2019 RURAL PULSE™ SNAPSHOT: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Rural Pulse™ is a research study commissioned by the Grand Rapids-based Blandin Foundation to gain a real-time snapshot of the concerns, perceptions and priorities of rural Minnesota residents. It includes comparative findings from urban Minnesotans and identifies trends within significant, complex subject areas including the economy, education, employment and quality of life. Results are also analyzed as they relate to nine separate but inter-related dimensions of a community’s health: life-long learning, inclusion, recreational and artistic opportunities, environmental stewardship, infrastructure and services, safety and security, community leadership, economic opportunity, spirituality and wellness.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IS …

One of the Nine Dimensions of a Healthy Community, economic opportunity is defined as: conditions where all people can earn an income that allows them to live with dignity. The economy of the community is sustainable and not dependent on exploiting human beings or depleting the natural environment.

Condition of Economy

Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community’s economy now compared to a year ago. Thirty percent of rural respondents believed it had improved, half (50%) indicated it stayed the same, and 16 percent felt that their local economy regressed over the last year.

Rural Minnesotans: Condition of Local Economy Compared to One Year Ago

- 30% Much better now
- 20% Somewhat better now
- 50% The same
- 12% Somewhat worse now
- 4% Much worse now
- 5% Unsure

Rural Minnesotans: Condition of Local Economy Compared to One Year Ago

- Better: 31%, 18%, 31%, 30%
- Same: 56%, 51%, 56%, 49%, 50%
- Worse: 9%, 17%, 20%, 18%, 16%
Those residing in the Southeast region were the most doubtful about improvement in the economy (-13% compared to 2016). West Central residents also were less agreeable (-10% compared to 2016). Central and Northwest region respondents were the most likely to have said they have seen an improvement in their local economy over the past 12 months.

Women and those with household incomes of less than $100,000 voiced the least confidence in the condition of their economy.

One in four (25%) Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community respondents believed that the economy has improved over the past 12 months. About half (49%) felt it stayed the same. Eighteen percent indicated that their local economy had receded over the last year. While that number remained steady for rural Whites since 2016 study findings, this represented a 12 percentage point regression for cultural community groups.
Jobs Continue to be a Concern
About seven in 10 (69%) rural Minnesotans – and 78 percent of urban area residents – believed that their community maintains and grows existing job opportunities. Twenty-seven percent of rural respondents – and 18 percent of those in urban cities – disagreed.

Residents in the Northeast region were the least likely to feel that their community successfully maintains and grows existing jobs, though they experienced the most significant upswing in sentiment (+14%) compared to Rural Pulse 2016 findings.
About six in 10 (61%) rural BIPOC residents believed that their community maintains and grows existing job opportunities, an increase of seven percentage points since 2016 study findings. A third (34%) disagreed.

The belief that there are sufficient living-wage jobs increased 13 percentage points from Rural Pulse 2016, showing a significant sustained upswing since 2010 survey findings. There was still disagreement by some, however. Thirty-six percent of rural Minnesotans – and 30 percent of urban residents – felt that there are inadequate household-supporting job opportunities in their community.
Those in Northeast Minnesota were the most likely to have disagreed that there are enough living-wage jobs (48%), although that was a 13 percentage point upturn from 2016. Those in Southern and Central Minnesota were the most likely to have believed living-wage jobs are available, with Central region residents perceiving the most improvement since 2013.

**Do Not Believe There Are Adequate Jobs That Pay Household-Supporting Wages**

![Chart showing the percentage of people who do not believe there are adequate jobs that pay household-supporting wages in different regions of Minnesota, with data from 2013, 2016, and 2019.

Somewhat or strongly disagree that there are adequate jobs that pay household-supporting wages.

While the belief that there are sufficient living-wage jobs increased for rural Whites, the number slightly decreased from 2016 study findings for BIPOC respondents. About 48 percent felt that there are jobs that pay a living wage available within their local communities, while another half (49%) cited household-supporting job opportunities are deficient.

**Rural BIPOC Residents:**

**There Are Adequate Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages**

![Bar chart comparing the responses of BIPOC and White respondents on the belief that there are adequate jobs that pay household-supporting wages.

48% BIPOC vs. 60% White
49% BIPOC vs. 37% White

A third (34%) of rural Minnesotans – and 21 percent of urban area residents – believed that their community does not do enough to advocate for economic growth and development. Sixty-three percent of rural respondents – and three-quarters of urban Minnesotans – felt positively toward their community’s ability to promote new industry and economic progress, however.
Those in the Southwest and West Central regions were the most inclined to believe that their community adequately promotes economic development, with the Northeast having displayed the most disagreement.

Thirty-seven percent of rural BIPOC respondents believed that their community does not do enough to support economic growth through entrepreneurship and attracting new businesses, which showed even less confidence than 2016 survey findings (-10%). Fifty-eight percent felt positive about their community’s economic development efforts.

When asked how they feel their community does with providing an adequate workforce, 27 percent of rural Minnesotans – and 17 percent of urban area residents – believed that their community does not possess enough available workforce to meet the needs of local businesses. Two-thirds (66%) of rural respondents – and three-quarters (76%) of urban Minnesotans – felt their communities possess a sufficient labor pool.
Those in the Central, Southwest and Northeast regions were the most likely to give good grades to their community regarding the availability of an adequate workforce, with the Northwest showing the most disagreement.

![Adequate Workforce for Businesses](chart)

About a third (35%) of BIPOC community members believed that there are not enough workers to assist the needs of local businesses. Six in 10 felt their communities have a sufficient labor pool.

![Rural BIPOC Residents: Availability of an Adequate Workforce for Businesses](chart)

Personal demographics play a role in how the job and economic climate are perceived. Women in rural areas were the least confident regarding economic growth. Sentiment also varied by age, income and business ownership.
Rural Minnesotans:
Do Not Believe Community Provides Sufficient
Job Opportunities and Economic Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate job opportunities that pay household-supporting wages</td>
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<td>Economic development</td>
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<td>38%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining and growing existing local job opportunities</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
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<td>40%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate workforce for businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate workforce for businesses</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate job opportunities that pay household-supporting wages</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate workforce for businesses</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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Impact of the Economy
About a third of Minnesotans (28% rural, 33% urban) noted that their household income has increased over the past year. Some rural households saw a decrease in wages in the past year (17%). More than half (54%) said their household income did not change within the past 12 months.

Household Income Increased Over Past Year

![Bar chart showing the percentage of households whose income increased over the past year, broken down by rural and urban areas. The chart indicates 28% in rural areas and 33% in urban areas.](image-url)
Southwest and West Central residents were the least likely to have said that their household income went up. Women were slightly more likely than men to say their household income has increased (32% vs. 26%). Rural Minnesotans ages 35 to 49 and those with higher incomes were also most likely to have had paycheck gains, while those with the lowest incomes ($35,000 or less) said they were impacted negatively in the financial realm.

Further, business owners were slightly more likely than those who don’t own a business to have said their income went down (22% vs. 16%).
Three in 10 (31%) BIPOC residents noted that their household income increased over the past year – a decline from 2016 study findings (-10%). Some experienced a decrease in wages (15%), and about half (52%) said their household income did not change within the past 12 months.

One in 10 rural residents – five percentage points fewer than 2016 study findings – said that someone in their household lost their job. Job loss impacted 13 percent of urban Minnesotans.

Rural residents most likely to have experienced a job loss were between the ages of 25 and 34, and those with lower household incomes.
Job loss impacted 14 percent of BIPOC residents within the last 12 months. That was a six percentage point improvement over 2016 survey findings.

A new question within Rural Pulse this year asked Minnesotans if they had ever experienced poverty. Forty-two percent of rural residents – and 38 percent of those in urban areas – said that they have. More than half said that they have not (56% rural, 59% urban). A few were unsure. [Note: Definition of poverty was left to personal interpretation.]

Regionally, those in Central Minnesota were the most likely to have said that they have experienced poverty. Residents in the Northwest and Southwest sectors of the state were the least likely to have said such was true.

There was wide variation to this question when it came to personal demographics. The youngest residents in rural Minnesota (ages 18-24) were by far the least likely age group to have said that they have experienced poverty. Those with the lowest incomes ($35,000 or less) cited having lived in hardship at some point in their life.

Rural Minnesotans who do not own a business were more likely than entrepreneurs to have reported experiencing poverty in their lifetime.
Nearly six in 10 (57%) rural BIPOC respondents – 16 percent higher than their White counterparts – said that they have been in poverty at some point in their life; 41 percent said that they have not.

### Rural BIPOC Residents:

**Ever Experienced Poverty**

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<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>41%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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**About Rural Pulse**

*Rural Pulse™* is a research study commissioned by Blandin Foundation to gain a real-time snapshot of the concerns, perceptions and priorities of rural Minnesota residents. It has been conducted periodically since 1998, and was last conducted in 2016. It includes comparative findings from urban Minnesotans, and identifies trends within significant, complex subject areas including the economy, education, employment and quality of life. For this study, 1,068 telephone interviews were conducted with rural Minnesotans. View the full report at [www.RuralPulse.org](http://www.RuralPulse.org).