

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A
20/01/2026) - IRSA 18 - RURAL FUTURES: EXPLORING THE SOCIO-
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL-URBAN NEXUS

HOMESTEADERS IN MISSOURI: THE APPEAL OF THE FRONTIER IN RURAL UNITED STATES

Rebecca Scott (scottrr@missouri.edu)

Joan Hermesen (hermsenj@missouri.edu)

Kandice Grossman (kgrossman@truman.edu)

Sarah Hultine Massengale (hultines@umsl.edu)

Our team conducted a qualitative research study in rural Missouri between 2023-2024 examining experiences, attitudes, and discourses about equity and community wellbeing. Findings highlighted some long-standing and emergent trends which suggest a resurgence in frontier ideology and behavior that complicates the neoliberal consensus and reflects a breakdown in the idea of a social contract. Due to a rejection of taxes and regulation, churches and schools are the main locations of public action and community mutual support but are underfunded and can act as agencies of exclusion. Conditions attract former urbanites who invest in property while embracing rural isolation, the lack of local taxes and regulation, and what they perceive as traditional family values.

Newcomers and long-standing residents alike refer to these in-migrants as “homesteaders.” This and other terms that recall the American frontier reflect both the dissolution of social solidarity and the increasing value of hyper-independence in US politics and culture.

Palavras-chave: frontier; social contract; public good; homesteaders; neoliberalism.