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New Report Shares Data Trends on Kentucky's Rural Economy

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A new report by Blueprint Kentucky provides data on Kentucky's rural economy. Blueprint Kentucky (formerly CEDIK) is an integrated research and outreach unit within the University of Kentucky [Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment](#).

Their report found that in 2023, eighty-five of Kentucky's 120 counties are considered rural by the USDA Economic Research Service. That translates to 1.85 million rural Kentuckians, or about 41% of the population.

"This report is intended to provide rural community leaders valuable information about economic trends happening in rural Kentucky," said Sarah Bowker, managing director for Blueprint Kentucky. "So often, reports like these choose to focus on our urban centers, overlooking the realities of rural communities."

One notable finding is the reversal of a long-standing trend in rural population decline. After nearly a decade of losses between 2011 and 2019, rural Kentucky as a whole experienced population growth from 2020 to 2024, driven in part by the rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to note that not all rural communities experienced population growth.

"This population shift marks an important moment for rural Kentucky," said Simona Balazs, research director for Blueprint Kentucky. "It underscores the need for continued investment in job creation, housing and essential services to sustain growth and ensure these communities remain attractive places to live and work."

The report is presented in two formats. The shorter report provides the main takeaways on several data points related to individual, community and industry level economic conditions. For those

interested in more data and extended analyses, Blueprint Kentucky has a longer report, which explores all industry sectors. Both reports have sections that cover various population changes, big-picture economic indicators, employment trends across key industries as well as data and analysis on firms, government and community level factors.

“What makes this analysis unique is the focus on rural Kentucky specifically,” said Blueprint Kentucky director Alison Davis. “From demographic changes to industry trends, we highlight the data local leaders can use to identify opportunities, anticipate challenges and develop strategies tailored to their communities.”

Blueprint Kentucky used several federal data sources, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Economic Analysis to create the report. In addition to the data that’s publicly available, Blueprint Kentucky also provides rural Kentucky data from proprietary sources including Chmura and YourEconomy.

For many of the topics in the report, Blueprint Kentucky also provides county-level data profiles to be able to better understand the local situation.

“These county-level snapshots help local officials and partners design strategies that reflect their unique strengths and challenges,” Balazs said. “Rather than relying on one-size-fits-all approaches, leaders can use this data to make informed, community-specific decisions.”

Blueprint Kentucky regularly provides reports on local economic conditions and impacts. To learn more about their reporting, visit their website at <http://blueprintkentucky.ca.uky.edu>.

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