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Annual "Best Places to Live in Rural America" Rankings Released

The Progressive Farmer magazine crowns Maryland's Kent County and nine other best rural places to live based on their ability to thrive--even during struggles--among other quality-of-life statistics.

Rankings are further indication of growing interest in rural living in America.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala.-- Kent County, Maryland, was awarded top honors in the fourth annual edition of the "Best Places to Live in Rural America" rankings by The Progressive Farmer magazine. Each year, the rankings name the top 10 rural counties in the nation, according to several quality-of-life indicators and statistics; all 10 counties are profiled in the February 2008 issue of The Progressive Farmer, and the top 500 rural counties are listed on the magazine's web site (www.progressivefarmer.com).

The top 10 rural counties are ranked based on rural quality-of-life indicators such as great schools, access to health care, low crime and affordable farmland. In 2008, the editors of The Progressive Farmer added extra criteria by focusing on counties that have been able to protect farmland, control growth pressure from urban and suburban areas, and strike a good balance between agriculture, manufacturing and modern conveniences. For instance, No. 1 Kent County has doggedly maintained its rural heritage by preserving farmland, says Senior Editor Jamie Cole. "They have determined there that the best use of their land is for farming. The level of commitment to that idea is extraordinary.

"This year, we wanted to celebrate the people that make the places special," says Cole. "We want to show what they're doing to keep their rural counties rural. We hope other places--small towns, counties, rural areas--that face these same challenges can find ideas through our list."

Debuting this year is the "Reader's Choice Award," where any of our nation's 2,000-plus rural counties can solicit the most votes and win this reader-driven distinction, which will be announced in August 2008. Voting on www.progressivefarmer.com opens Feb. 1 and runs through May 31. Web visitors can vote once a day and will be able to see real-time results.

"This is one of the most exciting additions this year," Cole adds. "Our editorial staff is always inundated with e-mails and calls from readers suggesting their county is the best place. Now communities can prove it by rallying together, showing their spirit and pride to elect their county as our Reader's Choice winner."

The Top 10 List of "Best Places to Live in Rural America"

1. Kent County, Md., was selected as the best place to live in rural America this year. The county of 20,000 residents was chosen in part because of its commitment to preserving the county's rural roots, despite being within driving distance to Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia. Many local farmers have sold development rights of their land to the state to keep sprawl at bay.

In order, the other counties selected among the top 10 "Best Places to Live in Rural America" are:

2. Ellis County, Kan.--Located between Kansas City and Denver, this county is known for its frontier spirit, with agriculture and oil sustaining its economy. Like many agricultural areas, Ellis County saw hard times in the 1980s, but has since revitalized the area by forming a coalition to ensure economic vitality.

3. Livingston County, Mo.--In the heart of this top-ranked county is Chillicothe, an inventive and industrious town known as the "Home of Sliced Bread." This can-do attitude extends past the town's city limits and can be seen through a regional marketing plan that attracted employers and residents to the county through services that make the area more livable as a whole.

4. Obion County, Tenn.--This sprawling rural county is a place where agriculture and industry go hand in hand, forming a strong economy despite little or no population growth. The county also features great schools, great farmland and legendary wildlife populations.

5. Columbia County, Penn.--Located near New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia, Columbia County is certainly facing development pressures. But conservation easements and agricultural security areas are helping preserve farming for future generations.

6. Wexford County, Mich.--Set amid rolling meadows and thick forests, this county and its habitants are adaptable, migrating their industry from primarily lumber and small farms to Christmas tree production and tourism. It's this adaptability that has helped Wexford County flourish over the years.

7. Fayette County, Texas--Fayette County is prime cattle country, ranking as the top in the state for beef cow numbers and herds. Winters are mild, and blankets of wildflowers cover the fields and hills in the spring.

8. Coffee County, Ala.--If overcoming challenges is a criterion for our list this year, this top 10 county has certainly done that. In fact, a statue of a woman holding a boll weevil sits squarely downtown as a tribute to the insect that forced Coffee County to become economically diversified. The town is also recovering and rebuilding from a destructive tornado that hit a year ago, but will keep on thriving, thanks to a tight-knit community.

9. Gilchrist County, Fla.--Urban development is fast approaching this scenic and wildlife-rich county, which shares a boundary with the county housing the University of Florida. However, Gilchrist County is trying to protect its rural areas with acre requirements for homesites.

10. La Plata County, Co.--Gorgeous scenery, abundant wildlife, a booming economy and friendly, welcoming locals would put this county on anyone's top 10 list. It made our list in part due to its alliance for educating locals on how to buy locally grown food and its work on zoning laws.

In addition to the new Reader's Choice Award, The Progressive Farmer web site (www.ProgressiveFarmer.com) also features commenting. This allows visitors to post their thoughts and personal stories on the 500 counties making the complete list. Also featured is the ever-popular "Find Your OWN Best Place," which allows web visitors to create a list of preferred locales based on personal preferences such as climate and recreational amenities. Plus, through a partnership with United Country Real Estate, users can search for homes and farms available for sale in counties on the list.

About The Progressive Farmer magazine and web site

Living the good life in the country is a passion for 40 million-plus landowners who take great pride in their land, farm and family. That's why The Progressive Farmer (www.ProgressiveFarmer.com)--the largest magazine and web site for landowners and farmers--publishes practical, useful information to help our 3.7 million readers get MORE from their life on the land.

The Progressive Farmer, now owned by real-time market information services leader DTN, is available by subscription only and can be ordered by calling 1-800-292-2340 or visiting www.ProgressiveFarmer.com.

About DTN

DTN, a private company based in Omaha, Neb., is the leading business-to-business provider of real-time market, news and weather information services to agriculture, energy trading markets and other weather-sensitive industries. The company delivers on-demand market information, commodity cash prices, industry news and in-depth analysis, and location-specific weather to more than 120,000 subscribers through DTN for agriculture, refined fuels and trading markets, and DTN/Meteorlogix. More information can be found at www.dtn.com.

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The Progressive Farmer Best Places to Live in Rural America
PHOTOS

For higher resolution photos for publication **please contact Dana McGough**
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Columbia County,
Pennsylvania



La Plata County,
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Ellis County, Kansas



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