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Hispanics in South Dakota

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Few topics draw more attention today than Hispanic¹ immigration and the impacts of legal and illegal immigrants on society. As discussions and debates continue, immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries are finding work in the U.S. Hispanics now reside in South Dakota. What draws them here?

How many Hispanics are in South Dakota?

The 2000 Census recorded 10,903 Hispanic residents in South Dakota, or 1.4% of the state's population. This is a 50% increase since 1990 and is an increase almost 10 times higher than that of native-born residents. This percentage increase may be due to higher out-migration and lower birth rates of native-borne residents compared with those of immigrants.

Table 1. Top five counties in terms of total Hispanics, 2000.

Rank	County	Number
1	Minnehaha	3,187
2	Pennington	2,341
3	Meade	509
4	Lawrence	396
5	Yankton	395

In general, the most populous counties in South Dakota were home to the most Hispanics (Table 1).

Counties where 2% or more of the total county population was Hispanic in 2000 tended to be urban and contain job prospects (Table 2).

Table 2. South Dakota counties with over 2% of total population as Hispanics, 2000.

Rank	County	Percentage
1	Pennington	2.6
2	Aurora	2.1
3	Corson	2.1
4	Meade	2.1
5	Minnehaha	2.1
6	Bennett	2.0

Pennington County's percentage of Hispanics may be due to the pull of food processing jobs. The county is also one of the fastest growing in the state.

Which counties gained the most Hispanics?

Trends become important after noting the Hispanic population change for selected South Dakota counties (Table 3). South Dakota gained 5,651 Hispanics between 1990 and 2000 (2000 U.S. Census Bureau). This is a 107.6% increase in one decade.

¹ Definition of Hispanic from the U.S. Census Bureau: "People who identify with the terms 'Hispanic' or 'Latino' are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire—'Mexican,' 'Puerto Rican,' or 'Cuban'—as well as those who indicate that they are 'other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino.' Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race" (U.S. Census Bureau glossary).

The Hispanic increase was greatest in southeast South Dakota. For example, Aurora County's 814% increase was due to gaining 57 Hispanics between 1990 and 2000. Counties with agricultural centers may attract Hispanic immigrants (Millard and Chapa 2003). Of counties in Table 3, only Harding County decreased its percentage of Hispanic residents in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau).

Table 3. South Dakota counties with the largest increase of Hispanic immigrants from 1990 and 2000.

<i>County</i>	<i>Number (change 1990-2000)</i>	<i>Percent change</i>	<i>Rank (by % change)</i>
Aurora	57	814.3	1
Kingsbury	35	700.0	2
Lincoln	146	634.8	3
Harding	19	633.3	4
Jerauld	6	600.0	5
Douglas	11	550.0	6
Tripp	46	511.1	7
Buffalo	15	500.0	8
McCook	37	462.5	9
Charles Mix	143	420.6	10

What has happened since 2000?

In 2005, the U.S. Census reported that 14,140 Hispanics lived in South Dakota. This is 2.1% of the state's population. Meade and Corson counties had the highest percentage of Hispanics (Table 4).

Table 4. South Dakota counties with over 2% of total population as Hispanics, 2005.

<i>Rank</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	Meade	3.5
2	Corson	3.4
4	Aurora	3.3
4	Minnehaha	3.3
5	Butte	3.1
5	Pennington	3.1
7	Bennett	2.9
8	Todd	2.7
9	Shannon	2.6
9	Yankton	2.6
11	Custer	2.5
12	Charles Mix	2.3
12	Dewey	2.3
12	Lawrence	2.3
15	Fall River	2.2

Many of the counties with high percentages of Hispanics are in western South Dakota. Five of these counties have Indian reservations within their borders. Another four are adjacent to reservations.

Contemporary issues: immigration in South Dakota

Historically, Hispanic immigrants lived along the southwestern border of the U.S. The 2000 census confirms that Hispanics are residing in rural areas more than ever before. As that pattern continues, we need to understand what draws them to South Dakota and how localities are affected.

Hispanics and work in South Dakota

Hispanic immigrants seem to be following food processing and similar factories that left urban areas for the lower operating costs of rural counties. Like most ethnic groups, Hispanics migrate to places where they know others. A growing network of friends and relatives shares news about jobs at new locations (Weeks 2005). For example, in the U.S., a laborer's pay is higher and jobs are more plentiful than in Latin American countries.

Many think Hispanic immigrants take jobs away from local residents. This is rarely the case. As other minorities gain social status, they do not want to work in lower-sector jobs like meat processing. Meat processing companies may recruit Hispanic immigrants because they are willing to work for lower pay and do jobs many find undesirable.

In South Dakota, Hispanics fill many jobs at manufacturing plants and other agricultural units. This may explain why many of the southeastern counties experienced more Hispanic growth between 1990 and 2000. Yankton, Minnehaha, and Jerauld counties each have meat processing.

Hispanic/local resident interaction

One study of Latino newcomers in the rural Midwest found white residents upset by the rapid increase in Hispanic immigrants (Millard and Chapa 2003). Many feared that immigrants would increase crime rates.

Meanwhile, Hispanics often keep a low profile. In the factories, Hispanics often perform manual labor while the whites are in management positions. While some Hispanics report low job satisfaction with few opportunities for advancement, few complain about poor treatment or lack of benefits. And the longer Hispanic immigrants reside in a town, the more accepted they become.

Summary and conclusions

Hispanics are here. More will be coming to South Dakota. They come because there is work for them. As more South Dakotans move up the ladder, it gets harder to find people to fill their old jobs. Hispanics are often recruited and hired because they will work many hours for low pay.

Since South Dakota's Hispanic population has been low, small changes in total numbers translate to large percentage gains. Census estimates show the state's population grew by 21,089 between 2000 and 2005. The Census also estimates that the Hispanic population grew by 3,237 in the same period. This means that 15% of South Dakota's population growth was Hispanic (Weeks 2005).

Why has western South Dakota increased its Hispanic percentage? Why are Indian reservations and adjacent counties gaining Hispanic immigrants? What impact will Hispanic immigrants have on South Dakota, especially as the state's resident population ages?

If you want more information on Hispanic immigration in South Dakota, contact Trevor Brooks or Mike McCurry in the Rural Life/Census Data Center. Our e-mail address is sdsudata@sdstate.edu. Our phone number is (605) 688-4899. Or you can visit our website at <http://sdrurallife.sdstate.edu/>

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