

McCurtain County Listening Session Report

<http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls/>



October 8, 2002



OKLAHOMA

The mission of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service is to disseminate information to the people of Oklahoma and encourage the adoption of research-based knowledge relating to agriculture, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development.



McCurtain County Listening Session

Twenty-eight (28) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the McCurtain County Listening Session. The Listening Session was an effort to get a broad base of citizen input to identify local issues so a plan can be developed to create a better economic, environmental, and social situation for McCurtain County. Participants from across the county provided input and identified, discussed, and defined their community's needs and opportunities while building on the assets that presently exist.



The purpose of this report is to share publicly the process and the information that was collected from the McCurtain County Listening Session. The report lists the needs and concerns of the county as identified during the open forum process. This report also will be used as a starting point for the upcoming *Focus Forum*, in which an assembled group of stakeholders will define, discuss, and begin to address the needs and concerns identified in the Listening Session. Many of the needs and concerns of Oklahoma can be addressed through partnerships with other groups and organizations. The report can be found on the Oklahoma Community Listening Session website at <http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls/>.

The Listening Session revolved around a single, key question: **“Considering the next 3 to 5 years, what are the critical issues in your community and in Oklahoma that need to be addressed to realize a positive future for you, your family, and your community?”** The needs and issues identified by participants reflect several broad areas of interest. Available data do not show that any one area is more significant than another, but they do show that all these issues are vitally important to the people of McCurtain County.

The Listening Session Process

Listening Session participants were divided into small groups, usually not more than 12-15 participants. Small group participants considered the guiding question (see below) and suggested issues that they felt were of most importance to their families and community. With the assistance of a group facilitator, each small group discussed its chosen issues, combined similar issues, and then voted to determine its top five issues.

Following the small group sessions, participants came together in a large group setting to discuss the results of the small group sessions. They combined similar and overlapping issues and voted to determine the top issues for the county.

Considering the next 3 to 5 years, what are the critical issues in your community and in Oklahoma that need to be addressed to realize a positive future for you, your family, and your community?

Large Group Discussion

The following five interest areas encompass the concerns, needs, and issues cited most frequently by Listening Session participants in their large group discussion:

- **Education**
 - Keep dependent schools open
 - Better schools
 - Better pay for teachers (salary and benefits)
 - Funding cuts in schools
 - Back to basics

- **Sustaining farm enterprises due to our agriculture base**
 - Health issues – nutrition

- **Health care**
 - Prescription drug prices
 - Affordable medical insurance (private and state)
 - Healthcare for the working middle class and self-employed

- **Economic development**
 - Increase wages
 - Job skills training
 - More industry in county/sustain the industry we have
 - Taxes
 - Encourage usage of local resources
 - Management plan

- **Substance abuse programs**
 - Awareness for youth
 - Support for families
 - Law enforcement
 - Drug eradication

Small Group Discussions

In addition to the interest areas identified in the large group discussion, the following are issues that were also discussed in the small breakout group sessions:

- Water
 - Promote industry
 - Water management/development
 - More rural water systems
- Apathy – need citizen involvement
- Infrastructure
 - Sewer and water
 - TV station
 - Roads
 - Environmental management
- Before and after school day care
- Education
 - Keep dependent schools open
 - Better schools
 - Better pay for teachers (salary and benefits)
 - Funding cuts in schools
 - Back to basics
- Sustaining farm enterprises due to our agriculture base
 - Health issues – nutrition
- Health care
 - Prescription drug prices
 - Affordable medical insurance (private and state)
 - Healthcare for the working middle class and self-employed
 - High cost prevents retirement/local access to a VA doctor
- Economic development
 - Increase wages
 - Job skills training
 - More industry in county/sustain the industry we have
 - Taxes
 - Encourage usage of local resources
 - Management plan

Small Group Discussions

- Substance abuse programs
 - Awareness for youth
 - Support for families
 - Law enforcement
 - Drug eradication

In the months following the Listening Session, McCurtain County Extension Educators will invite community leaders and representatives from organizations and agencies to a *Focus Forum* to consider what the people are saying and to devise action plans for McCurtain County. As Extension begins its long-range strategic planning process, the involvement of citizens in identifying needs and opportunities in the county and community will be extremely valuable. Through the upcoming *Focus Forums*, education and service providers will learn more about community concerns while forging new partnerships with other groups to address identified issues.

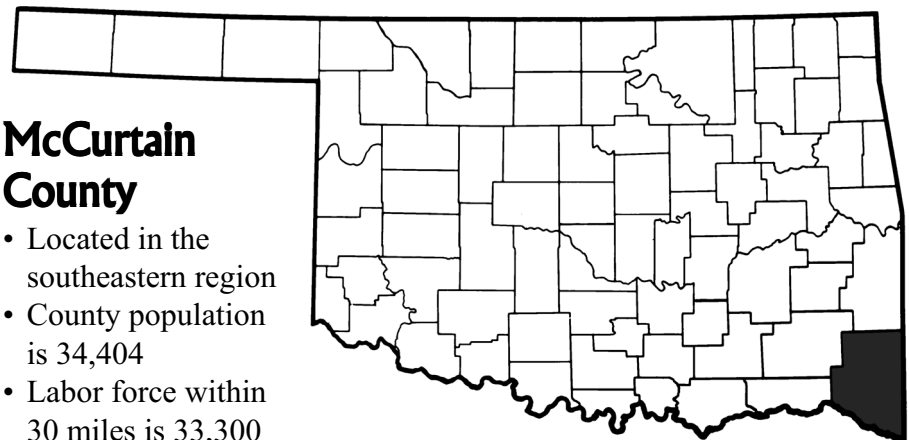
Facts About McCurtain County

The intent of these data is to provide local perspective and context for discussion. Local circumstances can change the demographic and economic data; the following is the most up-to-date information that is currently available.¹

◆ History

The topography of McCurtain County varies from the rugged foothills of the Ouachita Mountains in the north to the fertile coastal plain in the south. The county has a unique heritage ranging from the Caddoan mound builders to the first white settlements in the early 19th century, including 75 years of Choctaw sovereignty, and finally statehood.

The county name is that of a prominent Choctaw family, several of whose member served as chiefs. The Choctaw period left such historic sites as the Wheelock Mission Church and Academy. The Dierks family developed large holdings beginning before the turn of the century and sold the land to Weyerhaeuser Company in 1969.



¹ County statistics from Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000

Facts About McCurtain County

◆ **Industry**

Weyerhaeuser is the largest employer and has a paper mill in Valliant and a sawmill in Wright City. Other major employers are Tyson Foods, Inc., a poultry processing plant; SETCO, a company that builds solid tires for heavy equipment and ships worldwide; Hagale Industries, a garment manufacturing plant; and Rockwall Industries, a lumber mill. Tourism is also a major industry with Beavers Bend State Resort, Museum of the Red River, and hunting, fishing, and historic sites.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, McCurtain County had 1,573 farms (averaging 208 acres). Average gate receipts were \$87,146 in 1997, and the county had 85 farms with gate receipts in excess of \$500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (97 percent) and crops (3 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts increased 25 percent, and the average farm size decreased 13 percent.

◆ **Profile**

McCurtain County is located in southeastern Oklahoma, adjacent to the Texas and Arkansas borders. The county is comprised of 1,900 square miles of rugged terrain, valleys, and mountains. The average annual rainfall is 62.3 inches. Average temperatures range from 42 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 79.1 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 census the county seat of Idabel had a population of 6,952 residents. The city is located 225 miles southeast of Tulsa.

◆ **Population Characteristics**

The population density of the county is 32 persons per square mile. The median age of the population is 33.2 years of age.

Facts About McCurtain County

◆ County Population - 2000

	<i>2000</i>	<i>Percent</i>
County population	34,402	100.0
Male population	16,557	48.2
Female population	17,845	51.8
Under 5 years	2,518	7.3
5 to 9 years	2,690	7.8
10 to 14 years	2,806	8.2
15 to 19 years	2,619	7.6
20 to 24 years	1,921	5.6
25 to 34 years	4,196	12.2
35 to 44 years	4,808	14.0
45 to 54 years	4,503	13.1
55 to 59 years	1,962	5.7
60 to 64 years	1,577	4.6
65 to 74 years	2,606	7.6
75 to 84 years	1,612	4.7
85 years and over	593	1.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000

◆ Households

McCurtain County had 13,216 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are included in the table on the final page of this report.

◆ Poverty

The poverty status in McCurtain County decreased for individuals by 15.9 percent. In 1990 there were 9,937 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 8,355 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 7.5 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 1,687 such families, but by the year 2000 the number had declined to 1,560 families. Female households with no husband present and with her own children under 18 years of age living below

Facts About McCurtain County

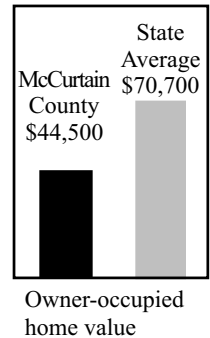
the poverty level numbered 805 in 1990. These households declined 5.5 percent to 761 by the year 2000.

◆ Labor Force

The McCurtain County labor force numbered 15,258 in 2000. Participation rate in the county labor force constituted 47.44 percent of males and 40.95 percent of females. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 5.96 percent in 2000, and the per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was \$18,423.

◆ Housing

The county has 13,216 housing units, and 73.3 percent of these are occupied by owners. Statewide, 68.4 percent of housing units are occupied by owners. The median owner-occupied home value in the county is \$44,500. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is \$70,700. The median housing rental contract is \$302 per month in McCurtain County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is \$456 per month.



◆ Tax Structure

The county tax rate in McCurtain County is 1.25 percent and generated \$2,360,158 in Fiscal Year 2000 – 2001. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent, and local sales tax for cities in the county varies. City sales tax rates and revenues for seven population centers are: in Broken Bow, a 2.25 percent sales tax rate generates \$1,420,887; in Garvin, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$25,146; in Hayworth, a 5 percent sales tax rate generates \$2,411,834; in Millerton, a 2 percent sales tax rate generates \$13,770; in Valliant, a 3 percent sales tax

Facts About McCurtain County

rate generates \$288,857; and in Wright City, a 3 percent sales tax rate generates \$91,364. The ad valorem average mill levy for McCurtain County is 83.39 mills, which generated \$10,697,858 in 2001 – 2002. Also, McCurtain County received \$3,430,649 from the state for the county's proceeds from gas, diesel, and special fuel tax; the gross production tax; and motor vehicle collections.

Source: OTC State Payments to Local Governments FY 2000-2001 and "Oklahoma Ad Valorem Mill Levies, Fiscal Year 2002," by Notie H. Lansford, Jr., and Dondee Payne, Department of Agricultural Economics, July 2002, AE 02136

◆ Education

The county is home to the McCurtain County Higher Education Center. There are 69.2 percent of McCurtain County residents over 25 years of age who are high school graduates, compared to 74.6 percent statewide. College graduates 25 years and older number 10.8 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.

Facts About McCurtain County

◆ Primary Employers in the Area

Major Employers	Products/ Services	Number Employed	City/ Town
Weyerhaeuser	wood products	1,800	Idabel
Tyson Foods	poultry products	1,350	Idabel
Weyerhaeuser Company	paper mill	475	Valliant
Brown & Root	maintenance for paper mill	300	Valliant
Idabel Public Schools	education services	263	Idabel
Hagale Industries	jeans	200	Idabel
McCurtain Memorial Hospital	medical services	164	Idabel
Broken Bow Public Schools	education services	134	Broken Bow
Wal-Mart	retail store	130	Idabel
McCurtain County	government services	91	Idabel
Pan Pacific	fiber board	90	Broken Bow
City of Idabel	government services	88	Idabel
Georgia-Pacific	soft wood products	87	Idabel
Jimmy Tucker Trucking	nationwide common carrier	80	Broken Bow
Department of Human Services	government services	76	Idabel
Pan Pacific Products	wood products	75	Idabel
Thomason Lumber	lumber	55	Broken Bow

Source: Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000

Facts About McCurtain County

◆ County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000

	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Change</i>
County population	33,433	34,402	2.9
Hispanic/Latino population	459	1,064	131.8
White population	24,821	24,267	-2.2
Black or African American population	3,452	33,200	-7.3
American Indian and Alaska Native population	4,873	4,669	-4.2
Asian population	80	74	-7.5
Median age of all persons in the county	33.05	36	8.9
Labor force	13,873	15,258	10.0
Average annual unemployment rate	9.13	5.96	----
County per capita income	11,366	18,423	62.1
Poverty - families with related children under age 18	1,687	1,560	-7.5
Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present	805	761	-5.5
Poverty - individuals	9,937	8,355	-15.9
Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma	6,522	7,913	21.3
Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma	59.2%	69.2%	16.9
Persons over age 25 with a college degree	1,979	2,361	19.3
Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor's degree	9.6%	10.8%	12.5
Households - family household with own children under age 18	4,634	4,500	-2.9
Households - married couple family with own children under age 18	3,385	3,026	-10.6
Households - female householder, with own children under age 18, no husband present	1,016	1,181	16.2
County housing units	13,828	15,427	11.6
Owner-occupied housing units	8,940	9,692	8.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices, or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Samuel E. Curl, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$95.00 for 95 copies.

**McCurtain County Extension Office
108-B North Central Avenue, Suite 2
Idabel, OK 74745-3835
Phone: 580-286-7558
Fax: 580-286-7688**



**Division of Agricultural Sciences
and Natural Resources
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Oklahoma State University
139 Agricultural Hall
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-6019
Phone: 405-744-5398
Fax: 405-744-5339
www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/**