



# Hard Living in America's Heartland: Rural Poverty in the 21st Century Midwest

*Paula vW. Dáil*

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Despite living hard, endlessly challenging lives, the rural poor remain tirelessly optimistic, believing things will get better next year. As one struggling farmer explained, "Sometimes I feel like a jackass in a hailstorm—I just have to stand here and take it...but what the hell—it'll stop hailing sooner or later." The struggle to survive on the richest farmland in America has produced some of the nation's poorest people. However, rural poverty is not the same as urban poverty: the usual definitions and criteria do not always apply, the known predictors do not necessarily hold up, and again and again the rural poor save themselves because they know no one else will. This book refutes the common image of the poor as lazy slackers averse to work. In reality, fiercely independent, politically astute, hard-working men and women who possess a wide array of useful skills populate the rural heartland—and they struggle to stay afloat in small-town economies that rise and fall on the whims of remote farm policy decisions, a volatile world marketplace and Mother Nature, who is a fickle, wildly unpredictable business partner.



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