

■ Rural Income and Poverty

Rural median household income was \$26,280 in 1994, up 1.6 percent from 1993 after adjusting for inflation, but still slightly below the median at the beginning of the decade. Median rural household income continues to fall short of that in urban areas by nearly 24 percent. Incomes were substantially lower for rural minorities, for families headed by women, and for women living alone.

The poverty rate in rural America was 16.4 percent in 1994. The rural urban poverty gap, at 2.4 percentage points, was as small as it has been since poverty statistics have been calculated. Although the decrease of nearly a percentage point in the rural poverty rate from 1993-94 was not statistically significant, the trend of gradually increasing poverty observed during the previous years appears to have stopped. Over half of the rural poor (52 percent) live in the South, a disproportionate concentration compared with the South's 44 percent of the total rural population.

Families headed by women experienced the highest poverty rates of all family types (45.0 percent in rural areas and 36.8 percent in urban), and a high proportion of rural women living alone were also poor (33.0 percent). Nearly one-fourth of rural children lived in poor families.

Poverty among Blacks in inner cities receives much more public attention than does that among rural Blacks, yet the 1994 poverty rate for rural blacks (36.4 percent) was comparable to that for central-city Blacks (33.6 percent). And nearly half of all rural Black children (48.2 percent) lived in families with below-poverty-level income.