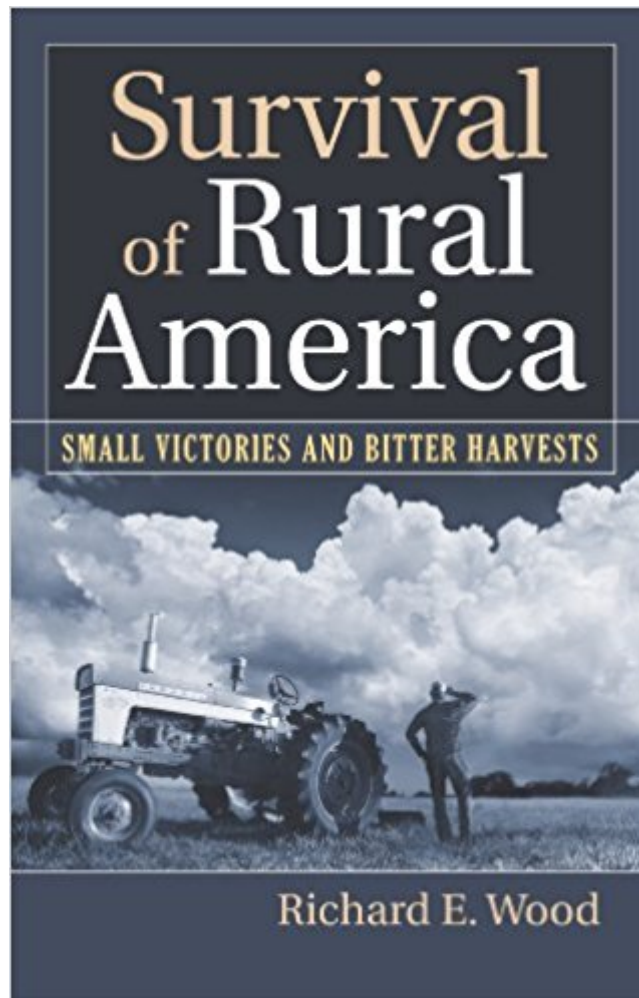




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Survival Of Rural America: Small Victories And Bitter Harvests



Synopsis

On the high plains of Kansas, the future of rural America is at stake. Small farming communities are the heart and soul of America, but it's no secret that they're under siege. Family farms are disappearing and manufacturing is outsourced. Schools close, jobs vanish, and local stores can't survive. Some communities resort to giving away land just to get people to move there. Richard Wood knows that rural communities need more than jobs or money to survive: they need to become valued again as desirable places to live. He takes a closer look at what has happened in several Kansas farming towns and shows that there is much more depth and diversity to rural life than meets the eye. Wood traveled the back roads to gather stories of people in some of the most vulnerable communities that are trying to stave off depopulation. These are not just accounts of people scrambling to survive in incipient ghost towns like Ada, but gritty success stories like Plainville, where an upscale design business ignited a revival, or Atwood, which shifted from industrial recruitment to home-grown entrepreneurship. Unlike Thomas Frank, whose *What's the Matter with Kansas?* used the state as a political yardstick, Wood sees it reflecting major economic and population trends throughout the world. Looking at projects as small as community medical clinics or plans for vast buffalo grassland parks, he also sees a robust future for small-town pioneers, folks who are betting their—and rural America's—future on such things as alternative energy (think "ethanol"), sustainable natural agriculture, tourism, and the enduring appeal of rural life to outsiders. With dozens of photos that bring rural America to life, Wood provides an inside look at what really makes this country tick—and at some of the developments that may turn the tide against what seemed an inevitable decline. Although the odds are stacked against rural recovery, the small victories that Wood shows us hold the promise that transformation and revival may yet stave off the final bitter harvest.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Setting out to find a rural America in decline, Richard Wood found instead a much more complex picture. He found a rural America that is neither fatalistic nor defeatist, places with much to offer those who live there.

•David Danbom, author of "Born in the Country": A History of Rural America

Wood's book is about more than Kansas. It's about community, lifestyle, and the very roots of America.

•Jane Kolodinsky, codirector, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont

Gives a unique look at rural communities and the internal and external conditions they confront, with humor, insight, and wisdom. I really like this book and think everyone should read it.

•Cornelia Butler Flora, director, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development

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This book is very interesting just by itself but extremely useful if you are working on rural economic development. It tells the stories of different Kansas small towns and the socio-political and economic situations and downturns and how the community was either turned around or continued to fail.

Good read, great info! Rural American is in crisis and is worth saving! I'll keep this and share as a reference!

Too focused on Kansas. Requires the reader to have a good knowledge of rural/urban interface in other parts of the country to really be able to apply the information to modern America

Excellent!

There are numerous books available about rural development, but most of them only cover theory. This book looks at the stories of a variety of rural communities in Kansas and examines what these towns have done for better or worse to try to improve their fate. The lesson really learned is it is tough for rural America to stay strong, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

This book made me want to go straight to Kansas. But even if I don't make it there, I feel that I have a sense of the strengths, the challenges and the quirky good humor of this under-appreciated state. I want to go to the World's Largest Collection of the World's Smallest Versions of the Worlds Largest Things and the display of fork art - both conveniently in the tiny town of Lucas. The author doesn't minimize the problems facing rural America but he shows that challenge can also mean opportunity. In this book you will meet Wes Jackson founder of the Land Institute. Quoted as saying "If you're workin' on something that you can finish in your lifetime, you're not thinkin' big enough," Jackson is trying to find the key to perennial crops that mimic the natural prairie. This is book about a bountiful land with a colorful history - the history of America's heart both geographically and spiritually - as it struggles to find its worth in a post-modern world. I like the subtitle "Small Victories and Bitter Harvests" but I don't think the title does justice to the book. Survival of Rural America sounds too gloomy and academic for what is an engaging and enjoyable read.

The author approaches a universal dilemma, the future of rural America, in a micro way - focusing on the plight of several small towns in Kansas. His empathy for his subject and his seemingly tireless research humanizes and enlightens. His wonderful photos - and humor lend another happy aspect to an important book on an important problem.

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