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Importance of Being Digital Ready – What Does that Mean?

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Cornhusker Economics

Importance of Being Digital Ready – What Does that Mean?

Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	9/7/18
Livestock and Products.			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	105.00	*	*
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	161.84	177.62	169.69
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	159.89	162.42	163.74
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	192.35	205.91	209.13
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated	57.25	43.68	45.05
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	82.72	70.35	66.84
Slaughter Lambs, woolled and shorn, 135-165 lb. National.	170.98	160.18	134.10
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	405.52	370.67	377.15
Crops.			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	3.08	4.91	4.63
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Columbus, bu.	3.15	3.40	3.31
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Columbus, bu.	8.87	7.68	7.29
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	5.31	5.29	5.13
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	2.80	2.91	2.93
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	*	*	185.00
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	92.50	102.50	102.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	90.00	150.00	102.50
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	116.00	122.50	136.50
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	40.00	40.00	44.00
* No Market			

Communities often determine if they are digital ready on whether or not high speed internet is available. The conversation then focuses on who has high speed internet and who does not. Hence, the divide. High speed internet is an important factor on whether or not a community can be competitive in a global market. But, it is not the only digital-ready factor necessary to compete in a global economy. One challenge of focusing on the *divide* is that assumptions are made that individuals do not have skills in rural areas to use technology and, that these rural residents may not need higher speed internet. These assumptions impact policy.

A recent study was conducted to gauge the digital readiness among Nebraska households by calculating a digital readiness index (DRI) score. Dr. Roberto Gallardo, Purdue University, led the study in collaboration with the Nebraska Broadband Initiative which included the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, University of Nebraska, Nebraska Public Service Commission and the Nebraska Library Commission.

An online household survey was distributed during April and May of 2018 to gather data on the following: device and internet access, digital resourcefulness and utilization, and internet benefits and impact. Some key takeaways include:

- There is a device and internet access divide between metropolitan and rural Nebraska households.
- No significant difference between urban and rural households regarding digital resourcefulness, internet utilization, and internet impacts and benefits that exist.

- The difference in digital readiness index scores was higher among age, income, educational attainment, and presence of children groups than county type.
- The digital readiness level of Nebraska households is at half of its potential—as measured by this study.

The study found that rural households were resourceful in using high speed internet. This article pulls out highlights from the *Gauging the Digital Readiness of Nebraska Households* study.

Device and Internet Access. There is a device and internet access divide between metropolitan and rural Nebraska households. Efforts need to be made to reduce this divide by expanding broadband availability and device ownership throughout the state, especially in rural areas. Despite this divide, rural households utilized the internet as frequently or more compared to their metropolitan counterparts albeit relying at a higher rate on smartphones, mobile data and libraries.

On a positive note, the study found that 56.7% of Nebraska households reported never having an issue with internet over the past year while one-fourth reported being without internet for five or more days. While this is positive, 31.2% of rural households reported having issues with the internet for five or more days compared to 15.7% in metropolitan counties. Despite this, rural households access the internet as frequently, or more, compared to households in metropolitan or small city counties. For example, 90.8% of rural households reported using their smartphones to access the internet at least once daily, compared to 81.3% in metropolitan and 80.9% in small city counties. In addition rural households spent the same amount of time accessing their internet from home as those in urban communities.

The divide is much more complex between urban and rural households in Nebraska beyond just availability.

Digital Resourcefulness & Utilization. There was not a significant difference between urban and rural households regarding digital resourcefulness, internet utilization, and internet impacts and benefits that exist. However, there is ample room to maximize the technology's impact.

There is no significant difference concerning internet use between metropolitan and rural households. Both metropolitan and rural households use the internet frequently and in multiple ways. However, on average Nebraska households utilized the internet at least once monthly for less than half of the potential uses listed in the survey. This means there is room to increase digital readiness.

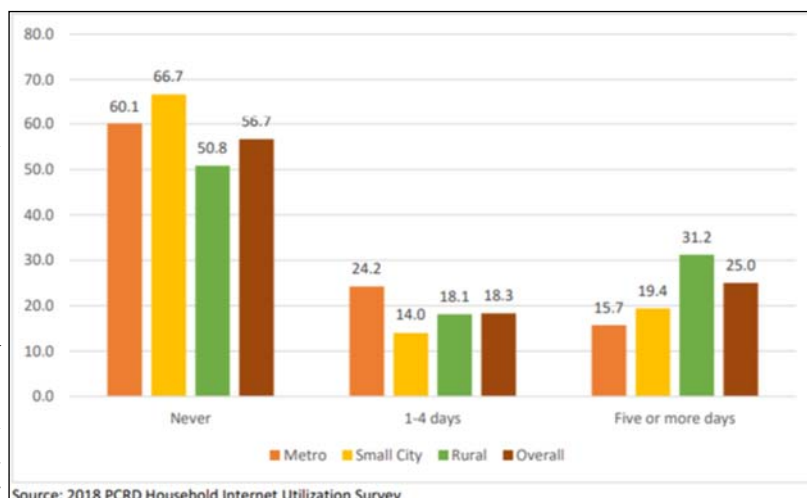
Furthermore, on average, Nebraska households utilized the internet in eleven out of twenty-five different ways. For example, three-quarters of Nebraska households did not earn money online by selling, freelancing, or renting

Digital Readiness – Social Economic Characteristics. The digital readiness index scores were higher among age, income, educational attainment, and presence of children groups than county type. This supports national research where older, lower income and lower educational attainment are found to make a higher share of non-internet users¹. In fact, when looking at those who relied more on mobile data to access the internet versus those who did not, the difference in the digital readiness index score was higher. On the adoption and use front, rather than focusing on a metro-rural divide, the issue should focus on age, income and occupational differences.

Digital Readiness Potential – Benefits and Impacts. The digital readiness level of Nebraska households is at half of its potential—as measured by this study. More importantly, this level is very similar regardless of county type. Efforts need to be made to ensure Nebraska households are at their maximum regarding their digital readiness in order to reap the benefits of this evolving digital age. Additional efforts should be made to ensure that older, less educated households in occupations not conducive to improving digital skills and adoption receive the proper training to benefit.

Benefits explored included utilizing on-line health care, applying for jobs, price matching, finding coupons or selling on-line.

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Number of Days without Internet by County Type

¹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/05/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/>

Next Steps and What Can You Do

Internet applications have the potential to improve the quality of life. These benefits will only materialize if communities and individuals are ready to address all areas of digital readiness. The landscape continues to change. One effort in particular in addressing broadband is the Nebraska Rural Broadband Task Force. The [Nebraska Rural Broadband Task Force](#) created through LB 994 will be holding its first meeting in September. This task force is charged with reviewing “issues relating to availability, adoption, and affordability of broadband services in rural areas of Nebraska.” The website will track the progress of the group.

Broadband availability is continually expanding. Here are some suggestions on what you can do:

- Understand what broadband is available in your community/county.
 - Review the [Nebraska Broadband Map](#) to know who the providers are in your region and what has been deployed.
 - Talk to your local provider about current services and what is planned.
 - Identify and report issues to your local provider.
 - Contact local and state officials, such as the [Nebraska Public Service Commission](#), your state senator or a member of the Nebraska Broadband Task Force.
 - Document the demand. *This study can help with documenting importance and demand.*
 - Complete an Intelligent Communities Assessment that can help lead conversation in your community’s digital readiness.
- Work with your provider to build a business case.
 - Understand the costs for broadband.
 - Waive or reduce fees for providers that may be deterring deployment.
 - Reduce regulatory barriers where possible such as streamlining permitting.

Learn from others on how communities are becoming more digital ready. There are many examples of Nebraska communities utilizing technologies to communicate and to offer more services from on-line bill paying to increasing civic engagement. Nebraska City recently held the first (or one of the first) Twitter Town Halls to engage community members. You can check out the conversation of this pilot project at #NECityListens on Twitter.

The Nebraska Information Technology Commission, Public Service Commission and Nebraska Extension are also willing to help communities work through broadband issues.

Conversations can help to document demand or bring together providers to meet with community members. The broadband initiative encourages communities to consider people living outside city limits in their efforts.

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The Nebraska Information Technology Commission is documenting the progress made on the Statewide Broadband Plan. The full analysis of how Nebraska compares is available at http://www.nitc.ne.gov/community_council/documents/newsletters/Nebraska_and_DDIApril2017.pdf.

The *Gauging the Digital Readiness of Nebraska Households* full report is available at: <http://www.nitc.nebraska.gov/news/community/resources/DigitalReadinessReportNebraska2018.pdf>

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