



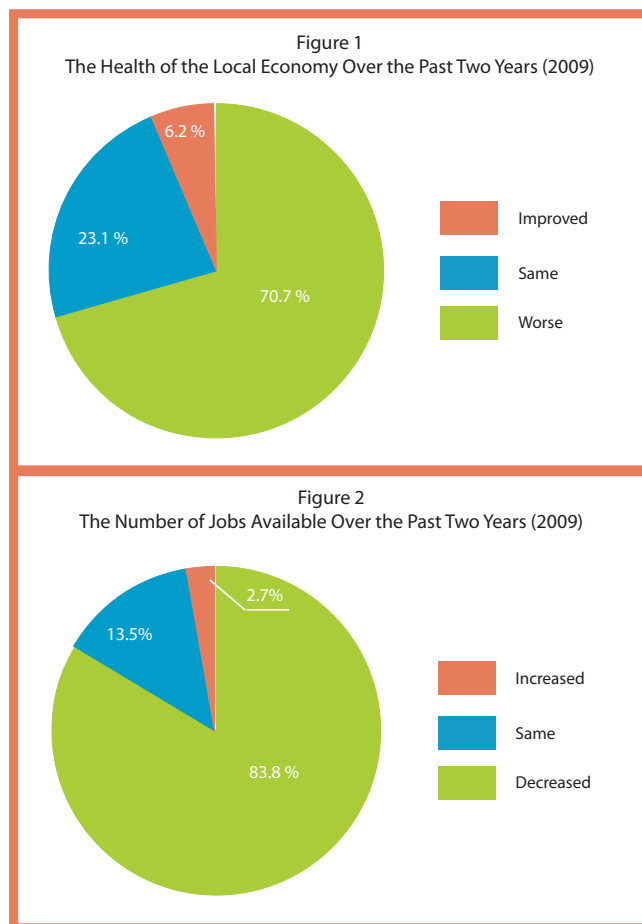
Jobs and the Local Economy in Coahoma County, Mississippi

This information brief provides a unique snapshot of the status of jobs and the local economy from the perspective of Coahoma County's residents. The data, taken from a countywide survey the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University conducted in 2009, is presented in straight-forward and useful manner in hopes to stimulate informed conversation between all who are working to increase economic opportunities in Coahoma County.

The State of the Local Economy

Coahoma County is not exempt from the tough economic times that the nation has experienced in recent years. Residents were asked to share their views about the state of the local economy, and to state whether the number of good jobs in the county was improving. The Center was particularly interested in determining how the local residents' perspective of these two economic issues may have shifted since the original October 2007 survey to the follow-up 2009 survey. Their thoughts included the following:

- Over 70 percent felt the local economy has gotten worse from 2007 to 2009, while the percent of residents who believed it has remained was less, just above 23 percent. Only 6.2 percent stated that the local economy was improving from 2007 to 2009 (Figure 1).
- About 84 percent of the respondents in 2009 believed the number of quality jobs available in the county had dwindled (Figure 2).
- White residents and those with some college education were the most likely to say that good jobs were on the decline in the country (Figure 2).





Quality of Jobs and Benefits for Better Education and Skills

Research conducted by the Economic Research Service, USDA and others suggests that low-wage work opportunities are declining and that small cities, town, and rural counties that hope to strengthen their local economies should focus their efforts on good paying jobs with decent benefits. When places create better jobs, they are better able to retain and attract workers that have higher levels of education and good job-related skills. A sample of Coahoma County residents were asked to ponder if quality jobs are on the rise and if better skilled and educated workers are being attracted to the county.

The survey featured five job-related questions. Individuals were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements. From these results (Table 4.5), the following key observations stood out:

- Almost 80 percent of residents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement that jobs that pay decent wages and offer good benefits are available in Coahoma County. On the other hand, 13.5 percent of residents agreed/strongly agreed with this statement.
- Over 47 percent of residents stated that local employers do not reward workers who secure more education or training, but a sizable percent (44 percent) agreed/strongly agreed that employers reward employees who complete additional education or training.
- The issue of whether job training is available to local residents received mixed reviews from respondents. About 53 percent agreed that job training is available, but nearly 42 percent disagreed with this statement. As for the access to GED and adult education classes, a whopping 80 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, leading one to believe that many respondents simply did not know for sure.
- Almost 64 percent agreed/strongly agreed that new businesses in the county tend to hire locally while 24 percent argued that they did not.

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Table 4.5 Responses of Coahoma County Residents to Job-Related Issues (2009)

Statement	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither	Strongly Agree/Agree
Plenty of good paying jobs with benefits	79.8	6.6	13.5
Additional education or training is rewarded	47.5	8.3	44.2
Job training is available	41.6	5.3	53.1
GED and adult classes are available	3.0	80.0	17.0
New businesses tend to hire locally	23.8	12.4	63.8

Local Residents' Financial Situation: Better or Worse?



Despite the economic uncertainties many people across the nation face, just over 50 percent of Coahoma County residents noted that their financial situation had remained about the same over the past two recent years. On the other hand, the number who claimed that their financial status had taken a turn for the worse was 37.5 percent (Figure 3).

By examining key background characteristics of survey respondents, the issue of who is feeling the pinch of those difficult economic times becomes clearer as Table 4.6 details.

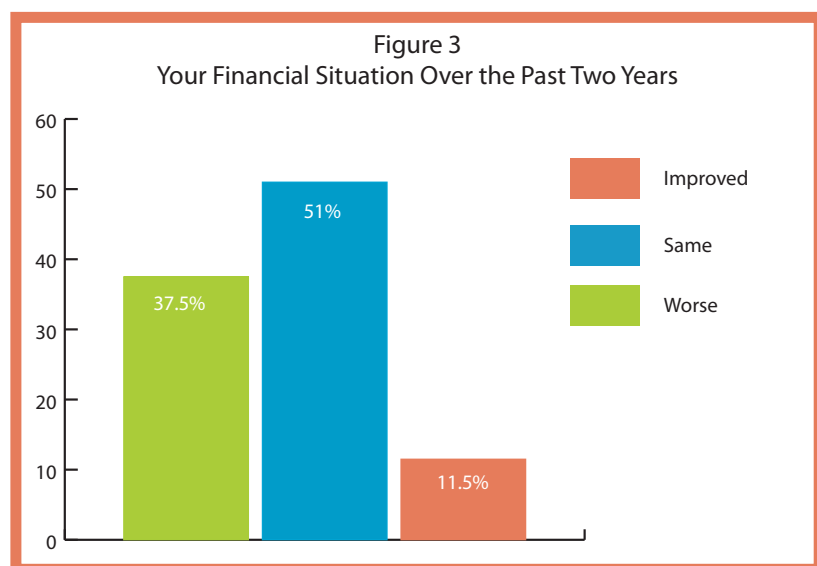
Table 4.6.
Personal Financial Situation of Coahoma County Residents in 2009 by Key Characteristics

Background Information	Worse	Improved
Education		
Less than High School	33.0	8.7
High School	40.3	9.0
Some College	43.1	10.0
College or more	26.3	26.3
Race		
White	30.6	12.2
African American	38.7	10.8
Age		
18-44	37.8	11.9
45-64	40.3	15.3
65 and over	31.9	2.8

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*B*usiness Ownership

Adult residents were asked if they owned their own business. About 11 percent of residents responded “YES.” In many communities, small businesses and nonfarm proprietorships are emerging as key sources of new jobs. The survey found that 11 percent of respondents own their own business. This number is small in comparison to many other small counties in the nation. Increasingly, small businesses and self-employed workers are being seen as potential growth areas for communities, and this is an area that Coahoma County leaders might want to give greater attention to as part of the economic development priorities.

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*S*ome Closing Thoughts

No doubt about it, the economic climate in America today is being felt in communities across the country, including cities and towns in Coahoma County. Many of the respondents believe that the economic situation is worse today than it was two years ago, that the availability of good jobs is on the decline, and that several feel their financial situation has deteriorated in recent years.

While these insights provide reason for local leaders to be concerned, resources are available in Coahoma County to help provide workforce training and skill building, but many survey respondents do not appear to be aware of them. Even GED or adult education classes are opportunities that these individuals do not appear to know very much about.

Accelerating efforts to inform and educate local residents about these resources could be well worth pursuing.

With the perceived decline in good jobs with benefits, local leaders and citizens may need to take a hard look at how they can build a diverse economic development plan, one that includes not only industrial recruitment (which is becoming a tougher strategy for small-sized counties like Coahoma County), but also business retention and expansion programs, entrepreneurship and small business development, and regional economic development strategies. This mix of approaches offers the best hope of placing the economy on firmer footing.

For More Information:
Contact the Southern Rural
Development Center at
662-325-3207
Or visit us online at
<http://srdc.msstate.edu>



About these Surveys

The surveys used for this brief were conducted in the fall of 2007 and 2009. Telephone interviews with adult respondents from households in the target counties were conducted using a random digital dialing sampling procedure for telephone numbers.

A total of 800 respondents (two counties) participated in 2007 and 1,279 respondents (three counties) participated in 2009. The surveys were weighted based on gender, educational attainment, and age groups to ensure they were representative of the communities.

Authors: Lionel J. (Bo) Beaulieu and Roberto Gallardo, Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State University