



Local voices Local PERSPECTIVES

Jobs and the Economy in Leflore County, Mississippi

This report is intended to provide a snapshot of the job market and the local economy from the perspective of residents from Leflore County, Mississippi. The Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University conducted countywide surveys in the fall of 2007 and 2009. The Center hopes the information presented in this brief offers insight for local officials who wish to expand jobs and economic development opportunities in Leflore County in future months.

The State of the Local Economy

From the surveys, it is apparent that local residents in Leflore County are being impacted by the economic problems that the U.S. has faced in recent years. Local residents shared their views about the state of the local economy and the number of available jobs in the county. Their perspectives on how these two key economic issues may have changed over the two year period are important to the Center's study.

- The percentage of people who felt the local economy had gotten worse increased from 35.9 percent to nearly 76 percent between the 2007 and 2009 surveys (see Figure 1). Residents most likely to state that the economy was getting worse included college-educated people, white residents, and homeowners.
- The percentage of residents who believed the local economy remained relatively the same decreased from the 2007 to the 2009 surveys – dropping from 37.7 percent to 18.2 percent.

- Over 26 percent stated that the local economy was improving at the time of the 2007 survey; in the 2009 survey, this figure plummeted to 6 percent.
- Nearly 87 percent of the 2009 survey respondents believed that the number of jobs available in the county had declined. This was two times greater than the 42 percent recorded in the 2007 study (see Figure 2). The higher the level of education, the more likely respondents were to feel that the number of available jobs had decreased over the past two years. This is also the case for persons 45-64 years of age, with 93 percent of this age group feeling that job availability had deteriorated over the two year period.
- Only 4.2 percent of respondents in the 2009 survey stated that the availability of jobs had taken a turn for the better over the past two years, a sizable decline from the 31 percent who felt this way in the 2007 countywide survey.

Figure 1. The Health of the Local Economy Over the Past Two Years

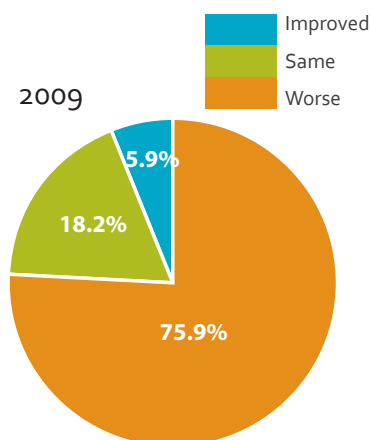
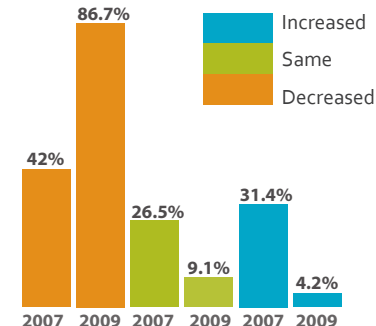
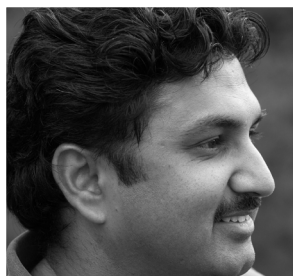


Figure 2. Number of Jobs Available Over the Past Two Years



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 and rural counties should focus on providing well-paying jobs with decent benefits in their quest to strengthen their local economies. When better jobs are created, areas are more likely to retain and attract workers who have higher levels of education and essential skills. Thus, the next series of questions was intended to determine if the number of quality jobs was increasing in Leflore County and whether better skilled and educated workers were being attracted to the county.



Small cities and rural counties should focus on well-paying jobs with decent benefits in their quest to strengthen local economies.



Five questions in the surveys addressed job-related issues. In particular, individuals were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements. For purposes of this discussion, the responses of individuals who answered agree/strongly agree are combined as well as those who stated they disagree/strongly disagree with the five statements. The results and key observations are displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Responses of Leflore County Residents to Job-Related Issues

Statement	2007 Stronly Disagree/ Disagree	Neither	2009 Strongly Agree/ Agree
Plenty of good paying jobs with benefits	61.3%	21.7%	17%
	67.9%	9.7%	22.5%
Additional education and training is rewarded	50.5%	21.5%	28%
	38.4%	9.7%	51.9%
Job training is available	42.3%	19.4%	38.3%
	40.3%	8.3%	51.4%
GED and adult classes are available	12.8%	7.5%	79.6%
	3.6%	0.8%	95.6%
New businesses hire locally	28.2%	20.8%	51%
	23.3%	7.2%	69.6%

2007
 2009

Table 4.1 Observations

- The majority of residents disagreed with the statement that jobs with decent wages, good benefits and opportunities for advancement are available in Leflore County. On the other hand, a greater percent of 2009 respondents said they agreed with this statement than those taking part in our 2007 survey (22.5 percent versus 17 percent).
- More residents in the 2009 survey agreed that getting more education or training is essential to being rewarded by local employers. Those who agreed with this statement swelled from 28 percent in 2007 to 51.9 percent by 2009.
- While nearly half of residents in 2007 agreed that new businesses in the county hired locally, those in 2009 who agreed represented 70 percent.

Local Residents' Financial Situation: Better or Worse?

Are Leflore County residents being influenced by the challenging economic times that are impacting the nation and Mississippi? Despite the current economic uncertainties, the countywide surveys reveal that the majority of residents claimed their own financial situation had maintained stability. In fact, a slightly larger number of 2009 respondents claimed their financial situation had remained stable over the past two years than those in 2007 (49.4 percent versus 45.5 percent). On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who claimed that their financial status had worsened increased from 28 percent in 2007 to 35 percent in 2009. See Figure 3.

Table 4.2 gives a brief overview of the changing personal financial situations for various Leflore County residents between the 2007 and 2009 surveys.

Figure 3.
Personal Financial Situations 2007-2009

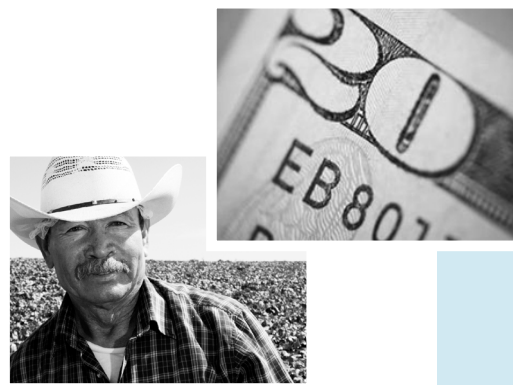
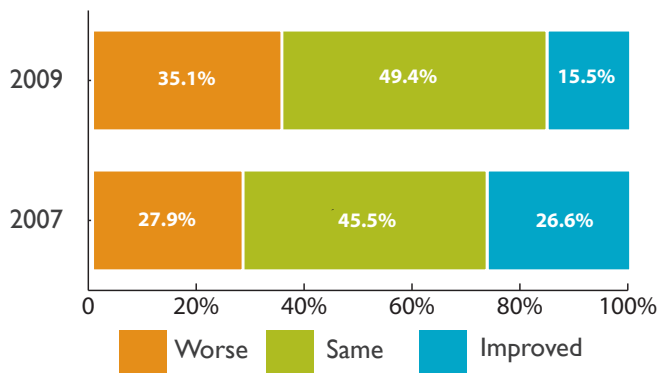


Table 4.2. The Personal Financial Situation of Residents: Changes by Key Characteristics

Table 4.2 Observations

Table 4.2 indicates that respondents who stated that their personal financial situation worsened tend to be well-educated, white, and 18-44 or 65 years of age or older. For example, over 42 percent of those with a college education noted that their own financial situation had improved at the time of our 2007 survey, but this number dropped to less than 18 percent by 2009. Only 9 percent of the county's senior citizens 65 and older indicated that their personal financial situation had improved by 2009, a significant decrease from the 21 percent who answered this way in 2007.

Background Information	Worse		Improved	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Education				
Less than High School	32.8%	28.6%	19.3%	18.3%
High School	39.6%	41.5%	21.6%	10.2%
Some College	20.4%	38.2%	30.6%	17.3%
College	11%	29%	42.4%	17.7%
Race				
White	15.6%	37.9%	28.3%	14.6%
African American	33.3%	34%	25%	15.2%
Age				
18-44	30.5%	42%	28.6%	13.2%
45-64	30.1%	26.8%	26%	22.8%
65 and over	14.5%	26.9%	21%	9%

Business Ownership on the Decline

All adult residents surveyed in 2007 and 2009 were asked if they owned their own business. Approximately one in seven persons responded “yes” in 2007, but in 2009, the percentage responding in the affirmative dipped to seven percent. In

many communities, small businesses and nonfarm proprietorships serve as a key source of providing new jobs. The fact that fewer survey participants in 2009 stated that they owned their own business should concern local leaders and economic development organizations.

Concluding Comments

Undoubtedly, the distressed economic climate in America today has affected communities across the country, including Leflore County. People were concerned that well-paying jobs with decent benefits were becoming hard to come by in the county, which is seen by the number of well-educated residents who claimed the status of their personal finances had recently diminished. It is important to remember, however, that those with less education were experiencing tough times as well. In 2007 and 2009, approximately 2 in 5 persons with only a high school education said their personal financial situation had worsened over the course of the previous two years. As for race, both African American and white

Entrepreneurial businesses play an important role in increasing the vitality of small communities.

residents claimed they were continuously facing a decline in their economic status.

In order to prevent skilled workers from exploring job opportunities outside of Leflore County, employers should

reward those with more training and education by providing well-paying jobs with decent benefits. Also, local leaders should carefully examine ways to increase the number of personally-owned businesses since the Center’s surveys revealed these numbers

have declined since 2007. Entrepreneurial businesses play an important role in increasing the vitality of small communities, providing further motive to strengthen the retention and expansion of these types of enterprises.



For More Information:
Contact the
Southern Rural Development Center
at 662-325-3207
or visit 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 400 adult residents took part in the 2007 study and another 400 adults responded to the 2009 survey. The surveys were weighted based on gender, educational attainment, and age groups to ensure they were representative of the adult members of the county (18+ years of age).

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