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## Editor's Notebook

This month's *Rural Development Perspectives* takes a look at new developments in some of the older themes important to the rural economy—rural manufacturing, passenger railroad service in rural America, direct marketing of farm products, and small farms.

Manufacturing's share of jobs nationally has been in a long-term decline, but in rural areas the number of manufacturing jobs has been growing. G. Andrew Bernat, Jr., finds that manufacturing jobs in the rural Midwest increased in the 1980's and 1990's, especially in less urbanized and completely rural counties, where earnings from manufacturing jobs have become an increasingly larger share of total county income. For the future, the rural Midwest may be in a good position for further manufacturing growth because of its proximity to urban manufacturing and its concentration on durables production.

The significance of passenger rail service has changed with time. At the turn of the last century, a vast network of rail lines linked thousands of rural communities. Today little more than the main-line routes of Amtrak endure and these continue to dwindle as Amtrak reduces its service. Nevertheless, Dennis Brown's article shows how passenger service remains an important alternative for the approximately 180 nonmetro communities still served. Communities faced with loss of service have tried a number of successful strategies, including organized opposition, subsidies, and finding new uses for abandoned rights-of-way.

Fred Gale discusses the possibility of using direct marketing as a rural development tool. Direct selling by farmers to consumers, once the most common way of marketing perishables, has recently become popular again. Although often promoted as a way of enhancing farm income and the rural economy, the direct marketing of farm products through farmers' markets, pick-your-own farm operations, and similar strategies is concentrated near metro areas convenient to urban customers instead of in those counties where agriculture is the primary source of personal income. For most farms, direct selling represents only a small portion of farm income, but many farmers, especially the small farmers who do most of the direct selling, have shown an entrepreneurial spirit and have pioneered innovative ways to reach their customers.

Small farms remain important to rural areas, and their nature has changed significantly in the half century since World War II. Once small-scale farming was often equated with poverty, since small-farm households had to depend on the meager income that modest farm operations could generate. Today, commercial-sized farms have become larger, more specialized, and more capital-intensive. A majority of all farms are still small (with sales under \$20,000 per year) but, as Cheryl Steele's article shows, these are now mostly part-time operations whose household income derives mainly from the diversity of economic opportunity that now characterizes rural areas. Even so, small farms remain important in the production of many crops and contribute in significant ways to the rural economy and as preservers of the rural landscape.

Finally, in our Indicators piece, Linda Ghelfi and Timothy Parker show social and economic changes that have occurred in nonmetro counties classified by level of urban influence. The urban influence classification groups nonmetro counties by the size of the metro areas they adjoin and by the size of their own largest cities. These new categories will permit researchers to better study the effects of population centers on nonmetro counties. The authors look at the relationships of adjacency and own city size with growth in population, employment, and earnings and the location of institutions of higher learning, hospitals, and physicians.

Douglas E. Bowers