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**SELECTION FACTORS IN HOUSING
AMONG RURAL LOW-TO-MODERATE INCOME RESIDENTS¹**

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ABSTRACT Growth in rural areas has increased the need to examine more closely the quality and acceptability of different types of existing housing. This study focuses on the reasons rural residents moved to their housing and whether their needs were satisfied by their selections. Comparisons of reasons for moving among conventional home, mobile home, and apartment residents indicated similar motivations for housing choices. Comparisons of present housing satisfaction revealed that a large majority of all respondents selected housing that met their needs. The results suggest that despite the predominant preference for single-family conventionally built homes, a substantial portion of future housing demand for low-to-moderately priced housing in rural areas could be accommodated quite adequately with nonconventional housing such as mobile homes and apartments.

Introduction

As recent population trends indicate, rural areas have experienced considerable growth (U.S. Census Data 1982). Much of this growth has occurred as a result of the decentralization of manufacturing from the central cities and the development of recreational areas, retirement communities, and mining enterprises (Beale 1983; McGranahan 1984; Till 1981). A result of this growth has been an increase in the demand for housing and for improvements in the quality of life afforded residents by their housing situations (Dillman 1979). Because this rapid increase in rural housing demand has been quite recent, many questions remained unanswered. One of the more important is whether residents are obtaining satisfactory housing in response to their needs and preferences.

Although the choice of a particular dwelling unit largely depends on availability and affordability, it also generally reflects people's housing needs and preferences. Individuals and families move for a variety of reasons, including changes in economic conditions, perceived deficits in housing conditions, changes in family composition, and in response to personal needs (Morris and Winter 1978; Rossi 1980). Efforts to catalog these reasons have resulted in various conceptual frameworks, one of which involves

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classifying them into categories of "push" and "pull" (Bell 1968; Rea 1978). "Push" factors encompass reasons why people leave their housing or location, while "pull" factors represent why people select a particular new home or location over other alternatives.

Attempts to focus on specific reasons why people move have led some researchers to argue for the greater importance of either "push" or "pull" reasons. Boyce (1969), for example, asserts that when the move is voluntary, it is likely to be based on dissatisfaction with the dwelling unit or the neighborhood, although most moves are also likely to be motivated to some degree by the opportunity of upward mobility (a "pull" factor). Kirschenbaum (1983) also argues that "push" factors are perhaps the more predominating influence on people's decisions to move. He contends that dissatisfaction with housing unit and neighborhood is the chief reason people move and that moves are made to housing situations which better fit their needs. The relative importance of housing unit compared with neighborhood or community in terms of influencing residential mobility was measured by Norcross (1966) who found, at least among young low-income residents, that dissatisfaction with the housing unit was a considerably greater factor in determining predispositions to move than was discontent with the community.

Other researchers, such as Butler et al. (1969), have argued that "pull" factors are more the important determinants. They contend that the quality of the neighborhood and housing unit moved to are more important than the neighborhood and housing unit being moved from. They also suggest that the quality of the new neighborhood--neighbors, social and economic status, schools, public and community services and amenities--are far more important influences than the size or construction of the home. In support of this view, Lansing and Mueller (1966) suggest that individuals choose new residences on the basis of the quality and social status of the people and on the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, as well as whether their new housing provides them with adequate open space, uncongested living, and enhancement of personal status.

Still other investigators argue that "push" and "pull" factors are highly correlated and their relative importance may not be easily determined (Bell 1968; Michelson 1977; Rea 1978; Rossi 1981). Rea (1978), for example, found that the predominant reason for moving among recent movers in San Diego County was some past problem which residents attempted to remedy in their choice of a new residence. In an analysis of his data by age and stage in the family life cycle, Rea found that among residents with few resources (young households, lower income) reasons for moving were mainly associated with the housing unit such as cost, physical space, and construction quality. By contrast, among older more established residents, reasons for moving were more associated with the quality of the location, including proximity of shopping and availability of police and fire protection, and identification with the neighborhood.

For whatever reasons people move, whether "push" or "pull" factors or a combination of the two, the ultimate question is whether the move results in housing that suits their needs and preferences.

One change that may be expected to have an impact on the overall evaluation of the quality of rural housing is the marked increase in households moving to multi-family housing (i.e., apartments) and manufactured housing (i.e., mobile homes) in rural areas (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1982). Although the desire to own a single-family house remains strong (Dillman et al. 1979), market factors such as the costs of land, building materials, and financing have made the single-family conventionally built home unattainable to an increasing number of housing consumers (Hohm 1983; Houstoun 1981). Still, Census data indicate that the majority of rural families in the United States are housed predominantly in conventionally built single-family homes. Therefore, it may be expected that housing other than the traditional single-family conventional home would be viewed as less desirable housing. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that housing other than a single-family conventionally built structure is not necessarily the less preferred choice, nor one that results in decidedly lower quality housing (Gray et al. 1980; Shelton et al. 1983). Recent studies comparing the acceptability of mobile homes and apartments as alternative housing types generally have failed to provide conclusive evidence that conventional home residents exhibit higher overall satisfaction with their housing situations, especially when conventional home and mobile home residents are compared (More and Crocker 1979; Pike and Stubbs 1978; Shelton et al. 1979). For example, Shelton et al. (1983) found that conventional home and mobile home residents reported comparable levels of satisfaction and positive sentiment regarding their housing situations and were more satisfied than apartment residents.

Because of population growth and the increased availability and selection of mobile homes and apartments, there is a need to establish the status of these housing types relative to single-family conventional homes with respect to ability to satisfy occupants' housing needs. This study addresses this question by analyzing data from a sample of low-to-moderate income residents who had moved in the past 15 years to single-family conventional homes, mobile homes, or apartments. This comparison sample made it possible not only to determine the relationship of "push" and "pull" factors with residential satisfaction, but to determine whether differences in dwelling type were associated with differences in reasons for moving and subsequent housing satisfaction. The major purposes of the study were to determine the following:

 2 According to the U.S. Census, in 1970, single-family housing comprised 88 percent of all rural housing units in North Carolina (U.S. Census Data, 1972). By 1980, this figure had decreased to 80%, despite a 10% increase in population. By contrast, there was a substantial increase in mobile homes (148%) and multi-family housing units (62%) (U.S. Census Data, 1982).

- 1) whether housing selection criteria can be conceptualized as either "push," characteristics of the previous dwelling and (or) neighborhood, or "pull," characteristics of the present dwelling and (or) neighborhood;
- 2) whether residents of different housing types differ in their reasons for selecting new housing; and
- 3) whether residents of different housing types were able to achieve satisfaction with the criteria that were instrumental in influencing that selection.

Methodology

The data reported in this paper were collected as part of a larger study focusing on the quality of living of 305 residents of low-to-moderate-priced housing from the Piedmont region of North Carolina (Shelton et al. 1983). Eleven counties from two adjacent regional planning districts within the region were used to represent the initial sampling frame. The respondent sample was drawn from townships within the 11 counties that had the following characteristics: 1) fewer than 20,000 residents (rural); 2) at least a 7 percent nonwhite resident population (racially heterogeneous); and 3) at least 5 percent of all housing units were mobile homes (representative of mobile homes).

Most respondents were randomly selected (using systematic quota sampling) from tax records from within the selected townships. A supplemental sampling system also was implemented because mobile homes and apartments comprised only a small proportion of the total number of housing units in the selected townships. Additional mobile home and apartment addresses were obtained from telephone directories and real estate listings. Some of these listings were located outside the selected townships, but all of them were located within the targeted counties. Complete address listings were obtained from mobile home parks and apartment complexes. Prospective respondents were identified via a systematic quota sampling selection procedure.

Although the entire sample consisted of 305 households, data were used only from respondents who indicated that they had moved one or more times within the previous 15 years. The resulting sub-sample consisted of 258 households--93 from conventional homes, 70 from mobile homes, and 93 from apartments. The data were collected via personal interviews with an adult member of the sample households between July 1980 and June 1981.

Results

Background characteristics

Background characteristics of the sample categorized by present housing type are presented in Table 1. The majority of conventional home household heads were married homeowners, over age 30, who had graduated from high school or attained additional education. Most mobile home households heads reported owning their homes and two-thirds

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Households

Character- istics	Conventional Homes		Mobile Homes		Apartments		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age of head								
30 and under	22	24	23	34	38	42	83	34
31 to 45	37	42	18	27	25	28	80	33
46 and over	29	33	26	39	27	30	82	33
Total	88	100	67	100	90	100	245	100
Educational level of head								
Less than high school	23	28	31	48	27	30	81	34
High school	34	42	24	37	32	36	90	38
Beyond high school	24	30	10	15	31	34	65	28
Total	81	100	65	100	90	100	236	100
Race								
White	73	83	56	85	61	69	190	78
Black	14	16	09	14	27	31	50	21
Indian	01	01	01	01	00	00	02	01
Total	88	100	66	100	88	100	242	100
Marital status								
Married	71	81	44	66	27	30	142	58
Not married	17	19	23	34	63	70	103	42
Total	88	100	67	100	90	100	245	100
Size of household								
One to three	44	50	54	81	79	88	177	72
Four or more	44	50	13	19	11	12	68	28
Total	88	100	67	100	90	100	245	100
Tenure								
Owned	70	80	61	91	01	01	132	54
Renting	18	20	06	09	89	99	113	46
Total	88	100	67	100	90	100	245	100

were married with families of fewer than four members. As a group, mobile home residents had lower educational levels than either conventional home or apartment residents; 48 percent had not completed high school. Apartment residents were younger, higher in educational attainment, not married, with households of fewer than four members. All except one resident were renters.

Housing selection factors

Responses to a set of 13 items representing reasons for moving were factor analyzed using the principal components method with varimax rotation. Included in the reasons were items representing housing characteristics such as size, condition, and neighborhood of the previous dwelling and cost, condition, and neighborhood of the present dwelling, as well as proximity of the present dwelling to job and community services. The importance ratings were made on 5-point Likert type scales with 5 indicating that the influence of the item was "very important" and 1 indicating it was "of no importance" to the respondents' housing selection decision.

Table 2. Factor analysis of reasons that were important to respondents selecting their present homes

Factor	Factor name	Item	Loading	
1	Characteristics of previous home	Type of previous home	.88	
		Size of previous home	.85	
		Condition of previous home	.82	
		To get out of old neighborhood	.58	
	Locational characteristics of present home	Convenience of present home to		
		a change in job		.70
		Convenience of present home to getting to work		.68
		Nearness of present home to neighborhood schools		.67
		Convenience of present home to neighborhood shopping centers		.65
		Nearness of present home to church		.60
		General characteristics of present home		
	General neighborhood of present home		.75	
	Condition of present home		.75	
Cost of present home		.66		
Who your neighbors were		.54		

Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted accounting for 55.8 percent of the variability in the set of original items. Items loading .50 or greater were used to label the factors. Items that loaded .50 or greater were used to label the factors. Items that loaded .50 or greater on the three factors are presented in Table 2.

The first factor explained the greatest portion of variability (31.5 percent) and was named "Characteristics of the Previous Home" because it reflected reasons pertaining to the type, size, condition, and neighborhood of the previous home. The second factor, accounting for an additional 14.5 percent of the variability, was labeled "Locational Characteristics of the Present Home" and included reasons associated with a change of job and proximity of the chosen dwelling to job, shopping, schools, and church. The third factor, explaining an additional 9.8 percent of the variability, was named "General Characteristics of the Home" because it contained reasons associated with the neighborhood, condition, and cost of the chosen dwelling.

In general, the factor analysis confirmed the findings of previous research that reasons for moving may be conceptualized as either "push" or "pull." For this sample of rural households, however, reasons associated with the selection of the present living situation ("pull" characteristics) were characterized by two separate dimensions--reasons reflecting concern for the location and reasons reflecting concern for the general characteristics of the present home.

Differences in housing selection factors by housing type

A series of analysis of covariance tests comparing the three housing groups were conducted to control for possible effects from socio-demographic variables.³ Selected socio-demographic characteristics reported to be related to moving decisions in previous research (see example, Butler et al. 1969; Rossi 1980), including age at the time of the move, educational level of the head of household, race, and marital status, were entered as covariates. Separate analyses were performed on each of the three housing selection factors. No differences by housing type were found on the three housing selection factors, although significant differences did result for two of the variables entered as covariates: race with "Characteristics of the Previous Home" ($P < .001$) and education with "Locational Characteristics of the Present Home" ($P < .05$). The influence of race on the previous home "push" factor revealed that blacks were more likely than whites to consider characteristics of their previous homes as important reasons for moving. The effect of education on the locational "pull" factor indicated that the more schooling respondents had received the greater concern they had for the general neighborhood, cost, and condition of the home to which they moved. Additional analyses were

³ The conventional .05 probability level was used here and in all subsequent analyses as the determining point for statistical significance.

Table 3. Importance of Selections Reasons by Satisfaction with Housing Characteristics

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Factor	Reason for moving	Respondents*		Satisfaction with characteristics of present home	Conventional home			Mobile home			Apartments			Total	
		N	%		N	%	X	N	%	X	N	%	X	N	%
Characteristics of previous home	Type of previous home	111	44	Overall housing satisfaction	39	85	4.2	26	100	4.5 ^a	28	72	3.8 ^a	93	80
	Size of previous home	109	43	Number of rooms	37	80	4.1	23	85	3.9	24	69	3.5	84	80
				Size of rooms	35	78	3.8	19	65	3.6	26	74	3.7	80	73
				Inside storage	32	73	3.7	15	46	3.4	21	62	3.1	68	65
	Condition of previous home	103	41	Quality of construction	29	78	3.8	17	68	3.6	27	65	3.6	73	71
				State of repair	25	68	3.6	20	80	3.9	27	66	3.5	72	70
To get out of previous neighborhood	72	28	Neighborhood	14	70	4.0	10	48	3.4	15	52	3.4	39	56	
			Neighborhood good place to live	15	71	4.0	13	62	3.9	17	59	3.6	45	63	
Change in job	53	21	Convenience in getting to work	14	70	3.7	14	88	4.0	13	76	3.8	41	77	
Locational characteristics of present home	Nearness of present home to work	146	58	Nearness to work	36	85	3.8	39	89	4.2	44	82	3.9	119	82
	Nearness of present home to schools	99	39	Nearness to schools	32	84	4.2	24	80	4.1	28	88	4.2	83	84
	Nearness of present home to shopping	26	86	Nearness to shopping	26	86	4.0	28	93	4.3	42	84	3.9	95	87
	Nearness of present home to church	133	52	Nearness to church	41	85	4.3	40	89	4.2	37	93	4.2	118	89

Table 3. (continued)

Factor	Reason for moving	Respondents*		Satisfaction with characteristics of present home	Conventional home			Mobile home			Apartments			Total	
		N	%		N	%	X	N	%	X	N	%	X	N	%
General characteristics of present home	General neighborhood of present home	190	75	Neighborhood	70	94	4.6 ^{ab}	46	90	4.1 ^a	40	70	4.0 ^b	172	91
				Neighbors	70	93	4.6	41	80	4.4	58	91	4.3	169	89
	Condition of present home	209	83	How well built	51	72	4.1 ^a	40	70	4.0 ^b	41	51	3.5 ^{ab}	132	63
				State of repair	55	77	3.8	46	82	4.0	62	77	3.8	263	78
	Cost of present home	176	69	Overall cost	63	91	4.2 ^a	49	94	4.2 ^b	41	75	3.6 ^{ab}	153	87
	Who neighbors were	120	47	Present neighbors	48	94	4.6	34	87	4.5	27	90	4.3	109	91
Friendliness of neighbors				39	77	4.2	29	74	4.2	25	83	4.1	93	78	

Note: Means followed by the same letter are significantly different (Tukey test, $P < .05$) from each other.

* Respondents in the total sample, N = 256.

performed further dividing the subjects into the groups by previous and present housing type (i.e., those moving from conventional home to conventional home, conventional home to mobile home, conventional home to apartment, etc.). The only significant difference ($P < .05$) by this grouping was found on the "General Characteristics of the Home" factor. A post hoc test failed to discriminate significant differences between any two groups of respondents on this factor.

Selection reasons and housing satisfaction

To determine if there was a relationship between reasons reported as important in home selection and subsequent satisfaction with the homes, a series of cross-tabulations relating individual reasons for moving and satisfaction with specific housing characteristics for the total sample and by present housing type were computed. These cross-tabulations were constructed by pairing each of the original set of 13 selection items with respondent evaluations of housing characteristics matched on the basis of similar object content. The data set pairings were further reduced by including only respondents who rated a given selection item as "important" or "very important" in their housing selection decision. For ease of presentation and interpretation, an additional limiting procedure was performed. The response categories of "satisfied" and "very satisfied" (or their equivalents) were combined to form a single positive satisfaction response category.⁴ The results of this analysis showing only the composite "positive" responses are presented in Table 3. Also included in Table 3 are mean satisfaction ratings based on the entire range of responses) of each housing characteristics. A series of analysis of variance tests were performed to compare these ratings across the three housing type groups. F-ratios associated with P-values of .05 or less were considered significant. Post hoc analyses using the Tukey test with harmonic means and the .05 level of significance were conducted to identify significant differences between group pairs.

Characteristics of the previous home

Type of previous home: The importance of the type of previous home was related to respondents' "Overall Housing Satisfaction." Comparison of mean ratings by housing type indicated that for respondents who reported that the type of previous home was an important reason to select their present home, mobile home residents were significantly ($P < .05$) more satisfied with their present homes than were apartment residents. No significant difference in satisfaction level was found between either conventional home and mobile home or apartment respondents. Overall, most respondents from the three housing type groups were satisfied with their homes.

⁴ Ratings were based on a 5-point satisfaction scale: 1 = "very satisfied" to 5 = "very dissatisfied."

Size of previous home: The importance of size of previous home was related to satisfaction with "Number of Rooms," "Size of Rooms," and "Inside Storage." Comparison of mean ratings for each characteristic by housing type revealed no significant differences. Overall, a majority of respondents were satisfied with the number of rooms, size of rooms, and inside storage space provided by their present housing. This pattern was generally true for each housing type group with the main exception being the mobile home respondents; more than half reported that they were dissatisfied with storage space inside their homes.

Condition of previous home: The importance of the previous home's condition in respondents' housing selection decision was related to "Quality of Construction" and "State of Repair." No significant differences by housing type were found on either variable. On both characteristics a majority of respondents reported being satisfied. Additional information was collected (but not presented in Table 3) concerning a number of problems such as leaks in roof or basement, cracks in wall, sags or bulges in floors, broken or missing window panes or screens, decay, etc., that reflected the condition of dwellings. Eighty-nine percent of conventional home, 88 percent of mobile home, and 76 percent of apartment residents stated they had no problems with their homes. In addition, 65 percent of conventional home, 52 percent of mobile home, and 54 percent of apartment residents indicated they had no heating or cooling problems such as noisy furnaces, cold floors or walls, drafty rooms, or temperature fluctuations.

To get out of previous neighborhood: The desire to move out of the previous neighborhood was related to two variables--"Neighborhood" and "Neighborhood Good Place to live." Comparison of ratings on the two variables revealed no significant differences. Examination of the percentage of respondents who were satisfied shows that while a majority of the sample was satisfied on both neighborhood variables, less than half of the mobile home respondents and just over half of the residents of apartments were satisfied with their neighborhoods.

Location characteristics of present home

In terms of the importance of the Location Characteristics of Present Home factor, no significant differences were found in satisfaction among respondents from the three groups regarding the relative location of their present homes. On each of the location characteristics, most respondents from each housing type reported their housing location as satisfactory. Thus, the importance of a job change was related to respondents' satisfaction with "Convenience in Getting to Work." The importance of being near where one works was related to satisfaction with "Nearness to Work." The importance of being near schools was related to satisfaction with "Nearness to Schools." The importance of being near shopping was related to satisfaction with "Nearness to Shopping." The importance of being near one's place of worship was related to satisfaction with "Nearness to Place of Worship."

General characteristics of the present home

General neighborhood of present home: The general neighborhood of the present home was related to two variables--satisfaction with "Neighbors" and "Neighborhood." Comparison of satisfaction ratings of respondents from the three housing type groups who felt the general neighborhood of their present home was an important influence on their decision to move, yielded a significant difference ($P < .05$) for "Neighborhood." Post hoc comparison tests indicated that conventional home and mobile home respondents were significantly ($P < .05$) more satisfied with their present neighborhood than were apartment residents. A large majority of respondents reported themselves as satisfied with the neighborhood in which their present homes were located. No significant difference was found on the "Neighbors" variable.

Condition of present home: The condition of the present home was related to two variables--"How Well Built Present Home" and "State of Repair." Comparison of the three housing type groups ratings of how well build they perceived their homes to be revealed a significant difference ($P < .05$). Post Hoc comparison tests showed that both conventional home and mobile home respondents who felt the condition of their present homes was an important influence on their decision to move were significantly ($P < .05$) more satisfied with the quality of their present homes than were apartment residents. No significant difference was found on the variable, "State of Repair." A majority of respondents felt their homes were well constructed and in a good state of repair.

Cost of present home: The importance of the cost of their present housing was related to "Overall Cost." Comparison of this variable by housing type yielded a significant difference ($P < .05$). Post hoc comparison tests indicated that both conventional home and mobile home respondents who felt the cost of their present home was an important influence on their decision to move were significantly more satisfied ($P < .05$) with the cost of their homes than were apartment residents. Most respondents reported being satisfied with the "Overall Cost" of their homes.

Who neighbors were: The importance to respondents of who their neighbors would be in selecting their present homes was related to "Present Neighbors" and "Friendliness of Neighbors." No significant differences by housing type were found on either variable. On both characteristics a majority of respondents reported being satisfied.

Discussion

One of the purposes of this study was to determine whether reasons for moving by a sample of rural low-to-moderate-income residents could be cast into a "push-pull" decision framework as has been found in other work on residential mobility. A factor analysis of ratings of importance of 13 reasons for moving yielded three factors representing one "push" ("Characteristics of Previous Home") and two "pull" ("Locational Characteristics of the Present

Home" and "General Characteristics of the Present Home") factors. Consequently, the data found in this study support findings of previous research showing that reasons for moving can be categorized as representing a "push" factor, reflecting discontentment with the previous housing environment, or a "pull" factor, relating to attracting characteristics of the home that is selected.

A second purpose of the study was to determine whether the importance of the reasons respondents gave for moving to their present homes were the same or different for residents of the three housing types. Given the widely acknowledged preference for single-family conventionally built homes and rural attitude that mobile homes and apartments are "secondary" housing choices, it was expected that residents of mobile homes and apartments would place less importance than conventional home residents on the selection factors involved in their housing choice. No significant differences were found, however, on the "pull" factors, "Locational Characteristics of the Present Home" and "General Characteristics of the Present Home." These data suggest that mobile homes and apartments are selected for many of the same reasons as single-family conventionally built homes. While these data may appear contrary to expectation, other data reported elsewhere by the authors indicate that the reason for the great similarity in selection may be that housing, regardless of type, in the low-to-moderate price range, offers basically the same quality housing environment (Gruber et al. 1985).

The third purpose of the study was to determine whether respondents were satisfied with the characteristics they rated as important in the selection of their housing. To test this possibility, evaluations of housing characteristics matched in content were compared with the reasons respondents rated as important. Analyses of these data revealed that, overall, most respondents apparently found housing that satisfied the reasons they identified as being important in their decision to move to their present homes. This pattern of results suggests that in comparison with conventional homes, mobile homes and apartments in the same general price range provide similar levels of satisfaction of housing needs and demands for the households that occupy them.

Because of the limitations regarding the design and sampling used in this study, it is important to recognize that the findings may have limited applicability to other residential groups and housing populations. Future research is needed using samples of prospective movers for assessing needs and preferences before moving and then after the move is made. These households could then be followed over a period of time to determine whether their new housing situations are meeting their needs and addressing the reasons they moved. In addition, to increase the applicability of findings such as those reported in this study, future research needs to integrate theoretical explanations of residential mobility and residential satisfaction in order to provide the housing industry with a conceptual base from which it can better generate solutions to consumer housing preferences, needs, and demands. Finally, as suggested by the findings of this study, future

investigations should explore more closely why residents selected their homes and what are the outcomes of their choices in terms of housing goals, personal satisfaction, and achieved quality of living. By gaining a better understanding of what determines residential satisfaction, we can build stronger support for making more housing options available and affordable to the rural housing consumer.

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