

TEXOMA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2017-2022



Texoma Economic Development District

Texoma Council of Governments

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Executive Summary

Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG) is designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration as the Economic Development District for the Texoma region of Texas (Cooke, Fannin, and Grayson counties). As such, TCOG is responsible for facilitating the creation of a five year planning document or Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). The CEDS is created through a rigorous locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process guided by a committee of stakeholders from each of the three counties in the Texoma region.

Through the collection of data from various secondary sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and The Bureau of Labor Statistics as well as primary data collected locally through the use of surveys the CEDS Committee suggests regional strategies for economic growth. The data collected are analyzed to discover strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges and provides committee members with a snapshot of current economic conditions. The CEDS Committee can then formulate strategies for leveraging strengths to overcome weakness, and utilizing opportunities to meet current and future challenges.

In Texoma, Grayson County continues to be the fastest growing of the three counties with Cooke County second and Fannin County third. The change in population from our 2012-17 CEDS and the projected population growth for the 2017-22 CEDS both echo a trend we are seeing on a national level. Urban areas are growing at rapid rates while rural areas are growing at a slow and steady pace. Perhaps the most notable changes for Texoma lie in the changing racial demographics of the growth. Hispanic populations now represent the fastest growing demographic group for Texoma. Culturally relevant solutions will need to be considered as issues which are experienced at higher rates among Hispanics move into the mainstream during this shift of racial demographics. Social issues that are seen in greater concentrations in the Hispanic communities may be felt on a broader scope. Dealing with population growth and demographic changes will be challenges that must be considered in economic development for the region.

Another challenge for the region is the shortage of available housing. This is an issue for all of the cities in the region and is a major issue in economic development. A growing workforce is needed for new industry and business, and this workforce must be housed. Housing shortages hinder the ability of cities and counties to attract new business for fears that there will not be enough housing to support the workforce needed. Another challenge for the region is transportation. Many of the region's residents live in rural areas (where job opportunities are scarce) and face the dilemma of finding affordable, reliable transportation to commute to more densely populated areas for employment.

There are strengths in the region to help Texoma address these challenges. Natural resources and the friendly laid back characteristic of the area provide lifestyle accommodations that are commonly sought by employees to attract a larger workforce pool. Ecotourism continues to bolster economic health as well as the regions many creative industries such as craft beverage and the natural and organic industry that relies heavily on our natural resources.

Background

Population

Since 2010, the total population for Texoma has seen an increase of 2.7%. This is considerably smaller than the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex increase of 9.0%. However, it is closer to the national average increase of 4.1%

In Texoma, Grayson County is expected to have the largest increase in population (Table A), although Cooke County had the largest percentage growth from 2010 to 2015. The Hispanic population is expected to increase 9.1% in Texoma, a larger increase than other racial/ethnic populations in Texoma. The 2.5% increase in the Black population in Texoma is slightly less than the projected growth of blacks in Texas. The white population throughout Texoma and Texas is expected to show percentage declines in the future. The Texoma population will change from a mainly a non-Hispanic white population, to become a more diverse region. Future economic development in the region must, to some extent, reflect these changes.

Table A: Population Projections, by County

Population Projections						
Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cooke	39616	39813	39996	40175	40359	40549
Fannin	34277	34352	34412	34480	34554	34623
Grayson	123373	123680	123961	124234	124504	124759

Source: Texas Demographic Center, 2015 Population Estimates Program

Table B: Population Growth, 2010 - 2015

Population Growth 2010-15			
Geographic Region	2010 Census	2015 Census	% Change
Cooke County	38,437	39,626	3.10%
Fannin County	33,915	34,378	1.40%
Grayson County	120,877	124,374	2.90%

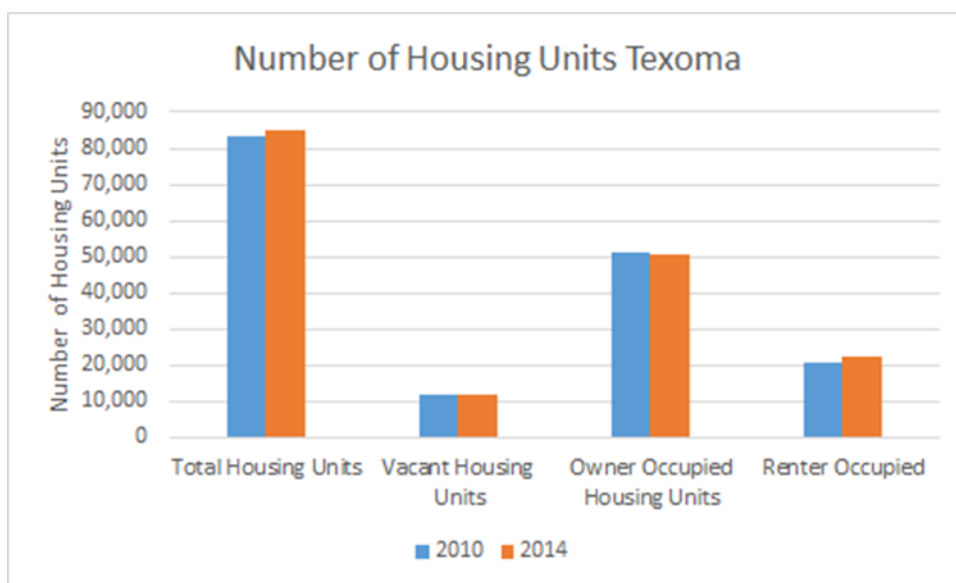
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 census population; 2011-2015 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Economic Health Indicators

Housing

The total number of housing units in Texoma is 73,159 (Figure 1). As noted, there was a small increase in the number total housing units from 2010 to 2014, but a small decline in the number of owner-occupied units was made up for by an increase in renter-occupied units. This decline in owner-occupied units is disturbing, and must be reversed in order to provide housing for an increased labor force.

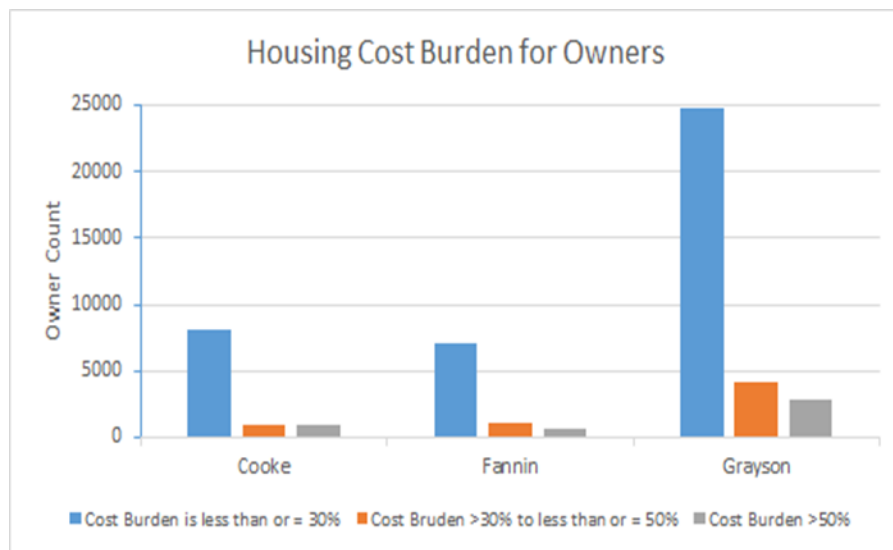
Figure 1: Number of Housing Units, Total Texoma Region



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 ACS Selected Housing Characteristics

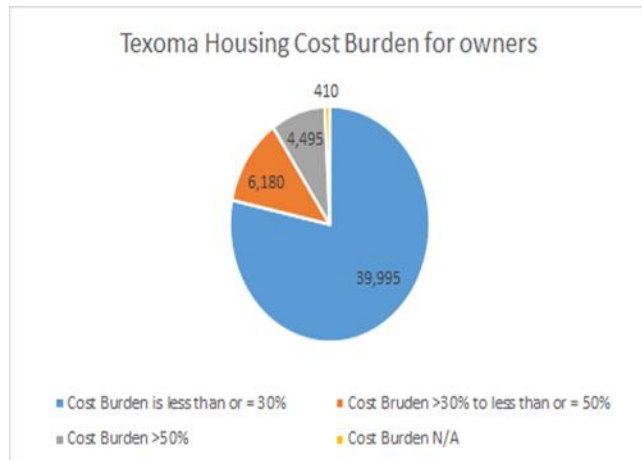
Housing cost burden is an important indicator of the stability of housing in a region. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 show the housing burden for both owners and renters. As shown, all counties show a relatively high proportion of owners having a cost burden of 30% or less of their total income. The cost burden is higher for renters, with more of the population of each county having a cost burden greater than 30%. This is important in light of the data above showing a relative increase in the number of renter-occupied housing units.

Figure 2: Housing Cost Burden, Owners, by County



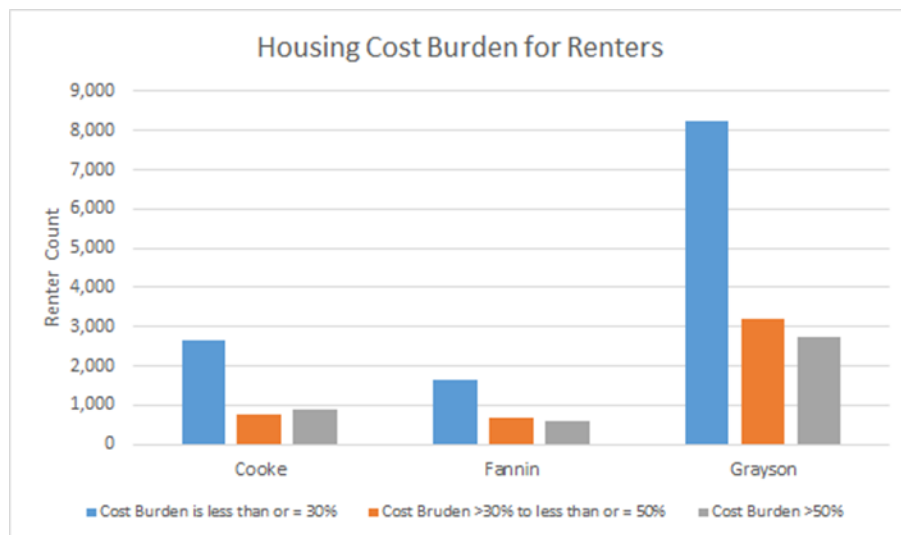
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 ACS Selected Housing Characteristics

Figure 3: Regional Housing Cost Burden for Owners



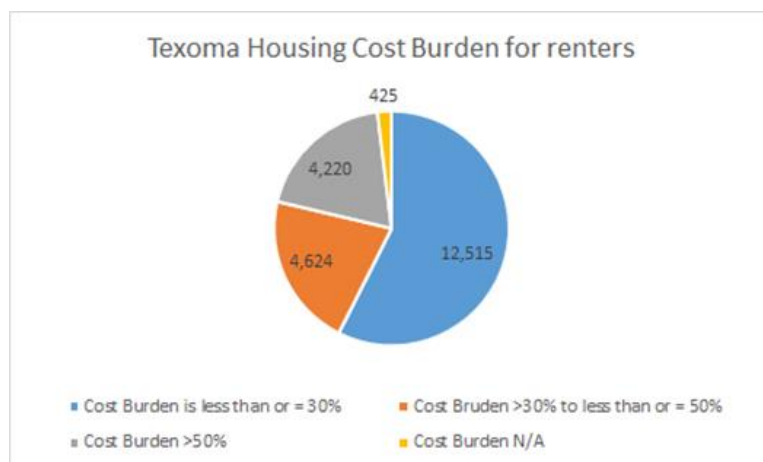
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 ACS Selected Housing Characteristics

Figure 4: Housing Cost Burden for Renters, by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 ACS Selected Housing Characteristics

Figure 5: Regional Housing Cost Burden for Renters



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 ACS Selected Housing Characteristics

Health and Healthcare

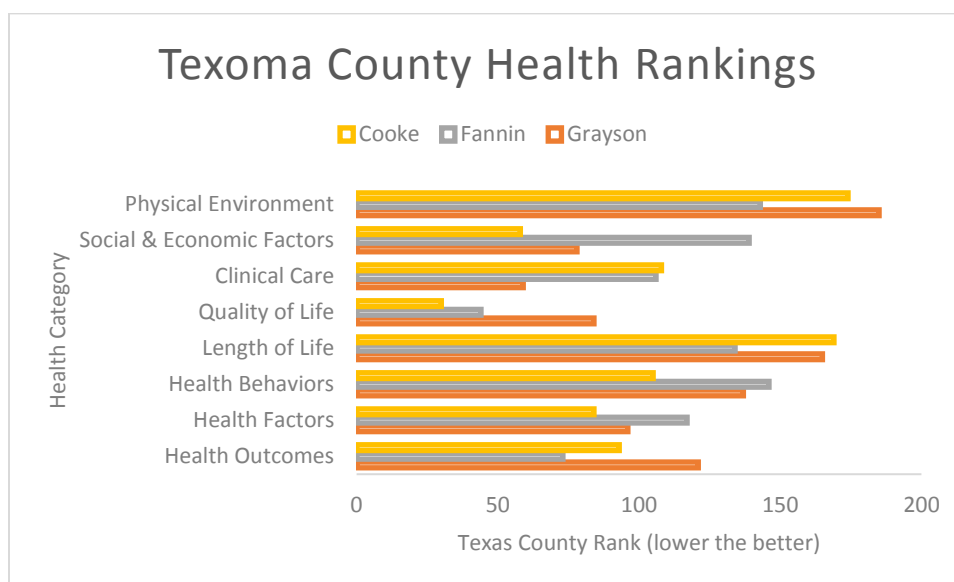
Every year, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation analyzes data on various factors that shed light on the health of communities across the United States. Pictured below (Figure 6) are the health rankings of Grayson, Fannin, and Cooke counties on selected measures. Each county is ranked from 1 to 254, with a ranking of “1” being the best and “254” the worst. There are some incongruities in these rankings. For example, Fannin County ranks much lower (139) on “Social and Economic Factors” than either Cooke (58) or Grayson (78) county, but ranks higher (134) on “Length of Life” than Cooke (169) and Grayson (165). Likewise, Fannin County ranks lower on “Health Factors” (117) than Cooke (84) and Grayson (96), but ranks higher on “Health Outcomes” (73) than Cooke (93) and Grayson (121).

Further analysis of this data set show that Fannin and Cooke County both have higher rates of obesity than either Grayson or the Texas average, and limited access to exercise opportunities. All three counties show more premature deaths than the Texas average; a disturbing point is that while the state and national trends have declined from 1997 to 2014, the trends for all three counties have remained relatively stable over that time period. Fannin County also has a dramatic shortage of primary care physicians, at 4,210 people for every 1 primary care physician. Fannin also shows more preventable hospital stays, perhaps tied to this limited physician access.

However, some measures show positive trends in the Texoma region. For example, violent crime rates in all three counties are considerably lower than both the state and national figures, and trends for all three counties show violent crime decreasing.

High School Graduation rates show promise too, with all three counties having graduation rates higher than both the state and national averages.

Figure 6: Health Rankings, by County (Rank out of 254)

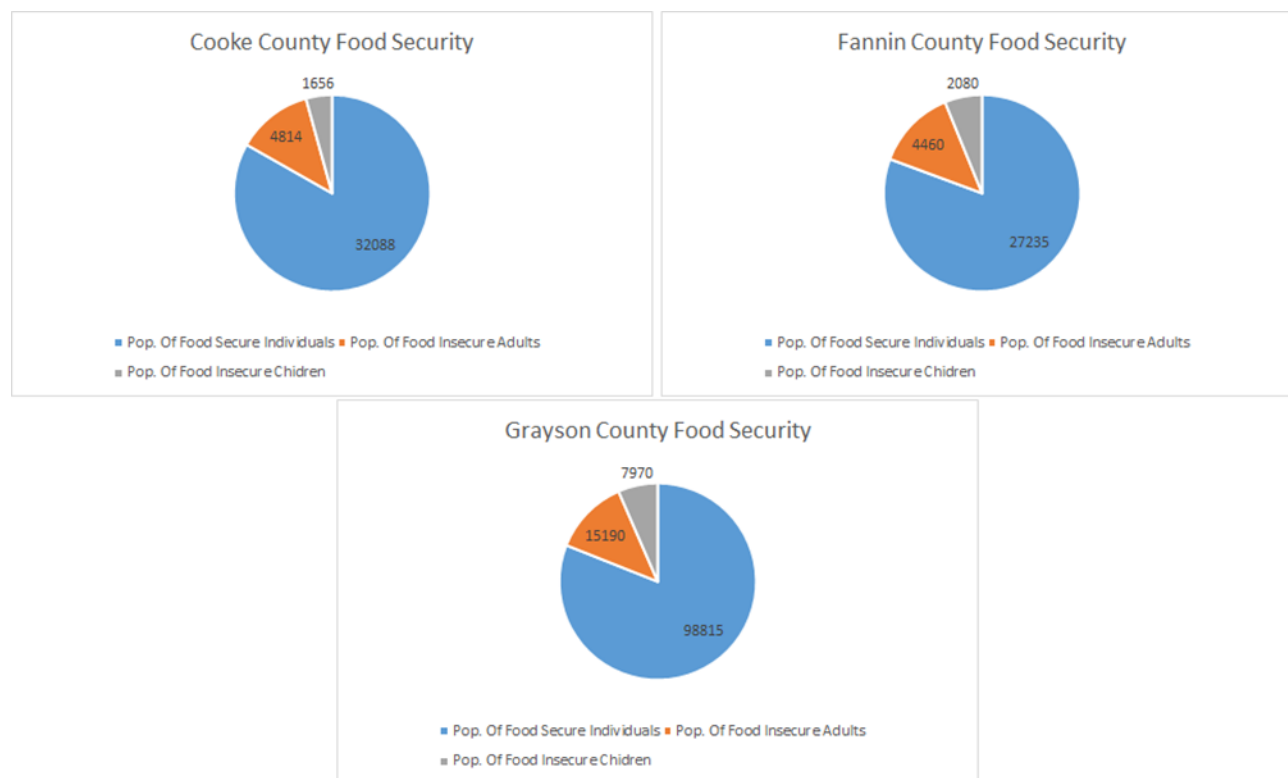


Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation *County Health Rankings and Roadmaps 2016*

Food Insecurity and Hunger

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as a household and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Within Texas, 17 percent of the entire population is living in food insecurity. The level of food insecurity in the Texoma region is currently higher than the state average. Specifically, both Fannin and Grayson counties have food insecurity at about 19 percent of their respective populations (6,540 in Fannin and 23,160 in Grayson), while Cooke has 16.8 percent of their total population (or 6,470 individuals) without adequate access to food (Figure 7). Out of the thousands of individuals that are experiencing hunger in the Texoma region, many children are included with the food insecure population. One-fourth of all food insecure individuals in Cooke County are children, while Fannin and Grayson counties have about one-third of their respective hungry populations being children. Multiple food pantries are present in the Texoma area, with organizations within Grayson and Fannin counties teaming up with the North Texas Food Bank and Cooke County working with the Tarrant Area Food Bank. However, the distribution of food banks across the three counties is disproportionate; Grayson has 22 food pantries and other food-related organizations, while Cooke and Fannin have 3 and 7 respectively.

Figure 7: Food Insecurity, by County

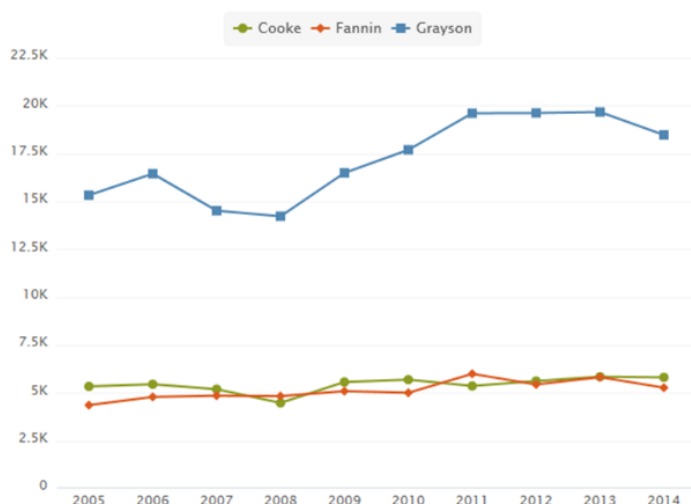


Source: United States Department of Agriculture, *Economic Research Service* 2016

Individual, Family, and Community Support

Poverty - The two generally accepted measures of poverty are the Federal Poverty Guidelines published by the US Census Bureau, and the Average Median Income published by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. As shown in Figure 8, the number of individuals in poverty in Cooke and Fannin counties has remained relative stable from 2005 to 2014, while the Grayson County number has fluctuated more, with a relative rise in the number of individuals in poverty over that time period. As shown in Figure 9, Fannin County has a higher percentage of population in poverty, while the percentage in poverty for the region has remained around 16% from 2011 to 2014.

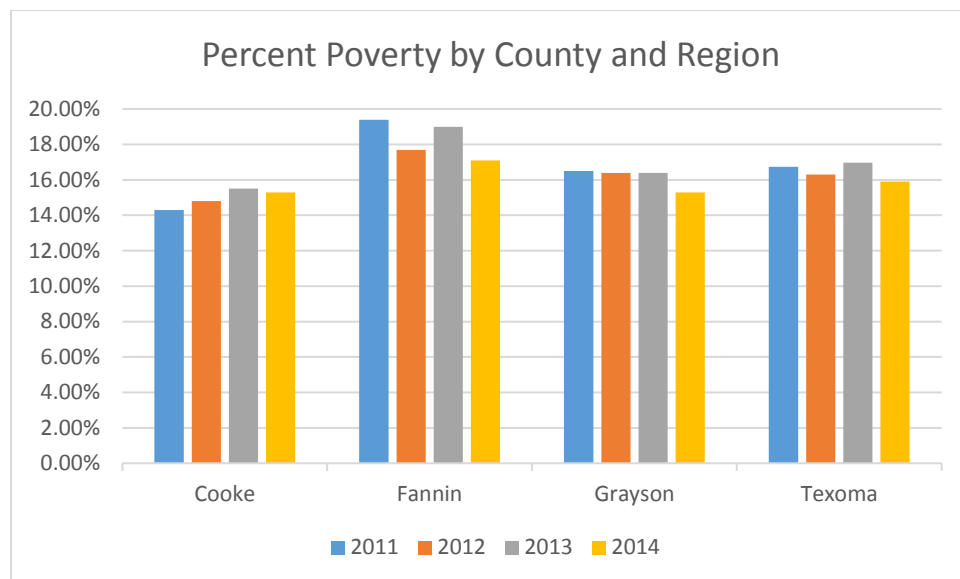
Figure 8: Number of Individuals in Poverty, All Three Counties



POVERTY (ALL AGES) (NUMBER)

Texas KIDS COUNT at the Center for Public Policy Priorities

Figure 9: Percent of Population in Poverty, All Three Counties



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 ACS Survey 5year Estimates

Employment and Training

Table C shows the regional labor force increased by 7.2% over the past 10 years, while it has increased only 1.7% over the past 5 years. Percent employed has increased, while the unemployment rate has decreased over the same years. The Texoma region is probably at “functionally full” employment, and the number in the labor force must increase for economic development to take place over the next 5 years; as discussed previously, one related factor is the lack of available, affordable housing.

Table C: Regional Labor Force

Labor Force Annual Averages in 2015	Number	Rank in U.S.	% of U.S.	U.S.
Total Labor Force	60,503	492	0.0 %	157,130,000
5-Year % Change	1.7 %	787	--	0.0 %
10-Year % Change	7.2 %	653	--	5.2 %
Employed	58,081	488	0.0 %	148,834,000
5-Year % Change	6.3 %	771	--	7.0 %
10-Year % Change	8.8 %	577	--	5.0 %
Unemployed	2,422	592	0.0 %	8,296,000
5-Year % Change	-50.3 %	2,496	--	-44.0 %
10-Year % Change	-20.2 %	2,536	--	9.3 %
Unemployment Rate	4.0	2,437	75.5 %	5.3
5-Year % Change	-51.2 %	2,614	--	-44.8 %
10-Year % Change	-25.9 %	2,872	--	3.9 %

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016

U.S Bureau of Labor statistics indicated that of the 46,165 employed in Grayson county, 23,365 (50.6%) live outside of Grayson county; 22,800 (49.4%) live and are employed in Grayson county. Of the 50,777 living in Grayson county 27,977 (55.1%) work outside of the county, while the remaining 22,800 (44.9%) live and are employed in Grayson county.

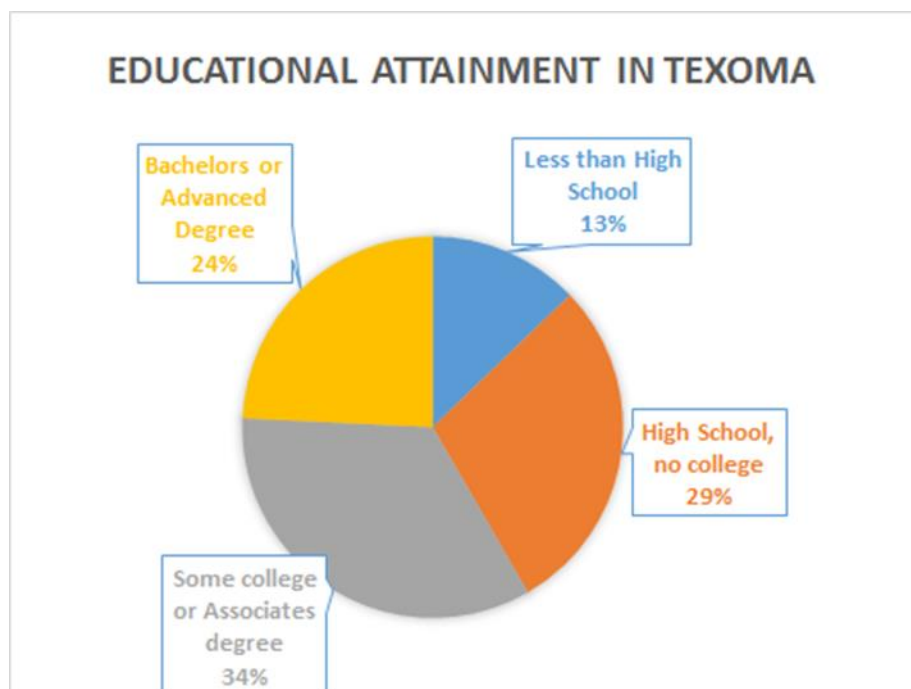
Of the 16,881 workers employed in Cooke county, 9,976 (59.1%) live outside of Cooke county and 6,905 (40.9%) live and work in Cooke. Of the 17,241 people living in Cooke, 10,336 (60%) of them are employed outside the county, whereas 6,905 (40%) live and reside in Cooke.

Of the 13,994 people living in Fannin County, only (24.2%) are also employed within Fannin County and (75.8%) are employed outside the county. And of the 6,378 employed in the county 47% don't reside there while 53.0% live and are employed in Fannin County.

Education

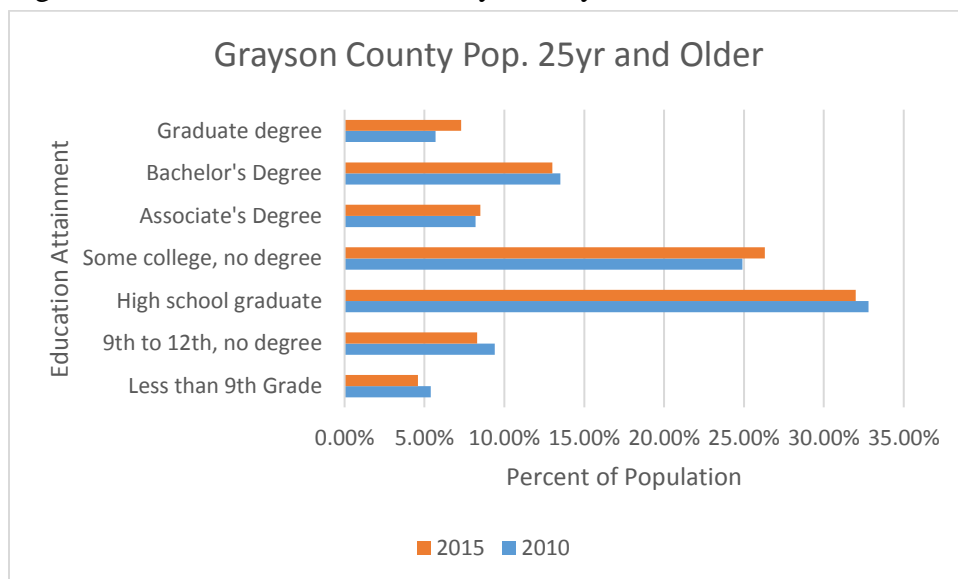
Educational levels are for the region (Figure 10) and for the three counties in the region (Figure 11) are shown below. While the percentage having less than a high school degree or equivalent is disturbing, the relatively large percentage (58%) having some college or a degree is an indicator of as relatively well-educated workforce. Efforts are underway to increase the number of high school graduates who enter into vocational college programs to fill the gaps in the skilled labor force of the region.

Figure 10: Regional Educational Attainment

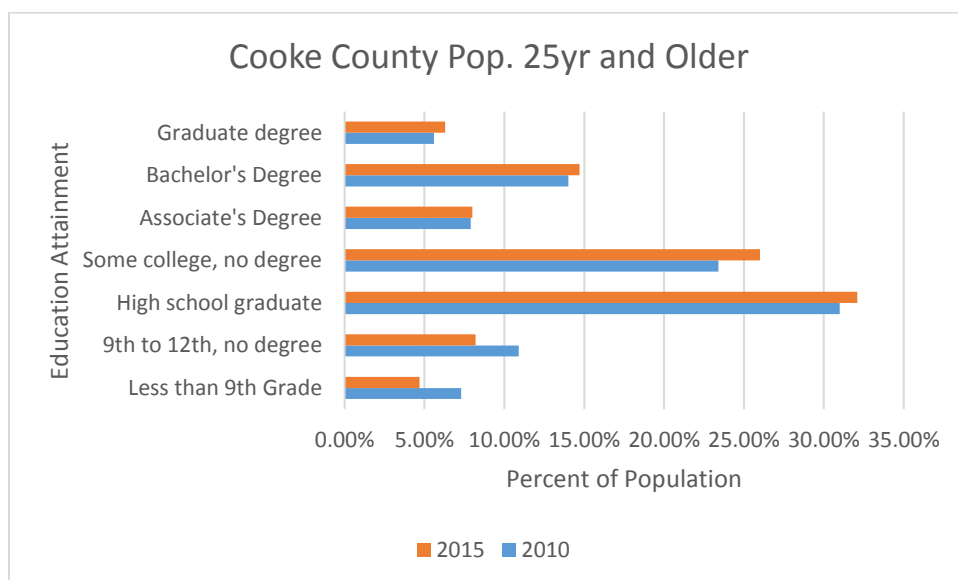


Source: U.S. Census Bureau ASEC, 2016

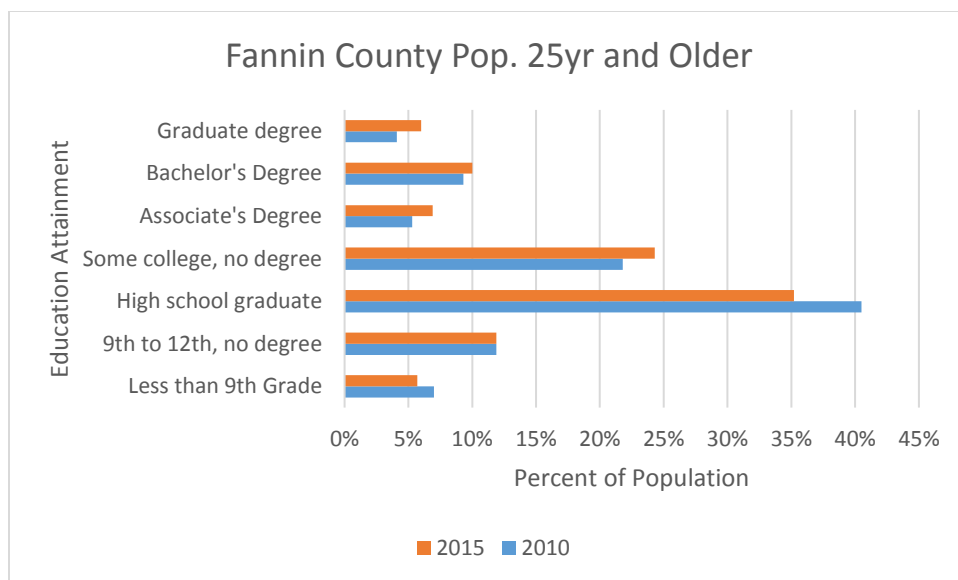
Figure 11: Educational Attainment by County, 2010 and 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau ASEC, 2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau ASEC, 2016



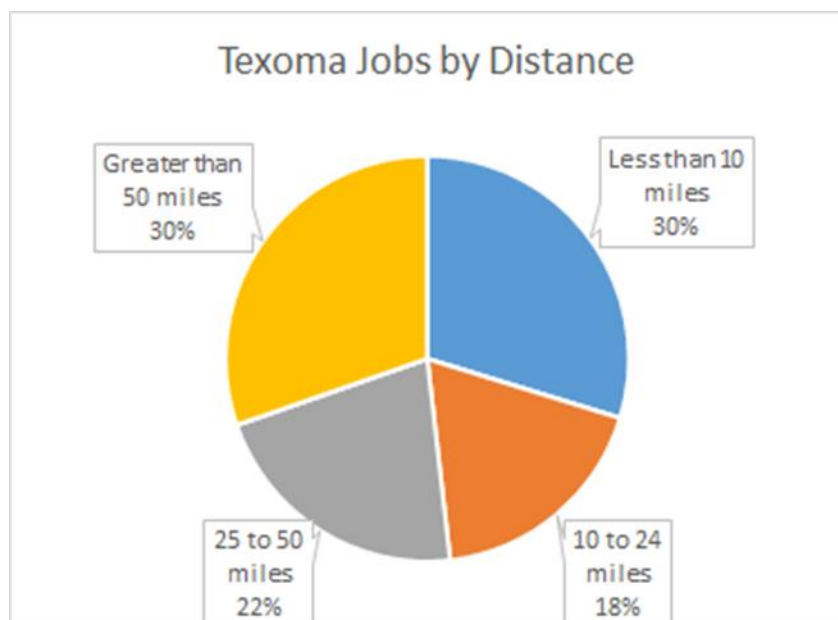
Source: U.S. Census Bureau ASEC, 2016

Transportation

The residents of the Texoma Region love their cars, drive themselves to work, and some (30% - Figure 12) engage in relatively long (over 50 miles) commutes. “Driving alone” is the most common means to work in the region (79.6%); second is carpooling and third is working from home.

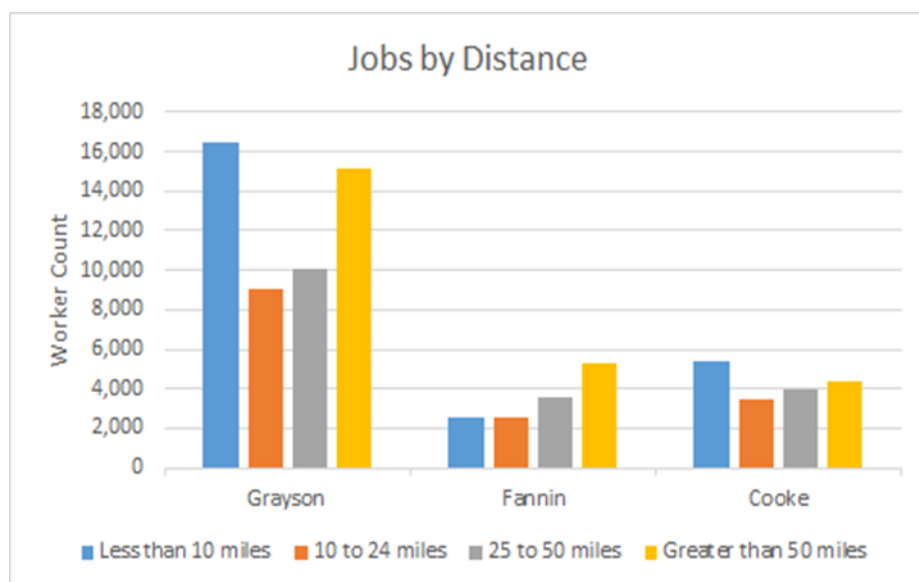
Figures 12 and 13 show the distances Texoma workers drive every day to work. What is especially interesting is the relatively large numbers, and percentages, of workers who drive more than 50 miles, especially in Fannin and Grayson counties. A majority of these drive to jobs in the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex.

Figure 12: Commuting Distances, Texoma Region



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2014 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics; 2015 ACS

Figure 13: Commuting Distances, by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2014 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics; 2015 ACS

Infrastructure

Solid Waste Management

There is no materials recovery center (MRF) in Texoma or known residential or commercial material reuse warehouse/ facility in Texoma. Numerous communities in the region have residential curbside recycling and transport those recycled materials to MRFs in the Dallas/Fort-Worth Metroplex.



Landfills

There are two open landfills in Texoma, both with sizable capacity to meet waste disposal for decades to come. The Texoma Area Solid Waste Authority (TASWA) was officially formed in 2000 by the cities of Denison, Gainesville, and Sherman, Texas and by Cooke and Grayson Counties to provide a solid waste disposal and recycling facility for its member cities, counties, and other communities in the Texoma region. In 2005, landfill construction was completed and the landfill took its first load of waste on April 11, 2005.

Hillside Sanitary Landfill is the only other operating landfill in Texoma, originally allowed in September 1977 and is privately owned. The facility is a Type I municipal solid waste landfill Operated by Waste Management, the nation's largest waste service provider. It is permitted to accept non-hazardous household, commercial, industrial, and special waste, as well as construction and demolition debris. The facility does not accept hazardous or radioactive waste.

Legacy metals is a locally owned recycling business that provides a fee for service accepting all kinds metals including batteries. Commercial prices are offered to those with large quantities. Other services include residential pick-ups and on site clean-up of oil fields, construction sites and big demolition sites.

Water Management

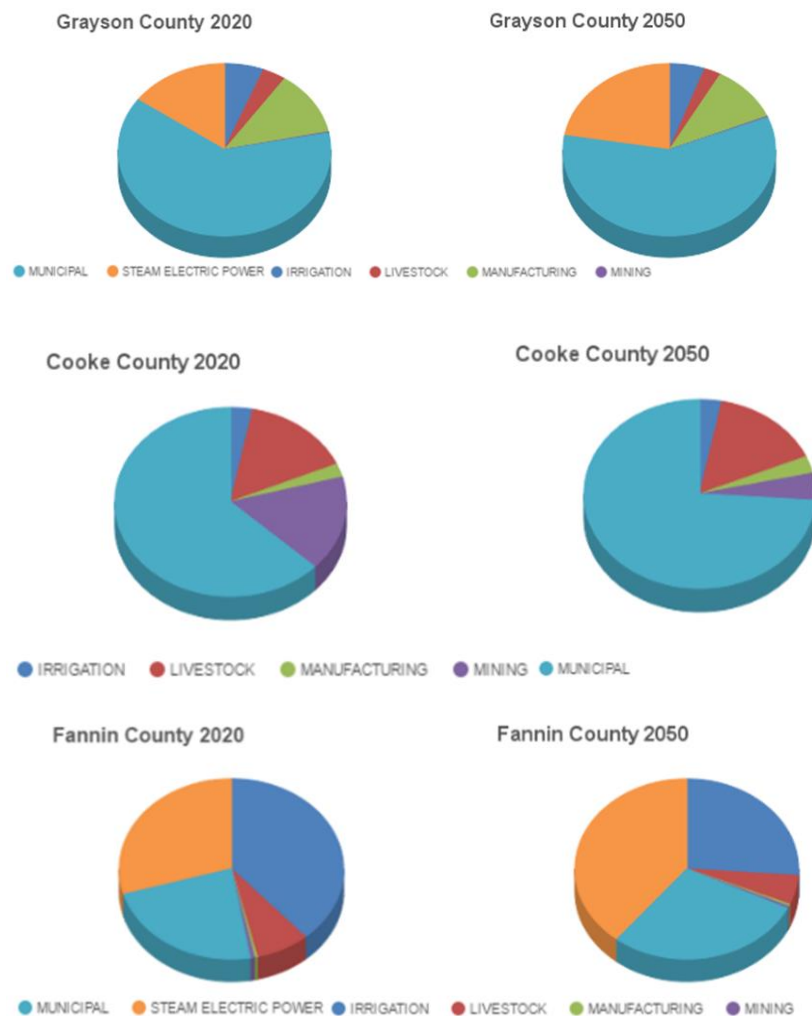
Grayson County is the largest consumer of water of the three counties, using 24,638 acre-feet (\approx 8 trillion gallons) in 2013, with its largest use being municipal, due to its comparatively larger population. Fannin comes in at 19,543 acre-feet (\approx 6 trillion gallons) due to its high agricultural irrigation. Cooke uses only 8,032 acre-feet (\approx 2 trillion gallons), shown in Table D. Projections for increasing water demand, by county, for 2020 and 2050 are shown in Figure 14. It is important to note that the pie charts communicate only the relative percentage of water demand by industry, but the actual volume is expected to increase dramatically in the same time span.

Table D: Water Usage by County, 2013

WATER USE SURVEY HISTORICAL SUMMARY ESTIMATES BY COUNTY <i>(All volumes are in acre-feet unless otherwise noted. 1 Acre-Foot = 325,851 gallons)</i>							
Year	County	Population	Municipal	Mfg.	Mining	Irrigation	Livestock
2013	COOKE	39,389	4,967	114	498	1,200	1,253
2013	FANNIN	34,526	4,767	0	505	12,757	1,514
2013	GRAYSON	123,115	17,314	2,049	52	4,152	1,071
2013	STATE AVERAGE	104,127	9,242	276	335	22,308	858

Source: Texas Water Development Board 2013

Figure 14: Projected Water Use, 2020 and 2050, by County



Source: Texas Water Development Board 2013

Information and Technology

Download Speeds

According to Connected Texas, nearly all of the Texoma region has broadband access to Internet downloads. The average Internet broadband download speeds for high-density population centers within Cooke, Fannin and Grayson counties ranges from 100 Megabytes per second to 1 Gigabyte per second. For rural homesteads and townships, the average broadband speed is about 10 - 25 Megabytes per second, with some areas being as slow as 768 Kilobytes per second.

Energy Systems

Providers

Texas is a deregulated energy market, meaning consumers can choose from a multitude of energy providers in the area, resulting in more competition and lower prices for consumers/

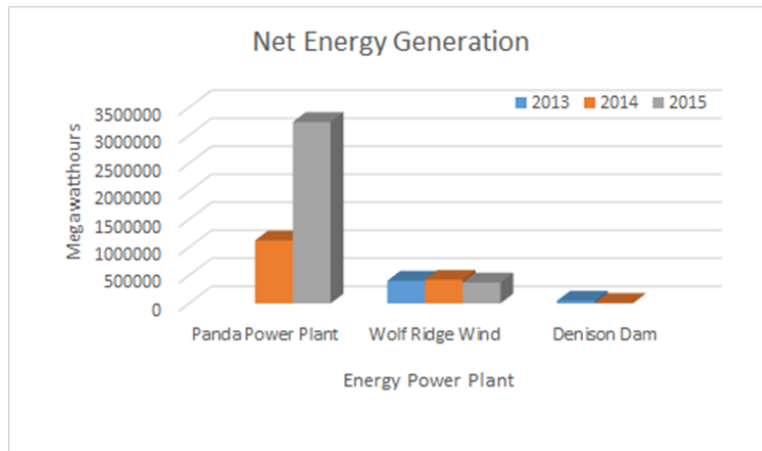
There are 4 active energy power plants in Texoma; 3 produce electricity, 1 produces compressed natural gas. Commissioned in 2014, the Sherman Panda Power Plant is a natural gas electricity generation facility serving the North Texas Area in the ERCOT power grid. It is expected to be one of the cleanest natural gas facilities in the United States through a new efficient technique known as “combined cycling. The plant is estimated to have created over 800 jobs and is estimated to input \$1.7 billion into the North Texas Area during construction and the first ten years of its operation. It has a maximum capacity of 758 Megawatts, equivalent to up to 250,000 homes.

One of the purposes of the Denison Dam is to serve as a conventional hydroelectric power plant. The Denison Dam was constructed in 1944 and in some past years its energy production has been in the hundred thousands of megawatt hours. However its production greatly fluctuates. For example, in 2013 48,499 megawatt hours were produced and in 2014 10,751 megawatt hours were generated.

The Wolf Ridge Wind is located in Cooke County and began operation in 2008. It is a wind energy power plant owned and operated by a subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources. It is a 112.5-megawatt wind generation plant containing 75 1.5-megawatt GE wind turbines that are capable of generating enough electricity to power about 34,000 homes. Each of these wind turbines is 262 feet tall from the ground to the hub in the center of the blades. Its energy production has been very steady throughout the years. Outputs for all three electric plants are shown in Figure 15.

SemGas is a separate privately owned cryogenic processing plant, which is a facility where natural gas flowing from wells is cooled to subzero temperatures in order to condense liquids or natural gas liquids. The plant is found in Sherman and has approximately 340 miles of high and low-pressure gathering pipeline. SemGas does not produce electricity - they sell their compressed natural gas to Atmos.

Figure 15: Electricity Generation, Texoma Region, 2013 - 2015



Source: Panda Power generation report, NextEra Energy generation, Denison Dam U.S. Army Corps of Engineers generation data

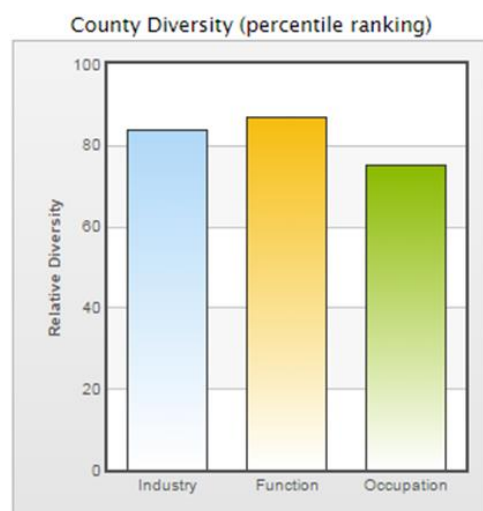
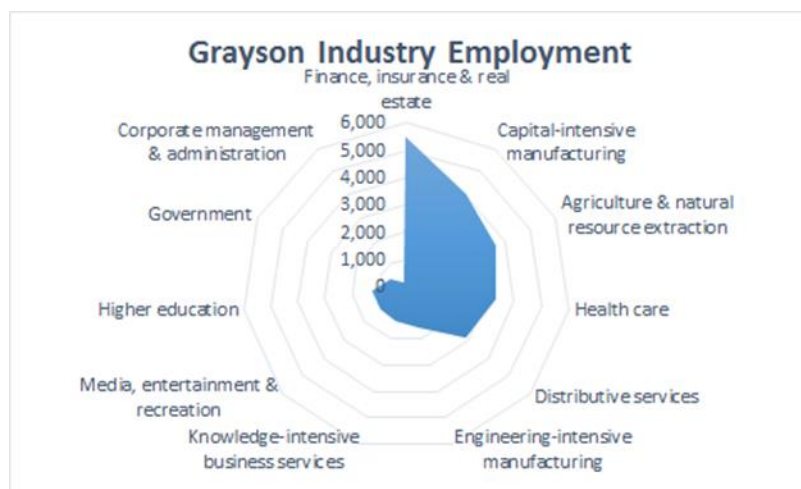
Economic Development

Industry Diversity

It has been demonstrated that while having low diversity and high concentration of industry may result in lower unemployment rates in the short term, having a more diversified economy makes a region more resilient to future economic shocks or stress. Across the region there is room for improvement in industry diversity, so long-term public and private initiatives to bolster industry diversity will be a powerful buffer to future downturn. These can also serve as a useful metric to show improvement in resilience. Figures 16, 17, and 18 below show the industrial sectors and diversity for the three counties in the Texoma region.

As shown in Figure 16, Grayson County shows high diversity of industry, with a greater industrial and functional diversity than 80% of US counties. Its occupational diversity is still above average, but it doesn't match the level of the other two metrics, indicating that though many industry types thrive in the area, employment across these types is still somewhat uneven, evident in the radar chart below.

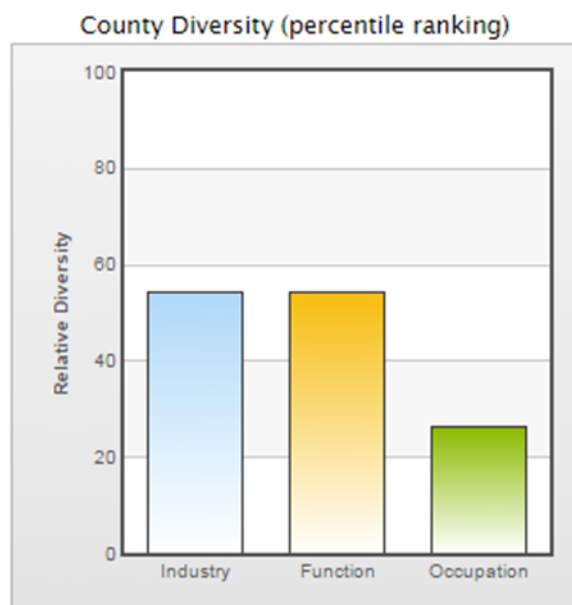
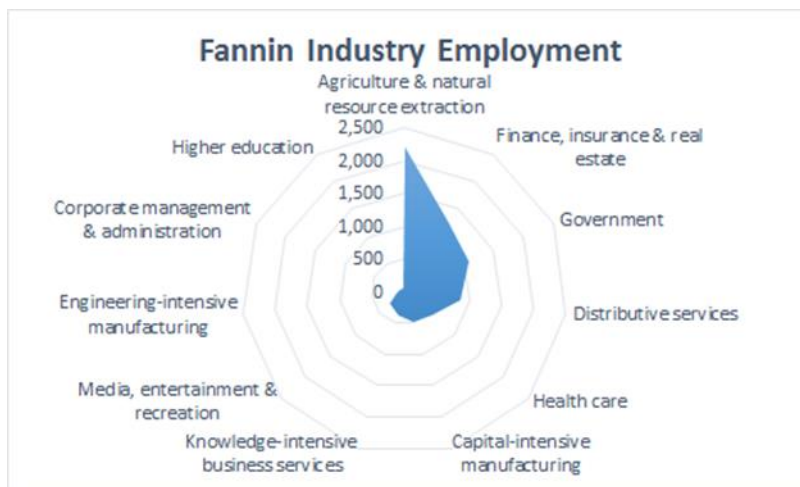
Figure 16: Industrial Diversity, Grayson County



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, data tables 2016

As shown in Figure 17, Fannin County shows slightly above average industry and functional diversity, but like Grayson, this diversity is not reflected in employment distribution. In order to further diversify and bolster regional economic resilience, a long-term plan to diversify the local workforce would be useful.

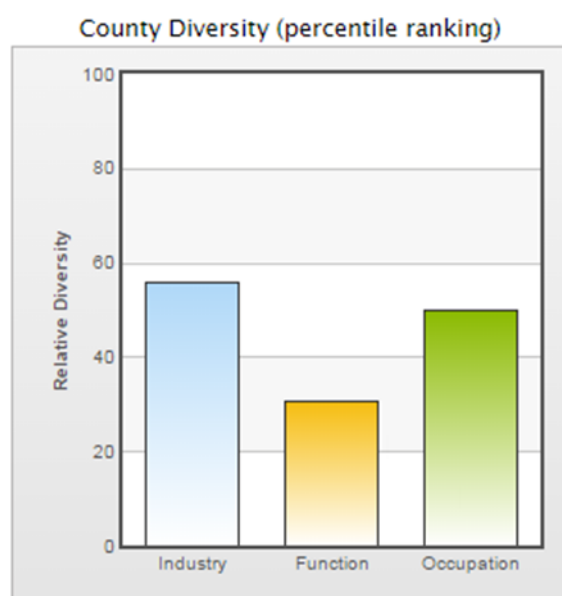
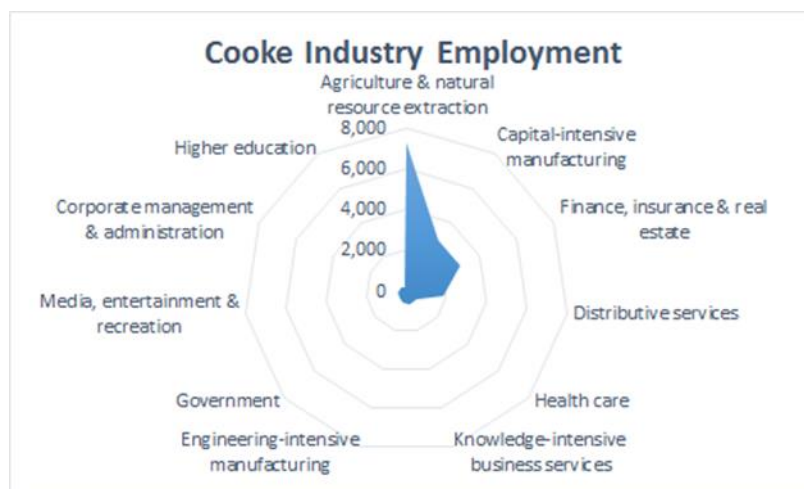
Figure 17: Industrial Diversity, Fannin County



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, data tables 2016

Cooke County (Figure 18) shows about average industry diversity, but would also do well to build employment in understaffed industry clusters.

Figure 18: Industrial Diversity, Cooke County



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, data tables 2016

Economic Resilience

The economic health of Texoma is directly tied to its resilience. This is the regions ability to prevent, adjust, and/or recover from economic disruptions such as those caused by a natural disaster that upsets the daily functions of the local economy and strains it during the recovery process or through an economic downtown caused by external factors like the housing market crash of 2008 or internally through the loss of a major employer. For Texoma both types of economic distress are addressed either directly through this CEDS or collaboratively as part of the TCOG Emergency Planning Program.

The ability to address economic down turn not connected to natural disaster is woven into the economic development goals of this CEDS with one goal dedicated solely to addressing weakness that leave the region vulnerable to negative change in the economy. Goal 3 of the CEDS listed below addresses creating a resilient economy by aligning resiliency planning efforts across the region, diversification initiatives, and the promotion of equitable development. These three objectives address the main threats to Texoma's economic resilience. Many of the planning efforts even those that are already aligned with regional goals overlook resiliency for economic health. Collaborating with economic development professionals, municipalities, counties, and various private sector stakeholders to address resiliency in their planning efforts is paramount. Diversification and equitable development represent weaknesses that when addressed create the largest amount of stability by developing the current workforce and creating jobs.

There is no economic threat harder to control and prevent than natural disaster. Texoma has weathered several disaster declarations in the last several years with little long-term effects to the economy. This is in no small part due to the TCOG's Public Safety Department which operates the Emergency Planning Program as part of the Governor's Division of Emergency Management. Through this program Public Safety Specialist at TCOG work with regional first responders, counties, municipalities, and policymakers to develop and maintain a regional response plan and a catastrophic communications plan.

Strengths & Challenges

A strengths, weakness, opportunities, and challenges or SWOC analysis was conducted with the Economic Development Corporations and business stakeholders across Texoma, as well as our CEDS Committee. The information gained through this process allows for a thorough assessment of the economic needs of the region and the assets available to meet those needs. The goals, objectives, and actions formed to encourage economic growth were created with information gathered and analyzed through this process.

Strengths & Opportunities

The positive attributes of the region revealed through the SWOC analysis are of two types, internal (strengths) and external (opportunities). Strengths are those desirable characteristics that Texoma possess to attract and stimulate economic growth, the opportunities are those influences outside of our region that may represent state or nationwide trends that can be leveraged to encourage growth in our own economy. Each of these play a vital role in the improvement of the regional economy. Our strengths are an assessment of our assets that can be built upon and leveraged to spark more growth, fortify our weakness, and improve our resilience. The

opportunities available when assessed lead to strategic planning efforts used to unify the region behind common goals and a common purpose.

Strengths

The overwhelming consensus from input collected by economic development stakeholders across Texoma revealed that the regions location is its biggest strength. There are many aspects that are encompassed when considering the benefits of Texoma's location. The location of interstate highway 35 connecting Dallas to Oklahoma City, highway 75 runs through the heart of the densely populated Grayson County and highway 82 runs east to west across each of the 3 counties in Texoma. The southbound highways allow for easy access to the Dallas metroplex making Texoma a gateway to this area. It allows residents to benefit from the close proximity of this area while maintaining the slower more relaxed atmosphere of Texoma life. This life style is increased by the areas access to scenic Lake Texoma and its many amenities. Residents have the benefit of being near hubs of commerce while enjoying the beauty and recreation available from Texoma's many natural resources.

Texoma is also uniquely positioned for growth. With the space to expand and affordable cost of living it is a great place for individuals and families to find increased quality of life and developers and entrepreneurs looking to grow and expand. Low crime rates, excellent schools, affordability, and a friendly, caring community are attracting new families into the area daily. Low taxes for individuals, families, and business alike are also give a major boost to the areas desirability. Enough cannot be said about the natural resources that not only boost the local economy but are the heart of the Texoman lifestyle providing weekend recreation through boating, fishing, and hunting, but also providing education through local AgriLife Extension programs, 4H, and FFA Clubs.

Opportunities

There is a growing trend across the nation of an increased demand for the creative industry to supply local craft food and beverages. Texoma has begun to leverage this trend by infusing the market with local flavor. Initiatives such as Texoma Craft Beverage Alliance utilize the talents of creative Texoma's to create local favorites. There has been a surge of wineries, vineyards, breweries and distilleries across the region in the past 5 years. The trends for organic locally grown foods have also influenced Texoma and paired well with the surge in craft beverage entrepreneurs. The region is now home to fruit orchards, lavender and honey farms. This creates an amazing opportunity to combine the regions ability to attract tourism with its natural resources and allow that market to sample the original flavor of the area with its hand-crafted food and beverage.

Another consumer trend bolstering economic growth that also has the potential to attract new residents with the education and skill levels associated with discretionary income is one that emphasizes lifestyle amenities centered around vibrant hubs such as revitalized downtown areas. This trend compliments the growth of the creative industry and concentrates it. Downtown centers become community gathering spaces that combine arts and culture with dining and retail experiences. Small business is being reinvigorated as residents open eateries and boutiques, responding rapidly to the demand. Downtown areas across Texoma are seeing a resurgence that has just begun to be utilized and presenting an extraordinary opportunity for growth.

Weaknesses & Challenges

Weaknesses

Every community has room for improvement. The ability to analyze these weaknesses and create a plan of action for addressing them is the sign of a strong community. The challenges of today will be the triumphs of tomorrow and will strengthen our resilience to withstand economic threats in the future. For Texoma this means improving the low-skilled workforce and the asset poverty that exists in the region. Consistently across the various stakeholders surveyed improving the skills of the workforce in Texoma was a major concern. Texoma residents are hard workers and unemployment remains low but many lack the skills to retain employment at a living wage. This low skilled employment is the main cause of asset poverty, meaning that the average Texoman does not have enough assets to sustain themselves if unemployed for 3 months. Further complicating this problem is the inability to attract living wage jobs to the area because the workforce they need is not available.

Demographics for the area reinforce findings revealed through the 2016-2018 Texoma Needs Assessment: housing, transportation, and healthcare are 3 major threats to Texoma's economic health. These same problems were consistently mentioned through the SWOC process as well because of their effects on the existing and available workforce. This was especially true of transportation. Many employers have found that unreliable transportation for their employees has a consistent and negative effect on their own production. The problem of transportation is only compounded when the rural nature of Texoma is taken into consideration. This can be even more obvious in areas such as Fannin County where most of its employed residents must commute outside of the county for employment and the majority of the unemployed do not have access to transportation to obtain employment.

Challenges

Factors that affect markets and /or trends from forces outside of our region must also be considered when assessing the economic health of the region. One such problem is the effect of changing demographics on the local economy. Culturally competent economic development methods will need to be developed as the population of Texoma sees a dramatic increase in the Hispanic residents and a decline in Non-Hispanic Whites. The importance of these changes is clarified when one considers cultural differences that may play a role in factors such as workforce development and educational attainment. With economic development, some characteristics need to be considered outside of a more clearly defined economic growth. Social problems that plague certain ethnic demographics will grow in scale with that demographic. Poverty is one such characteristic that has traditionally plagued minority populations at double the rates of non-minority groups. The lack of affordable housing, transportation, and healthcare impact more severely those workers with low wages near poverty income levels.

Another challenge to the region is the access to public and government funding sources. The political trend currently affecting policy and ultimately funding dollars results in dramatic cuts in government spending. This has potential repercussions for many of the programs once used to stimulate economic growth through grant awards that were often utilized for the hard and soft infrastructure needed for development. These government spending cuts are also being seen

across the social safety net that many of the low income workers in our region have utilized to compensate their needs for which their income could not provide.

Strategies

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: Create a Vibrant Regional Identity

Objective 1: Market the region as a cohesive economy through the promotion of its creative industry and ecotourism

Objective 2: Revitalize regional economic collaboration

Objective 3: Create unified branding for the region

Activity 1: Assess the feasibility and promote use of incubators to create an innovation ecosystem

Activity 2: Facilitate workshops and create a regional forum to unify branding and leverage planning efforts

Activity 3: Conduct regional collaborative efforts to address branding of Texoma

Goal 2: Create a Diverse and Healthy Regional Economy

Objective 1: Improve business ecosystem

Objective 2: Improve the Talent Supply and Education Pipeline for Workforce Development

Objective 3: Engage and assist communities in Texoma with planning activities to prepare for growth, leverage assets, and increase funding for healthy local economies

Activity 1: Facilitate the creation of regional projects that improve hard and soft infrastructure of the business ecosystem with a focus of increasing the skilled workforce

Activity 2: Assist economic and workforce development professionals in mapping and assessing the school to workforce pipeline to develop planning efforts for its improvement

Activity 3: Conduct workshops for local government, private, and nonprofit sectors to improve their planning abilities to enhance their efforts for addressing growth and funding projects

Goal 3: Create a Resilient Economy

Objective 1: Align resiliency planning efforts across the regional

Objective 2: Create diversification initiatives

Objective 3: Promote equitable development

Activity 1: Collaborate with economic development and emergency planning professionals to unify resiliency planning efforts across the region

Activity 2: Collaborate with stakeholders for the formation of regional initiatives to promote economic diversification

Activity 3: Assist in the creation of initiatives to promote equitable development to develop a skilled workforce, increase average earning potential, asset building in a culturally sensitive manner accounting for shifting regional demographics

Performance Measures

The Texoma Council of Governments will report CEDS performance measures on the GPRA form submitted to the EDA and will provide these figures on the TCOG Community & Economic Development Program website, www.texomaedd.org.

Number of Jobs Created and/or Retained in the Region

- Total employment in initial year
- Total employment in subsequent years
- Number of jobs retained as a Result of Federal Investments
- Number of Jobs Retained as a Result of Select State and Local Investment

Amount of Investment in the Region

- EDA sponsored investments
- Significant state and local investments

Business Formation and Expansion in the Region

- Total formations or expansion in initial year
- Total formation or expansion subsequent years

Workforce Development in the Region

- Number of people receiving job training in the region
- Number of people receiving training on economic development, soft infrastructure, or hard infrastructure at TCOG workshops
- Number of requests for assistance with data collection, data analysis, or data development in the region.

Changes in the Economic Environment of the Region

- Changes to taxes & fees, new incentives programs etc.