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Human Resources in the South: Rural Sociology in the 1990s

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ABSTRACT  This article focuses on the problem of human resources in the South during the 1980s. The author contends that the problem is especially critical in the rural South, where the impacts of widespread rural economic stress in the eighties contributed to further underdevelopment of already limited human resources. Educationally, the South not only lags other regions, but the rural South lags the urban South. Furthermore, a wide gap exists in the educational attainment of southern rural blacks and whites. It is argued that the development of an adequate human resources base in the rural South begins with building initiative and capacity at the local level to enable each community to assess its own human resource problems and initiate ways to address them. The challenge for rural leaders is to devise a mix of strategies that balance economic and human goals. Strategies for human resource development in the 1990s involving local, state and federal governments and the role of rural sociologists are discussed.

Introduction

Social scientists from many disciplines are recognizing that profound changes in the economy and workplace, both nationally and globally, make human resource development an essential element for the economic well-being of rural people and rural communities (Brown and Deavers, 1988; Deaton and Deaton, 1988; Reid, 1988; Rosenfeld, 1988a; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988; Schertz, 1988; Tweeten, 1988). Underscoring the human costs of the

1Presidential address presented at the 1989 annual meeting of the Southern Rural Sociological Association, Nashville, Tennessee. The views expressed herein are those of the author, not the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The author acknowledges Economic Research Service reviewers David McGranahan, Leslie Whitener and Linda Swanson and three outside reviewers for their helpful comments. Elizabeth Morrissey and Karen Mizer provided invaluable assistance in preparing the graphics, and many colleagues in the Economic Research Service generously shared their work.

2Throughout this article, the term rural, which is used interchangeably with nonmetropolitan, refers to counties that do not meet the census definition of metropolitan. Generally speaking, a metropolitan area is a county or group of counties containing a population center of 50,000 or more.
economic stress and decline affecting rural America during the 1980s, Deavers observes:

Most of the burden of the economic adjustments occurring in rural America falls on the human resources—displaced industrial workers, displaced farmers and other proprietors, and members of their households. Problems of job loss are exacerbated by difficulties individual workers may face in shifting from production jobs to white collar jobs in the service sector. Skills gained in farming, mining, and blue-collar manufacturing employment frequently are of little direct use in the service sector. Most who succeed in making the occupational transition may have to accept changes in job tasks (1988a:391).

Human resource development benefits both rural people and rural communities. From an individual standpoint, rural children need access to quality education to develop the basic educational skills needed to function productively in today's complex workplace, whether it be in a rural or urban setting. Similarly, rural workers require ongoing access to training and adult education to develop new job skills or upgrade old ones.

From a community standpoint, rural communities depend not only on the availability of a well-trained workforce to be competitive in today's complex and rapidly changing national and world economies but also on having an adequate educational system to help create a community environment that is attractive to business and conducive to growth (Rosenfeld, 1985; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988).

Documenting the condition of rural human resources has been a longstanding concern of rural sociologists in the South. Between 1910 and 1920, over 50 rural sociological studies, in response to serious conditions of poverty, examined the socioeconomic conditions of rural people in the region. During the 1930s, as rural sociology gained recognition as a discipline, several southern rural sociologists made notable contributions to organized national research on relief of rural farm families and communities hard hit by the Great Depression. In ensuing years as rural sociology developed as a discipline and expanded its focus, research related to various aspects of human resources (including youth, family, poverty and education) continued to appear among the wide range of demographic, socioeconomic and social

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3A division of research and statistics in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) spearheaded a national survey of rural relief needs and a census of unemployment. Growing out of the research effort, several reports that received widespread attention came from southern rural sociologists (Bertrand, 1987).
change studies coming out of the South (Bertrand, 1987). During this same period, extension activities at southern land-grant universities, which had previously concentrated on developing the knowledge and skills of farmers, began to emphasize programs to improve the quality of life available to rural residents and the communities where they lived (Beaulieu, 1987).

Today, many social scientists and southern leaders perceive that the need for human resource development is especially critical in the rural South, where impacts of widespread rural economic stress in the 1980s contributed to further underdevelopment of already limited human resources (Commission on the Future of the South, 1986; Mulkey and Henry, 1988; Lyson, 1988, 1989; Rosenfeld, 1988b; Schertz, 1988; Wilkinson, 1988; Winter, 1988). Several (e.g. Rosenfeld, 1988b) refer to the dilemma of "two Souths," one represented by the popular image of the modern Sunbelt with its prospering, growing cities, and the "other South, largely rural, undereducated, underproductive and underpaid that threatens to become a permanent shadow of distress" (Commission of the Future of the South, 1986:2). In fact, the perceived urgency of the human resources problem in the South prompted the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South to target human resource development as a topic for special inquiry (Commission on the Future of the South, 1986).

In this article, I examine more fully the nature of the human resources problem in the rural South and indicate some possible directions for policy strategies in the next decade. Specifically, I will contend that:

1. The condition of the rural human resource base in the South results from the combination and interplay of human, economic, social, and demographic forces operating within and outside of the region.
2. Relative to other regions, the rural human resource base in the South is deficient on a number of accounts, although these deficiencies are unevenly distributed across demographic groups and geographic areas within in the region.
3. Policy strategies to improve the condition of human resources in the rural South must include a combination of innovative economic, educational and community development programs involving federal, state and local governments.
4. Rural sociologists at the southern land-grant universities can make significant contributions to human resource development in the South through improved coordination, communication, and cooperation of research and extension activities, and especially through greater active involvement in shaping a course for human resource development in the future.
I will explore each of these statements in turn.

**The rural South in the eighties: a blend of the old and the new**

Thinking about the sweeping changes which the rural South has undergone in the past 50 years, I am struck by how much the South has changed in some ways, and in others it has hardly changed at all. Capturing this image, William Winter describes the rural South as:

a region of incredible paradoxes . . . a place where great pride is taken in family and personal relationships . . . a place where live the greatest number of underdeveloped and undereducated human beings in the nation . . . a region that combines an abundance of all the basic natural resources . . . that should make it the country's richest area . . . it is the poorest . . . the section that has most fiercely resisted change . . . but the region that . . . has been most drastically affected by change (1988:358).

Undeniably, the rural South has changed from a place where agriculture dominated its economic and social character to a place of much greater diversity. Yet in many ways the nature of rural life has changed little over the years, and despite the removal of many former barriers, deep social cleavages still exist (Mu' Min, 1988; Wilkinson, 1988). Thus the economic and social setting of the rural South in the 1980s reflects a mixture of the old with the new—changes brought about by national and world economic and social forces blending with the South's distinctive economic history and unique social and cultural patterns. It is this setting that provides a backdrop for understanding the condition of human resources today.

**The South in the seventies**

Events over two decades have played a critical role in shaping the rural South of the 1980s. During the 1970s, a period often referred to as the rural renaissance (Deavers, 1988a; Reid, 1988), economic and population growth brought renewed economic vitality to many rural areas including the rural South, despite its concentration of rural poor people and economically depressed communities. Contrary to the national pattern, the population in the South grew faster in metro areas than in nonmetro areas over the decade, although growth rates for both exceeded the national average (Reid, et al., 1988).

During the 1970s, southern employment soared, and income rose in both metro and nonmetro areas. In the rural South alone, employment grew by over 2 million new jobs. Real per capita incomes grew, on average, about 30
percent in both metro and nonmetro counties, although nonmetro per capita incomes consistently lagged metro per capita incomes (Morrissey, 1989).

Not only was the 1970s a period of unusual economic growth, but it was a time of significant industrial and occupational restructuring in the South. The importance of agriculture to the rural economy continued to decline and employment in farming steadily decreased. The share of the farm population living in the South dropped from over half in 1950 to about one-third by the early 1980s (Kalbacher and Deare, 1989). By 1988, three-fifths of southern farm residents worked in nonfarm jobs, the highest proportion of any region in the country. Manufacturing employment remained relatively stable during the 1970s, although new kinds of manufacturing came to the South. Jobs in the low-wage, labor-intensive textile and apparel industries, which had opened up nonfarm employment opportunities after World War II, declined. These were typically replaced by other types of manufacturing jobs which also required few skills and offered low wages and prestige (Lyson, 1988). In contrast, in the cities and metro areas undergoing rapid industrialization, new manufacturing jobs often came in the form of high-wage, high-technology jobs. Also, jobs in the service sector in both the metro and nonmetro South proliferated.

Improved economic and socioeconomic conditions during the 1970s did not benefit all groups or areas equally. Poverty levels remained high in the South, particularly the rural South, where the 1979 poverty rate (19.9 percent) was 3 percentage points higher than that in the central cities of the South, and over 8 percentage points higher than the national rate. Over 40 percent of all southern rural blacks were poor. Furthermore, over 90 percent of persistently low-income nonmetro counties were located in parts of Appalachia, the Ozark-Ouachita Plateau, and the Mississippi Delta (Bellamy and Ghelfi, 1988; Ross, 1985). Eight of the ten states with the highest proportions of working poor were in the Southeast (Johnson and Scurlock, 1986).

The South in the eighties

In the early 1980s, economic conditions at home and abroad sharply reversed the national rural growth trends of the 1970s, although the new trends had different effects in the South than the nation as a whole. Between

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4These nonmetro counties fell in the bottom quintile of county per capita income over several decades beginning with 1950 through 1979.

5These states had at least 8 percent of working household heads who were classified as officially poor in 1979.
1980-86, population growth slowed in both metro and nometro areas of the South, but not as slow as the comparable U.S. rates.

High interest rates, decreased foreign demand for agricultural products, increased foreign competition from Third World countries, plummeting land values, and tighter monetary controls at home contributed to serious financial stress in the agricultural sector (Beaulieu, 1987; Brown and Deavers, 1988). One out of ten farmers in the nation was in serious financial difficulty (Brown and Deavers, 1988), and southern farmers experienced greater financial stress than farmers in other parts of the country, even the Midwest (Beaulieu, 1987). During the farm crisis, many farms and farm financial institutions went out of business, and many are still experiencing financial difficulty.

The serious recession of the early 1980s, coupled with forces in the international workplace, seriously affected the rural manufacturing sector, where jobs were lost due to plant closings, cutbacks, and competition from low wage foreign sites. Lyson (1988:266) observes: "Many of the manufacturing industries that have moved South to escape the high wage, unionized areas of the North were now by-passing the sunbelt and shifting their production directly to Third World Countries".

Problems of structural unemployment, which hit many areas of the rural South—especially those dependent on manufacturing and energy-related industries—left behind sizeable numbers of displaced workers. During 1983-1986, 45 percent (over 598,000) of 1.3 million nometro displaced workers and 47 percent (237,000) of .5 million nometro displaced manufacturing workers lived in the South (Swaim, 1989).

Gains made against rural poverty in the 1970s were lost in the 1980s, and southern rural poverty became even more pronounced. In 1986—well into the economic recovery period—the poverty rate in the nometro South stood at 22.4 percent—higher than either the southern central city rate (18.3 percent) or the metro South rate (13.5 percent). Poverty among blacks in the South remained three times higher than among whites. Three of every four southern elderly black women who lived alone were poor.

Like the nation, real earnings in the South stagnated during the 1980s, and nonmetro earnings remained lower than metro earnings. Between 1979-1986, metro earnings per job showed no growth, and nonmetro earnings per job declined slightly (after adjustments for inflation). Southern nonmetro

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6Beaulieu (1987) states that five indicators of farm stress showed the South to be worse off than other regions. He asserts that 6.5 percent of southern farmers filed for bankruptcy in 1986, the highest figure of any region.

7A displaced worker is any wage and salary worker who becomes unemployed because of plant or firm closings or layoffs due to permanent cutbacks.
earnings per job in 1986 were about $4000 less than metro earnings (Majchrowicz and Ghelfi, 1988). White earnings outpaced black earnings, even at comparable educational levels (Mu'Min, 1988).

Employment growth was greater in the South's metro areas. Compared to the nation, employment in the metro South grew at a slightly faster rate from 1982-1986 and from 1987-1988. Next to the metro West, the metro South had the highest regional rate of growth during 1982-1986. The South's nonmetro employment grew about half as fast as the metro South during the same period (Majchrowicz and Ghelfi, 1988). Interestingly, employment growth in southern counties adjacent to metro areas was three times greater than the growth in non-adjacent counties (Reid et al., 1988).

The reliance on manufacturing in the South and the extent of the poverty problem are further demonstrated by examining the dominant economic base and population characteristics among nonmetro southern counties8 (see Bender et al., 1985; Ross and Green, 1985; Hady and Ross, 1990). The distribution of counties across six county types indicates that the patterns of diversity in the nonmetro South differ from those in the nonmetro U.S. (Figure 1). Compared to the nation's nonmetro counties, a smaller share of the South's nonmetro counties depended on farming as a primary economic base, and larger shares relied on manufacturing and retirement-related activities. Also, chronic poverty conditions prevailed in many—over 20 percent—of southern nonmetro counties.9

These county types depict important patterns of variation in economic activity and demographics that have contributed to shaping the conditions of human resources in the rural South (Hady and Ross, 1990). During and preceding the 1970s, an abundant labor supply of relatively unskilled workers attracted low-wage, labor-intensive industries that brought employment growth to the rural South. However, this employment growth did not necessarily lead to improved incomes, higher standards of living, or enhanced job opportunities for the residents of many areas of the South. And too often, the better educated young people of these communities fled to the cities and towns

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8 Figure 1 is based on data drawn from a recent update of the Economic Research Service county classification scheme. Brief definitions of the county types are as follows: farming—at least 20 percent of labor and proprietary income from farming, weighted annual average, 1981,1982,1984-1986; manufacturing—at least 30 percent of labor and proprietary income from manufacturing, 1986; mining—at least 20 percent of labor and proprietary income from mining, 1986; government—at least 25 percent of labor and proprietary income from government, 1986; retirement—at least 15 percent net immigration rate of people aged 60 and over, 1970-1980; poverty—county per capita personal income in the bottom quintile in each of the years 1950, 1950, 1969, 1979.

9 As noted above, these represented over 90 percent of all persistent poverty counties.
seeking higher-paying jobs and employment-enhancing opportunities.

The condition of rural human resources

A closer assessment of the condition of the rural human resource base in the South requires several different kinds of information. First, it requires information about the existing inventory of human resources—the kind and quality of skills, knowledge, and behaviors available in the human resource pool. Also needed is information about the kind and quality of human resources needed in the future, and how well what is presently available can fulfill those future needs.

Whereas skills and knowledge are acquired slowly and require sizeable investments of time and money, needs for different kinds of human resources can arise dramatically and change abruptly. New technologies, new business openings or closings, and business expansions may demand radically different skills and knowledge, and the value of a rural community's human resources can drop sharply if the work force is not adaptable to the changing needs (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988:336).
The skills and knowledge acquired in school and training programs influence job growth and productivity, but education has other equally important noneconomic goals that contribute to the overall development and well-being of individuals and the communities where they live.

Second, it requires information about the capacity of rural communities to provide education and training needed for human resource development. The capacity includes having the institutional systems (public schools, vocational schools, institutions of higher learning) not only to provide quality education to rural youth, but also to meet the education and job training needs of rural adults. It also involves having a built-in capacity for self-help and self-direction through community action, whereby, through local initiative, rural communities take responsibility for their own economic development and social well-being of their residents (Reid, 1988; Wilkinson, 1988).

**Levels of education**

The South has historically lagged other regions in the level of formal education. Factors including lower investment of public funds in education, segregated schools until the 1960s, a pronounced concentration of poor, and an industrial base that did not need or value education contributed to an undereducated human resource base (Rosenfeld, 1988a). Since the 1970s, the gap for the South as a whole relative to the U.S. has narrowed, although evidence shows that on a number of indicators the rural South continues to lag the urban South as well as other regions. Furthermore, educational deficiencies are unevenly distributed across geographic and racial groups within the region.

In 1980, more than 50 percent of all rural adults and 37 percent of urban adults living in the South lacked a high school education (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988). By 1988, rising levels of educational attainment had reduced the figures to about 40 percent of rural adults and 25 percent of urban adults who have not completed high school. Yet, a wide gap still exists between the educational attainments of southern blacks and whites in both metro and nonmetro areas (Figure 2). However, the educational gap between southern metro blacks and whites is similar to the U.S. gap10 (Bureau of the Census, 1988). Not only do black and white rural adults lag their urban counterparts, but rural blacks lag rural whites significantly.

A critical aspect of educational development is the ability to retain youth in school, at least through high school. One indicator of this is the high school dropout rate for youth ages 16 to 21. Although the geographic

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10In 1987, 23 percent of U.S. white adults and 37 percent of black adults had not completed four years of high school (Bureau of the Census, 1988).
variation is substantial, in all but 1 of 14 southern states, the nonmetro dropout rate exceeded the metro rate (Figure 3).

Another aspect of educational development is a community's ability to retain the skills, ideas and earning power of its better educated youth—in short, to halt brain drain. The issue of brain drain has important implications for future support of education as well because local taxpayers are asked to underwrite the costs of public education without realizing an adequate return on their investment. Between 1985 and 1986, the South had net outmigration to metro areas at all educational levels except less than high school (Swanson and Butler, 1988). As the accompanying chart indicates, the pattern of net outmigration of the more highly educated continued through 1987 (Figure 4). Between 1986 and 1987, there was a net outmigration of adults from the nonmetro South to the metro South or to other regions,\textsuperscript{11} and the greatest

\textsuperscript{11} The net migration rates are based on migration flows to southern metro areas and all areas (metro and nonmetro) outside the South. They do not reflect movement within areas of the nonmetro South.
outmigration occurred among those who had some college.\textsuperscript{12}

The benefits of education vary by residence and race. Although the rural South is educationally deficient relative to the urban South, rural adult workers at all educational levels earned less, on average, than urban workers in 1987 (Figure 5). The earnings gap between rural and urban workers increased with education. For example, nonmetro adult workers with a high school education earned about 86 percent of what their metro counterparts earned, but nonmetro workers with college degrees earned only 82 percent of average earnings for metro workers with college degrees.

Similar patterns exist when the effects of education on earnings are examined for whites and blacks in the rural South (Figure 6). At all educational levels, the average earnings of nonmetro southern blacks was less than 75 percent of average earnings of nonmetro southern whites. College educated blacks earned, on average, 72 percent of average earnings for college educated whites. Black-white gaps were greater among nonmetro than metro workers at different educational levels (Figure 7).

\textsuperscript{12}CPS data indicate that the pattern of outmigration may have reversed between 1987 and 1988 with immigration occurring at all educational levels. Whether this pattern will continue or whether it indicates a sampling aberration awaits the test of time.
One of the most serious educational problems facing the Rural South is functional illiteracy (Mendel, 1988; Rosenfeld, 1988a; Winter, 1988). Completion of less than eight years of school has been the traditional definition of illiteracy. In 1980, 1 out of every 4 southern rural adults and 3 out of every 5 black adults were functionally illiterate. However, experts have begun to argue that no single standard definition of illiteracy is adequate, but rather "literacy must be seen as a continuum of basic and applied skills measured against the increasingly complex demands of society and the workplace" (Mendel, 1988:9). In short, literacy must be measured against the changing skills and abilities needed to function in today's world and the modern workplace.

The South of tomorrow will need an increasingly better educated population. According to one estimate, by the year 2000, the median job in the U.S. will require 13.5 years of education (Mendel, 1988).

**Quality of rural schools**

The quality of rural education is another factor in determining the capacity of the human resource base since rural educational institutions bear formal responsibility for human resource development. Rural education, as it exists today, has both strengths and weaknesses.
Rural schools, on average, tend to have fewer resources, less adequate facilities, and less experienced teachers, a factor which is influenced by teacher turnover. Rural school districts, on average, spend less money per pupil for their educational programs than urban school districts (Rosenfeld, 1988a). In 1985-86, U. S. school districts spent an average of $3700 per student. Eight of 10 states spending less than $3000 per student were in the South\footnote{These were: Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee.} (Bureau of the Census, 1988). Because about half of school revenues come from local funds—typically property taxes—communities with declining population and lower land values often face problems of inadequate revenues for their schools (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988).

One measure of the relevance of education in rural schools to emerging labor market needs is math and science education. In 1982, a smaller share of southern rural high school seniors than urban high school seniors had taken four or more math or science courses (Rosenfeld, 1988a; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988).
The picture is not totally bleak, however, since some aspects of rural schools can be tapped in positive, instrumental ways. In a recent article, Rosenfeld (1988a) refers to the strengths of rural schools as "three rays of sunshine". First, the smaller size and organization of rural schools, he argues, provide flexibility and an environment that encourage student participation and opportunities for leadership development. Second, vocational agriculture with its historical orientation toward leadership development, entrepreneurship, science and technology, and a general problem-solving approach provides a model for vocational education in general to follow in preparing rural students for the modern day work world. A third strength is the presence of the two-year technical college in many rural communities which can serve not only as a center for training and human resource development but as a catalyst for economic development. The challenge to southern educational leaders is to find ways to draw on the strengths of the rural educational system and to remedy its weaknesses.

**Strategies for human resource development: Looking to the 1900s**

There are some who argue that past human resource programs, including education, vocational-technical training, and public assistance, have made a
difference in the well-being of rural people. If for no other reason, they help prepare people for jobs, wherever jobs may be located (Tweeten, 1988:5). However, rural development policy has largely overlooked human resource development in the kinds of programs that have been emphasized. In their overview to rural policy formulation in the United States, Long, Reid, and Deavers (1987) write:

Except for maintaining high levels of farm income, underwriting major highway improvements and maintenance, and some limited concerns for environmental protection, the Federal Government's current rural development priorities are to encourage untargeted, market-directed economic growth (1987:30).

Developing effective strategies to shape an adequate human resources base for the rural South in the 1900s is not easy. The ultimate key begins with building initiative and capacity at the local level that would enable each community to address its own problems, including human resource shortfalls. This approach to community development has been advocated by a small but growing group of community sociologists for years (Wilkinson, 1988). It has newly come to be translated as "self-development strategies," whereby
community leaders themselves through their own actions and their own resources identify problems, set goals, and develop strategies to reach them (Reid, 1988).

The challenge for rural leaders is to devise a mix of strategies that balance economic and human goals. Reid observes:

The future ability of the rural economy to be competitive in an ever more competitive national and world economy will depend on the ability of rural people to work smarter, not just harder. But the rural economy of the past did not demand well-trained workers, and the skill levels of rural workers put them at a disadvantage in terms of future growth potential (1988:6).

It makes little sense to create jobs in areas where the required skills are unavailable in the local workforce. It also makes little sense to base economic development solely on the proliferation of low-wage, unskilled jobs that offer little opportunity to improve either the quality of human resources or the overall quality of life in an area. It is true that economic and population growth has occurred in such instances, but local residents, particularly those who are poor and most in need of work, seldom benefit. Conversely, it makes little sense to train people for jobs that do not exist in the local and regional economy, unless the goal is to enhance employability elsewhere and encourage commuting or residential mobility (Brown and Deavers, 1988). This is not to imply that human resources development is only a local concern. To the contrary, it is an essential element in a package of new, multi-faceted, coordinated and innovative efforts involving local, state and federal governments.

As varied as they might be, effective strategies for the development of human resources in the rural South must address five needs:

First, rural educational systems must have the capacity to develop basic academic skills needed to function in today's world. Steps to remedy its educational deficiencies are the single most important needs that the rural South faces. The ability to just read, write and cipher at the 8th grade level is no longer sufficient to function in a global, automated society dominated by sophisticated high technology including word processors, computer-integrated manufacturing, linked automated networks, and satellite communications. The use of robots has become commonplace in manufacturing industries, and automation of the bulk of factory jobs has become a reality (Rosenfeld, 1983). Today, even low-level jobs frequently require the operation of sophisticated equipment. In addition, strong noneconomic reasons exist for strengthening basic skills, including the relationship of low levels of basic skills to serious social problems such as crime, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and youth joblessness (Berlin and Sum, 1988).
A second need is the development of more options for training programs for adults, particularly displaced workers. The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is the main programmatic vehicle for federally sponsored public employment training programs. The lack of national data to evaluate the relative effectiveness of JTPA in different regions, states, and rural versus urban settings limits knowledge about how well it has worked in different locations. JTPA does have provisions which could benefit rural areas, including special set-aside funds for special programs for displaced farmers.¹⁴ Not all rural workers desiring training are displaced workers, and opportunities for education and training to upgrade skills and become occupationally mobile should be available. As noted earlier, the two-year community colleges and technical schools can play important roles in nondegree training activities. I believe that rural educational institutions in the South can take the lead in serving as an model for implementing new concepts like job upgrading and lifelong learning.

Third, the need exists for a stronger federal role in funding public education. Funding for elementary and secondary education has historically been the province of local government, and in 1985 only about 6 percent of funding for elementary and secondary schools came from the federal government.¹⁵ Because of outmigration of its better educated youth, most rural communities are unable to realize the benefits of higher spending in basic education and training programs (Deavers, 1988b; Tweeten, 1988). Tweeten (1988) reports that many rural school districts lose more than 90 percent of their students to other areas. And laying the issue of externalities aside, too many rural small school districts lack the tax base necessary to support quality education programs. A position calling for greater federal involvement in public education funding may seem incompatible with the strong argument for local initiative and self-development. Yet the potential benefits of larger federal investment in education are, in my mind, considerable.

Fourth, development of rural human resources requires continuing attention to one of the most pressing problems in rural areas, chronic poverty and social deprivation for many rural residents. Federal legislation in the form of the Family Security Act of 1988 restructures AFDC to emphasize

¹⁴In 1987, about 20 States had established programs for displaced farmers, under Title III of the JTPA legislation. Some evidence exists that displaced workers programs tend to emphasize urban displaced industrial workers (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988).

¹⁵Current legislation for compensatory education is Chapter 1 of the 1981 Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) that combined Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 with a number of smaller educational programs. In 1987, the $3.7 billion dollar program served about 5 million disadvantaged students.
education, work and training, and enforcement of child support from absent parents. The long-term effects of welfare reform on reducing poverty, particularly in rural areas of the South, await the test of time. Changes in AFDC certainly cannot be viewed as a panacea for rural poverty given that less than 20 percent of rural poor families received AFDC in 1986 and that a sizeable share of rural poor are intact families with working heads (Deavers, Hoppe, and Ross, 1988). Education certainly has an important role to play in combatting poverty, but it must reach children in their early formative years to counteract the effects of living in socially and economically deprived environments. Designing policies and programs to ameliorate poverty is a difficult undertaking and involves coordinated roles at all levels of government.

Fifth, development of the rural human resource base in the South cannot fully occur without addressing problems of inequality. Progress has taken place in reducing inequalities, particularly among blacks and whites, over the past 20 years. Community leaders coming together to work for the common good and building a base for self-directed community action can promote working relationships and equality of opportunities across racial, cultural and class lines.

Promising signs are on the horizon as southern states are not only recognizing the essential role that education plays in economic development, but they are doing something about it through legislation and statewide action (Heady, 1984). Efforts for educational improvement in some southern states have already resulted in greater investment of state funds in educational programs, teacher salaries, and state plans for educational reform (Heady, 1984). There are also signs of increased activity at institutions of higher learning, including the establishment of centers for lifelong learning at some institutions.

Human resource development: The role of rural sociologists in the 1990s

Rural sociologists, along with other social scientists and the southern land-grant institutions, have a role to play in the development of human resources in the rural South. I am convinced that rural sociologists in the South will strive to address issues of human resource development in their research and extension programs. In fact, part of the legacy of the discipline in the South has been the importance of being keenly alert and responsive to current issues and being at the forefront in analyzing the impacts of economic and social change on rural people. However, future research is needed that will better focus on the underlying causes of underdeveloped human resources rather than just on documenting the symptoms. The time has come for rural sociologists to do more than show research interest in issues like human resources that are so vital to social well-being. Rural sociologists must engage
in activities that help point the way for identifying and legitimizing fundamental social values critical to human welfare. In his 1987 presidential address to the Rural Sociological Society, Christensen issued this challenge:

We must articulate, document, and advocate the social values supporting basic education, the national goals for attaining a literate populace for the information age, and the economic, social, and long-term consequences of not achieving these goals or at least the minimal standards. As rural sociologists we cannot just note the needs and sit back (1988:18).

The opportunities for greater involvement of rural sociologists in activities that help shape a course for rural society have increased in recent years. The establishment of policy and action-oriented organizations, like the regional rural development centers, chances for participation in state and regional taskforces and commissions, national symposia on timely policy-relevant issues, and jointly sponsored efforts of social science professional associations to promote better rural research and adequate data bases for rural research illustrate only some of the opportunities open to rural sociologists. These kinds of activities have also opened up new opportunities for interdisciplinary interaction, cooperation and collaboration through projects like the Social Science Agricultural Agenda Project and the National Rural Studies Committee.

Southern rural sociologists cannot alter their roles in creative and innovative ways without a supportive and legitimizing environment. Such an environment will require some institutional restructuring within the land grant system, where most southern rural sociologists are located. Restructuring is needed that will not only encourage (and reward) the initiation of high quality research on contemporary human resources issues but that will allow rural sociologists to shed the traditional extension and service roles for ones that may lead to important and needed human resource policy changes.

On an ending note, I want to recognize that the role of rural sociology in human resource development in the South has already been enhanced through increased communication, cooperation, and collaboration of social scientists at the 1862 and 1890 universities over the last two decades. The Southern Rural Sociological Association has definitely gained through this increased interaction. Now is the time to reach out even further to social scientists at non land-grant universities who are engaged in research on rural populations.
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