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Hancock County has been found to be one of the top prosperous rural counties in America.

Prosperous rural counties graduate their kids from high school. People work in prosperous rural counties, and unemployment rates are low. There's less poverty in prosperous counties, and the housing people live in is both affordable and in good repair.

A recent study completed by Andrew Isserman, an economist at the University of Illinois, decided to use prosperity as his measure for rural success. Isserman didn't measure either growth or income. "Growth and prosperity are not the same," Isserman wrote. His measurement for prosperity came from 4 factors: low drop-out rates; lots of jobs; low poverty rates; good and affordable housing. The Midwest states had the most prosperous rural counties while the South West and South East had the least.

Prosperous rural communities have more places for people to meet such as coffee shops, bars, restaurants, bowling lanes, and country clubs. Prosperous places grow slowly and are not as diverse as the rest of the nation; the citizens go to church more often and are more community minded.

Jobs are important. The average unemployment rate in prosperous rural counties is %3.5 and %6.7 in non-prosperous rural counties. "The prosperous counties have a more vigorous private sector, with more jobs per capita", Isserman wrote. Prosperous rural communities have private sector jobs, not government jobs. In prosperous counties more people earn average incomes and



fewer people make either a whole lot or very little. These counties have more family farms, more farm employment and, consequently, more government subsidy payments.

Mostly, according to Isserman "prosperous rural counties keep their kids in school." Adults in prosperous places have more education than do adults in the nation as a whole, and so do their kids. In prosperous rural counties, 63 percent of young adult women (age 24-34) have some college, compared to 50 percent in the rest of rural America. And 53 percent of young men have some college, compared to 39 percent in all other rural counties.

The study determined that what mattered least were items such as whether the county had a 4 lane highway or an airport, indeed most had neither. The prosperous rural counties have colder winters and flatter topography. Most of the counties did not have major tourist destinations like mountains or lakes. Rural communities that have little or no control over such things can still be prosperous.

Approximately 25 percent of the nation's population lives in 2,187 counties deemed 'non-metropolitan,' or rural. Isserman's study listed Hancock County in the top 289 rural counties in the nation. Other area counties listed in the study were Floyd, Franklin, Kossuth, Mitchell, Winnebago and Wright.

Isserman states "We are still far from understanding why some places prosper and others do not, but the results so far are intriguing. "

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