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Cell Phones Common among Iowa Farmers
About 70 percent of farmers report using at least one technology that provides them with Internet access, according to the 2012 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll.

Internet and mobile communications technologies are becoming more widespread for communicating with farmers. ISU Extension researchers provided Farm Poll survey participants with a list of communication technologies and asked them to select the ones they own or use regularly.

A basic cell phone was the most common communications technology used by farmers in the survey. Seventy-five percent reported that they own and/or regularly use a cell phone without Internet access. Fifty-eight percent reported that they have or regularly use a computer with high-speed Internet access.

According to Farm Poll data, about 11 percent of farmers reported that they use a smartphone. Eleven percent had a computer with dial-up Internet access, 10 percent own or use a tablet computer such as an iPad or Kindle and 5 percent reported using a cell phone with Internet access.

One of the motivations for this research was that a number of online surveys conducted by agricultural press organizations have found that a relatively high percentage of respondents report smartphones. It is suspected that the online nature of such surveys might bias samples toward farmers who use such technologies. The Farm Poll results indicate that, at least in Iowa, the percentage of farmers who use smartphones is substantially lower than some estimates.

ISU Extension specialists cautioned, however, that the Farm Poll, because it is a panel study that surveys the same farmers each year, is somewhat biased toward older farmers. To the extent that older farmers are less likely to use more sophisticated communications technology, our results might underestimate the use of some technologies.

That said, use of high-tech communications technology in agriculture is definitely on the rise. From an ISU Extension standpoint, these developments are exciting, because they offer more ways to provide research-based information to farmers and the agribusinesses who serve them.

About the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll
Conducted every year since its establishment in 1982, the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll is the longest-running survey of its kind in the nation. ISU Extension and Outreach, the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service are all partners in the Farm Poll effort.

The 2012 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll summary report (PM 3036) and previous Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll summary and topical reports are available to download from the ISU Extension and Outreach Online Store, https://store.extension.iastate.edu/ and Extension Sociology, http://www.soc.iastate.edu/extension/farmpoll2012.html.