

*By the Kansas Historical Society*

## Where do people in Kansas live?

The second half of the 19th century was a busy one for Kansas. The Homestead Act of 1862 provided land for families to settle and farm. Thousands of settlers took the government's offer and moved to Kansas to claim acres of land. Cities formed along transportation routes. Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, and Manhattan were some of the first to grow along the Kansas River. As train companies laid tracks crisscrossing the state, cities like Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City flourished. And once the Interstate Highway system invited Americans to propel themselves in cars from coast to coast, cities along I-70 and I-35 grew quickly. Rural families, once isolated on the vast plains, now found that Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita were only a few hours' drive away.

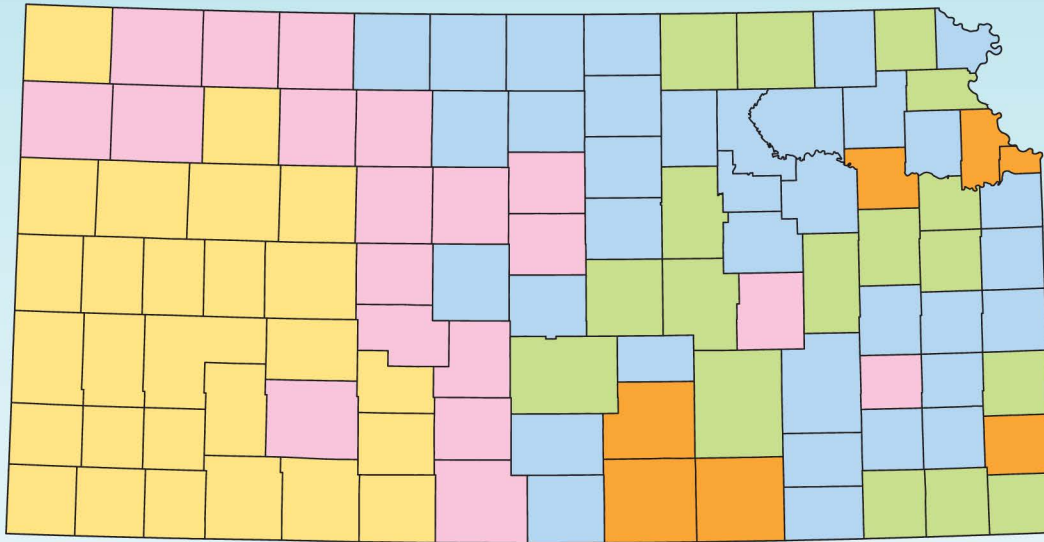
The Dust Bowl prompted many families to leave their farms. It had become common practice for farmers across the Great Plains to deep till their fields, depleting them of topsoil and natural grasses that protected the land from erosion. When a crippling drought fell on the plains in the 1930s, the dry dirt turned to dust and blew in great storms. Crops were ruined and banks began to foreclose on family farms. People had no choice but to abandon their homes, leaving the Great Plains for a chance at a better life elsewhere. Rural towns across the Midwest suffered blows to their population numbers while urban centers grew rapidly. In the decades following World War II, industrial jobs in cities and suburbs encouraged people to move away from rural towns and farms.

Advances in transportation, the Dust Bowl, and economic development in cities contributed to rural depopulation. The effects of rural depopulation are felt today in Kansas' rural towns. Kansans in rural areas deal with unique problems including closing schools, limited access to health care, and lack of locally owned businesses to provide jobs and the everyday necessities of life—even food.



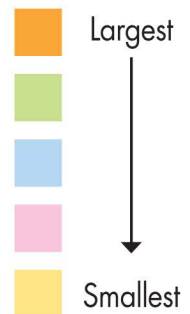
*A farm equipment retail business in rural Kansas.*

## Kansas 1890 Census

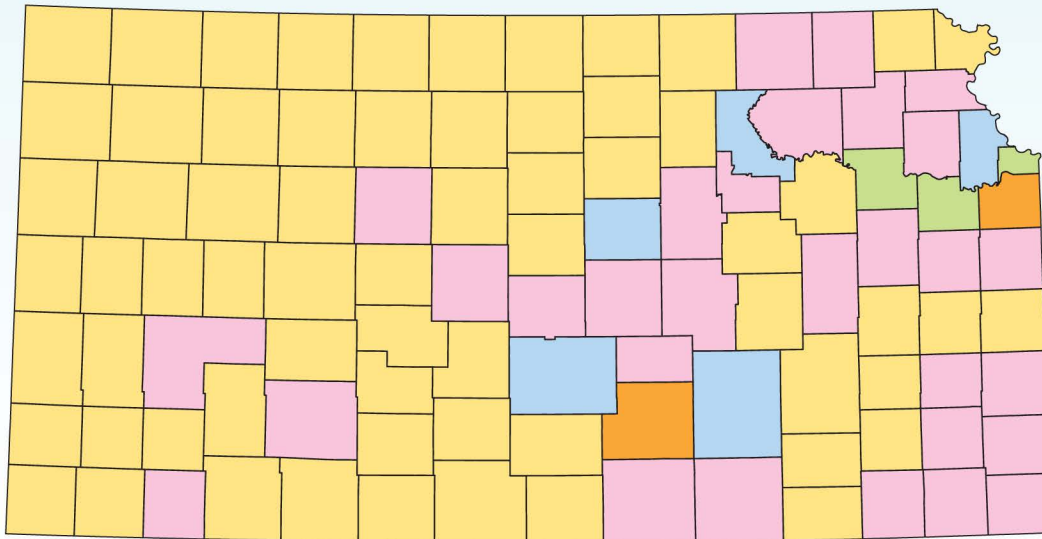


**Total Population: 1,427,096**

### County Population Key



## Kansas 2010 Census



**Total Population: 2,853,118**