Immigration in Rural America

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The Pennsylvania State University
Small Town Communities
Rabun County, Georgia
Rabun County, Georgia
In the words of a local employer...

I use a ton of Hispanics, I love ’em. I love ’em....

The Hispanics work...they work their tails off, they don’t care if its Saturday, Sunday, Monday, they don’t care if they work seven days a week, twelve hours a day, they don’t complain [as long as] I treat them well....

--Homebuilder
### Share of workers who are undocumented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Undocumented Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming, fishing, or forestry</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance, grounds keeping</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drywall installers</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction painters</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maids &amp; housekeeping</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Worthington, Minnesota

“Once a dying town”
Fear and distrust

• Perception that the town has a significant criminal element
  – Rumor of “thugs” hiding under cars.
  – “I don’t want to go downtown at night”
• Facts do not back up the perception
“Immigrant Optimism”
(Grace Kao and Marta Tienda)

% Attended College Among Those Whose Parents Did Not Finish High School

- Children of Mexican Immigrants: 48%
- Children of U.S.-born Mexican Americans: 41%
- White Children: 30%

Source: General Social Survey
Conclusions

New Immigrant Destinations
• New jobs in agriculture/meat packing, manufacturing, construction, and high-end services
• Social networks connect immigrants to jobs
• Now they are growing because of births than migration

Reception of new immigrants
• Mixture of appreciation and fear

Long-term Consequences
• Revitalization of local economy
• Social and economic integration takes time and more likely in 2nd generation