Highlights from recent releases on rural population trends

• Rural counties include 46.2 million people (15 percent of the U.S. population) spread across 72 percent of U.S. land area.

• Between 2010 and 2012, rural counties as a whole declined in population for the first time.

• Suburban and exurban growth slowed dramatically, affecting overall population trends in both urban and rural areas.

• Population growth in rural areas with recreation-based economies slowed in response to the housing-market crisis and the recession.
Rural counties cover 72 percent of U.S. land area and include 15 percent of U.S. residents.

Urban America was much smaller in 1970, with fewer metropolitan areas and smaller suburbs.

Rural counties are diverse, with major regional differences in economic specialization.
For the first time, rural counties as a whole are declining in population.

Population growth from natural change (births minus deaths) has steadily declined in rural counties.

A dramatic slowdown in suburban and exurban development has contributed to rural population loss.

Rapid population growth in rural recreation counties has been interrupted

Most rural counties lost population during 2010-2012

Rural change, 2010-12
- Population decline
- Population growth lower than 2 percent
- Population growth, 2 percent or higher
- Urban counties
