Preface

This book was created as a resource on rural families, especially low-income families. The slice of their life on which we have focused is work, and the environments and support around work. Researchers from a large multistate project sponsored by the Agricultural Experiment Stations (AES) at land-grant universities across the United States conducted research on low-income rural families and their functioning as a major policy change swept across the United States in 1996. Welfare reform influenced not only families receiving benefits, but families living in the community. In rural areas, many do not receive benefits even when they may be eligible. This book frames rural families in general, specifically what we know about low-income rural families. In addition, we use the research findings from the NC223/1011 multistate project “Rural Low-Income Families: Tracking their Well-being and Functioning in the Context of Welfare Reform” from 1998 to 2008 to provide a consistent research base and illustrate with actual voices other research concepts and findings about rural low-income families and work.

In this book, the voices of 115 mothers from the study are highlighted. All the names (including place names) are pseudonyms. Their statements illustrate the concepts presented in the chapters. The quotes you will read are taken verbatim from the transcripts of the interviews with the mothers from 1999 to 2003, when the data were collected. During this time the economic situation was changing. Chaps. 3 and 4 talk about the context of the rural situation, the variability, and employment issues for rural families.

One of our goals with this multistate research project was to bring along young researchers. Six of the authors (Bird, Katras, Lee, Manoogian, Sano, and Son) were graduate students at one point working with a RFS lead researcher. All have used the data for their dissertation and/or research that is shared in the book. Drs. Katras and Sano were research associates after they graduated and managed the work supported by National Research Initiative Cooperative Grant Program (NRICGP) funding. Six of the authors were at the first meeting of the research project in 1998, were lead researchers in their states, collected data, and have worked with graduate students using the data from the project. They are Bauer, Dolan, Lawrence, Mannen, Seiling, and Richards. Two other authors, Braun and Dyk, joined the project within the first 2 years, collected data, and supervised graduate students. Our other
author, Walker, was on the project as support faculty in Maryland in the early years and has since moved to Minnesota. All of the chapters are authored by people in at least two different sites and sometimes more. This is a hallmark for cooperative work across states with the multistate research AES project.

Our goal in organizing this book is for you to learn more about the contexts in which rural families live and work: Their problems and issues with work in a changing rural environment that has been influenced by a major policy change in our nation. We happily present to you, Rural Families and Work: Context and Problems for your reading and as a base for future research, programs, and policy development.

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