

The Role of Rural Areas in Regional Clusters: The Case of the Great Lakes Chicago EDA Region

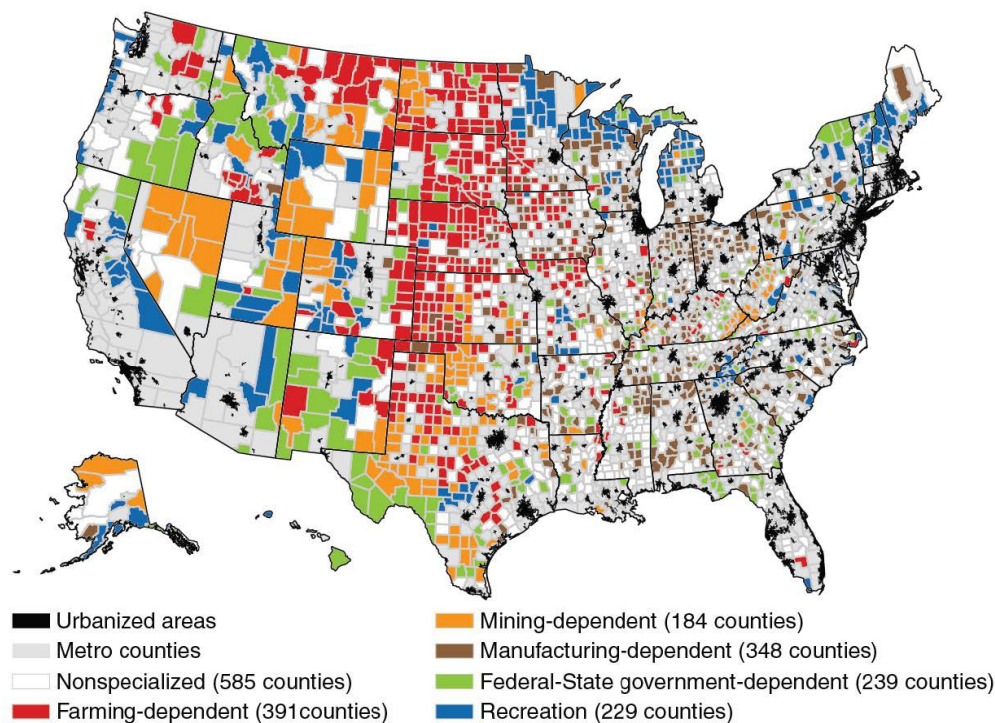
Story Behind the Numbers

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The cluster concept has dominated the economic development practice for more than 20 years. The study examines the mix of counties that play a significant role in various clusters by identifying their footprint or concentration of jobs. The performance of agriculture and manufacturing clusters in the Great Lakes Chicago Economic Development Administration's Region was inspected using the Purdue Cluster Classification typology and employing location quotients and spatial analysis. The findings show that rural and urban areas have specific competitive advantages that could guide their economic development strategies. As the industry clusters cross administrative boundaries, cluster development strategies can have unique regional boundaries irrespective of state political jurisdictions. The results also indicate that connecting sectors in corresponding economic areas may promote cluster-based economic development opportunities and specialization.

Figure 1. Rural counties vary in their economic structure with marked regional differences



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