

## ERS Peer Review Plan

Preliminary Title: Examining the Rural College Labor Market

Type of Report (ERR, EIB, EB) EIB  
 Influential Scientific Information

Agency: Economic Research Service  Highly Influential Scientific Assessment  
USDA

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Subject of Review: The rural population is gradually becoming more educated. For the period of 2019-2023, 32 percent of the nonmetropolitan population 25 years and older held either associate, bachelor's or advanced degrees. Compared to estimates for 2009-2013, the share with associate degrees grew 23.6 percent, bachelor's 21.7 percent growth, and advanced degrees 27.7 percent growth. This growth coincided with a reallocation of workers in the nonmetro economy away from goods producing industries that hire fewer college educated workers in favor of nonmetro services producing industries with higher shares of workers with associate and bachelor's degrees. Though enrollment in nonmetropolitan post-secondary educational institutions declined 16.3 percent from 2011 to 2023, due to a decrease in drop-out rates and faster degree completion, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded increased 5.6 percent, and the number of associate degrees awarded remained relatively constant. Land-grant institutions (metro and nonmetro) however bucked the declining enrollment trend, where undergraduate enrollment increased by 10.9 percent. The number of bachelor's degrees awarded at land-grant universities grew 23.1 percent. The two most common bachelor's degree majors are for business and health professions; however, the largest growth has been for computers, increasing 150 percent from 2011 to 2023. Most agriculture degrees awarded are in animal science, plant science, and agricultural business and management. Finally, most graduates from land grant universities with a major in agriculture take jobs in professional services industries, followed by agriculture, wholesale and manufacturing.

Purpose of Review: The purpose of the review is to ensure the high-quality of the economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience.

Type of Review:  Panel Review  Individual Reviewers  
 Alternative Process (Briefly Explain):

Timing of Review (Est.): Start: 6/18/2025 Completed: 12/23/2025

Number of Reviewers:  3 or fewer  4 to 10  More than 10

Primary Disciplines/Types of Expertise Needed for Review: Economists

Reviewers selected by:  Agency  Designated Outside Organization

Opportunities for Public Comment?  Yes  No

If yes, briefly state how and when these opportunities will be provided:

How:

When:

Peer Reviewers Provided with Public Comments?  Yes  No

Public Nominations Requested for Review Panel?  Yes  No