

Overview of Ontario's rural geography

June 2013

Highlights

- 2.6 million Ontario residents (20%) live in non-metro areas.
- 1.4 million of those Ontario residents live in areas under 10,000 in population.
- 1.1 million in smaller cities over 10,000 and under 100,000

What is rural?

People have many ways of understanding what rural means to them. No statistical definition can capture all the aspects of what makes a place rural. Two of the most fundamental dimensions of rural places are distance from large urban centres and population density – the people in rural places are typically farther apart.

For the purpose of presenting statistical data found in the **Focus on Rural Ontario** fact sheet series, a consistent geographic boundary was selected reflecting these two fundamental dimensions - the non-metropolitan geography of Ontario, those areas outside Census Metropolitan Areas.

What is metro vs non-metro?

Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) have a population of 100,000, including the residents within the commuting zone around these centres (areas where 50% or more of the employed workforce commute to the CMA). CMAs have distinctly metro functions¹.

Ontario's non-metro population resides in smaller cities, small towns and areas outside the commuting zone of metro (CMA) areas. **Focus on Rural Ontario** has adopted the non-metro geography to represent rural Ontario. In 2011, 2.6 million Ontario residents were living in a non-metro area, which represented 20% of Ontario's population (Table 1).

Further defining non-metro

Within non-metro Ontario are 1.1 million residents of smaller cities. These Census Agglomerations (CAs)

have a population of 10,000 to 99,999 and include the residents within their commuting zone. The charts in most of Statistics Canada's *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletins* show that the population of non-metro smaller cities has characteristics similar to the population of smaller towns and rural areas². Centres distant from a metro centre, even the larger regional service centres in non-metro areas, often lack a full range of higher-order services (e.g. specialized surgery) and often have a narrower selection of employment opportunities.

The rural and small town (RST) population (1.4 million) is outside the commuting zone of CMAs and CAs. The RST population is classified according to its 'metropolitan influenced zone' (MIZ) where strong MIZ refers to communities where 30% or more commute to a CMA or CA.

In Table 1, we have classified census divisions according to whether they are completely non-metro, partially-non-metro or completely metro. When we use the terminology of non-metro census divisions, we are referring to the non-metro census divisions shown in Table 1. For the detailed definitions of alternative geographic grids for presenting rural statistics, see du Plessis *et al.*³.

Summary

Non-metro areas are the reference geography and population of interest for **Focus on Rural Ontario**. There is an urban-to-rural gradient within non-metro areas, but differences are less than between metro and non-metro.

¹ Mendelson, Robert and Janet Lefebvre. (2003) **Reviewing Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA) and Census Agglomerations (CA) in Canada According to Metropolitan Functionality** (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Geography Working Paper Series No. 2003-001, Catalogue no. 92F0138MIE) (www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/listpub.cgi?catno=92F0138MIE)

² See <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=21-006-X&CHROPG=1&lang=eng>

³ du Plessis, Valerie, Roland Beshiri, Ray D. Bollman and Heather Clemenson. (2001) "Definitions of Rural." **Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin** Vol. 3, No. 3 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 21-006-XIE). (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=21-006-X&CHROPG=1&lang=eng>)

Table 1

Population by type of community within each census division, Ontario, 2011											
*** Total population by type of community ***											
Census Division ID	Name of Census Division ranked by percent non-metro	Total population, 2011	Metro (CMA)	Non-metro (non-CMA)							Percent non-metro (i.e. percent of population residing in a CSD that is outside a CMA)
				Non-metro (non-CMA) (subtotal)	Census agglomerations (CAs)	Rural and small town areas					
						Rural and small town (subtotal)	Strong MIZ	Moderate MIZ	Weak MIZ	No MIZ	
Metro census divisions											
3506	Ottawa	883,391	883,391	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3519	York	1,032,524	1,032,524	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3520	Toronto	2,615,060	2,615,060	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3521	Peel	1,296,814	1,296,814	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3524	Halton	501,669	501,669	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3525	Hamilton	519,949	519,949	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3553	Greater Sudbury	160,376	160,376	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
3529	Brant	136,035	135,501	534	-	534	-	534	-	-	0
Partially-non-metro census divisions											
3526	Niagara	431,346	417,509	13,837	-	13,837	13,837	-	-	-	3
3510	Frontenac	149,738	143,340	6,398	-	6,398	-	6,398	-	-	4
3539	Middlesex	439,151	419,644	19,507	-	19,507	16,856	1,369	-	1,282	4
3518	Durham	608,124	575,121	33,003	-	33,003	32,910	-	-	93	5
3530	Waterloo	507,096	477,160	29,936	-	29,936	29,936	-	-	-	6
3515	Peterborough	134,933	118,975	15,958	-	15,958	9,146	6,812	-	-	12
3558	Thunder Bay	146,057	121,596	24,461	-	24,461	5,909	3,145	13,906	1,501	17
3537	Essex	388,782	319,246	69,536	49,765	19,771	19,600	171	-	-	18
3523	Wellington	208,360	141,097	67,263	26,693	40,570	10,770	29,800	-	-	32
3534	Elgin	87,461	55,142	32,319	-	32,319	27,162	5,157	-	-	37
3522	Dufferin	56,881	35,521	21,360	-	21,360	21,360	-	-	-	38
3543	Simcoe	446,063	245,324	200,739	95,391	105,348	104,066	1,249	-	33	45
3502	Prescott and Russell	85,381	38,432	46,949	10,551	36,398	36,398	-	-	-	55
3511	Lennox and Addington	41,824	16,221	25,603	-	25,603	7,560	18,043	-	-	61
Non-metro census divisions											
3552	Sudbury	21,196	394	20,802	-	20,802	5,885	12,414	2,309	194	98
3501	Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry	111,164	-	111,164	58,957	52,207	31,162	21,045	-	-	100
3507	Leeds and Grenville	99,306	-	99,306	39,024	60,282	30,160	30,122	-	-	100
3509	Lanark	65,667	-	65,667	-	65,667	29,180	36,487	-	-	100
3512	Hastings	134,934	-	134,934	92,540	42,394	26,223	8,317	5,348	2,506	100
3513	Prince Edward	25,258	-	25,258	-	25,258	-	25,258	-	-	100
3514	Northumberland	82,126	-	82,126	34,733	47,393	23,392	24,001	-	-	100
3516	Kawartha Lakes	73,214	-	73,214	73,214	-	-	-	-	-	100
3528	Haldimand-Norfolk	109,118	-	109,118	63,175	45,943	44,876	-	-	1,067	100
3531	Perth	75,112	-	75,112	30,886	44,226	16,021	28,205	-	-	100
3532	Oxford	105,719	-	105,719	65,201	40,518	40,518	-	-	-	100
3536	Chatham-Kent	104,075	-	104,075	104,075	-	-	-	-	-	100
3538	Lambton	126,199	-	126,199	89,555	36,644	18,083	18,561	-	-	100
3540	Huron	59,100	-	59,100	-	59,100	-	30,109	28,991	-	100
3541	Bruce	66,102	-	66,102	-	66,102	-	31,628	34,474	-	100
3542	Grey	92,568	-	92,568	32,092	60,476	17,537	42,939	-	-	100
3544	Muskoka	58,047	-	58,047	-	58,047	-	23,372	34,465	210	100
3546	Haliburton	17,026	-	17,026	-	17,026	-	17,026	-	-	100
3547	Renfrew	101,326	-	101,326	40,005	61,321	5,684	53,979	1,658	-	100
3548	Nipissing	84,736	-	84,736	60,179	24,557	4,728	19,749	80	-	100
3549	Parry Sound	42,162	-	42,162	3,864	38,298	5,082	20,581	12,377	258	100
3551	Manitoulin	13,048	-	13,048	-	13,048	-	406	11,847	795	100
3554	Timiskaming	32,634	-	32,634	13,566	19,068	1,549	8,456	8,728	335	100
3556	Cochrane	81,122	-	81,122	43,165	37,957	-	10,599	24,909	2,449	100
3557	Algoma	115,870	-	115,870	91,148	24,722	7,758	10,095	6,058	811	100
3559	Rainy River	20,370	-	20,370	-	20,370	-	563	17,566	2,241	100
3560	Kenora	57,607	-	57,607	15,348	42,259	951	9,341	22,481	9,486	100
	Ontario	12,851,821	10,270,006	2,581,815	1,133,127	1,448,688	644,299	555,931	225,191	23,261	20

Source: Statistics Canada. (2012) GeoSuite: 2011 Census (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 92-150) (<http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/bsolec/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=92-150-X&chropeg=1&lang=eng>)

Note: The geographic units shown in the table are organized by Census Division (CD). The total population residing within the Census Division is broken down into those living within Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and those outside CMAs, i.e. the non-metro sub-total. CDs such as Wellington County include the cities within them such as Guelph, even though they are separate municipal jurisdictions. Guelph is a CMA. CMAs and Census Agglomerations (CAs) are one or more census subdivisions (CSDs) or municipalities surrounding a common core where the majority of the working population commutes to that core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the core. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000. See <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/ref/dict/geo009-eng.cfm> for complete definitions. The CDs are listed in ascending order of the proportion of non-metro (i.e. non-CMA) population. The non-metro population is further broken down into those living in towns greater than 10,000 or CAs and those living in smaller towns and in the countryside or the Rural and Small Town (RST) subtotal. The CD of Greater Sudbury is the metro area of Sudbury and the CD of Sudbury is the District of Sudbury outside the metro area.

Rural Ontario Institute gratefully acknowledges the work of Ray Bollman in preparing this edition of [Focus on Rural Ontario](#). Questions on data sources can be directed to RayD.Bollman@sasktel.net. Any comments or discussions can be directed to NRagetlie@RuralOntarioInstitute.ca.

