

# Housing key to rural community vitality

## Informing policymakers through research

**The issue.** Officials say that an insufficient amount of development is taking place in their rural counties and ask the question, “What promotes rural community vitality?”

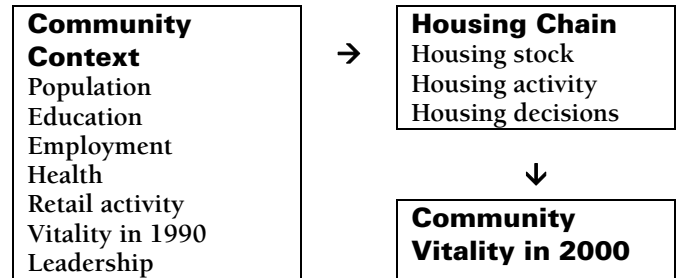
Although anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that the need for housing in rural areas stymies economic development efforts, the role of housing in promoting successful rural development and community vitality has been largely ignored. Rural development practitioners can benefit from knowing more about how housing decisions strengthen communities.

Housing is a cornerstone of rural community wealth. It represents a multi-billion dollar asset in individually-owned and rented housing units; the largest form of private investment in a community. Housing is a key element in quality of life for families and as such is essential for building prosperity and fueling the engine of economic growth.

**According to our research.** Increases in housing inventory and local housing options improve community vitality. Increases in the housing inventory are accomplished by leaders who use community resources wisely and bring people together to make things happen. We found evidence that a chain of housing decisions and activities begins with local leaders who are able to identify and use local and federal housing financial aids to increase the housing inventory. Research-based evidence of a housing decision chain and its link to vitality has not been reported elsewhere.

In order to thrive, communities need to attract and retain residents and provide housing choices appropriate for those individuals and families. Rural community leadership has both direct and indirect effects on housing processes that lead to community vitality. Our research

provides convincing research-based information for local decision-makers and illustrates that *housing matters* in small rural communities.



**We recommend.** Communities that are able to mobilize resources to meet existing and future housing needs can expect to stimulate and strengthen community vitality. Housing should be identified as a necessary ingredient in rural economic development strategies.

By Christine C. Cook and Sue R. Crull  
(Iowa State University).

**For more information, visit:**  
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This policy brief is based on published research: Bruin, M.J., Cook, C.C., Crull, S.R., & Yust, B.L. (2006). Uncovering the dynamics of social capital, housing planning and rural community vitality. *International Scope Review*, v8(13), 1-15.

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