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Celebrating 25 Years of the Nebraska Rural Poll

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Cornhusker Economics

Celebrating 25 Years of the Nebraska Rural Poll

In 2020, the 25th annual Nebraska Rural Poll will arrive in mailboxes across the state. For 25 years, the Poll has examined many topics of concern to rural Nebraskans and accumulated a rich dataset for state and community leaders.

The Nebraska Rural Poll was first conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Agricultural Economics in 1996 under the leadership of Dr. John Allen and Dr. Sam Cordes. Each year since, 7,000 surveys are mailed to randomly selected households located in the nonmetropolitan counties of the state. The goal of the poll is to give rural Nebraskans and their leaders a better understanding of the issues, opportunities, challenges and concerns of Nebraska's rural citizens. By understanding what issues rural Nebraskans are most concerned about and how they see the future, state and community leaders can do a better job of supporting citizens and improving the state's quality of life. Results from the survey are released in a series of three to five reports each year, depending on the number of topics included in the questionnaire. These reports are distributed to state lawmakers, news media, local economic and community development groups as well as rural citizens. In addition, the reports are posted [online](#) where interested parties from across the globe have accessed the data. The Department of Agricultural Economics, Nebraska Extension and Nebraska Rural Futures Institute currently financially support the survey.

For 24 years, this survey has focused on topics such as agricultural policy, energy, the environment, climate change, government, crime, education, health care, housing, immigration, taxes, community development strategies, technology and work. While these important and sometimes controversial topics draw the interest of the media, another set of core ques-

10-19Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	1-3-20
Livestock and Products,			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	*	*	*
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	177.98	154.65	*
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	150.98	*	*
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	215.75	232.36	208.96
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated	49.84	*	*
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	68.52	81.44	73.54
Slaughter Lambs, woolled and shorn, 135-165 lb. National.	134.55	*	148.60
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	386.15	393.90	420.81
Crops,			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	4.53	3.82	426
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Columbus, bu.	3.52	3.59	3.69
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Columbus, bu.	8.13	7.91	8.69
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	5.75	5.84	5.98
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	3.24	*	3.39
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	*	175.25	*
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	103.00	107.50	107.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	87.50	95.00	95.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	155.00	156.50	160.50
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	53.00	51.00	50.00
* No Market			

tions on community and well-being provide insights about trends and changes occurring in rural Nebraska. These questions, repeated in every Poll, examine satisfaction levels with an array of community characteristics, such as infrastructure, amenities, services and leadership. Other repeated questions deal with the respondents' level of satisfaction with their current personal or household situation, including employment and income. These questions provide community leaders directions to improve life for its residents. Members of the Rural Poll team have been examining and presenting these trends to community groups to help them make sense of the data and how it affects their community or region.

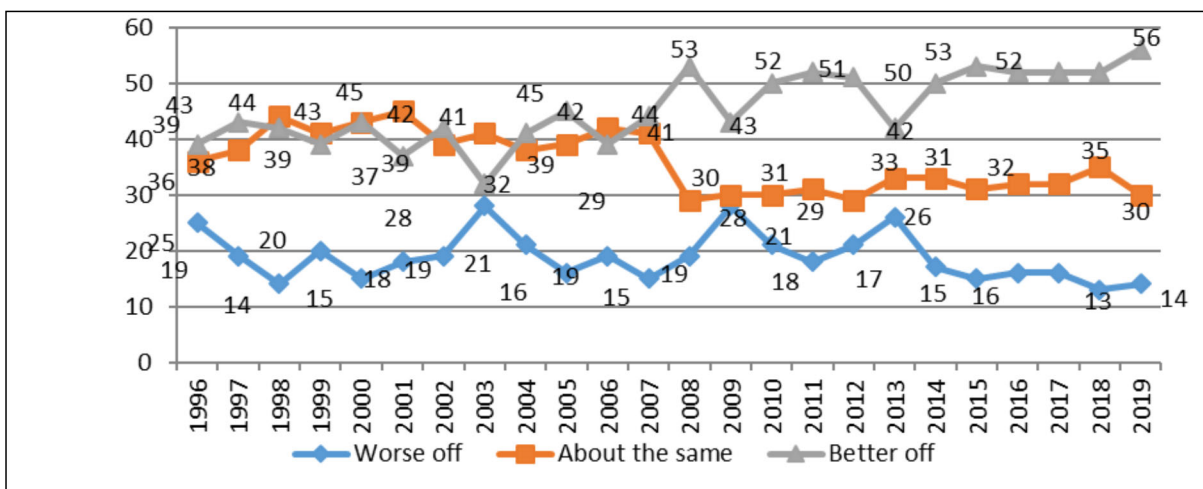
Some of the trends identified during the first 24 years include:

- The proportion of rural Nebraskans satisfied with many social services (nursing home care, medical care services, senior centers and mental health services) has generally declined across all years of the study. In addition, satisfaction with entertainment services (entertainment, retail shopping and restau-

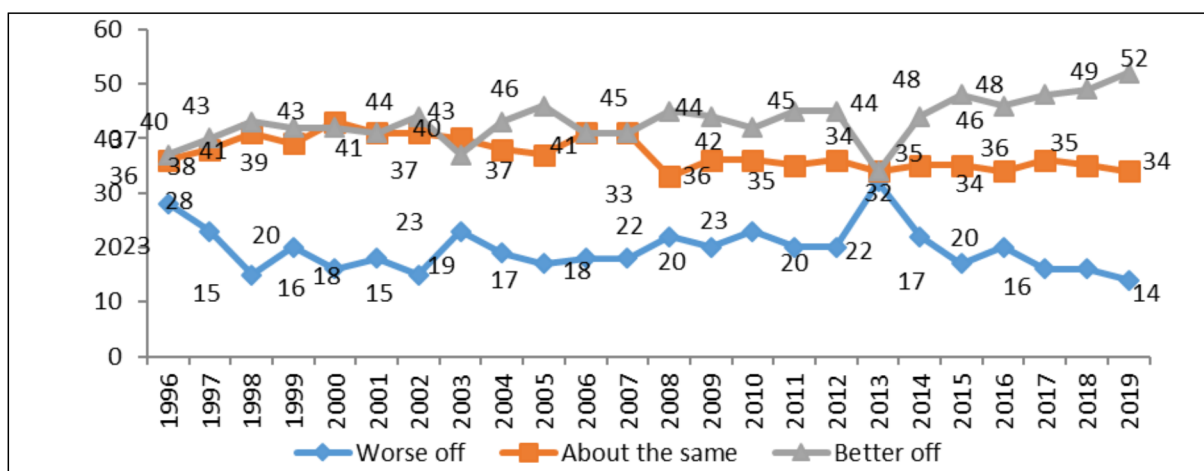
rants) have also generally declined over the past 20 years.

- Rural Nebraskans have generally given positive reviews about their current situation over the past 24 years. Each year the proportion of rural Nebraskans who say they are better off than they were five years ago has been greater than the proportion saying they are worse off than they were five years ago, especially during the past six years when the gap between the two has widened. The average proportion saying they are better off than they were five years ago has been approximately 45 percent. The average proportion believing they are worse off has been approximately 19 percent.
- When looking to the future, respondents' views have also been generally positive. The proportion saying they will be better off ten years from now has always been greater than the proportion saying they will be worse off ten years from now. In fact, the gap between the two has gradually widened since 2013.

Well-Being Compared to Five Years Ago: 1996 - 2019



Well-Being Ten Years from Now: 1996 - 2019



The Nebraska Rural Poll has remained relevant by its collaborations with other University faculty, state agencies, community/economic development groups and rural citizens. Each year, these individuals and groups serve in an advisory capacity to identify key issues or topics to include in the survey.

In a recent evaluation of the Nebraska Rural Poll, end users of the data provided examples of how they have used the results.

- *The Nebraska Rural Poll is the preeminent dataset for all things rural in Nebraska. It is an invaluable tool for municipalities, counties and planning consultants. (An economic developer)*
- *The Rural Poll has always provided a basis of information that we can use to better understand what is happening in rural Nebraska. It has given us a snapshot of the social and economic issues facing our communities and has helped us in our organization's programming. (A representative from the Nebraska Main Street Network)*
- *Some of the most insightful comments about what Nebraska needs to do to assist in the rural areas have come from results of the Rural Poll. Nebraskans are very willing to let us know what they think and feel. (An economic/community developer)*
- *I use the Rural Poll to provide information to the Unicameral when I have specific legislative initiatives that require fact-based research. It is the premier poll giving an idea of rural Nebraska's feelings and beliefs. (An economic developer)*

These testimonials are just a sample of how this robust data treasure, with input from over 64,000 nonmetropolitan Nebraskans over the past 24 years, has been used by policymakers, state agencies, University faculty and staff, community/rural development organizations, and local economic developers to explain current trends and provide guidance as they plan for the future of rural Nebraska. As an example, the Nebraska Information Technology Commission recently used Rural Poll data on broadband adoption and access to monitor the state's broadband plan. And, data collected on the housing stock and support for housing programs/strategies provided communities with vital information they need to address a critical issue for new resident recruitment and retention.

The data have been used in many grant proposal applications, presentations to community groups, evaluations and needs assessments for Extension programming, and in other grant-funded projects. Findings from the Poll are regularly lifted up in local, state and national news such as National Public Radio (NPR) as well as legislative conversations. Other states have modeled survey efforts after the Poll, including Mississippi, Texas, South Dakota and Ohio. Academic articles using Poll data have examined community satisfaction, migration intentions, and residential preferences. The Nebraska Rural Poll started out over 20 years ago as a research tool but today its reach goes well beyond that.

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