



Consumption in Rural America

Why is Consumption Important?

- The where, what & why of our consumption shapes the quality of our lives and how we impact the environment

Patterns Have Changed

- 60 yrs ago – easy to distinguish rural residents from urban ones
 - rural residents wore their home made clothing
 - ate the food they produced
 - they were the producers
 - urban dwellers were the consumers

Conspicuous Consumption

- Definition: The habits of middle- and upper-class individuals who achieve their identity and prestige by what they consume rather than by what they produce or by the nature of their character

Increasing Consumption

- Since WWII – great increase in consumption
- Why?
 - Economic growth
 - Mass Media shape consumer tastes
 - Women entered labor force
- Rural residents poorer, consume more carefully

Trend of Consolidation

- What is consolidation? Businesses become regional or national

Factors Influence Consolidation

- Central place theory: larger places provide greater diversity of products & services
- Economies of scale: greater volume of business at one particular site allows fixed costs (transportation, land, buildings, equipment, labor) to be spread over a larger number of units

Consolidation Trend Prevalent: Social Services & Businesses

- Medical care, hospitals regionalized
- Schools become regionalized
- Grocery stores become regionalized
 - “food deserts”

Results of Consolidation

- Rural businesses find it difficult to offer variety available in large central markets
 - Rural businesses have trouble taking advantage of economies of scale
- Loss in business for local merchants, decline of revenue for local gov'ts
- Family operated businesses fail or become franchises
- Loss of downtowns, increase in malls

Declining Household Production & Services

- Women in jobs=Loss of Household Production
 - Gardens
 - Food preparation and preservation
 - Child supervision
 - Making/maintaining clothing
 - Bookkeeping
- Results:
 - Expansion of consumer goods and services
 - Increased amount of money a HH needs

Impact of Increased Consumption on Human Capital: Health/Education

- Rural people higher rates of overweight, obesity than urbanites
- Gap between educational level of girls and boys in rural areas
 - Gap greater between male and female minorities
- Teens susceptible to media message
 - Some argue boys more susceptible

Impact of Increased Consumption on Social Capital

- People spend more time alone
 - At home with technology
 - Not visiting with others
- Result:
 - Lack of civic engagement
 - Lack of public gatherings

Impact of Increased Consumption on Natural Capital

- Consumption affects the environment
- U.S. consumes about 25% of the world's energy & is less than 5% of the world's population
- Rural areas represent 97% of the US land area

Organize for the Environment

- Rural people are less than 20% (1/5th) of the US population
- Live in 97 percent of the US land area
- Result of lower population density:
 - Likelihood of organized opposition less when density is low
 - Decision makers can abuse rural people/areas

Impact of Increased Consumption on Cultural Capital

- Define who we are by what we consume
- Improve our cultural capital by no longer defining ourselves by what we consume

- Re-orient our definitions
- Story of Stuff Project:
www.storyofstuff.org