



Introduction

This survey of farm families provides a glimpse into the complex set of farm and rural issues confronting Iowa. Sponsored by Iowa State University Extension and the Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, the poll helps us target research and Extension programs to the needs of farm families. The Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll was created in 1982 as a partnership with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Data collected are used to better inform local, state, and national leaders on the views of farmers and how to better respond to farm and rural issues. A debt of gratitude is owed to the hundreds of farm families who took the time to respond to the survey and provide their candid assessments about important issues faced by the state.

Methodology

Questionnaires were mailed to a statewide random sample of 2,959 farm operators followed by reminder postcards and replacement questionnaires to maximize the response rate. Useable responses were received from 1,960 producers for a response rate of 66 percent. The primary focus of the survey was to determine producer opinions on a wide set of important issues, and to assess how changes in the farm economy are reflected

in the attitudes of farm families. This report summarizes the major findings from this year's poll. Additional copies of this or previous years' reports can be obtained from your local county Extension office, by contacting the Extension Distribution Center at Iowa State University, or by contacting the author.

Highlights from the 2002 Poll

Farm Management

Use of nitrogen

This year's poll contained a series of questions about the use of nitrogen fertilizer. Corn growers were asked to indicate the form of nitrogen they use and the percent of their corn acres it was applied to (Table 1). Anhydrous ammonia was the form of nitrogen most commonly used, with 92 percent of producers applying

**Table 1. Forms of Nitrogen Used
(applies to corn growers only)**

	Producers Using	Corn Acres Applied
	——percent——	
Anhydrous ammonia	92	68
Liquid nitrogen	74	59
Dry (granular) nitrogen	73	54
Manure	74	27

it to 68 percent of their corn acres. Liquid nitrogen and manure were used by 74 percent of corn growers, with liquid nitrogen applied to 59 percent of corn acres and manure applied to 27 percent of corn acres. Seventy-three percent of producers reported using dry (granular) nitrogen on 54 percent of their corn acres.

When asked how they determine the appropriate nitrogen fertilizer rates, 82 percent of farmers reported that they assessed the crop nutrient requirements based on yield goals (Table 2). Eighty percent of farmers set their rates based on past experience, while 73 percent depend

	<u>Percent</u>
Crop nutrient requirements based upon yield goals	82
Past experience	80
Recommendations from fertilizer dealer/supplier	73
Recommendations from crop consultant	33
Validated field tests from my farm	31

on recommendations from their fertilizer dealer or supplier. One-third of farmers (33 percent) use recommendations from their crop consultants, and slightly fewer (31 percent) use validated field tests from their farms to determine the nitrogen fertilizer rates to use. When asked for their opinions on the amounts of nitrogen used by farmers, only one percent felt that too little was used (Table 3). Over half (59 percent) said that about the right amount of nitrogen was used by other farmers, while 40 percent felt that too much was used.

Table 3. Amounts of Nitrogen Fertilizer Most Farmers Use

	<u>Percent</u>
Too little used	1
About the right amount used	59
Too much used	40

Corn growers were asked if they had made any significant changes in the past five years in the amount of nitrogen fertilizer they applied to their corn acres. Of the 30 percent who had made significant changes, 17 percent reported increasing the amount used while 83 percent said they used less nitrogen. When asked to provide reasons for this change, 77 percent of corn growers said that the change was to reduce costs (Table 4). Fifty-eight percent changed their nitrogen use out of concern for groundwater pollution. Forty-six percent changed because of credit taken from manure or legumes, and 40 percent said it was based on a new understanding for their land and operation. Just over one-third (36 percent) based their change in nitrogen rated on validated tests from their own farms, while 26 percent changed to increase corn yield.

Table 4. Reasons for Changes in Amount of Nitrogen

	<u>Percent</u>
Reduce costs	77
Concern for groundwater pollution	58
Credit taken from manure/legumes	46
New understanding for my land and operation	40
Validated test from own farm to establish rate	36
Recommendation by supplier/dealer	29
Increase yield	26
Concern for health effects	20
Recommendation by crop consultant	20

Recommendations from others played a role with 29 percent changing the amount used based on recommendations from their supplier, and 20 percent made changes based on recommendations from a crop consultant. Twenty percent reported changing the rate of nitrogen applied out of concern for health effects.

Farmers' use of various practices to manage nitrogen is shown on Table 5. Crop rotations were the most commonly used practice, with 88 percent of farmers reporting moderate or heavy use, followed by assessing yield goals which was used by 79 percent of farmers. Sixty-one percent reported either moderate or heavy use of soil testing, and 48 percent used animal manure. A significant number of farmers also reported planting legumes (48 percent) or variable fertilizer rates (43 percent). Less commonly used practices include measuring soil temperatures (33 percent), integrated crop management (23 percent), and use of test strips (21 percent). Fewer than one-fifth of farmers reported using N-Serve or N-Stabilizer (15 percent), a late

spring nitrogen test (12 percent), aerial photos or remote sensing (9 percent), Stalk N tests (8 percent), or a SPAD (chlorophyll) meter (3 percent).

Use of manure

Farmers who use manure reported how they determined the proper application rates (Table 6). Most (72 percent) said that they base their application rates on prior experience. Fourteen percent reported using either a nutrient content analysis or

Table 6. Method of Determining Manure Application Rates (applies to manure users only)

	<u>Percent</u>
Nutrient content analysis	14
Manure management plan	14
Prior experience	72

that they relied on a manure management plan. To achieve their desired application rate, nearly all farmers (99 percent) reported that they relied on spreader manufacturer recommendations and kept their equipment properly calibrated (Table 7). Slightly fewer (96 percent) reported using flow controllers.

Table 5. Practices to Manage Nitrogen

	<u>Do Not Use</u>	<u>Limited Use</u>	<u>Moderate Use</u>	<u>Heavy Use</u>
	percent			
Crop rotations	6	6	30	58
Yield goals	10	11	47	32
Soil testing	17	22	40	21
Animal manure	35	17	27	21
Plant legumes	31	21	31	17
Variable fertilizer rates	38	19	31	12
Soil temperatures	51	16	24	9
Integrated Crop Management (ICM)	57	20	18	5
Test strips	59	20	16	5
N-Serve or N-Stabilizer	73	12	10	5
Late spring nitrogen test	71	17	9	3
Aerial photos or remote sensing	82	9	7	2
Stalk N tests	81	11	7	1
SPAD (chlorophyll) meter	93	4	2	1

Table 7. Method of Achieving Manure Application Rates (applies to manure users only)

	<u>Percent</u>
Spreader manufacturer recommendations	99
Keep equipment properly calibrated	99
Use flow controllers	96

Opinions on Modern Agricultural Practices

Change in opinions over time is shown as well, with a few statements added to this year's poll to determine opinions surrounding nitrogen use. Sixty percent of farmers agreed that increased use of

Table 8 shows farmers' opinions about different modern agricultural practices.

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Somewhat Agree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Somewhat Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
	————— percent —————				
Table 8. Farmers' Opinions on Modern Agricultural Practices					
There is increasing public concern about the safety of some modern agricultural practices. What is your opinion of these statements?					
Increased use of sustainable farming practices would help maintain our natural resources					
Spring 2002	18	42	28	8	4
Spring 1994	17	45	22	12	4
Spring 1989	21	48	19	10	2
The need for an adequate supply of food limits the use of sustainable farming practices on a commercial basis					
Spring 2002	6	26	36	22	10
Spring 1994	9	36	29	19	7
Spring 1989	8	38	27	21	6
Modern farming relies too heavily upon chemical fertilizers					
Spring 2002	20	41	15	18	6
Spring 1994	20	40	9	23	8
Spring 1989	34	42	5	15	4
Modern farming relies too heavily upon insecticides and herbicides					
Spring 2002	22	34	14	19	6
Spring 1994	23	38	9	22	8
Spring 1989	40	38	6	13	3
There is too much attention about the harmful effects of pesticides and too little about their benefits					
Spring 2002	14	40	24	14	8
Spring 1994	24	42	13	14	7
Spring 1989	6	24	14	37	19
Farmers would use more sustainable farming methods if more research information was available					
Spring 2002	8	26	46	15	5
Spring 1994	8	39	35	15	3
Spring 1989	14	42	31	11	2
There is too much concern about food safety issues					
Spring 2002	5	24	23	33	15
Spring 1994	9	30	18	31	12
Spring 1989	14	37	14	23	12
The following questions were asked only in the 2002 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll.					
The pollution effects of nitrate fertilizer are quite unimportant compared to their benefits	20	31	24	20	5
Most farmers are too concerned with making profits and not concerned enough with preventing pollution	10	25	16	36	13
The best way to establish appropriate nitrogen levels is through trial and error on my own fields	23	33	20	21	3
Low prices for nitrogen fertilizer contributes to its over-use	14	26	20	32	8

sustainable farming practices would help maintain our natural resources, which is slightly down from 62 percent in 1994 and 69 percent in 1989. Only 32 percent of farmers agreed that the need for an adequate food supply limits the use of sustainable farming practices, compared to 45 percent in 1994 and 46 percent in 1989. Sixty-one percent of farmers believed that modern farming relies too heavily on chemical fertilizers, up from 60 percent in 1994, but significantly lower than 76 percent in 1989. When asked if modern farming relies too heavily on insecticides and herbicides, 56 percent of farmers agreed this year, compared to 61 percent in 1994 and 78 percent in 1989. Fifty-four percent thought that too much attention is given to the harmful effects of pesticides and too little to their benefits. This was down from 66 percent in 1994, and up from only 30 percent in 1989. About one-third (34 percent) of farmers agreed that farmers would use more sustainable farming methods if more research was available to them, compared to 47 percent in 1994 and 56 percent in 1989. Twenty-nine percent agreed that there is too much concern about food safety issues, down from 39 percent in 1994 and 51 percent in 1989.

New items in this year's poll concern opinions about nitrogen use. Fifty-one percent of farmers agreed that the pollution effects of nitrogen are unimportant when compared to their benefits. Just over one-third (35 percent) agreed that most farmers are too concerned with making profits and not concerned enough with preventing pollution. Fifty-six percent of farmers thought that the best way to establish appropriate nitrogen levels is through trial and error in their own fields, and 40 percent agreed that low prices for nitrogen fertilizer contributes to its over-use.

Opinions on Livestock Issues

Table 9 shows farmers opinions about livestock issues. The majority of farmers (80 percent) agreed that if people choose to live in the country they must be willing to accept the presence of livestock. Most (65 percent) agreed that most livestock producers do a good job of controlling odor and noise from their livestock operation. Finally, a majority of farmers (79 percent) are indifferent if a neighbor raises livestock as long as it doesn't affect their quality of life.

Table 9. Opinions on Livestock Issues

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Uncertain	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		percent				
If people choose to live in the country then they should (must) accept the presence of livestock (should be willing to)	2002	40	40	4	9	7
	1998	50	35	3	7	4
	1995	53	35	3	6	4
	1992	66	26	3	3	2
Most livestock producers do a good job of controlling odors and noises from their livestock operations	2002	21	44	12	15	8
	1998	29	42	10	14	5
	1995	29	47	8	12	4
	1992	32	44	11	10	3
I don't care whether my neighbor raises livestock, as long as this doesn't affect my quality of life	2002	35	44	9	8	4
	1998	45	38	7	7	3
	1995	40	43	7	7	5
	1992	46	36	9	6	4

In terms of expansion of the livestock industry, opinions were mixed (Table 10). Only one-quarter of farmers agreed that others in their neighborhood should be encouraged to raise more hogs, with nearly half disagreeing. This has changed

significantly over that past ten years. Raising more cattle was supported by 42 percent of farmers, but raising more poultry was only supported by 22 percent, with 38 percent uncertain and 40 percent not supporting more poultry.



Table 10. Expansion of Livestock Industry

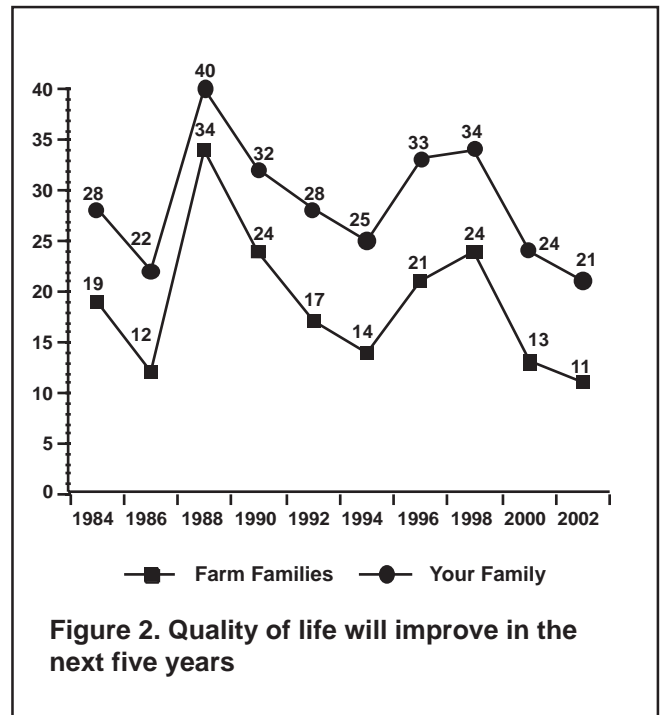
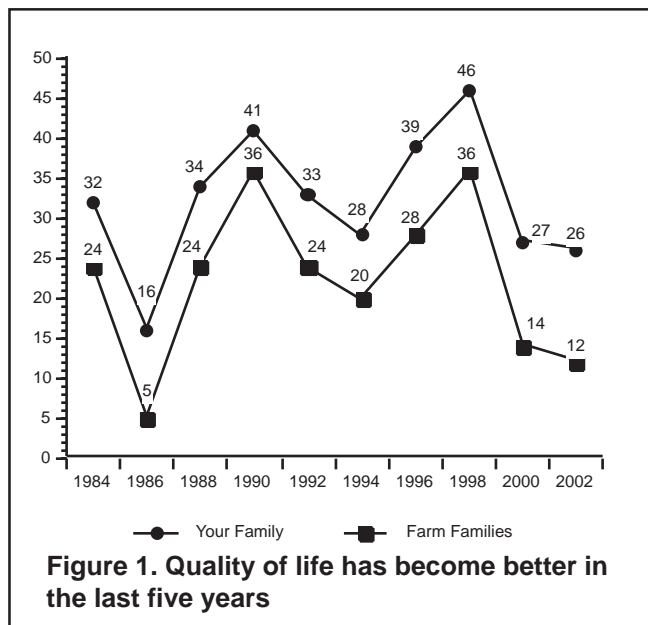
Farmers in my neighborhood should be encouraged to raise more:

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Disagree</u>
	percent		
hogs			
2002	25	30	45
1998	37	32	31
1995	40	29	31
1992	34	36	30
cattle			
2002	42	30	28
1998	49	31	20
1995	48	27	25
1992	41	35	24
poultry			
2002	22	38	40
1998	30	41	29
1995	33	37	31
1992	24	42	34

Producer Perceptions of Quality of Life Changes

Perceptions about how farm families' quality of life has changed in the past five years is shown in Figure 1. Twenty-six percent of farmers reported that their own family's quality of life had improved over the past five years, and only 12 percent saw improvement for other farm families in their neighborhoods. Although only down slightly from opinions in 2000, these figures show a dramatic drop from 1998 percentages, continuing the declining trend.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of respondents who believe that farmers' quality of life will improve over the next five years. As such, these data can be interpreted as a measure of optimism about the future. Although optimism was increasing from 1994 to 1998, this year's levels continue the downward trend that began in 2000. Only 21 percent of farmers believed that quality of life for their family would improve over the next five years. Even fewer (11 percent) thought that their neighbors' quality of life would improve.



Of equal concern is the opinion about overall economic prospects in the next five years for Iowa farmers (Figure 3). Only about one in ten (11 percent) of farmers believed that economic prospects for Iowa farmers will improve in the next five years. This again continues a downward trend that began in 1998, and represents a new record low percentage for the past 20 years.

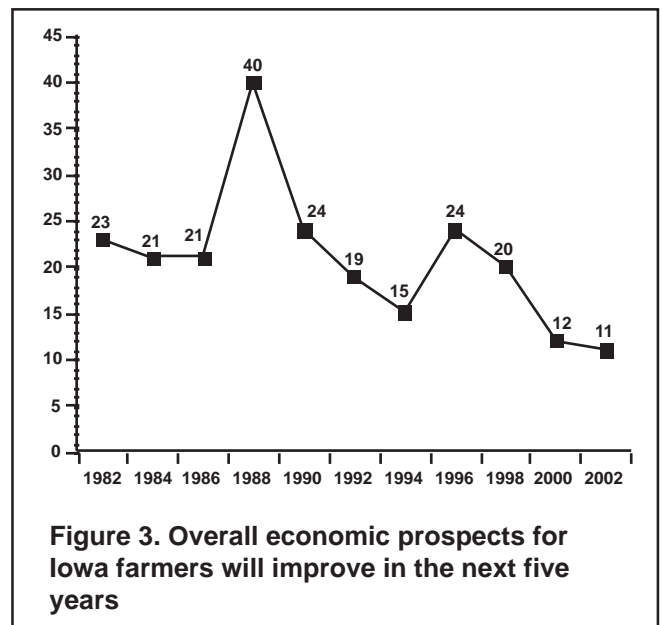


Table 11 shows the complete data that were used to produce these figures. Nearly all of the data show concern that conditions for farm families are not improving. Nearly half of farmers reported that the quality of life for their family has not changed, with 26 percent reporting that it is worsening, and 26 percent seeing an improvement. Perceptions of quality of life for other farm families show that nearly half (48 percent) believe quality of life is worsening, 40

percent see no change, and only 12 percent see improvement. More than half viewed quality of life as staying the same for their families in the next five years. Forty-three percent thought that quality of life for their neighbors' families would stay the same over the next five years, while 46 percent believed it would worsen. A majority of farmers (64 percent) believed that the overall economic prospects for Iowa farmers would worsen in the next five years.

Table 11. Farmers' Perceptions of Quality of Life for 1990-2002

		<u>Become Much Better</u>	<u>Become Somewhat Better</u>	<u>Remained the Same</u>	<u>Become Somewhat Worse</u>	<u>Become Much Worse</u>
		percent				
During the past five years, has the quality of life of your family:	2002	3	23	48	22	4
	2000	4	23	46	23	6
	1998	8	38	40	10	4
	1996	4	35	45	14	2
	1994	4	25	45	22	5
	1992	4	29	45	18	4
	1990	5	36	40	15	4
During the past five years, has the quality of life of farm families in your community	2002	1	11	40	40	8
	2000	2	12	35	40	11
	1998	3	33	43	18	3
	1996	2	26	42	27	3
	1994	2	18	41	33	6
	1992	2	22	43	27	6
	1990	3	33	35	24	5
In the next five years, will the quality of life of your family:	2002	2	19	54	21	4
	2000	2	22	49	22	5
	1998	5	29	50	13	3
	1996	3	30	53	12	2
	1994	3	22	51	20	4
	1992	2	26	51	18	3
	1990	3	29	53	13	2
In the next five years, will the quality of life of farm families in your community:	2002	1	10	43	38	8
	2000	1	12	37	40	10
	1998	2	22	45	26	6
	1996	1	20	50	26	3
	1994	1	13	43	36	7
	1992	1	16	49	29	5
	1990	1	23	50	22	4
In the next five years, will the overall economic prospects for Iowa farmers:	2002	1	10	25	48	16
	2000	1	11	24	45	19
	1998	1	19	32	38	10
	1996	1	23	33	36	7
	1994	1	14	30	44	12
	1992	1	18	32	40	9
	1990	1	23	38	32	6

Perceptions of Financial Conditions

In addition to quality of life, farmers were asked to assess the extent to which financial issues were a problem for themselves and others in their area. Sixty-six percent of farmers indicated that financial problems were either moderate or very serious for farmers in their area (Table 12). Somewhat fewer (55

percent) said the same for local agribusiness firms. Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) felt that financial institutions were facing moderate or very serious financial strain, while 38 percent of farmers reported that their own farms faced a moderate or very serious financial situation. Most of these figures have changed little since 2000 when financial conditions worsened for many producers.

Table 12. Farmers' Perceptions of Farm Financial Conditions: 1990-2002

		<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Not a Problem</u>	<u>Slight Problem</u>	<u>Moderate Problem</u>	<u>Very Serious Problem</u>
		percent				
Farmers in your area:	2002	4	5	25	41	25
	2000	3	4	20	40	33
	1998	7	15	35	33	10
	1996	8	14	34	34	10
	1994	6	7	30	41	16
	1992	6	7	30	41	16
	1990	6	8	33	40	13
Agribusiness firms in your area:	2002	7	10	28	40	15
	2000	7	12	27	39	15
	1998	7	27	34	26	6
	1996	9	26	37	23	5
	1994	8	20	33	30	9
	1992	8	15	32	34	11
	1990	7	15	35	34	9
Financial institutions in your area:	2002	8	43	26	19	4
	2000	8	47	25	17	3
	1998	7	61	20	10	2
	1996	9	60	19	9	2
	1994	7	60	21	10	2
	1992	8	41	30	17	4
	1990	7	41	29	19	4
Your own farm:	2002	2	30	30	27	11
	2000	1	30	29	28	12
	1998	2	45	29	18	6
	1996	2	49	28	16	5
	1994	1	39	31	21	8
	1992	1	41	28	21	9
	1990	1	44	26	21	8

Table 13 shows farmers' assessment of various factors that have an effect on farm income. The market power of food processors was seen as having a significant impact on farm income by 63 percent of farmers. This represents a significant change from 1993, where only 39 percent of farmers felt this way. The inadequacy of markets was mentioned by 61 percent of farmers. Fifty-three percent reported that the unfair trade practices of other countries and land values or rental rates had a big impact on farm income. Lack of competition among suppliers, outside ownership of

farms, and government subsidies that encourage overproduction were all mentioned by 48 percent of farmers. More than one-third (38 percent) indicated a significant impact on income due to production contracts with agribusiness, and a similar number (37 percent) blamed heavy reliance on purchased inputs such as fuel or fertilizer. Other than opinions about the market power of food processors, little has changed since 1993. Exceptions include an increase in impact due to inadequate markets and the lack of competition among suppliers.

Table 13. Factors Affecting Farm Income

	<u>None</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Lot</u>
	percent			
Market power of food processors				
2002	1	5	31	63
1993	1	12	48	39
Inadequate markets				
2002	1	9	29	61
1993	2	10	36	52
Unfair trade practices of other countries				
2002	1	12	34	53
1993	1	9	34	56
Land values/rental rates				
2002	1	9	37	53
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lack of competition among suppliers				
2002	1	11	40	48
1993	3	17	45	35
Outside ownership of farms				
2002	4	18	30	48
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Government subsidies that encourage overproduction				
2002	3	13	36	48
1993	3	14	38	45
Production contracts with agribusiness				
2002	2	13	47	38
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Too heavy reliance on purchased inputs such as fuel, fertilizer, etc.				
2002	2	18	43	37
1993	3	17	43	37

Issues Affecting Rural Iowa

Iowa farmers assessed the importance of a number of issues affecting the future of rural Iowa as shown in Table 14. The loss of competitive markets for farm products and the declining number of farms were mentioned by the greatest percent of farmers as being “very important” to rural Iowa’s future. This was followed closely by the lack of quality, well paying jobs in rural communities (51 percent), and out-migration of young people (50 percent). About one-third said that the consolidation of rural services was “very important,” and about one-quarter noted the significance of the growth in chain stores. Lack of access to telecommunication technology in rural areas was mentioned by only 13 percent of respondents as very important.

Ethics and Ethical Behavior

To assess changes in perceptions of ethical behavior in society, a series of questions first asked in 1993 were included in this year’s poll. Tables 15 and 16 on the following pages contains responses to these questions for both 1993 and 2002. Overall, little change has occurred over the nine-year time lapse between surveys. As in 1993, a majority of farmers (88 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the general ethical standards in society have declined. Interestingly, 58 percent of farmers in 2002

and 52 percent in 1993 agreed that farmers’ ethical standards have declined. Ninety-two percent agreed with the statement “at one time, a person’s word was as good as a signed contract; now you must get it in writing,” down from 93 percent in 1993. Eighty-five percent of farmers agreed that nowadays, you can’t always just accept what a person tells you, only a slight change from 88 percent in 1993. When responding to the statement “even among friends and neighbors, I am concerned that they no longer feel obligated to honor their word,” 54 percent of farmers agreed or strongly agreed in both 1993 and 2002. People losing respect for authority was viewed as a reason ethical standards have declined by 70 percent of farmers in 2002, down slightly from 78 percent in 1993. The lowest percentage of farmers (45 percent) agreed with the statement “Often, people admit they are not being ethical in paying the full amount of their taxes.”

When asked how ethical standards have declined over the past ten years for selected groups, the greatest declines were seen in state and local elected officials, with 71 percent and 69 percent of farmers reporting declines respectively (Table 15). Only four percent of respondents saw an improvement in ethics for elected officials, both state and local. This was followed closely by perceived declines among youth

Table 14. Issues Impacting the Future of Rural Iowa

	Not Important		Moderately		Very
	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important
	percent				
Loss of competitive markets	1	1	5	17	76
Declining number of farms	1	2	13	22	62
Lack of quality jobs in rural communities	1	2	16	30	51
Out-migration of young people	1	2	19	28	50
Consolidation of rural services	4	7	28	29	32
Growth of chain stores	11	12	31	23	23
Lack of access to telecommunication technology	9	18	38	22	13

Table 15. Opinions about Ethics

		<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Somewhat Disagree</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Somewhat Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
		percent				
The general ethical standards in society have declined	2002	1	3	8	42	46
	1993	2	4	6	44	44
At one time, a person's word was as good as a signed contract; now you must get it in writing	2002	1	3	4	33	59
	1993	1	4	2	37	56
Today, you can't always just accept what a person tells you	2002	1	6	8	45	40
	1993	1	7	4	47	41
Even among friends and neighbors, I am concerned that they no longer feel obligated to honor their word	2002	6	24	16	37	17
	1993	9	27	10	39	15
Often, people admit they are not being ethical in paying the full amount of their taxes	2002	4	15	36	31	14
	1993	5	16	30	37	12
One reason ethical standards have declined is people have lost respect for authority	2002	3	9	18	40	30
	1993	3	8	11	45	33
Farmers' ethical standards have declined	2002	4	15	23	43	15
	1993	9	22	17	42	10

and young adults, with 68 percent reporting a decline in ethical standards and only six percent reporting improvement. Nearly one-half (46 percent) of farmers reported that ethical standards among farmers have declined, with about half (48 percent) indicating no change, and six percent seeing improvement. Forty percent reported that ethical standards among lenders have declined; ten percent saw an improvement. Over one-third of the respondents viewed ethical standards among local agribusiness as having

declined, with 54 percent reporting no change and nine percent indicating improvement. Ethical standards among neighbors were seen as declining by nearly one-third (30 percent) of farmers. Sixty-three percent reported no change and seven percent saw an improvement. Finally, 24 percent of farmers reported that ethical standards among clergy had declined over the past ten years, while 63 percent said there was no change and 12 percent reported improvement. In comparison to 1993 responses, again there is little change.

Table 16. Changing Ethics

		<u>Greatly Declined</u>	<u>Somewhat Declined</u>	<u>Remained the Same</u>	<u>Somewhat Improved</u>	<u>Greatly Improved</u>
		percent				
Local elected officials	2002	25	44	27	3	1
	1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
State elected officials	2002	27	44	25	3	1
	1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Youth and young adults	2002	17	51	26	5	1
	1993	14	42	19	3	0
Farmers	2002	7	39	48	5	1
	1993	4	37	52	6	1
Lenders	2002	9	31	50	9	1
	1993	13	36	39	11	1
Agribusiness in your community	2002	7	30	54	8	1
	1993	3	27	60	9	1
Local merchants	2002	4	31	58	6	1
	1993	5	33	55	6	1
Neighbors	2002	4	26	63	6	1
	1993	3	23	66	7	1
Clergy	2002	4	20	64	10	2
	1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Farm Goals

Respondents were asked to assess the importance of various goals they have for

their farm business (Table 17). The most important goal was being viewed as a good neighbor. Eighty-nine percent gave this item a score of 4 to 5, indicating it is quite

Table 17. Importance of Farm Goals

	<u>Not Important</u>		<u>Moderately Important</u>		<u>Very Important</u>
	percent				
Being viewed as a good neighbor	1	1	10	29	60
Spending time with family	1	1	12	27	59
Ensuring adequate retirement	2	3	12	29	55
Place to raise family	2	3	12	26	57
Being my own boss	1	3	15	30	51
Making money	1	1	19	29	50
Maintaining comfortable lifestyle	1	2	20	36	41
Working with nature	2	4	20	34	40
Working outside	2	5	25	35	33
Being viewed as a conservationist	3	7	24	33	32
Passing farm on to children	11	13	22	29	35
Preserving family tradition	9	12	23	23	33
Feeding the world	9	16	39	22	14

important for them to be viewed as a good neighbor, followed closely by spending time with family (86 percent), ensuring an adequate retirement (84 percent), having a good place to raise a family (83 percent), and being their own boss (81 percent). Seventy-nine percent of farmers said that an important goal was to make money; similarly, 77 percent reported that maintaining a comfortable lifestyle was important.

Enjoying the environment was also important to farmers with 74 percent reporting that an important goal was working with nature, 68 percent said working outside was important, and being viewed as a conservationist was important to 65 percent of the farmers. Sixty-four percent reported that passing the farm on to their children was important and 56 percent noted preserving a family tradition. Of least importance was feeding the world with only 36 percent giving that goal high importance.

Reasons for Farm Success

Nearly all farmers (87 percent) reported that their farms were at least “somewhat successful.” They were asked to assign a level of importance to various activities that are related to the success of their farms (Table 18). Not surprisingly, most farmers (81 percent) said that hard work was important in the success of their farms, followed closely by the timing of sales and production (79 percent), and attention to detail (78 percent). Seventy percent of farmers attributed having accurate information about the farming operation and considering available options carefully as important to their farms’ success. Government policies were viewed as important by 58 percent of farmers, while 54 percent attributed involving their families in decision making to success. Just over half (51 percent) of farmers noted that luck and off-farm employment were important, with the fewest number (45 percent) attributing importance to formal education or training.

Table 18. Activities Related to Farm Success

	<u>Not Important</u>		<u>Moderately Important</u>		<u>Very Important</u>
	percent				
Hard work	1	2	16	29	52
Timing (sales, production)	9	3	18	37	42
Attention to detail	1	2	19	42	36
Accurate information about farming operation	1	4	26	40	30
Careful consideration of options	1	3	27	41	29
Government policies	6	8	28	28	30
Involving family in decisions	5	12	29	32	22
Off-farm employment	21	10	18	20	31
Luck	8	12	29	24	27
Formal education/training	4	12	39	29	16

Enjoyment of Farm Tasks

Farmers were asked to specify their level of enjoyment for various farming activities (Table 19). Crop or fieldwork was farmers' favorite activity with 85 percent reporting enjoying it greatly. Seventy-two percent of farmers reported enjoying exploring new ideas. Working with livestock and working on machinery were also enjoyable to most farmers (64 percent and 61 percent

respectively). Fewer than half reported enjoying marketing or purchasing crops (47 percent) or livestock (48 percent) or purchasing equipment (47 percent). Finally, the least favorite activities for farmers were record keeping or paperwork which was disliked by one-third (33 percent) of respondents, and going to farm meetings for which 35 percent of farmers reported disliking.

Table 19. Farm Activity Preferences

		percent				
		<u>Dislike Greatly</u>	<u>Indifferent</u>			<u>Enjoy Greatly</u>
Crop/field work	2002	1	2	12	38	47
	1992	0	2	11	36	51
Exploring new ideas	2002	1	4	24	48	24
	1992	2	6	25	42	25
Working with livestock	2002	7	8	21	34	30
	1992	5	6	19	33	37
Working on machinery	2002	4	9	27	39	22
	1992	4	11	27	39	19
Marketing/purchasing livestock	2002	9	12	31	33	15
	1992	9	10	27	33	21
Marketing/purchasing crops	2002	5	16	32	37	10
	1992	4	11	32	39	14
Purchasing equipment	2002	6	14	33	34	13
	1992	7	13	35	31	14
Record keeping/paperwork	2002	11	22	33	25	9
	1992	15	22	34	22	7
Going to farm meetings	2002	14	21	36	23	5
	1992	14	21	36	22	7

Importance of Farm Records

Table 20 provides the percentage of farmers who use farm financial records for various purposes and the importance of those records for each purpose. Farmers reported spending an average of ten hours per month on keeping or analyzing their farm's financial records. Most farmers used financial records to monitor cash flow (83 percent), provide information to government agencies (82 percent), and to identify unprofitable parts of the farm operation. About two-thirds reported that records were used to provide financial information to lenders (71 percent), to evaluate government program options (70 percent), and for market planning and analysis (67 percent). Thirty-five percent used financial records to provide information to landlords, and less than one-

quarter (23 percent) reported using records to provide information to potential investors. Evaluations of the importance of each purpose showed that farmers placed the highest level of importance on monitoring cash flow (72 percent) and identifying unprofitable parts of their operation (63 percent). Sixty percent viewed records as important in providing financial information to lenders, followed closely by market planning and analysis (59 percent), evaluating government program options (58 percent), and providing information to government agencies (57 percent). Only one-third (32 percent) of farmers viewed records as important in providing information to landlords, with even fewer (22 percent) assigning importance using records to provide information to potential investors.

Table 20. Use and Importance of Farm Records

	Percent who use farm records to:	Importance of these records				
		Low (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	High (5)
		—————percent—————				
Monitor cash flow	83	5	4	19	31	41
Identify unprofitable parts of the operation	76	8	5	24	31	32
Provide financial information to lenders	71	14	6	20	26	34
Market planning and analysis	67	8	8	25	30	29
Evaluate government program options	70	11	7	24	28	30
Provide information to government agencies such as ASCS, Worker's Comp., etc.	82	11	9	23	25	32
Provide information to landlords	35	34	12	22	16	16
Provide information to potential investors	23	51	11	16	13	9

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[B] File: Communities 9-3

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