

## Research Identifies Challenges to Accessing Mental Health Services in Rural Pennsylvania

It's no secret that barriers to receiving mental health care have existed for years. Research has shown disparity in mental health service use in rural areas nationwide, as rural residents are significantly less likely to receive any mental health treatment compared to urban residents.

To learn more about access to and demand for mental health services in rural Pennsylvania, especially among youth and the elderly, the Center partnered with researchers from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania as part of the Center's Research Grant Program.

The researchers analyzed available data from the Pennsylvania Youth Surveys (PAYS) and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and they surveyed rural residents to identify the challenges they face in accessing mental health care.

According to the research findings, the most common barriers to supplying mental health services in rural Pennsylvania were shortages of professionals, issues with professional qualifications and credentialing, fragmented levels of care, flaws in interagency collaboration, and funding and insurance challenges.

The core challenges in accessing mental health services faced by rural residents, especially youth and the elderly, were transportation issues, health insurance, stigma and mental health acceptance, distance and travel time and conflicting work hours, family engagement and the role of family, and telehealth, internet access, and technology issues.

The resident survey findings also indicated that about 35 percent of parents said their children had, at some point, been diagnosed with a mental health disorder by a health professional. Forty-five percent of parents said their children had a history of mental health treatment, and about



46 percent said their children had seen a mental health professional within a year.

The survey respondents with more unmet mental health needs were typically male, not married, and had lower educational attainment levels.

*(Research Examines Access to Mental Health Services continued on Page 6)*

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## Chairman's Message

In February, the Center's board sponsored two public hearings, each focusing on innovations and strategies to help improve the health and care of our rural residents.

The first hearing was on the Rural Health Redesign Center, and the work it is doing to help small, rural Pennsylvania hospitals continue to operate in their communities. At the hearing, we learned more about the implementation of the Rural Health Model – how it works, which hospitals are participating – and what the participants and payors think about it. In a nutshell, the model provides predetermined revenues from government and commercial payors to participating hospitals so that they can focus more on community health than the bottom line.

Hospital administrators told us that having predictable revenue sources is giving them the opportunity to expand programs that improve the health status of their patients, and their communities, and not just provide traditional healthcare services. From the payor's perspective, we were told that the Model has deepened its relationship with hospitals, and is providing new approaches to meet community health needs. Brock Slabach, chief operations officer at the National Rural Health Association, called the Model the "crown jewel" of rural innovation projects nationwide, noting that every rural Pennsylvania hospital participating in the Model continued to serve their communities during the pandemic and did not have to close their doors.

The second hearing focused on strategies to combat the opioid addiction and overdose crisis. This was the Center's 18<sup>th</sup> hearing on opioids, and like the others before, it provided important information on how state and local agencies are combating the crisis. This hearing also provided an important reminder that addiction is a disease, and one that was exacerbated by the pandemic.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro told us about the historic agreement Pennsylvania and other states across the country reached with three of the largest drug distributors in the country and the more than \$1 billion that will come to Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Secretary Jennifer Smith and Department of Human Services Acting Secretary Meg Snead updated us on the work their departments are doing to improve access to treatment and recovery services, particularly during the pandemic.

Officials from the City of Pittsburgh told us about an innovative pilot program that allows paramedics to administer buprenorphine to patients experiencing opioid withdrawal. And we were updated on Positive Recovery Solutions' services that offer mobile access to Vivitrol. Finally, Penn State University researchers reviewed their recent research, the first of which was sponsored by the Center that examined the behavioral counseling treatment workforce, and the second that examined mental health and substance use disorders among youth.

I encourage you visit the Center's website to read the testimony submitted by the panelists or to watch the recordings of these hearings. Thank you to all of the participants and to all who attended the hearings.

*Senator Gene Yaw*

# Rural Policy SUMMIT

The 2021 Rural Policy Summit wrapped up on January 14 with a look at agriculture and future ag policy.

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding provided opening comments. He then joined panelists: Senator Elder Vogel, Chair, Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee; Senator Judy Schwank, Democratic Chair, Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee; Representative Dan Moul, Chair, House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and Center Board Member; and Representative Eddie Day Pashinski, Democratic Chair, House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, and Center Board Vice Chairman.

Panel moderators were Dr. Timothy Kelsey, professor of Agricultural Economics at Penn State University and Center Board Member, and Mark Critz, Western Regional Director and Executive Director of the Rural Development Council with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

Thank you to everyone who participated in and attended the series. A big thank you to our Rural Policy Summit series cohosts: the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health, Pennsylvania Rural Development Council, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Pennsylvania Downtown Center, and Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank's Community Development and Regional Outreach Department.

**Visit [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov) for more details on the summit series, speakers, presentation materials and recordings.**

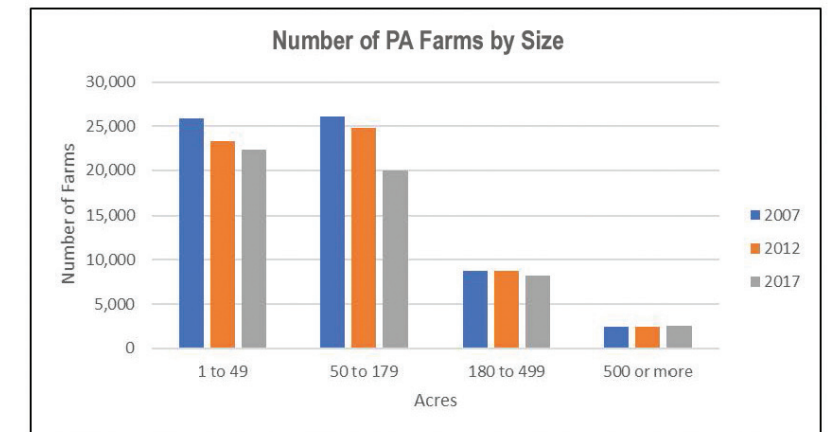
## Trends in Agriculture: Analysis of Ag Census Data from 2007 to 2017

From 2012 and 2017, the number of farms in Pennsylvania decreased 10 percent, and the number of farmland acres decreased 6 percent, but the average farm size increased 5 percent, according to research conducted by Dr. Sunita Mondal and Dr. Roger Solano of Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania.

The research, sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, examined data from the 2017, 2012, and 2007 Censuses of Agriculture to develop descriptive profiles of Pennsylvania farm operations and farmers, as well as trends in Pennsylvania agriculture. The researchers also interviewed key farm organizations to learn more about the current state and future trends in Pennsylvania agriculture.

In terms of farm size, the research found that the largest number of farms (42 percent) were small-sized, between one and 49 acres, followed by medium-sized farms, between 50 and 179 acres (38 percent). These farms were mostly family-owned or individual proprietorships (74 percent).

The average age of primary producers in 2017 was 57 years old, a year older than in 2012. More than one-third (33 percent) of primary producers in Pennsylvania were 65 years old or older.



In 2017, about 21 percent of primary producers were female, a substantial increase from 14 percent in 2007 and 2012. This indicates a trend toward an increased number of female primary producers in Pennsylvania over time.

A little over half (51 percent) of primary producers reported farming as their primary occupation in 2017. Out of these, 35 percent operated on large farms of more than 500 acres.

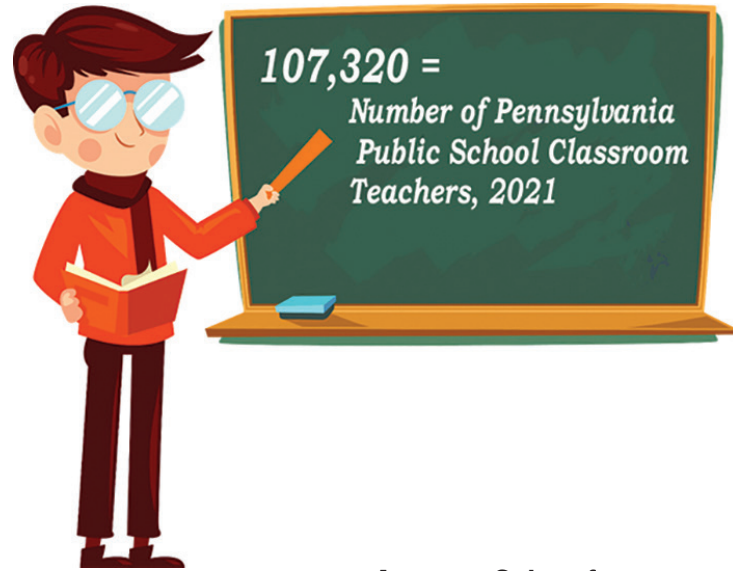
In 2017, Pennsylvania farms sold \$6.5 billion (adjusted for inflation, using 2007 as the deflator) in agricultural prod-  
*(Analysis of Ag Census Data continued on Page 6)*

# Rural SNAPSHOT

## Pennsylvania Public School Teachers

### About the Snapshot:

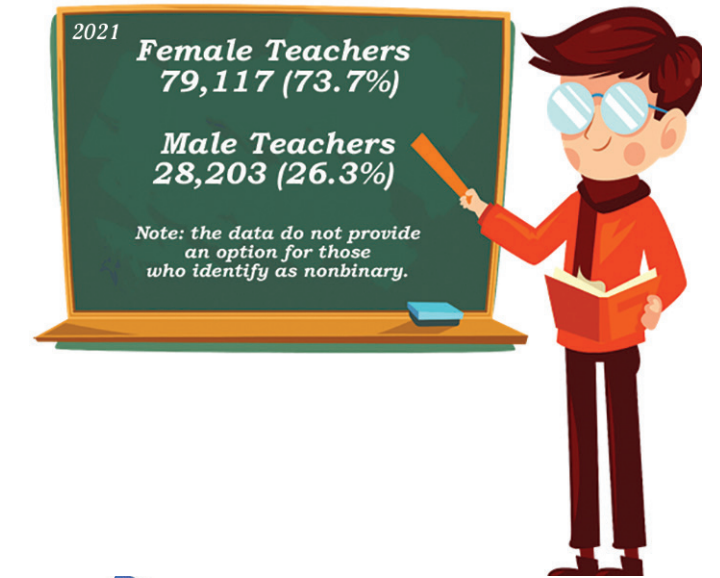
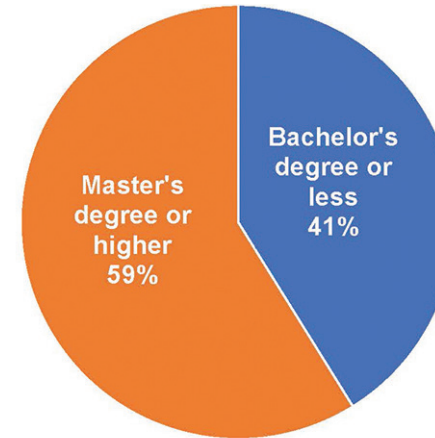
This snapshot focuses on teachers in Pennsylvania public school districts, as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. "Rural" and "urban" are based on the Center's definition of rural and urban school districts, which is based on population density in the districts. All data are from the 2013 to 2021 summary reports of the Pennsylvania Department of Education



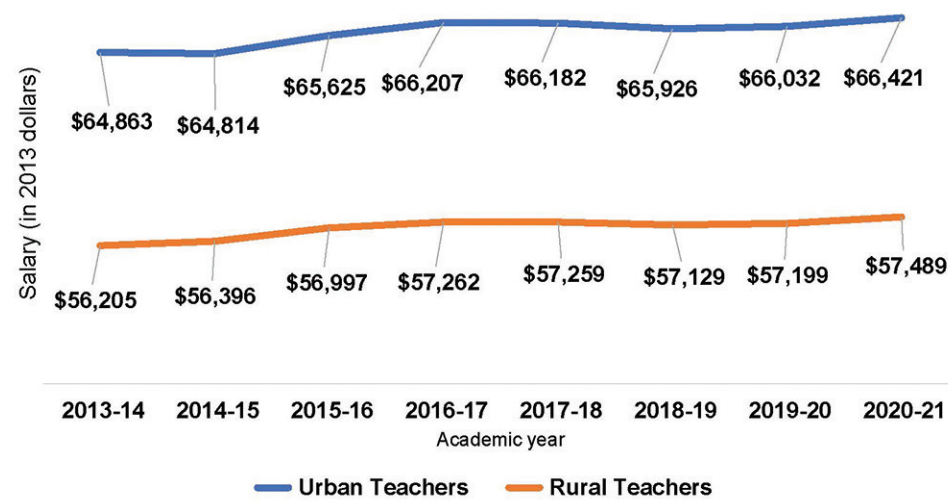
Number of Years Teaching, 2021

Years Teaching	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
5 or fewer years	18,574	17%
6-10 years	16,364	15%
11-15 years	20,738	19%
16-20 years	21,185	20%
21-25 years	17,259	16%
26-30 years	8,568	8%
35+ years	4,632	4%

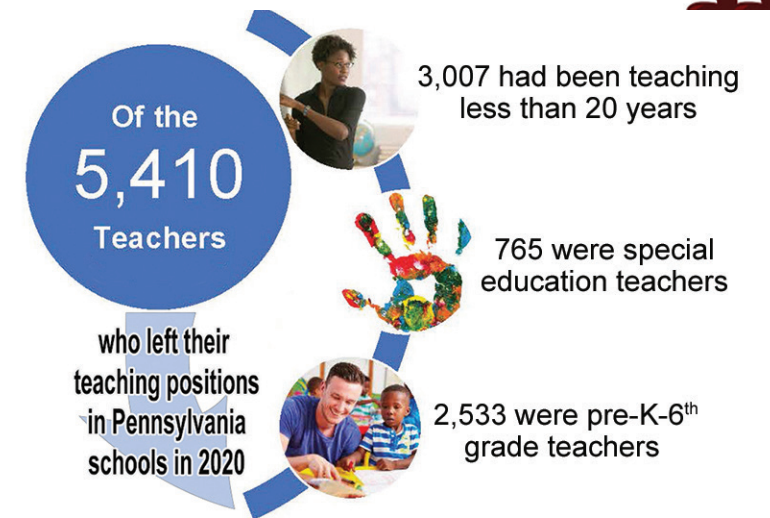
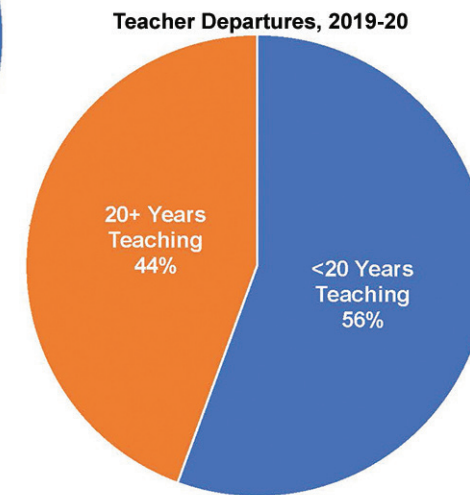
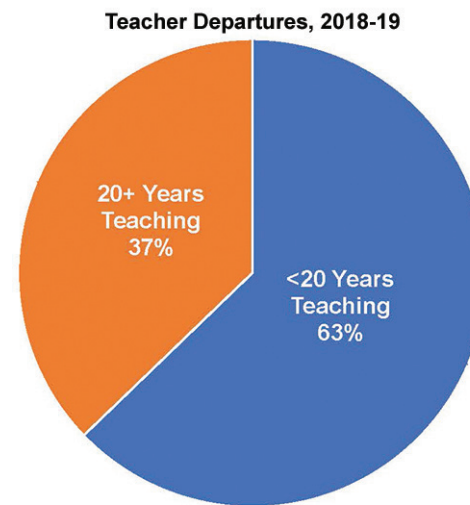
Educational Attainment Levels of Pennsylvania Public School Teachers, 2021



Average Salary for Rural and Urban Public School Teachers, 2013-2021



Teaching Experience of Public Teachers Who Left Pennsylvania Public School Districts in School Years 2018-19 and 2019-20

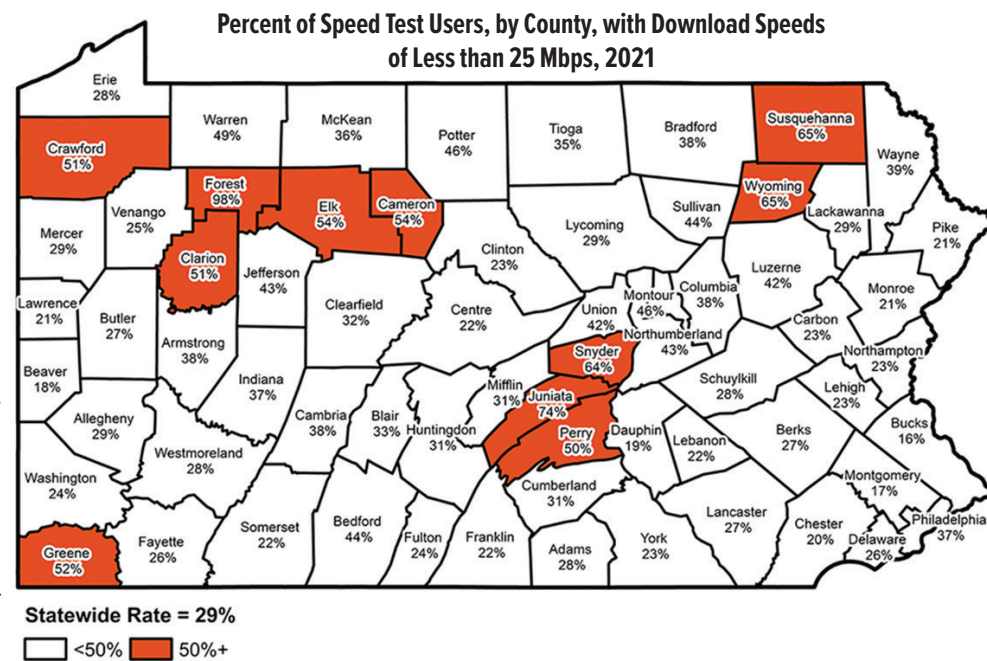


## Analysis of Speed Test Data Shows Broadband Need in PA Rural Counties

Broadband service improvements are needed across Pennsylvania, but the most significant need remains in rural counties, according to a recent analysis of broadband speed test data by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

The Center estimated broadband connectivity in Pennsylvania's rural and urban counties using data from Measurement Lab (M-Lab), which measured the download and upload speeds of internet users throughout Pennsylvania. M-Lab is a consortium of research, industry, and public-interest partners providing verifiable measurement of global network performance.

The Center's analysis included data from nearly 3 million upload and download tests taken throughout Pennsylvania in calendar year 2021. The data were provided to the Center by a collaboration between Exactly Labs and X-Lab, a non-partisan technology and policy institute at Penn State University. Using these data, the Center



identified areas that continue to lack significant access to broadband internet service.

These data indicate that, while there is need across Pennsylvania for improved broadband access, the counties most in need (and most eligible for aid under federal programs) are rural.

For a copy of the report, *Pennsylvania Broadband Access: A Speed Test Analysis*, visit [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).

## Research Examines Access to Mental Health Services

(continued from Page 1)

The researchers offered several policy considerations to address both the access to and demand for mental health services. They included:

- address transportation barriers related to long travel distances and affordability;
- attract qualified mental health professionals to rural areas and facilitate staff credentialing and education to ensure availability of providers;
- promote the de-stigmatization of mental health through education, prevention, and normalization;
- expand and fund telehealth, case management services, and in-home and mobile therapy to address rural service access barriers; and
- amplify the role of schools in addressing youth mental health and expand school-based therapy.

Visit the Center's website for the report, *Access to Mental Health Services in Rural Pennsylvania*.

## Analysis of Ag Census Data

(continued from Page 3)

ucts, which was a 2 percent decrease from 2012. Sales from livestock outpaced crop sales in 2017, and within livestock, dairy constituted the largest sector.

Organic product sales increased substantially over the previous decade, as the number of farms with organic products increased from 680 in 2007 to 1,048 in 2017. Total organic product sales increased from \$70.9 million in 2012 to \$598 million in 2017 (data adjusted for inflation, using 2007 dollars).

There has been an increase in the number of farms using renewable energy systems in recent years, with the greatest increase being in the use of geothermal and geo-exchange systems.

A copy of the full report, *Analysis of 2017 Census of Agriculture Data*, is available at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).

## JUST THE FACTS: PENNSYLVANIA'S POPULATION CENTER

Look no further than the state's population center for confirmation that Pennsylvania's population growth is uneven.

The population center is a statistical point where the state's population would perfectly balance on a flat map if every resident weighed the same.

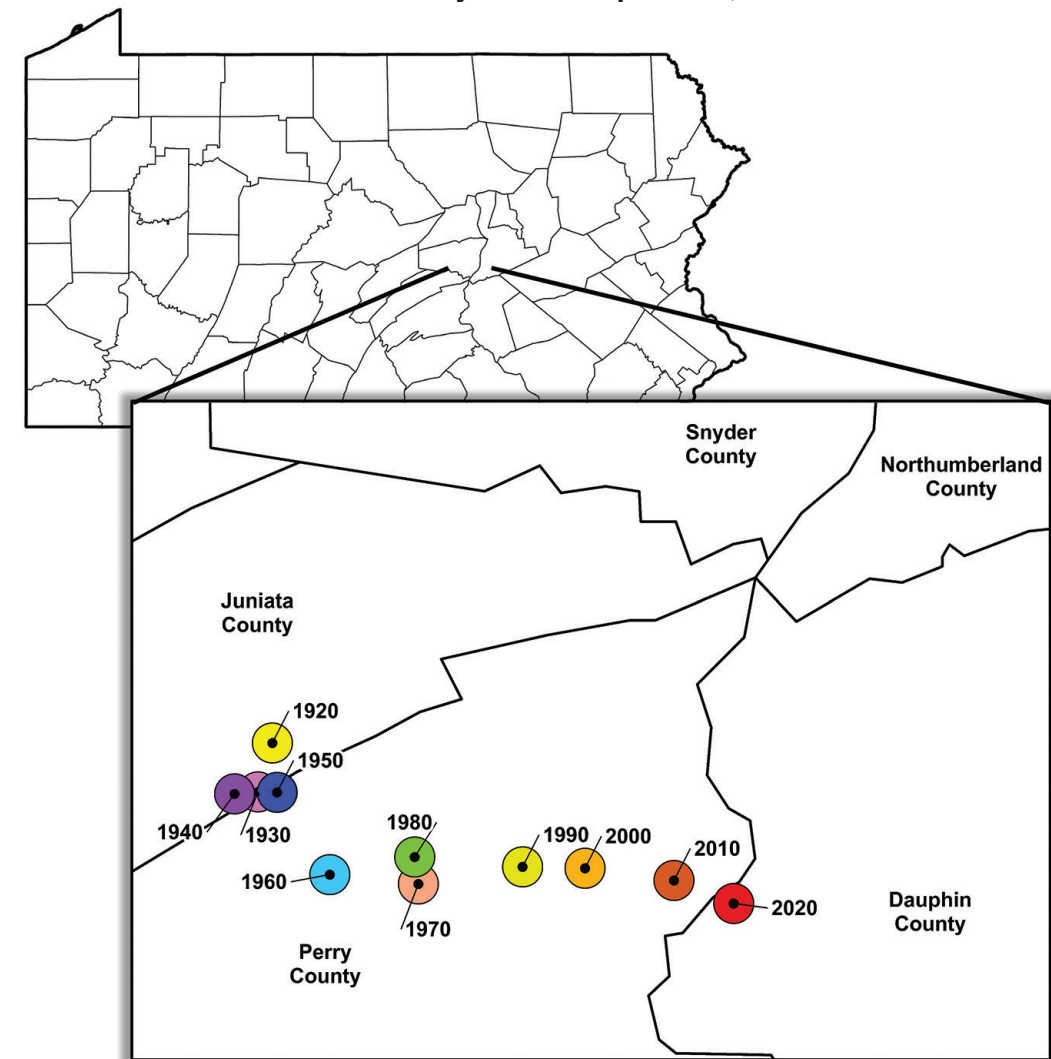
According to Census data, from 2010 to 2020, Pennsylvania's population center shifted three miles to the southeast. In 2020, that point was at the edge of a farm field in Halifax Township, Dauphin County.

As the map below indicates, Pennsylvania population centers have been moving eastward since 1990. This shift is attributed to population increases in southeastern Pennsylvania and population stagnation and decline in western Pennsylvania.

From 1990 to 2020, the population in southeastern Pennsylvania increased 19 percent and the population in the rest of Pennsylvania declined 1 percent.

In 2020, the mean center of population in the U.S. was in a wooded area near Hartville, Missouri, a town of about 600 residents.

Mean Center of Pennsylvania's Population, 1920 to 2020



Data source: U.S. Census Bureau.



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## Resources

### **AgriStress Helpline for PA Farmers and Families**

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has launched the AgriStress Helpline for Pennsylvania farmers and their families who may be experiencing feelings of loneliness, sadness, stress, or depression. Call the AgriStress HelpLine for Pennsylvania - 833-897-AGRI (2474) - which is available 24/7. Visit the department's website at [https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Pages/Mental\\_Wellness.aspx](https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Pages/Mental_Wellness.aspx) for more information.

### **Affordable Connectivity Program**

The Affordable Connectivity Program, which replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit, is an Federal Communications Commission (FCC) benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more. The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they

contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household. For more information, visit <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>.

### **PA DEP Accepting Comments on a New Reg to Protect Drinking Water from PFAS**

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is accepting public comments on a new regulation to protect Pennsylvania drinking water from two forms of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) – perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). The comment period will run to April 27, 2022. Comments may be submitted at <https://www.ahs.dep.pa.gov/eComment/>. Comments also may be submitted via e-mail: [RegComments@pa.gov](mailto:RegComments@pa.gov). Comments must include a subject heading of the proposed rulemaking and the name and address of the person submitting the comment. Written comments may be mailed to the Environmental Quality Board, P.O. Box 8477, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8477.