



The Message from Rural America

**Media Coverage of Rural America
2004 vs. 2002**



W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION
FROM VISION TO INNOVATIVE IMPACT

The report was written by: S. Robert Lichter, President; Daniel Amundson, Director of Research; and Linda S. Lichter, Vice President; all of Center for Media and Public Affairs.

About the Center for Media and Public Affairs

The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) is a nonpartisan research and educational organization which conducts scientific studies of the news and entertainment media. CMPA election studies have played a major role in the ongoing debate over improving the election process. Our continuing analysis and tabulation of late night political jokes provides a lighter look at major news makers. CMPA is one of the few groups to study the important role the media plays in communicating information about health risks and scientific issues.

Since its formation in 1985, CMPA has emerged as a unique institution that bridges the gap between academic research and the broader domains of media and public policy. Founded by Drs. Robert and Linda Lichter, CMPA has become an acknowledged source of expertise in media analysis.

The Center's goal is to provide an empirical basis for ongoing debates over media fairness and impact through well-documented, timely, and readable studies of media content. CMPA's bi-monthly newsletter, Media Monitor, is a prime example of these analyses. Our scientific approach sets us apart from self appointed media "watchdog" groups, while our timeliness and outreach distinguishes us from traditional academic researchers.

About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 "to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations." Its programming activities center around the common vision of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being; and has the capacity to be productive, and to help create nurturing families, responsive institutions, and healthy communities.

To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation targets its grants toward specific areas. These include health; food systems and rural development; youth and education; and philanthropy and volunteerism. Within these areas, attention is given to the cross-cutting themes of leadership; information systems/technology; capitalizing on diversity; and social and economic community development programming. Grants are concentrated in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the southern African countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

More information about the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and its programs is available on the Foundation's Web site at www.wkkf.org.

Executive Summary

How do the major media portray rural America? And how does the picture change in the crucible of a presidential election year? These are the questions that guided this study, which updates our 2002 report on rural America's media image.

We examined all coverage from June through November 2004 in the same ten news outlets as before – *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today*; *Newsweek*, *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*; and the ABC, CBS, and NBC morning and evening news shows, including prime time newsmagazine programs.

This sample produced 529 stories, identified through Lexis/Nexis, which used the word “rural” in the context of discussing the lifestyle, conditions, or problems and issues related to a specific rural area or to rural America in general. That's a jump of 57 percent from the 337 stories that we found in our previous study from January through June 2002.

Major Findings:

The Forgotten Farmer – Only three percent of discussions of rural life involved farming, and only one out of every 16 stories was framed in terms of an association between rural life and agriculture. The amount of coverage linked to farming dropped by over 50 percent from the already modest levels we found in 2002. And only one percent of all sources who were quoted had any connection to agriculture.

Don't Fence Me In – Zoning and other land use issues accounted for one-quarter of all discussions in both 2002 and 2004, making this the number one topic of discussion each year. This reflects the frequent attention newspapers in particular paid to exurban counties encroaching on open countryside. For the urban press, “rural” is often whatever lies beyond the suburbs.

Country Is Cool – Three out of four terms (77%) used to describe rural America had a positive tone. This included praise for the behavior of residents (e.g., “good values,” “strong work ethic,” “all-American”) as well as more aesthetic judgments (e.g., “picturesque,” “pastoral”). Fewer than one out of four terms (23 %) were negative (e.g., “boorish,” “rednecks,” “trailer trash”). There were too few descriptions in 2002 for valid comparisons.

But Change Is Bad – Just one out of four sources (25%) welcomed any changes being discussed, nearly half (46%) opposed changes, and the remainder (29%) indicated they would accept change only grudgingly. Support for change dropped sharply from a more balanced picture in 2002, when 35 percent were in favor and 38 percent were opposed.

Whose Change Is It, Anyway? – Change was supported by four out of five sources (79%) associated with business and economic development, one out of three government officials (35%), and only one out of fourteen ordinary residents (7%) whose opinions were cited.

Additional Findings

Crime Wave Crests – Coverage of crime dropped from one in five discussions (20%) in 2002 to one in eight (13%) in 2004. The decline was especially sharp in reports on violent crime, which fell from 14 percent to only three percent of all discussions. This reflects heavy coverage of the “mailbox bomber” in 2002. The change was most dramatic on television news, where crime news dropped to just 11 percent of coverage, two years after making up a whopping 78 percent.

Not Ready for Prime Time – Although rural news increased by 57 percent overall from 2002 to 2004, it decreased by 23 percent on television, dropping from 62 to only 48 stories. That’s an average of fewer than two stories per week on all three broadcast network morning and evening news shows combined. This reflects the sharp decline in crime news, which was only partially offset by election news, lifestyle, and other stories that paralleled the print news agenda.

What Election? – Despite the overall increase in coverage, the proportion of political news dropped from 15 percent of all discussions of rural life in 2002 to 12 percent in 2004. This reflects heavy coverage of a major farm bill being debated in Congress during 2002. Television ran a slightly higher proportion of political stories than did print – 13 vs. 12 percent.

Neither Woeful Nor Wobegon – Few stories were framed in terms of either negative stereotypes of rural people as rednecks, hillbillies and bumpkins or positive stereotypes of rural life as a Norman Rockwell painting or Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegon, where “all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.” The theme of rural folk as life’s losers was present in only one of every 16 stories, down from one in ten in 2002. The theme of a pastoral paradise appeared in only one of every 20 stories, down from one in 12 in 2002.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how our urban national news media portrays rural America today. We examined such building blocks of news coverage as the events and issues that made news, the sources who were quoted and the opinions they expressed, as well as the descriptive language and narrative style.

Rural life was rarely associated with agriculture in the news, either in the topics that were discussed, the sources who were quoted, or the themes that ran through the stories. In the absence of any farming-related legislation before Congress, even the appeals of candidates to rural voters and values rarely involved agricultural themes.

The coverage was largely episodic, rarely contextualizing events in terms of broader qualities or issues associated with rural life. Instead, the media frequently used the term “rural” to describe areas that are becoming urbanized and are trying to preserve their rural past or atmosphere. Hence the extensive coverage of exurban counties encroaching on open countryside. This use often left implicit the substantive characteristics attached to rural conditions or lifestyles. Thus, land use issues were the most heavily covered topic.

In keeping with this emphasis on urbanization, change was frequently associated with economic development, and the voices heard in support of change were often those of businesspeople or public officials. But this kind of change was usually equated with loss. Most sources who expressed opinions either opposed changes in their communities or grudgingly accepted them as inevitable. This was particularly true of ordinary residents who were quoted, as opposed to officials or sources with some obvious interest in or connection to the change.

Thus, the media largely presented rural America as a vestige of our past facing an uncertain future, a place being buffeted by its close encounters with the physical and cultural mainstream of contemporary urban society. This tone was largely appreciative, if somewhat elegaic. But by using “rural” as a foil for “urban,” the media frequently hollowed out whatever substantive meaning might be attached to rural conditions or lifestyles. It was not associated with agriculture or countryside so much as empty space and the real or imagined qualities of small town living. In this sense rural life was often presented positively but defined negatively – not in terms of what it is, but what it has ceased to be or what it may become.



Introduction

*L*n our 2002 report we went into some detail about the process by which the news and entertainment media help to create models or frames of how we perceive and understand rural America. These models, having evolved over time, are complex and sometimes contradictory. Research presented in *Perceptions of Rural America* and conducted under Kellogg Foundation auspices in 2002 revealed four central themes that have run through a voluminous list of books, movies and TV shows: rural America is primarily agricultural, and rural America symbolizes American values, rural areas are peaceful and serene, rural areas are friendlier and safer than the rest of America.

There can be little doubt that American mass media have played a significant role in building and decorating these frames. In 2002 the Kellogg Foundation commissioned the Center for Media and Public Affairs to examine media messages about rural America. In 2004 the Foundation once again approached CMPA about updating the previous research.

In our 2004 research, we utilized the same codebook and procedures to examine how an urban national news media frames rural America today. Once again we identified the events and issues that made news as well as the sources who discuss rural America. We took our analysis further by capturing opinions about the current and future state of life in rural areas. From the previous study and other research sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation we know that ideas about rural areas are also communicated through the use of descriptive language and narrative style that produce an overall gestalt or framework for understanding rural life.



Sample and Methodology

The period of this study ran from June 1, 2004 through November 30, 2004. The sample represented major newspapers, news magazines and television newscasts. Specifically, we included all news broadcasts in the following: ABC “World News Tonight”, ABC “20/20” (all editions) ABC “Prime Time,” ABC’s “Good Morning America”, CBS “Evening News”, CBS “60 Minutes”, “60 Minutes II”, CBS “48 Hours”, CBS’s “The Early Show”, NBC “Nightly News”, NBC “Dateline” (all editions), NBC’s “The Today Show”; as well as news printed in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek*, *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*.

Following the parameters set in the original study, our sample was based on the appearance of the word “rural” within a story. Using the Lexis/Nexis service we identified over 3100 stories that used the word “rural” from the outlets selected during the study period. We removed from the sample stories about rural places in foreign countries. We also removed any duplicate stories that appeared in different editions of the same paper.

The remaining stories were examined to sort out those that contained a substantive link to rural America from those that merely mentioned the word “rural” in a non-substantive context. For a story to be coded it had to meet one of the following criteria:

- It discussed issues that faced a rural community or area (e.g., how to appeal to rural voters in the 2004 campaign, efforts to create rural jobs, debates over land use).
- It examined the impact rural life may have had on one or more individuals (e.g., how growing up in a small North Carolina mill town shaped John Edwards).
- It looked at how life differed in rural areas from urban areas (e.g., the pace or style of life, the role of religion in many rural areas, etc.).

These criteria leave us with a group of articles that substantively discuss rural areas and provide meaningful opinions and descriptions of such areas. While the sample ranges over a wide set of issues and geographic areas they are unified by their substance.

As a result of the particular shape of the 2004 Presidential campaign there were many more stories that fit our criteria. Relevant coverage of rural areas increased by 57 percent (529 vs. 337 stories). The most dramatic increase came at the *Chicago Tribune*, where coverage more than doubled (see Table 1).

Coverage also more than doubled at the *Washington Post*. The *New York Times* saw a modest increase of eight percent (92 vs. 85 stories). Coverage at *USA Today* and in the news magazines remained largely unchanged from two years ago. Coverage on TV actually

dropped in 2004 by 23 percent. This is a result of the more superficial way television used the word rural, without the elaboration necessary for the story to be included in the sample.

Table 1

Number of Stories		
News Organization	2004 Number of Stories	2002 Number of Stories
Chicago Tribune	180	76
Washington Post	173	80
New York Times	92	85
USA Today	26	25
U.S. News & World Report	4	3
Newsweek	3	4
Time	3	2
Subtotal Print	481	275
NBC	21	18
CBS	15	22
ABC	12	22
Subtotal TV	48	62
Total Stories	529	337

Topics

The topical agenda of “rural” news shows many similarities to the 2002 study, with a few significant differences. As in 2002 debates and battles over land use continued to be the most prominent area of coverage (25%). The proportion of coverage of land debates was virtually the same in 2004 as in 2002 (see Table 2). Lifestyle discussions moved up to second place with 20 percent of discussions. That represents almost a doubling of coverage since 2002 (20% vs. 11%). Coverage of crime fell by 35 percent and slipped to third place on the agenda. In 2002, the rural mailbox bomber case went on for days and generated widespread coverage across all media outlets. 2004 lacked such a riveting crime story, and no stories had the ongoing nature of the mailbox bomber.

In fourth place were economic and employment issues, which accounted for 13 percent of topical discussions in both years. In fifth place were discussions of politics in rural life. Political issues accounted for 12 percent of coverage, which was a decline from 2002 levels (15%). While the 2004 election drew attention to rural America, that did not always translate into stories about the political behavior of such regions. Coverage in 2002 was bolstered by the lobbying and discussions of the farm bill that passed during our sample period.

The remaining topical areas saw no significant changes from 2002. With six percent of discussions, environmental concerns placed sixth as they did in 2002. Questions about health and health care policy in rural America once again followed the environment with five percent of discussions. Education issues came in last with five percent of issue discussions.

Table 2

Rural News Issues (%)						
	All		TV		Print	
	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>
Land Use	25	24	21	0	26	29
Planning (16)						
Loss of Farms (1)						
Sprawl (3)						
Lifestyle	20	11	20	6	20	13
Crime	13	20	11	78	13	7
Violent (3)						
Drugs (2)						
Employment	13	13	16	9	12	14
Economic Development (3)						
Politics	12	15	13	2	12	17
Environment	6	6	6	0	6	7
Health	5	6	4	6	6	6
Education	5	4	9	0	4	5
Total	99%	99%	100%	101%	99%	98%
N	523	306	55	54	468	252

Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Table 3

Rural News Issues – Print Outlets (%)												
	New York Times		Washington Post		Chicago Tribune		USA Today		Magazines		All	
	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002
Crime	15	13	13	4	15	4	0	12	0	33	13	7
Education	3	6	4	9	4	1	11	0	8	0	4	5
Health	7	4	5	3	6	10	4	0	0	33	6	6
Lifestyle	18	13	24	16	19	5	18	29	8	22	20	13
Employment	10	30	11	10	13	12	21	12	23	0	12	14
Land Use	21	4	27	34	25	47	29	0	46	0	26	33
Politics	15	23	11	17	12	13	14	29	15	11	12	17
Environment	9	6	5	6	7	8	4	18	0	0	6	5
Total	98%	99%	100%	99%	101%	100%	101%	100%	100%	99%	99%	100%
N	98	47	159	96	170	83	28	17	13	9	468	275

Land Use

As in 2002, land use discussions were the special province of the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*, which combined to present over three fifths of all discussions. In both papers, discussions focused on the counties ringing the metropolitan areas that were quickly being consumed by spreading suburbs. While the *New York Times* featured less coverage, the tone and substance of coverage was much like the *Post* and *Tribune*. Television offered limited coverage of land use issues, and what did occur was often a part of election reports on changing demographics and lifestyles in rural areas. Land use coverage in *USA Today* and the news magazines was similar to television in amount and scope.

As in 2002 there was relatively little discussion of sprawl, but rather a focus on how to preserve rural or semi-rural areas from encroaching development. This excerpt from the *Chicago Tribune* was typical of the coverage.

The Kane County Board is scheduled to vote next week on a resolution urging Elgin to resist expanding south and west into Campton Township to accommodate a large residential and commercial development.

The board's Executive Committee agreed Wednesday to add the resolution to the County Board agenda, with the proviso that before a vote Elgin officials be encouraged to make their case for annexing and developing more than 700 acres astride Campton's border with Plato Township.

Phil Bus, director of Kane's Development Department, said he could not recall a similar resolution opposing annexation by a municipality ever coming before the board.

The resolution was brought to the Executive Committee by board member Barbara Wojnicki, a Republican from Campton Township who argued that the dense development plan Elgin is considering is severely out of character with the more rural community.

"It is absolutely developer-driven," Wojnicki said of the proposed annexation and plan for the 778-acre area, which lies mostly south of McDonald Road, both east and west of Corron Road. About 75 acres of the total are in Plato Township.

The proposed site, where more than 1,000 residences and 56 acres of commercial development are being planned, abuts the historic Corron Farm, portions of which are owned by the Kane County Forest Preserve District and Campton Township, which bought the land to preserve as open space. (9/9/04)

All in all, there was little new in these discussions from 2002. There were occasional unusual pieces, such as a *New York Times* report on how the city's Department of Environmental Protection is becoming one of the largest landholders in outlying counties to protect its watershed.

Want to grow hay, log trees or tap maple syrup?
Could be New York City is the place to start.

Far from its skyscrapers and subways, the city has begun leasing hundreds of acres of farmland and forests around its drinking water reservoirs in the Catskills and the Hudson Valley for traditional rural uses. City officials are even considering marketing a line of maple candies, with the label "made in the New York City watershed."

To promote the expanded usage, the city's Department of Environmental Protection, which oversees activities in the vast watershed, has dispatched its employees to town hall meetings and country fairs around the state. Last week, for instance, they set up a booth at the Ulster County Fair in New Paltz, handing out refrigerator magnets with scenic vistas of the reservoirs and fly swatters emblazoned with the D.E.P. logo.

New York City has been forced to assume the role of country squire at a time when it is rapidly becoming one of the largest landowners in upstate New York. It owns more than 103,000 acres of prime undeveloped land in the watershed, roughly half the size of the entire city. Of that, 58,639 acres were purchased since 1997, as part of a landmark agreement with the federal and state governments and the upstate communities. (8/9/04)

USA Today offered a piece on how development pressures are even weighing on Molokai, Hawaii as rural residents fight to keep out cruise ships and other tourist-oriented development.

Lifestyle Issues

This category covers a wide range of discussions, from the pleasures of rural living to local eccentrics to the values and attitudes of residents. Coverage in this area in 2004 was different in tone from what we encountered in 2002. Largely gone from coverage were accounts of local eccentrics whose behavior appeared odd and sometimes off-putting to neighbors and authorities. Also dramatically reduced were travel pieces that sought out picturesque, quaint or charming rural retreats for harried urban readers. These two excerpts are typical of this category.

There was a time when a chicken could cross the road, for whatever reason, without much ado in northern Loudoun County. Not so today.

Residents of Taylorstown, a rural community not far from the Maryland border, have reported several fowl fatalities recently. Ever since a gravel section of the main road that runs through the town was paved, residents say cars have been zooming down the steep hills and taking curves too fast.

Lately, feathers have been flying. A chicken named Oreo (his head was black and white) was found dead in the road. An especially tame bird was hit while purportedly stalking cicadas, according to its owner. And the president of the community association has lost three chickens in the past month.

Now, a Taylorstown resident is spearheading an effort to erect chicken-crossing signs. To her way of thinking, the signs could spare some chickens and slow the traffic that has so riled the community. (Washington Post 7/6/04)

Tweaking his stock car a few minutes before the first race of the night, Randy Embrey peered through a crowd of racers to one of his harshest competitors – his father.

Soon, the two would be battling each other and 20 more drivers around a quarter-mile oval dirt track before a crowd of 1,500 fans at Boone Speedway. Set amid cornfields, shoulder high this time of year, the speedway has attracted people from all over Boone County. Many of the fans personally know many of the racers and the mechanics and probably a few of the guys selling tenderloins and beer, too.

“That’s how it goes,” said Embrey, 41, a mechanic who lives near Boone, where there are really not enough people to race someone you don’t know. “I’ve beat him; he’s beat me. . . . There’s competition, but when it comes down to it, I still want to be friends with everybody.”

It is a midwestern, friendly approach to competition. That is the way it is here in Iowa, where dirt-track racing has become one of this state’s most popular sports, and everybody knows everybody.

It is a poor man’s version of NASCAR: unpaved tracks, cars made from junked frames, wrecks pulled off the course by hulking green and yellow John Deere tractors.

And people really like it. In rural Iowa, more than 50 new tracks have sprung up in the past decade – all but one is unpaved – and that is far more than other midwestern states, said Brett Root, a vice president with the International Motor Contest Association in Iowa.

Each summer, thousands of rural Iowans crowd grandstands to watch their neighbors and friends speed around short, muddy tracks. As many as 200 cars can show up for each race. The air smells of gasoline, oil and cigarette smoke. Speeding cars – almost always made from parts bought at a scrap yard – slam together on the track and fly apart.

“Around here, this is the only thing we can do, the only sport that can involve a lot of people,” said Larry Nefzger, 58, who owns a tiny NASCAR merchandise shop in West Union, Iowa. “Even though everybody knows someone who’s racing, nobody knows who won the races after an hour of drinking. A lot of [the excitement about racing] is that the week’s over from work, they want to see their friends, they like the loud noise, they like the speed.”
(Washington Post 8/23/04)

Crime

In our 2002 research crime stood out as a dominant note in the coverage. This was particularly true on television, where more than three quarters of all stories focused on crime. In 2004, television coverage of crime dropped to just 11 percent. Without the sort of ongoing crime story presented by the mailbox bomber, 2004 offered far less crime news. Coverage was also more scattered, reflecting the local nature of most crimes. CBS *Evening News* report on a Wisconsin shooting was typical of violent crime reports.

DAN RATHER, anchor: The suspect in a shooting Sunday in rural Wisconsin that killed six deer hunters and wounded two others told investigators one of the victims fired the first shot.

Laotian immigrant Chai Vang of St. Paul, Minnesota, has not yet been charged in the case, but a judge today ordered him held on \$2 1/2 million bail.
(11/23/04)

Apart from such violent offenses, newspapers also drew some attention to trends in rural crime, as in this *New York Times* piece.

Country living for the Nilmeier family has gotten a lot less charming these days.

“Now I can get a clear shot from my bedroom window at whoever is ripping me off,” said Keith Nilmeier, pointing to a 450-watt industrial light

mounted atop a wooden pole near his barn. And "I don't come to the door at night without a .357 Magnum in hand."

Mr. Nilmeier has yet to fire a shot since putting up his new night light, but thieves be warned: this fourth-generation farmer has had enough. In the last year or two, a pair of big rigs, three pickups and an assortment of tools have been stolen from him. And most recently, in the crime du jour of rural California, hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel have been siphoned from a storage tank in his peach orchard.

While drivers in Los Angeles and San Francisco bemoan some of the highest gasoline prices in the country, farmers like Mr. Nilmeier, in the big agricultural expanse in between, are striving to keep their tractors and harvesters running at all.

"Right now diesel is my highest cost aside from labor," Mr. Nilmeier said. "It is even higher than insurance."

Diesel fuel stealing has quadrupled in the last several months here in Fresno County and in some other parts of the Central Valley, the nation's richest farming region and a land of plenty for thieves cashing in on spiraling prices. The price of diesel in California has risen 25 percent in the last year, according to the Department of Energy, turning it into the hottest black-market agricultural commodity around. Diesel here is now consistently over \$2 a gallon, most recently 34 cents above the national average. (6/22/04)

Violent and property crimes made news as might be expected, but the media continued to cover the problem of drugs in rural communities. The amount of coverage was identical to 2002 levels (2%), but the tone was somewhat more positive. While coverage in 2002 tended to focus on the lure of drugs in poor rural areas with a lack of other opportunities, in 2004 drugs were a problem being fought by rural communities. This was particularly true when drugs were connected to the influx of urban gangs to rural areas.

. . . Virginia's Shenandoah Valley is isolated in its affair with methamphetamine, a powerfully addictive drug made with ingredients that sound less-than-intoxicating, such as battery acid, cold medicine and drain cleaner.

In the past five years, meth has become the No. 1 drug seized along the north-south corridor between Winchester and Harrisonburg, a belt that parallels Skyline Drive as well as Interstate 81. What stumps local authorities is that the deadly wave of meth, which began rolling east from Mexico and California in the 1990s, seems to have stopped – or paused – in central Virginia.

Ninety-five percent of methamphetamine seized this year in Virginia was found in the northern Shenandoah Valley, between Frederick County and Rockingham County. The majority of methamphetamine seized from West Virginia to Maryland was also found along that same, 70-mile belt, local and federal drug officials say. . . .

The amount of methamphetamine seized in the Shenandoah Valley – from Frederick to Rockingham counties – has climbed by more than 2,000 grams between 2000 and last year. Through last month, authorities in that region seized nearly 6,000 grams, or 94 percent of the drug found in Virginia.

They cite the beginning of gang activity in the valley – in a few cases connected to drugs – and the addictiveness of meth, which costs about the same as crack but keeps users high and awake for days at a time.

“I’m sure folks in the Midwest didn’t think it would spread, either. It’s naive to suggest it’s a regional problem,” said state Sen. Mark Obenshain (R-Harrisonburg), noting that state and local police have found dozens of meth labs, while other states have hundreds. . . .

[Nancy Haden who runs a treatment program at the Northwest Community Services Board in Front Royal] says the “old drug” has come roaring back. She disagrees with officials who say there aren’t many people making their own. “I’d be surprised if we don’t have hundreds of meth labs,” she said. The relapse rate with meth is particularly high, she said.

“It’s very rural and very underground,” Haden said. “It’s kind of like, you don’t hear about people making hard liquor anymore, but they still do.” (Washington Post 8/22/04)

Employment and Economic Issues

The level of attention to employment and economic issue remained stable between 2002 and 2004 at 13 percent. The *Chicago Tribune* offered the most coverage (33% or coverage) followed by the *Washington Post* (25%) and *New York Times* (15%). Coverage of this area appeared to be far more upbeat than in 2002. Three quarters of discussions this year focused on farm and non-farm employment and redevelopment efforts, versus one quarter about unemployment, loss of family farms and emigration from rural areas. *USA Today* offered this appraisal of newly minted micropolitan areas:

Amid the corn and wheat fields of southwestern Ohio lies Wilmington Air Park, an Airborne Express package-sorting hub that has generated 6,500 jobs and turned the farming community surrounding it into one of the fastest-growing areas in the state.

Now that DHL has taken over Airborne, an additional 600 full-time jobs and 300 part-time jobs are coming to Clinton County. A 1 million-square-foot distribution center is on the way.

“But we still raise a lot of corn, soybean, wheat and hogs,” says Roger Bennett, a farmer and local official.

That’s why Clinton County describes itself as a place “where rural and urban ideas mix.” As its population nears 41,000, up 16% since 1990, the

county “typifies a growing community answering the challenges of merging rural and urban ideals with mutual respect and the core values of yesterday,” the county’s official Web site says.

Counties such as Clinton that are too urban to be rural but too small to be metropolitan now have an official designation from the federal government: “micropolitan” areas. Once lost in the vast rural expanse beyond the nation’s metropolitan areas, these “mini-metros” with rural sensibilities now stand on their own as a quantifiable slice of small-town America. (11/23/04)

The *Washington Post* reported on a successful firm with plants scattered across rural America.

These days, when even technology companies are outsourcing sophisticated software work overseas, it’s unusual to find a manufacturer of something as prosaic as kitchen cabinets making them almost entirely in the United States.

That’s the case at American Woodmark Corp. in Winchester, which has built almost a plant a year in this country since 1997.

Most big U.S. cabinetmakers get at least some of their wooden parts from China, then assemble them here, but not Woodmark, said Kent B. Guichard, executive vice president.

Guichard said his company is one of the three largest cabinetmakers in the nation. The only parts that come from abroad are metal hardware such as hinges and handles, he said.

Woodmark is soon to have 14 plants in rural towns like Berryville, Va., and Hazard, Ky., near where it gets its wood and where wages tend to be low. When you add the cost of shipping Chinese goods, Woodmark says it can compete on cost and get the products to customers faster. (6/14/04)

Politics

The political discussions of 2004 were very different from those of 2002 as a result of the election campaign. Discussion in 2002 was dominated by the farm bill, while 2004 discussions focused on rural voting behaviors, candidate strategies to appeal to rural voters, and various ballot measures that directly affected rural areas. NBC *Nightly News* offered a typical report on how the campaign was playing in rural America.

JOHN SEIGENTHALER, anchor: Now to decision 2004 and the race for president. As John Kerry hit the road this weekend looking for votes, it appears it may be close to a decision on his running mate, while the Republican running mate, Vice President Dick Cheney, began a campaign swing through several key states that could be pivotal in this election. NBC’s Carl Quintanilla reports.

CARL QUINTANILLA reporting: In America's swing states today, the battle of the bus tours. John Kerry in Iowa spinning a homespun image – sportsman, a friend of farmers; while Dick Cheney courted voters in rural Ohio.

Vice President DICK CHENEY: This is a great crowd.

QUINTANILLA: Smalltown America hosting a high-stakes political game with fierce attacks on both sides.

Vice Pres. DICK CHENEY: On issue after issue, the choice on November 2nd is very clear. It's a choice between President Bush's hope and optimism and Senator Kerry's pessimism.

Senator JOHN KERRY: They got to be scared. Either that or the president doesn't have a record to run on, he has a record to run away from, so they attack me.

QUINTANILLA: In 2000 George Bush won the rural vote by a 22 percent margin, but polls show Kerry has cut that lead by more than half.

Ms. ANNA GREENBERG (Democratic Leader): What you've seen in rural areas is a real shift around – around the war primarily. And there is a great concern about how the war's being handled. A great number of the soldiers in Iraq are from rural areas.

QUINTANILLA: That and other rural issues, like manufacturing job losses, have given Kerry's bus tour some resonance out here. So does the continued buzz surrounding his vice presidential pick expected within days. But few expect Kerry to win the rural vote outright. His Boston image is hard to shake. Today the co-owner of this dairy farm introduced him as an Eastern man.

Sen. KERRY: We actually have farms in Massachusetts.

QUINTANILLA: Cheney's bus tour, observers say, is aimed at Republican strongholds. The Brookings Institution's Stephen Hess.

Mr. STEPHEN HESS: When a race is going to be this close—or appears this close at this time, you don't let – leave anything to chance.

QUINTANILLA: A lesson both campaigns are putting to work because this year some of the smallest towns in America may hold the most important votes. Carl Quintanilla, NBC News, Independence, Wisconsin.

Other stories explored how the different value systems of rural areas were affecting candidate messages and strategies.

Churches—and bars. Wisconsin has been carried by a Democrat in every presidential election since 1984, but it's not a classic “blue” state. Home to two liberal senators, the state's legislature is dominated by conservative Republicans. Wisconsinites tend to vote for person over party and have a soft spot for mavericks like Russ Feingold, the only U.S. senator to oppose the Patriot Act. ...

Unlike most rural areas nationwide, the farm-rich counties of southwestern Wisconsin went to Gore by wide margins in 2000. After skipping the region in 2000, Bush toured it by bus earlier this year. But political experts say that

unlike in many other rural areas, voters there are less likely to be driven by social issues like abortion and gay marriage and less likely to vote Republican. “Go to a rural area of Ohio or Missouri and you’ll have four churches,” says University of Wisconsin political scientist Ken Goldstein. “Go to a rural area of Wisconsin and you’ll have four bars.”

For most Wisconsin voters, though, issues like national security and healthcare trump agricultural concerns. After watching the vice presidential debate last week at Badger High School in rural Lake Geneva, more than two dozen participants argued passionately over whether the Iraq war was justified. “Whoever wins is going to inherit a much divided country,” says Scott Yager, a management consultant who organized the event. “It’s pretty scary.” (U.S. News & World Report 10/18/04)

SITTING among the prized huckleberry jams and manicured hogs of the Western Montana State Fair, the lone representative of the Democratic Party tried to blend in.

With his jeans and rawhide face, Geoff Badenoch certainly looked the part. And as a native of Glendive, in the wind-seared ranching country of eastern Montana, he talked the part.

But there was the matter of that scarlet D attached to his booth. It made him stick out like someone eating corn on the cob with a fork.

As one of the poorest states in the country with a long tradition of scrappy unionism, Montana seems like it could be a Democratic stronghold. But it’s not. Despite a populist roar, former Vice President Al Gore lost this state by nearly two to one in the last presidential election, and Republicans expect President Bush to win big again this year.

A big reason is the three G’s in the Republican culture-wars deck – gays, guns and God – the issues that resonate in the heartland and overshadow economic issues that Democrats say should move poor and lower-middle-class voters here into their camp.

The liberal writer Thomas Frank makes such a case in his recent best-selling polemic, “What’s the Matter With Kansas?” In return for voting Republican by a wide margin, people in the poorest counties in the Great Plains get nothing economically, he argues, because no matter what the Republicans promise, their fiscal policies favor the rich.

The Great Backlash, as Mr. Frank calls it, “is a working-class movement that has done incalculable, historic harm to working-class people.”

Such arguments, while much debated, are being taken to heart this campaign season by Democratic politicians in rural, low-wage, red-state America – even as the focus of the Democratic presidential campaign of Senator John Kerry remains elsewhere, on middle-of-the-road voters in swing states. (New York Times 8/22/04)

Environment

As we discovered in 2002, environmental issues are rarely discussed in isolation from the impact of development on habitats, water supplies and air quality. The majority of environmental discussions in 2004 followed a similar path, linking the environment almost inseparably to land use planning. The *Chicago Tribune* offered an unusual piece when it examined how attempts to protect an endangered mouse have gone awry.

Amy and Steve LeSatz want to be able to teach their clients the finer points of riding and roping without having to haul their animals 25 miles to the nearest public indoor arena whenever the weather turns miserable.

But the LeSatzes aren't able to build their own riding arena. The only decent site on their property in southeastern Wyoming lies within 300 feet of Chugwater Creek, and building there is far too expensive because of Endangered Species Act restrictions intended to protect the Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

"The mouse that doesn't exist," Amy LeSatz said dryly.

After six years of regulations and restrictions that have cost builders, local governments and landowners on the western fringe of the Great Plains as much as \$100 million, by some estimates, new research suggests the Preble's mouse never existed. Instead, it seems to be genetically identical to the Bear Lodge meadow jumping mouse, considered common enough not to need protection. . . .

In rural areas, protecting the mouse has meant telling ranchers they cannot clear weeds out of their irrigation canals, reducing the amount of water that gets to their hay fields in the middle of summer. They are also restricted in how they can allow their animals to graze along streams, another regulation the LeSatzes must work around.

On top of that, the mouse has blocked the construction of reservoirs amid a five-year drought in the Rocky Mountains.

"The bottom line is, it has been a wonderful tool for environmental groups to try to stop things," said Kent Holsinger, attorney for Coloradans for Water Conservation and Development, which has asked the Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the mouse from federal protection.

Environmental groups are calling for Endangered Species Act protection for the Bear Lodge mouse.

The Preble's mouse was established as a subspecies by a study 50 years ago that was cited in the 1998 decision to declare it threatened. (*Chicago Tribune* 6/13/04)



Health Care

Health care discussions were affected slightly by the presidential campaign, as the Kerry/Edwards campaign tried to make health care an issue. While this raised the issue overall, campaign discussions were only rarely linked to rural areas. More common were laments about the lack of health services in some of the poorest rural areas.

Some volunteers who have participated in medical missions in developing nations compared the area's health profile with what they have seen in the world's poorest countries.

"It's sadder to me the conditions we see here because we have [good] health care here," said Audrey Snyder, an associate professor at the University of Virginia School of Nursing who has also volunteered in El Salvador and India.

Health professionals pointed to preventable diseases and conditions, such as tooth loss and cervical cancer, as evidence of the disparity in services available to rural populations relative to those in more urban settings.

"It's because they don't have that economic margin to make routine care or preventive care choices," Dalton said.

"They don't have an advocate. They don't have a Ryan White," said Dickinson, referring to the Indiana teenager for whom HIV/AIDS health care legislation is named. "But, they're not the complaining type."

At last year's clinic, a doctor found that a woman had cervical cancer. She was treated at a nearby hospital.

"In the U.S., there should not be anyone who gets it," said Kathie Hullfish, a University of Virginia assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology. (Washington Post 7/25/04)

Some of the more interesting pieces explored ways in which rural communities are coping with health care issues. The *Washington Post* reported on an unusual and successful medical school in Appalachia.

The Pikeville medical school, established in 1996 with \$10 million from private corporate and government donors, has 270 students, with 180 more going through three-year residency programs.

Osteopaths undergo training similar to that of medical doctors, and like M.D.s can prescribe drugs and perform surgeries. Osteopathic medicine places a special emphasis on the interrelationship of organs and body systems.

Graduates are not only encouraged to work in communities with few doctors, but are expected to.

Manning said starting a medical school in the region was a great idea. "Actually being trained here, I think, prepares us better to practice here," he said. "Out of the doctors coming out of the Pikeville residency program, we're all staying somewhere out here in Appalachia."

Strosnider said the medical school would not fulfill its directive if most graduates did not open offices in the mountains.

“Our mission was to try to get physicians who would be willing to practice in rural Appalachia,” Strosnider said. “That’s what they’re doing. Most of them were picked from this area, trained in this area and did residencies in this area. They speak the language. They know the needs. That’s the ideal family practice physician.” (8/29/04)

Education

Education continued to be the least covered area in rural reporting with only five percent of discussions. The most widely covered education story of the year was the E-rate program that helps schools connect to the Internet. The program has been plagued by allegations of abuse and was temporarily suspended while education officials investigated and promulgated a reform plan. As evidenced by this *USA Today* piece, however, not all news about the E-rate program was bad.

Cameron Independent School District is one of those tiny, rural school systems where the superintendent is named Maxie and he only has four schools to worry about.

Eighty miles northeast of Austin, Cameron has only 1,682 students. But if you paired up kids and computers, there’d nearly be one for every other student – higher than in most wealthy suburban districts. This fall, every classroom in town will get a 42-inch plasma-screen TV bolted to the wall so teachers can surf the Web with students, show Powerpoint presentations or just watch a DVD.

The Internet connection in every classroom comes compliments of the federal E-rate program, says Steele Cooley, the district’s technology director. And while it can’t be used for computers or TVs – just for the infrastructure necessary to get schools wired to the Web – E-rate frees up “tens of thousands of dollars each year,” Cooley says, allowing schools to use tax receipts for classroom gear. “It’s been an ongoing, driving force in our technology.”

Despite its problems – including waste, fraud and mismanagement, according to federal investigators, who plan a series of hearings on Capitol Hill next week – E-rate has been a dazzling success in thousands of public schools and libraries nationwide, advocates say. (6/9/04)

Another *USA Today* piece picked up on some of the experiments in education that are going on around the country.

Begun as a money-saving experiment in 1982, the four-day school week in the mountain towns of Granby, Fraser and Grand Lake started out as “a shock,”

says Superintendent Robb Rankin. But now, Rankin says, “it fits in with the lifestyle” of communities that cherish outdoor recreation and extra family time.

A small but growing number of districts across the country are switching to a four-day school schedule, mainly because of financial pressures. A survey conducted last year by the National School Boards Association found 108 districts in 10 states had made the switch.

“It is typically a rural cost-saving measure,” says Kathy Christie of the Education Commission of the States, an education policy center headquartered in Denver. (6/14/04)

Sources

Repeating our 2002 work, we again identified all sources who were quoted or interviewed in stories to find out whose voices were being heard on rural issues. Table 4 shows the distribution of sources in print and television outlets. Once again ordinary citizens of rural America led the list with 22 percent of citations. They were followed by officials of local government (18%), state government (12%), the federal government (8%), and business leaders (8%). This distribution is close to that found in 2002, but local and state government sources did get a boost. The higher profile was likely the result of land use debates that increasingly drew local and even state officials into the fray.

In 2004 coverage identified citizens of rural America were used in similar proportions in both TV and print. That marks a shift from 2002 when ordinary citizens were more rarely cited in print. This is most likely the result of campaign trail reports that gave ordinary citizens had an opportunity to express their opinions. Local and state government sources saw increases in representation in both TV and print, although the increase was somewhat greater on television. Federal government sources were less common than in 2002, with the biggest declines occurring in print (9% vs. 16%). With the reporting taking on a more local flavor, the role of federal officials was reduced. Also without the farm bill debate, congressional sources were far less evident. In fact, without the election campaign, the level of federal involvement might have been even lower.

Table 4

Rural News Sources (%)						
	All		TV		Print	
	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>
Citizens	22	16	24	31	21	13
City/County Government Police (4)	18	14	8	3	19	16
State Government	12	9	7	4	13	10
US Government Congress (3)	8	14	4	3	9	16
Business	8	10	10	2	8	11
Experts	7	6	12	3	6	6
Activists Environmental (2)	7	5	5	1	7	6
Health Workers	2	3	7	4	2	3
Educators	3	3	7	3	2	3
Other	13	21	16	22	13	20
Total	100%	101%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	2484	1201	242	186	2242	1015

Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding error

As can be seen in Table 5, the role of agricultural sources was reduced from already low levels in the 2004 coverage. Agriculture experts appeared only eight times versus 22 in 2002. Department of Agriculture sources were more numerous in 2004 (19 vs. 3 citations). The increase in USDA sources was not enough to offset other declines, however, and agricultural sources dropped to one percent of all citations.

Table 5

Agricultural Related Sources		
Source Type	Number of Sources	
	2004	2002
Experts	8	22
Department of Agriculture	19	3
Farm/Agriculture Groups	0	6
Total	27	31
Percent of Shares	1%	2.6%

Appraisals of Change

In addition to the basic elements of topics and sources, news reports contain opinions and speculation about policies or activities. Based on our findings in 2002, we once again examined how sources and reporters saw change in rural America. Did sources or reporters welcome change as beneficial to rural areas? Were they resigned to the inevitability of change? Or did they actually oppose it?

Debate over change increased threefold from 2002 levels (129 opinions vs.37). As can be seen in Table 6, there was a dramatic increase in opinions about change from two years ago.

Table 6

Rural News Issues – Print Outlets (%)										
	Support		Accept		Oppose		Total		N	
	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>
Residents	7	25	36	33	57	42	100%	100%	58	24
Others	25	54	29	16	46	40	100%	100%	71	13
Total	25	35	29	27	46	38	100%	100%	129	37

While 2002 coverage saw opinions roughly split in thirds, 2004 coverage featured a clear plurality opposing change. Opinions opposing change went from 38 percent to 46 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, sources supporting change dropped from 35 percent to 25 percent.

The shift was most pronounced among ordinary citizens or residents, where support for change dropped precipitously from 25 percent to seven percent. Opposition to change rose fifteen points to a solid majority of 75 percent. Among all other sources (which includes local government officials and business leaders) opinion shifted from a majority supporting change to a plurality opposing it. In 2004 only a quarter (25%) of these sources supported change, while 46 percent now opposed change. Change was supported by four out of five sources (79%) associated with business and economic development, one out of three government officials (33%), and only one out of fourteen ordinary residents (7%) whose opinions were cited.

Both of these shifts were linked to the increasingly fractious debates over land use in many exurban areas. As challenges to land use regulations came under judicial and political challenge, residents and their elected officials became more emphatic in their opposition. These *Chicago Tribune* pieces reflect low-key opposition to change, although both show the sense of dread many rural residents expressed about change.

Smack dab in the middle of 3,300 acres of woods and fields just south of the Wisconsin state line, a sign advertises the sale of six, 5-acre subdivision lots, a sure indicator the invasion has begun.

Just as surely, concerns are rising over changes to the rural character of one of the last pastoral areas in Lake County.

“They’re coming,” said a worried Marilyn Carney, who has lived on her five acres on Crawford Road for 25 years. “And we are afraid that the beauty is going to be gone.” (6/15/04)

But on the remaining acres north of Fort Collins, they endure the torment of new “exurban” commuters who zoom past on Owl Canyon Road, a narrow side road that connects Interstate Highway 25 with U.S. 287.

They knew the development of 35-acre ranchettes around Weaver Ranch would bring traffic, Weaver said, “but we didn’t know it would be the nightmare it has become.” (7/25/04)

But not all opponents were so understated. This was particularly true where development pressure ran up against smart growth restrictions in exurban counties to create a highly charged debate. These two quotes from the Washington Post reflect the tension between rural leaders and newcomers.

But with Loudoun’s breakneck growth, and rapid home building just over the Blue Ridge mountains in West Virginia, [Mayor Roger] Vance said his town is facing a historic onslaught.

“What is threatened here is really the viability of the town, its existence,” he said. . . .

The scholarly Vance, who edits history magazines for a living, sounds like a firebrand when he declares that the town can’t take it anymore.

“We want to reclaim this town,” he said. “It’s not Route 9 for us. It’s Charles Town Pike for us, and our main street, and we’re going to reclaim it. We don’t want to be the doormat for everyone anymore.” (8/18/04)

Loudoun Supervisor Sarah R. Kurtz (D-Catoctin) declares the town “besieged” and resists growing pressure to widen the roadway. Asked how she would respond to the West Virginians who will be bottlenecked if she succeeds in keeping Route 9 two lanes, Kurtz responded with a question.

“Do I demolish a historical town for your commute? You have a choice to live anywhere you want. If this is what you chose, this traffic in Hillsboro is what you’ll encounter.” (8/9/04)

Those sources and reporters who lamented the changes to rural areas often sounded very similar regardless of their geographic region. For instance, a Chicago Tribune reporter observed:

Whether a greatly increased population is good or evil is much debated these days in this county 50 miles southwest of Chicago. Will it bring jobs and restaurants and things to do that might keep the young people from leaving, while at the same time giving a needed boost to the local economy? Likely yes. Will it put great pressure on the schools and roads and taxpayers and the traditional ways of life? Again, yes.

What can't be argued, though, is its inevitability. Indeed, something is coming, something big. (Chicago Tribune 7/15/04)

Halfway across the country in Loudoun county Virginia, a lifelong resident who is also the major shareholder in the county's main bank expressed a similar mix of views.

West cringes as she ponders the look-alike townhouse developments that have taken over huge tracts of farmland in Loudoun County. . . .

"They are awfully ugly," she said in the back yard of her 170-year-old stone house, overlooking green pastureland and the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. . . .

"It's one of those things. I mean, there's no way I can control the growth, is what I'm really saying," West said. "I mean, the growth is already done by the time the bank comes in" to open branches.

She's talking a bit faster now. "We don't make the people build houses. We are just there to serve after they have built the houses. I mean, once they are there, you can't let people starve. They have to find a place to put their money." (Washington Post 8/29/04)



Frames

The final part of our analysis of rural news moves beyond the individual components of news stories to examine the frames they provide to readers and viewers. A frame is a conceptual framework the story offers to help organize the information provided to the reader. Frames emerge from an interplay of issue discussions, opinions and the use of descriptive language. Not all stories include a pertinent frame, and some types of stories are more likely to include framing than others. For instance, short news summaries are much less likely to frame rural news than are lengthy feature stories in the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*.

In developing this analysis in 2002, we were informed by the research conducted for *Perceptions of Rural America* and our own preliminary analysis of news content. From that research we identified three relevant frames in rural news – an agricultural or farming context, the notion of rural life as backward or empty, and the view of rural areas as quaint or charming. Our analysis of these frames emerged from the aggregation of several distinct and reliably identifiable elements in each story. In this way, our analysis moves beyond merely cataloguing individual story to include more abstract and wholistic features. We discuss the substance and frequency of these frames at length below.

The first frame linked “rural” with an agricultural or farmstead lifestyle. To identify this frame in the initial 2002 study, we combined two distinct measures. Issue discussions of the farm bill, loss of family farms and farm-based employment were combined with the use of descriptive language like “agricultural” and “farming” to describe rural places. To replicate that work in 2004 we combined the same items, although the farm bill was no longer a significant issue in the news.

The second frame we developed in the 2002 research captured presentations of rural areas as the domain of losers, filled with hillbillies who have an impoverished or backwards lifestyle. In 2004 we once again identified this frame by discussions of domestic violence and unusual crimes. These issue discussions were combined with discussions of poor living conditions and the use of descriptive language like “redneck,” “hillbilly,” “bumpkins,” “hardscrabble,” or “poor” to describe rural peoples or their living conditions.

The final theme was the most abstract and symbol-laden. We looked for indications that rural America is a remnant of an idealized past, as expressed in Norman Rockwell paintings, Currier & Ives prints and Garrison Keillor’s stories of Lake Wobegon – the whimsical fictional town where “all the children are above average.” Once again we followed the 2002 procedures to find indicators of this frame. We combined issue discussions of local eccentrics (who were neither criminal or dangerous) and those of rural

areas as a retreat from urban life with the use of descriptive terms like “pastoral,” “picturesque,” “quiet,” “sleepy,” “quaint,” etc.

Table 7 shows the results of this examination of rural frames. The most striking change from two years ago is a marked decline in the amount of framing identified. In both absolute and proportional terms, there were fewer stories that relied on one or more of these three frames.

Table 7

Combined Number of Frames				
News Organization	Number		Frames Per 100 Stories	
	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2002</i>
All TV	3	6	6	10
New York Times	18	57	19	67
Washington Post	29	17	17	21
Chicago Tribune	33	16	18	21
USA Today	3	9	12	36
News Magazines	2	7	20	78
Subtotal Print	(85)	(106)	(18)	(39)
Total	88	112	17	33

Framing dropped most significantly at the *New York Times* where it declined to 19 frames per 100 stories from 67 per 100 in 2002. The newsmagazines showed a similar decline in the framing rate, but the number of stories in both years was very small. *USA Today* was also less likely to invoke a frame, even though the number of stories was virtually the same between the two samples. There were small declines in the amount of framing at the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*, although this may have been a function of the larger number of stories in 2004. Also in 2004, the framing rate at the major newspapers was very similar with the exception of *USA Today*.

Agricultural Frame

The agricultural frame seems the most germane to the coverage. The incidence of this frame is shown in Table 8. Use of this frame was down by 42 percent from 2002 levels as part of a general trend away from framing the news in these terms. This decline was found in all outlets except television, where the number of instances rose from one to two.

Table 8

Agricultural Frame								
News Organizations	Present		Absent		Total		Frames Per 100 Stories	
	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002
All TV	2	1	46	61	48	62	4	1
New York Times	6	27	86	58	92	85	6	32
Washington Post	10	10	163	70	173	80	6	12
USA Today	1	5	25	20	26	25	4	20
Chicago Tribune	13	6	167	70	180	76	7	80
News Magazines	0	4	10	5	10	9	0	44
Subtotal Print	(29)	(52)	(451)	(223)	(481)	(275)	(6)	(19)
Total Stories	31	53	497	284	529	337	6	16

This piece from the Chicago Tribune, while more upbeat than others, is typical in its agricultural focus.

Glen and Kim Fritzler tried all the conventional tricks to save their family farm.

They planted onions instead of corn because they promised higher returns. They repaired their old tractors, instead of buying new ones, to reduce their expenses. And they borrowed money from the bank, and then borrowed some more.

None of their ideas worked. So five years ago, on the verge of bankruptcy, the Fritzlers decided to try something unconventional: They cut a maze in a cornfield in the shape of the Denver Broncos' logo.

"We got to the point where the bank was looking at us very seriously, and we were given the option to try something new or get out of farming," said

Glen Fritzler, 47, a third-generation farmer who has a commanding view of the Rocky Mountains. "It was terrifying."

The corn maze ended up on the front page of the Rocky Mountain News, and the number of paying visitors at the Fritzlers' maze has increased steadily. This year customers are paying up to \$8 a person to walk through a likeness of the famous flag raising at Iwo Jima.

Fritzler was on the front end of a corn maze craze that has swept over America's countryside, part of a larger trend in which farmers are trying unconventional steps to save their farms during a time of intense consolidation in agriculture.

While some farmers are getting bigger to remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace, a growing number have moved in the opposite direction, focusing on niche markets in their own communities that appeal directly to consumers.

The trend has fueled an explosive growth of farmer's markets, U-pick farms and specialty farming from organic farms to emu ranches. (10/4/04)

A *New York Times* book review strikes a more ominous note while framing rural news in distinctly agrarian terms.

THE FATE OF FAMILY FARMING

Variations on an American Idea.

By Ronald Jager.

244 pp. University Press of New England. \$26.

I LOVE food. I know nothing about farming. That most Americans would put these two sentences together shows how divorced we now are from our rural heritage. We might know a good tomato when we see one – but we have very little idea where it comes from. What's worse is that our children may not even recognize a good tomato – or like it. Too much juice, too much flavor, too many spots. Today, food is cheap (prices have been dropping since 1947), fresh (in its newly expanded definition, fresh only means it doesn't come out of a can – though it might have come out of the ground in New Zealand weeks earlier) and abundant (thanks to the ever more powerful agribusiness). But it isn't necessarily good, or good for us.

To further complicate matters, as Ronald Jager relates in "The Fate of Family Farming," we are in the midst of a national malaise, which he traces not only to our alienation from the land but to our collective irresponsibility in sustaining a culture that has made it impossible to have a significant population of farmers thriving among us. For a book that doesn't venture more than a couple of hundred miles from the writer's home in New Hampshire, "The Fate of Family Farming" covers a lot of ground. This is an ambitious work with a moral imperative. Jager lets the agrarian writer Louis Bromfield state it: the farmer is "the fundamental citizen of any community, state or nation." . . .

These days you have to make a distinction between the real farmers and the factory owners. Factory food is homogenized, tasteless and comes from animals raised in sickeningly brutal conditions. Today, 1 percent of farmers account for more than half of all farm income; that's how big those factories are. Ninety percent of all farmers earn less than \$20,000; that's how small those family farms are. (6/6/04)

The 2004 news coverage offered stories that invoked what might be called a non-agrarian frame for rural news. These stories focused on new manufacturing or service jobs that were being created in rural areas. The occurrence of these stories certainly can be linked to the election campaign. Following the candidates around the country led reporters to small cities (under 50,000 people) and other regions where the major economic activity is not farming or even farm support industries. The trend may also have gotten a boost from a decision by the Census Department to create "micropolitan" areas. These centered on small cities of less than 50,000 people and the rural areas that surround them. *USA Today* reported on the new census definition and its meaning in the real world.

For many travelers on Interstate 95, this old mill town is merely a pit stop halfway between New York and Florida.

They fill their tanks, satisfy their craving for Carolina barbecue, crash for the night at the Sleep Inn and drive away from the fields of peanuts, cotton and tobacco. Avid fishermen sometimes stay an extra day to catch rockfish in the Roanoke River.

But for residents of two largely rural counties just south of the Virginia border, Roanoke Rapids is "the city" that anchors an area of 76,000 people. Wal-Mart and Lowe's just opened stores, helping replace jobs that vanished with the textile industry. A multiplex theater is on the way. Business is booming for Ruby Tuesday, Cracker Barrel and other chain restaurants. And in the ultimate sign that this isn't the backwoods anymore, Starbucks is coming.

Roanoke Rapids and hundreds of small cities like it were long written off as rural outposts where population was sparse and the economy sleepy. They were known simply as "non-metropolitan" areas.

Until now.

The government has created a new label for these communities, which increasingly fill the gaps on the map between major cities. The new term – Micropolitan Statistical Areas – recognizes that even small places far from metro areas are economic hubs that draw workers and shoppers from miles around.

For scholars and urban planners, the new category more accurately reflects changes across the country brought on by development, migration and the shift from farming and manufacturing to an economy dominated by service industries.

For marketing experts who help companies decide where to expand, the "micropolitans" represent potentially lucrative – and untapped – markets. More than 28 million people, or one in 10 Americans, live in such areas.

“Businesses used to look at these places and see Green Acres,” says Robert Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech. “Now they look at them and just see ‘green.’ “ (6/28/04)

U.S. News & World Report offered this report on the growth of tourism and some new high tech industries in Appalachia.

Timing, John Richards would say, is everything. For more than a decade, the West Virginia native worked in a local auto-parts factory. But in 2002, Richards learned of an opening for a plant manager in a fledgling biotech firm and decided to take a risk. Today, he guides a team of employees at Diagnostic Hybrids Inc., which manufactures cell cultures used to detect, say, strep throat and SARS. And his old job at the auto plant? The factory shut down two months after he jumped ship.

This is the changing face of Appalachian Ohio, the southeastern portion of the state, where coal mines and auto and furniture factories once provided steady jobs to thousands. Although the region’s 29 counties boast some of the highest unemployment rates in the state—topped by Morgan County at 15.2 percent unemployment in April—there is hope. A burgeoning tourism industry is pumping up the area’s service economy, while the focus on luring high-tech firms has already reinvigorated several small towns.

Castles in the air. The Hocking Hills region, with its supposedly haunted caves and the natural beauty of nearby 233,000-acre Wayne National Forest, is the gem of the new tourism trade. Running through the heart of Hocking Hills is Route 93, chockablock with chalets, quaint bed and breakfasts, and craft stores. “It’s growing so fast, I can’t keep up,” says Dot Scott, who sells country kitsch at the Cross Creek General Store, with Dolly Parton memorabilia inside and a garden dedicated to Jesus out front. At Ravenwood Castle, owner Sue Maxwell says weekend stays in her \$ 195 luxury suites are booked much of the summer. “When I told the banks I wanted to build a castle in Ohio, some of them laughed at me,” says Maxwell. “No one’s laughing at me today.” Indeed, an average of 20 new lodging facilities have opened every year in the past four years.

The tech sector, however, takes more nurturing. DHI counts on the support of a nearby Ohio University campus. The United States Enrichment Corp., which supplies enriched uranium fuel to commercial nuclear power plants, opted to construct another plant in Pike County after the governor’s office offered more than \$ 125 million in tax breaks, job retraining, and other incentives. “We’re going to turn this town around,” says Jim Morgan, an operations manager at USEC.

As a result of these two trends, readers of rural stories were not only less likely to see the news framed as a story about farmers, they were more likely to see rural areas depicted as a growth area for new industries and unusual jobs.

Losers Frame

As we observed in 2002, many stories about rural America reported on poverty, poor living conditions and other difficulties of rural life without portraying the residents as losers or rednecks. The pattern held true in 2004 as well, with few stories making judgments about rural residents, even as they struggled with adversity.

Table 9

Loser Frame								
News Organizations	Frame Present		Frame Absent		Total		Frames Per 100 Stories	
	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002
All TV	0	5	48	57	48	62	0	8
New York Times	7	17	85	68	92	85	8	20
Washington Post	8	1	165	79	173	80	5	1
USA Today	1	3	25	22	26	25	4	14
Chicago Tribune	14	6	166	70	180	76	8	8
News Magazines	1	1	9	8	10	9	10	11
Subtotal Print	(31)	(28)	(450)	(247)	(481)	(275)	(6)	(10)
Total Stories	31	33	498	304	529	337	6	10

In one exception, The *New York Times* printed a review of a new documentary with an unflattering portrayal of rural Midwesterners.

It's called shooting fish in a barrel. Asked to express their opinions about the war in Iraq, the mostly unidentified subjects of this documentary polemic, "This Ain't No Heartland," are only too happy to make fools of themselves. Their fundamental ignorance of the facts, compounded by their disinterest in knowing more, doesn't prevent them from expressing strong opinions and conveying misinformation in bad grammar.

To make the movie, which opened yesterday in New York at the Two Boots Pioneer Theater, the Austrian filmmaker and photographer Andreas Horvath visited a half-dozen Midwestern states to select the fish for his barrel. The subjects he chose are ill-informed rural and small-town Americans who have not followed the war beyond absorbing a few sound bites from television.

As one unidentified woman claims in a fiery speech that is heard but not seen, "We fought the most moral war that has ever been fought by any people." She goes on to assert that no country waging a war has done so much to protect innocent civilians. Most believe that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction despite all the evidence to the contrary, and some are certain that his goal was to conquer the United States. The events of 9/11 have also left their mark. One person after another imagines that the Midwest is as vulnerable to attack as New York or Washington. That belief bolsters their vehement opposition to gun control.

We meet a middle-aged man who stands at a street corner every afternoon with a sign that asks drivers to honk their horns to show support for American troops. The chorus is almost unanimous. He believes that our soldiers, wherever they are, will hear those honks and be uplifted.

The film returns several times to a bar where a group of increasingly tipsy beer drinkers tell racist jokes and fantasize fending off invading armies. The rowdiest of the group gleefully imagines facing down "two billion screaming Chinamen coming at you," with a certainty that America would win. Feeling no pain, he drops his trousers and moons the camera. We also meet the contestants in a demolition derby whose damaged vehicles are souped up with flags and the name Jesus. (8/26/04)

As with the agricultural theme, the incidence of this frame dropped markedly at most outlets. Levels stayed constant at the *Chicago Tribune* while increasing at the *Washington Post*. The increase at the *Post* may reflect its discovery of areas of rural poverty both close to home and farther afield, as these two excerpts suggest.

Some of the families go back many generations in this wooded, remote Caroline County community, so self-sufficiency was familiar to them, even if that meant drawing water from a well out front, pumping a septic tank out back, even having an outhouse.

They didn't worry until human waste began surfacing in their yards. But there was little they could do about the brown ooze that started rising decades ago from the soggy earth around their homes, leaked into their water supply and caused the region's top public health official to declare a state of emergency in last December after nearly a decade of talk. It was the earth itself that was causing the problem, soil too poor and wet to allow privies and septic tanks to drain properly.

So the residents of Dawn's 250 homes boiled their water and poured bleach into their wells.

Now, however, growth has intervened, reaching down from Washington and up from Richmond to make Dawn's water crisis impossible to ignore. With more than \$3 million in grants, workers will begin installing a new sewer system in the spring. Then they will rebuild some homes to include indoor plumbing.

In large part, Dawn became a priority not because of the people who had long endured unsanitary conditions but because of the people who wanted to move in and were unable to build houses because of new, tougher septic standards. At the same time, northern Caroline gradually became a Fredericksburg suburb, and the county invested in a new wastewater treatment facility for gas stations, restaurants and some homes. Then, last year, the Virginia state fair decided to move to a sprawling farm just down the road from Dawn. The community's turn had come. (11/21/04)

Far from the Mexican border and just outside one of Texas's major tourist destinations, with its popular nearby beach and bustling port, a string of shantytowns thrives.

Hidden behind acres of tall grain sorghum live some of the area's poorest residents. They bought the only piece of the American dream they could afford: a patch of land with no running water and no sewage treatment or wastewater service. Their homes are modest, made of wood or vinyl siding. Some live in shacks made of scrap metal or in dilapidated trailers. The spring rains bring massive flooding to these low-lying areas and with that, contamination, disease and disruption of life.

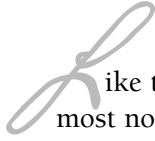
Known as colonias, these developments have existed for years along the border with Mexico. Now they have migrated north, attracting not only new immigrants but also second- and third-generation Mexican Americans, and whites and blacks unable to find affordable housing elsewhere.

Dozens of the unregulated, rural subdivisions have sprung up deep into Texas, near Corpus Christi and outside Austin, Houston, Beaumont, San Antonio and as far north as Dallas and Fort Worth. Officials say unscrupulous developers take advantage of weak county laws to subdivide land and sell the plots with inadequate, if any, improvements. Over the past decade, Texas lawmakers have passed tough regulations on colonias near the border. With the squalid developments spreading, lawmakers are turning their attention to the rest of the state.

"This is just like Guatemala or Africa," said Lionel Lopez, a retired Corpus Christi firefighter who organized the South Texas Colonia Initiative to bring attention to what he counts as 88 such developments in Nueces County. "You see kids with all kinds of sores on their little legs, and the dogs – they don't even bark, and they have mange." (WP 8/2/04)



Lake Wobegon Frame



Like the others, this frame was less frequent in 2004 than in 2002. The decline was most noticeable at the *New York Times*, where the framing rate fell from 15 frames per 100 stories to five frames per 100 in 2004.

Table 10

Lake Wobegon Frame								
News Organizations	Frame Present		Frame Absent		Total		Frames Per 100 Stories	
	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002
All TV	1	0	47	62	48	62	2	0
New York Times	5	13	87	72	92	85	5	15
Washington Post	11	6	162	74	173	80	6	7
USA Today	1	1	25	24	26	25	4	14
Chicago Tribune	6	4	174	72	180	76	3	5
News Magazines	1	2	9	7	10	9	10	22
Subtotal Print	(24)	(26)	(457)	(249)	(481)	(275)	(5)	(9)
Total Stories	25	26	504	311	529	337	5	8

In both 2004 and 2002, most stories in our sample failed to frame rural America as an engagingly eccentric, carefree retreat from the travails of modern life. There were virtually no reports on the charming eccentrics that populate the fictional “Lake Wobegon.” Many of these characterizations (pastoral, peaceful, picturesque, sleepy, quaint, etc.) were more frequently applied to exurban areas. As we observed in 2002, “the Lake Wobegon theme was reflected mostly in the language of realtors trying to depict great places to live on the outskirts of various metro areas. These were places that had charm or were quaint not because they were genuinely rural but because they had not yet been fully suburbanized.”

This *Washington Post* piece is typical of such idyllic descriptions as applied to outlying suburbs.

Ho-hum. Another gated golf community with matching mailboxes.

First impressions can be deceiving, though. A summer visit to Lake Manassas in western Prince William County brings numerous descriptions to mind – peaceful, eclectic, friendly, even a bit quirky – but ho-hum isn’t one of them.

The community of custom homes on the edge of suburbia, named after the 1,100-acre lake it borders, provides resort-style living with views of the Bull Run Mountains. Just outside the gates, to the west along Route 29, the area remains largely rural; it's easy to buy homegrown fruits and vegetables or homemade bread and butter, as well as ice cream from old-fashioned stands.

Within the community, children ride bikes to swim practice and make milkshakes with blackberries picked along the meandering paved paths.

From her deck, Joan Matthews overlooks the public-access par-72 Stonewall Golf Club. But it's not the course that animates her – she doesn't play. Rather, it's her encounters with wildlife in the buffer zone between her house and the area around the 10th green. Once, after she found a turtle that was laying eggs, Matthews put a trellis over the area so golfers wouldn't step on the nest. Three months later, she rejoiced when she found exit holes and leathery remnants of turtle eggs, letting her know the hatchlings had made their getaway.

Another time, while she was cleaning out one of her bluebird boxes a few days after a successful fledging of four baby birds, Matthews got another surprise. Tucked underneath the nest were four little flying squirrels, newborns with their eyes still closed. She and her neighbors kept vigil until the mother squirrel moved the babies. (WP 8/7/04)

As with the agricultural frame, occasional stories served as a reality check. This *Chicago Tribune* story offers an unusually broad and empirically based view of both the perceptions and realities of the rural Midwest.

Since 1997, Harris Interactive has conducted an annual poll asking Americans where they would most like to live other than their current state. In seven years, no Midwestern state has ranked in the top 15.

What's the problem? Granted, the weather can get a little dicey, an understandable turnoff for folks fond of gentler climes. But writing off the Midwest goes beyond climatic conditions.

According to regional-identity experts, outsiders view the Midwest as an uninteresting landscape inhabited by overweight, Protestant whites – a backward region that is resistant to change and where a gala event is more apt to be a tractor pull than a night at the opera.

“In spite of cities like Detroit and Chicago, we're perceived as relatively rural – not red-necked hillbillies, but a rurality that translates into hardworking and honest but also plain, ordinary and dull,” says Dennis Preston, a linguistics professor at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Never mind that Minnesota and Iowa rank among states with the healthiest population, according to the United Health Foundation, which bases annual state rankings on a variety of statistics such as prevalence of smoking, motor vehicle deaths, violent crime and high school graduates.

And when it comes to real estate, the Midwest market compares favorably to other regions in the country, says Walter Molony, spokesman for the

National Association of Realtors (NAR), which has been tracking national and regional prices since 1968.

For one thing, the Midwest shows the steadiest growth rate in prices, avoiding wild swings seen in other regions.

“When it comes to buying power, you can afford more house for your money in the Midwest,” Molony says. “And for entry-level buyers, there are greater array of housing choices. Most can afford to buy a single-family house, which isn’t always possible in the Northeast and West.” . . .

“When people leave the Midwest, they aren’t always positive spokespeople for it,” observes Ruth Olson, associate director of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Olson, who previously lived on the East and West Coasts, recalls hearing transplants describe the Midwest as a good place to be from. “That suggests it’s not a good place to be,” she says.

Advertisers frequently capitalize on regional images prevalent in the public’s mind to promote products. This reinforces and perpetuates stereotypes, says de Wit. Even if the image of a place was once valid, it’s frequently out-of-date, lagging reality by several decades.

When it comes to entertainment venues, movies have a significant effect on our sense of place. And cinematically speaking, the Midwest has not fared well.

Movies frequently perpetuate negative images of the Midwest and can do damage, even if they’re brief references. For example, in “Dogma,” instead of being sent to hell, the erring angels were doomed to spend eternity in the Milwaukee airport, Olson points out.

A more recent film, “Love Almighty,” depicts Wisconsin women as buxom and promiscuous. One of Olson’s students was traveling in England at the time the movie debuted and endured considerable teasing from her British friends. Yet perhaps no movie has wielded more influence on people’s perceptions of the Midwest – particularly Kansas – than “The Wizard of Oz.”

When the movie appeared in 1939, Technicolor was a relatively new process, and MGM shot all Kansas scenes in black and white to make the transition to Oz more dramatic. So, Dorothy’s home state is forever linked not only with bad weather and provincial people but also a bleak landscape.

“Kansas is hillier and greener than people think,” says de Wit, who grew up there. “Yet the Wizard-of-Oz image is impossible to get rid of.” . . .

Another factor: The Midwest lacks the cultural mystique associated with other states and regions. For example, the East and West Coasts are noted for setting trends in fashion and movies.

“Much of the West is also characterized by a rugged, spectacular landscape and is historically associated with the rugged individualism of the pioneer spirit,” says Marcus Gillespie, a geography professor at San Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. “People like to identify with this spirit.” In fact, Gillespie says one of his colleagues moved to Texas precisely because of its cachet.

Other regions derive their distinctiveness by contrasting to a national standard. “Yet Midwest has always personified the norm for the United States rather than a deviation,” Shortridge explains. “We don’t have mystique because we stand for the average, which can be translated as bland.”

That hasn’t helped tourism, he adds. “Travel is all about escape,” he says. “If you travel to the average part of the country, you’re not really escaping anything.”

Aside from being average, perhaps the strongest association with the Midwest is of a rural lifestyle. Never mind the fact that rural communities are declining.

“When people think of the Midwest, there seems to be a disconnect between rural and urban,” says Schnell. “The rural Midwest is what sticks in their minds. For example, people don’t associate Chicago as being part of Illinois.”

Paradoxically, though people may poke fun at the Midwest and eschew the idea of living on a farm, they’re attracted to rural ideals such as wholesomeness, a strong work ethic and looking out for one’s neighbors.

Shortridge believes Americans are becoming more nostalgic for these values. “Although the Midwest’s rural image hasn’t changed, what’s changing is the nation’s judgment of that image,” he says. “First it was good, and then as the nation became more urbanized, the pastoral image became negative. But now it’s starting to look good again.” (6/13/04)



WK.KELLOGG
FOUNDATION

One Michigan
Avenue East
Battle Creek, MI
49017-4058
USA
269-968-1611
TDD on site
Facsimile: 269-968-0413
www.wkkf.org