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### Television Signal Changes and Rural Nebraskans

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# Nebraska Rural Poll Research Brief

[cari.unl.edu/ruralpoll/](http://cari.unl.edu/ruralpoll/)

RB 08-001

October 2008

## *Television Signal Changes and Rural Nebraskans*

### *Key Findings*

- One in five rural Nebraska households currently receive their television signal over the air, using an antenna or rabbit ears. Thirteen percent of the households only receive their signal over the air, while seven percent receive a television signal over the air but also receive a signal from another source (cable, satellite or wireless TV provider).
- Residents of smaller communities, South Central region residents, younger persons and lower income households are the persons most likely to be affected by the upcoming change to digital television signal.
- Most rural Nebraskans feel they understand the upcoming change in how they will receive their television signal either very or fairly well.
- Many of the households that will be affected by the change to digital television signal say they don't understand the issue very well or don't understand it at all. Over one-third (38%) of respondents that only receive their television signal over the air say they don't understand the change at all (11%) or not very well (27%).

### *Introduction*

Starting in mid-February 2009, all television stations in the country can only broadcast a digital signal. This change does not affect households that currently receive their television signal from a cable or satellite TV provider, only those that receive their signal over-the-air through an antenna or rabbit ears. The 2008 Nebraska Rural Poll included questions related to television viewing, providing a picture of the effect this change will have on 2,496 randomly selected non-metropolitan Nebraskans.

### *The Nebraska Rural Poll*

The Nebraska Rural Poll is an annual survey of rural Nebraskans that was started in 1996 to give local and state leaders a better understanding of the issues, challenges and concerns of Nebraska's rural citizens. The Rural Poll focuses on such issues as community, government policy, well-being and work. Core questions are included every year; over time these core questions will provide insight about trends and changes occurring in rural Nebraska. In addition, each year rural citizens and government officials form an advisory committee that identifies key issues or topics to include in the survey.

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### Sources of Television Signal

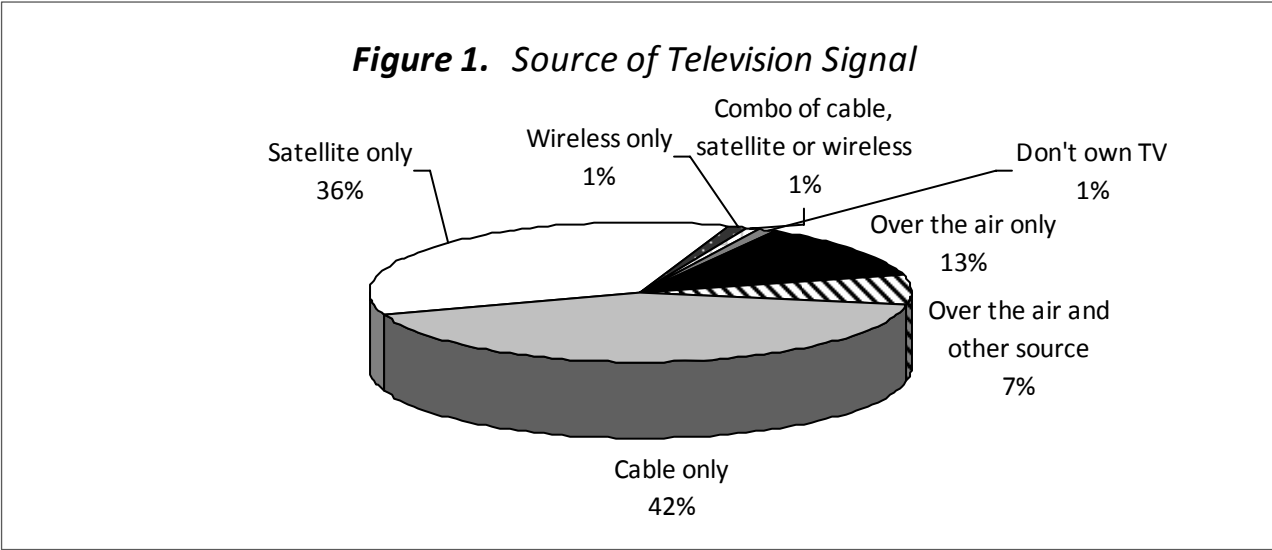
Thirteen percent of rural Nebraskans currently receive their television signal only over the air, using an antenna or rabbit ears (Figure 1). These households are the ones that will be affected by the change to digital television signal. Another seven percent receive their signal over the air, but also receive a signal through another source, such as from a cable or satellite provider. These households may have to make changes to continue to receive their signal over the air. Forty-two percent receive their signal only through a cable TV provider, 36 percent receive it only from a satellite TV provider, and one percent receive their signal only through a wireless TV provider. Another one percent receive their television signal through a combination of cable, satellite or wireless providers. The remaining one percent indicated they don't own a television.

Residents of smaller communities are more likely than residents of larger communities to be affected by the change to digital television signal. Persons living in or near smaller communities are more likely than

persons living in or near larger communities to receive their television signal over the air only. Seventeen percent of persons living in or near communities with less than 500 persons currently receive their television signal only over the air, compared to 12 percent of persons living in or near communities with populations of 5,000 or more. Another 12 percent of persons living in the smallest communities receive a signal over the air but also receive a television signal from another source.

Residents of the South Central region are more likely than persons living in other regions of the state to be affected by the change. Sixteen percent of persons living in the South Central region receive their television signal only over the air. An additional six percent receive a signal over the air, but also receive a signal from another source. Only six percent of Panhandle residents receive their signal over the air only, and another four percent receive a signal over the air but also receive television signal from another source.

Younger persons and lower income households are more likely than older



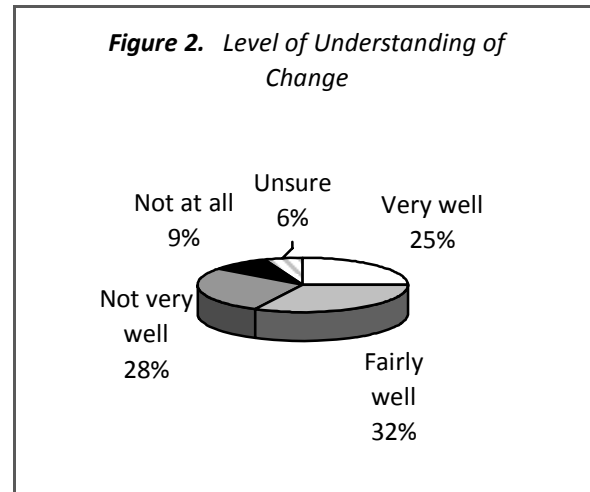
persons and high income households to be affected by the change. Eighteen percent of persons age 19 to 29 receive their television signal over the air only, compared to approximately 11 percent of persons over the age of 50. Twenty-one percent of respondents with the lowest household incomes receive their television signal only over the air, compared to six percent of persons with the highest household incomes.

***Level of Understanding of Changes***

Most rural Nebraskans feel they understand the upcoming change in how they will receive their television signal either very or fairly well. One-quarter (25%) of rural Nebraskans feel they understand the upcoming change very well (Figure 2). An additional one-third (32%) believe they understand the change fairly well. Over one-quarter (28%) believe they understand the change not very well and nine percent don't understand the change at all. Six percent were unsure.

Many of the households that will be affected by the change to digital television signal say they don't understand the issue very well or don't understand it at all. Over one-third (38%) of respondents that only receive their television signal over the air say they don't

understand the change at all (11%) or not very well (27%). Forty-one percent of the households that receive a signal over the air but also receive a signal from another source either don't understand the issue at all (7%) or not very well (34%). It should be noted, however, that this survey was answered by respondents in March and April. Continued publicity of this upcoming change may have changed residents' level of understanding and perhaps more residents may now better understand this change and how it will affect them.



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***Methodology***

A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in February and March to approximately 6,200 randomly selected households. Responses were received from 2,496 Nebraskans living in the 84 non-metropolitan counties in the state - a response rate of 40 percent. Metropolitan counties not included in the sample were Cass, Dakota, Dixon, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and Washington. The margin of sampling error for this study is plus or minus two percent based on the total sample at the 95% confidence level. The margin of sampling error is higher for results based on subgroups of respondents. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to well-being, community, energy, climate change, television viewing and personal finances. For more detailed information about the survey methodology and the respondent profile, see Research Report 08-1 available online at <http://cari.unl.edu/ruralpoll/report08.shtml>.

**Appendix Table 1. Source of Television Signal by Community Size, Region and Individual Attributes**

	<i>How do you currently receive your television signal?</i>							<i>Chi-square (sig.)</i>
	<i>Over the air only</i>	<i>Over the air and another source</i>	<i>Cable TV only</i>	<i>Satellite TV only</i>	<i>Wireless TV only</i>	<i>Combo of cable, satellite and wireless</i>	<i>Don't own TV</i>	
<i>Percentages</i>								
<b><u>Community Size</u></b>	(n = 2333)							
Less than 500	17	12	17	49	1	1	3	$\chi^2 = 225.02^*$ (.000)
500 - 999	13	11	29	46	1	0*	0*	
1,000 – 4,999	11	6	39	41	1	1	2	
5,000 – 9,999	12	2	48	36	1	1	0*	
10,000 and over	12	5	56	25	0*	1	1	
<b><u>Region</u></b>	(n = 2425)							
Panhandle	6	4	36	48	1	3	0*	$\chi^2 = 102.0^*$ (.000)
North Central	9	7	37	43	0*	2	3	
South Central	16	6	43	33	1	0*	1	
Northeast	13	7	49	29	1	1	1	
Southeast	13	8	39	37	1	1	2	
<b><u>Age</u></b>	(n = 2426)							
19 - 29	18	3	34	41	0	1	3	$\chi^2 = 110.9^*$ (.000)
30 – 39	11	7	34	46	0	1	2	
40 – 49	13	7	41	37	1	1	1	
50 – 64	11	8	44	37	0*	1	1	
65 and older	12	7	53	25	2	1	1	
<b><u>Household Income</u></b>	(n = 2229)							
Less than \$20,000	21	4	44	26	1	1	3	$\chi^2 = 104.6^*$ (.000)
\$20,000 - \$39,999	16	7	41	34	1	1	1	
\$40,000 - \$59,999	9	7	41	42	0*	0*	1	
\$60,000 and over	6	7	45	40	0*	1	0*	

0\* = Less than 1 percent.