



## Urban / Rural Areas and CBSAs

Kathy Miller

Internal Working Paper

Revised August 15, 2006

### Official Definitions

Core Based Statistical Areas are county level designations, and were described in the previous brief ("Micropolitan Areas - Preliminary Description"). Common perception equates nonmetropolitan areas with rural areas, but this is not technically correct. The Census defines areas as urban or rural, and these definitions are at a sub-county geography. Specifically, urban areas (defined as urbanized areas and urban clusters). These areas are defined as "core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile." Any territory not defined as urban is rural.

### Population Distribution

Counties, then, contain both urban and rural areas. There are rural areas within metropolitan counties and urban areas within nonmetropolitan counties. The nonmetropolitan population should not be equated with the rural population. In fact, more rural residents live in metropolitan counties than in micropolitan and noncore counties combined. Based on the Census 2000 population and the current CBSA classifications, 51 percent of *rural* residents live in *metropolitan* counties.

Likewise, metropolitan counties should not be equated with urban. Nearly 13 percent of the metropolitan population is rural, and 41 percent of the nonmetropolitan population is urban.

Distribution of Population			
	Urban	Rural	Total
Metropolitan	202,403,216	30,176,724	232,579,940
Micropolitan	15,231,742	14,299,972	29,531,714
Noncore	4,723,351	14,586,901	19,310,252
Total	222,358,309	59,063,597	281,421,906

*note: Urban and Rural Population figures from Census 2000; CBSA status for the December 2005 Classifications*

Of a total of 1,089 metropolitan counties in the U.S., only 29 have a population that is 100% urban - all the rest have at least some portion of their population that is rural. Clearly, the mix of county level CBSA designations do not equate with Census designations of urban and rural.

Number of Counties by Percent of Population that is Urban and CBSA Status							
	Completely Rural	0.1% to 24.9% Urban	25% to 49.9% Urban	50% to 74.9% Urban	75% to 99.9% Urban	100% urban	Total
Metropolitan	96	108	181	277	398	29	1,089
Micropolitan	61	26	256	294	56	1	694
Noncore	575	234	390	138	18	3	1,358
Total	732	368	827	709	472	33	3,141

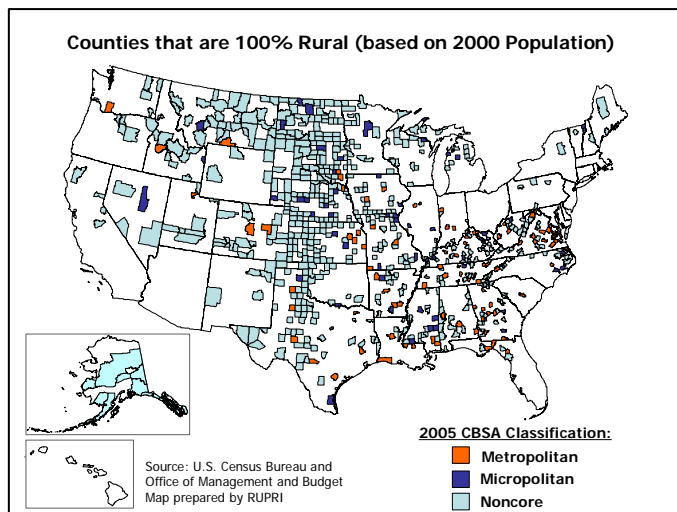
*note: Urban Population from Census 2000; CBSA status for the December 2005 Classifications*

## CBSA Designations of Central and Outlying Counties

Metropolitan and micropolitan areas include both *central* and *outlying* counties. Central counties are those associated with an urbanized area or urban cluster and form the core of metropolitan or micropolitan areas. Outlying counties are those that have close ties with the central county or counties of the CBSA. The ties are measured with commuting flows between the central and outlying counties, with a threshold of 25 percent of employment.

Because of the commuting rule within the CBSA classification system, areas in which high levels of commuting occur become classified into metropolitan and micropolitan areas, despite their rural nature.

There are 732 counties in the U.S. that are completely rural (see table on previous page). That is, they have no place designated as an urbanized area or an urban cluster; 96 of these counties are located in metropolitan areas, and 61 are in micropolitan areas.



In the announcement of the CBSA standards, The Office of Management and Budget stresses in several places the importance of understanding the overlap between rural and urban and metro and nonmetro, and continues to stress the cautions that should be taken when using these classifications in the design program and policies.

Specifically addressing the issue of outlying counties included based on the commuting rule, OMB states:

*Although the inclusion of such a county in a Metropolitan Statistical Area indicates the existence of economic ties, as measured by commuting, with the central counties of that Metropolitan Statistical Area, it may also indicate a need to provide programs that would strengthen the county's rural economy so that workers are not compelled to leave the county in search of jobs.*