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Twenty Years of the Nebraska Rural Poll

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Twenty Years of the Nebraska Rural Poll

Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	2/20/15
Livestock and Products,			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	146.94	*	158.18
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	215.40	278.92	280.88
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	173.41	217.73	214.14
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	212.98	246.69	239.47
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.	92.06	67.49	59.14
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	97.19	80.32	71.63
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Woolled, South Dakota, Direct.	151.00	*	198.75
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	369.22	378.87	361.05
Crops,			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	6.48	4.87	4.83
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.	4.33	3.47	3.67
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.	13.34	9.16	9.64
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	7.64	6.88	7.14
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	4.72	3.08	3.08
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	162.50	212.50	*
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	125.00	75.00	75.00
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	107.50	82.50	92.50
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	195.00	177.75	177.50
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	63.50	58.00	58.50
* No Market			



The 2015 edition of the Nebraska Rural Poll will be mailed to 6,000 non-Metropolitan Nebraska households in March. Having run every year since 1996, the Poll is the largest and oldest annual survey of its kind in the nation. Over the Poll's nineteen years, surveys have been completed by over 49,000 respondents in 84 non-Metropolitan Counties. This amounts to roughly 6.6% of that population (755,000 in 2010). In a number of very small rural counties, the portion of the population reached is closer to 10%. More importantly, the Poll has reached over 16% of all non-Metropolitan Nebraska households (305,891 in 2010).

The Nebraska Rural Poll had its origins with the Center for Rural Revitalization and Development (later the Center for Applied Rural Innovation), housed within the UNL Department of Agricultural Economics and was originally led by Dr. Sam Cordes and Dr. John Allen, faculty members within that department. In the Poll's first year, survey data were summarized in four reports, dealing with work patterns and benefits, state and federal taxes, environmental issues and the quality of life in rural communities.



Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the US Department of Agriculture.

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The reporting pattern of one quality of life report and three topical reports as developed in 1996 has been more or less repeated over the next 19 years. To date, the Rural Poll has provided 76 reports on topics including development strategies, immigration, technology availability and use, schools, business transfers, government services, climate change, livestock, water quality and quantity, housing, crime and safety and many others. Some of these have proven to be controversial. All have been of interest to policy makers, planners and development groups. The Poll reports are routinely distributed to a list of 116 readers, including all Nebraska State Senators. Poll results are also released to and through print media outlets.

The makeup of the faculty group working with the Poll has changed over time. The Poll team currently includes faculty members from the Department of Agricultural Economics, the Rural Futures Institute and the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication. The Poll also routinely involves individuals with specialized expertise in assisting to develop the survey and analyze the results. Over the years, the Poll has found partners from the UNL Departments of Business Administration, Sociology, the Public Policy Center, the University of Nebraska-Kearney, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, the UNL School of Natural Resources and the Nebraska Small Business Development Center.

While many Rural Poll questions may be asked only once, others have been repeated after a passage of time or the occurrence of some major event in an effort to see if opinions change as a result. In this way the Poll has demonstrated, for instance, a decline in public acceptance of anthropogenic effects in climate change between 2008 and 2013.

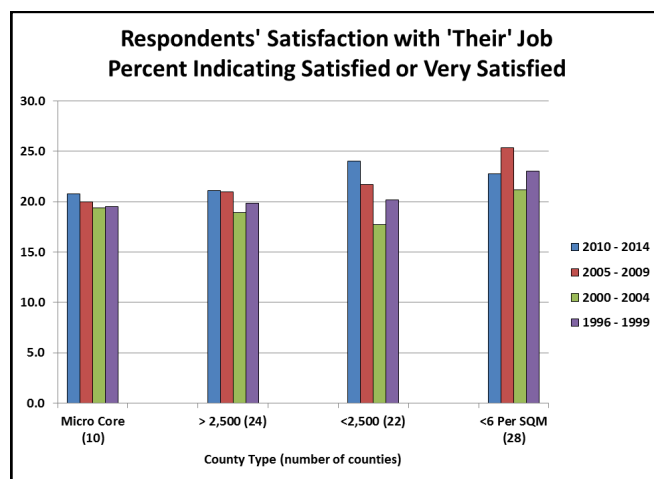
The 2,500 surveys returned each year allow the Poll to make statements at a 95% confidence level for Nebraska's non-Metropolitan population and for five broadly defined regions of the state. In 2014, the Rural Poll was for the first time coordinated with the Metro Poll conducted by the University of Nebraska Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research. In that year, the two Polls matched their methodology and the great majority of their questions in order to provide the first ever large scale, statewide opinion poll. Comparative results from the two surveys will be released over the coming year.

Questions repeated annually are also of interest. All told, there are about 40 questions that have been asked annually for multiple years. These mostly take the form of *satisfaction* questions, in which respondents identify their level of satisfaction with various characteristics of their community and their lives. By aggregating these data into five-year groupings, the Poll is able to track changes in satisfaction over time with numbers large enough to be noted, even if not always large enough to make statements with statistical certainty.

Take for example satisfaction with one's job. The question is part of a series which asks respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction with several aspects of their personal work and financial situation. Specifically, they are asked about their job, their job security, their job prospects and their income.

Figure 1 depicts responses to the instruction: Please indicate how satisfied you are with each of the (23) following items: Q16i Your Job. Responses were selected from a five point scale ranging from *Very dissatisfied* to *Very satisfied* with a midpoint indicating *No opinion*.. Responses to the question are disaggregated to represent four types of Nebraska counties: Micropolitan core counties, counties with a trade center larger than 2,500 residents, counties with no trade center that large, and counties with population densities of fewer than six per square mile.

Figure 1



With the data aggregated into five year totals (four years in the case of 1996 through 1999), the sample involves 1.5% to 2% of the population for each set of counties for each observation.

What is immediately apparent is that the percentage of respondents indicating that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their job hovers around 20 percent for most county types and most observations. However, this particular analysis has not removed *No opinion* responses, and a 20 percent satisfaction rate does not necessarily indicate an 80 percent dissatisfaction rate. Since we know that roughly 25 percent of Poll respondents are retired, students, disabled or otherwise not involved in the labor force, the satisfaction rate among those who are currently employed will be higher. That remains to be demonstrated empirically from these data.

Still, the comparisons over time and between places are interesting even without additional analysis. Note

for instance that job satisfaction appears to be consistently higher in the most rural Nebraska counties than is reported in the more economically active and diversified Micropolitan core counties. Since Rural Poll (and other) data have demonstrated that farm and non-farm self-employment is higher in more rural places one might seek a reason for increased job satisfaction there.

Things come out somewhat differently when the question is satisfaction with *Job opportunities*. That question follows immediately upon the previous job satisfaction question and uses the same response scale. The results are depicted in Figure 2.

Responses to this question indicate that satisfaction with job opportunities among rural residents is generally higher than the reported level of satisfaction with their current job. In this case, the proportion of respondents indicating that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with job opportunities has been above 30 percent for most county types in most time periods. The same caveat regarding *No opinion* responses applies here and a 30 percent satisfaction rate does not necessarily indicate a 70 percent dissatisfaction rate.

Figure 2

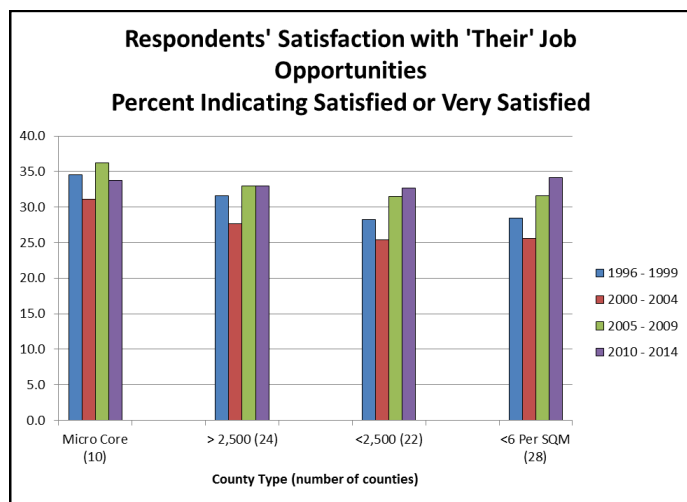


Figure 2 also depicts what appears to be a slightly higher level of satisfaction with job opportunities in the larger and more diversified Micropolitan core counties. It also appears that the most rural counties have experienced a steady increase in satisfaction with job opportunities since a low point in the 2000 to 2004 time frame.

None of this may be exactly exhilarating material. It does, however, profile the rural population of a single state in a way that does not to our knowledge exist anywhere else. Twenty years is a long time in terms of both planning and social research. Community development practitioners are often hard pressed to get their clients to look that far ahead. Yet we all seem to assume that twenty years will see significant changes in our communities and our lives. We are probably correct in that assumption.

In 1996 when the first Rural Poll was mailed out computers at UNL featured green letters on a black screen. In 1996, there was no serious World Wide Web presence for most of the University of Nebraska, including the Department of Agricultural Economics, several wars had not been fought and two recessions were yet to be felt. In 1996, global positioning systems for agriculture were some technologists dream.

Over those twenty years, millions have been spent on rural development projects and programs. Businesses and in fact entire industries have appeared and disappeared and rural communities have invested in their infrastructure and amenities with the expectation of strengthening their economy. Despite those efforts, population losses in many rural areas have continued.

Considering all of that, it is noteworthy that, in terms of individual satisfaction with one's job, not all that much has changed. However, with regard to satisfaction with job opportunities, the last decade may have actually seen some payoff for those efforts, at least with regard to how residents perceive their situation.

Twenty years of the Nebraska Rural Poll have provided a truly unique data base. It may be a small data base in national or global terms, but it is also complete in a way that is unlikely to be replicated. Nebraska's commitment to the Nebraska Rural Poll demonstrates a level of foresight and an understanding of the time involved in change at the community level that is not to be found in most social science research.

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