



# Rural America: Wasteland or Reasons for Hope?

The United States seems to be divided into two different countries – an urbanized “Blue” region of social and cultural liberalism and the “Red” rural regions rebelling against social and demographic change and resenting coastal elitism. It seems everyone has an opinion about rural America. Is it gripped in a tragic decline? Or is it on the cusp of a glorious revival? Is it the key to understanding America today? Perhaps, we’re missing the real question...is rural America even a thing?

The presenters will examine this supposed divide from a social, economic, and political perspective. Does it really exist and what, if anything, should be done? What can we do to better understand each other? How can we address the economic issues that have victimized rural America?

## Saturday, October 12, 2024

**Registration Deadline:** Thursday, Sep 26

**Location:** UNL East Campus Union, Great Plains Ballroom, 1705 Arbor Drive, Lincoln

**Registration is required. Cancellation after the deadline will be non-refundable, unless cancelled by UNL**

**8:30 am** Doors Open

**9:00 am** Welcome

**9:10 am** **Steven Conn – Keynote**  
W.E. Smith Professor of History  
Miami (OH) University

**10:05 am** Questions and Answers

**10:20 am** Break

**10:25 am** **Jena Ochsner**  
Double “O” Farms, Sutton, NE

**10:55 am** Questions and Answers

**11:05 am** Break

**11:15 am** **Nebraska Rural Polls Panel**  
**Brad Lubben**, Nebraska Extension, UNL  
**Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel**, Nebraska Extension, UNL  
**L.J. McElravy**, Ag Leadership, UNL

**12:05 pm** Questions and Answers

**12:20 pm** Lunch

**1:00 pm** **Ronnie Green**  
UNL Chancellor Emeritus

**1:30 pm** Questions and Answers

**1:45 pm** Break

**1:55 pm** **Center for Rural Affairs**  
**Erin Schoenberg**, development manager, CFRA  
**Jillian Linster**, policy director, CFRA

**2:25 pm** Questions and Answers

**2:35 pm** Closing Remarks – Conclusion

## OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

**Register for only one format:**

### CON079Z

**Location:** Zoom Live Stream

**Enrollment Limit:** 100

**Cost:** \$15

### CON079L

**Location:** UNL East Campus Union, Great Plains Ballroom. No parking permit is required.

**Enrollment Limit:** 250

**Cost:** \$20 includes cost of lunch and symposium. Please contact the OLLI office if you have specific dietary restrictions.

## Sponsored by:





**Steven Conn, Ph.D.**

Steven Conn is the W.E. Smith Professor of History at Miami (Ohio) University and the author of numerous books, including the one that inspired this symposium entitled, “The Lies of the Land.” In 2016, he admitted to becoming an “accidental expert.” Eighteen months earlier, he published a book examining the “anti-urban tradition” in American life and traced its impact on policy and places across the 20th century. His goal was to explore a central American paradox: “we are a highly urbanized nation filled with people who dislike their cities.”



**Jena Ochsner**

Jena Ochsner is a farmer, a farm wife, mother of two farm kids, and an advocate for all things agriculture, though she was not raised on a farm. Her husband, Levi, and her family live and work on his family’s fifth generation farm where they raise corn, soybeans, cattle, and country kids. The two also ship their homegrown beef (Double O beef) from their farm to families across the country.



**Brad Lubben, Ph.D.**

Brad Lubben is an extension associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is active in conducting the Nebraska Rural Poll annual survey, gathering the aggregated voice of rural Nebraskans on such issues as community, government policy, well-being, and work. He relays the findings to state lawmakers, ensuring the rural voice is heard.



**Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, Ph.D.**

Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel is a professor and extension specialist at the University of Nebraska Panhandle Research, Extension, and Education Center in Scottsbluff. Her community development experience focuses on new resident recruitment, retention, tourism development, and community planning.



**L. J. McElravy, Ph.D.**

L.J. McElravy is an associate professor of Leadership in the Department of Ag Leadership, Education, and Communication. His research and extension efforts focus on leadership assessment, leadership training, and development based on positive psychology, and developing shared leadership systems prepared to engage in effective creative and innovative problem-solving.



**Ronnie Green, Ph.D.**

Ronnie Green is Chancellor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He was appointed the 20th chancellor of UNL in 2016 and retired from that position in 2023. Before that appointment, he was the Harlan Vice Chancellor of the UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Vice-President for Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of Nebraska system. Green was raised on a mixed beef, dairy, and cropping farm in southwest Virginia.



**Erin Schoenberg**

Erin Schoenberg is development manager at the Center for Rural Affairs. Raised on a farm/ranch in North Central Nebraska, Erin’s work is focused on strengthening community networks and partnerships and organizing workshops and courses for farmers.



**Jillian Linster**

Jillian Linster is policy director at the Center for Rural Affairs. She draws on her diverse experiences to advance the organization goals of values, worth, and action. She supports a group of exceptional people in their tireless dedication to strong rural communities.

Register at:  
<https://olli.unl.edu>