

Geographic Territory of the Great Plains

What is the Great Plains? The definition of the Great Plains is debated. Typically, it refers to the territory from Montana to Minnesota and down to New Mexico and Texas. In this study, a 12-state area is used, including Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Combined, these states represent approximately 40% of all U.S. land area outside of Alaska and Hawaii. Rather than narrow the territory to select counties within these 12 states (i.e., delineation typically used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture), all 1,009 counties are included, specifically for those Federal policymakers who represent these states.

A more in-depth discussion of different ways to delineate the Great Plains can be found in:

Donald L. Bogue and Calvin L. Beale, *Economic Areas of the United States*, **Free Press**, 1961.

S.R. Johnson and Aziz Bouzaher (eds.), *Conservation of Great Plains Ecosystems: Current Science, Future Options*, **Kluwer Academic Publishers**, 1995.

Highlights

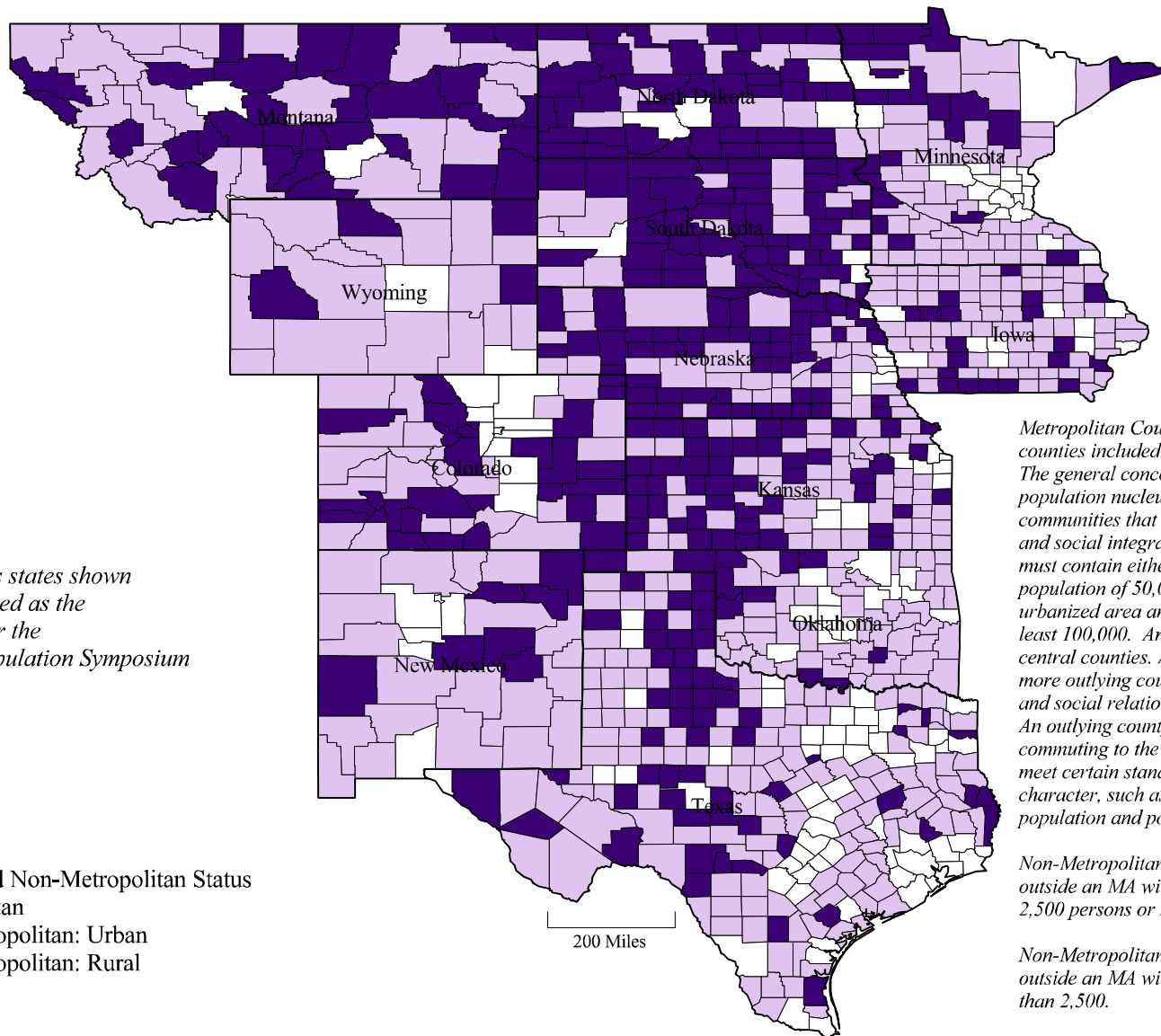
Figure 1. The metropolitan counties tend to lie on the outside borders of the region.

Table 1. The Great Plains is sparsely populated. Only 14% (N=142) of the counties in the region are metropolitan. In contrast, 36% (N=358) are rural (i.e., lacking a city of at least 2,500 people). Nearly 23% of counties in Texas are classified as metropolitan, the highest proportion in the Great Plains region. North Dakota and South Dakota have the highest concentration of rural counties with 72% and 68%, respectively.

Table 2-3. Nearly 39% of the counties in the region are “farm-dependent” (i.e, at least 20% of their total labor and proprietor income is derived from farming). Approximately 14% of the counties in the region have persistent poverty (i.e., a poverty rate of at least 20% for the past four decades). These are typically counties that include Native American reservations.

Figure 1. Metropolitan Status of Counties in the Great Plains States: 1993

*Note: Metropolitan Status was determined based on 1993 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (ERS)*



The Great Plains states shown are those identified as the research area for the Great Plains Population Symposium in October 2001

Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Status

- Metropolitan
- Non-Metropolitan: Urban
- Non-Metropolitan: Rural

Metropolitan Counties are defined as those counties included in Metropolitan Areas (MA). The general concept of an MA is one of a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social integration with that nucleus. Each MA must contain either a place with a minimum population of 50,000 or a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area and a total MA population of at least 100,000. An MA comprises one or more central counties. An MA also may include one or more outlying counties that have close economic and social relationships with the central county. An outlying county must have a specified level of commuting to the central counties and also must meet certain standards regarding metropolitan character, such as population density, urban population and population growth.

Non-Metropolitan Urban counties are those counties outside an MA with places having a population of 2,500 persons or more.

Non-Metropolitan Rural counties are those counties outside an MA with places having a population less than 2,500.

Table 1. Distribution of Counties in the Great Plains by Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Status: 1993

Note: Metropolitan Status was determined using the 1993 Beale Codes provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. For purposes of this study, the Great Plains is defined as all counties in Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Data reflect the actual number and percent of counties.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

States in the Great Plains	Total Counties	Metropolitan Counties		Non-Metropolitan Counties							
				Total		Urban population 20,000 or more		Urban population 2,500 to 19,999		Rural population less than 2,500	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Colorado	63	10	15.9	53	84.1	1	1.6	24	38.1	28	44.4
Iowa	99	10	10.1	89	89.9	9	9.1	60	60.6	20	20.2
Kansas	105	9	8.6	96	91.4	10	9.5	40	38.1	46	43.8
Minnesota	87	18	20.7	69	79.3	4	4.6	45	51.7	20	23.0
Montana	56	2	3.6	54	96.4	5	8.9	19	33.9	30	53.6
Nebraska	93	6	6.5	87	93.5	7	7.5	28	30.1	52	55.9
New Mexico	33	6	18.2	27	81.8	7	21.2	13	39.4	7	21.2
North Dakota	53	4	7.5	49	92.5	1	1.9	10	18.9	38	71.7
Oklahoma	77	14	18.2	63	81.8	7	9.1	45	58.4	11	14.3
South Dakota	66	3	4.5	63	95.5	1	1.5	17	25.8	45	68.2
Texas	254	58	22.8	196	77.2	12	4.7	127	50.0	57	22.4
Wyoming	23	2	8.7	21	91.3	2	8.7	15	65.2	4	17.4
TOTAL	1,009	142	14.1	867	85.9	66	6.5	443	43.9	358	35.5

1993 Beale Codes (Rural-Urban Continuum Codes): These codes, published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, form a classification scheme that distinguishes metropolitan counties by size, and non-metropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and proximity to metro areas. All U.S. counties and county equivalents are grouped according to the official metro status announced by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in June 1993, when the current population and commuting criteria were first applied to results of the 1990 Census of Population. New Rural-Urban Continuum Codes based on the 2000 Census are not expected to be available until 2003. For more information, visit the following URL: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/>.

Metropolitan Counties are defined as those counties included in Metropolitan Areas (MA). The general concept of an MA is one of a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social integration with that nucleus. Each MA must contain either a place with a minimum population of 50,000 or a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area and a total MA population of at least 100,000. An MA comprises one or more central counties. An MA also may include one or more outlying counties that have close economic and social relationships with the central county. An outlying county must have a specified level of commuting to the central counties and also must meet certain standards regarding metropolitan character, such as population density, urban population and population growth.

Non-Metropolitan Urban Counties are those counties outside an MA with places having a population of 2,500 persons or more.

Non-Metropolitan Rural Counties are those counties outside an MA with places having a population less than 2,500 persons.

Table 2. Distribution of Counties in the Great Plains by Economic Type: 1989

Note: Economic Type was determined using the 1989 Revised County Typology Codes provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. For purposes of this study, the Great Plains is defined as all counties in Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Data reflect the actual number and percent of counties.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

States in the Great Plains	County Economic Type												
	Total Counties	Farming Dependent		Mining Dependent		Manufacturing Dependent		Government Dependent		Services Dependent		Non-specialized	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Colorado	63	17	27.0	6	9.5	0	0.0	6	9.5	20	31.7	4	6.3
Iowa	99	41	41.4	0	0.0	11	11.1	2	2.0	9	9.1	26	26.3
Kansas	105	44	41.9	1	1.0	7	6.7	5	4.8	14	13.3	25	23.8
Minnesota	87	29	33.3	0	0.0	10	11.5	6	6.9	7	8.0	17	19.5
Montana	56	21	37.5	7	12.5	1	1.8	7	12.5	14	25.0	4	7.1
Nebraska	93	70	75.3	0	0.0	4	4.3	0	0.0	7	7.5	6	6.5
New Mexico	33	7	21.2	4	12.1	1	3.0	10	30.3	3	9.1	2	6.1
North Dakota	53	28	52.8	3	5.7	1	1.9	2	3.8	11	20.8	4	7.5
Oklahoma	77	19	24.7	4	5.2	4	5.2	13	16.9	7	9.1	16	20.8
South Dakota	66	49	74.2	1	1.5	11	16.7	6	9.1	6	9.1	1	1.5
Texas	254	65	25.6	30	11.8	0	0.0	19	7.5	24	9.4	47	18.5
Wyoming	23	0	0.0	8	34.8	0	0.0	9	39.1	1	4.3	2	8.7
TOTAL	1,009	390	38.7	64	6.3	50	5.0	85	8.4	123	12.2	154	15.3

1989 County Typology Codes: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service identifies 11 types of non-metropolitan counties according to their economic or policy type. This classification scheme reduces the wide range of economic and social diversity to a few important themes relevant to rural policy making. For more information, visit the following URL: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/>.

Economic Types:

Farming-Dependent: Farming contributed a weighted annual average of 20 percent or more labor and proprietor income over the three years from 1987 to 1989.

Mining-Dependent: Mining contributed a weighted annual average of 15 percent or more labor and proprietor income over the three years from 1987 to 1989.

Manufacturing-Dependent: Manufacturing contributed a weighted annual average of 30 percent or more labor and proprietor income over the three years from 1987 to 1989.

Government-Dependent: Government activities contributed a weighted annual average of 25 percent or more labor and proprietor income over the three years from 1987 to 1989.

Services-Dependent: Service activities contributed a weighted annual average of 50 percent or more labor and proprietor income over the three years from 1987 to 1989.

Non-specialized: Counties not classified as a specialized economic type over the three years from 1987 to 1989.

Table 3. Distribution of Counties in the Great Plains by Policy Type: 1989

Note: Policy Type was determined using the 1989 Revised County Typology Codes provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. For purposes of this study, the Great Plains is defined as all counties in Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Data reflect the actual number and percent of counties.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

States in the Great Plains	County Policy Type										
	Total Counties	Retirement Destination		Federal Lands		Commuting		Persistent Poverty		Transfers Dependent	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Colorado	63	10	15.9	33	52.4	6	9.5	7	11.1	10	15.9
Iowa	99	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	7.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kansas	105	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	8.6	0	0.0	2	1.9
Minnesota	87	1	1.1	2	2.3	4	4.6	2	2.3	10	11.5
Montana	56	3	5.4	23	41.1	1	1.8	3	5.4	4	7.1
Nebraska	93	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	3.2	2	2.2	1	1.1
New Mexico	33	4	12.1	12	36.4	3	9.1	13	39.4	7	21.2
North Dakota	53	0	0.0	1	1.9	0	0.0	7	13.2	7	13.2
Oklahoma	77	1	1.3	0	0.0	5	6.5	20	26.0	28	36.4
South Dakota	66	0	0.0	2	3.0	2	3.0	17	25.8	5	7.6
Texas	254	27	10.6	1	0.4	25	9.8	72	28.3	26	10.2
Wyoming	23	0	0.0	12	52.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
TOTAL	1,009	46	4.6	86	8.5	65	6.4	143	14.2	100	9.9

1989 County Typology Codes: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service identifies 11 types of non-metropolitan counties according to their economic or policy type. This classification scheme reduces the wide range of economic and social diversity to a few important themes relevant to rural policy making. For more information, visit the following URL: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/>.

Policy Types:

Retirement Destination: The population ages 60 years and older in 1990 increased by 15 percent or more from 1980-90 through in-movement of people.

Federal Lands: Federally-owned lands made up 30 percent or more of a county's land area in the year 1987.

Commuting: Workers ages 16 years and older commuting to jobs outside their county of residence were 40 percent or more of all the county's workers in 1990.

Persistent Poverty: Persons with poverty-level income in the preceding year were 20 percent or more of total population in each of four years, 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990.

Transfers Dependent: Income from transfer payments (Federal, state, and local) contributed a weighted annual average of 25 percent or more total personal income over the three years from 1987 to 1989.