

WHAT IS RURAL?

Rural Ministries Discussion Paper

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1. Precise definitions are notoriously difficult.

Attempts include:

1. A village is a place where the inhabitants believe they are the centre of the universe.
2. A village is an island in a sea of green which can be reached by crossing a tarmac causeway.
3. "The simplest and most useful way of distinguishing between urban and rural areas is the relative proportion of open countryside found in an area." Davies, Watkins and Winter in "Church and Religion in Rural England."
4. "Rural areas are essentially parts of the country which show unmistakable signs of being dominated by **extensive** (as opposed to **intensive**) use of land." Wibberley.
5. "Rural means areas when looked at on a map are largely farm land, moor or forest with separated settlements ranging from single dwellings to small towns." David Osborne "The Country Vicar".
6. "Rural England is not only a reality, a major part of the country in terms of land areas, but also a myth" David Osborne "The Country Vicar."
7. A rural area is one that is not urban or suburban.
8. Settlements of less than 1,000 population tend to be regarded as villages. The scattered community with less than 100 inhabitants, with no public services, would normally be classified as a hamlet.

2. Simple definitions all have some problems.

They do not permit classification of small market towns, the army camp estate, the mining or fishing village.

3. The search for adequate definitions continues.

Several government departments are involved in research projects and have produced complicated formulas. The general consensus is that a land classification at eight levels is possible. These are:

1. Urban (Sparse)
2. Urban (Less Sparse)
3. Town (Less Sparse)
4. Town (Sparse)
5. Village (Less Sparse)
6. Village (Sparse)
7. Dispersed (Less Sparse)
8. Dispersed (Sparse)

4. Definitions are unlikely to provide “a feel” of a particular place.

One way of determining what is rural is to ask local people how they categorize their own settlement. Those working in mining or fishing villages will rarely describe themselves as being rural.

What constitutes rural areas in Scotland or Northern Ireland is very different from what constitutes a rural area in England and Wales. A settlement with a population of 5,000 may be perceived as rural in England but urban in Northern Ireland.

5. For the majority, often it is the “look” or “feel” of a locality that defines whether people regard it as rural or not.

6. Other interesting information:

- U.K. Government defines four fifths of the land area as being rural, with an estimated 11 million population.
- There are less than 400,000 people employed in agriculture in England, a quarter of whom are part-time or seasonal workers.
- The average income per farmer is estimated to be £11,000 per annum.
- A quarter of the working population in rural England work in wholesaling, retailing, hotels and restaurants.

7. Consequences for Rural Ministries

We will continue to support church planting and growth in areas that are neither urban nor suburban. Our mission field in the United Kingdom is enormous and we will seek to work with other evangelical churches and agencies in a non-competitive way. We will carefully consider working with churches that are not geographically located in rural areas but have a vision to reach people living the countryside.