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Current Activities

Measuring Food Insecurity and Hunger

In March 2004, with ERS support, the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council (the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences) convened an expert panel to review USDA's methods for measuring food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. population. It has been 10 years since the USDA's measures were developed. A substantial body of survey data has been collected and used to conduct research on food security and hunger. The panel will review current methods and procedures and consider recommendations to enhance these methods for monitoring, evaluation, and related research purposes. Staff from ERS, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, and the Office of Management and Budget provided background information to the panel at its initial meeting in Washington, DC.

Mark Nord, marknord@ers.usda.gov

The Role of Homeownership in Wealth Accumulation by Rural Households

As part of ERS's research program on the economics of rural housing, ERS and Kansas State University are examining rural-urban differences in household mortgage affordability, home equity, and net wealth accumulation over time. Homeownership is an important means to generate wealth. The extent to which owning a home generates accumulated wealth depends on the home's value, holding period, rate of appreciation, and the household's consumption of accumulated home equity. Preliminary results show that, compared with urban households, rural households have on average about 25 percent less net worth, their homes are worth half as much, and equity in those homes is 40 percent lower. These and other findings will be useful to USDA's Rural Housing Service in their efforts to develop effective single-family housing assistance programs for low-income rural residents. **James Mikesell, mikesell@ers.usda.gov**

How Do Households, Sectors, and Countries Adjust to Policy Change?

In the United States and other countries, adjustment and change in the farm sector and rural economy is an ongoing process, with farm households, markets, and rural communities continually adapting to agricultural policy reform and changing market conditions. Because each segment of the farm and rural community faces unique conditions, ERS economists are engaged in a broad-ranging set of studies focusing on the diverse responses of countries, regions, commodity sectors, and farm households to fundamental policy adjustments. Research is intended to inform decisionmakers about the broader impacts of policy reform, and offer insights on developing mechanisms to facilitate adjustment among groups affected by policy change. Research in this area is available in a new Briefing Room on the ERS website, "Farm Policy, Farm Households, and the Rural Economy" (www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/adjustments/). **Erik Dohlman, edohlman@ers.usda.gov, and Carolyn Dimitri, cdimitri@ers.usda.gov**

New Releases

China Commodity Markets

China is contributing to a tighter world market in wheat, corn, and soybeans. China has cut back on corn and wheat exports and appears poised to increase wheat imports. China has emerged as the world's largest soybean importer, and its huge appetite for soybeans is contributing to soaring world prices and tight supplies. Two recently released reports—*China's Wheat Economy: Current Trends and Prospects for Imports* (www.ers.usda.gov/publications/whs/may04/whs04d01/) and *Is China's Corn Market at a Turning Point?* (www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fds/)

may04/fds04d01/)—provide up-to-date information on policy, trade, supply and demand trends. A third report on soybeans is forthcoming. **Fred Gale, fgale@ers.usda.gov**

How Rural Areas Differ: The New ERS County Typology

ERS recently released a new county classification that captures the broad economic and social diversity among rural areas. Earlier ERS typologies have been widely used by policy analysts and public officials to determine eligibility for and effectiveness of Federal programs to assist rural America. The new county typology

identifies six discrete economic types of nonmetro counties based on the primary economic activity of the county—farming, manufacturing, mining, service, Federal/State government, and other. The typology also identifies seven county types that distinguish important policy themes, including persistent poverty, persistent population loss, housing stress, retirement destination, recreation, low education, and low employment. Also, for the first time, this classification identifies both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties by county type. See www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/typology/ for more information on the new ERS County Typology. **Linda Ghelfi, lghelfi@ers.usda.gov**

