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# Farmers's Preferences for the Structure of Agriculture, Communities and Employment in the Future

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# Cornhusker Economics

## Cooperative Extension

Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources  
Department of Agricultural Economics  
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

### Farmers' Preferences for the Structure of Agriculture, Communities and Employment in the Future

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	2/25/00
<b><u>Livestock and Products,</u></b>			
<b><u>Average Prices for Week Ending</u></b>			
Slaughter Steers, Ch. 204, 1100-1300 lb Omaha, cwt. ....	\$62.78	\$67.24	\$67.84
Feeder Steers, Med. Frame, 600-650 lb Dodge City, KS, cwt. ....	79.21	89.82	93.45
Feeder Steers, Med. Frame 600-650 lb, Nebraska Auction Wght. Avg. ....	80.82	96.97	96.79
Carcass Price, Ch. 1-3, 550-700 lb Cent. US, Equiv. Index Value, cwt. ....	93.80	101.28	103.97
Hogs, US 1-2, 220-230 lb Sioux Falls, SD, cwt. ....	25.25	40.50	41.63
Feeder Pigs, US 1-2, 40-45 lb Sioux Falls, SD, hd. ....	*	49.45	44.00
Vacuum Packed Pork Loins, Wholesale, 13-19 lb, 1/4" Trim, Cent. US, cwt. ....	92.10	99.75	111.80
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., 115-125 lb Sioux Falls, SD, cwt. ....	64.75	64.75	80.88
Carcass Lambs, Ch. & Pr., 1-4, 55-65 lb FOB Midwest, cwt. ....	150.00	148.00	170.00
<b><u>Crops,</u></b>			
<b><u>Cash Truck Prices for Date Shown</u></b>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Omaha, bu. ....	2.69	2.91	2.80
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Omaha, bu. ....	1.86	1.95	1.95
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Omaha, bu. ....	4.27	4.87	4.76
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Kansas City, cwt. ....	3.27	3.33	3.22
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Sioux City, IA, bu. ....	1.22	1.28	*
<b><u>Hay,</u></b>			
<b><u>First Day of Week Pile Prices</u></b>			
Alfalfa, Sm. Square, RFV 150 or better Platte Valley, ton. ....	*	*	85.00
Alfalfa, Lg. Round, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton. ....	40.00	32.50	85.00
Prairie, Sm. Square, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton. ....	65.00	*	*
* No market.			

Tensions continue to develop as farmers and ranchers face changing international marketing conditions, changes in their communities and changes in the overall structure of food and fiber production. In the most recent Nebraska Rural Poll, farmers and ranchers were asked their preferences about the future as well as their expectations for what is to come.

The Nebraska Rural Poll is an annual study sent to residents living in the 87 non-metropolitan counties in the state. Metropolitan counties not included in the sample are Cass, Dakota, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy and Washington. The self-administered questionnaire was mailed in February 1999 to approximately 6,100 households. This study is based on 3,036 responses received. The 18 page questionnaire included questions pertaining to well-being, community, work, the future of rural Nebraska and local finance issues. This report provides comparisons of farmers and ranchers to the general rural population regarding their preferences and expectations for the future of rural Nebraska.

#### Farm Ownership

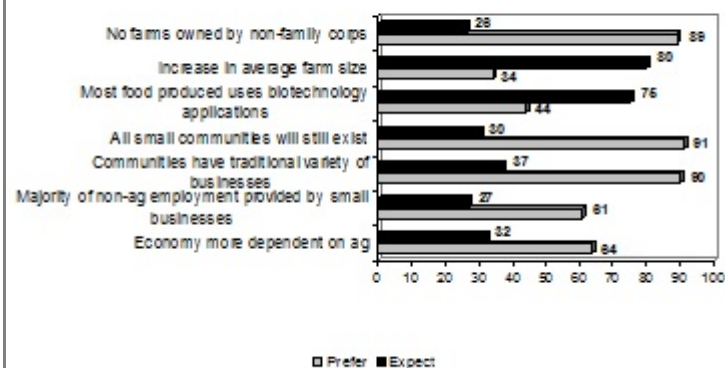
When asked about farm ownership, 89 percent of farmers and ranchers preferred that no farms would be owned by non-family corporations twenty years from now; yet only 26 percent of them expected that to be the case in the future (See Figure 1). These responses were very similar to the general population: 80 percent preferred no corporate ownership of farms and ranches and only 29 percent expected that to be the case.

#### Farm Size

When farmers and ranchers were asked whether they preferred an overall increase in farm size, only 34 percent preferred an increase. Yet 80 percent expect to see the



Figure 1. Farmers' Preferences and Expectations for Agriculture, Community and Employment



average acreage of Nebraska farms increase in the future. The general rural population differed from the farmers ranchers. Thirty-three percent of rural Nebraskans indicated that they would like to see an increase in farm size while only 66 percent expected this to occur.

### Food Produced Using Biotechnology

Currently an international debate is occurring over the use of biotechnology in food and fiber production. When farmers and ranchers in rural Nebraska were asked if they preferred that the majority of food be produced using biotechnology, 44 percent preferred that future. Seventy-five percent expected that to be the case. Farmers and ranchers differed with the general public on this issue as well. Only 36 percent of rural Nebraskans preferred the use of biotechnology while 65 percent expected biotechnology to be used to produce a majority of our food and fiber in the future.

### Maintaining Rural Communities

Farmers and ranchers were also asked whether they preferred that all small communities (with populations of 500 or less) still exist in rural Nebraska in the future. Ninety-one percent indicated that was their preference. Yet only 30 percent expected that to occur. These responses were similar to the overall rural population with 85 percent preferring all small communities continue to exist and 35 percent expecting that to occur.

Respondents were also asked if they preferred a blend of traditional business in their communities. Ninety percent of the farmers and ranchers preferred that future scenario, yet only 37 percent expected that to occur. Similar results were found when examining the overall rural population: 88 percent preferred a blend of traditional businesses but only 44 percent expected that to happen.

### Non-Ag Employment

How employment in non-agricultural businesses should be structured in rural Nebraska was another question asked. When asked if they preferred the majority of non-ag employment to be provided by small businesses, 61 percent of agricultural producers preferred that future while only 27 percent expected that to occur. The overall population differed dramatically when this aspect of development was addressed. Forty-eight percent of the general rural population preferred that scenario, while 32 percent expected it to occur.

### An Economy More Dependent on Agriculture

As to the future of the state's economy, 64 percent of the farmers and ranchers would prefer that it become more dependent on agriculture, yet only 32 percent expect that to occur. Again, a difference exists between farmers and ranchers and the general rural population. Less than one half (48%) of the overall rural population preferred an economy that was more agriculturally dependent and only 29 percent expected that to occur.

### Future Summary

While differences exist between farmers and ranchers and the general rural population over what they prefer the future of rural Nebraska to look like, there are some similar patterns to their preferences. Continued family farm ownership and a slowing of the expansion of acres per farm is the preference for agriculture noted by both groups. As for the future of rural communities, the preference of both farmers and ranchers and the general rural population is to continue to support these entities by providing opportunities for smaller non-ag related businesses.

The conflict between the preferences and expectations of farmers and ranchers and their rural neighbors illustrates some important focal points for future policy debates about the future of rural Nebraska and agriculture's role in that future.

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For more information on these and other Rural Poll Reports see <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/rural/ruralpoll.htm>