

Loleta Community Report



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Introduction

In the spring of 2002, a group of researchers from Humboldt State University conducted a study on rural community life in Northern Humboldt County California. The research was directed by Dr. Sheila Steinberg, Assistant Professor of Sociology, and included both graduate and undergraduate students from Humboldt State University. The goal of the study was to examine rural communities in an effort to identify local community strengths. The information contained in this report can aid local community and economic development efforts. Our project included secondary data, key informant interviews, and a questionnaire that was distributed to residents living in the Loleta community. This report focuses on the community of Loleta, California.

Loleta, population 750 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000), is located fifteen miles south of Eureka on the banks of the Eel River and near the Van Duzen River. It is a small community surrounded by pasturelands and is within sight of the Pacific Ocean. The single row of storefronts sitting parallel to the railroad tracks on the Main Street and a winding road all add to the small town atmosphere. Historically, dairy and agriculture have been the main industries supporting the community of Loleta (Parry 1963). Today, many local families continue to work in the dairy industry. Additionally, many residents of Loleta presently work in retail, service, and education outside of the community due to lack of local employment opportunities. Recently, the tourist industry has also become important to Loleta through the presence of the Loleta Cheese Factory.

The Loleta Cheese Factory was established in the early 1980s when the factory created its first batch of cheese on November 11, 1982 and has been making cheese ever since that time (Laffranchi 2002). This attraction brings tourists into the unincorporated district known as Loleta, located south of Eureka.

Population Characteristics

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic information for both Humboldt County and the community of Loleta. Although Loleta is a small community its population reflects similar patterns found in Humboldt County.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile 2000: Humboldt County and Loleta

	Humboldt County	Loleta
Population	126,518	750
Male	62,532	376
Female	63,986	374
% White	84.7	85.5
% Black	0.9	0.1
% American Indian and Alaska Native	5.7	4.0
% Asian	1.7	0.1
% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.2	0.4
% Some Other Race	2.4	6.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000

As Table 1 illustrates, the population of Loleta is 750 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Overall, the population demographics of Loleta are representative of Humboldt County. Loleta is 85.5 percent White, only slightly higher than the county level with 84.7 percent White. The U.S. Census counts for Loleta indicate a higher number of individuals that identify as “some other race” (6.7%) compared to Humboldt County (2.4%). Census records also show a Native American population of 4 percent in Loleta, while census records show 5.7 percent for Humboldt County. The percent of Native Americans in Loleta almost matches that of the county, which may be partially due to the Table Bluff Rancheria and Bear River Valley Rancheria that are located in the Loleta area.

Loleta Community History

Originally known as Swauger's Station, its current name "Loleta" was adopted in 1897 (*Times-Standard* 1985). Loleta is an unincorporated district in Humboldt County, set to the south of Eureka, north of Fortuna, and between two bodies of water. The Eel River is one mile south of the community and the Pacific Ocean is five miles west. The first known non-native settlers are the Shaw brothers, S.L. Shaw and S.W. Shaw along with W. Allen. The three men came to Loleta in 1851, but left one year later after their crops were not successful, moving on to Ferndale (Parry 1963). Thus, Loleta and Ferndale share some of their first town settlers of European descent. Later, the Danes became well known for their role in Loleta's dairy production. Other settlers arrived and the community grew from a population of 22 in 1853 to 807 in 1880 (Parry 1963). The Wiyot Tribe already resided in the area around the Humboldt Bay and Eel River in substantial numbers until the 1860 massacre. Interestingly, Loleta's name is derived from three Indian words "Lo-le-ta" which translates as a "pleasant place at the end of tide the water" (Loleta Chamber of Commerce).

The dairy industry has always played an important role in the history of Loleta. The Creamery Association in Loleta was established in 1893 as the Diamond Springs Creamery, a co-operative of the Golden State Creamery (Schwarzkopf 1948). Today, known as a division of the Humboldt Creamery, Loleta's creamery has known several owners, company names, and produced various dairy products. The creamery has known as many as seven names before the Humboldt Creamery Association bought it in the late 1980s. Milk, cheese, condensed milk, butter, casein, and powder ice cream mix are many of the products the creamery has produced over its many years of operation (Parry 1963). Probably the most well known product is a powdered milk marketed under the brand name of "Milkman." Milkman is a high quality powdered milk which was developed at the Loleta plant by Golden State in the 1950s and 1960s and is still produced today (Laffranchi 2002).

Agriculture also has a long and significant history in Loleta. In 1854 wheat, oats, and potatoes were grown in lower regions of Table Bluff (now an American Indian reservation where Wiyot reside). Potatoes remained a major crop until the 1870s when the potato prices fell causing Loleta's potato farming to dwindle (Parry 1963).

Fishing was another source of economy in the 1800s. Loleta is situated near the Eel River and South Spit. Salmon were commercially fished out of the Eel River in 1853. Later, salmon were fished from the Humboldt Bay, processed by Chinese immigrant employees of the Cutting Packing Company of San Francisco's cannery and shipped to San Francisco. Chinese immigrants were utilized because they would work for low wages. Eventually, the Chinese were forced to leave after an incident in 1885 in Eureka when a city council member was shot by a stray bullet in the Chinatown section of the city. Chinese immigrants were blamed for the shooting and forced to leave Eureka. The cannery completely closed in 1889 after Chinese immigrants were forced to leave four years earlier and prohibited from returning in 1887 (Parry 1963).

The South Spit, also referred to as the South Jetty, has created a unique situation for Loleta residents in its recent history. In the late 1970s the South Spit was overcome with a homeless community that lived without water and electricity until 1997 when the Humboldt County Health Officer closed the site, requiring Spit residents to move elsewhere (Driscoll 2001). This created difficulties transporting the children of this community from the South Spit to and from Loleta Elementary School. Additionally, the South Spit was noted as a health hazard due to the poor living conditions of the residents.

Research Methods

Two main methods of research were utilized in the Loleta community study. This section provides a description of the different research methods employed in the project.

General Household Survey

A general household survey was sent to residents who live within Loleta. The sample for the household survey was selected from a residential parcel ownership list that originated from the Humboldt County Assessors office. Because Loleta is an unincorporated district, boundaries were determined by the County Assessor's Office. The household survey was sent to individuals that were listed on the residential parcel ownership list with a mailing address and parcel located in Loleta.

The household survey that was mailed to local residents consisted of 32 questions. The survey sought to measure respondents' attitudes towards their community. The survey required approximately 15-25 minutes to complete. Respondents were provided

with a postage paid return envelope to mail back their responses. In total, 91 surveys were completed. (See Tables 3-16 for further discussion).

Key-Informant Interviews

Prior to developing a household survey, key-informant interviews were conducted with various community residents in order to identify major issues in Loleta. Key-informants were asked about local social and economic issues, attitudes towards the community, and community strengths. In total, 9 key-informant interviews were conducted in Loleta (see Table 2 for occupational breakdown of key-informants). Using a snowball sampling technique, people were interviewed from local government, businesses, and educational sectors of the community. At the end of each interview, people were asked to suggest other members of the community who are knowledgeable about local community issues. These individuals were then contacted, thus employing a snowball sampling technique. Key-informant interviews were conducted prior to developing a household survey in order to formulate relevant questions that fit the community. The various occupations of Loleta key-informants are summarized below in Table 2.

Data and Discussion

A variety of data sources were collected for this project. This section presents and discusses the various data collected. Key-informant interviews are discussed first followed by a discussion of survey data. Interviewees were asked to comment on issues related to local community development, economics, and community strengths.

Table 2. Loleta Key-Informant Occupations

Community Volunteers	2
Education	1
Chamber of Commerce	1
Business Persons	3
Clerical	2
Total	9

The interviews were conducted in order to gain insight on current community issues concerning economy and development as well as to gain knowledge of the community's strengths and successes. In order to develop a relevant survey, key-informants were asked general questions about the community such as "how would you describe the local economy?" and "have there been any issues related to local community development?" Interviewing key-informants allowed researchers to identify general economic and community development issues. This section summarizes the findings from these interviews.

Community Development

Three informants (33.3%) mentioned that the clean up of the park in town, along the railroad tracks, was a community development issue that the Chamber of Commerce successfully facilitated. The South Jetty clean up was also noted as a successful development issue by one informant (11.1%) while other informants discussed the South Jetty in relation to economics or environment. The South Jetty clean up project took at least a year to clean up and was noted as especially important for Loleta's respectable image. The homeless population brought unwanted issues related to health and poverty that were not appreciated by the community. Loleta Cheese factory, churches, and Indian gaming were among other community development issues discussed.

Economics

The local housing development across from the school is still underway in Loleta and was mentioned by four informants (44.4%) under the topic of economics. The new housing development discussed was understood to include as many as 100 new homes in the course of the next few years. CDF is considering the placement of a new fire station in Loleta's boundaries according to three informants (33.3%). The South Spit clean up was mentioned twice (22.2%) as an economic topic as well. The homeless population inhabiting the South Spit used Loleta to obtain any necessities. Loleta Cheese Factory was discussed in relation to the economy and a prospective casino was also mentioned by one respondent (11.1%).

Community Success/Strengths

One major success for the community is the local school. It was mentioned in five of nine key-informant interviews (55.6%) as a success of the community. Loleta

Union Elementary School was noted as an integral part of the community that plays an active role in the children's lives whether school related or not. If children get into trouble during non-school hours, the school is likely to be involved in the attempt to resolve the issue. The school and its community involvement were viewed as a strength of the community. Three informants (33.3%) noted that the Volunteer Fire Department is a success. Besides being dependable in case of an emergency, the Fire Department has excellent equipment. Swauger Days, the community's annual 4th of July celebration, celebrates the founding of the community. This celebration was cited as a community success among two informants (22.2%).

Loleta Sample Description

In the spring of 2002 a total of 91 Loleta residents completed the household survey. Table 3 summarizes the sociodemographic data about Loleta respondents.

Table 3. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the 2002 Loleta Survey Sample

Characteristic	Sample
Number of Respondents (N)*	91
Mean Age	52 yrs
% White	93.2
% Native American	4.5
% Other	2.3
Mean Length of Residence in Years	19.48
% Female	65.9
% Male	34.1
% High School Graduates	89.8
% College Graduates	35.9
% Unemployed	5.5
% Retired	23.1
Mean Income	\$48,316.63

The mean age of the sample is 52 years (see Table 3). The average length of residence among the Loleta survey sample is 19.5 years. A larger number of females

* The letter N refers to the total number of respondents. In the following tables, N refers to the total number of respondents that answered that particular question.

completed our survey than males at 65.9 and 34.1 percent respectively. The majority of the surveyed residents have completed high school, with 89.9 percent reporting a high school education. Approximately, one-third (35.9%) of the sample are college graduates. Only 5.5 percent of the sample reported being unemployed, and as many as 23.1 percent reported that they are retired. The majority (93.2%) reported White as their ethnicity. This is somewhat higher than what the Census reported for Loleta in 2000 as 85.5 percent White.

Community Interest

Community interest was measured by asking respondents how interested they were in knowing what goes on in their community. As Table 4 shows, most respondents were “somewhat interested.”

Table 4. Level of Community Interest in Percentages N=91

Very Interested	42.9
Somewhat Interested	48.4
Neither	6.6
Somewhat Disinterested	0.0
Very Disinterested	2.2
Total	100.0

Almost one-half of Loleta respondents (48.4%) reported being “somewhat interested in what goes on in the community (see Table 4). Another 42.9 percent reported being “very interested.” This left only a small percentage (2.2%) that reported being “very disinterested” in knowing what goes on in their community.

Social Ties

Respondents were asked to identify how many adults they know in their community. Table 5 displays the results of this question.

Table 5. Number of Adults Loleta Respondents Know in the Community N=91

	Percent
None	4.4
Less than half	64.8
About Half	22.0
Most	8.8
All of Them	0.0
Total	100.0

Very few respondents, 4.4 percent, reported that they know no adults in their community (see Table 5). Most respondents (64.8%) reported knowing less than half of the adults in their community. This left 22 percent of respondents who reported knowing about half and 8.8 percent who reported knowing most adults in their community.

Community Attitudes and Attachment

Feelings and attitudes regarding the community were measured with a series of eight statements that offered five responses: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Table 6 summarizes how the responses regarding community attitudes were answered.

Table 6. Community Attitudes in Percentages

Issue	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I belong to this community	85	34.1	41.2	18.8	3.5	2.4	100.0
When something needs to be done in comm. the whole neighborhood supports it.	85	8.2	45.9	34.1	8.2	3.5	100.0
I am satisfied with my community.	85	11.8	57.6	17.6	11.8	1.2	100.0
My community is changing for the better.	85	3.5	25.9	44.7	22.4	3.5	100.0
Newcomers are welcome in my community.	83	7.2	48.2	32.5	8.4	3.6	100.0
I am concerned about the future of my community.	81	7.2	48.2	32.5	8.4	3.6	100.0
My community provides good work opportunities for young people.	84	1.2	0.0	10.7	39.3	48.8	100.0
My community provides good economic opportunities for me.	83	2.4	9.6	24.1	24.1	39.8	100.0

Over one-half of the respondents (57.6%) agree with the statement “I am satisfied with my community” and 11.8 percent strongly agree (see Table 6). Similarly, 41.2 percent agree that they belong to the community while 34.1 percent strongly agree that they belong to the community. Almost one-half of the respondents (48.2%) agree that

they are concerned about the future of their community. Overall, Loleta respondents displayed high levels of attachment to their community.

Conversely, very few Loleta respondents felt that their community provided good work opportunities for young people or good economic opportunities for themselves. Almost one-half (48.8% and 39.8% respectively) strongly disagreed with the previous statements. Such responses illustrate that respondents feel work and economic opportunities in their community are limited.

Community Involvement

Loleta respondents displayed a significant level of community involvement. Tables 7 and 8 summarize how many respondents participate in groups and organization as well as how much time is being devoted to group/organization participation.

Table 7. Participation in Groups/Organizations N=88

	Percent
Belong to a group or organization	45.5
Do not belonging to a group or organization	54.5
Total	100.0

Table 8. Time Spent in Groups/Organizations N=38

# of Hours Participating	Percent
More than 10 hours per month	29.5
5-10 hours per month	27.3
1-4 hours per month	36.4
Less than 1 hour per month	6.8
Total	100.0

Almost half of the respondents (45.5%) reported belonging to a group or organization (see Table 7). Of those who reported group participation, only 6.8 percent spend one hour or less each month (see Table 8). About one-third (36.4%) of respondents who participate in groups or organizations reported high levels of participation, spending between one and four hours per month, 27.3 percent spending five to ten hours per month, and 29.5 percent spending more than ten hours per month.

Community Issues

Respondents were asked to choose the important issues for their community. As many as seven issues could be identified. Table 9 displays how many respondents felt each issue was important to the community.

Table 9. Community Issues N=91

Issue	Percent
Health Care	37.1
Water Quality/Availability	62.9
Jobs for Local Residents	48.3
Youth	52.8
Crime	34.8
Poverty	32.6

* Percent totals do not equal 100 percent. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose more than one issue.

The most prevalent issue among survey respondents was water quality/availability, reported by 62.9 percent (see Table 9). Youth issues were reported by about one-half (52.8%) and jobs for local residents were reported by another one-half (48.3%) of the respondents.

Community Strengths

Two questions asked directly about community strengths. The first question simply asked whether respondents felt their community possessed strengths while the following question asked respondents to describe what type of strengths exist in the community. Table 10 summarizes the results of these two questions.

Table 10. Loleta Community Strengths N=88

	Percent
Loleta has strengths	86.4
Loleta does not have strengths	13.6
Total	100.0
Type of Strength	Percent
Size of Community	40.0
Community Cohesion	31.4
Community Support	17.1
Beauty	17.1
Rurality	17.1

* Percent totals do not equal 100 percent. Respondents were given the opportunity to list more than one strength.

In response to a question that asked, “do you feel that your community has strengths,” the majority of respondents (86.4%) reported that Loleta does have strengths (see Table 10). The most common strength listed was the community size, listed by 40 percent of the respondents. Respondents explained that the small community size was a benefit and strength of the community. Cohesion was reported among one-third of the sample (31.4%). Examples of responses that were categorized as community cohesion include a sense of closeness, having a tight-knit community, friendly neighbors, and community pride among other similar responses.

Neighborhood and Heart of Community

Respondents were provided a map of their community and asked to mark what they considered the heart of the community and their neighborhood on the map. Three regions were then later defined as commercial, residential, and rural. The commercial region consists of clusters of commercial developments such as, businesses, public administration buildings, restaurants, shops, and other non-residential developments. The commercial region for Loleta envelops the mainstreet and extends to the Loleta Cheese Factory and creamery building. The residential region consists of clusters of housing developments and other non-commercial developments such as schools and community centers. Loleta’s residential areas span as far up as the Loleta Grammar School and as far down as the 76 gas station on the edge of town. Finally, rural regions consist of sparsely

developed areas with open space, often towards the outskirts of the community. Rural regions were designated as any location outside of the residential region. Table 11 shows how respondents marked their neighborhood and the heart of the community.

Table 11. Neighborhood and Heart of the Community In Percentages

	N	Commercial Region	Residential Region	Rural Region	Total
Neighborhood	69	7.2	49.3	43.5	100.0
Heart of the community	78	75.6	14.1	10.3	100.0

The majority of respondents (49.3%) reported living in the residential area of Loleta (see Table 11). This was followed by 43.5 percent who reported living in the rural region. The smallest percentage (7.2%) reported living in the commercial region. Three-fourths (75.6%) of the respondents marked the heart of the community in the commercial region of the community. Fewer respondents (14.1%) marked the heart of the community as existing in the residential region; many of such marks were located by the school and Volunteer Fire Department. Finally, one-tenth (10.3%) of respondents marked the heart of the community in a rural region.

Immigrants

Questions regarding immigrants in the community were limited to two. The first asked whether immigrants play a role in the community and the second asked respondents to describe what kind of role immigrants' play. Table 12 displays how these questions were answered.

Table 12. Immigrants in Loleta

N=84	Percent
Immigrants do not play a role in community	15.5
Immigrants play a role in the community	84.5
Total	100.0

N=67	Percent
Immigrants do not play a role in agriculture	28.4
Immigrants play an important role in agriculture	71.6
Total	100.0

A high number of Loleta respondents (84.5%) recognized that immigrants play a role in their community (see Table 12). The large majority (71.6%) also recognized that immigrants play a role in local agricultural production. Immigrants were noted as working on farms, working in dairy production, and working in other agricultural production.

Computer Use

Table 13 summarizes how many respondents reported using a computer and for what purposes respondents are using their computers.

Table 13. Computer and Internet Use

N=91	Percent
Use a computer	72.5
Do not using a computer	27.5
Total	100.0

Internet Use N=67	Percent
Travel Information	67.2
Data Collection	74.6
Chat with Friends and Family	73.1
News	53.7
Job search	19.4
Meet new people	10.4

* Percent totals do not equal 100 percent. Respondent were given the opportunity to choose more than one Internet use.

Seventy two percent of the respondents reported using a computer (see Table 13). Internet uses were listed and respondents could pick any that applied to their experience. The most common Internet use reported was data collection among three-fourths (74.6%). Chatting with family and friends was reported almost as frequently at 73.1 percent. As many as 67.2 percent reported using the Internet for travel information. Overall, Internet and computer use was prevalent among respondents.

Work Experience

Respondents reported several different types of job experiences. Several respondents reported multiple areas of work experience, displaying more than one employment situation. Table 14 summarizes the various jobs of Loleta respondents.

Table 14. Job Experiences N=89

Job	Number	Percent
Dairy	8	9.0
Timber	6	6.7
Government	4	4.5
Education	11	12.4
Clerical	7	7.9
Retail	12	13.5
Construction	8	9.0
Service	12	13.5
Professional	14	15.7
Other	26	29.2

*Percent totals and number totals do not equal 100 percent.
Respondents were provided the opportunity to pick more than one job.

While Loleta is known for its participation in agriculture and dairying, the areas of work respondents reported show that professional (15.7%), service (13.5%) and retail (13.5%) were the most common (see Table 14). The “other” category was the most

frequent response, noted by 29.2 percent. Dairy and timber were noted among the same number of respondents (9.0%).

Skills

The majority of respondents (76.7%) reported that they possess skills that would benefit the community (see Table 15). The most common skill respondents reported was gardening at 57.6 percent. Working with children was also commonly cited with 47 percent reporting this as a skill. Home maintenance was reported by 39.4 percent and woodworking by 13.6 percent. The following table displays skills that respondents reported.

Table 15. Skills N=86

	Percent
Have a skill that would benefit the community	76.7
Do not have a skill that would benefit the community	23.3
Total	100.0

Type of Skill	Percent
Working with Children	47.0
Gardening	57.6
Wood Working	13.6
Home Maintenance	39.4

* Percent totals do not equal 100 percent. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose more than one skill.

Hobbies and Interests

Respondents listed several hobbies and interests. The question was designed so that as many answers could be listed as the respondent desired. Table 16 summarizes the results.

Table 16. Hobbies and Interests N=91

Hobby/interest	Percent
Sports Recreation	40.2
Gardening	53.7
Arts/Crafts	37.8
Reading	28.0
Traveling	11.0
Family	19.5
Cooking	13.4
Nature	13.4
Music	9.8
Religion	8.5
Movies and Television	8.5

* Percent totals do not equal 100 percent. Respondents were given the opportunity to list more than one hobby/interest.

Again, most common was gardening with almost as many reporting this hobby as listed it as a skill. Over one-half (53.7%) reported gardening as a hobby/interest (see Table 16). The second most common category was sports recreation with 40.2 percent reporting these types of activities. Sports recreation, such as hiking, biking, fishing, swimming, backpacking and hunting were among some of the sports recreation hobbies/interests that individuals reported. Arts and crafts was another broad category that includes several activities, for example decorating, photography, sewing, painting, writing, and flower arranging were considered an art/craft for this category. As many as 37.8 percent reported an art/craft as a hobby/interest.

Conclusion

Agriculture and dairy have historically been an integral part of the local community and continue the trend today. More recently, Latino immigrants have become important to the farm and dairy production in Loleta. The majority of respondents recognized that immigrants do play a role in the community, and are especially involved in local agriculture. In Loleta, there are few other economic options leaving many to work outside of Loleta in the surrounding Fortuna and Eureka area.

At present, moderate levels of community participation exist, yet the potential exists for more. Respondents also reported a substantial level of involvement, which would also be increased by involving community members through better use of their interests and skills. Developing programs that draw upon residents' existing skills and abilities could further enhance levels of community involvement. High levels of satisfaction and sense of belonging among respondents exist, showing that overall Loleta residents are pleased with their community.

Many skills were reported by respondents, illustrating that individuals have resources that are vital to the community. Thus social capital and human capital exist in Loleta. Social capital refers to social networks and connections. Cohesion was reported by many respondents (31.4%) as a community strength, displaying that social capital is significant in Loleta. Human capital refers to skills and abilities. Respondents listed skills such as gardening, working with children, and home maintenance. The majority of respondents reported computer and Internet use, which are important skills and methods for communication thus providing the opportunity to enhance human capital and social capital.

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