

AROUND BUTLER COUNTY
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Farm and Rural Life Poll

The Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll was established in 1982 to provide timely and relevant information on agriculture and rural life. It is an annual survey of Iowa farmers. It is a cooperative project between the Iowa State University Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, ISU Extension Service and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. The annual survey is managed by ISU Extension Sociology. The overall objective of the farm poll is to understand how the ongoing changes in Iowa's agriculture and rural areas affect farmers and rural society as a whole.

How does it work? A statewide sample of approximately 2,000 farm operators participate in the annual survey. The questionnaires are sent to the same group of farmers every spring, which permits analysis of change over time. This year, 1,276 farmers participated in the poll. On average, the participating farmers were sixty-five years old and fifty-one percent earned more than half of their income from farming.

What kinds of issues does the Farm Poll examine? A wide variety of issues are examined through the Farm Poll: opinions about current agricultural policies, land stewardship ethics, assessments of the future of farming, research and extension education needs and priorities, the incidence of off-farm employment, plans for the future, the next generation of farmers, etc. The 2011 survey sought to understand farmer's perspectives on climate change due to the extreme weather events in Iowa over the past several years, as well as conservation issues, investment in agricultural drainage, use of the internet and perspectives on reducing the federal deficit and balancing the budget.

ISU Extension Sociologists, J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr. and Paul Lasley, conducted the survey. While there are too many topics and information in the poll to be included here, the following findings will give you a flavor for the responses given. Let's look at answers given regarding climate change. First, there is uncertainty and skepticism about climate change. Arbuckle and Lasley found that sixty-eight percent of farmers indicated that they believe change is occurring. Of those, thirty-five percent believed that climate change is caused by natural variations in the environment and human activities. About a quarter of farmers attributed climate change to natural changes in the environment and ten percent believed that it is caused mostly by human activities. More than forty percent expressed concern about potential impacts of climate change on agriculture and about half believe that extreme weather events will happen more frequently in the future.

What are the benefits of the Farm Poll? Information from the poll is made available to local, state, and elected officials, community leaders, farm organization leaders, policy makers, and many other groups and individuals who have a stake in the vitality of agriculture and rural society. Information from the Farm Poll is used to guide policy decisions and actions and as the basis for public policy seminars, Extension reports, radio and television broadcasts, and newspaper and journal articles.

Go to: www.soc.iastate.edu/extension/farmpoll/2011/PM3016.pdf for the 2011 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll summary report or contact the Butler office of ISU Extension at 319-267-2707.