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Conceptualizing, Operationalizing and  
Measuring Important Factors in  
Rural Development Research

Steven Hastings, University of Delaware, Moderator;  
Fred K. Hines, EDD ESCS USDA;  
Frank M. Goode, The Pennsylvania State University;  
Roger J. Beck, Rutgers University;  
Theodore E. Fuller, EDD ESCS USDA;  
Brady J. Deaton, Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University; and  
Eldon D. Smith, University of Kentucky.

In order to empirically investigate the economic development process in rural areas, factors that are associated with the level and changes in employment must be conceptualized, operationalized and measured accurately. This symposium was organized to discuss the conceptualization, operationalization and measurement of these factors.

Goode discussed various issues that must be recognized in operationalizing and measuring employment change in rural communities. These issues include: Employment change from the location of new farms and from the expansion (or contraction) of existing firms, the geographic unit of analysis, the level of industrial specificity and the time period to be considered. Beck considered the operationalization and measurement of the availability of labor in rural communities. Components of the factors discussed were: The spatial dimensions of labor availability, the quantity and quality of labor, and the price of labor.

Hastings discussed a method operationalizing the supply of intermediate inputs for manufacturing firms. The method is based on the potential model of spatial interaction and is an improvement on the previous empirical treatment of this factor. Fuller presented a definition of non-tax financial incentives. The role of non-tax financial incentives in the location decision and problems with the operationalization of the factor were considered. Deaton discussed problems with conceptualizing, operationalizing and measuring the quality of industrial plant sites. Improvements for a previously used method of measuring this factor were considered.

Hines pointed out that a lack of secondary data would be a problem for measuring many of the factors. However, he concluded that the papers raised some useful and interesting points about the conceptualization, operationalization and measurement of factors in rural development research.