

# RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

HALE COUNTY

**W**e had an excellent group for the SET (Stronger Economies Together) meeting in Plainview on September 10. We had active participants from Floyd, Castro, Swisher and Hale Counties. The application has been sent and many positive support letters were written to move the SET training process forward.

USDA, at this time, is on hold due to the government shut down but when the shut down is over the SET process will move forward. Participants saw a mini session of what the full training program will be. We had representation from county governments, councils of government, business, labor, government, education and not for profit.

We did module one and put together a great regional team for this SET region. Here is what we will be doing in the upcoming training sessions:

Module 2—Exploring the region’s economic and demographic foundation. Looking at our statistics to see where to begin.

Module 3—Focusing on regional competitive advantages. Our five counties have advantages we have not brought out which we can work with on a regional basis.

Module 4—Exploring strategies for enhancing the regional economy. Working together to develop a comprehensive strategy on a regional basis.

Module 5—Developing your visions and goals. Creating visions and goals with a road map to regional communication on issues affecting our region.

Module 6—Exploring regional assets and barriers. Exploring what we can build from and what, we as a region, see as road blocks ahead.

Module 7—Planning for success. The goal of these sessions is to develop a plan that is agreed upon and workable in our region.

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRILIFE**  
EXTENSION

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## Fun Facts

As of March 2013,  
nationally SET has  
resulted in

- \$6 million leveraged
- \$14 million invested or loaned
- 230 jobs created or saved

A great website to add  
to your favorite's list is:

[http://  
ruralcommuni-  
ties.tumblr.com/](http://ruralcommunities.tumblr.com/)

Module 8—Measuring for success. Properly evaluate what our success is through developed measurement tools.

These eight trainings can present economic tools that will give us a start to look at issues we have in common and positive outlooks on a regional basis. Yes, we have had an economic blow to our region but it gives us the opportunity to see how we can diversify and build on successes. Small successes in turn will lead to larger successes in the long term.

With SET we are providing tools to move forward and ground ourselves in our assets and barriers to create a balance of what we can address and at what level.

Secrets to a successful community:

- ◆ Have a vision for the future
- ◆ Inventory Community Assets
- ◆ Build plans on the enhancement of existing assets
- ◆ Use education and incentives not just for regulation
- ◆ Pick and choose among development projects
- ◆ Cooperate with neighbors for a common goal
- ◆ Pay attention to community aesthetics and beautification
- ◆ Have strong leaders and committed citizens

"The Kentucky Highlands Stronger Economies Together Team identified the healthcare cluster as important economic driver in the 22-county region in Southeast Kentucky. Their area of emphasis focuses on Electronic Medical Record implementation specifically provider training and education, Health IT workforce development, and provider recruitment and retention. Through a grant award, the project coordinator surveyed 600 healthcare providers in the region and with the SET partner team has identified specific objectives and activities to further this work. The team is now actively pursuing funds for implementation and will also be applying for Promise Zone designation in 2013."

At least four regions have already pursued grant funding opportunities that align with the specific goals delineated in their regional plans.

One Arizona team is tackling a major barrier to economic growth identified in their regional economic development plan: no broadband or Internet access in remote communities. While much work remains to be done, two neighboring tribes with a history of competing for land and other resources have come to the table as a result of SET to plan collaboratively on a strategy to secure high speed Internet services, not only for their own future, but for the future of their neighbors as well.

At least two SET regions considered applying for the Jobs Accelerator Challenge grant, an EDA-DOL-SBA program aimed at upgrading a region's key economic cluster. One SET team submitted an application while the second team determined that the grant opportunity did not align with its new strategic plan and as such, opted not to apply for the grant. Both instances demonstrate how SET can provide the tools to better evaluate and respond to the right opportunities for a region.

Because of SET, a county department of education in West Virginia is now developing a meat butchering training program, advancing one of the SET team's economic development strategies to focus on raising natural beef and constructing a meat processing facility.

Twelve post-survey respondents (27 percent) noted the value of exploring data and strategies together to gain a better insight into the potential opportunities for the region was a key value of the initiative.

Under SET, one Ohio region has received state funding for continued work on their regional plan.

from the Year One Accomplishment report at the bottom of <http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/>

## American Wealth Transfer

The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) Center for Entrepreneurship has published a document called American Wealth – Household Wealth Holding in America.

“From America’s earliest traditions, there has been a strong value placed on personal initiative and responsibility for one’s economic well-being. Entrepreneurship and property rights have combined to create a powerful incentive for personal wealth creation. Another value system strongly tied to personal work ethic and estate formation is “giveback”.

Individuals, families, businesses and even communities are expected to give from their wealth, supporting those in need and helping to improve quality of life. Government policy embraces and encourages charitable giving in a remarkably wide range of areas. Over time, charitable giving or community giveback has become a deeply rooted value and behavior among most Americans.”



# Agritourism Resources for Entrepreneurs

Many farms open their gates to the public for fruit and vegetable picking, hayrides, corn or hay bale mazes, petting zoos, horseback riding, wagon rides, guided crop tours, camping, picnics, bonfires, hiking, tours of all kinds (winery, crop, garden, nursery, birding, livestock), fishing, birding, bicycling, heritage crafts and farm or ranch vacations.

A number of states offer valuable resources to encourage farmers and ranchers to open create agritourism operations. Here are some valuable resources for those interested in launching an agritourism business:

[Agritourism in Arkansas](#) is a 40-page document from the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas Agritourism Initiative. Information includes the hurdles, the perks, a personal evaluation to see if you have the right personality, location, assets and finances the launch an agritourism business. This is a terrific resource that is just the right size to be useful but not too long to be burdensome.

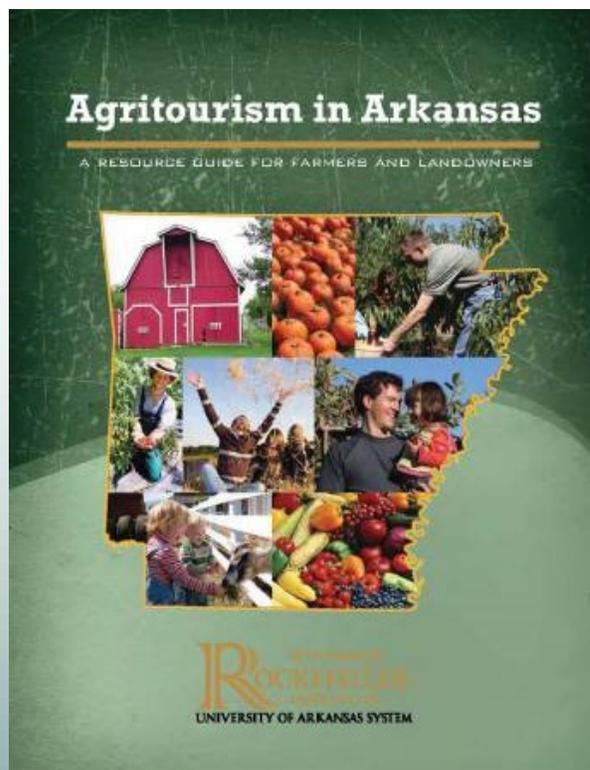
The University of California Small Farm Program – sign up for the California Ag Tour Connections which always has valuable resources. This month's issue shares info about resources from past "Agritourism Intensive 2012-2013" classes and contact info to sign up for 2013-2014 classes in California. Also offered on their website are more resources, including Survey of agritourism operators 2009, Business planning & management, Marketing an agritourism operation, Permits & regulations and more information. In a previous blog post I shared information about UC's *Agritourism and Nature Tourism* how-to book.

The Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, known as the LSU Ag Center, offers a resource guide for agritourism entrepreneurs – [www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism) is a website maintained by the LSU Ag Center to provide information on how to start and grow an agritourism business. The site includes information on the limited liability agritourism legislation passed in 2008 by the Louisiana Legislature. There are also free PDF copies of publications: *Agritourism: A New Agricultural Business Enterprise* and *Agritourism: Best Management Practices & Plan of Operation*. <http://>

[www.louisianaagritourism.blogspot.com/](http://www.louisianaagritourism.blogspot.com/) is a blog featuring agritourism in Louisiana.

Oklahoma Agritourism offers two sides to their website: one for the traveler and one for entrepreneurial farmers and ranchers. You can click here to plan your agri-adventure or here if you want to develop your farm or ranch into an agritourism enterprise. The 72-page Oklahoma Agritourism Resource Manual introduces farmers and ranchers to Agritourism and its potential, how to diversify their current operation to offer agritourism, building a business plan, and listing important contacts and resources to assist in agritourism business development.

Sometimes farmers are fearful of inviting the public onto their property because of the liability they incur. Enjoying experiences in the great outdoors can be inherently dangerous but the farming hosts must do their part to make their farms safe for visitors. The National Ag Law Center shares on its website the statutes from the twenty-three states that protect farmers and ranchers that play host to the public with agritourism ventures.



## Successful Communities: Civic Engagement

Every once in a while a really good how-to manual comes across my desk. Yesterday the Orton Family Foundation (based in VT and CO) sent out an email entitled *The Key to Successful Communities*. A report called *Planning for Stronger Local Democracy*, written by Matt Leighninger, Executive Director of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, offers “fundamental building blocks of strong local democracy” and breaks down the blocks into actions. You can also listening to a one hour Community Matters conference call discussion on Civic Infrastructure to learn more about the subject.

The email states:

“Signs of success are everywhere in our Heart & Soul communities: young people are getting involved in Cortez, CO; neighborhood conversations are underway in Essex, VT and Polson, MT; story sharing has begun in Gardiner, ME and the North Fork Valley, CO. As these towns continue to shift the community-planning paradigm, Orton staff is looking ahead to how today’s positive momentum becomes tomorrow’s long-term success. A big part of the answer lies in developing strong civic infrastructure. Communities spend lots of time thinking about *built infrastructure*—the roads and bridges, water mains and power lines that are essential to a functioning municipality. But what about *civic infrastructure*—the social connections, decision-making processes, difficult conversations and informal networks that influence how the people in a community function? While many towns spend millions of dollars building roads, not a lot of places invest in getting civic infrastructure right.

“This is where the Community Matters Partnership comes in. CM believes that without a strong civic infrastructure, great ideas get lost, innovative breakthroughs get bungled, and positive momentum comes to a jerking halt. Communities can write fantastic plans supported by equitable visions, but without strong civic infrastructure, those plans could end up buried on a shelf or co-opted by special interests. Heart & Soul incorporates civic infrastructure development into planning, so that by the time a community plan is written, residents will know about it, they will feel their voice helped shape it, and will therefore be invested enough to help put it into action.”

## Farmers engage local leaders in

### ‘Community Conversation’

The news in recent years has been full of stories about Michigan’s high unemployment rate relative to the nation and the decline of Detroit due to the struggles of America’s automobile manufacturing and related industries. But across the state in Ottawa County, a growing population enjoys a healthy economy; it’s one of the fastest-growing counties in Michigan, and that’s due in large part to the county’s agriculture.

There are over \$390 million in annual cash receipts from farms,” said Dr. Adam Kantrovich, county Extension director at Michigan State University. The county has the second-highest level of cash receipts from agriculture in the state, a title it swaps every year or two with neighboring Allegan County.

From milk, fruits and vegetables, corn and soybeans, to hogs, beef cattle and greenhouse plants—you name it, they grow it in Ottawa County, says Jason Jaekel, a Michigan Farm Bureau field staffer serving the county.

“The way we like to describe it is if it’s grown east of the Mississippi River, it’s probably found in Ottawa County,” he said.

The county still has a good manufacturing base, and its location on the banks of Lake Michigan makes it a top tourist destination. But the area’s farmers would like residents and local government leaders to know how important agriculture is in their lives. In addition, they want to start a dialog with local leaders about how to build on the area’s strengths, especially agriculture, to further economic development.

That was the starting point for a Community Conversation event held by Ottawa County Farm Bureau and MSU-Extension April 18. Attendees included Farm Bureau members, township supervisors, school superintendents, planning and zoning administrators, city managers, county commissioners, Chamber of Commerce representatives and state legislators.

“The main focus was outreach,” explained Jaekel, “to say, ‘Here we are as farmers and here’s the impact we’re having on Ottawa County. We have resources. You have the ability to help us. How can we fit into your goals.’”

The attendees started with a brainstorming session on three types of challenges in growing the local agricultural and general economy: regulations, market access and developing the local workforce.

Then, working in smaller groups, the participants decided on four more-focused issues for further discussion: a branding and marketing campaign for local agricultural products; attracting livestock production facilities, particularly pork processing, to the area; boosting agricultural and vocational education; and smart growth planning to balance the interests of maintaining land for agricultural production with preserving development rights. The committees formed at the event will meet again this summer to continue their work.

Community Conversation is a pilot program that may be replicated across the state, according to Luke Meerman, a farmer and vice president of the Ottawa County Farm Bureau. He said the Michigan Farm Bureau board of directors looked at the idea and picked Ottawa County to be the testing site for it. The county board endorsed the idea wholeheartedly, he said.

“The idea of reaching across boundaries is very exciting,” said Meerman. “Too often those boundaries we’ve created are all self-made. Once we cross those boundaries, we find out there’s not that big a difference in what we’re all trying to accomplish. I think that for the community as a whole, this is how to move forward as a group. We’re so interconnected. We cannot view ourselves as islands unto ourselves.”

Meerman said the county’s farmers have “a lot of capital to work with” in reaching out to local leaders, and not just on what’s important to them, but on what’s good for the whole community, the state and the nation.

“The farmers are a group that they respect and admire, but had not had a chance to talk with

face-to-face,” Meerman said. “I think they were surprised by how much we were thinking about community issues already, such as childhood education—how do we reshape Michigan’s education vision, starting in Ottawa County. I think it was refreshing for them to learn from us personally that we do have things we can work on together.”

Kantrovich says that a local agriculture branding and marketing effort would succeed. Sales of turkey produced locally and processed at a facility established by the region’s turkey growers in a neighboring county are excellent, he says. Getting a large, commercial hog processing facility in the county could offer the same type of opportunity. Many of the region’s hog producers now have to send their animals to Indiana for processing, according to Jaekel.

Consumers’ support for Meijer, a growing regional chain of retail stores with Michigan roots, also shows the potential of a local branding effort.

“You can have a Wal-Mart and a Meijer store across the street from each other, and people will gravitate to the Meijer store because it’s right here in Michigan,” said Kantrovich. “People would be more likely to look for that [local] brand.”

He said that the attendees also are taking a regional approach to looking at opportunities for growth, “because what takes place on zoning, education, economic development, etc., here affects the county next door.”



## Young dreams, huge obstacles

While the farming community continues to age fewer young people are filling the ranks, prompting the question: Do young people even want to farm anymore?

The quick answer is yes, just not in the same numbers as they used to. And surveys indicate many of them don't want to farm in conventional ways.

A 2011 survey from the National Young Farmers Coalition (PDF) showed access to land and capital to be the single biggest factors keeping young people from getting into farming or ranching. The results also indicated young people are concerned about the environment and interested in small-scale operations.

But it can be difficult to turn dreams of a farm life into reality.

In Longmont, Colo., Eva Teague, 31, has learned how difficult it can be to start a financially sound pig farm. Teague is a grad school dropout turned farmer, originally from the East Coast. Jaded with academia, she moved to Colorado and began working as a farm apprentice. She bought her first pigs a couple years ago.

"(I) didn't have that much cash, so I paid for feed with the credit card just to get going," Teague said.

Right now, her biggest challenge, like many other young farmers is access to capital. She recently secured a low-interest loan from the federal Farm Service Agency, but it's not

enough to get her business off the ground completely. Teague still spends her days on the farm and every evening working full-time as a waitress. Next year she plans to take a big leap; she wants to quit her off-farm job and rely solely on her on-farm income to sustain herself.

Teague lucked out and scored a lease for her 15 acres at the base of the Rocky Mountains after searching for plots of land on Craigslist. She taught herself Quickbooks accounting software through Google searches. She relies heavily on the skills she picked up during a handful of apprenticeships throughout Colorado. In short, Teague is part of the millennial generation of farmers, a group that often eschews traditional forms of agriculture and favors small-scale operations.

"It's a very rare person who's not grown up on a farm that's going to go out and say, 'I want to plant 100,000 acres of corn. I want to invest \$300,000 in a tractor. I want to get a confinement hog barn with 300,000 pigs,'" Teague said.

Of course, the millennial generation isn't exclusively made up of farmers who've jumped on the local food movement. There are still young people out there who want to get involved with more conventional forms of agriculture, but many of them still find their options limited.

"There's no way I'll ever be able to own my own ranch," said Bo Bigler, 25, a graduate student at Colorado State University. He'll graduate at the end of the summer with a master's degree in beef management, which almost ensures a career working at large feedlots.

## Young dreams, huge obstacles, continued

“The price to buy into it, it’s too much -- the cost of land is unreal,” Bigler said. “The only way that somebody can get into it is if a ranch was handed down to them, unless they’re millionaires to begin with.”

The ability to purchase land is another major hurdle keeping many young people from entering the agriculture industry as producers. Leased land is available, but it leaves farmers at the whim of a landlord who could choose to cancel or refuse to renew a lease agreement.

Ranchland prices in the West have reached staggering highs. Ranch and farmland, not just in Colorado, but across the plains, is going for several thousand dollars per acre, keeping aspiring farmers from contemplating to buy.

“There’s no way they can pay the student loan, and pay a land payment and still have enough money left over to live on,” said Kraig Peel, a professor of animal sciences at Colorado State University.

Many of Peel’s students come into his classes with idealistic ideas about farming and ranching. These days about 80 percent of his students have grown up in an urban setting, with the rest leaving a rural life to attend school. They quickly learn to realign their expectations, he said.

“It’s very frustrating for a lot of these students, that would like to [run a farm or ranch], but economically it just doesn’t make sense, and it’s not feasible and the banks won’t loan them money in the first place,” Peel said.

The ranching industry has reached a tipping point, Peel said. The need to bring in young people is a concern for both large and small operations. Sixty-four percent of the nation’s cattle ranches are owned by someone older than 55. Given the economic situation, many of Peel’s students have chosen to forgo the financial difficulties of running a ranch and work for large agribusiness companies instead.

“The system is not working right now to allow them entrance into the job market,” Peel said.

Back at Eva Teague’s pig farm in Longmont, she’s working on a multi-year business plan to make sure she can add on a few acres of vegetables and some more pigs.

“I think a lot of young people want to work outside in sort of a ‘farm camp’ fun experience,” Teague said. “There are fewer people who would like to work really hard, like 50-60 hours a week for not a lot of money, which is what working on a farm is.”

Teague filled out a form for the latest agricultural census last year. When data is released in 2014, we’ll see whether enough young people have joined the ranks to keep the average age of farmers from climbing even higher.

From the series: Changing Lands, Changing Hands—Harvest Public Media



# Retirement? Not on the farm

Working beyond retirement is a fairly common refrain these days. In 2012, 5 percent of the U.S. workforce was beyond retirement age. But farmers seem to work longer than most. In the last Agriculture Census 25 percent of all farm operators were over 65 years old.

Why do farmers keep working? For one thing, modern machinery makes it easier to work longer.

"It's more you use your mind rather than your back, so you can go longer," said Mike Duffy, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University.

Duffy said there's also an economic incentive. Many farmers are making more money today than just about any time in their careers thanks to higher yields and high grain prices.

But there's something else about farmers. In surveys of farmers in Iowa, Duffy has learned regardless of the money or new technology, some farmers will just never quit.

"Farmers are farmers," Duffy said. "And that's who they identify themselves as. They'll leave horizontal."

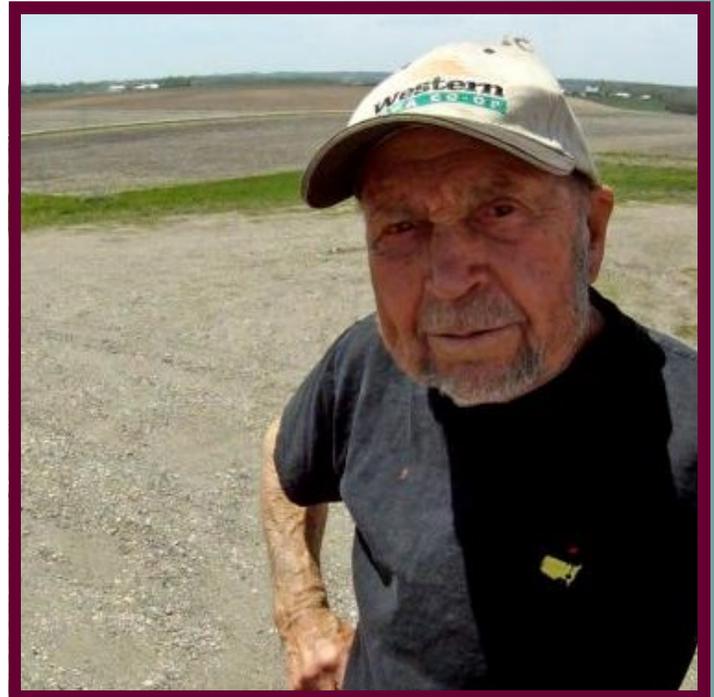
Bob Hawthorn is that kind of farmer. At 84 years old, Hawthorn's hands and face are weathered. Spring came late this year and on a bright April afternoon he was in a hurry to get corn and soybeans planted on his 2,000 acre farm in the Loess Hills of western Iowa.

Hawthorn braced himself against the wind in the back of his red pickup and unstrung the top of a bag of seed corn. After nearly 60 years on the farm, he said neighbors ask how long he plans to continue.

"They keep bugging me," Hawthorn said. "They say, 'When are you gonna quit?' I think I'll tell 'em I won't quit farming till all hell freezes over. Something like that."

The farm was started by his great-grandfather, Trapper Hawthorn, in the late 1870s.

Bob Hawthorn left for a brief career in aerospace before returning to Iowa in 1955 to farm with his father, Fred, who worked on the farm into his 90s and lived to be 98 years old. Longevity runs in the family.



But after four generations, the Hawthorn family farm will come to an end. He has had foster children, but he never had biological children and never married. No one is lined up to take over the farm, but then, Hawthorn has no plans to quit, either.

"I'd be bored not having anything to do," Hawthorn said. "I've also noticed that farmers, when they retire, buy a house in town and die of a heart attack about in the next year. It seems like farmers have to keep going or they just fade away."

Psychologist and retired farmer Mike Rosmann calls it the "agrarian imperative," the drive to keep farming even when your body might be ready to quit. In fact, Rosmann said, studies show over half of aging farmers don't have a will or an estate plan.

"I think it reflects perhaps a denial of the fact that somebody's got to take over and I need to have a plan for that," Rosmann said.

More farmers staying on the farm into their old age is one reason younger farmers struggle to find their place.

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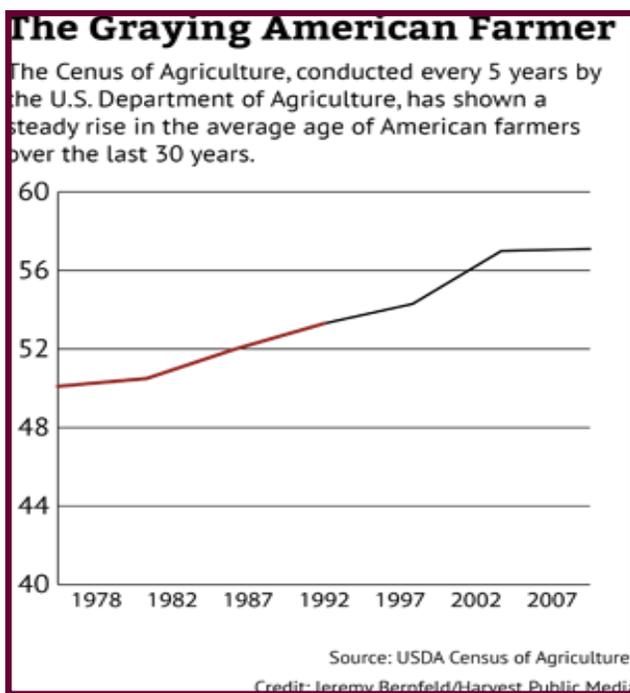
"We're not short of young people who want to farm," said Iowa State's Mike Duffy. "We're short of old people who want to move over."

Duffy said the plans older farmers make have larger implications because more often than not, they own the land they're working. That means farmers like

wait until I retire, I die, or become physically or mentally incompetent to run the farm so they get their greedy hands on my farmland."

Hawthorn does wonder what will happen to the four-generation family farm. Whose hands will it go to next? It's a big question, and not one he seems ready to answer. Not just yet.

From the series: Changing Lands, Changing Hands—Harvest Public Media

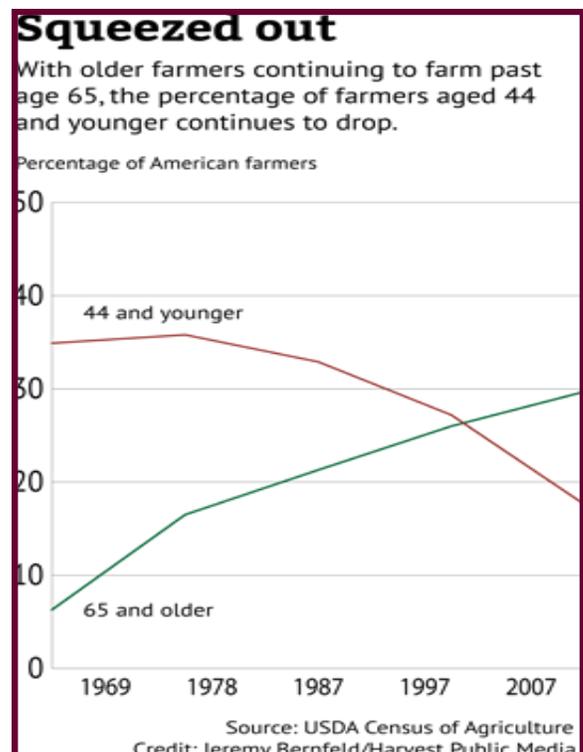


Bob Hawthorn hold a big piece to the future of farming.

Surveys of land ownership in Iowa show that in 1982, 12 percent of farmland was owned by people over 75 years old. By 2012, that figure rose to 30 percent.

Those landowners, such as Bob Hawthorn, know their neighbors are watching and wondering how long they will farm.

"When I look overhead, I see a lot of vultures circling and descending on me," Hawthorn said. "They can't



Has Elkhart's battered economy hit bottom or maybe even turned the corner? At least one economist and a city business leader think it has. But the mayor isn't so sure.

"There are some really good signs there, and chances are a bottom has been hit," Morton Marcus, a retired Indiana University economist and consultant with the Elkhart County Economic Development Council, told msnbc.com. "One is that we're seeing firms that have been in the RV and manufactured housing industries for a long time saying, 'Hey, maybe we ought to do something else, maybe we ought to diversify.' That is of critical importance when you have structural change in the economy."

Also cautiously optimistic – though in the nearer term -- is Phil Penn, president of the Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce.

"There just seems to be a little bit more of an upbeat mood" among local business owners, he said. "Certainly things are not swinging yet, but maybe we're seeing the start of a turnaround on this thing."

In an e-mail newsletter sent earlier this week, Penn noted that several local manufacturers have told him that "they are seeing some up-tick in activity."

He also cited the recent announcement by the Electric Motors Corp. and RV manufacturer Gulfstream of plans to build electric car components in nearby Wakarusa and the upcoming groundbreaking of a new local campus for the Ivy Tech community college as encouraging economic signs.

"Just hang in there," Penn said in closing. "There ARE better times ahead. And it may happen quicker than we think."

Elkhart Truth business reporter Marilyn Odendahl also spotted some "green shoots" in a report published last weekend, noting that several local manufacturers – including some surviving RV makers – have hired back some laid-off workers in recent weeks, likely contributing to a dip in the county's unemployment rate in April to 17.8 percent.

Meantime, the first obvious project funded by federal stimulus dollars in Elkhart County has recently gotten under way, putting 13 unemployed young people to work improving trails in a state park. You can read about that on Friday in a report by Msnbc.com's Kari Huus.

But Elkhart Mayor Dick Moore said Thursday that while he's optimistic that the economic downturn has

slowed, he's not ready to say that his city and surrounding communities have hit bottom.

"I understand what everybody is seeing, and I appreciate what they're saying and hope they're right, but I'm not totally convinced that we have," he said.

Moore said he too has heard that some manufacturers are ramping up their operations and has been encouraged by reports from local retailers that sales are up slightly.

"But we need to remember that with summer, the construction industry has gone back to work, and maybe people who are working are loosening up on their spending a little."

Moore is not alone in his concern that the flattening could prove temporary.

Teresa Voors, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, noted in a press release that the April jobless rate figures did not account for the recent layoffs in the auto industry and major steel operations, which she said would be reflected "in the next few months."

And Marcus, the economist, said he expects it will be at least three to six months before the county sees significant improvement in its unemployment rate, and that even then the area will not be a leader in emerging from recession as it has in the past.

"I don't believe it's going to be true this time," he said, predicting that RV manufacturing will not return to previous levels and that it will take time for other industries to establish themselves in the area.

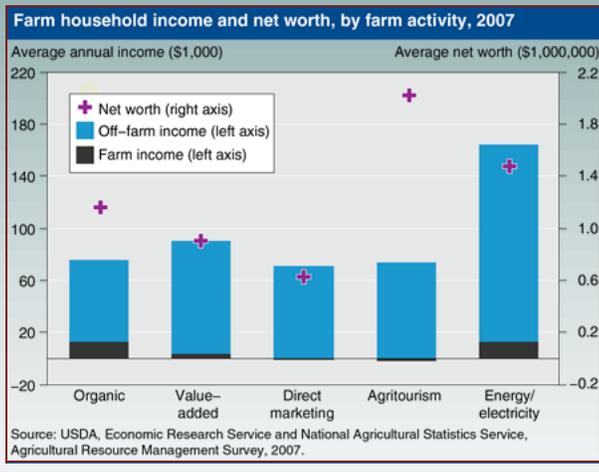
He also said that Elkhart County needs to address other long-term issues, such as improving its schools and building its retail base, if it is to prosper over the long term.

"We often look at manufacturing as the base of an economy, but the welfare of a community often will depend on the quality of its schools and its general attractiveness as a place to live," Marcus said. "That's something that Elkhart County is going to have to come to terms with."

Are you seeing hopeful economic signs in your community? Are you growing more confident that there is light at the end of the recessionary tunnel? Share your thoughts by leaving a comment below.

## Farm income and net worth by farms' retail ag activity

Today's ERS Charts of Note (sign up at [chartsofnote@ers.usda.gov](mailto:chartsofnote@ers.usda.gov)), ERS shared a chart and explanation of farm household income and net worth by farm activity.



“While rural development efforts generally focus on the nonfarm economy in the United States, over the last 10 years, several USDA Rural Development programs have put increased emphasis on funding farm-related business activities associated with renewable energy, local/regional food industries, and the use of farm and ranch natural resources. Using data from the 2007 Agricultural Resource Management Survey, the characteristics of farms involved in organic farming, value-added agriculture, direct marketing, agritourism, and energy/electricity production are compared in this chart. Household wealth and income are important indicators of financial capacity, or the ability to make financial investments in farm activities. Average farm household net worth was highest for agritourism farms (\$2.0 million) and lowest for direct marketing farms (\$631,000). Total household income exhibited a different pattern and was highest for energy/electricity farms (\$165,000 annually) and value-added farms (\$90,000 annually), on average. The income generated by these rural development-related activities is considered part of farm income (which was highest, on average, for energy/electricity and organic farms, and negative for agritourism farms). This chart comes from the ERS report, *Farm Activities Associated With Rural Development Initiatives*, ERR-134, May 2012.”

*Our focus with this newsletter is to provide an inter-communication platform in Hale County to offer educational training opportunities and education information on rural development issues and projects affecting our community.*

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