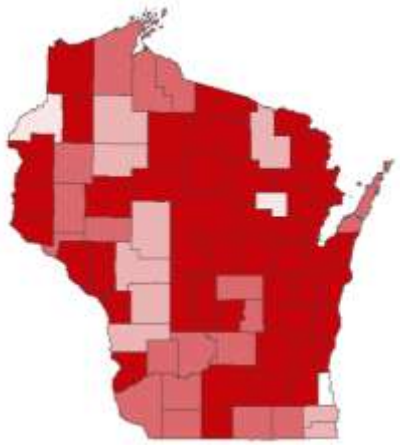

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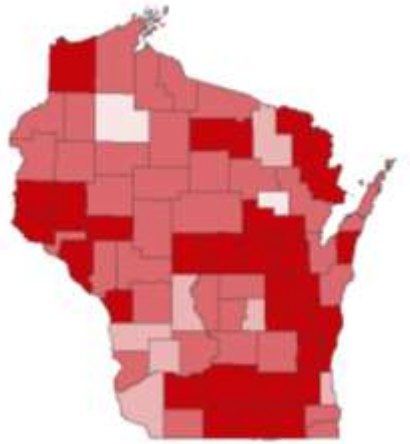

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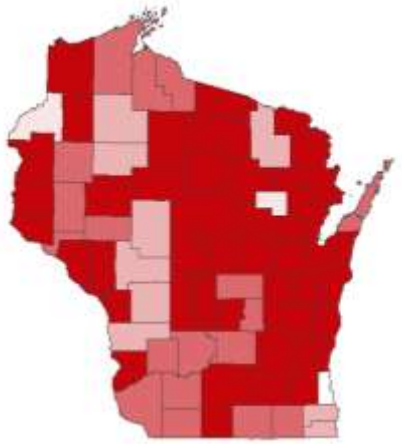
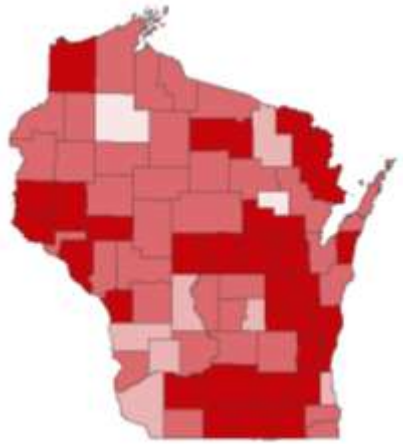


2020



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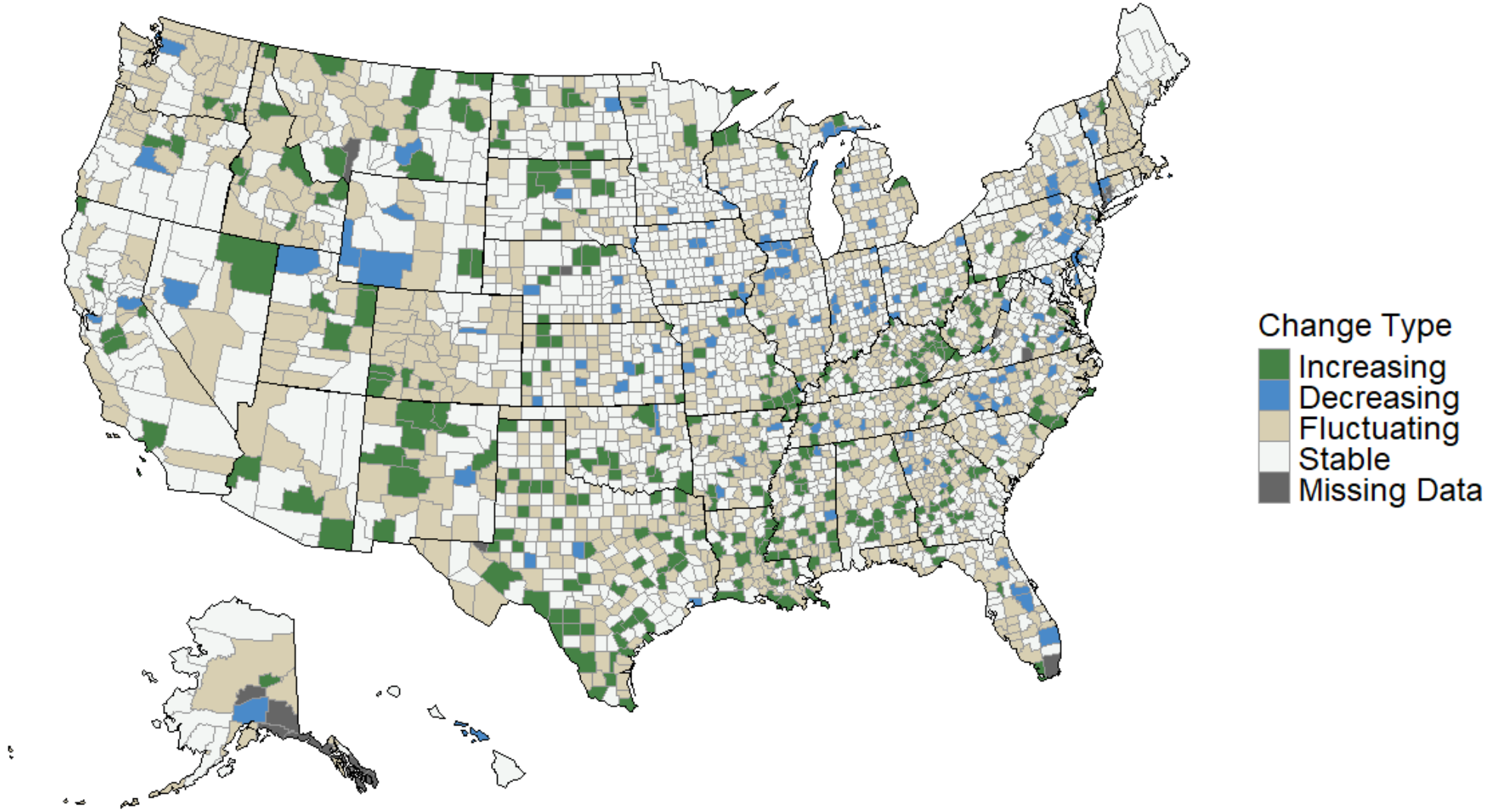
Prosperity changes over time, at a national scale



We find evidence that contradicts a narrative of universal rural decline.

Prosperity Pathway Change by Metro Status									
	Increasing		Decreasing		Stable		Fluctuating		Average Prosperity Score
Metro	79	6.8%	72	6.2%	599	51.8%	407	35.2%	2.45
Nonmetro Adjacent	126	12.3%	44	4.3%	475	46.4%	379	37.0%	2.16
Nonmetro Remote	145	15.4%	30	3.2%	448	47.7%	316	33.7%	2.40

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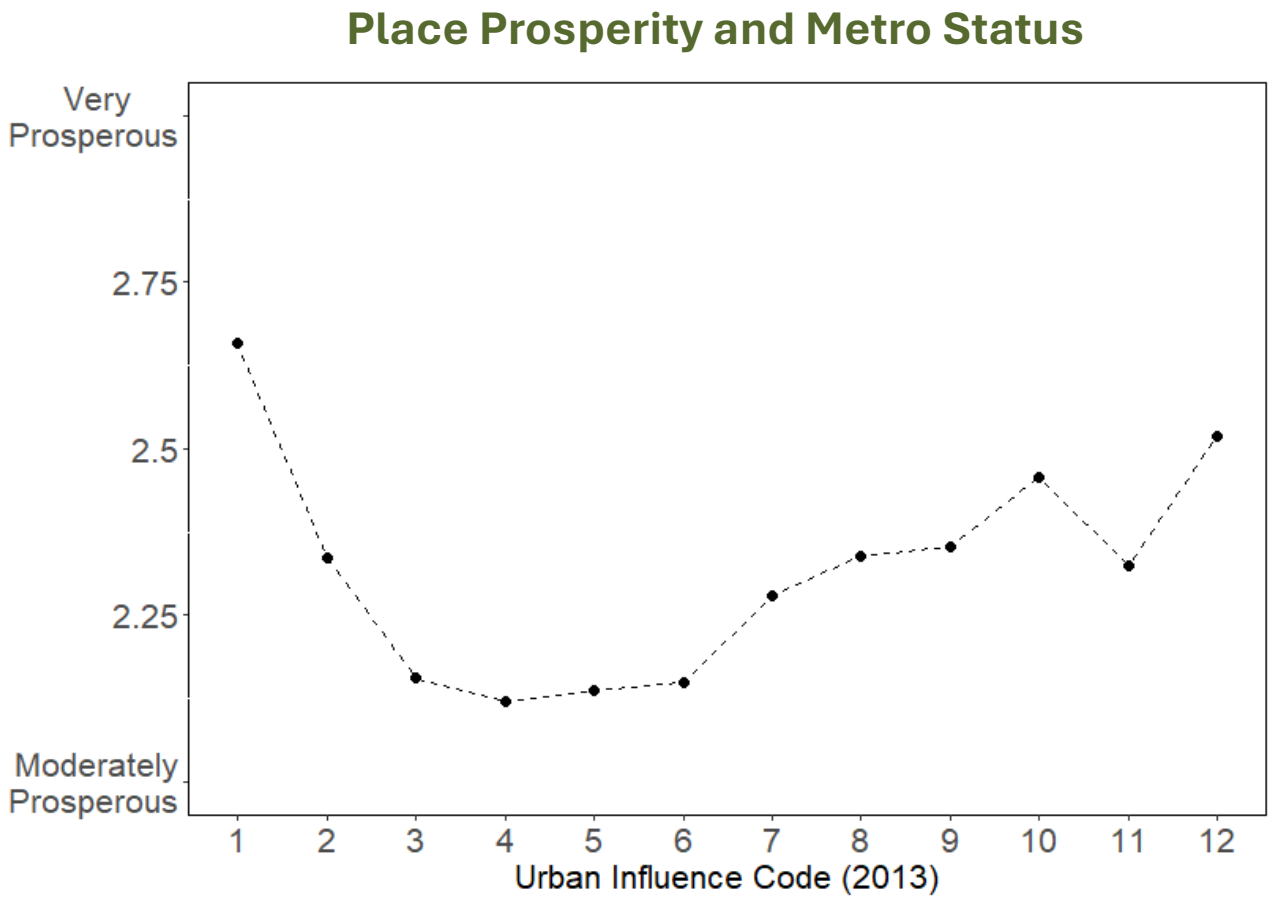
The most rural and most urban counties score the highest in the prosperity index, by average and over time.



Notes: The y-axis is the numeric representation of the Prosperity Pathway Typology (for example, extremely prosperous = 4, very prosperous = 3). The x-axis is the 2013 Urban Influence Code (UICs), with 1 being the most urban and 12 being the most rural. Each point represents the average Prosperity Pathway score by metro status. This figure demonstrates that the most urban (1) and most rural (12) counties tend to have the highest prosperity scores over the study period.

Takeaways:

1. Assess prosperity over time → **Education**
2. Leverage existing assets → **Housing**
3. Be creative in defining prosperity → **Don’t discount rural**

the RURAL LIVABILITY project

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We relied on high-quality and accessible federally collected data to conduct this study.

We are grateful to our collaborators on the Rural Livability Project for their support and contributions. Financial support comes from the Wisconsin Rural Partnership Initiative at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, part of the USDA-funded Institute for Rural Partnerships and the United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration in support of Economic Development Authority University Center [Award No. ED21CHI3030029]. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.

Read More Here!

Moving Beyond Growth to Evaluate Change in Community Well-Being

Understanding WI Prosperity in the National Context

A Presentation Pop Quiz In 4 Questions

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The Big Question

- Why are rates of entrepreneurship lower in Wisconsin?
- How does the experience of rural entrepreneurs differ?
- What policy guidance can we offer to increase entrepreneurship in our rural areas?

Survey Stats

- Spring/Summer 2024
- 1,628 Wisconsin Respondents
- 66% Rural
- Average Age = 60 (S.D. 16); Median Age = 62
- Average Income = $119,020; Median = $80,000
- 47% Male; 53% Female
- 44.6% Bachelor's Degree or Higher

We Asked ...

- Have you ever owned a business?
- Have you ever been involved in starting a business that earned revenue?
- Have you ever discontinued a business before

Question 1: What percentage of rural Wisconsin residents …

- … Have at least some entrepreneurial experience?
- … Have been part of an entrepreneurial venture that earned revenue?
- … Have been part of an entrepreneurial venture that did not earn revenue?

Rural Residents More Likely to Have Entrepreneurial Experience

50%

At least some experience

35% of Urban Wisconsinites

41%

In venture that earned revenue

28% of Urban Wisconsinites

9.4%

In venture that did not earn revenue

7.2% of Urban Wisconsinites

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Rural Residents More Likely to Have Entrepreneurial Experience

50%

No Experience

65% of Urban Wisconsinites

9%

Yes, 1 Question

9% of Urban Wisconsinites

36%

Yes, 2 Questions

23% of Urban Wisconsinites

4%

Yes, 3 Questions

3% of Urban Wisconsinites

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Hi Experience

50%

No Experience

65% of Urban Wisconsinites

9%

Yes, 1 Question

9% of Urban Wisconsinites

36%

Yes, 2 Questions

23% of Urban Wisconsinites

4%

Yes, 3 Questions

3% of Urban Wisconsinites

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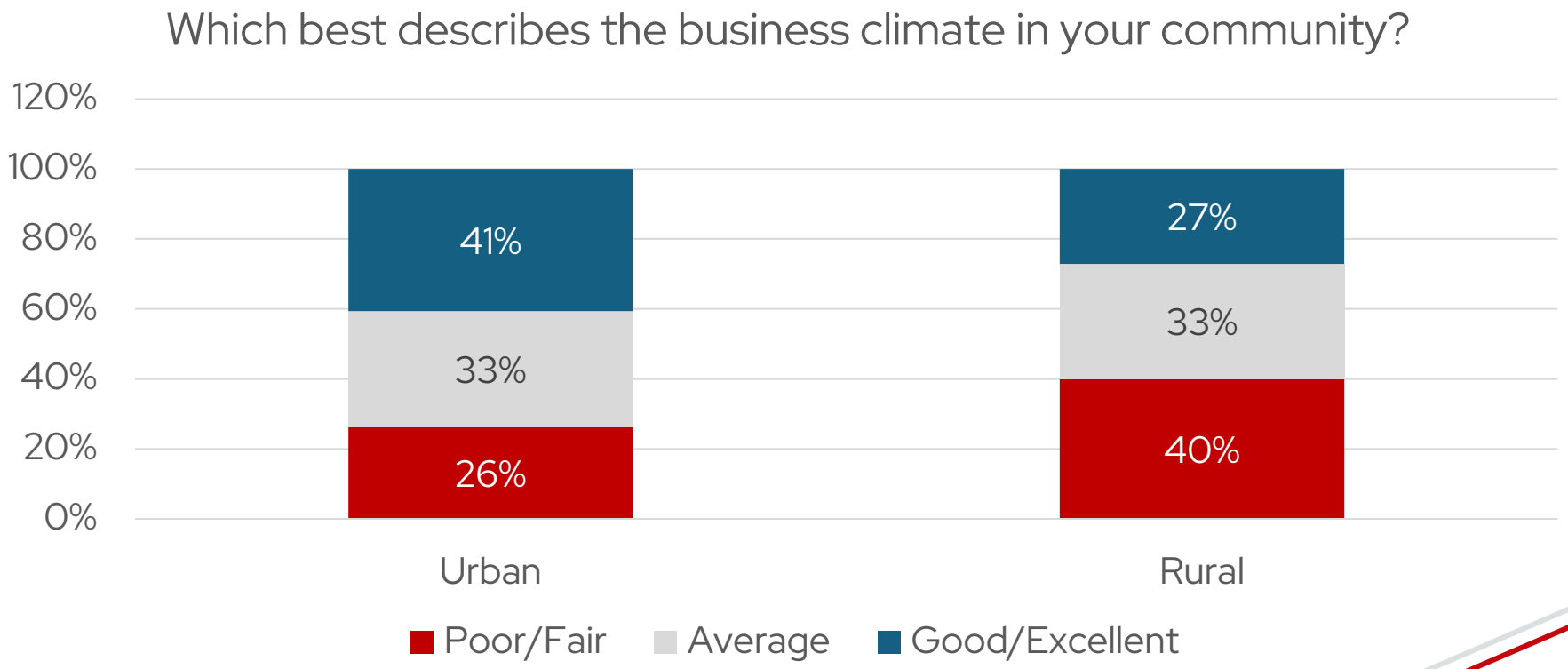
Question 2: Are rural Wisconsinites more likely to describe their local economy as …

- … Good/excellent or Fair/Poor?
- … Are they more optimistic about their local economy than urban Wisconsinites?

We Asked …

- Compared to other communities, how much opportunity for entrepreneurs is there in your community?
- Compared to other states, how much opportunity for entrepreneurs is there in your state?

Rural Residents More Likely to See Local Business Climate as Poor/Fair.



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Wisconsin Entrepreneurial Climate Survey

Kristin Runge, Ph.D. kristin.runge@wisc.edu

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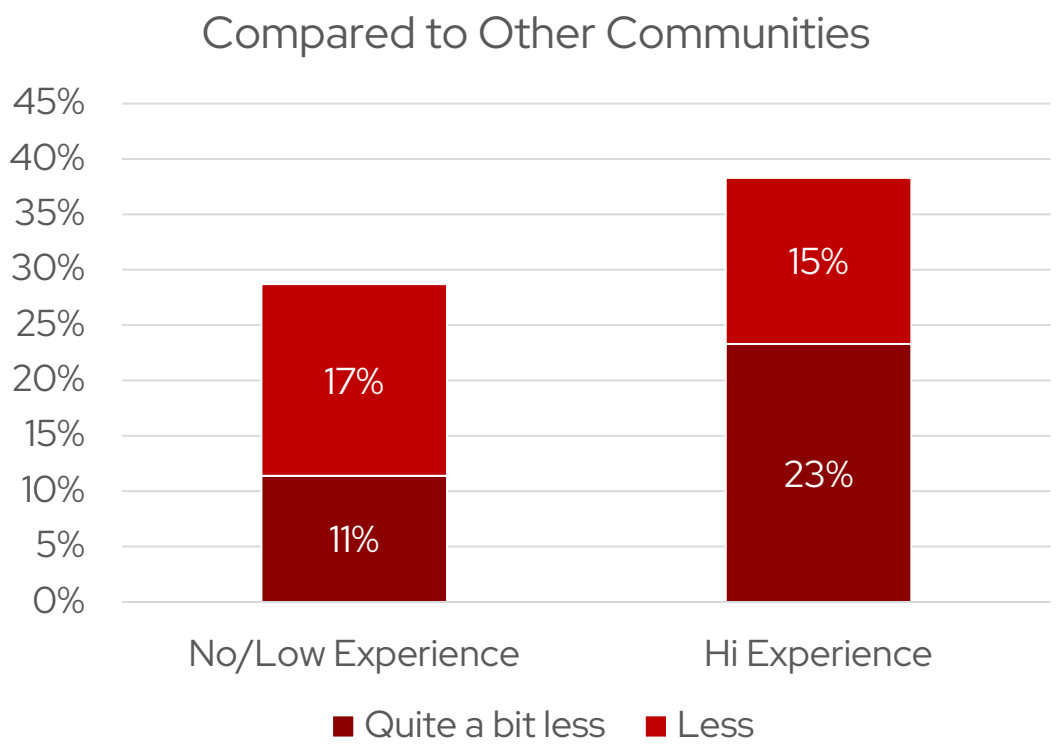
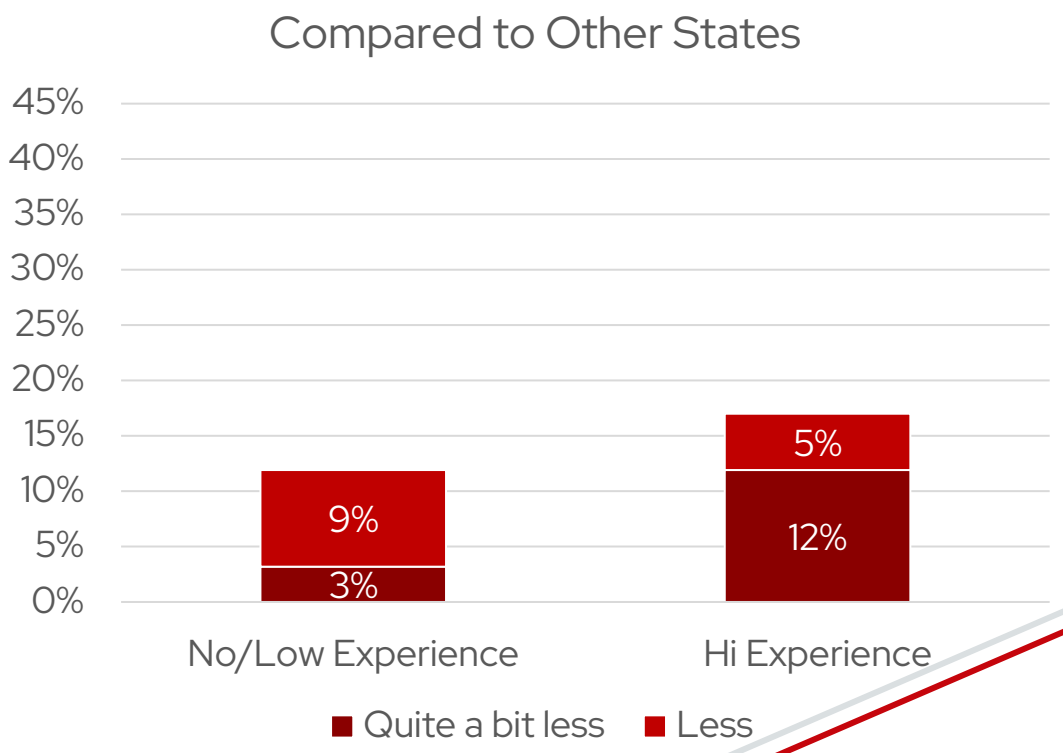
Question 3: Do hi experience entrepreneurs have more see more opportunity than low experience entrepreneurs in their community? In Wisconsin?

- … Opportunities in their community as compared to other communities?
- …. Opportunities in our state as compared to other states?

Experienced Entrepreneurs More Pessimistic About Opportunities Here vs. There





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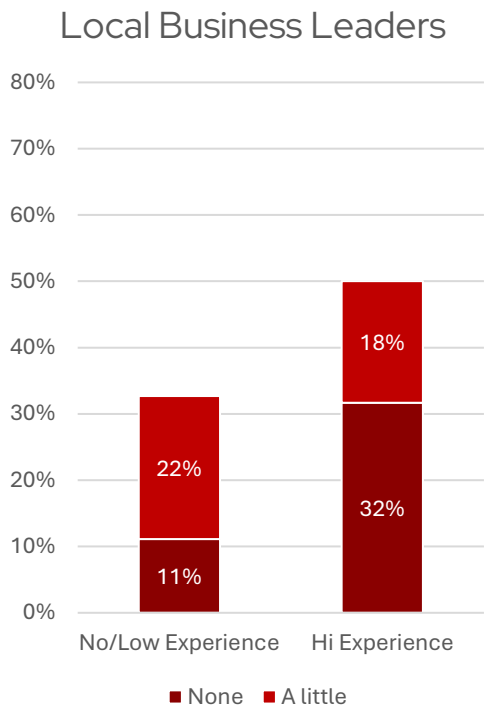
We Asked …

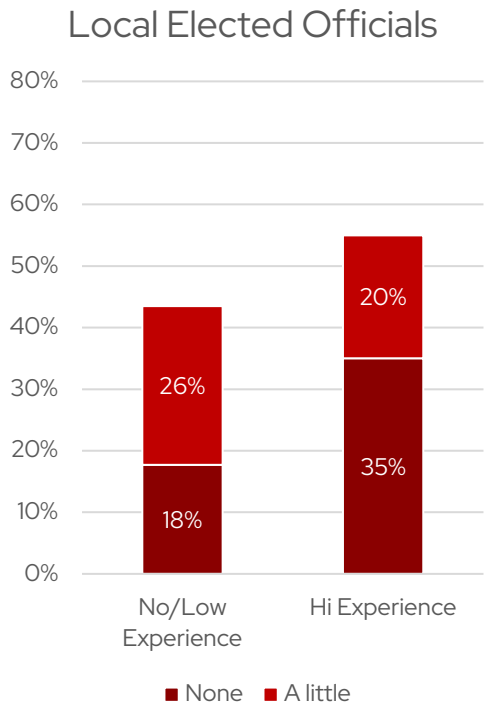
- How much support for a new business do you think you would get from …
  - …. Local business leaders
  - …. Local elected officials
  - …. State government

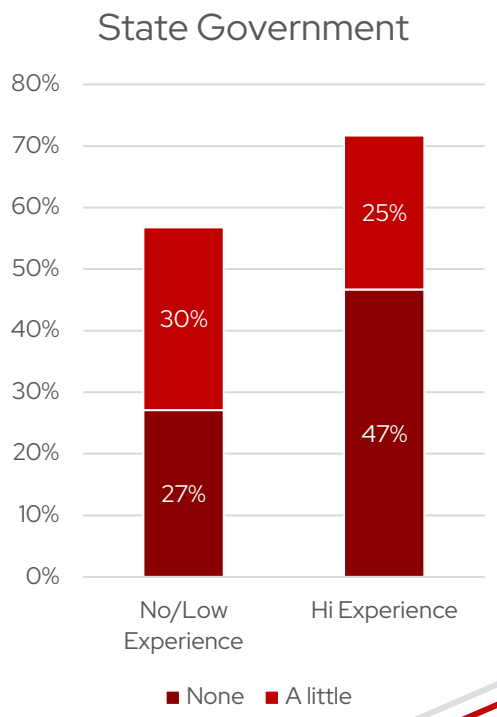
Question 4: Do hi experience entrepreneurs have more faith than low experience entrepreneurs that the following will help if they start a business …

- … Local business leaders
- … Local elected officials
- …. State government

Experienced Entrepreneurs More Pessimistic About Likelihood of Help







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How do we respond as local champions?

extension.wisc.edu/community-development/

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Trends in Rural Entrepreneurship

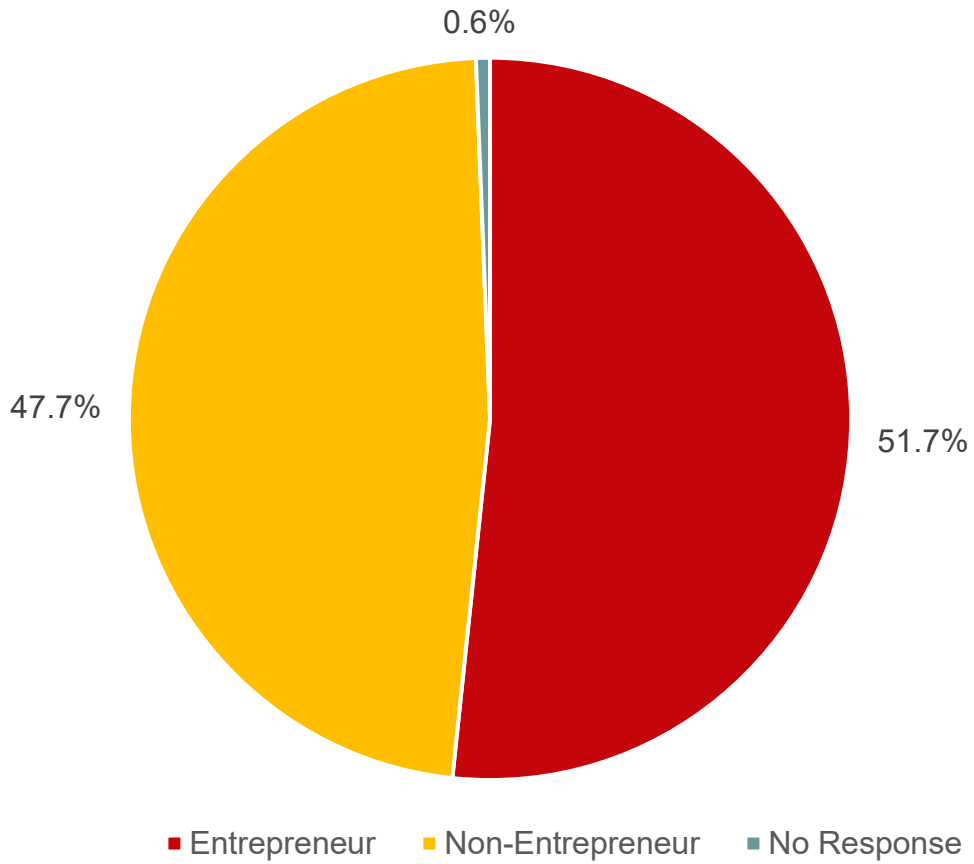
Tessa Conroy, PhD
Vilas Associate Professor-Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics
Economic Development Specialist-Division of Extension
Team Lead-The Rural Livability Project
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Key Themes

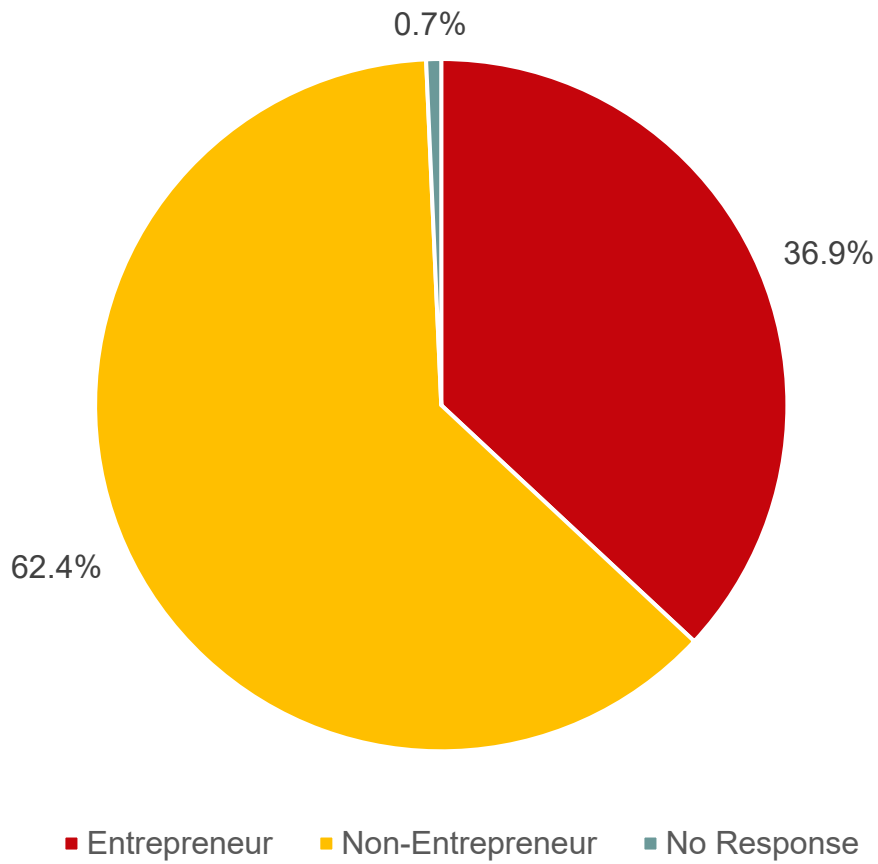
- Rural communities are very entrepreneurial.
- Most new businesses will not have employees.
- BUT many want to.
- Opportunity for targeted entrepreneurial support.

Rural places are very entrepreneurial.

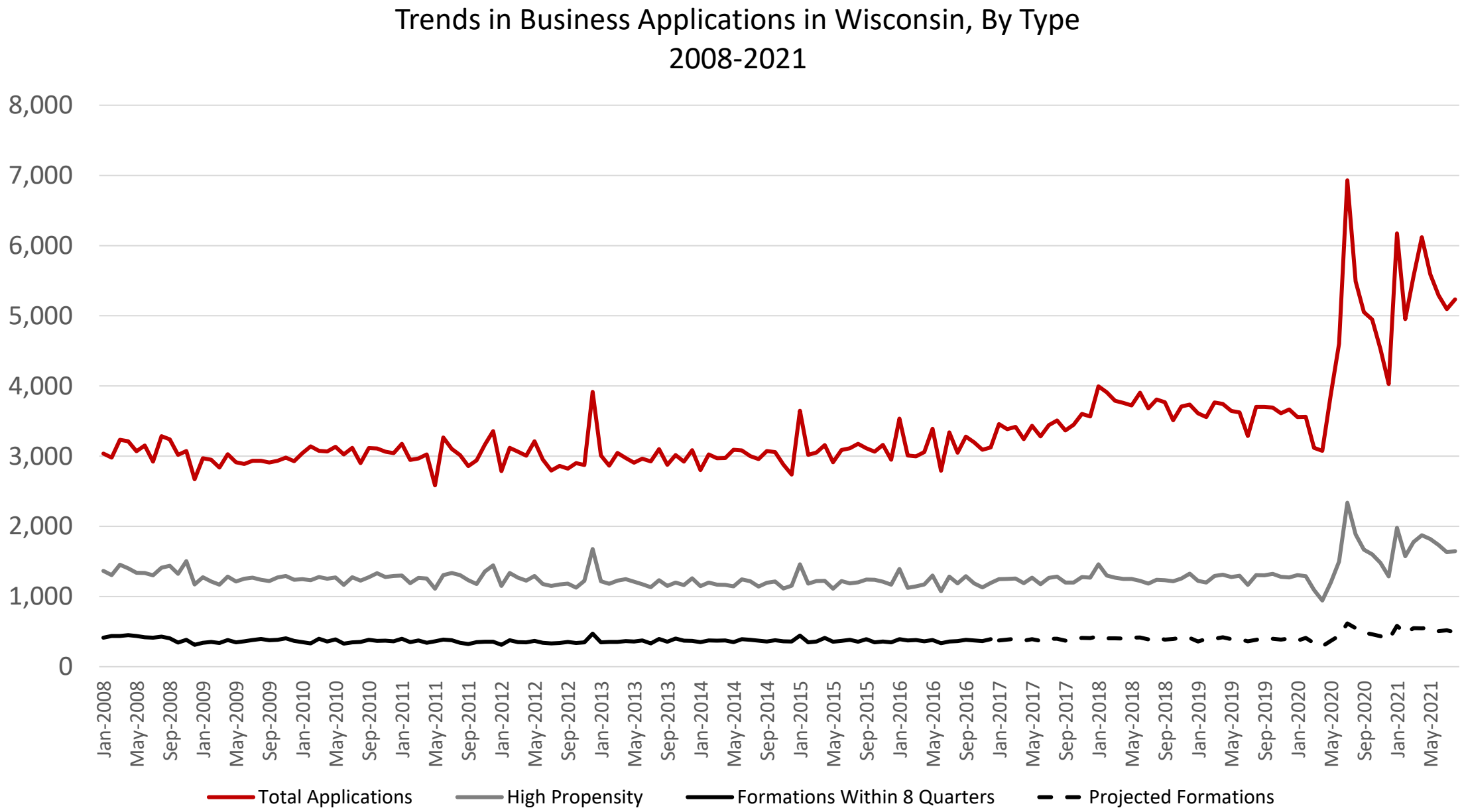
Entrepreneur Share of Population-Rural



Entrepreneur Share of Population-Urban



Entrepreneurial intent is high.


Trends in Business Applications in Wisconsin, By Type
2008-2021
8,000
7,000
6,000
5,000
4,000
3,000
2,000
1,000
0
Jan-2008
May-2008
Sep-2008
Jan-2009
May-2009
Sep-2009
Jan-2010
May-2010
Sep-2010
Jan-2011
May-2011
Sep-2011
Jan-2012
May-2012
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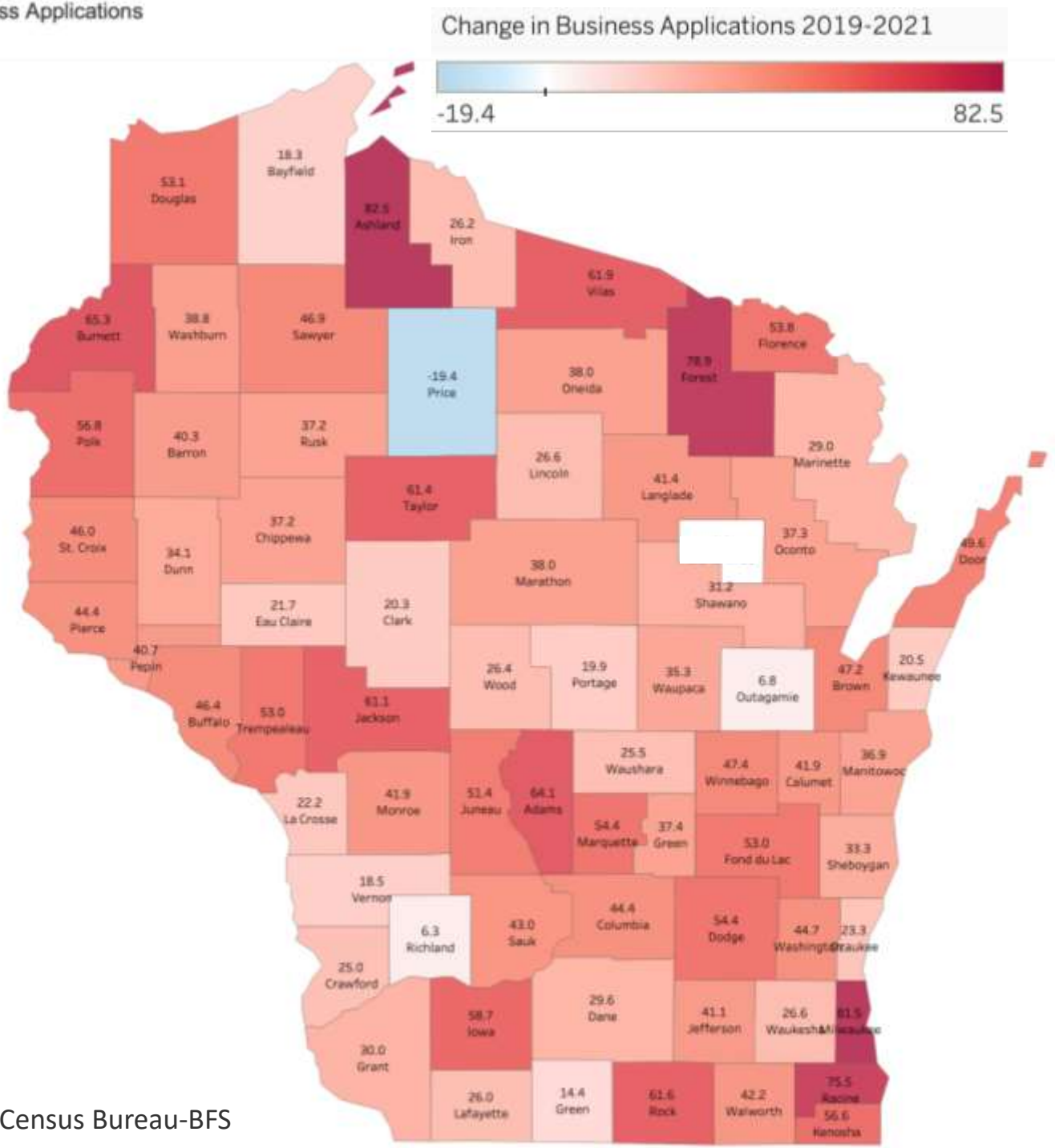
May-2017
Sep-2017
Jan-2018
May-2018
Sep-2018
Jan-2019
May-2019
Sep-2019
Jan-2020
May-2020
Sep-2020
Jan-2021
May-2021
Total Applications
High Propensity
Formations Within 8 Quarters
Projected Formations

Rural Business Applications: +39%

Change in Business Applications 2019-2021



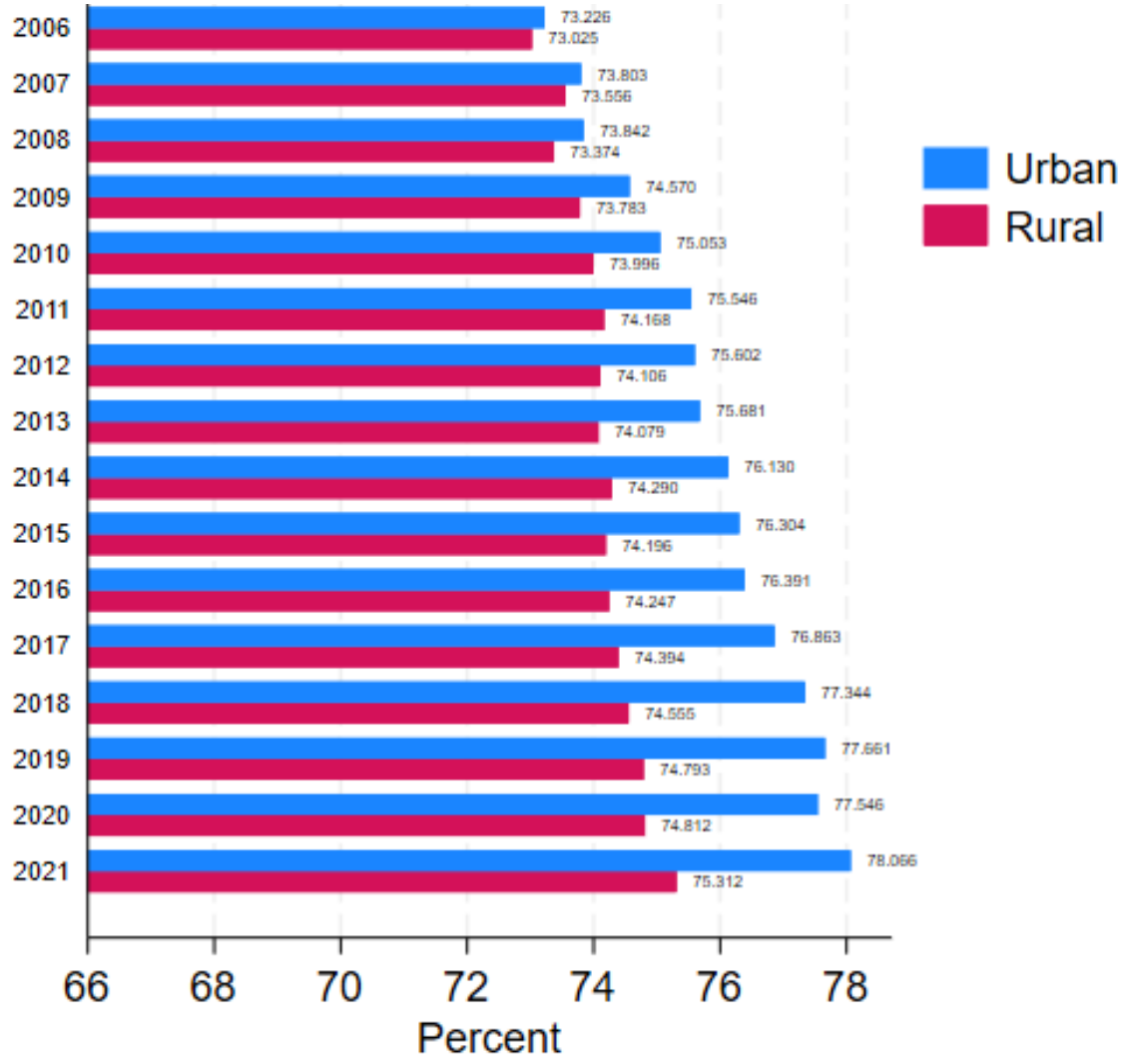
On average, from 2019 to 2021, business applications increased 39% in rural counties.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau-BFS

Most new businesses will not have employees.

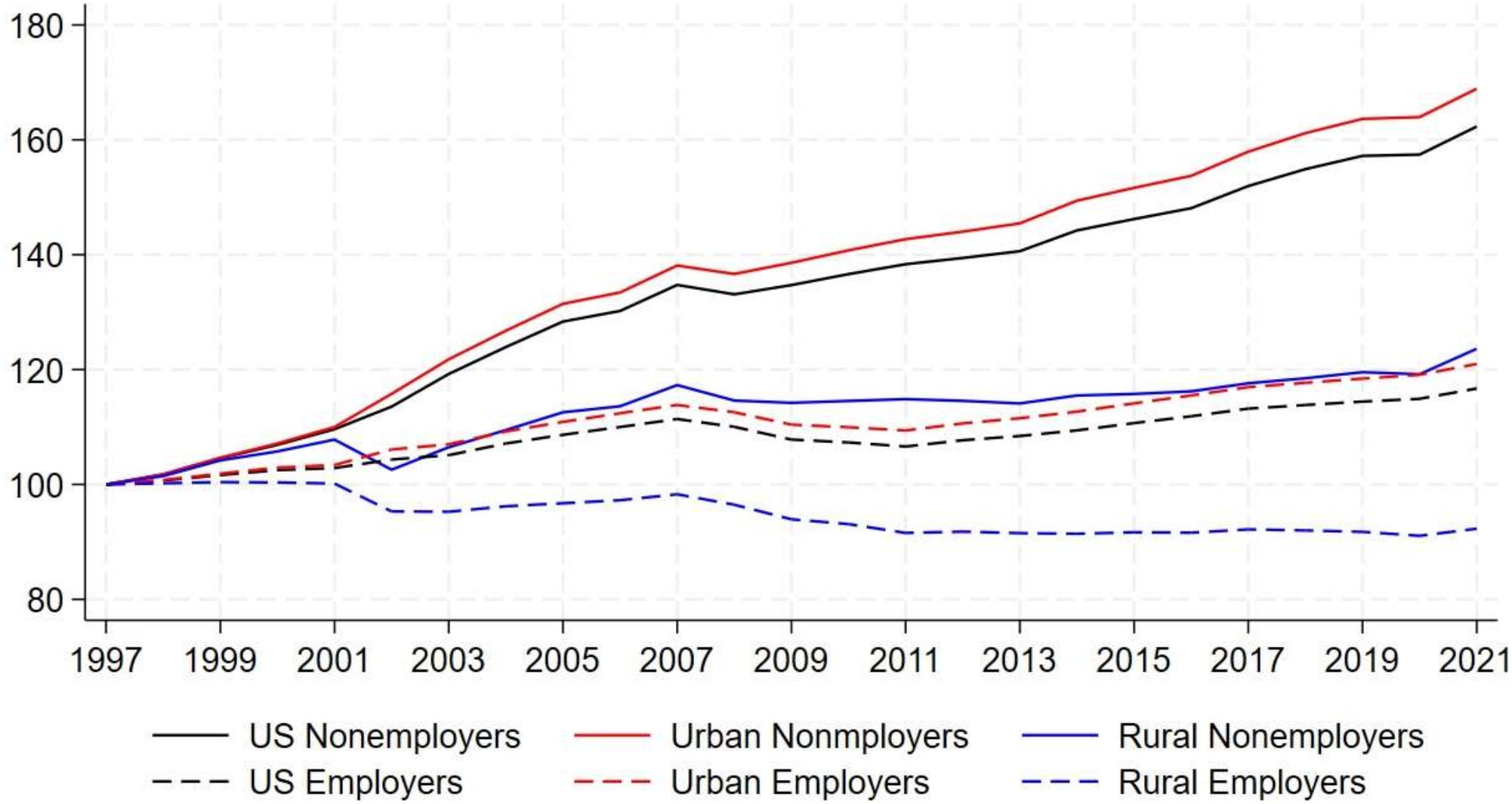
Nonemployer Share of Total U.S. Businesses

Source: NES-D (1997–2021), County Business Patterns (1997–2021).



Rural Microbusinesses: +20%

Growth of U.S. Employer and Nonemployer Businesses
Source: NES-D (1997–2021), County Business Patterns (1997–2021).

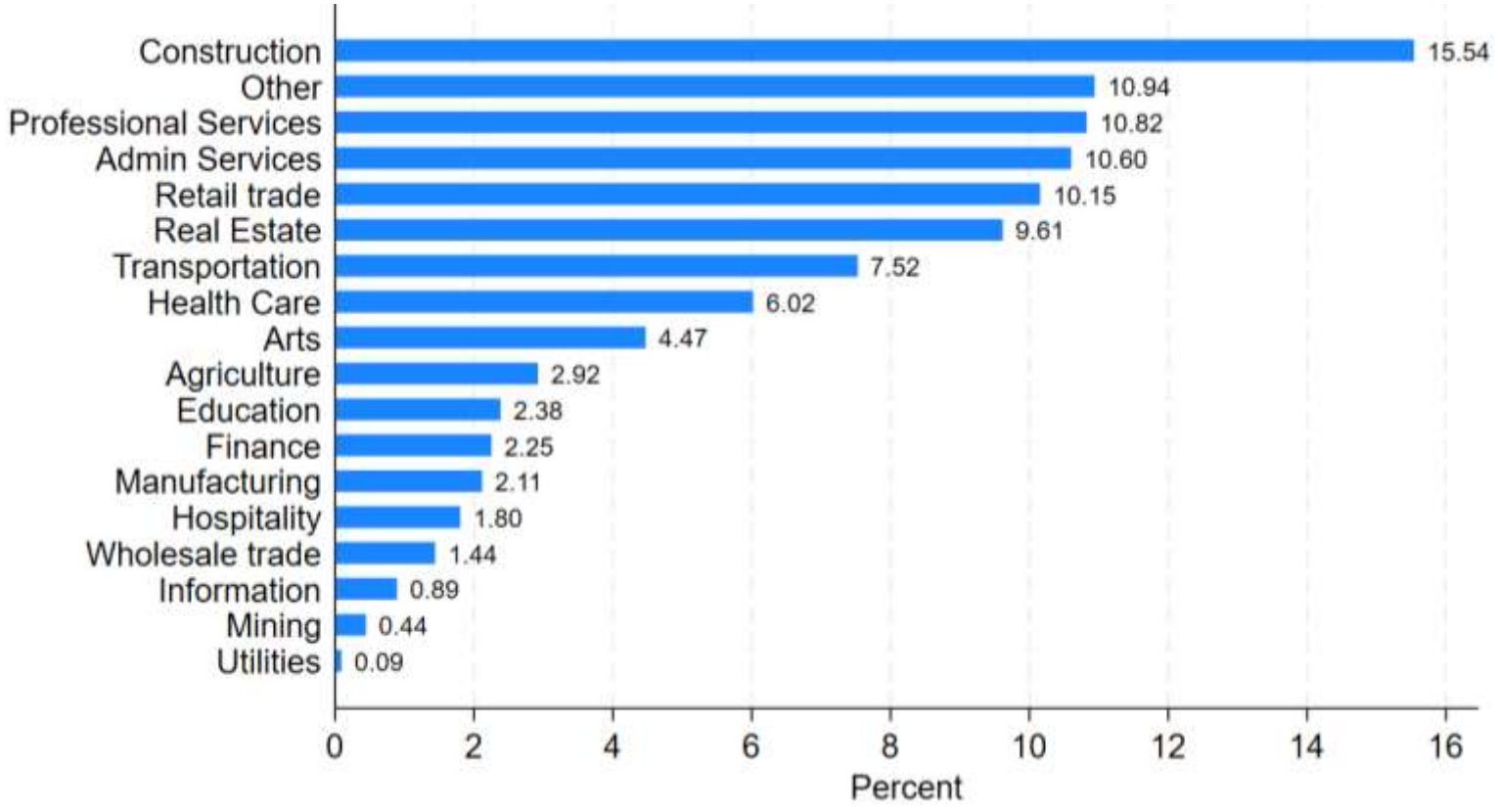


1 in 4 want to hire

Targeted Support

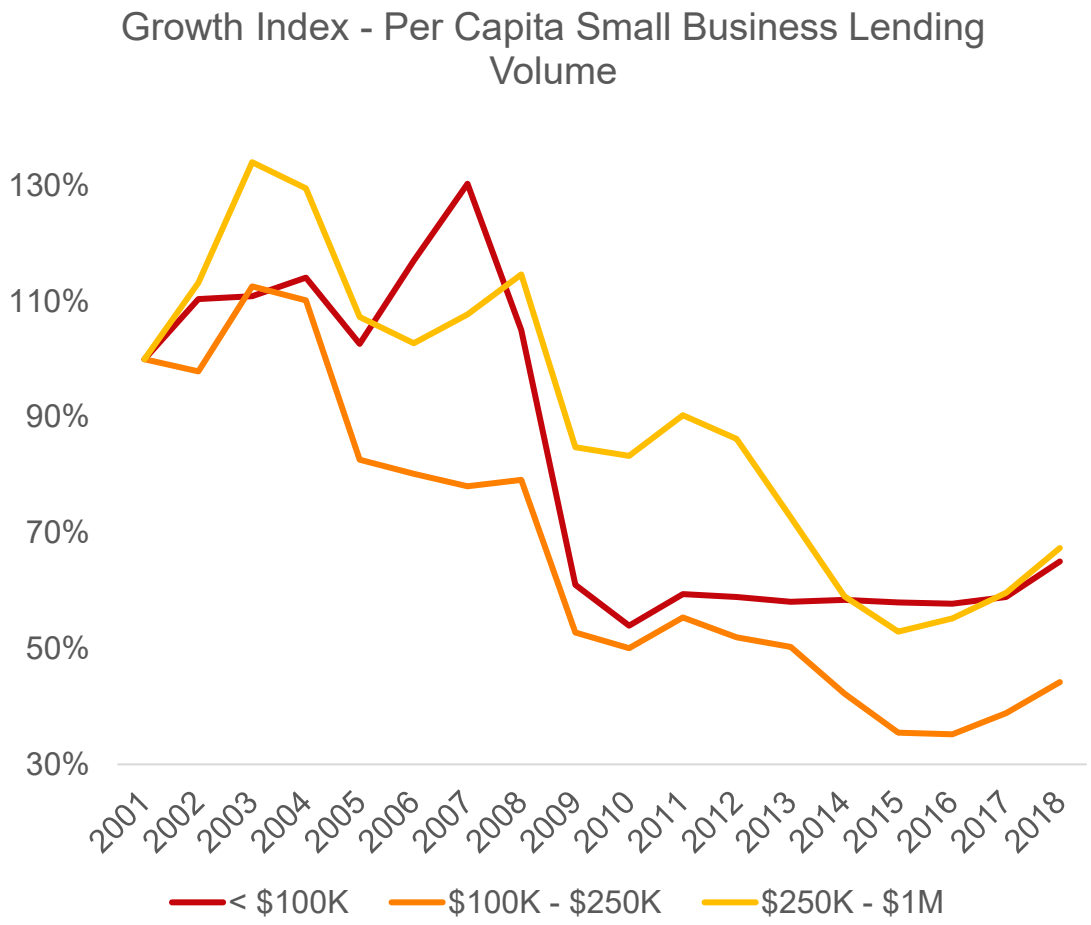
- Rural- and Home-based businesses
  - Broadband is really important.
  - Technical assistance.
- Growth aspirations.
  - Payroll/taxes.

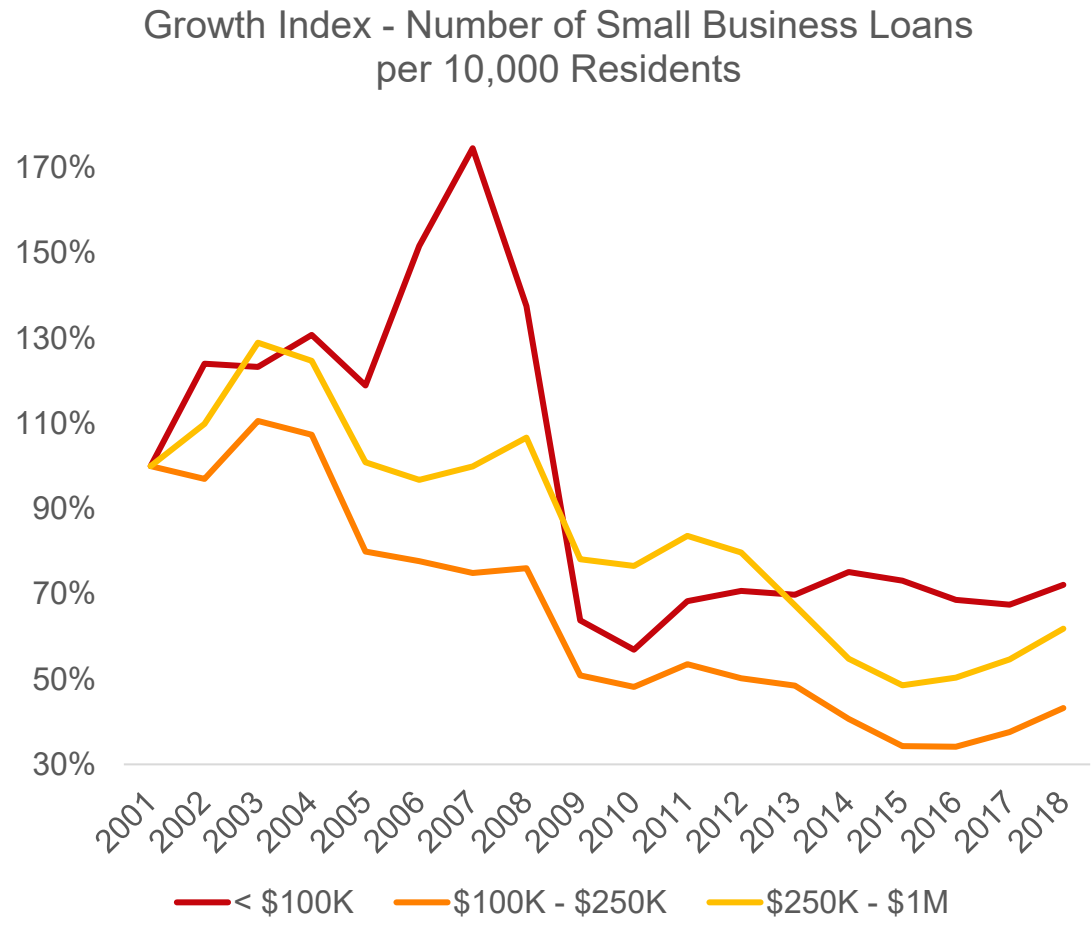
Nonemployers by Industry in Rural America
Source: NES-D (2021).



Targeted Support

- Small loan amounts.





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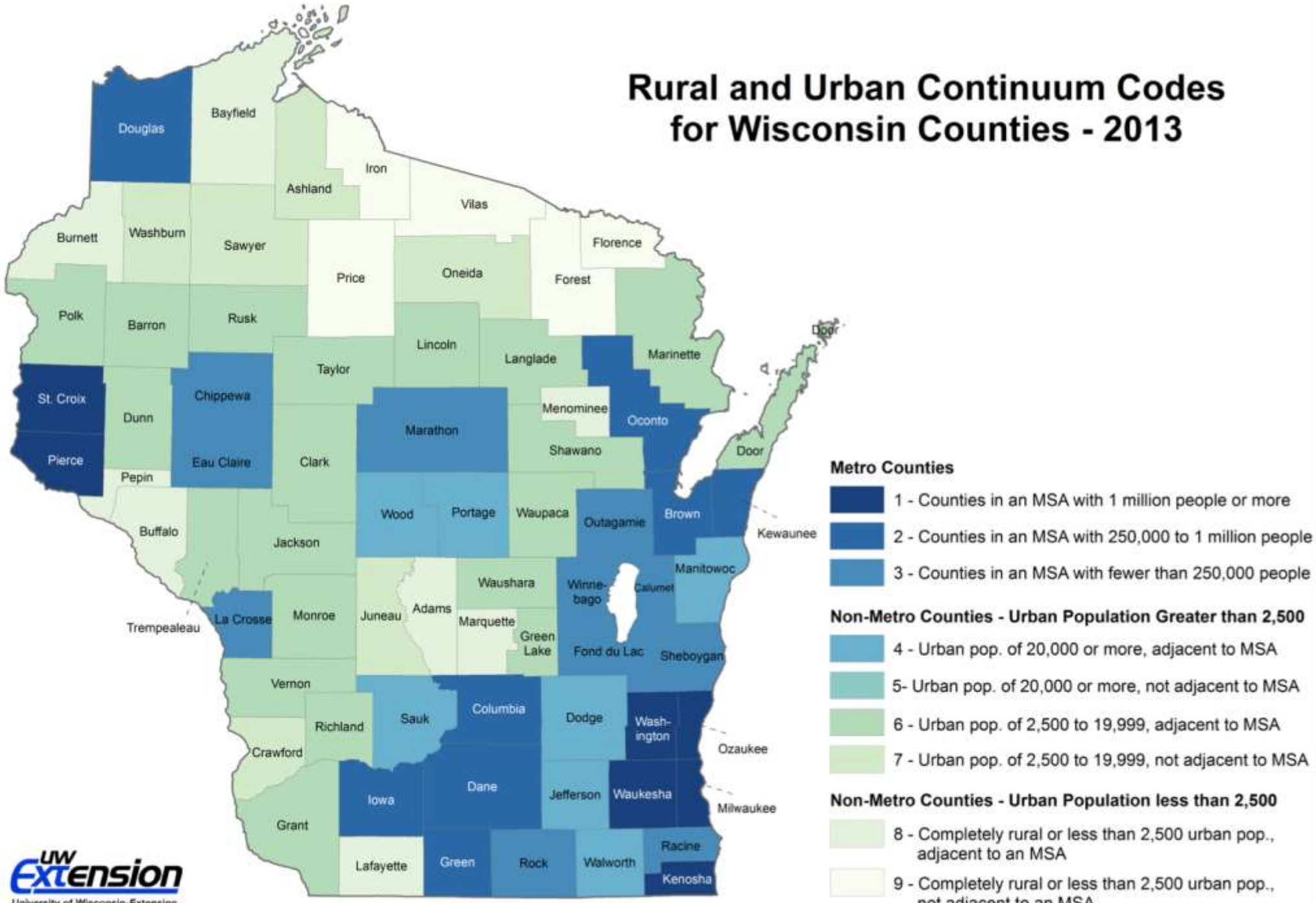
Thank you for your time.

Tessa Conroy

E: tessa.conroy@wisc.edu

Rural and Urban Continuum Codes for Wisconsin Counties - 2013



Metro Counties

- 1 - Counties in an MSA with 1 million people or more
- 2 - Counties in an MSA with 250,000 to 1 million people
- 3 - Counties in an MSA with fewer than 250,000 people

Non-Metro Counties - Urban Population Greater than 2,500

- 4 - Urban pop. of 20,000 or more, adjacent to MSA
- 5- Urban pop. of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to MSA
- 6 - Urban pop. of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to MSA
- 7 - Urban pop. of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to MSA

Non-Metro Counties - Urban Population less than 2,500

- 8 - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban pop., adjacent to an MSA
- 9 - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban pop., not adjacent to an MSA

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