

# The Rural Center Data Almanac



Before the internet, television, and radio, our grandparents and great-grandparents often turned to the Farmer’s Almanac for essential information. The good news is that we have today far more reliable information to answer life’s essential questions. The bad news is that there is simply *too much* information. Sometimes it seems the more information we have the less we know.

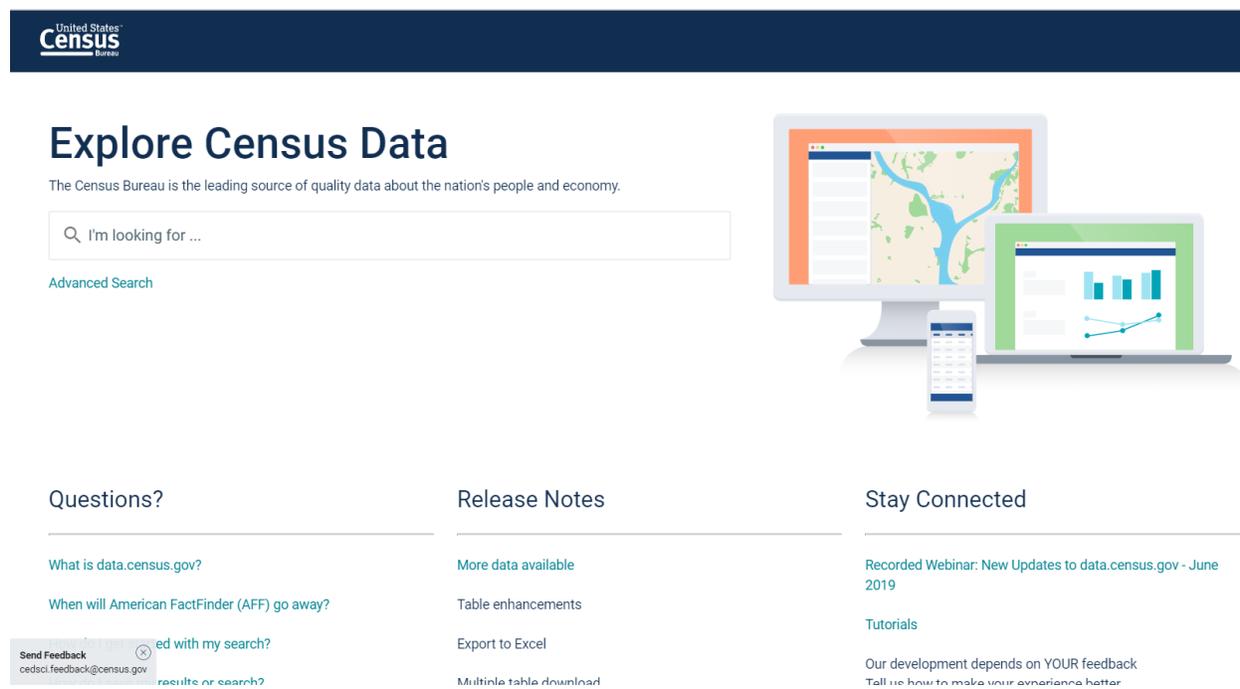
The Rural Center Data Almanac can help. There is a universe of data sources on the Internet. Some are excellent. Others are excellent and complicated. More than a few are just complicated and unhelpful. This data almanac gives you the center’s best direction for online data sources that are relatively easy to access, and provide reliable and useful data for rural leaders.

## The Two Best Basics Sources to Know and Love

We always need quick answers for the basic questions we face day-to-day, say for completing a USDA grant or loan application: what is our most recent population estimate? What is our income level? What is our poverty rate? What about our median age? What’s our current unemployment rate? There is now a simple way to access this from the U.S. Census Bureau website and the North Carolina Department of Commerce. Let’s walk through it, and we start with the American Fact Finder.

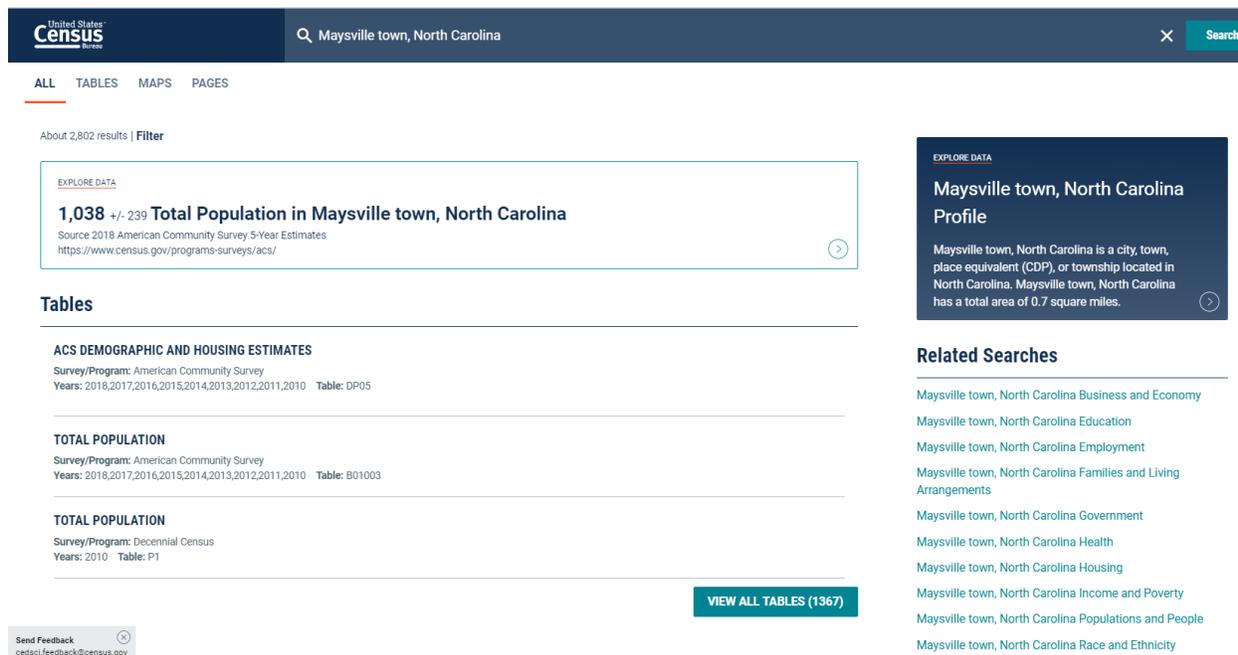
### United States Census Bureau Census Explorer (data.census.gov)

Set your bookmark to: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>



Under the “Explore Census Data” text, you’ll find a search box. Here, you enter your town or your county. For this example, we typed in **Maysville** which is located in Jones

County. For Maysville and likely your own town or county, several choices might appear. For a town, it helps to enter in “Maysville town” to refine the search. For example, there are several Maysvilles across the nation, but we want the one we know and love best: Maysville town, North Carolina. This leads you to:



The screenshot shows the United States Census Bureau search interface. At the top, the search bar contains "Maysville town, North Carolina" with a search button. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for "ALL", "TABLES", "MAPS", and "PAGES". The main content area displays "About 2,802 results | Filter". On the left, an "EXPLORE DATA" box highlights "1,038 +/- 239 Total Population in Maysville town, North Carolina" with source information and a URL. Below this is a "Tables" section listing three table entries: "ACS DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES", "TOTAL POPULATION", and another "TOTAL POPULATION" entry. On the right, a "Maysville town, North Carolina Profile" box is highlighted in blue, providing a brief description of the town. Below the profile is a "Related Searches" section with a list of links such as "Maysville town, North Carolina Business and Economy", "Maysville town, North Carolina Education", etc. At the bottom right, a "VIEW ALL TABLES (1367)" button is visible. A "Send Feedback" link is located at the bottom left.

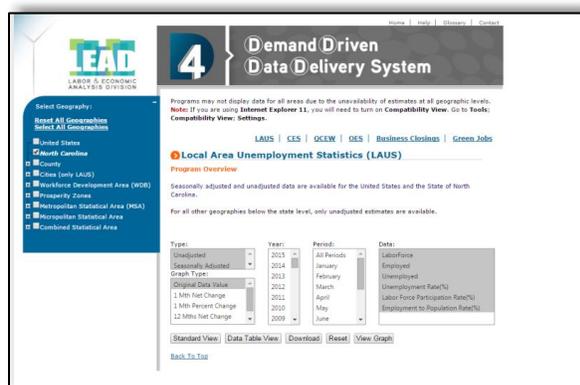
From this location you can get the most up-to-date basic information on your community short of tomorrow’s weather report. Here is what is particularly helpful about it:

- **Basic information is easy to access.** On the left hand side of the page, you’ll notice four distinct features; an “**Explore Data**” summary box, **Tables**, **Maps** and **Pages** sections. The “Explore Data” summary box highlights the “total population in Maysville town, North Carolina, from the current 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. The Tables section of the page shows the number of tables associated with our search, in this example, over 1,000 related tables. To explore these tables, click “View All Tables”, or, you can narrow down the number of tables by clicking on any of the topics listed under “Related Searches” in the pane to your right. This list includes Business and Economy, Education, Employment, Health, Housing etc.
- **Deeper additional information is at hand.** If you wish to get an inside view of your search, you have multiple options. First, you can click inside the “*Maysville town, North Carolina Profile*”, highlighted in blue, in the top right corner of the web page. This takes you to a new page that presents a snapshot data profile of Maysville town. Apart from a map of Maysville town, the page also provides information about the Population, Median Household Income, Poverty Rate and Employment Rate of the town. Other themes visualized on the page include Race and Ethnicity, Health, Education, Business and Economy etc.

## N.C. Employment Security Commission – Demand Driven Data Delivery System

Set your bookmark to: <http://d4.nccommerce.com/>

This will bring you to following web page:



This site has useful labor and occupation projections every rural leader should know. This page is the starting place for four different data sets:

1. **Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS).** This is the data set most commonly cited for employment and unemployment statistics. It is available in a variety of geographies.
2. **Current Employment Statistics.** A slightly different data set, less usable for rural leaders as it only reports a state total and by metropolitan region.
3. **Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW).** This is an excellent source to understand the sectoral make up of your county economy, for example the employment, total wages, establishments for manufacturing, or construction. It allows you to drill down to sub-sectors as well, though for rural counties you will increasingly see data suppression. For the “Super sector or Domain” you can also get reports of the largest employers in a given county.
4. **Occupational Employment and Wages in North Carolina (OES).** This source is similar to the QCEW above, but focuses on occupational data.

As an example, let’s focus on the first data set at the top of the page – the Local Area Unemployment Statistics. What is shown in the box is the current state total. To see data for your county, look just below the box and click on “More Detail.” A new page will appear and there will be a blue box on the left that gives you geography options. Click on the plus sign (+) beside County and every county in the state will appear. Click on your home county.

From the menu box in the center you need to select “unadjusted” – all county level labor statistics are unadjusted, meaning there are no adjustments for seasonal variations in

labor dynamics. This makes county level data a little less accurate than seasonally adjusted state or metropolitan level data, but this is generally well understood.

You will then select the year and the month you want to see. Be aware that there is a month to six week lag from the most recent month you want to see and the data being posted. You can select multiple months or years if you like.

You can then select the data. For the county level you can retrieve labor force, employment, unemployment and unemployment rate. You can also select all four. Labor force participation rate and employment to population ratio is unavailable at the county level.

Policy makers and the general press mostly focus on the unemployment rate. This is fine, but understand that the unemployment rate is dependent on two variables: those known to be unemployed and looking for work and the size of the labor force. A county can have an increase in the number of jobs, but if its labor force is expanding it might still show a constant or rising level of unemployment. In addition to the unemployment rate, we advise that you look also at the change in the number of employed, which has no external variable.

Once you make your selection, you can view the data as a table on the webpage by selecting “standard view” or it can be downloaded into a spreadsheet by clicking on download.

The Census Bureau American Fact Finder site and the North Carolina Department of Commerce D4 data portal can put a world of practical information at your finger tips! Put them to good use for your community!

## More Advanced Sources When You Need Them

### N.C. County Population Estimates and Projections

Set your bookmark to:

[http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts\\_and\\_figures/socioeconomic\\_data/population\\_estimates.shtm](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates.shtm)

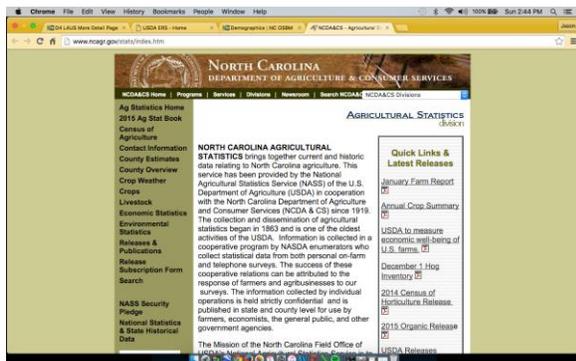


Data sites typically give you most recent or historic data. This site, provided by the state demographer's office of the N.C. Department of State Management and Budget, gives population projections of total population, race, and age cohorts for individual counties. These estimates extend out to 2035. They are projections, not predictions, but there is considerable rigor to their analysis. The site also gives certified population estimates for counties and municipalities. This is a highly useful site if you want to see how your county's population is likely to change in the future.

## N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: Agricultural Statistics Division

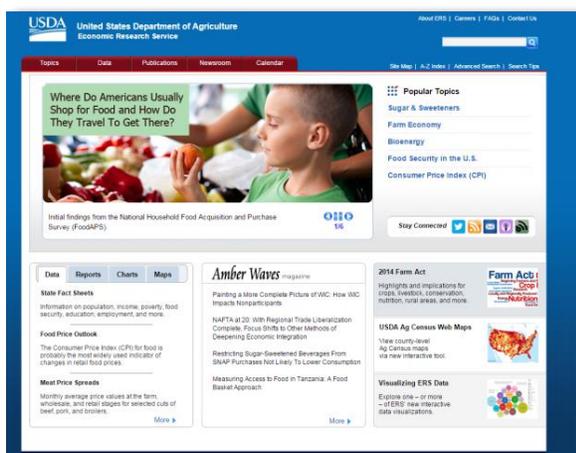
Set your bookmark to: <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/index.htm>

This state site has very good county summary data and the 2015 Agricultural Stat Book, which is a strong single source of information on agriculture across North Carolina.



## U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service

Set your bookmark to: [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov)

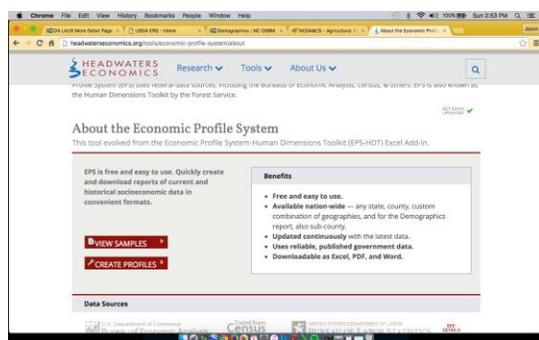


The Economic Research Service is the research arm of USDA. The information here is both broad and deep and should be a key reference point for all rural leaders.

The ERS site is best navigated by clicking on the “Topics” top left of the page. It organizes short briefing documents, data, and publications under thematic headings. For example, there are subsections on farm economy, natural resources, and the rural economy, to name just a few. The rural economy section has a range of recent briefing summaries on rural labor and education; income, poverty and welfare; development strategies; and rural population and migration. It also links to relevant ERS publications and data sources. This is a significant resource of rural data and expertise relied on by federal policy makers, but it is there for your use, too!

## Economic Profile System – Headwaters Economics

Set your bookmark to: <http://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/economic-profile-system/about>



Headwaters Economics is a nonprofit research organization based in Montana. Through major contracts from the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management, it has developed a rich, highly contextual database that produces county profiles on a number of topics delivered in several formats. While it is not widely known outside of the West, the database includes every county in the nation.

What makes the reports impressive is that every set of information includes some context for understanding its importance. This is unusual and much welcomed. The data series covers many years, so it is easy to see trends for your county.

The link will take you to Headwater’s Economic Profile System Page. Click on the “Create Profiles” button. This takes you to a new page that presents reports by topic. For our example, choose “Summary.” This will scroll the page down to the Summary section. Click on “Build Report.” Next, enter a geography name, such as your home county, and then click on “add geography.” Right below you have the option of downloading the report as an Excel, Word or a PDF. When you click on the report type it will download the Word or Excel file to your computer, and if a PDF, it will open up a new browser tab, which can then be saved as a PDF.

## Rural News Sources

### **The Rural Blog:**

Set your bookmark to: <http://irjci.blogspot.com/>

The Rural Blog is a project of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues from the University of Kentucky; it is an excellent source for rural news stories from around the nation.

### **The Daily Yonder:**

Set your bookmark to: [www.dailyyonder.com](http://www.dailyyonder.com)

The Daily Yonder is an online rural focused newspaper by the Center for Rural Strategies. The Daily Yonder brings stories and opinion articles of national issues facing small communities.