



Introduction

Rural Iowa is rapidly changing. Indicators of change exist throughout the state. Some of these changes are viewed as positive but in other cases the changes are viewed as undesirable. Since 1982, Iowa State University Extension and the College of Agriculture in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship have conducted annual surveys to assess how Iowans view the many changes underway in the state. This report summarizes the major findings from this year's survey of farm families. We wish to acknowledge the assistance of hundreds of Iowa families who took time to complete the questionnaires. Without their help this project would not be possible.

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of the 2001 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll. The poll is an ongoing panel of Iowa farm operators that was first established in 1982. Mail questionnaires were sent to 3,376 randomly selected producers in February and March. We received 2,061 usable replies—a response rate of 61 percent. The survey provides a representative sample of Iowa farmers.

Highlights from the 2001 Poll

Preferences for the 2002 Farm Bill

In spite of the shortcomings and criticisms of the 1996 Freedom to Farm legislation, the majority of Iowa farmers are supportive of its basic intentions and agreed that the basic directions should be continued in the new Farm Bill (Table 1). Forty-eight percent agreed that the basic directions of the 1996 Farm Bill should be continued in the 2002 legislation, although 32 percent disagreed, and 20 percent were unsure.

Looking at specific recommendations for the new Farm Bill, highest priority was assigned to devoting more effort to the promotion of exports—88 percent favored this policy. Eighty percent of the farmers expressed strong support for extending the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to allow buffer strips along all waterways.

Seventy-nine percent of the producers agreed that the new Farm Bill should provide incentives to allow them to participate in alternative energy development. Three-fourths (75 percent) agreed that in return for farm program payments, adoption of conservation technologies should be required on highly erodible land.

Table 1. Iowa Farmers' Preferences on the Future Direction of the 2002 Farm Bill

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Somewhat Disagree</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Somewhat Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
	Percent				
a. The basic directions in the 1996 Freedom to Farm Bill should be continued in the 2002 Farm Bill	17	15	20	32	16
b. The government should devote more efforts to the promotion of exports.....	2	3	7	30	58
c. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) should be extended to allow buffer strips along all waterways.....	4	6	10	41	39
d. The 2002 Farm Bill should provide incentives to allow farmers to participate in alternative energy development.....	2	3	16	47	32
e. In return for farm program payments, the adoption of conservation technologies should be required on highly erodible land	4	9	12	41	34
f. The 2002 Farm Bill should provide better crop insurance protection.....	3	9	21	40	27
g. Government program payments should be used to counter the cyclical nature of commodity markets.....	3	5	25	42	25
h. The current level of farm program payments should be continued in the 2002 Farm Bill.....	6	10	21	37	26
i. Overall the 1996 Farm Bill has been successful in providing support for farmers.....	13	17	15	39	16
j. The new farm bill should do more to address environmental issues in agriculture	5	17	24	37	17
k. Grain production policy should return to supply management (acreage set aside and deficiency payments)	18	15	20	31	16
l. The 2002 Farm Bill should provide incentives to farmers to save more through creating risk management accounts.....	4	10	41	34	11

The majority of farmers (67 percent) wants the 2002 Farm Bill to provide better crop insurance protection. Two-thirds of the producers (67 percent) agreed that government program payments should be used to counter the cyclical nature of commodity markets.

When asked whether the current level of farm program payments should be continued in the 2002 Farm Bill, 63 percent agreed, 16 percent disagreed, and 21 percent were unsure. Fifty-five percent of the respondents agreed that overall the 1996 Farm Bill has been successful

in providing support to farmers, although 30 percent disagreed, and 15 percent were unsure.

Fifty-four percent agreed that the new Farm Bill should do more to address environmental issues in agriculture. Less than one-half of the producers (47 percent) preferred grain production policy returning to supply management that involved set-asides and deficiency payments. Forty-five percent agreed that the new Farm Bill should provide incentives to farmers to save more through creating risk management accounts.

Community development issues

Respondents were asked to rate their community in terms of 18 dimensions based upon a 4-point scale that included poor, fair, good, and excellent. The responses were coded so that higher scores reflect more positive evaluations (Table 2). Dimensions of community life that received the highest ratings were “a place to raise children,” “public schools,” “friendliness of people,” and “overall quality of life.” Each of these items had average scores of 3.0 or higher.

Table 2. Iowa Farmers’ Ratings of Their Communities

	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Average Score *</u>
	Percent					
a. A place to raise children	1	6	45	48	0	3.41
b. Public schools	2	12	52	31	2	3.15
c. Friendliness of people	2	14	53	30	0	3.13
d. Overall quality of life	1	11	64	23	1	3.10
e. Health care services	5	18	50	25	1	2.95
f. Protection against crime	3	19	59	17	2	2.92
g. Adequate credit for home and business loans	4	18	52	15	10	2.89
h. Quality of housing	3	22	60	13	2	2.86
i. Community or civic spirit	5	27	52	13	2	2.75
j. Telecommunication networks	8	24	46	14	8	2.71
k. Local leadership	6	29	52	11	2	2.70
l. Cost of living	6	30	53	10	2	2.68
m. Acceptance of newcomers	7	29	51	10	3	2.67
n. Recreational opportunities	10	33	41	14	2	2.60
o. Maintenance of streets and roads ..	12	32	48	8	0	2.53
p. Cultural activities	11	32	42	7	7	2.50
q. Shopping facilities	18	30	38	14	0	2.46
r. Job opportunities	17	35	35	10	2	2.39

* “Don’t know” responses were not used in calculating the average score.

The two dimensions receiving the lowest scores were “job opportunities” and “shopping facilities.” Only 10 percent judged job opportunities as excellent, and 14 percent felt shopping facilities were excellent.

Slightly more than one-half of the respondents (54 percent) indicated their community is headed in the right direction. About one-fourth (24 percent) felt their community is on the wrong track, and the remaining 21 percent were not sure.

Economic development

In the last few years there has emerged considerable agreement on the need for economic development in the state. What is less clear is which strategies should be pursued. The lack of job opportunities was viewed by many as a major issue for rural Iowa. Many believe the lack of jobs is responsible for the continued out-migration of rural residents to urban places resulting in population loss in many communities and contributing to stagnating rural conditions.

To address the need for rural economic development, respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on several economic development strategies by using a 5-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Table 3). These items have been ranked in descending order to facilitate presentation.

The highest level of agreement among respondents is the need to raise wages to attract and retain people. Over three-fourths of the respondents agree with the need to raise wages. The second development strategy that received high levels of agreement was that the state should base its future economic prosperity on production agriculture and related industries. Sixty-nine percent agreed with this strategy.

Two-thirds of the respondents (67 percent) agreed that economic development should emphasize main street businesses. Likewise, two-thirds felt the state should offer financial or tax incentives to employers who hire Iowa graduates. Sixty-five percent agreed that agricultural biotechnology should be a focus of Iowa’s future industrial growth. Approximately two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents agreed that increased tourism is a viable option of the state to pursue. Moderate levels of agreement existed for offering farmers financial assistance to reduce non-point pollution sources from farming; sixty-four percent supported this option. Farmers were in general agreement that employers who receive government subsidies or tax incentives should be required to pay wages that exceed the local average wage rate. Fifty-two percent agreed that the state should implement a childcare subsidy for low-income families to give their children a head start in the education system. Forty-eight percent agreed that funding and access to communication technology in every town should be a priority.

On the other hand, three economic development strategies had moderate to strong levels of disagreement. Thirty-one percent disagreed that consolidation of county government would provide better efficiency for taxpayers, 24 percent were uncertain, and 45 percent were supportive of this option. Forty-five percent of the respondents opposed increasing the state’s population growth rate to match the growth rate of neighboring states, 25 percent were unsure, and 30 supported this strategy. The strategy eliciting the strongest opposition was recruiting new immigrants. Sixty-five percent disagreed with this option, 23 percent were unsure, and only 12 percent supported recruiting new immigrants to the state.

Table 3. Views on Economic Development

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Score
	Percent					
a. Raising wages in the state is necessary to attract and retain people ...	2	8	14	48	28	3.9
b. Iowa should base its future economic prosperity on production agriculture and related industries	2	13	16	48	21	3.7
c. Economic development in small towns should emphasize main street businesses.....	2	10	21	47	20	3.7
d. The state should offer tax incentives or other financial rewards to employers who hire Iowa graduates to help retain the young population in the state.....	5	13	15	50	17	3.6
e. Agricultural biotechnology should be a focus of future industrial growth in Iowa.....	4	9	22	49	16	3.6
f. Promotion of Iowa's unique culture and beauty for increased tourism is a viable option for economic growth	3	12	20	52	13	3.6
g. Iowa's farmers should be given assistance and financial incentives to reduce non-point source pollution originating from agriculture	3	9	24	47	17	3.6
h. Employers who receive any government subsidies or tax incentives should be required to pay wages that exceed the local average wage	6	13	22	39	20	3.5
i. Iowa should implement a childcare subsidy for low income families to give children a head start in the educational system.....	6	15	27	40	12	3.4
j. Public funding of and access to modern communication technology in every town in Iowa should be a priority	6	15	31	39	9	3.3
k. County governments should be consolidated to provide better efficiency for the taxpayer	14	17	24	30	15	3.2
l. Economic development should be directed towards increasing the state's population to match the growth rate in neighboring states	17	28	25	25	5	2.7
m. Iowa should focus on recruiting new immigrants to the state	36	29	23	10	2	2.1

Threats to rural Iowa

Table 4 presents farmers’ perceptions of “threats” to their communities. The loss of family farms was viewed as a severe threat by 76 percent of the respondents. The loss of small businesses was viewed as a severe threat by 64 percent. Other items respondents defined as severe threats included: “decline in the work ethic,” “illegal drugs,” and “changes in the traditional family structure.”

Opportunities for Iowans

Table 5 presents farmers’ judgments on the adequacy of opportunities to several groups to

achieve the American dream. Residents of rural areas and small towns were judged as not having adequate opportunities to achieve the American dream by 43 percent of the respondents. Rural youth were viewed as not having enough opportunities by 34 percent of the respondents. Approximately one-fifth judged wage earners, minorities, and new immigrants as not having sufficient opportunities to achieve the American dream. On the other end of the scale, 49 percent viewed urban people as having very adequate opportunities to achieve the American dream.

Table 4. Threats to Rural Iowa

	Doesn't Threaten	Somewhat Threatens	Severely Threatens	Don't Know
	Percent			
a. Loss of family farms.....	2	21	76	1
b. Loss of small business.....	2	33	64	1
c. Decline in work ethic.....	4	38	54	4
d. Illegal drugs.....	6	34	57	3
e. Lack of adequate wages.....	7	55	36	2
f. Loss of local schools.....	12	45	41	2
g. Changes in traditional family structure.....	4	42	51	3
h. Depletion of natural resources.....	21	44	28	7
i. Migration into cities.....	11	48	36	5
j. Ill-prepared work force.....	16	52	25	7
k. Lack of land use planning.....	18	48	22	12
l. Crime.....	24	51	22	3

Table 5. Opportunities for Iowans

Please indicate whether you feel the following groups have adequate opportunities in Iowa to achieve the American dream:

	Not Adequate	Somewhat Adequate	Very Adequate	Don't Know
	Percent			
a. People living in cities with populations greater than 50,000	2	32	49	17
b. People living in towns with populations between 2,500 and 50,000.....	7	55	29	9
c. People who live in rural areas and small towns (under 2,500 population)	43	38	14	5
d. Self-employed persons.....	19	55	21	5
e. Younger people (under the age of 30).....	21	53	20	6
f. Rural youth.....	34	45	16	5
g. Wage earners	23	58	14	5
h. Minorities.....	22	45	16	17
i. New immigrants.....	22	40	17	21

Views on alternative energy

Respondents were asked to provide their opinions on alternative energy sources on a 5-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to

strongly agree. In general, farmers are very supportive of alternative energy development (Table 6). Strong agreement existed for the statement that wind energy is a viable energy

Table 6. Farmers' Views on Alternative Energy Sources

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
	Percent				
a. Wind energy is a viable energy resource to utilize	0	1	8	41	50
b. Iowa should invest more in alternative energy sources.....	1	2	10	53	34
c. Burning garbage for electricity production is a possible energy source....	1	3	27	47	22
d. Burning crop residues in power plants should be a focus of research at our state colleges.....	2	6	23	50	19
e. The state colleges should place more emphasis on developing alternative energy sources for Iowa.....	1	2	12	53	32
f. Solar energy is a viable alternative to help heat homes in Iowa	1	10	25	45	19
g. Iowa should subsidize better public transportation systems wherever it is appropriate.....	3	10	31	43	13
h. I would be willing to use public transportation if it was available.....	7	15	35	33	10

resource to utilize—91 percent agreed with this statement. Eighty-seven percent agreed that Iowa should invest in more alternative energy sources. Nearly seven out of ten respondents agreed that burning garbage for electrical generation is possible. The same proportion agreed that burning crop residues in power plants should be a focus of research at the state colleges. Eighty-five percent supported the state

colleges placing more emphasis on developing alternative energy sources.

There were three alternative energy items that received at least 90 percent agreement on pursuing alternative energy development (Table 7). These items included: “more research on new (alternative) uses for Iowa farm commodities; ethanol is an environmentally friendly fuel; more research should focus on new (alternative)

Table 7. Iowa Farmers’ Support for Alternative Energy

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
	—————percent—————				
a. More research should focus on new (alternative) uses for Iowa farm commodities	1	1	4	38	56
b. Ethanol is an environmentally friendly fuel	1	1	4	22	72
c. More research should focus on new (alternative) crops for Iowa	1	2	7	45	45
d. Iowa should develop policies or incentives for using biodiesel fuels such as those derived from soybean oil	1	1	9	40	49
e. Using some Iowa farmland for fuel and fiber production will not affect the world food supply ...	2	6	14	44	34
f. Iowa tax incentives for alternative energy should encourage small start-up facilities rather than large-scale facilities	2	5	21	43	29
g. Producing perennial grass crops for energy will contribute to an environmentally friendly agriculture	1	4	24	47	24
h. It is a worthy goal for Iowa to move towards energy independence	1	2	8	43	46
i. Crop residues such as corn stalks can be collected for energy or fiber production in an environmentally friendly manner	2	8	22	46	22
j. The state should promote crops to be grown for energy such as switchgrass or poplar trees ...	1	5	31	46	17
k. The collection of crop residues such as corn stalks for energy and fiber production should be encouraged	2	9	28	46	15
l. It is more appropriate to use crops and crop residues to produce liquid fuels than to produce electricity	2	11	58	21	8

crops for the state. Eighty-nine percent agreed that Iowa should develop policies or incentives for using biodiesel such as those derived from soybean oil.

Seventy-eight percent agreed that using some Iowa farmland for fuel and fiber production would not affect world food supplies. Almost three-fourths (72 percent) agreed that tax incentives for alternative energy should encourage small start-up facilities.

More than seven in ten producers agreed that producing perennial grass crops for energy would contribute to an environmentally friendly agriculture. Eighty-nine percent felt it was a worthy goal to move towards energy independence.

Views on transgenic crops

Farmers tend to blame the media for much of the controversies that surround transgenic crops

(Table 8). Seventy-three percent agreed that the media has exaggerated the negative aspects of transgenic crops, and nearly three-fourths agreed that much of the controversy comes from the media. However, 58 percent of the respondents indicated they worry about cross-pollution with non-transgenic crops. Fifty-four percent agreed that they trust the seed dealers to sell them products that are safe to use, although 30 percent disagreed with this statement.

While 55 percent of the farmers indicated they do not have any reservations about feeding their families products derived from transgenic processes, 25 percent voiced concern. Forty-five percent agreed there is no difference between altering crops through gene insertion and what agriculturists have practiced for decades, while 35 percent disagreed, and 20 percent were not sure.

Table 8. Producers' Opinions on Transgenic Crops

Please indicate your level of agreement about transgenic crops. Transgenic crops result from inserting a gene from one organism into another. Recent examples include BT corn and herbicide resistant soybeans.

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Somewhat Disagree</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Somewhat Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
	percent				
a. I feel the media has exaggerated the negative effects of transgenic crops.....	6	7	14	34	39
b. Much of the controversy about transgenics comes from the media	5	8	14	36	37
c. I worry about cross pollination of my non-transgenic crops from transgenic crops planted in the area	9	16	17	37	21
d. I trust seed dealers to sell me products that are safe to use.....	13	17	16	37	17
e. I do not have any reservations about feeding my family products derived from transgenic processes	11	14	20	30	25
f. There is no difference between altering crops through gene insertion and what agriculturists have practiced for decades	16	19	20	28	17

Use of transgenics

Table 9 shows that 54 percent of the respondents planted herbicide tolerant soybeans in the 2000 crop year (exactly the same proportion that reported doing so in 1999). Similarly, there were no statistical differences in the proportion that planted insect tolerant corn for 1999 compared with 2000 (41 percent planted insect resistant corn in 2000 compared with 42 percent in 1999). When asked about their experiences in marketing their 2000 transgenic crops, only 4 percent reported they had trouble finding a grain dealer willing to take their crop. Four percent reported they received a lower price for their transgenic crop, 53 percent reported they had no problem selling their crop, and 22 percent reported feeding their crops to their livestock. When asked about planting intention for the year 2001, 59 percent reported they planned to plant herbicide tolerant soybeans, and 38 percent planned to plant insect resistant corn.

Opinions on land use issues

Ninety percent of the respondents agreed that farmers are good stewards of the land (Table 10). There was also high agreement that high land prices prevent young farmers from getting started in farming. Seventy-three percent agreed that farmland lost to development is a problem for the future of agriculture. Seventy-one percent agreed that a landowner's property

rights are more important than the rights of the public to demand land use restrictions. While 41 percent indicated they would sell their land for a development project if the price were right, 31 percent indicated they would not sell, and 28 percent were not sure. Likewise, there were mixed opinions on the statement, "the free market should dictate how land is used, not zoning laws or other regulations." Thirty-eight percent agreed with this assertion, 17 percent were not sure, and 45 percent disagreed. Fifty-nine percent disagreed that land values should be the same for development or farmland. The item receiving the most disagreement was the statement that "the public should have access to wetland, CRP, buffer strips and any other land that receives a government payment"; 79 percent disagreed with this statement.

Use of Extension

Table 11 provides the usage rates of Extension among farmers in the past 12 months. The contact with Extension ranges from 83 percent who had read at least one Extension bulletin, to five percent who had served on an Extension committee or council. Producers indicated multiple contacts among several of the items. For example, 29 percent reported listening to Extension reports on the radio six or more times, and 28 percent reported reading about Extension in their local newspaper six or more times.

Table 9. Experiences with Transgenic Hybrids

	Herbicide Tolerant Soybeans		Insect Resistant Corn	
	1999	2000	1999	2000
Did you plant any.....	Yes 54% No 46%	Yes 54% No 46%	Yes 42% No 58%	Yes 41% No 59%
Number of producers.....	1,573	1,056	1,208	798
Average number of acres planted .	167	201	133	152
Range.....	0-2,246 acres (2000)		0-1,510 acres (2000)	
Total acres planted.....	212,143		121,317	

Table 10. Producers' Opinions about Land Use Issues

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Somewhat Disagree</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Somewhat Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
	percent				
a. Farmers are good stewards of the land.....	1	5	4	46	44
b. High land prices prevent young farmers from getting started in farming.....	4	7	5	35	49
c. Farm land lost to development is a problem for the future of agriculture.....	6	13	8	37	36
d. A landowner's private property rights are more important than the rights of the public to demand land use restrictions.....	4	12	13	37	34
e. I would sell my land for a development project if the prices was right.....	21	10	28	25	16
f. The free market should dictate how land is used, not zoning laws or other regulations.....	16	29	17	26	12
g. Land values should be the same for agriculture and development.....	31	28	23	12	6
h. The public should have access to wetlands, CRP land, buffer strips, or any land that is supported by a government payment.....	59	20	9	8	4

Table 11. Use of Extension by Iowa Farm Families

	Number of Contacts During Past 12 Months						
	<u>None</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6 or more</u>
	percent						
a. Attended an Extension meeting.....	50	20	16	7	3	1	3
b. Attended a meeting where Extension staff spoke/presented.....	36	26	19	9	5	2	2
c. Read an Extension bulletin.....	17	9	15	15	12	7	25
d. Visited your county Extension office.....	37	20	15	11	6	4	7
e. Listened to an Extension report on the radio.....	26	7	11	10	10	7	29
f. Watched an Extension television report.....	51	10	10	9	5	4	11
g. Asked an Extension worker to visit your farm.....	88	7	3	1	1	0	0
h. Called the Extension office for information....	45	16	16	10	6	2	5
i. Read Extension material in a farm magazine.....	19	8	13	15	13	7	25
j. Read about Extension in local newspapers ..	21	8	12	14	10	7	28
k. Attended a 4-H club meeting.....	88	3	2	1	1	1	4
l. Served on an Extension committee or council.....	95	2	1	0	0	0	2

Evaluation of Extension

Three-fourths of Iowa farmers agreed that Extension has been beneficial to their farm and to their families, and that Extension has responded to the needs of rural Iowa (Table 12). When asked to whom Extension should refocus its efforts, youth and farm families received the

highest priority. The least support was directed towards urban families and business and industry—each receiving less than 50 percent agreement. Given this high level of use, it is not surprising that 69 percent of the farmers judged the assistance they received from Extension in the past year as either very good or good.

Table 12. Iowa Farmers’ Opinions about ISU Extension

Please indicate your opinion about Iowa State University Extension:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Not Sure	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
	percent				
Extension programs:					
a. have been beneficial to my family	2	8	14	56	20
b. have been beneficial to my farm.....	3	7	12	56	22
c. have responded to the needs of rural Iowa	3	7	17	56	17
Extension should refocus its efforts to better serve:					
a. farm families	1	2	14	52	31
b. rural <u>non-farm</u> families	4	12	33	41	10
c. urban families	5	17	39	32	7
d. communities.....	2	8	25	53	12
e. business and industry	6	14	32	39	9
f. youth	2	2	17	48	31

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[B] File: Communities 9-3

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