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Young Generation, the Green Agenda, and Rural Development Policy in Southern Russia

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Abstract. The study of Russian rural young generation requires new approaches that take into account contemporary realities. Conflicting assessments of "rurality" in academic discourse are, to a certain extent, the projection of contrasting images of the countryside in the public consciousness. Retaining young people in rural areas is key to rural development, a barrier to depopulation, and a source of economic and social innovation. Based on the analysis of empirical data from the study of rural young people in two regions of southern Russia — Krasnodar Krai and Astrakhan Oblast — the main motivations for living in or moving to the countryside, their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a rural lifestyle, and the future of their communities are defined. The role of environmental factors in determining life strategies of rural young people is demonstrated. The shift in rural development paradigm is possible through introduction of new forms of motivation for rural youth, focusing not only on using modern agricultural technologies but also on development of creative industries in rural areas. It is critically important to consider regional factors, the specific values and living conditions of young people in various regions of The Russian Federation.

Keywords: development policy, rural areas, rural young people, green agenda, rural identity, vision of the future

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Молодежь, зеленая повестка и политика развития сельских территорий Юга России

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Аннотация. Изучение российской сельской молодежи требует новых подходов, учитывающих современные реалии. Противоречивые оценки в научном дискурсе в определенной степени являются проекцией контрастных образов села в массовом сознании. На основе анализа данных эмпирического исследования сельской молодежи в двух регионах Юга России — Краснодарского края и Астраханской области — авторы выявили основные мотивы жизни на селе или переезда в сельскую местность, представления о преимуществах и недостатках сельского образа жизни, будущем своих населенных пунктов. Показана роль экологических факторов в определении жизненных стратегий сельской молодежи. Изменение парадигмы развития возможно на основе внедрения новых форм мотивации сельской молодежи. Критически важным является учет регионального фактора, особенностей ценностных ориентаций и условий жизни молодых людей в различных субъектах РФ.

Ключевые слова: политика развития, сельские территории, сельская молодежь, зеленая повестка, сельская идентичность, образ будущего

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Introduction

Contemporary Russian rural sociologists, noting the paradoxical nature of the social sciences' problematic field of rural development, lamented that many contemporary patterns of rural reality remain outside the scope of agricultural sociologists' research. "The preconditions for ruralization trends toward self-development, the emergence of a new post-agrarian way of life with qualitatively new specifics of work, education, recreation, healthcare, tourism, information services, and leisure are already emerging…". "To consider how rural-urban

life, moving rapidly, 'sews a shroud for the past and swaddling clothes for the future,' and what remains unchanged — this is a fascinating challenge for future researchers!" [Velikiy, Vyal'shina 2025]. Drawing on this metaphor, the authors examine whether young people constitute a major driving force behind the transformation of rural life.

Many contemporary studies compare rural youth with their urban peers, whose experiences and lifestyles are treated as normative, while rural areas are portrayed as socially devalued and structurally disadvantaged [Nartova, Krupets 2019]. Many authors portray rural youth as a socially marginalized group. This position contrasts with our understanding, which emerged from an analysis of empirical research materials in the Krasnodar Krai and Astrakhan Oblast. Despite a significant number of problems, young people express optimism about the future of their rural communities. These conflicting assessments, to a certain extent, reflect contrasting images of the village in the public consciousness: on the one hand, rural areas are perceived as an archaic realm doomed to extinction, while on the other, they are seen as the bearer of a "Russian cultural code", reproducing the deep cultural values of Russian civilization [Velikiy, Vyal'shina 2025].

"Demography is destiny". This phrase, attributed to Auguste Comte, is often found in journalistic discourse today. The demographic aging of countries and regions leads not only to socioeconomic problems but also to the possible replacement of the indigenous population by migrants. Retaining young people in rural areas is key to rural development, a barrier to depopulation, and a source of economic and social innovation. Today the classic triad of "rurality" — rural residence, employment in agricultural production, and adherence to traditional values — rarely exists in unity. In the modern world, multiple heterolocal identities are emerging, tied to several places of residence simultaneously, a hybridization of "rural" and "urban", and a blending of lifestyles. Rural labor is diversifying, and a rural precariat is emerging. Migration flows are consistent with the global trend of ruralization.

Research on rural development requires particular attention to regional specifics, as significant disparities in rural development are evident across regions, which can be caused not only by natural and climatic differences but also by the quality of governance. This study was conducted using data from two regions in southern Russia — Krasnodar Krai and Astrakhan Oblast. Despite significant differences in the sectoral structure of rural production and the ethnic and religious composition of the rural population, depopulation processes in these regions are offset by high migration growth.

Methodology and Research Methods

One of the theoretical foundations of this study is V.I. Chuprov's concept of youth as an agent of social reproduction and public life [Chuprov 2008]. This approach was further developed by Yu.A. Zubok, who conceptualizes youth as an autonomous agent of social change [Zubok 2022]. M.A. Yadova's idea of glocal models of growing up, combining global generational trends with specific "local" characteristics, proved valuable for the study [Yadova 2022]. Regarding rural youth, Belarusian scientists have proposed an integral model for analyzing life strategies [Balich 2023].

The role of youth is considered in the context of changes in the socio-cultural and socio-political aspects of the lifeworld of the modern Russian village [Velikiy 2022; Toshchenko, Velikiy 2018; Vinogradskiy, Vinogradskaya 2023; Shmakov 2020]. An important role in understanding socio-cultural changes is played by the ideas proposed by I.S. Semenenko on the synthesis of traditions and innovations in development policy [Semenenko 2023], as well as the concept of intangible resources of rural development policy formulated by Krasnodar authors [Miroshnichenko, Morozova, Rusiya 2025].

The research methodology is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The empirical data were collected through an online survey of rural youth administered via the Survey-Studio platform. IP-based controls were used to prevent duplicate submissions (respondents could not complete the survey twice via an electronic link). The sample size was 600 respondents aged 18 to 39, half of whom live in rural settlements in Krasnodar Krai and the other half in Astrakhan Oblast. Key data was obtained through focus group interviews with rural youth in 10 districts of these regions (6 in Krasnodar Krai and 4 in Astrakhan Oblast). The study also included monitoring and qualitative content analysis of the social media accounts of 36 rural bloggers (Telegram, VKontakte, and Odnoklassniki) in 2024–2025.

Rural Youth of Kuban and the Lower Volga Region Talk about the Present and Future of Their Territories

Rural residents make up 35.6% of the total population of the Astrakhan Region and 42.9% of the Krasnodar Krai. The rural population of the Astrakhan Region grew by 2.3% between the last two censuses, with young people aged 18 to 35 accounting for 21.2% of the rural population. While the urban population of the Krasnodar Krai grew by 15% between 2010 and 2022, the rural population grew by 1.9%. Since 2020, the growth of the rural population in the Krai has reversed, ultimately leading

to a decline in its share of the total population from 47.1% to 42.9%. Krasnodar Krai, and particularly its rural areas, is experiencing active migration of the elderly from other regions of the country. The percentage of the working-age population falls as the proportion of the elderly rises, decreasing by 2.8% within the same time period (from 58.6% in 2011 to 55.8% in 2022) [Rakachev 2023].

Data from an online survey of 600 young rural residents in the Krasnodar Krai and Astrakhan Oblast, conducted in the summer of 2025, allow us to assess respondents' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of rural life, their level of social activity, and the prospects of their "small homeland". 76.3% of respondents have lived in rural areas their entire lives, with about half having had brief breaks for study or military service. 15.2% of survey participants had moved from the city, and 8.5% had left the countryside and then returned. The main reasons for living in rural areas, according to respondents who have lived in rural areas their entire lives, excluding brief breaks, are having family and friends living in the area (47.4%) and choosing their place of residence based on their birthplace (38.0%). The reasons for city dwellers moving to rural areas differ in Krasnodar Krai and Astrakhan Oblast (see Table 1). Kuban respondents prioritize environmental concerns, proximity to nature, opportunities for professional growth, and personal and community safety, while Astrakhan residents prioritize business opportunities and government support, alongside environmental concerns.

Table 1

Reasons for moving to rural areas from the city, % of respondents who moved

Answer option	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
Safety	7.7	10.6	4.5
Ecology and proximity to nature	35.2	29.8	40.9
Business opportunities	7.7	10.6	4.5
Professional growth opportunities	11.0	8.5	13.6
Government support	4.4	6.4	2.3
Personal safety and child safety	7.7	2.1	13.6
Other	26.4	31.9	20.5

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

Financial constraints that prevented respondents from remaining in the city were the most frequently reported reason for returning to rural areas (23.5%). The Krasnodar Krai respondents concentrated more on financial challenges when residing in the city (30%). 33% of respondents from the Astrakhan Oblast mentioned a change in family status.

Responses to the question, "What is your overall attitude toward the rural lifestyle?" also show regional variations, while most respondents (62.2%) describe living in a rural location as a conscious and positive choice (see Table 2). In the Astrakhan Region, 25% of respondents believe that living in a rural area is required and would like to live in a city, which is twice as high as the same percentage in the Krasnodar Region.

Table 2

Attitude towards rural lifestyle, %

	Answer option	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
1.	I like living here; it's my conscious choice	62.2	54.0	70.3
2.	This is a necessary measure; I'd rather live in the city	19.3	25.3	13.3
3.	I don't know	18.5	20.7	16.3

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

Participants in the survey were asked to rank the roles that they deemed most and least significant. This showed that our respondents who reside in rural areas think of themselves as: 1) Russian citizens; 2) representatives of their community; 3) inhabitants of their region (oblast/krai); 4) representatives of their people (ethnic group); 5) representatives of their profession; 6) representatives of their faith (religion); and 7) representatives of certain political beliefs. The question's regional specificity matches the study's average sample indicator. According to survey respondents, national civic identity is much more important than local identity (Table 3).

Table 3

Self-identification of respondents (where 1 is the most important degree, 7 is the least important degree) (average value)

	Statement	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
1.	I am a Russian citizen	2.53	2.07	2.99
2.	I am a resident of my community	3.12	3.01	3.23
3.	I am a resident of my region	3.31	3.27	3.35
4.	I am a representative of my people (ethnic group)	3.42	3.48	3.36
5.	I am a representative of my profession	4.19	4.73	3.65
6.	I am a representative of my faith (religion)	4.20	4.72	3.69
7.	I am a representative of certain political views	5.10	5.99	4.20

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

This pattern of self-identification is characteristic not so much of the southern region as of rural youth in general. Surveys conducted by SFedU researchers reflect a social contradiction: a high level of microregional identity among rural residents and a low level of macroregional identity among rural residents [Shadrikov 2017]. We previously noted manifestations of the discrediting of rural identity [Morozova 2023], associated with the devaluation and denigration of collective identity. 32.7% of respondents in Astrakhan and 17.7% of respondents in Krasnodar Krai experienced unfriendly or dismissive attitudes toward themselves as representatives of the rural community, including rude behavior, ridicule, direct insults, and even online bullying.

The advantages of the rural lifestyle, as perceived by respondents, are as follows: a relaxed pace of life (81.8% of the total number of responses), proximity to nature (77.7%), the opportunity to farm (40.0%), and the opportunity to raise children in a safe environment (35.7%). A quarter of the total number of responses cites a strong community and supportive neighbors as an attractive feature of rural life. Among the disadvantages of the rural lifestyle, respondents primarily noted limited access to healthcare and education (58% of the total number of responses), while half of respondents cited such disadvantages as a lack of leisure opportunities, poor infrastructure, limited work and career opportunities, and low wages. Infrastructure deficiencies (roads, transportation, and communications) are more concerning to respondents in Astrakhan than in Krasnodar (62.3% versus 46%).

The occupations of the respondents are shown in Table 4. It is interesting that rural youth in the Astrakhan region had a larger percentage of unemployed respondents.

Table 4

Occupation of respondents, %

	Answer option	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
1.	I work for a government-funded organization	28.8	30.0	27.7
2.	I work for hire in a private business	13.5	10.0	17.0
3.	Entrepreneur	5.2	3.0	7.3
4.	Self-employed	18.3	17.3	19.3
5.	I work seasonally, occasionally	5.5	5.0	6.0
6.	Unemployed	24.7	31.7	17.7
7.	Other	4.0	3.0	5.0

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

The sample comprises Millennials and members of Generation Z, 96.5% of whom use the internet daily, indicating a high level of digital engagement. With 74.7% of our audience routinely using it, Telegram is the most popular application, followed by WhatsApp (49.5%) and TikTok (36%).[1] Due to mobile internet restrictions in southern regions during the COVID-19 epidemic, about half of respondents (52.6%) report having trouble using digital technology.

The findings indicate relatively low levels of respondents' civic engagement and participation in local community life (see Table 5).

Table 5

Distribution of responses to the question "Do you participate in the life of your local community (e.g., in meetings, events, initiatives)?", %

	Answer Option	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
1.	Yes, regularly	14.0	11.7	16.3
2.	Sometimes	26.2	24.7	27.7
3.	Rarely	24.2	25.3	23.0
4.	I don't participate	35.7	38.3	33.0

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

Among forms of socio-political activity, respondents noted participation in elections (35.0%) and volunteering (19.9%). A total of 28.8% of respondents would like to be more actively involved in the public life of their community, while the remaining respondents assessed this prospect negatively (29.2%) or were undecided (42.0%).

In this context, respondents view the future of their community as quite positive (see Table 6). 60% of respondents are convinced that their community will develop and become more modern, with the level of optimism significantly higher among Kuban rural youth. Meanwhile, the proportion of those who believe their community will decline is three times higher among Astrakhan rural youth than among Kuban rural youth (19.7% versus 6.0%).

Table 6

Distribution of responses to the question "How do you see the future of your community in 10 years?", %

	Answer option	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
1.	The community will develop and become more modern	60.8	51.0	70.7
2.	The community will remain the same as it is now	18.2	20.0	16.3
3.	The community will decline	12.8	19.7	6.0
4.	I don't know	8.2	9.3	7.0

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

[1] At the time of the survey, the MAX messenger had not yet become widely used.

Generational continuity plays a major role in determining the destiny of rural communities. The "dashing 1990s", which coincided with the village's decline, were the most productive years in the life of the parents of today's youth. "At the start of the new century, the unstable state of rural life, the devaluation of many traditional values of the Russian peasantry, and a lack of faith in the prospects of rural life became social catalysts, alienating rural students and their peers from the land and peasant labour" [Sillaste 2003]. Young villagers' personalities developed within the framework of a sharp social conflict between the traditional rural family values and the values of a society undergoing change, which were essentially at odds with one another in terms of their substance and moral and psychological "code". Young villagers' relatives and close friends made it easier for them to go to the cities, providing both material and moral support for their offspring [Perederiy 2021]. The stigmatization of "rurality" as an antiquated phenomenon unable to embrace innovation is a major contributing factor to the escapist paradigm of migration. Even Millennials and Gen Z are less excited about the prospect of rural living for their children due to these deeply ingrained preconceptions (see Table 7), with Astrakhan dwellers nearly twice as likely to provide negative answers as respondents from the Krasnodar Krai.

Table 7

Distribution of responses to the question "Would you like your children to live in a rural area?", %

	Answer Option	General	Astrakhan Region	Krasnodar Krai
1.	Yes	37.0	32.3	41.7
2.	No	31.7	40.3	23.0
3.	I don't know	31.3	27.3	35.3

Source: compiled by E.V. Morozova and co-authors based on the results of the study.

An analysis of quantitative research data confirms both common generational characteristics of rural youth and significant regional differences. We suggest that regional differentiation indirectly confirms the thesis advanced by Siberian scholar O.V. Nechiporenko regarding the polarization of rural socioeconomic space, manifested in its segmentation into clusters of innovative changes that form "archipelago" structures and degrading territories dominated by traditional economic structures (the "economic compression" model) [Nechiporenko 2015]. Considering this factor is critically important when developing programs for developing the human potential of rural areas, overcoming rural depopulation, and preserving youth as a development resource.

An analysis of the data obtained reveals that differences in the assessments of rural youth in Krasnodar Krai and Astrakhan Oblast are due not only to the individual

preferences of respondents but also to a combination of specific regional factors that shape disparate living conditions. Krasnodar Krai, characterized by a high degree of agricultural modernization, developed infrastructure, and migration attractiveness, creates a more favorable environment for the socioeconomic self-fulfillment of young people, reflected in higher rates of optimism, social engagement, and a positive attitude toward the rural lifestyle. Meanwhile, Astrakhan Oblast demonstrates the impact of structural constraints — low population density, seasonal employment, desertification and water shortages, infrastructure deficiencies, and limited digital inclusion — which exacerbate feelings of instability and forced residency, increase the proportion of negative assessments of the future of rural areas, and reduce levels of social activity. These differences highlight the need to consider the multifactorial nature of regional differentiation.

The "Green Dimension" of Life Strategies of Rural Youth

An examination of empirical data reveals that rural youth have persistent, albeit indirect, awareness of environmental challenges. On the one hand, they are rarely expressed in terms of "green policy" or sustainable development; on the other hand, the justifications for life strategies and territorial attachment consistently include the values of the ecological environment, air quality, natural resources, and the recreational potential of the territory.

Environmental factors serve not only as a value framework but also as a practical factor in mobility. In several focus groups, the environmental factor is directly cited as an argument in favor of living in the countryside. For example, a participant from the Timashevsky District notes: "*I really love my village: the nature, the clean air — all those factories are far away from us. That's why I consciously decided to live there"* (from a focus group in the Timashevsky District of Krasnodar Krai). A similar position is evident in the Tikhoretsky District, where participants, characterizing their reasons for moving to the countryside, emphasize: "*...people here are kinder, more responsive. It's easier to arrange your life and improve it. The air is better. They often mention this. The environment is better for children."* In the Krymsky district, the motive of environmental safety and quality of the environment is also reflected in the relocation narrative: *"It was supposedly very dirty here because of the coal plant, and the air was polluted, so my parents decided to move to a warmer climate because it was unlivable there"*. The environmental dimension is rarely conceptualized by rural youth as an independent political agenda, but in fact, it is an important factor in territorial mobility and rural settlement. Importantly, environmental arguments are often combined with socioeconomic factors (mortgage programs, housing costs,

infrastructure), but are not limited to them. Environmental quality forms part of young people's assessment of prospective places of residence, alongside considerations related to health, child-rearing, and psychological well-being.

The quantitative results of the study demonstrate a high level of local attachment and optimism among rural youth. This is particularly important in the context of the "green agenda": preserving the area's natural capital is becoming part of local identity. In interviews, environmental culture is expressed in the idea of a "calm, measured life", safety for children, and the absence of urban risks: *"A child can safely ride a scooter in the park..."* (from a focus group in the Timashevsky District of Krasnodar Krai). Here, the green agenda is primarily of an everyday nature: it is expressed in the value of clean air, the natural environment, access to recreational resources, and a favorable climate. It is important to note that environmental culture is not protest-based or politicized. It is not articulated as a demand for environmental reform but rather expressed in support of development models that do not destroy the environment. This creates a specific type of "green" subjectivity — that is not activist, but integrative, connected to everyday practices and life strategies.

Quantitative data demonstrates a consistently positive vision of the future of rural communities. Importantly, this optimism is not accompanied by expectations of urban transformation toward industrialization or dense development. In focus groups, modernization is not contrasted with the natural landscape but rather conceptualized as its preservation. Respondents emphasize the value of "clean air" and "a better environment for children". Rural youth perceive modernization not as a rejection of environmental benefits, but as their institutionalization. This fundamentally distinguishes the rural perspective from the urban development scenario, where modernization is often associated with densification and increased environmental burden.

Our findings are consistent with the results of a 2025 VTsIOM survey[2] on young people's perceptions of environmental issues. Young people are more interested in the environmental situation in the country, and older youth aged 30 to 35 are most often interested in the environmental situation in their region and in their specific locality (51% and 52%, respectively). Young people's interest in environmental issues is often driven by problems with waste removal, storage, and disposal (65%), pollution of forests, water bodies, and coastal areas (64%), and concern for their own health (60%). For rural youth, the problem of pollution of forests, water bodies, and coastal areas is a top priority (70% of respondents). Young people are also weakly involved in active forms of social change: only 12% of respondents participate in greening

[2] Should Ecology Be Economical? *All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM).* Retrieved February 18, 2026 from https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/ehkologija-dolzhna-byt-ehkonomnoi

events and environmental cleanups. However, young people recognize that the environmental situation in their locality depends on them (76%).

It is significant that youth environmental activism often continues historical traditions that have developed in specific regions. In the Krasnodar Krai, Cossacks are reviving many nature management traditions. Since 2018, representatives of Cossack organizations have been able to acquire the status of public environmental inspectors. A tripartite agreement was concluded between the Kuban Cossack Host, the Krasnodar Krai administration, and the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources, under which Cossacks receive financial support for the joint organization of environmental protection measures. In areas of the Krai where illegal logging of particularly valuable timber species occurs most frequently, Cossacks have been deployed to assist foresters [Ternovaya 2021].

Environmental values are manifested in a caring attitude toward the natural environment. The Don Cossacks considered spitting into the river the greatest sin. To catch poachers (then called "predators"), military wardens were assigned, commanded by an armed team to oversee the implementation of fishing laws; the position of "fishery wardens" was established. Fishing grounds were protected and cared for as if they were their own home [Petrushenko, Merzlyakov, Ageeva 2017]. Young people from the Astrakhan region participate in preserving the fish resources of the Lower Volga region. The "Blue Patrol" campaign is underway in the Astrakhan Nature Reserve: for decades, schoolchildren have been rescuing young fish from drying up reservoirs.[3]

Rural Youth in the Focus of Political and Managerial Practices

Factors that positively influence the role of young people in rural development policy require special consideration and classification. Academic discourse examines factors such as the nature of postmodern society, which "does not offer young people ready-made life scenarios, but demands significant adaptive capacities, a willingness to change, and sometimes even a radical shift in their life path" [Yadova 2022]; and a shift in youth value systems with an emphasis on environmental well-being [Zubok, Chuprov 2020]. Important factors include the gradual development of a multi-structured rural economy, the diversification of the agrarian model, and the digitalization of all spheres of rural life. Scholars have also identified internal, personal factors, such as social inclusion, the level of personal aspirations and adaptability, and strategies for coping with difficult life situations.

[3] The Astrakhan Nature Reserve is Holding an Environmental Campaign, "Blue Patrol". *Lotos GTRK*. Retrieved February 21, 2026, from https://lotosgtrk.ru/news/v-astrakhanskom-zapovednike-provodyat-ekologicheskuyu-aktsiyu-goluboy-patrul/

Contemporary research distinguishes between two approaches to youth as a target group of public policy: the resource-oriented and problem-oriented approaches. These approaches determine not only the set of government actions in relation to target youth groups (including rural youth), but also the meanings constructed in relation to youth and their role in state development scenarios [Miroshnichenko, Shpiro, Fedorenko 2022]. Political and managerial practices regarding rural youth in contemporary Russia are hybrid in nature, with the balance gradually shifting in favor of a resource-oriented approach.

The new version of the Federal Law "On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation"[4] emphasizes the need to include young people in the socioeconomic development of rural areas, and enhancing the attractiveness of the rural lifestyle among young people is one of the strategic directions of youth policy. The Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas of the Russian Federation through 2030[5] places significant emphasis on the professional and creative self-fulfillment of young rural residents. One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support youth initiatives to preserve rural historical and cultural heritage and to pass on experience and traditions. The Strategy for the Implementation of Youth Policy in the Russian Federation through 2030[6] emphasizes attracting young professionals to professional activities in rural areas and opportunities for their self-fulfillment in various fields.

New social mobility opportunities are gradually being created for rural youth. As part of the "Russia — Land of Opportunity" platform, and following the instructions of the President of the Russian Federation on July 16, 2025, the "Leaders of the Agro-Industrial Complex" management competition is being held.[7] The aim of the competition is to identify and support promising young leaders in the agro-industrial complex and engage them in business development in rural areas.

The All-Russian competition for agro-youth, "I am in Agro",[8] includes programs for several categories of participants, from agro-entrepreneurs to agro-bloggers.

Founded in 2008 with the intention of fostering opportunities for youth self-fulfilment in rural areas, the Russian Union of Rural Youth (RURYY) is an important

[4] Federal Law of December 30, 2020 No. 489-FZ "On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation". *Consultant Plus*. Retrieved February 21, 2026 from https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_430906/

[5] Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of February 2, 2015 No. 151-r "On Approval of the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030". *Consultant Plus*. Retrieved February 21, 2026, from https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_174933/2844094b7ba6e57e91fd5bb036ee91d9f6727238/

[6] Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of August 17, 2024 No. 2233-r "On Approval of the Strategy for the Implementation of Youth Policy in the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030". *Consultant Plus*. Retrieved February 21, 2026, from https://mvd.consultant.ru/documents/1058573

[7] Leaders of the Agro-Industrial Complex. *"Russia — Land of Opportunity" Platform*. Retrieved February 21, 2026, from https://rsv.ru/competitions/project/1/f6f8982f-9419-4119-a951-e0644bee46b4/

[8] "I am in Agro" Competition. *Konkurs Svoe Agro*. Retrieved February 21, 2026, from https://konkurs.svoevagro.ru/

platform for the all-encompassing development of rural youth, supporting their initiatives, and keeping young people in rural areas and developing rural areas. The "ARTvSelo" project, which supports creative industries in rural areas, the "Creativity in Rural Areas" competition for young artisans and designers, and the "School Agro-Startup" project and the "Young Rural Entrepreneurs" project, which encourages farming among young people, are just a few of the many activities that RURYY engages in.

Projects for rural areas' sustainable development are carried out by the RURRY. These include the information portal "Cultural and Historical Heritage of the Village"; the interregional competition "BayStadi", which seeks to increase the knowledge of plant protection among undergraduate and graduate students in agronomy departments at agricultural universities; "Civic Monitoring in Rural Areas", which seeks to identify opinion leaders in municipalities, ascertain the dynamics of agricultural development and the standard of living in rural areas, and support civic initiatives for rural development; and the game "Beginning Farmer", which is intended to help students with agricultural business planning.

In 2023, the All-Russian "Personnel for the Village" program was launched, organized by Rosmolodezh and the RURYY. The program's key project is the All-Russian competition for young managers, "Village Leaders",[9] aimed at identifying and attracting talented young leaders to management structures in all areas of rural life.

A more consistent government stance is needed, at both the federal and regional levels, regarding educational opportunities for rural youth. This applies both to general education, whose structures in most rural areas suffer from a personnel shortage, and to vocational education, which continues to reproduce imbalances in the labor market. According to personnel monitoring data from the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, only 3% of agricultural university graduates return to rural areas [Mukhanova 2015]. Experts estimate the labor shortage in the agricultural sector at approximately 240,000 people, roughly 10% of the economy's total needs. In 2023 alone, the agro-industrial complex lost 200,000 workers, and the average age of specialists is approaching 45.[10]

Starting in 2025, the Ministry of Education and Science has added an agricultural training program to Russian schools. 600 classes in 63 regions have been selected. The Ministry of Agriculture will compensate businesses for part of the costs of creating and equipping these agricultural training classes.

Modern agriculture is becoming a high-tech and knowledge-intensive industry. Vocational education systems must emphasize training specialists proficient in digital technologies and understanding the principles of robotics and biotechnology. Digital

[9] The Village Leaders Project. *Molodezh Sela RF.* Retrieved from February 21, 2026: https://молодежьсела.рф/kadry-selo/#tb4

[10] Ruzinova, I. (2025) And they don't even consider the university: the agrarian sector needs young professionals. *Business Journal.* South, 3 (7), 55.

agronomists, agricultural information specialists, and land management IT engineers — these professions of the future could attract many talented young people from rural and urban areas to the industry. Advanced Russian universities are already working in this direction: Kuban Agrarian University has launched a program in Digital Engineering, Sevastopol State University has launched a program in Digital Technologies in Agriculture, and Tomsk State University has launched its first master's program in digital agronomy.

Rural "Frontiersmen": the Power of Example

The theme of the frontier arises in articles devoted to the development of the modern Kuban village. "Rural settlements in Krasnodar Krai today are frontier territories, where, under the influence of new economic, military-political, axiological, technological, and demographic changes, traditional ways of life intersect with imported innovations" [Borisko et al. 2025]. As is well known, one of the main characteristics of frontier zones is an abundance of resources, but in this case, it is an abundance of opportunities to start a new business. In Russia (as in many countries), there is a gap between the rural population and the number of people employed in the production and processing of agricultural products. This gap can only be filled through new types of employment — platform employment, e-commerce of peasant farm produce, agritourism, ethnic tourism, rural coworking spaces, etc. "In many rural settlements that fully demonstrate 'success stories', in addition to the cultivation and processing of agricultural products, a service market is being created and developed, focused on the symbolic resources of rural settlements. This creates the foundation for rural prosperity in the new economic conditions" [Morozova, Miroshnichenko, Semenenko 2020]. Initiative is hampered by stereotypes that perceive new types of employment as "indulgence", but it is possible to overcome these stereotypes, including through the power of example.

During a focus group session, the Kushinki farm in the Apsheronsky District discussed camping and glamping. An innovative young businessman bought two hayfields and turned them into an ecotourism destination featuring ethnic festivals, horseback riding, and an art farm with spherical cottages. Nearly all of the 78 people who live on the farm and in the nearby settlements already work in this industry, producing cottage cheese, baking bread, and entertaining visitors with folk art.

Young entrepreneurs in the village of Fastovetskaya in the Tikhoretsky district have created a rather exotic business: a snail farm. The farm, named "Polzitto", is located on the grounds of an abandoned dairy farm in the village of Fastovetskaya. A snail processing facility has been opened in Tikhoretsk.[11] All products are produced without

[11] A New Agricultural Production Facility has Opened in Tikhoretsky District. *NIA Kuban*: Retrieved February 21, 2026 from https://www.23rus.org/news/economy/52299.html

chemicals, with an emphasis on quality and environmental stewardship. The facility can produce up to 40 tons of products annually. During the summer, in agreement with the local youth affairs department, the farmers hire 60–70 teenagers from disadvantaged families to provide them with both work experience and financial support.

Innovations are also emerging in the information sphere, particularly in its most dynamic segment — social media. Since 2020, there has been a rapid rise in the popularity of rural bloggers. The accounts of 36 young rural bloggers, which the authors monitored in 2024–2025, had a combined audience of over 30 million subscribers as of October 1, 2025. Bloggers have become a new symbolic model entering the marketplace of meanings [Melnikova 2020]. As part of the modern sociocultural environment, rural bloggers not only preserve existing cultural practices but also create new, unique forms of interaction. They act not simply as retransmitters of traditional values, but as creators of a new value hybrid in which traditional agrarian attitudes are synthesized with modern values of self-realization, environmental friendliness, and digital openness. In a certain sense, the practices of rural bloggers provide empirical confirmation of the idea that the dichotomy between tradition and innovation can be overcome, and that their convergence is possible, potentially becoming a key factor in successful development policy. This makes bloggers crucial actors in the process of redefining the cultural and value landscape of rural areas in contemporary Russia.

P.E. Sushko of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences coined the term "frontiersmen" for a progressive type of rural youth. "They are characterized by an active lifestyle, openness to change, and a strong motivation for success. Representatives of this group are not afraid of any obstacles they encounter; they easily find optimal solutions to their problems. Their value system includes elements that are not typical of the traditional rural way of life. Frontiersmen structure their behavior within the logic of urban life, striving to maximize the full range of available opportunities" [Sushko 2015]. This explanation is consistent with the activity-activist approach, which assumes that individuals with strong "agentive" resources are capable of profoundly transforming social life [Yadov 2001].

Clearly, the initiators and organizers of all the new forms of rural life described above are prime examples of this type. Unlike the "typical" and "followed" [Sushko 2015], they do not require external organization, control, or a predetermined action plan; they have their own thinking strategy. This group represents a particularly valuable resource for rural development because of its considerable capacity for local initiative and innovation. Through their example and success stories, they can positively influence the life strategies of rural youth and thus build human capital in the Russian countryside.

Conclusion

Attracting young people to move to rural areas and live there permanently requires comprehensive, long-term efforts that include both communication initiatives and positive changes in the quality of life in rural areas. This work can be an important part of changing the "agricultural-industrial paradigm", which once identified villages, peasants, and rural areas with agricultural production. In the context of diversifying socioeconomic practices, rural development planning should focus on creating alternative forms of employment unrelated to agriculture [Nechiporenko 2015]. Changing the development paradigm requires a shift in traditional forms of motivating rural youth, career guidance, and the development of new educational programs focused both on the introduction of modern technologies in the agro-industrial complex and the development of creative industries in rural areas.

Despite persistent structural constraints, young rural residents demonstrate a high level of optimism, a strong sense of local identity, and a willingness to connect their future with their small homeland. This suggests the need to reconsider traditional research approaches that have primarily treated youth as targets of external socioeconomic influences.

Regional effects demonstrate the importance of contextual analysis and confirm the thesis about the heterogeneity of the Russian rural space. Strategies for developing the agency of rural youth in Russia can only be successful by considering regional factors, the specific value orientations and living conditions of young people in various regions of the Russian Federation.

The values of the natural environment and the recreational potential of the territory are consistently present in the argumentation of life strategies and territorial attachment of rural youth, and the "green dimension" functions as an integrative value basis for territorial identity.

The specific nature of rural youth's social participation reveals a gap between value-based optimism and practical engagement in local community life. In this context, new forms of self-organization, linked to digital communications and the activities of rural bloggers, are particularly important, creating alternative channels for influencing local agendas and cultural norms.

An analysis of political and management practices shows that state youth policy is gradually shifting from a problem-oriented model to a resource-based approach that recognizes youth as a key actor in rural development. The emergence of new social mobility opportunities creates conditions for rural youth to express their agency.

Our empirical study revealed a contradiction between the generally positive image of the future of the village and the lack of socio-political engagement in rural

development. A significant number of young people demonstrate signs of social dependency and unwillingness to assume social responsibility.

Of particular interest are the identified examples of "frontiersmen" — progressive rural youth who are initiating new employment models, cultural practices, and economic projects. Their work demonstrates the potential for synthesizing tradition and innovation, serves as a source of local development, and is changing the symbolic image of the modern Russian village. These frontier youth strategies confirm that rural areas are spaces not only of scarcity but also of opportunity.

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