

## **Butler County**

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Twenty Rural Counties to Call Home,” the cover of the national magazine proclaims. Inside, the magazine describes desired rural locations in twenty states, including one in the heart of Kansas. This is today’s Kansas Profile.

American Cowboy magazine recently did a cover story called “Where to Live Now” about twenty rural counties from across the west. These were located in twenty different states, including Florida and nineteen states west of the Mississippi. The primary Kansas location on the list was Butler County, with Dodge City also recognized and Finney and Gray Counties receiving honourable mention.

“We gathered names from several sources,” said Philip Armour, editor of *American Cowboy* magazine. “Then we divided those up among several writers that we work with and they did the research. If there were a couple of places that were close, the tie-breaker question was: Is this a place we would like to live ourselves?”

Sample quotes from the published article include: “Here are 20 counties (and fun towns nearby) to call home – places with room for horses, cattle, and big dreams....Remote, with plenty of sky and grass, each is a fine destination well worth a visit – or relocation....Family values still thrive here, and the wide-open vistas and clean air are good for the soul.”

For each of the twenty sites, the magazine lists county population, cattle population, median income and home prices, total area, and average land price per acre plus a general description.

About Butler County, the magazine said in part: “The county is a vast expanse of rolling grassy hills cut through by river valleys....Farming and ranching have always been hugely important to the area, but the oil industry emerged as the major economic driver for the county....Today, Butler County has a diverse economy including oil workers, ranchers, farmers, machinists, metal workers, and other types of manufacturers. With convenient access to the thriving city of Wichita just minutes down the highway, Butler County is a wide-open Western dream come true with a modern touch.”

Butler County is Kansas’ largest county in square miles. As the magazine noted, it is a rural county with close proximity to Wichita. Western Butler County is affected by the urban sprawl of Wichita while the eastern part of the county is rolling rural grasslands. (This happens to be the exact opposite of the general demographic pattern of Kansas, which has the larger population to the east and the rural area to the west.)

El Dorado is the county seat of Butler County. Andover, next to Wichita, has experienced rapid growth. Butler County also has several smaller rural communities, such as Elbing, population 208; Latham, population 164; and Cassoday, population 128 people. Now, that's rural.

“Farming and ranching is still a main contributor to the economy,” said David Alfaro, Butler County economic development director. “Being close to a metro area provides access to manufacturing jobs yet still allows families time to be home together and share the many family values that are instilled in us from our birth.”

“Having lived in Butler County for over 25 years, I am still in awe when I drive through the beautiful Flint Hills during spring,” said Becky Wolfe, director of the Leadership Butler County program. “Our rural communities have found ways to stay alive and still offer the generosity and friendliness to neighbors and strangers alike,” she said. “Butler County honestly has the best of both worlds...from the urban feel of the west side of the county to the rural, majestic feel of the north and east part of the county,” Becky concluded.

How exciting to read a cover story celebrating Rural America and proclaiming that Butler County epitomizes these rural values. As the magazine said: “God bless the fly-over states! Rural America has never been more attractive.” Wow.

It's time to close this edition of the magazine, whose cover story highlights these great rural places in which to live now. We commend all the citizens of Butler County for making a difference by caring for and enhancing their quality of life. The many desirable rural attributes of Butler County mean that they have a lot to cover.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.