

# PopBites

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## Reasons for “Rural Rebound” Are Diverse

A rural population rebound is affecting Minnesota as well as other states, but the reasons for the shift are complex. Case studies of 12 Minnesota turnaround counties — counties that lost population in the 1980s but gained between 1990 and 1995 — show that no single reason accounts for the change. Counties included in this study are Otter Tail, Aitkin, Itasca, Brown, Clearwater, Todd, Sibley, Nobles, Pope, Mahnommen, Swift and Polk.

## Nonmetropolitan Counties Have More Favorable Population Trends in 1990s

Since 1990, all but one of the counties outside the Twin Cities area have had a more positive growth pattern than in the 1980s. Counties that lost population last decade are either losing at a slower rate or are growing. Nonmetropolitan counties that gained population in the 1980s are, with a single exception, growing at an even faster rate in the 1990s.

The 12 counties studied vary in size, location, and economic base. Population growth in the first half of the decade varied from 1.0 percent in Polk County to 7.6 percent in Aitkin County. Six of the 12 grew from both net in-migration (more people moving in than out) and natural increase (more births than deaths). Two counties experienced net out-migration and four experienced natural decrease (more deaths than births).

There was no single element common to the 12 counties, and in most counties growth appears to come from a combination of factors. Nine of the 12 counties had employment gains in manufacturing, including both durable and nondurable goods. Retirement and recreation appeared to be factors in five of the counties, all in regions with numerous lakes and other outdoor amenities. Four counties

are experiencing suburbanization or exurbanization (similar to suburbs, but more rural in nature) as growth spills over from cities in neighboring counties. In-migration of immigrants and Latinos has boosted population in counties with meat packing and food processing industries. In two counties, growth came from a single industry—gambling in Mahnommen County and meat packing in Nobles County. Two counties grew because they had gains in group-quarters population—college dormitories in Brown County and a prison in Swift County.

Rural Minnesota has done well thus far in the 1990s, retaining more residents and attracting some new ones. Discussions with local residents and officials suggest some potential barriers to continued growth, however. The most commonly mentioned problems include labor and housing shortages in some areas.

A more detailed version of these findings is in the report, “Population Turnaround in Rural Minnesota: Twelve Case Studies.” The report is based on interviews with knowledgeable local people, site visits and analysis of existing data. To receive a copy of the report, call the State Demographer’s Office Helpline at (612) 296-2557 or write to Minnesota Planning, 658 Cedar St., St. Paul, Minnesota 55155.

