

The Coulee Region  
Of Western Wisconsin

Our Area at a Glance – Population and Housing

Decisions that impact how we live are made at all levels from personal and family to national policy. Many communities are engaging in a planning process called Smart Growth to make decisions on land use and provision of services. Service organizations are looking at needs in the community that they have the capacity to address. People are looking at starting their own businesses. Information is an important part of the decisions we make. This paper gives us a glimpse into some important issues of the four county Coulee region. Table 1. provides information on individuals including income, age, and employment.

Table 1: General Population Data-Individuals

Title	Crawford	La Crosse	Monroe	Vernon	Total Area
Total population	17,243	107,120	40,899	28,056	193,318
Per capita income \$ *	16,833	19,800	17,056	15,859	-
Age					
19 years and under	5,062	30,245	12,573	8,423	56,303
20-44 years	5,160	41,150	13,293	8,261	67,864
45-64 years	4,268	22,285	9,343	6,603	42,499
65 and over	2,753	13,440	5,690	4,769	26,652
65 and over living alone	866	4,084	1,644	1,487	8,081
Race					
White	16,780	100,883	39,474	27,723	184,860
Black or African American	233	1,016	188	18	1,455
American Indian/Alaska Native	37	440	376	42	895
Asian	45	3,376	195	60	3,676
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	2	21	15	2	40
Some other race	29	286	347	75	737
Civilian labor force age 16 and over	8,670	59,516	20,802	13,682	102,670
% unemployed	4.8	4.1	4.8	4.2	4.3

\* Income data in this report are inflation-adjusted, expressed in 2001 dollars, to allow serious comparisons over time, as real purchasing power of a dollar declines through inflation. One dollar, in 1979, for example, would buy as much as \$2.26 in 2001.

Employment/Jobs/Income: Crawford County had the sixth highest labor force participation rate in the State in 1999. Traditionally the four-county area has labor force participation rates at or above the national rate. Yet, the per capita income as a percentage of the U.S. per capita income shows that this region is below the national average. Per capita income in Crawford County never reached above 80 percent of the national per capita income between 1969 and 1999. In 1999, Vernon County had the second lowest median income in the State. More than 50 percent of workers in Crawford and Vernon counties earned sub-poverty wages in their primary jobs in 1998. Yet, job growth between 1990 and 1998 was at least 10 percent greater in Crawford County than the other three counties.

Like Wisconsin in general, the number of full-time farms declined in all four counties between 1992 and 1997. Crawford, La Crosse and Vernon counties saw a rate of decline faster than the State average. During the same period, all four counties experienced faster losses in farm acreage than the State average.

Age: La Crosse County was the only county in our area to show a decline in population among those ages 16-24 over the past 10 years. It was also the only county in the area that showed an increase in population for the 25-39 age bracket.

Race/Ethnicity: From the 1990 Census to the 2000 Census, each of the four counties has experienced some changes in racial make-up. Each county reported decreases in the number of persons who identified themselves as being Caucasian: Crawford – 1.8%; La Crosse – 2.1%; Monroe – 1.7%; and Vernon – 8%. The largest numerical changes in race were noted in La Crosse and Monroe counties. In La Crosse County, the number of persons who reported being Black or African American more than doubled, from 409 to 1016, in the ten-year span between 1990 and 2000 an increase of about 700 Asian persons was experienced. In Monroe County, the number of persons who reported themselves to be “some other race” jumped from 65 to 347. Numbers of persons defining themselves as Hispanic or Latino increased in all four counties. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Hispanic Composition in the Four County Area

Hispanic Populations	1990	2000	% Change
Crawford County	67	129	92.54%
La Crosse County	640	990	54.69%
Monroe County	234	740	216.24%
Vernon County	98	186	89.80%

Table 3. provides information on families in our area including family composition and income.

Table 3. Families Data

Title	Crawford	La Crosse	Monroe	Vernon	Total Area
Total Families	4611	25,599	10,790	7,502	48,502
With own children under 18 yrs.	2,107	12,422	5,310	3,412	23,251
y Married couple families	3,786	20,807	8,734	6,357	39,684
With own children under 18 yrs.	1,597	9,366	3,989	2,731	17,683
y Female householder no husband present	559	3,486	1,349	739	6,133
With own children under 18 yrs.	352	2,310	906	446	4,014
y Grandparent responsible for grandchildren	33	293	231	125	682
y Median family income \$	41,540	50,380	43,835	40,666	-

Family Composition: Vernon County has the lowest percentage of single parent families, with one in five families headed by a single parent.

Table 4. provides information on poverty status of individuals and of families.

Table 4. Poverty

Title	Crawford	La Crosse	Monroe	Vernon	Total Area
y Total Persons: # in poverty	1,681	10,841	4,774	3,918	21,214
Poverty rate %	10.2	10.7	12.0	14.3	11.5
Children in poverty %	15.8	13.7	15.8	17.6	15.7
Persons 65 years and older %	9.6	11.0	8.6	11.8	-
y Total Families: # in poverty	334	1,382	908	678	3,302
Poverty rate	7.3	5.4	8.5	9.1	6.8
Families with related children under 18: in poverty %	11.3	8.4	12.4	14.4	10.0
Female householder, no husband present: in poverty %	24.3	21.4	27.4	23.5	-
With related children under 18 years %	33.8	27.8	34.6	33.7	-

Changes in Poverty: Each of the counties experienced a slight decline in its poverty rate from 1990 to 2000. Crawford, La Crosse and Vernon counties also experienced the expected slight decline in number of persons in poverty. Monroe County, due to its somewhat higher rate of overall population growth, did show an increase in the number of persons in poverty, from 4,614 in 1990 to 4,774 in 2000.

Table 5. Housing Data

Title	Crawford	La Crosse	Monroe	Vernon	Total Area
Total Housing Units	8,480	43,479	16,672	12,416	81,047
y Units built pre-1960 #, %	6,110 72.1	30,552 70.2	11,068 66.4	9,085 73.2	56,785 70.0
y Total occupied units	6,677	41,599	15,399	10,815	74,500
Total owner-occupied units	5,125	27,067	11,352	8,559	52,105
Vacancy rate %	2.8	1.0	1.4	2.2	1.8
Median value \$	75,100	96,900	77,500	73,400	-
Paying 30% or more of income on housing cost %	16.0	21.9	15.8	8.8	16.5
Total renter-occupied units	1,552	14,532	4,045	2,266	8,385
Vacancy rate %	8.7	4.9	6.6	7.0	6.7
Median monthly rent \$	394	470	455	367	-
Paying over 30% income as gross rent %	22.8	33.6	25.1	27.7	30.9

Housing occupancy: The number of rental households increased slightly in each county except Vernon County, where the number of rental households has actually dropped slightly from ten years ago.

2/2003

Couleecap's motto is "Creating opportunities, changing lives." Follow the story of Sandi as her life was changed through our programming.

Sandi (not her real name) was a 26-year-old single mom with a ten-month-old son. Sandi left her partner who suffered with on-going severe mental illness, causing erratic behavior. He was verbally abusive to Sandi and her son. She realized the relationship was unsafe for her and her child. Sandi did not have money for a security deposit and rent. Even though she grew up in La Crosse, she had no family or friends who would provide housing on an on-going basis. Sandi was homeless and turned to Couleecap for help. With a new baby and less than a year to go to complete her Surgical Technician degree, Sandi was working part-time cleaning houses. She did not want to give up on her educational goals. Completing her education would mean a job with wages and benefits adequate to support her and her child.

Sandi participated in our Transitional Housing Program for 22 months. Through this program, she received a safe and sanitary home, individualized case management, and supportive services to help her overcome barriers and plan for a successful future. With her Case Manager's help, Sandi signed up for Childcare Assistance and WHEAP (Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program). The program's educational assistance helped to provide school supplies and books. Through employment assistance, Sandi received uniforms and shoes needed for her internship and on-going employment. Life skills training for Sandi focused on interviewing skills and resume preparation to help her get started in her career; parenting and time management to help her balance school, work, and family; and money management to help her clean up back bills and develop good budgeting habits. Her Case Manager's consistent encouragement helped Sandi stay focused on her goals, even when she had set backs.

Sandi graduated in May 2002 as a Surgical Technician. She had a choice of several job offers. She accepted a job with Gundersen Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse, earning \$15.30/hr., with full medical and dental insurance coverage. She has taken over responsibility of her own lease and has enrolled in Couleecap's first-time homebuyer program in hopes of purchasing her own house one day.

Families want to be economically self-sufficient, but often need support and additional resources – a safety net during their time of crisis. They need a safe environment and support so that they can focus on what they need to do to achieve self-sufficiency.

Sandi's son is now three years old and is a healthy, happy, and intelligent little boy. He enjoys going to daycare and is looking forward to starting preschool next fall. The stability provided by his mom has helped him to have a positive self-image and has increased his self-confidence.

Assisting parents to get out of poverty and into self-sufficiency significantly benefits their children. Couleecap's Transitional Housing Program provides safe, stable housing. Stable housing gives children a sense of security and belonging in their schools and neighborhoods, allowing them to form friendships. Stability helps children to gain a more positive self-image and increase their self-confidence. Children benefit from increased family income, as parents get and keep employment, get better paying jobs, and/or increase hours of employment. Clients are encouraged to enroll in education or job training, increasing their long-term earning potential and allowing them to provide for their children's needs. Children benefit from observing their parents actively working for increased self-sufficiency. Parents serve as positive role models for their children. Children who see their parents working and pursuing education will learn from this example and are likely to follow this positive behavior in their own lives.