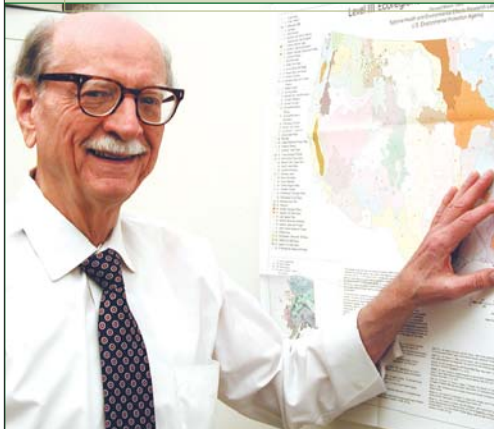


Calvin Beale



If demography is destiny, as some historians would argue, then Calvin Beale, Senior Demographer at ERS, has had a strong hand in tracking the destiny of late-20th-century rural America. During a career spanning 56 years—most at USDA—Calvin has been at the forefront in analyzing population patterns, migration flows, and racial/ethnic composition of nonmetropolitan (rural) areas.

Calvin is widely acknowledged for pathbreaking research on the farm population, notably for tracing and explaining its rapid decline over several decades. He produced the first comprehensive report on Black farmers, chronicling the circumstances that helped generate a massive rural exodus by Blacks from 1920 to 1960.

A landmark contribution was Calvin's discovery of the U.S. nonmetro population turnaround in the early 1970s. His study was first to report that the decades-long stream of rural-to-urban migration had reversed.

Thirty years later, Calvin is mining recently released Census data to uncover new patterns of change. He was among the first demographers to note that an influx of Hispanic residents accounted for a quarter of all nonmetro population change in 1990-2000. In 2001, he and colleague Glenn Fuguitt documented the reversal of the longstanding trend

of Black migration from the South, linking the reversal to economic development in the rural South. Over the past 2 years, Calvin's research on the disproportionate placement of prisons in nonmetro areas has drawn national media attention.

Rural America is both vocation and avocation. Having once said, "You can't know what's going on in the country from behind a desk in Washington," Calvin has visited most U.S. counties. Along the way, he photographed over 2,000 county courthouses. A sample of the photos, worthy of a coffee-table volume, can be viewed at www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rural/Photos. His firsthand observations and conversations with local officials and residents, combined with incisive analysis of data, have yielded precise readings of the rural population pulse.

In 1990 the Rand Population Research Center published *A Taste of the Country: A Collection of Calvin Beale's Writings*. Recognizing the book's continued influence, Penn State University Press reissued it in 2002. The year 2002 also saw Calvin honored by colleagues at an event sponsored by the Rural Sociological Society, the Population Reference Bureau, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, for 50 years of contributions to research on population migration and to the field of rural demography.

Michael Roberts & Nigel Key



Michael Roberts (left) and Nigel Key

Two newly minted ERS researchers are also delving into Census data—to examine changes in farm structure and to explain farmers' production decisions. Nigel Key and Michael Roberts joined ERS a couple of years ago and have already received national professional recognition for their work in agricultural and resource economics. For Nigel, it was Honorable Mention in the American Agricultural Economics Association's 2001 competition for "Outstanding Journal Article" (on how costs associated with buying and selling affect farm household production decisions). That same year, AAEEA honored Michael for "Outstanding Dissertation" (on reconciling the behavior of nonrenewable resource prices with economic theory).

Nigel and Michael, both graduates of the University of California at Berkeley, are collaborating on research to clarify the role of risk in agricultural production choices. By merging county-level data on crop insurance participation with farm-level data from the Census of Agriculture, they can account for differences in production decisions at the regional and farm level that may have biased the findings of earlier studies. In another collaborative effort, they are exploring the relationship between program payments and structural changes in the farm sector, again using Census data to control for farm and locational variations.

Both these economists, report ERS colleagues, take a creative approach in tackling problems, posing questions, and locating the data that will best answer the questions.

Their collegial, unassuming manner, say co-workers, reflects a willingness to share ideas and learn from others. They are adept at working on diverse topics—Nigel's current research topics cover farm financial risk and manure management policies, while Michael's include farm contracting arrangements and conservation policy. Rarely reluctant to challenge long-held ideas, Nigel and Michael are enthusiastic explorers pursuing the stories behind the statistics. Future research and policy on risk and conservation will likely be shaped by their innovations.