

Main Street Economic Vitality: Innovation in Rural Resources from Brad Attig: Foundry Collective, Reinventing Rural, Kiva Oregon

- **“Beyond Connectivity: The Role of Broadband in Rural Economic Growth” (Sept 2024)**

This major study by the **Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)** provides the hard data to back up the "potential" mentioned in older reports. It found that rural counties with high broadband adoption saw 213% higher business growth and 44% higher GDP growth compared to those without.

Link: <https://ruralinnovation.us/resources/reports/beyond-connectivity-broadband-rural-economic-growth/>
- **“Rural America at a Glance: 2024 Edition” (Nov 2024)**

Published by the **USDA Economic Research Service**, this annual report is the gold standard for rural data. The 2024/2025 research specifically highlights the rebound of rural populations and the role of broadband in helping rural employment recover to pre-pandemic levels.

Link: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=110350>
- **“The Future of Rural Entrepreneurship: Trends to Watch in 2025” (Jan 2025)**

This article from **Startup Colorado** explores how rural small businesses are currently using AI, "upskilling" local workforces, and moving into tech-focused industries to stay competitive in the 2025 economy.

Link: <https://startupcolorado.org/stories/the-future-of-rural-entrepreneurship/>
- **Strategic Design as a Catalyst for Rural Innovation (June 2025)**

This is the most recent direct follow-up from the Penn State **Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD)**. It explains that “design active” rural firms—those that use structured, creative processes rather than ad-hoc methods—are **eight times more likely** to launch new products. It proves that innovation isn't about location, but about the *strategy* used by the business owner.

Link: <https://nercrd.psu.edu/strategic-design-approach-boosts-rural-innovation-researchers-find/>
- **Rural Innovation Pathways Report (Nov 2024)**

This comprehensive report from the **OECD** argues that rural innovation is “distinct, not just a smaller version of urban innovation” It highlights how rural areas are becoming “living laboratories” for automation and AI to overcome labor shortages, moving past the old narrative of rural areas being in "decline."

Link: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/rural-innovation-pathways_c86de0f4-en.html

- **Rural Innovative Firms and Credit Access (Sept 2025)**

This 2025 study from the **Penn State NERCRD team** explores a new “latent” challenge: while rural firms are innovating at high rates, they often face more difficulty securing bank loans than urban firms. This is a critical piece of the “latent innovation” conversation—the innovation is there, but the financial “plumbing” to support it is still catching up.

Link: <https://nercrd.psu.edu/tag/rural-innovation/> (Top article: *Innovative businesses may be less likely to be approved for credit loans*)

- **How Rural America Leverages AI (Sept 2025)**

A report from the **Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)** focusing on how 2025 is the “year of AI” for rural small businesses. It details how “latent” innovators are using AI to scale small teams and compete globally without needing to relocate to a city.

Link: <https://ruralinnovation.us/blog/how-can-rural-america-leverage-ai-to-drive-economic-development-join-the-conversation-at-coris-2025-conference/>

This guide is designed for residents and local leaders in rural counties to effectively navigate the **StatsAmerica Innovation Intelligence (I13)** tool. This resource helps you move past the “urban myth” that innovation only happens in big cities by showing how your community creatively solves problems and builds economic opportunity.

Step 1: How to Access Your County’s Profile

1. **Navigate to the Tool:** Go to [StatsAmerica Innovation Intelligence](#).
2. **Select Your Geography:** Under "**1. Choose geography type,**" click on "**Counties**".
3. **Search Your Location:** Type your county name in the search bar under "**2. Type and enter a geography**" and select it from the list.
4. **Scroll Down:** Once your county is selected on the map, a detailed **Innovation Profile** will generate below.

Step 2: Key “Rural Vitality” Stats to Look For

Traditional indexes often focus on "Urban Innovation" (patents and venture capital), which can make rural counties look stagnant. To see the **real** activity in a rural community, look for these specific indicators:

A. Latent (Hidden) Innovation

- **Where to find it:** Under "**Employment and Productivity**".
- **What it measures:** This captures "User Innovation"—how local businesses improve their own processes or products to solve a personal or business problem. It identifies hidden industry specializations that traditional patent counts miss.

B. Proprietorship & Micro-Businesses

- **Where to find it:** Under "**Business Profile**".

- **What it measures:** Micro-businesses (5 employees or less) make up over **90%** of rural economies. A high **Proprietorship Rate** or a strong **Proprietor Income to Total Wages Ratio** signals a dynamic, self-starting economy where people are creating their own jobs.

C. “Salad Days” Population Growth

- **Where to find it:** Under "**Human Capital and Knowledge Creation**".
- **What it measures:** This tracks growth in the **Prime Working-Age (25–44)** demographic. Growth here is a critical signal that your county is successfully attracting or retaining the talent needed for long-term innovation.

D. Business Dynamics (Births vs. Deaths)

- **Where to find it:** Under "**Business Dynamics**".
- **What it measures:** Look for the **Establishment Births to Deaths Ratio**. This shows "creative destruction"—whether new, fresh ideas are replacing old industries fast enough to keep the county competitive.

E. Digital Readiness

- **Where to find it:** Under "**Economic Well-Being**".
- **What it measures:** **Broadband Infrastructure and Adoption** is the "plumbing" of rural innovation. Research shows a **30% positive difference** in revenue growth for rural businesses that have access to the digital assistance they need.

Step 3: Comparing Your Performance

One of the most powerful ways to use this tool is the **Comparison Feature** found further down the page.

- **Benchmark Your Peers:** Enter the names of neighboring counties or counties with similar populations.
- **Ask "Why?":** If a neighboring county has a much higher **Business Dynamics** score than yours, use that as a starting point to investigate their local policies or support systems.
- **Download for Your Case:** You can download all this data into an Excel spreadsheet to include in grant applications or local economic strategies.