

Wisconsin isn't as rural as some might think

Many people visiting Wisconsin for the first time are surprised. To them, Wisconsin is synonymous with America's Dairyland. Calendar photos of rolling hills, red barns, green pastures, and Holstein cows define Wisconsin. These rural icons are important parts of Wisconsin's history and future. However, the majority of the State's residents no longer live in rural Wisconsin. Most people with jobs work in urban Wisconsin and most of the income and wealth is concentrated in urban areas.

How many Wisconsin residents live in urban areas? That depends on the definition of urban and rural. The answer may be different depending on whether you ask the U.S. Census, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The most commonly used definition

Part 1 of this month's series on the changing population in Wisconsin

is OMB's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). An MSA is defined by the OMB as "an area having at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting distance."

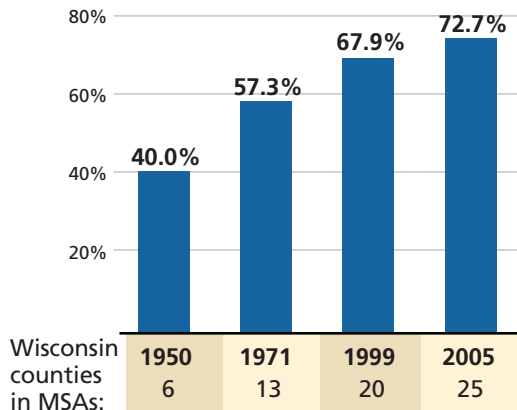
In 1950, only six Wisconsin counties (Dane, Milwaukee, Brown, Racine, Kenosha and Douglas), representing 40 percent of the state's population, were included in an MSA.

By 2005, 25 of the state's 72 counties (and 72 percent of the population) were part of an MSA.

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Growing metro areas

Percentage of Wisconsin's total population living in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA):



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Census