

## Iowa's Unincorporated Areas Lose Population in 2010 Census

Written by Joy Venhorst  
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AMES, Iowa — Iowa's unincorporated areas — the countryside outside any town or city limits — lost population according to the 2010 census, reversing a gain seen in the 2000 census. The loss of 20,000 residents put those areas at a level lower than 1990, as detailed in the report "Countryside and Town: Population in Iowa's Counties Within and Outside of Incorporated Places, 1990 – 2010," provided by the Community Vitality Center, at Iowa State University.

Sandra Burke, assistant scientist in economics, said the gain seen between 1990 and 2000 was due, in part, to residents living on acreages and in unincorporated developments. It is somewhat surprising to see losses from open-country areas in some of Iowa's larger counties. Annexation activities on the part of communities might account for some of those losses.

"What's happening in some of these areas that are traditionally more rural and farm-based is that they are aging out. Younger residents are graduating high school and not returning, and gradually you lose people in the child-bearing age group," Burke said. "You don't have many children born in these areas and older residents are retiring off their farms."

Burke said that the unincorporated areas are not the same as the census's rural data, since the rural data include small towns. She said towns are better at holding their populations, but the loss in countryside areas does affect businesses in towns, especially in small- to medium-sized towns. "As there is a loss of population base, that will impact the kinds of retail operations you can support in a smaller community," she added.

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Burke said some of the challenges for Iowa will be to look at farm succession trends, and work with young farmers to come in and take over operations from retiring farmers. She also said finding young entrepreneurs and their families to come into smaller towns to build businesses will be a key effort to maintaining population and vitality.

The full report is available for download from the Community Vitality Center website at [www.cvcia.org](http://www.cvcia.org).

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