

How the Food Processing Industry is Diversifying Rural Minnesota

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ABSTRACT

Minnesota has often been characterized as a largely “White” state, with little diversity, populated by persons of European ancestry--an image that is not wholly undeserved. During the past decade, however, Minnesota has experienced a rapid increase in foreign-born residents of largely non-European ancestry that has received much attention in the print and broadcast media. In this paper, the authors argue that the diversification of rural Minnesota is largely the result of the restructuring of the food processing industry, and the subsequent recruitment of low wage laborers. They begin with a brief discussion of demographic changes in the state as a whole, and in rural Minnesota. This is followed by an analysis of the relationship between the location of food processing industries and the diversity of the population, using different measures of diversity. They conclude with a discussion of the benefits and challenges that “new diversity” poses for rural communities.