DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES CONFRONTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ILLINOIS

(30TH ANNIVERSARY REPORT)

Annual Report to the Governor
And General Assembly

Prepared by

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University

In consultation with

Lt. Juliana Stratton, Chairperson
Governor's Rural Affairs Council

August 1, 2019

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNOR'S RURAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Member Agencies and Associations of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council

Office of the Lt. Governor
Illinois Agricultural Association / Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Community College Board
Illinois Department of Agriculture
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Illinois Department of Employment Security
Illinois Department of Human Services
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Department of Public Health
Illinois Department of Transportation
Illinois Department on Aging
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Illinois Finance Authority
Illinois Housing Development Authority
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Western Illinois University
Illinois State Board of Education
Rural Partners
Southern Illinois University, Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development
University of Illinois – Cooperative Extension

Citizen Members

Heather Hampton-Knodle
Doug Hankes
Todd Kaeb
Sonja Reece
Larry Richards

Ex-Officio Members

Douglas Wilson / Molly Hammond, USDA—Rural Development (Illinois)
Norman Walzer, Northern Illinois University, Center for Governmental Studies

PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNOR'S RURAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The purpose of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council is to develop and implement coordinated strategies to improve the way government services are delivered to the residents of rural Illinois. The end goal is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life for rural residents. The Lieutenant Governor, as Chairperson of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University, shall continue to issue an Annual Report in accordance with Executive Order 4 of May 18, 2011, and Executive Order 13 of October 11, 1991.

Copies of these Executive Orders are located in the Appendices.

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ACRONYMS

BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSCC	Carl Sandburg Community College
DCCA	Department of Commerce and Community Affairs
DCEO	Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
EIU	Eastern Illinois University
GRAC	Governor’s Rural Affairs Council
IBHE	Illinois Board of Higher Education
IDOA	Illinois Department of Agriculture
IDPH	Illinois Department of Public Health
IEMA	Illinois Emergency Management Agency
IIRA	Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
IOCRAC	Illinois Opioid Crisis Response Advisory Council
IPUMS	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series
LAUS	Local Area Unemployment Statistics
NHGIS	National Historic Geographical Information System
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
SIUC	Southern Illinois University—Carbondale
SIWDB	Southern Illinois Workforce Development Board
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WIU	Western Illinois University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Governor's Executive Order requires that the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) at Western Illinois University (WIU) submit a report each year to the Illinois General Assembly documenting the economic and social conditions affecting rural Illinois. The IIRA does this in collaboration with the Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC), chaired by the Lieutenant Governor. The 2019 report focuses on rural economic and demographic data, which shows that rural communities are losing population and falling behind urban communities with respect to wages, job growth, workforce development, and poverty. Local and state solutions to these rural development challenges do exist. These will require new or expanded investments in higher education, youth entrepreneurship, micro-lending to support non-traditional entrepreneurship, among other strategies.

New challenges and opportunities also affect rural Illinois. The ongoing opioid misuse epidemic causes community health, criminal justice, and economic development challenges in both rural and urban communities. Many state agencies and health care professionals are collaborating to address this issue. Heavy precipitation during the winter and spring of 2019 caused extensive flooding in farm fields and along the Illinois and Mississippi River. This flooding hampered spring planting, thus potentially hurting farm income for 2019. In addition, the flooding caused extensive infrastructural damage to roads, bridges, buildings, and levees. Many state and federal agencies collaborated to manage and then recover from the flooding. The long term damage caused by the flooding is yet to be determined.

Looking forward, rural Illinois has to confront many challenges including continuing demographic decline and disaster recovery. However there is reason for optimism. With a new administration there may also be opportunities for the GRAC to pursue new policies to provide services to populations neglected by previous administrations.

Part I. Overview of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council

1.1 Introduction and Report Overview

Each year, the Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC), in collaboration with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) at Western Illinois University (WIU), examines the long-term trends and current socioeconomic conditions in rural Illinois. The GRAC and IIRA summarize these findings in the form of a report, which is then submitted to the Illinois General Assembly for their consideration. The intent of this report is to keep public and legislative focus on rural development issues in Illinois, a state dominated by Chicago and other urban areas.

In order to accomplish this goal, this report unfolds in three sections. The remainder of section one summarizes the rationale for the GRAC and the need for this report. Part two provides an overview of the economic and demographic trends and current conditions. Rural versus urban comparisons are made on an array of topics including population change, unemployment rates, wage growth, poverty, and workforce development. The third and final section provides some concluding thoughts. It also offers some suggestions for new policy directions the GRAC and its constituent members might focus on to improve the quality of life in rural areas.

1.2 Origins and Composition of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council

The state of Illinois established the Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC) in 1989. This was the culmination of a statewide effort to address the hardships confronted during the Farm Crisis of the 1980s (Walzer and Merrett 2014). Rural stakeholders realized that the Farm Crisis was a misnomer. The crisis not only affected farmers, it also affected a broader rural economy, comprised of both farmers, and rural non-farm communities. Federal agencies such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) had policies to address farm issues. Illinois had a state department of economic development called the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA). However, it did not have an overt rural development focus. Consequently, elected officials recognized that rural non-farm communities fell into a service gap. The state filled this gap by creating the GRAC as a forum for multiple agencies to regularly convene to address rural development issues. The GRAC represented a new rural development paradigm because it brought multiple state agencies, federal agencies, institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations together in one place to address rural issues in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton currently chairs the GRAC on behalf of Governor Pritzker. Three types of representatives serve on the GRAC. The eighteen core members include thirteen state agencies, three institutions of higher education, and two nonprofit organizations. There are five citizen participants. Finally, two ex officio members represent an additional institution of higher education and the USDA. A Governor's Executive order promulgated in 1991, and reissued in 2011, stipulates that each year, the IIRA will collaborate with the GRAC to submit a report documenting conditions in Illinois. The current GRAC annual report fulfills this requirement.

Part II. Snapshot of Rural versus Urban Demographic, Economic, and Social Conditions

2.1 Defining Rural Illinois

Before this report can summarize rural conditions in Illinois, we must define what is meant by "rural." Experts agree that there is no single definition that applies to every situation. For example, different federal agencies use varying definitions depending on the types of services being delivered or policies being implemented. Varying definitions occur because of the variegated American landscape. What appears to be rural in New England looks different from a rural landscape in the Great Plains or Rocky Mountains. One USDA report admits that policymakers, researchers, and politicians define "rural" in a "dizzying" number of ways (Cromartie and Bucholtz 2008, 1).

While there may be significant differences between agencies, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the US Census Bureau offer a definition that is commonly used in demographic reports such as this. In 2003, the OMB defined rural or non-metropolitan counties as those outside Metropolitan Statistical Areas (i.e., counties containing cities or core population centers with populations of 50,000 or more people).

In 1991, 76 of the 102 Illinois counties were defined as rural or nonmetropolitan using this definition. Since that time, Illinois has become increasingly urban and hence, by 2003, the number of rural counties in Illinois dropped to 66 (Fig. 1). After the 2010 census, the number of rural counties in Illinois dropped further to 63 (Reinhold 2015). This report continues to use the 2003 definition so that comparisons can be made across different time periods.

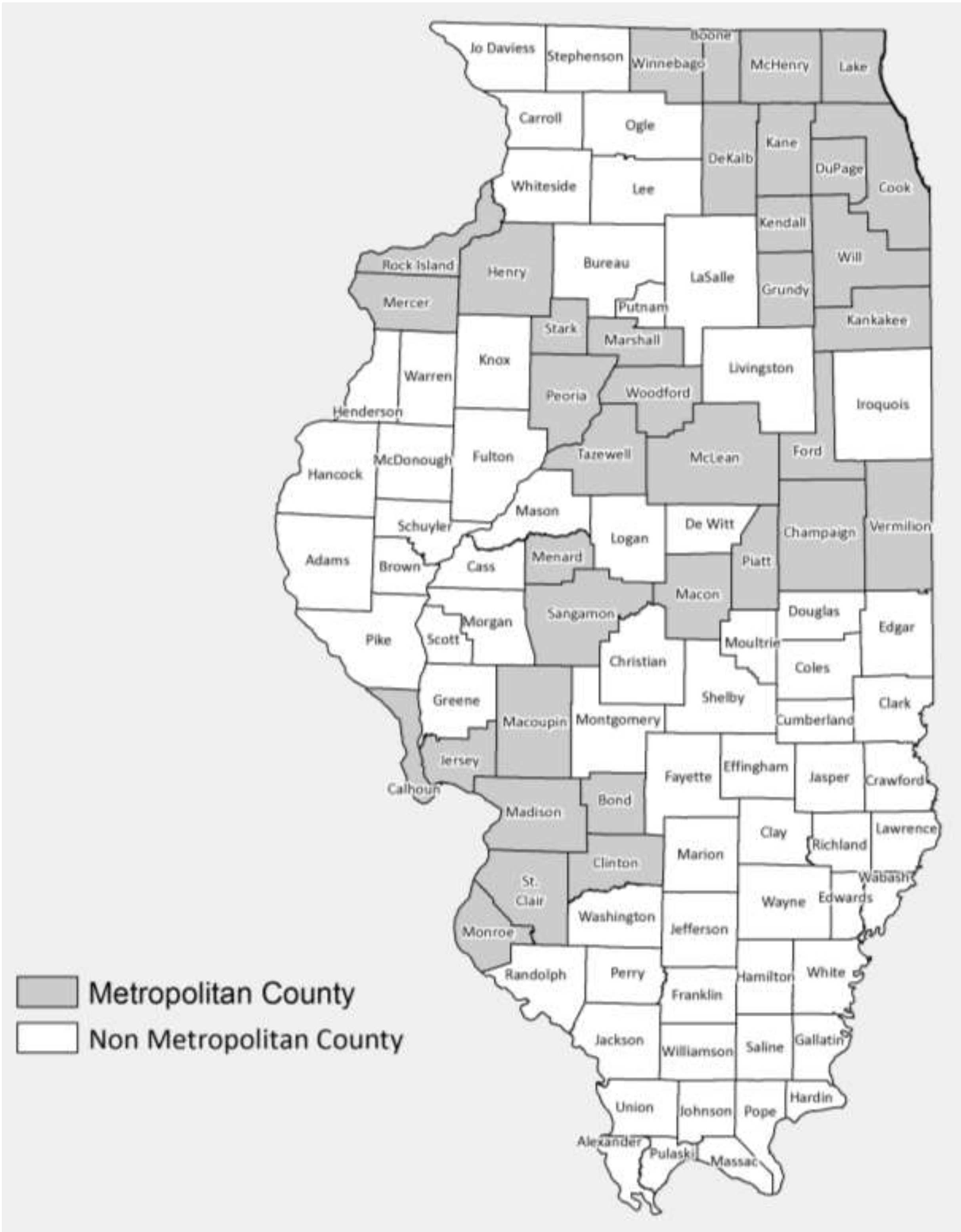
2.2 Demographic Trends in Rural versus Urban Illinois

According to the 2010 Census, Illinois had 12,830,632 residents. Of this total, 1,477,079 or 11.5% lived in rural counties. The fact that just over a tenth of Illinois residents live in rural counties might suggest that the rural Illinois populace is inconsequential. However, it is worth noting that more people live in rural Illinois than the total population of other states such as Alaska (710,231), North Dakota (672,591), and Maine (1,328,361)(US Census 2010).

While the non-metro population is large, it is declining compared to previous census years. The 2000 Census counted 1,509,773 or 12.1% of Illinoisans living in non-metro counties. Between 2000 and 2010, Illinois lost 2.2% of its rural population.

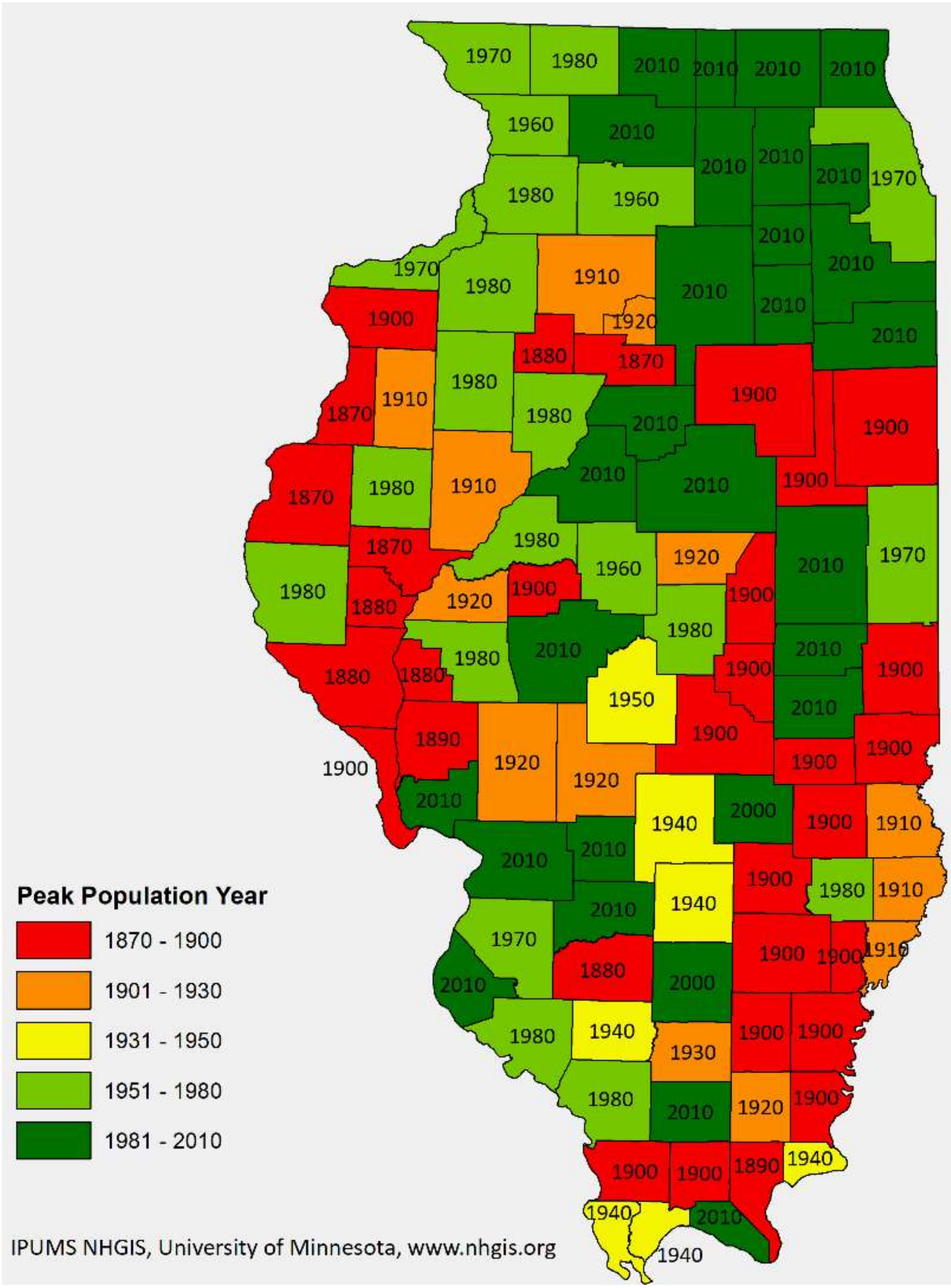
However, this recent rural demographic decline merely represents an overall long term trend of population decline in rural Illinois. Many rural counties in Illinois experienced their peak population decades ago. Thirty-three, or almost a third of Illinois' 102 counties reached their peak populations over a century ago (Fig. 2). It is this kind of population decline that prompts the *New York Times* to declare that, "small-town American is dying" (Harris and Tarchack 2018).

Figure 1. Nonmetropolitan Counties in Illinois



Source: US Census Bureau (2016).

Figure 2. Year of Peak Population for Illinois Counties



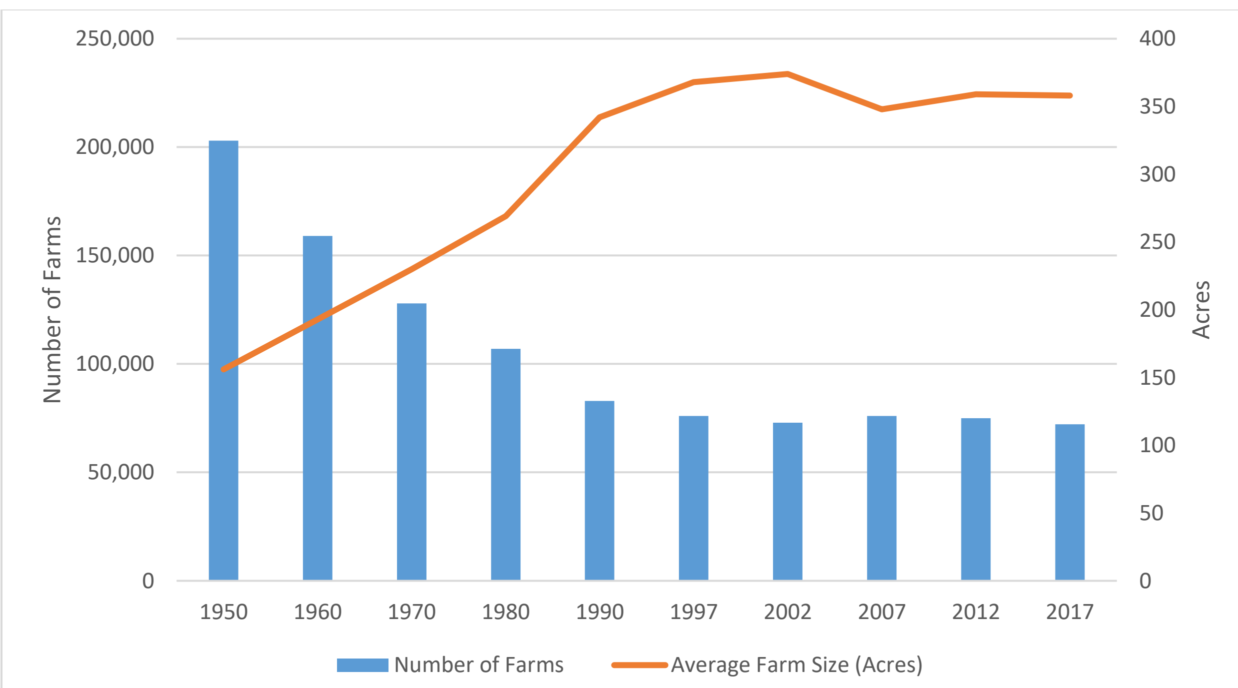
Source: National Historic Geographic Information System (2019).

Agricultural mechanization drove this depopulation in the first half of the 20th century. As farmers invested in new tractors and combines, each farm required less manual labor and fewer people. Furthermore, rising farm productivity, narrowing profit margins, and the overall cost of this technology prompted farmers to increase their farm size over which to amortize the costs of farm operations. The simple outcome was fewer farmers and larger farms (Fig. 3).

Two other farm trends lay within this overall 20th century trend of decreasing farm numbers and increasing farm size. First, the rate of farm number decline varied according to different factors, including access to foreign markets and domestic economic policy. During the 1970s, American diplomatic overtures opened Russia up to American farm commodities. In order to spur American farmers to increase productivity, US Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, exhorted farmers to "get big or get out" (Welte 2018). In order to heed this call, many farmers borrowed heavily to purchase more farmland and invest in new farm implements.

Agricultural productivity increased as farmers ramped up grain production to satisfy demand in export markets. Farm expansion in the 1970s came to a halt in the 1980s, due to domestic US monetary policy. During the late 1970s, the US economy experienced stagflation, the combination of rising unemployment rates coupled with increasing inflation. Economic advisors to President Carter prescribed increased interest rates to halt inflationary pressures on the economy. This policy continued under President Reagan.

Figure 3. Illinois Farms and Average Farm Size, 1950 to 2017



Source: Illinois Department of Agriculture (2017) and USDA (2012).

Increased interest rates successfully tamped down inflation, but they devastated farmers who had borrowed heavily in the 1970s to increase production. Thus the Farm Crisis of the 1980s was really the collateral damage caused by the Federal Reserve as it increased interest rates. Farmers secured variable rate loans with interest rates at 6% to 8%. Ten years later in the mid-1980s, the prime interest rate peaked at almost 19%. Farmers saw their interest payments double (Barnett 2000). In the face of rising interest rates, many farmers declared bankruptcy. Table 1 below shows that the number farms decreased more quickly during the Farm Crisis than during any period of the last seven decades.

The drive to increase farm size in the 1970s and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s also created an increasingly bimodal distribution of farm sizes. Table 2 shows recent evidence of this trend. There is an increasing proportion of total farms smaller than 100 acres in size (Table 2). There is also an increasing proportion of farms 2,000 acres and larger. In contrast, farms in the middle are shrinking as a proportion of all farms. This suggests that family farms are affected most negatively by recent trends in farming.

These trends also explain why it is important that off-farm employment opportunities exist for farm families. Many farmers are earning lower farm profits and rely increasingly on jobs off the farm. These off-farm jobs provide health insurance, retirement benefits, and income when farm profits are low. It is just this reason that the state established the GRAC and IIRA, which is to help foster off-farm rural economic and community development.

A healthy rural economy requires not just a robust farm economy, it also requires a diverse and growing non-farm economy. There is a synergistic relationship between the farm economy and the rural non-farm economy that is often overlooked by policymakers in Springfield and Washington, DC.

Table 1. Illinois Farm Number Decline and Average Farm Growth, 1950 to 2017

Year	Number of Farms	Percent Decline	Average Farm Size (Acres)
1950	203,000	--	156
1960	159,000	-21.7	193
1970	128,000	-19.5	230
1980	107,000	-16.4	269
1990	**83,000**	**-22.4**	**342**
1997	76,000	-08.4	368
2002	73,000	-03.9	374
2007	76,000	+04.1	348
2012	75,000	-01.3	359
2017	72,200	-03.7	358

Source: Illinois Department of Agriculture (2017) and USDA (2012).

In Illinois, rural economies that rely predominantly on agriculture production experienced peak population a century or more ago (Fig. 2). Consider Hancock County located in west-central Illinois, whose population peaked in 1870. It is heavily reliant on agriculture, with not much economic diversity.

In contrast, the population of McDonough County, located to the east of Hancock County, peaked in 1980. This more recent peak occurred because of significant manufacturing (e.g. Pella Windows) and public sector (e.g. Western Illinois University) investment, which helps to diversify and stabilize the economy. A similar situation occurs to the south of Hancock County. Adams County, with Quincy as its county seat, has a strong manufacturing base supported by a robust regional health care sector, and even a small liberal arts college. The comparative demographic resilience displayed by Adams and McDonough explains why rural development policies need to focus on economic diversification as a key component. It is not enough to just focus on agriculture if we want demographically sustainable rural communities in Illinois.

Table 2. Farms by Farm Size and by Sales, as Percent of Total Farms, 2002 to 2017

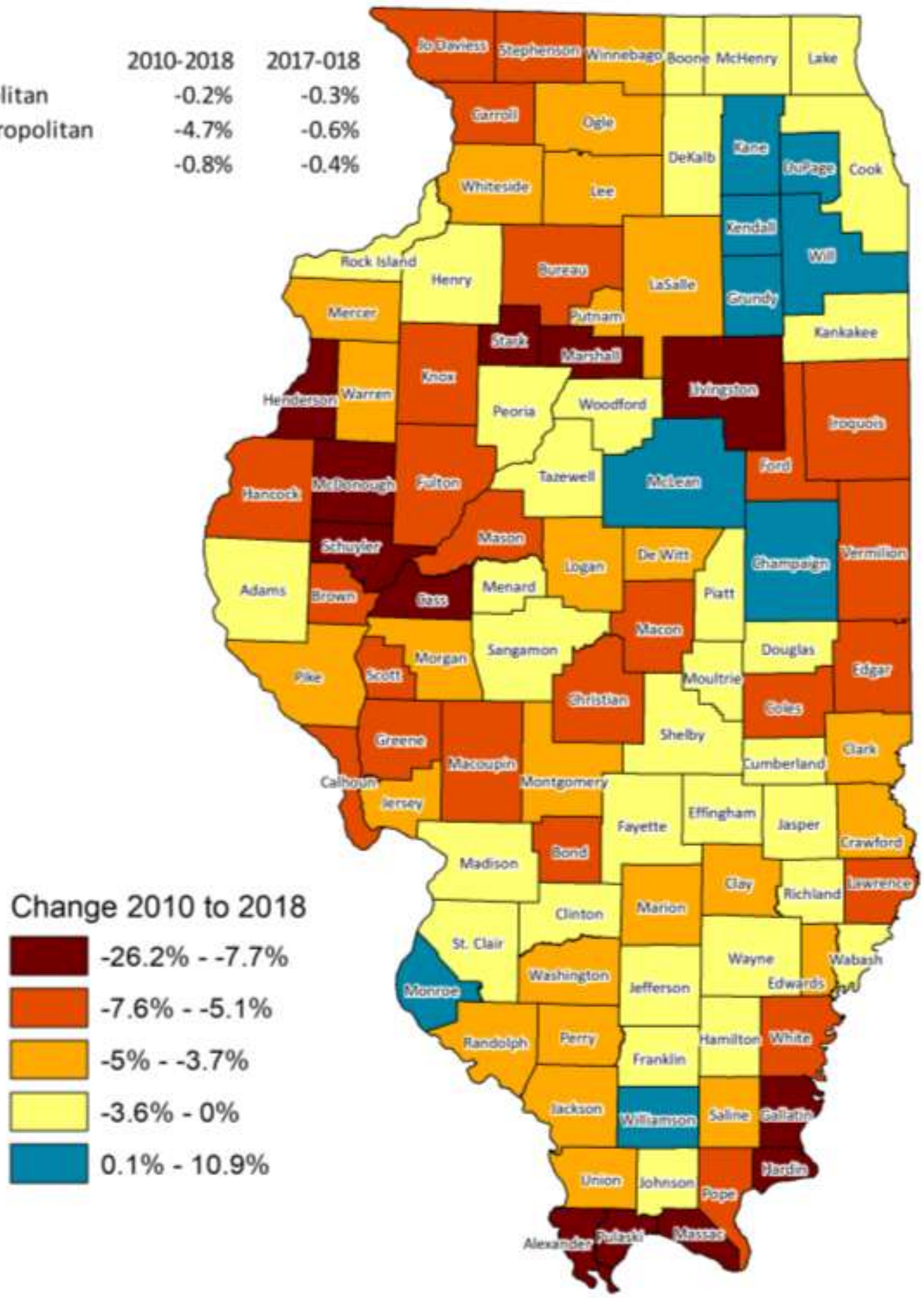
Farms by size (% of total farms)	**2002**	**2007**	**2012**	**2017**
1 to 99 acres	41.0	50.7	49.8	50.1
100 to 499 acres	35.0	28.3	29.8	28.8
500 to 999 acres	13.5	10.8	10.1	10.3
1000 to 1,999 acres	8.1	7.2	7.0	7.1
2000 or more acres	2.4	3.0	3.3	3.7
Farms by sales, current dollars (% of total farms)	**2002**	**2007**	**2012**	**2017**
Less than $9,999	41.4	46.9	45.5	44.7
$10,000 to $49,999	20.9	14.7	13.9	14.8
$50,000 to $99,999	11.0	8.1	7.5	14.8
$100,000 to $499,999	22.8	21.0	20.4	19.8
More than $500,000	3.9	9.3	12.7	12.8

Source: Parker (2019).

This section has focused on long term demographic decline. Notable changes occurred within the last two decades, too. First, maps show that a few places experienced accelerated decline since 2010. For example, downstate counties that host public institutions of higher education have all experienced population decline (Fig. 4). Example here include Jackson County, home to Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIUC), Coles County, home to Eastern Illinois University (EIU), and McDonough County, home to WIU. The resident student population of these universities are included in their respective host county census counts. Each of these universities experienced recent enrollment declines. This decline is reflected in the overall county population decline. The recent state budget impasse made things worse. During the impasse, public universities did not receive their regular monetary support from the state. Not surprisingly, student enrollments declined and so did the host county populations (Fig. 5).

Figure 4. Population Change by County in Illinois, 2010 to 2018

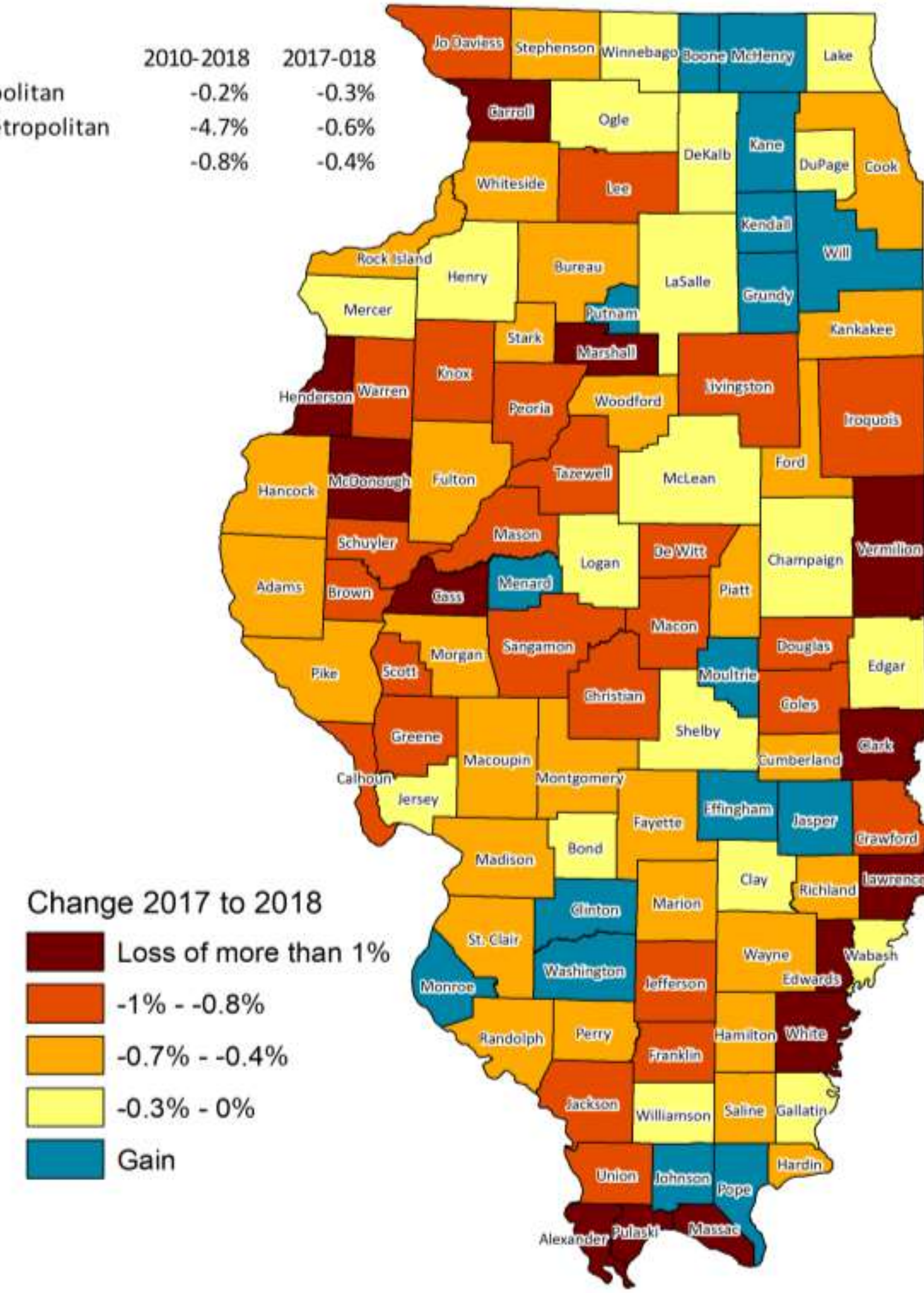
	2010-2018	2017-018
Metropolitan	-0.2%	-0.3%
Nonmetropolitan	-4.7%	-0.6%
State	-0.8%	-0.4%



Source: US Bureau of the Census; Population Estimates Program

Figure 5. Population Change by County in Illinois, 2017 to 2018

	2010-2018	2017-018
Metropolitan	-0.2%	-0.3%
Nonmetropolitan	-4.7%	-0.6%
State	-0.8%	-0.4%



Source: US Bureau of the Census; Population Estimates Program

The following series of three figures reveal demographic trends with significant economic development implications for Illinois in general, and for rural Illinois in particular. These three figures provide population growth indices using the year 2000 as a base year. Each of the following three figures reveals deeper demographic trends based on geography, age cohort differences, and then a combination of geography and age cohorts.

The first index compares population growth trends in rural versus urban counties (Fig. 6). In essence, this index merely documents in a different form the long-term rural population decline discussed earlier in the report. It shows that there are diverging rural versus urban growth rates. This has important governmental management implications because with fewer and fewer people living in rural areas, questions arise about where tax revenues will come from to pay for transportation, education, and other social services.

Some researchers have suggested that unless rural counties get serious about reversing population decline, they should consider embracing the concept of “shrinking smart.” Instead of trying to prop up existing government and social infrastructure with a declining population and tax base, rural governmental entities should consider ways to collaborate, merge, or consolidate to reduce the per capita taxpayer burden (Walzer and Chockalingam 2016). There is, of course, some resistance to this idea, but many communities have already been forced to reduce the services they offer, and have had to do so in an ad hoc manner. It might help some communities to plan for decline. This offers a better strategy for maintaining the quality of life despite population loss in rural places (Peters 2017).

Figure 6. Index of Metro versus Non-Metro Population Growth, 2000 to 2017

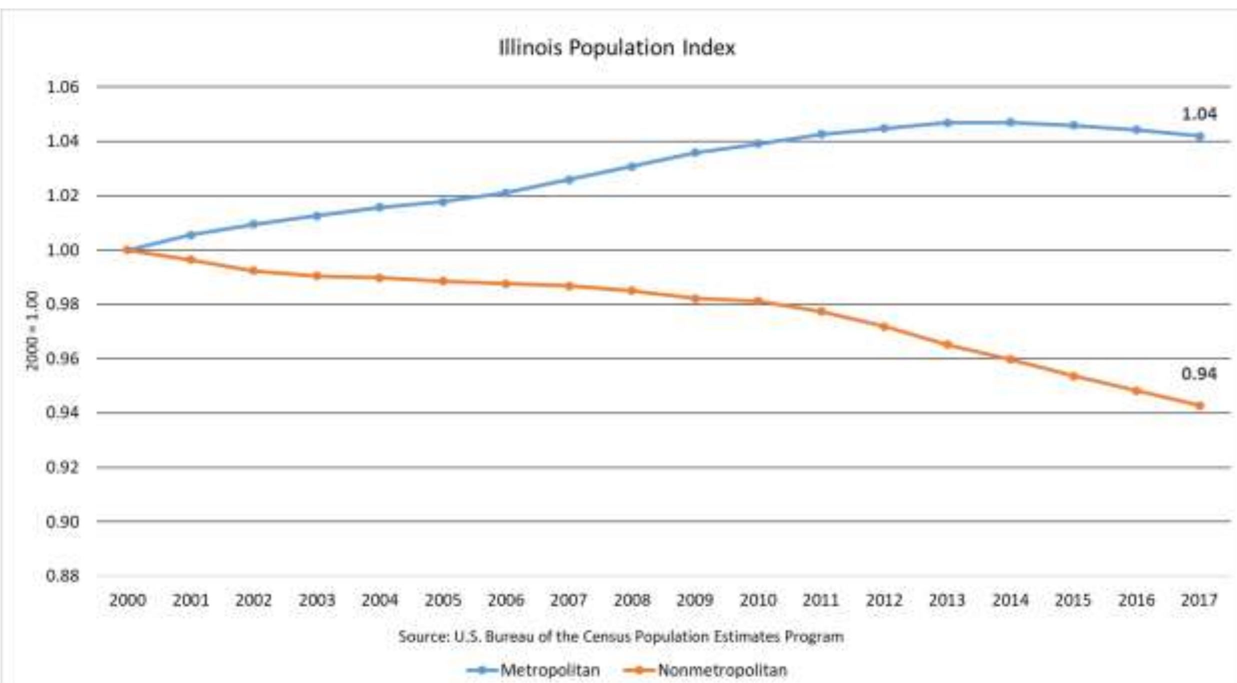
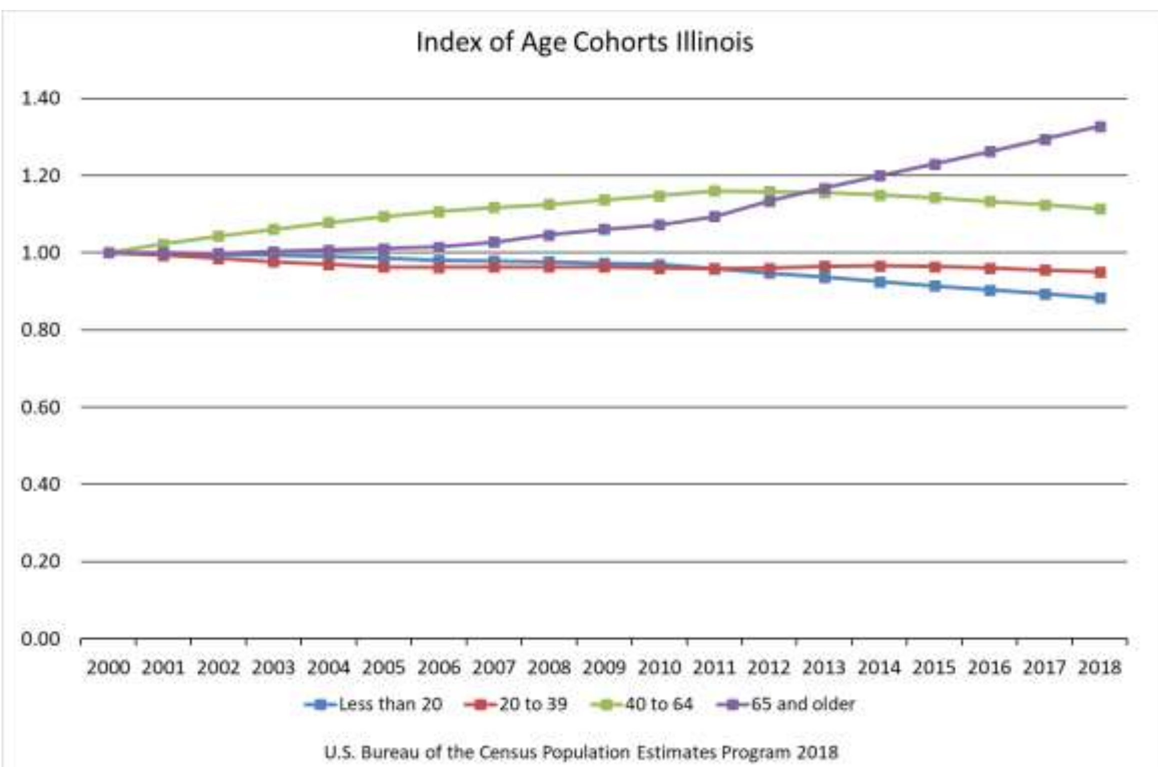


Figure 7 presents an Illinois population growth index broken out by age cohorts. This index has important workforce development and healthcare implications. First, the figure below shows the age cohort of people 65 years of age and older is the fastest growing cohort within Illinois. Second, it reveals that the working age populations of 20-39 and 40 to 64 years of age are relatively unchanged since 2000. Third, and most ominously from an economic development perspective, the figure shows that the population under aged 20 is shrinking (Fig. 7).

The fact that senior citizens represent the fastest growing segment of the Illinois population raises several issues. Health care costs increase as people age because people are more prone to diseases such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis, among other health-related challenges. It is not clear that Illinois is prepared for the onset of an aging population that will need increasingly expensive health care. This is particularly alarming for rural communities, where there are increasing shortages of health care professionals and health care services.

From a future economic development perspective, it is bad news for Illinois that the population representing the future workforce is in fact shrinking. Illinois policymakers have focused on the problem of businesses leaving for lower-tax destinations in the Sun Belt (Vasilogambros 2019). Pro-business advocates have called for cuts to state spending and reduced taxes as a remedy (Pearson and Riopell 2018). However, this emphasis on businesses neglects the workforce. As university tuition has increased, and because of the state budget impasse, thousands of university-aged students have left the state. Many will never return.

Figure 7. Population Growth Index by Age Cohorts, 2000 to 2018

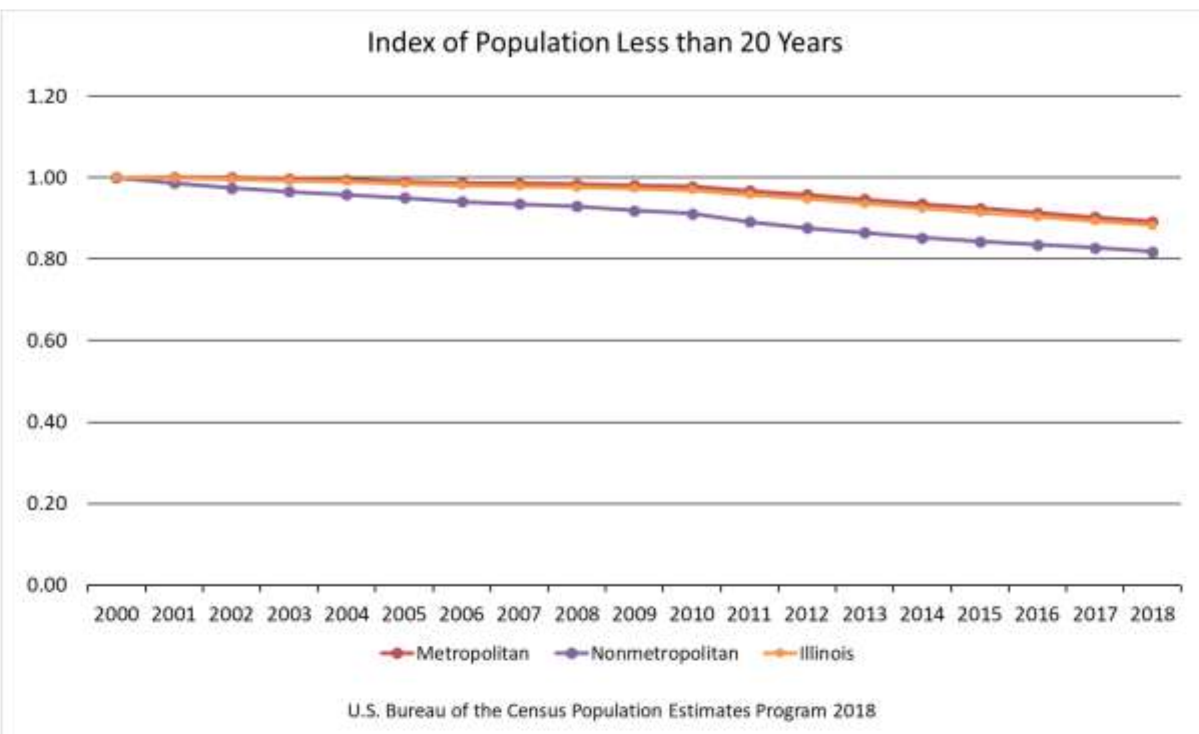


A closer look at Illinois' declining youth and young adult population reveals a significant rural versus urban difference. Rural youth outmigration has contributed to rural population decline for decades. Since the 2010 census, the downward trend has accelerated. This demographic trend has significant economic development trends for rural communities. Many business sectors are confronting worker shortages. This trend is having a hugely negative impact on rural manufacturers, struggling to find young, skilled workers (Rosen 2018). With an inadequate rural labor pool from which to recruit workers, some manufacturers are looking to recruit urban workers to rural areas.

There are also many aging "main street" business owners looking to retire. As these business proprietors begin to create a business succession plan, they soon realize that there is a lack of younger people willing to manage their own business in rural areas. This is a big problem for rural communities because if the business owner looking to retire cannot find a new buyer, the business will close. The outcome is a vacant storefront and laid off employees. This outcomes is no different than if the business had simply gone bankrupt.

The next section expands on the population decline implications for the rural workforce. Solutions exist, but it will take investment by local communities and state agencies to sustain a vibrant rural workforce.

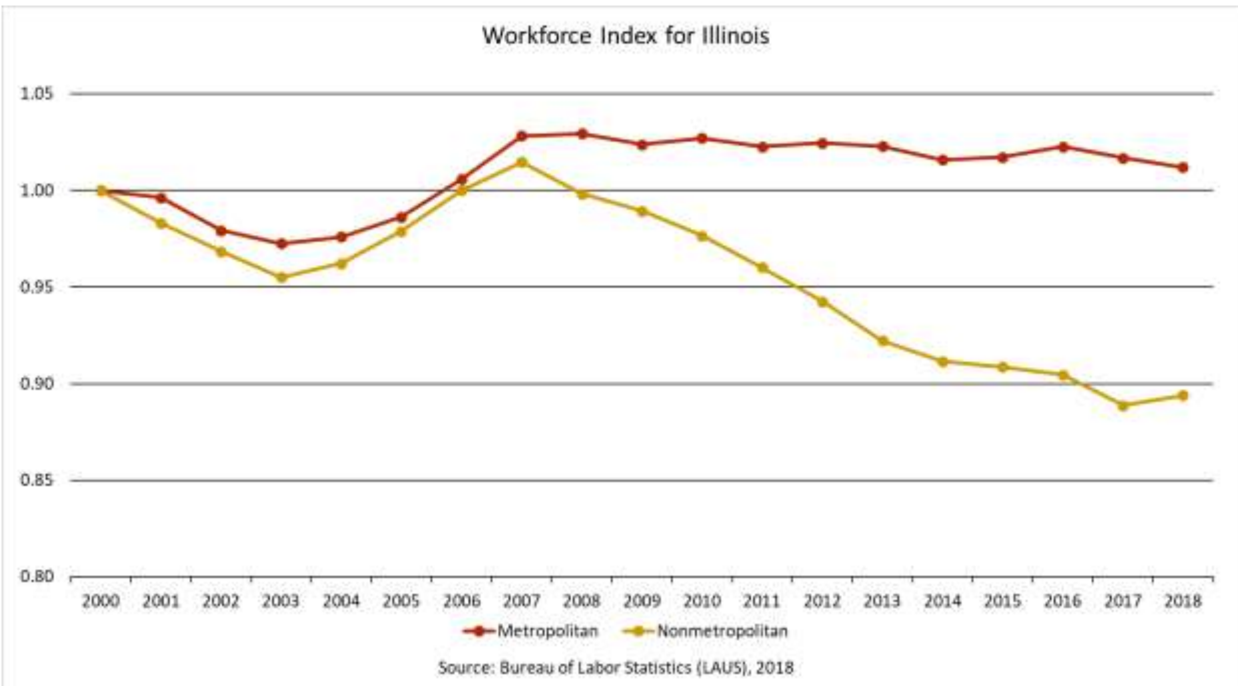
Figure 8. Metro versus Non-metro Population Growth Index of Population Less than 20 years



2.3 Workforce and Economic Development Trends in Rural versus Urban Illinois

Given the evidence provided in the previous section focused on rural demographics, it is not surprising to see that there is a direct connection between a declining rural population and a declining rural workforce (Fig. 9). The evidence suggests that the Illinois rural workforce never fully recovered from the Great Recession that occurred a decade ago (Drum 2017). The downward point of inflection in the figure below shows that the state budget impasse made the situation worse in the rural Illinois workforce (Fig. 9).

Figure 9. Workforce Index for Metro versus Non-Metro Counties, 2000 to 2018



Rural development experts have offered several strategies to retain young people in rural areas, thereby bolstering the rural workforce. One way to keep young people in Illinois generally, and in downstate and rural areas in particular, is to make attending community college or university more affordable. State support for higher education in Illinois peaked in 2002. Since then, tuition costs have been increasingly shifted onto students and their families.

As Illinois tuition costs increased, a growing number of Illinois young adults attended colleges and universities out of state. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) reported that in 2017, of all Illinois high school graduates who enrolled at a four-year university, 48.4% of them enrolled at a school outside Illinois (Hahn 2019). The IBHE also reported that the state budget impasse significantly contributed to the student outmigration. This occurred because the state cut funding to university operating budgets as well as tuition grants for students from low- and middle-income families. Without this assistance, many young adults simply could not attend school.

Every state has a business recruitment, retention, and expansion plan to spur business development, spur job growth, and promote overall economic development. Illinois might consider implementing a student recruitment and retention plan to increase the number of bright, young people who stay in Illinois. A first step in this plan would be to reinvest in Illinois higher education to make tuition cost-competitive with neighboring states.

Promise programs are a second strategy used by some communities to retain young people. These community-based programs use the promise of a subsidized or free tuition to young people who are willing to attend a local community college or university, with the quid pro quo being that the student will remain within the local region for a specified period of time after graduation. By 2018, there were an estimated 350 promise programs in the United States, funded through philanthropy or government, both state and local (Harris 2018).

Several communities in Illinois have implemented promise programs, including towns located in non-metropolitan counties, such as Galesburg which implemented its program in 2014 (Sundberg 2014). The Galesburg Promise program is linked to Carl Sandberg Community College (CSCC). The program offers to pay full tuition for Galesburg students to attend CSCC, after all state and federal student aid options have been used by the student (Carson 2016). By 2016, the program had 70 students, which was exceeding the budget used to pay for student tuition. The bottom line is that local communities can take initiatives to make it attractive for young adults to attend school locally. The potential outcome will be for more skilled young people, with certificates and degrees, who remain part of the rural workforce.

Youth entrepreneurship programs represent a third strategy for rural communities to development their own next generation of business owners. Many rural business owners are waking up to the fact that there are not enough young people willing to take over the existing businesses that populate small town main streets. Youth entrepreneurship programs such as the CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program, offered by the Effingham-based Midland Institute, offer hope to rural communities.

The CEO program works with local school districts, but is funded entirely by local businesses and other benefactors independent of local school districts. Students work and meet with local business owners before and after school, and are required to start their own businesses as part of the CEO curriculum (O'Dell 2018).

Certainly not every student in the CEO program will become an entrepreneur as an adult. Some may start their own businesses. Some may buy out an existing main street business as part of a succession plan. Others may decide that entrepreneurship and business ownership is not for them. However, the CEO program teaches every student to be good workers and community-engaged citizens as well. This is all part of improving the rural workforce.

Microenterprise and micro-lending programs are a good complement to youth entrepreneurship programs. They help to expand the idea of who can become an entrepreneur or successful business owner. In other words, micro-lending programs help diversify the range of people who can become entrepreneurs. In order to start a business, many entrepreneurs need a startup loan. In order to secure a loan, banks evaluate a person's credit worthiness. Loan officers evaluate a potential borrower on their educational background, prior business experience, collateral, credit scores, place of residence, and the quality of the borrower's proposed business plan, among other metrics.

Unfortunately, non-traditional entrepreneurs, who may be upstanding, hardworking individuals with a sound business plan, may be denied access to credit because of their gender, race, educational background, place of residence, or age (e.g. too young)(Abello 2017; Rosenberg 2017). Micro-lenders such as Chicago-based Accion and St. Louis-based Justine Peterson are able to evaluate a fledgling entrepreneur's credit worthiness using a different set of criteria. In doing so, Accion and Justine Peterson expand the definition of who gets capital to start a business. While both of these micro-lenders have urban origins, they have extended their lending efforts into the rural counties of central and southern Illinois (Bizjournals 2018).

Table 3 below provides further evidence as to why it is important for rural communities to produce, recruit, and retain, a skilled workforce. When most people drive through downstate Illinois, they see miles and miles of farmland. Most people assume that the downstate economy must only rely on corn and soybeans. Of course, agriculture is a huge part of the Illinois economy. However, rural Illinois also relies heavily on manufacturing, construction, healthcare, and education sectors. In fact, rural Illinois is more dependent on these sectors than urban areas.

Table 3 highlights in yellow three employment sectors for rural versus urban comparisons. In the first example, the table shows that 5.2% of the urban Illinois labor force works in the construction sector compared to 5.9% of the rural workforce (Table 3). Most residents of Illinois would be surprised to know that proportionately, there is a higher percentage of rural workers in manufacturing jobs (15.1%) than urban workers (12.0%).

Finally, the data show that there is a higher percentage of rural workers involved in education, health care, and social service jobs than urban workers. This means that during the state budget impasse when many educational, health care, and social service agencies had their funding slashed, rural communities reliant on these sectors took an enormous economic hit.

The broader point, however, is to note that rural Illinois actually has a diverse economy that relies on skilled workers. As noted previously, the rural communities that retained the largest proportion of their peak populations have the most economically-diverse economies (Fig. 2). However, this diverse economic foundation is at risk due to the shrinking rural workforce.

Table 3. Metro versus Non-Metro Employment by Sector in Illinois, 2017

Employment Sector	Total Number of Persons Employed 16 Years and Older			Total Percent of Persons Employed 16 Years and Older		
	Metro	Non-metro	Illinois	Metro	Non-metro	Illinois
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	5,456,147	691,099	6,147,246	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	30,775	34,190	64,965	0.6%	4.9%	1.1%
Construction	280,859	40,721	321,580	5.1%	5.9%	5.2%
Manufacturing	652,977	104,514	757,491	12.0%	15.1%	12.3%
Wholesale trade	171,029	18,362	189,391	3.1%	2.7%	3.1%
Retail trade	583,104	81,146	664,250	10.7%	11.7%	10.8%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	334,043	42,666	376,709	6.1%	6.2%	6.1%
Information	111,041	8,752	119,793	2.0%	1.3%	1.9%
Finance & insurance, and real estate and rental / leasing	416,540	33,112	449,652	7.6%	4.8%	7.3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	682,211	37,919	720,130	12.5%	5.5%	11.7%
Educational services, and health care & social assistance	1,232,417	174,806	1,407,223	22.6%	25.3%	22.9%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	508,467	50,828	559,295	9.3%	7.4%	9.1%
Other services, except public administration	258,254	32,628	290,882	4.7%	4.7%	4.7%
Public administration	194,430	31,455	225,885	3.6%	4.6%	3.7%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5 Year Estimates.

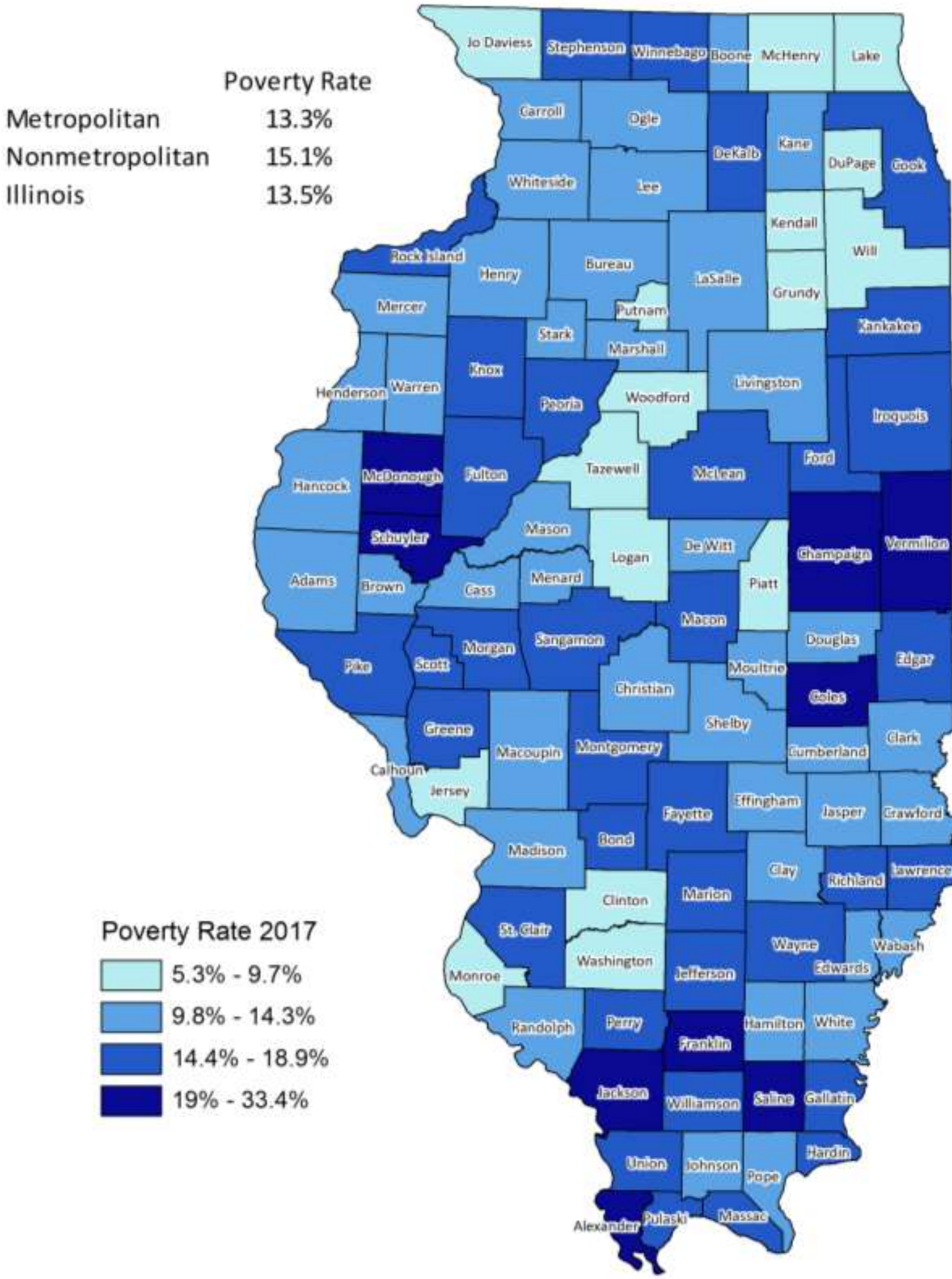
A persistent wage difference between rural and urban counties represents another possible factor driving rural youth outmigration and the rural job shortage (Fig. 10). Overtime, this rural-urban wage gap has actually increased, even when adjusted for inflation. This is an important issue because, while the cost of living might be lower in rural areas, the lower cost of living is not always low enough to offset the even lower wages and higher poverty rates (White 2015)(Fig. 11). For example, housing may be much less expensive, but it may also be of low quality. In addition, many rural residents have higher yearly transportation costs (Hawk 2013).

High poverty rates can be found in both urban and rural areas (Fig. 11). However, at a statewide level, poverty rates are higher in rural versus urban counties. In rural areas, different factors can cause high poverty levels in different parts of the state. For example, in some rural counties, there are many working poor families, who subsist on two or more part-time jobs, or one low-paying job (Williams and DeYoung 2017).

In other rural areas, the high poverty rates reflect a high university student population. Examples here include McDonough, Champaign, Coles, and Jackson Counties. Finally, there are a few rural counties in Illinois, such as Alexander County, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) calls Persistent Poverty Counties (CRS 2019). Poverty here is caused by a lack of job opportunities, but is compounded by problems of racial prejudice, persistently high unemployment, and geographic isolation (Davey 2017).

Figure 10. Average Wage in Metro versus Non-Metro Counties, 2000 to 2017

Figure 11. Poverty Rate in Illinois by County, 2017

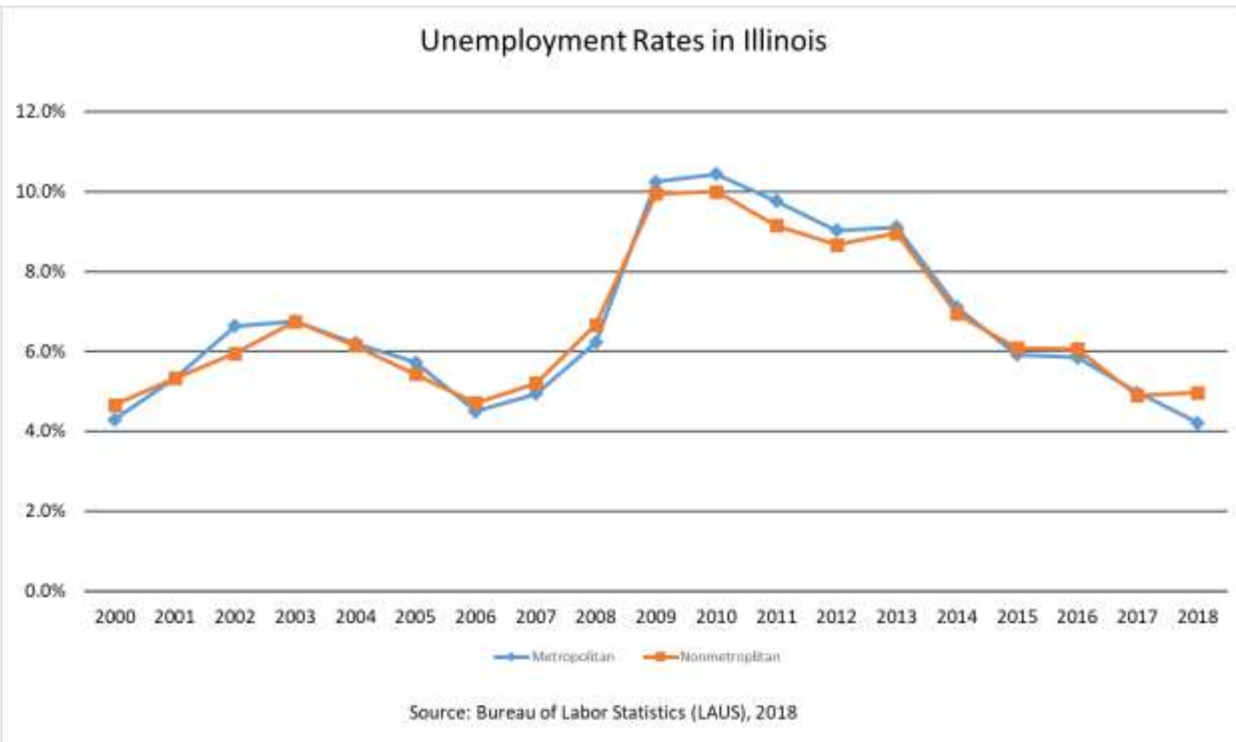


Source: US Census (2019).

Unemployment rates vary widely across Illinois. This fact is not apparent when rural versus urban unemployment rates are tracked over time (Fig. 12). During the Great Recession, running from 2007 to 2009, rural and urban unemployment rates are almost identical.

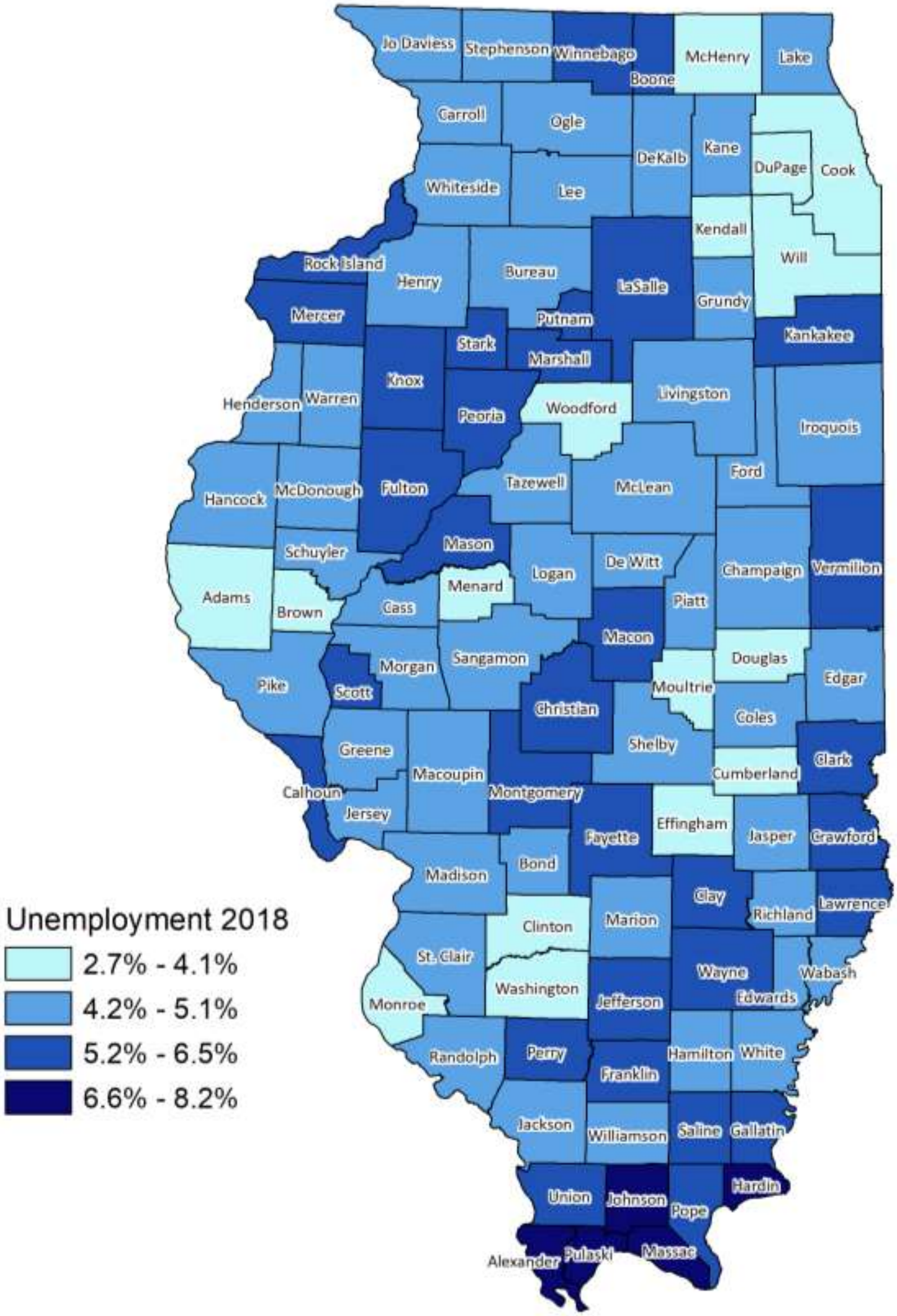
Some economists suggest that rural areas started to recover from the Great Recession more quickly because of the high commodity prices, which helped to bolster the larger rural economy. However, urban unemployment rates reach the same level as rural unemployment rates by 2012.The figure below shows that rural versus urban unemployment rates only diverged in a meaningful way in 2017. This buttresses the point made earlier that rural areas suffered more during the state budget impasse than did urban counties.

Figure 12. Illinois Unemployment Rate in Metro versus Non-Metro Counties, 2000 to 2018



A regional examination of unemployment rates allows a more nuanced interpretation of factors causing high unemployment. There are rural counties such as Adams, Brown, and Effingham that have very low unemployment rates. These counties have relatively diverse economies, with manufacturers operating at full employment. There are other rural counties in the far southern part of the state with very high unemployment rates because there is no viable economic base to generate jobs. This data reinforces the CRS (2019, 11) report identifying Alexander and Pulaski as “Persistent Poverty Counties.”

Figure 13. Illinois Unemployment Rate by County, 2018



Source: US Census (2019).

2.4 Other Trending Issues affecting Rural Illinois

2.4.1 Opioid Misuse Crisis in Rural Illinois

Recently, new issues have arisen that represent challenges and opportunities for rural Illinois. The opioid misuse crisis is a relatively recent but ongoing challenge confronting rural communities. Opioids are a category of powerful painkillers that have been widely prescribed over the past three decades. While they are effective pain killers, they can be highly addictive. Some patients with legitimate medical diagnoses that require strong pain management medications, can become addicted. Once their prescriptions run out, many struggling patients "doctor shop" in an effort to renew their prescriptions for legal opioids such as oxycodone (i.e. OxyContin) or hydrocodone (i.e. Vicodin). If this strategy fails, people may turn to illegal opioids such as fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, and to heroin.

The opioid misuse phenomenon is a crisis in so many ways. First, it is an individual, family, and public health crisis. In 2019, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) reported that 1,996 Illinois residents died of an opioid overdose in the previous calendar year (IDPH 2019). It is a criminal justice crisis because an increasing number of addicts engage in theft and other illegal activities to gain access to the opioids. These crimes disrupt communities and put increased stresses on the criminal justice system.

The opioid misuse crisis is also an economic development problem. Workers with an opioid addiction problem experience high rates of absenteeism. Many jobs require mandatory drug testing or drug screening. Once-productive employees who test positive for opioids face disciplinary actions or dismissal. When companies have to fire an employee, the company has to incur onboarding and training costs to hire a new employee. One recent study estimates that with each 1% increase in the rate of opioid prescriptions in a state, there is a 4% decrease in total labor productivity in that state (Athiyaman and Merrett, 2019).

There are important rural versus urban comparisons to make with respect to the opioid misuse crisis, too. A recent IDPH report compares opioid overdose fatality rates between Cook County, collar counties, downstate urban counties, and rural counties between the years 2013 and 2017 (Shah 2019). Cook County had the highest rates followed by downstate urban counties. Rural counties had higher fatality rates than the collar counties in 2013. However, by 2017, the IDPH reports that rural counties have the lowest opioid overdose fatality rates of the four geographic categories (Shah 2019).

This comparatively low ranking is nonetheless grave news because while rural areas have the lowest opioid overdose fatality rate, the rate has nonetheless steadily increased during the study period. The opioid misuse crisis also has implications for rural places that might not be as significant for urban areas for several reasons. First, rural residents may live at a greater distance to emergency services or health care facilities. That may mean that rural residents experiencing an overdose may not receive treatment in time to be saved.

Second, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) suggests that some rural hospitals do not have the same level of training as urban hospital to manage the opioid crisis. The CDC (2017) recently released a report documenting best practices for rural health care facilities to manage the opioid crisis.

The Illinois medical and public health community is working hard to confront the opioid misuse crisis in both rural and urban Illinois communities. In 2017, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) established the Illinois Opioid Crisis Response Advisory Council (IOCRAC). This council is comprised of a range of medical, public health, and social service agencies (IDHS 2019). The purpose of the IOCRAC is to create a more holistic approach to tackle as many aspects of the opioid crisis as possible.

In order to increase attention on the rural dimension of the opioid crisis, the GRAC in 2018 hosted guest speakers and learned about opioid overdose treatments. In July 2019, the Illinois office of the USDA-RD, the Southern Illinois University Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development, and the Southern Illinois Workforce Development Board (SIWDB) hosted a conference focused on rural strategies for addressing the opioid crisis in rural communities (SIWDB 2019).

A final point about the opioid crisis can be made about its impact on the rural workforce. As described earlier, rural communities are already confronting a long term population decline, and a shrinking workforce. The opioid misuse crisis further constricts the labor force in rural areas that are disproportionately reliant on manufacturing, transportation, and other jobs where drug testing is prevalent. The broader significance here is that the opioid misuse crisis represents one more factor driving downwards the rural population in Illinois.

2.4.2 Spring 2019 Flooding

Devastating floods affected much of Illinois during the spring and summer of 2019. The flooding was bad enough that Governor Pritzker included 36 Illinois counties in a gubanatorial disaster declaration (Associated Press 2019). Counties along the Illinois and Mississippi River were hit the hardest, but damage occurred across a broad swath covering a third of Illinois' 102 counties. The flooding prevented many farmers from planting crops. Flooding breached levees and overtopped river banks, and in doing so flooded roads, bridges, businesses, private homes and entire communities.

Compounding the problem for many flooded residents is that the flooding affected many of the poorest communities in Illinois, including Alexander and Pulaski County. The flood management and recovery effort involved many state agencies that also belong to the GRAC, including the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA). The Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), the Illinois National Guard, and the Red Cross also helped, as did hundreds of volunteers. Understanding the true impact of the flooding will take time as recovery is ongoing. The 2020 GRAC report will provide more indepth analysis of this natural and human disaster.

III. Conclusions

Rural Illinois embodies the idea of continuity and change. Many rural counties continue their decades-long downward population trends. Leaders in these communities will eventually be faced with two community and economic development options. They will have to take steps to boost the economy or in some other way grow the local population. Strategies do exist to retain youth and spur the main street economy. But this pro-growth development takes hard work and community-wide commitment. Alternatively, these communities may choose to "shrink smart." This may require communities to merge or consolidate services. Many community residents will resist these new ways of doing things. Either way, communities should be proactive about their future as a way to maintain their quality of life.

Illinois is also buffeted by recent changes. The state budget impasse of 2016 and 2017 disproportinately hurt rural communities, especially those that host community colleges, universities, health care facilities, or social service agencies. The state starved these institutions of operating funds, and many of these entities laid off workers, curtailed services, or shuttered their doors. The damage done can be seen in the recent population declines in the affected communities.

The opioid crisis represents a community health, criminal justice, and economic development challenge for both urban and rural communities in Illinois. However, evidence shows that a coordinated effort across geographies can help gain control of the situation. A recent *New York Times* article reports that in 2018, opioid deaths dropped for the first time since 1990 (Goodnough, Katz, and Sanger-Katz 2019). Maybe there is finally some good news on this issue.

And there is good news on other fronts as well. As noted above, the *New York Times* declared that, "small-town America is dying" (Harris and Tarchack 2018). Thankfully, the article goes on to explore ways that small towns might be saved. The GRAC is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. During the past three decades, the GRAC has addressed, studied and acted upon a range of issues related to rural economic development, community well-being, farm productivity, natural disasters, and a host of other topics to save small towns in Illinois.

Despite this breath of coverage, there are topics that have been neglected or underexamined related to rural communities. Topics here include issues related to immigrant well-being, gender equity, race relations, and restorative justice. The GRAC is now chaired by a new Lt. Governor and there may be new openings to expand the types of issues the GRAC can address. Rural communities have been and are a vital part of Illinois. They will not die. The GRAC will continue its efforts to ensure this vitality exists far into the future.

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APPENDIX A
GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER 13 (1991)

STATE OF ILLINOIS
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

EXECUTIVE ORDER **NUMBER 13 (1991)**

AN EXECUTIVE ORDER CREATING AN ANNUAL REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE RURAL ILLINOIS ECONOMY

WHEREAS, the Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University is the State's academic clearinghouse for rural development data and initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the Governor's Rural Affairs Council and the Institute for Rural Affairs coordinate rural development initiatives through the Office of the Lieutenant Governor; and

WHEREAS, the Lieutenant Governor as the Chairman of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council is given the authority to organize government and private sector resources to secure assistance for and to enhance the quality of life in rural Illinois; and

WHEREAS, the Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University has developed a format for an Annual Report on the State of Rural Economy and has agreed to produce this report.

THEREFORE, I, Jim Edgar, hereby order the following:

A. Executive Order Number 6 and 7 (1986) are hereby amended in accordance with the provisions of this Executive Order.
B. There is created an Annual Report on the State of the Rural Illinois Economy.
C. The Annual Report on the State of the Rural Illinois Economy shall replace the Rural Fair Share Initiative created by Executive Order Number 6 (1986).
D. The Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University shall organize the Annual Report in cooperation with the Governor's Rural Affairs Council.
E. The Annual Report on the State of the Rural Illinois Economy shall assess rural economic indicators and make recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on rural infrastructure needs.
F. The Governor's Rural Affairs Council and the Institute for Rural Affairs Western Illinois University shall issue the Annual Report on the State of the Rural Illinois Economy no later than August 1 of each year to the Governor and General Assembly.
G. For the purposes of the Annual Report on the State of the Rural Economy the following United States Bureau of the Census definitions as detailed in *Rural Revitalization: The Comprehensive State Policy For The Future* shall apply:

   a. Rural County — No municipality over 50,000 population. Under this definition Illinois has 76 nonmetropolitan or rural counties.
   b. Rural Area — Under 2,500 population regardless of whether they are in a Metropolitan Statistical Area or not.

This Executive Order Number 13 (1991), shall become effective upon filing with the Secretary of State.

October 11, 1991
Jim Edgar
Governor

APPENDIX B
GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER 11-4 (2011)

STATE OF ILLINOIS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

EXECUTIVE ORDER **11-04**

EXECUTIVE ORDER REGARDING THE GOVERNOR'S RURAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

WHEREAS, the Governor's Rural Affairs Council was created pursuant to Executive Order Number 7 on October 15, 1986, to maintain the rural emphasis in Illinois government, strengthen the rural economy, increase the capacity and viability of local government and improve education and human service opportunities in Illinois; and

WHEREAS, these issues remain priorities of the State of Illinois in the 21st Century; and

WHEREAS, the needs of rural residents and communities vary greatly from one part of the State of Illinois to another part of the State; and

WHEREAS, the rural challenges and opportunities continue to evolve over time; and

WHEREAS, the Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University is the academic clearinghouse in the State of Illinois for rural development and initiatives; and

WHEREAS, policies and programs developed to meet the needs of rural Illinoisans are most effective when directed and coordinate by a leader at the highest level of state government; and

WHEREAS, the Governor's Rural Affairs Council and the Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University coordinate rural development initiatives through the Office of the Lieutenant Governor; and

WHEREAS, the Lieutenant Governor, as Chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, has the authority to organize government and private sector resources to secure assistance and enhance the quality of life for rural Illinois; and

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of Illinois, pursuant to the powers vested in me by Article V of the Constitution of Illinois, do hereby order as follows;

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council is to develop and implement strategies for improving delivery of State of Illinois services to rural Illinois and to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life for rural residents. The Governor's Rural Affairs Council and the Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University shall continue to issue an Annual Report in accordance with Executive Order Number 13 of October 11, 1991.

II. MEMBERSHIP

a. The Lieutenant Governor shall serve as Chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council.
b. Members of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council shall include one representative from each of the following Illinois not-for-profit corporations: Illinois Agricultural Association and Rural Partners.
c. Members of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council shall also include one representative from each of the following governmental agencies or institutions in the State of Illinois: Illinois Department on Aging, Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois Department of Commerce of Economic Opportunity, Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Department of Human Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, University of Illinois-Cooperative Extension Service, Illinois Housing Development Authority, Southern Illinois University, Illinois for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University, and Illinois Finance Authority.
d. The Governor shall appoint up to six citizen members to serves on the Governor's Rural Affairs Council as required to increase the Governor's Rural Affairs Council as required to increase the Governor's Rural Affairs Council memberships to a total of no more than 25 members.

III. GOVERNANCE

a. The Council shall meet as often as the Chair deems necessary.
b. The governmental agencies or institutions in the State of Illinois with representatives eligible to serve on the Governor's Rural Affairs Council shall provide information upon request to the Chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council concerning agency programs, data, and activities that impact rural Illinois.
c. The Chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council may appoint persons, including but not limited to, representatives from government, private industry, and not-for-profit organizations, to serve on committees of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council and to provide input to the Governor's Rural Affairs Council as a whole.

IV. TRANSPARENCY

In addition to whatever policies or procedures the Governor's Rural Affairs Council may adopt, all operations of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council will be subject to the provision of the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 430/1 et seq.) and the Illinois

Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 12011 et seq.). This Section shall not be construed so as to preclude other statutes from applying to the Governor's Rural Affairs Council and its activities.

V. PRIOR EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Executive Order Number 6 of October 15, 1986, Executive Order Number 7 of October 15, 1986, Executive Order Number 13 of October 11, 1991, and Executive Order Number 1 of January 11, 2000, are each hereby amended in accordance with the provisions of this Executive Order Number 11-04.

VI. EFFECTIVE DATE

This Executive Order Number 11-04 shall become effective upon filing with the Secretary of State.

Pat Quinn
Governor

Issued by the Governor: May 18, 2011
Filed with the Secretary of State: May 18, 2011