



Perceptions of Rural America

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Combining surveys and in-depth research methods, an understanding of social currents, and advice on plans of action, GQR has emerged as one of the premier companies in the research world. It has elected national leaders on many continents. It has helped CEOs manage difficult social concerns. And it has guided organizations seeking to advance major public issues.

The mission of GQR is to help leaders and organizations that are trying to succeed in an era of change and uncertainty. Armed with surveys and in-depth research and actionable ideas, we help organizations change the world in which they operate.

The CEO, Stanley Greenberg, has served as pollster to President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, and their national campaigns.

We have decades of experience helping organizations in the U.S., Europe, and globally win attention to their issues, and influence the public and government. Our clients include public interest groups, foundations, NGOs and unions. GQR is known for its work on building receptivity to change, technology, globalization and international cooperation.

Introduction

Based on 242 in-depth interviews of rural, urban, and suburban Americans in several regions of the country, this study shows that respondents hold strongly positive views about rural life in America, seeing it as the repository of traditional values, closely-knit communities and hard work. At the same time, these perceptions are tempered by the economic and social challenges facing these regions and the poor prognosis for their economic future. This means that perceptions of rural America are centered on a series of dichotomies - rural life represents traditional American values, but is behind the times; rural life is more relaxed and slower than city life, but harder and more grueling; rural life is friendly, but intolerant of outsiders and difference; and rural life is richer in *community* life, but epitomized by *individuals* struggling independently to make ends meet. Rural America offers a particular quality of life including serenity and aesthetic surroundings, and yet it is plagued by lack of opportunities, including access to cultural activities.

It is difficult to imagine the suburbs or cities of our country evoking such a range of seemingly paradoxical views. They emerge because Americans both within and outside of rural America perceive rural America as a distinct culture in many ways:

- *Different economy* – Respondents perceive rural America as being based on an almost completely agricultural economy. In reality, farm employment is 7 percent of all rural employment. Adding .8 percent for farm input supplier employment, and 3.9 percent for processing and marketing jobs, the total is still only 11.7 percent for all agriculture related jobs in rural America.
- *Different values* – Respondents perceive that rural communities symbolize “America” because they revolve around families committed to religious values and the liberal traditions of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.
- *Different environment* – Respondents perceive that rural America is serene and beautiful, populated by animals and livestock and landscape covered by trees and family farms.
- *Different atmosphere* – Respondents perceive that rural America is friendlier and more relaxed than urban or suburban America. It is seen as a safe place to raise kids in the context of a society concerned with materialism and characterized by moral decline.

All of these differences mean that many respondents see rural America and its residents as making a distinctive contribution to American life. Rural America, as the people interviewed see it, helps perpetuate the values that define America, like individualism and self-sufficiency; rural Americans are the nation’s backbone as the suppliers of food, and they represent the last open space in an environment with a rapidly developing suburban landscape.





At the same time, survey participants see rural America in jeopardy. A significant proportion of respondents see a rural America plagued by persistent poverty, rooted in low wages and dismal job opportunities. When asked to name the most important problems facing rural America, lack of financial resources and other opportunities top the list. Taken together, lack of money (19 percent), price of crops (14 percent), and lack of opportunities (11 percent) account for 44 percent of responses. Respondents are also concerned about the decline of the “family farm” and the challenge smaller farms face in trying to recoup their investments because of low commodity prices. They identify a number of reasons for this perception of rural life:

- The family farm, the symbol of rural living and values, is undermined by the rise of vertically integrated, corporate farms, which makes it more difficult to compete in a market with already depressed prices.
- Rural land and lifestyle is being overtaken by urban sprawl and suburban housing development, which prices land out of reach of ordinary citizens and reduces the availability of farmland.
- Government regulation, particularly environmental regulations and rules governing what people grow, prevents the market from working for rural residents.

Paradoxically, while many respondents identify low agricultural profitability and job insecurity as the most important problem facing rural America, few people mention other low-wage employment – either in the service industry or manufacturing sectors – as part of the problem. Instead, both rural and non-rural respondents are focused on the issues that plague agriculture, despite the fact that only 2 percent of rural residents interviewed identify themselves as farmers, and less than 10 percent of the rural populations even live on farms. Throughout the 1990s, a majority of U.S. farm operator households received wages and salary from off-farm employment.

In addition to problems with agricultural profitability and lack of jobs, many respondents (including non-rural respondents) are aware that rural areas face inadequate access to healthcare, fewer educational choices, few opportunities for professional advancement and few cultural resources.

Methodology

This report is based on 242 in-depth interviews with residents of rural, suburban and urban America. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, based in Washington, D.C., designed and administered these in-depth telephone interviews at the request of the Kellogg Foundation, conducted September 6-October 5, 2001 (no interviews were conducted the week of September 11th, due to the terrorist attacks).

Respondents were selected through random digit dialing, and included respondents of appropriate gender and racial distribution. Regional quotas were established to ensure representation from urban, suburban, and rural areas, as well as from the following locations: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Des Moines, Iowa; Atlanta, Georgia; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Little Rock, Arkansas; Jackson, Mississippi; Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina (suburban only); and Riverside/San Bernardino, California (suburban only).

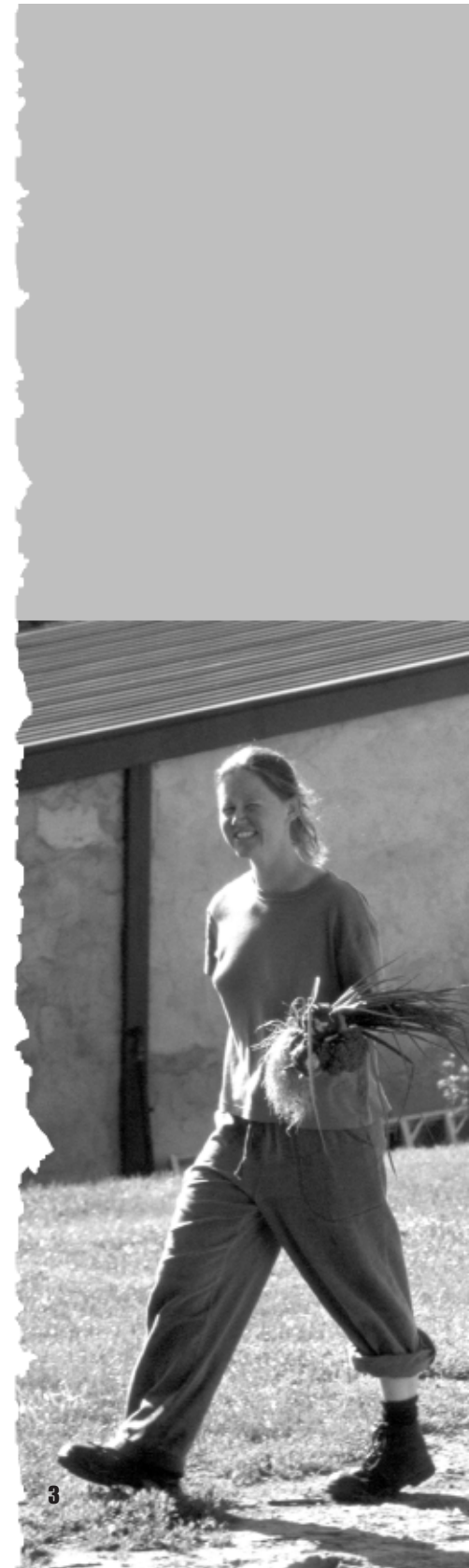
The geographic regions were selected to represent the considerable diversity of rural America. Respondents in rural areas also represented a range of industries – farming (e.g., Des Moines), services (e.g., Albuquerque) and manufacturing (e.g., Atlanta) – but with an eye to reflecting rural America’s racial diversity. Interviews were conducted in different kinds of cities and suburbs including aging, blue-collar cities (e.g., Pittsburgh), booming white-collar cities (e.g., Raleigh-Durham), and white (e.g., Des Moines) and racially mixed suburbs (e.g., Albuquerque). Because there was interest in the level of connection among rural, suburban and urban areas, rural states without substantial urban or suburban populations, such as the Plains States (e.g., North and South Dakota) were not included.

Because these data are qualitative in nature and the sample size is relatively small, conclusions must be drawn with caution. The quantitative data in the report serve as a guide to help understand larger trends in the qualitative data, but are not generalizable to the U.S. population.

American Pastoral: The Simple Life, The Puritan Ethic and Traditional Values

Agriculture plays the predominant role in respondents’ perceptions of rural America. Despite the fact that farming accounts for less than 11.7 percent of rural employment, the overwhelming majority of people in our study - both rural and non-rural - believe agriculture is the dominant industry of rural America. When asked to name the main industries of rural America, nearly all respondents name agriculture, farming, or ranching. Factory work was the only non-agricultural industry that registered with a significant number of respondents (15 percent). According to the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture, the largest share of rural jobs comes from the service sector, which employs over half of all rural workers. Service sector combined with the manufacturing sector employs two out of three rural workers.

The study’s participants demonstrate very little awareness of a service sector in rural America, except the notion expressed by several respondents that urban and suburban America, with their Wal-Marts and Targets, are spreading to rural America, eroding the rural landscape and corroding the rural culture. Over-development (17 percent) is the second most frequently named problem facing rural America, trailing only lack of money/poverty.





Respondents' notions of rural America are dominated by images of the family farm, crops and pastures. The three most common images of rural America for rural, suburban and urban respondents were farms and crops (32 percent), pastures (21 percent), and animals (12 percent). This very strong association of farming with rural America reflects the past when the vast majority of rural counties depended on farming as their primary source of income. Today, according to the ERS, less than a quarter of all rural counties depend of farming for their primary source of income, and those rural counties are home to only nine percent of the rural population.

Country Life

Through this study, we are able to view the portrait respondents' paint when describing rural America. Family members toiling over a small farm stand is at the center of the painting, but in the background are broad brushstrokes of rolling hills, open space, abundant trees, ditch banks and dirt roads. Taken together, this landscape comprises what many respondents refer to as "the country." Country life, as they view it, is serene, peaceful, and slow-paced. Non-rural residents speak in glowing terms about the peaceful, stress-free living of country life. A suburban New Mexico native, for instance, referred to "*the serenity and beauty and peacefulness*" of rural life. And a suburban Atlanta resident said that rural America invokes images of a "*peaceful, relaxing, fresh air kind of thing.*"

Rural respondents see rural areas as relatively free of crime and as a place where children can play safely. As one respondent from a rural community outside Jackson, Mississippi, stated, "*I got a lot of kids and I don't like to go up to town [where] you can't run around. There's so much cars and traffic and stuff [in town] and I stay in the country with [the kids].*" Describing the safety of living in the country, another rural resident noted, "*I sleep with my windows open and nine times out of ten, I go to bed with my doors unlocked. And I don't have to lock my car...or my truck.... You can leave things out and they're there the next morning, and that's why I like it here.*"

The perception of country life also encompasses people living a simple life, without the material trappings of city life. As one suburban Albuquerque resident comments, "*I think they pick to be in a rural area and are happy with those kinds of things that go along with that. They may not have as many opportunities to make above the average income in the area but they purposely make that trade-off, so that is not necessarily bad.*" Several rural respondents conveyed that the lack of material wealth is a worthwhile trade-off of living in the country. What they lose in wealth, these respondents feel they gain in the slower pace of life, the spiritual satisfaction, and the simplicity of rural life. As one rural respondent from the Mississippi Delta explains, "*I feel that they are more down to earth and have a more sense of who they are and more of what life is all about toward family and faith and things of that nature.*" At the same time, 46 percent of rural respondents say that they have considered leaving the region.

The Communal Individual

Respondents believe that this tranquil landscape of the country is populated with hard-working people struggling on their own to make a living. There is a strong sense that rural America represents “American values.” For many Americans, farming life, particularly the “family farm,” epitomizes what it means (or used to mean) to be an American. As a Des Moines native explains, “[Rural America is] the American way of life really.” A rural Georgia respondent remarks of rural America, “It’s what America is about. It’s about farm... The farmers were the backbone of America for a long time. I still feel like they still are.” In particular, many respondents volunteer that rural residents are hard working and self-sufficient. And when asked whether people in rural areas and small towns or cities and suburbs are more hard working, 53 percent say rural residents are more hard working and only 10 percent say cities and suburbs. Many respondents seem to feel that rural Americans personify the Puritan work ethic, although they do not use that term. A respondent from Des Moines succinctly expresses this view, “The first thing I think of is family farmers, small farms, people working hard to make a living.”

In many ways, rural America represents the American frontier. Non-rural respondents have a perception of rural Americans as individuals working independently on their farms to provide a living for their families and a common good – food – for the country. In fact, 70 percent of non-rural respondents believe that the term “self-sufficient” better describes rural areas and small towns than cities and suburbs; only 13 percent believe cities and suburbs are more “self-sufficient.” A suburban resident outside of Jackson, Mississippi describes rural Americans as, “people living on their own, not having a lot of outside help.” A rural Pennsylvania respondent reiterates that feeling, “I think there’s a job to be done, they know it has to be done, and they’re gonna be the ones to do it, because nobody else is gonna fall in. So I don’t know how you classify that. They have a lot of self-responsibility.” Rural Americans share this view of themselves; 71 percent agree that small towns and rural areas are more self-sufficient than cities and suburbs. As one rural native area outside Atlanta noted, “you have to be tough in the country because you have to scratch and work like hell.”

This perception of rural individualism is combined with a sense that rural communities are more tightly knit than cities and suburbs. Three-quarters (75 percent) of rural respondents and two-thirds (65 percent) of non-rural respondents agree that “commitment to community” better characterizes small towns and rural areas than cities and suburbs. Only 9 percent of rural participants and 16 percent of non-rural participants think of cities and suburbs as more committed to community than small towns and rural areas. As these participants see it, everyone knows each other in small towns in ways that are just not possible in urban setting:

The community tends to be a lot closer knit. You know who your neighbors are. You know who your community is (suburban Albuquerque).

Everyone knows everyone. Everyone cares about everyone. If my child were to be out late at night and she needed help or anything, there would be no one here that wouldn’t help them (rural Jackson).





That's just the sense you get from the small town that I live in. It's just you belong to a church and you do Sunday dinners with your family and everybody visits everybody and stuff like that. Everybody knows everybody, everybody's friends with everybody. Everybody's family, they all associate together (rural Atlanta).

Three-quarters of respondents say that rural residents have stronger families than people in the suburbs and cities; only 5 percent say urban and suburban residents have stronger families. Rural respondents (83 percent) are more likely to believe “strong sense of family” better characterizes rural people, while 69 percent of non-rural respondents concur. Some people indicated that rural areas have a stronger sense of family out of necessity because they are spread out geographically. Several non-rural respondents remarked that rural people need to foster community ties because there is no one else to help them in their social and economic struggles. As one Albuquerque city resident says of rural Americans, “*they kind of have to stick together 'cause there's nothing else to do.*” Without strong community ties, these respondents feel that rural Americans will be completely isolated.

Rural America will come together quicker for their fellow...they have to struggle so much so they really do depend on each other (rural Little Rock).

They have to be more caring and thankful to one another because they have to depend solely on their neighbors for help. In town, there are the police and ambulances, but in rural [areas] you have to depend more on your neighbor (urban Little Rock).

I guess in rural areas, families are more tight-knit because they're in a small town. They don't have the stuff to take them away like in the city (suburban, Raleigh-Durham).

Respondents attribute rural America's strong sense of family and religious faith in part to the need to stick together because of their isolation from the larger urban and suburban populations. A native of suburban Little Rock recalls her upbringing in a rural community that she felt was “*committed to family because in rural areas, like where I grew up, I had so many cousins and nephews and stuff. Even people that were distantly related. If anything went wrong they were right here.*”

Families, Religion, and Traditional Values

Related to the dual notion that rural Americans are both alone on their family farms and closely tied to their local communities is the idea reported by respondents that rural Americans typically have a strong sense of traditional values. As one urban Albuquerque resident says of rural Americans, “*I think they're a very hard-working group of individuals, not always on the cutting edge, but I think they're very hard-working and have very strong moral*

and ethical beliefs and actions.” A resident of suburban Jackson relates her experience growing up in a rural area:

We were taught to have strong moral and ethical values. You didn't try to cheat or hurt somebody else. I was taught if you couldn't help, you don't hurt. You do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. You try to live a good moral, decent respectable life.

More specifically, traditional values reflect a commitment to family, community and religious faith. From a list of phrases, respondents were most likely to choose “strong sense of family” (33 percent), “hard working” (31 percent), “commitment to community” (21 percent) and “strong religious beliefs” (20 percent) as the best characterizations of rural America. A suburban New Mexican characterizes rural America in the following way: “Tradition, religious beliefs. They value family more than city people.” This common theme was also echoed by other respondents:

[Rural Americans'] values are more on family, religion, not so much on money and trying to make a buck, just more on being with their families (suburban Jackson).

They have the values that the forefathers intended when they settled in this country (rural Atlanta).



Table One

Which words or phrases best characterize rural America? (multiple responses accepted)

A strong sense of family	33%
Hard working	31%
Commitment to community	21%
Strong religious beliefs	20%
Self-sufficient	14%
Loyal to their country	11%
Tough or resilient	5%
Behind the times	4%
Tolerant of others	3%
Lacking initiative	2%
Sophisticated	1%

Non-rural Americans tend to ascribe rural Americans' strong sense of family and religion to a lack of distractions. A suburban Des Moines native explains, “I would say that the small towns have a better sense of community, a



better sense of family and probably a stronger religious sense only because there are fewer distractions.... That's as simple as I could put it." People who live closer to big cities, they believe, aren't as religious and lack close family ties because there are more things vying for their attention. As one native of Des Moines describes it, "I guess I would put it that people who are from smaller towns with sometimes less distractions of things, have more central core values than what is exhibited by people who live in the city where they have lots more to distract themselves with."

The Inner Circle

Rural and non-rural respondents share an overwhelmingly positive view of the people, the values, and the culture of rural America. In fact, for 84 percent of respondents (including 82 percent in non-rural areas) rural America conjures up generally positive images. As mentioned earlier, respondents primarily think of rural Americans as diligent individuals with strong families in close-knit communities. At the same time, rural and non-rural residents overwhelmingly associate the phrase "behind the times" with rural areas. It is not entirely clear this is considered a negative attribute, given that some respondents see traditional values as equivalent to "old fashioned" values. For example, one rural Little Rock respondent remarks, "We are behind the times. That's good in a way. We could stand a little coming up to the 21st century. I guess that's good. The gang problem is not bad here. We don't have a drug problem here." Several people who associate "behind the times" more with rural America also say that rural Americans are catching up because of access to the Internet and television.

Rural and non-rural residents overwhelmingly associate the city and suburbs with sophistication. "Sophisticated" is the one characteristic respondents think clearly better characterizes cities and suburbs (77 percent) than small towns and rural areas (9 percent). However, the lack of sophistication is not necessarily seen as a negative trait but a lifestyle choice.

Rural and non-rural residents are divided about tolerance. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of rural residents see themselves as more tolerant while non-rural residents are split on the issue (44 percent believe rural areas more tolerant and 40 percent cities and suburbs). The non-rural respondents who remarked on rural America's intolerance typically offered this criticism after mentioning many positive attributes of rural America. In several regions, non-rural respondents view rural America as less tolerant:

I would say that in general they have pretty positive values, although they many not always be the most progressive people (suburban Albuquerque).

Not being close to major cities can be a negative sometimes. In rural America, they are not exposed to other peoples and other ways because they are out in a rural area, their own little area and everybody is the same. That's a negative when you are not exposed to other people and other cultures (suburban Pittsburgh).

Intolerance. Where I live there are very few people that are not white and people don't accept them. It's the way people are, not all of them, but a lot of them. (rural Des Moines).

[Rural areas have] problems with being so insular that their views can often be very backwards. A greater propensity for nationalism...not seeing the world because sometimes they have not even been outside of the state, let alone the country. So it makes it easier to...when you are in a small community like that, it becomes this us/them mentality (suburban Albuquerque).

Rural respondents are much more likely to feel that rural towns are as tolerant as or more tolerant than cities and suburbs. Many rural respondents regret what they see as unfair depictions of rural Americans as “hicks” or “rednecks.” A rural Jackson respondent explains, “*the movies portray rural American individuals as that they are backwater, somewhat slow, somewhat dimwitted, which is pretty much wrong.*”

Among rural residents, there is a tension between the emphasis on close-knit communities and the ability of “outsiders” to integrate into these communities. White rural respondents in places like the Mississippi Delta are reluctant to talk about racial tension, but they discuss their discomfort with the influx of city people as urban areas sprawl into rural areas.

Decline of an American Institution: The End of the Family Farm

The romantic notion of country living would be idyllic to many respondents were it not for their knowledge of the pervasive economic hardship rural Americans face. The overwhelmingly positive perception of rural America sits uncomfortably beside a vision of rural Americans as poor people with little hope for economic progress. Taken together, 44 percent of respondents name lack of money/poverty, price of crops, and lack of opportunities as the main problems facing rural America. One urban Little Rock respondent sums it up, “*I know there's areas where rural, and I guess in some ways, rural America represents traditional values, agriculture and small towns. Positive things like that. But I think there's also a lot of poverty and limited opportunities*” and another suburban New Mexican said, “*It could sometimes be a harsh place to live and at other times, it could be a real communal and pleasant place to live. It can go either way.*”

When asked what are the main problems of rural America, 24 percent of respondents talk about the problems of farming – the prices for crops (14 percent), the decline of the family farm (8 percent) and farmers selling off their land (2 percent). Rural residents are particularly concerned about the price of crops (23 percent). Respondents in rural, suburban, and urban areas see the farmer as the protagonist in a rural American struggle to survive against increasing odds

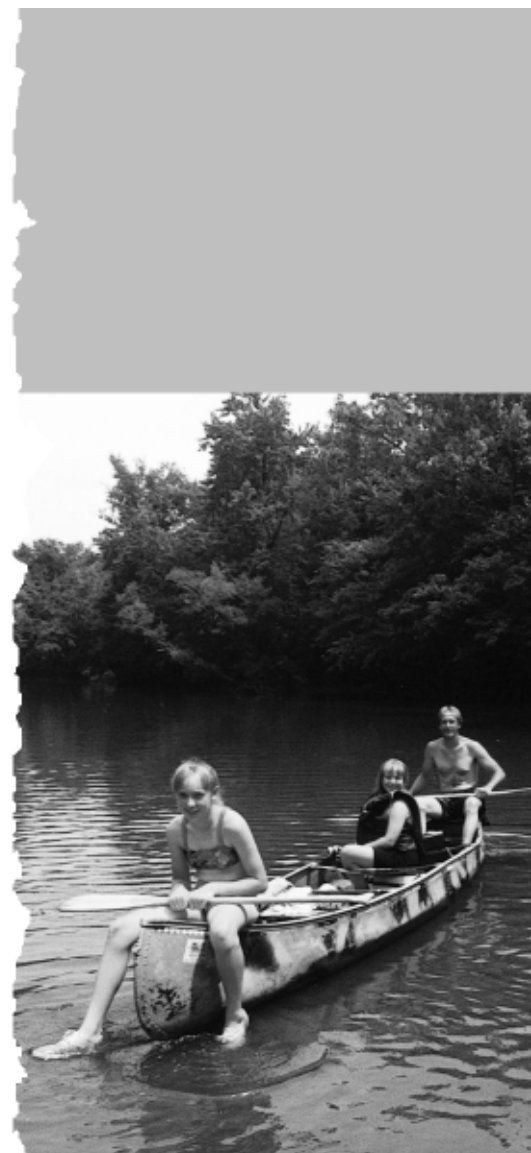




Table Two

What problems do you think rural America faces? (multiple responses accepted)

Lack of money/poor	19%
Over-development/sprawl	17%
Price of crops	14%
Droughts/weather	11%
Lack of opportunities	11%
Decline of family farm	8%
Isolated/lack of exposure	8%
Pollutions	7%
Schools/education	6%
Influences from the city	4%
Young people moving away	4%
None	4%
Farmers selling land	2%
Behind the times	2%
Transportation	1%
Other	13%

While respondents clearly recognize that many family farmers are poor and losing their farms, most non-rural respondents have difficulty explaining the underlying causes of the problems. One urban Pittsburgh respondent explained, “*They don’t get paid enough for their product.*” A few others mention competition with low cost international commodities as a cause of depressed crop prices.

Rural respondents, on the other hand, are acutely aware that farming does not pay well for small farmers. As one rural Des Moines resident puts it:

The cost of farming itself, because it costs so much to buy the seeds and the fertilizers, and then you get back so little from it anymore

Another rural resident of New Mexico notes the difficulty in getting an adequate price for beef, particularly in light of the cyclical nature of the market.

I don’t want to say people don’t want to farm and agriculture any more, but it’s getting like pretty tough. It gets pretty rough to get out there and have to buy equipment. I don’t know if you priced some of the equipment or not, but they’re pretty high...money’s hard to come by around here. As far as you know, you’ve got cattle you only get paid once a year when you go to market (rural Albuquerque).

Many respondents feel that the decline of the family farm and the out-migration of younger people pose a threat both to the economic survival of the small farmer and to the traditional American values the family farmer exemplifies for many respondents. A few Des Moines natives expressed this feeling well:

I think a lot of young people think that the place to be is the city. They don't realize until it's too late what they've given up.

There are a lot less younger people, younger generation are not upholding the values. I would say the loss of somewhat main values and just people. They move away for better jobs.

Other Economic Challenges

Thirty percent of respondents say that lack of money (19 percent) and the absence of opportunities (11 percent) are the biggest problems facing rural America (see Table Two). Both rural and non-rural respondents note the relative paucity of job prospects that offer decent pay, benefits and security. Almost half (46 percent) of the rural respondents say they have considered moving, primarily because of low pay and sparse opportunities for advancement. Even though rural respondents rarely discuss non-agricultural employment, they are aware that manufacturing jobs, especially in the South, do not pay well:

...There isn't much industry or stuff like that. Unless you're willing to leave rural America, you're pretty much stuck either at a low paying job or no advancement, stuff like that (rural Albuquerque).

There are not enough jobs, too many plants have closed and people don't have jobs here like they used to. I worked in a garment factory for twenty-three years and they closed down well they had another garment plant that made uniforms for hospitals and doctors and things and they closed down about three months ago. So we don't have a lot of business for people to have a job (rural Jackson).

The plants and stuff closing down, unemployment. Leaving people without jobs, so it's making the town a ghost town (rural Atlanta).

The concerns about poor pay are matched by a common perception among respondents that rural areas face serious limitations in access to health-care and quality education. Six-in-ten respondents, including 63 percent of rural respondents, believe that rural residents have fewer opportunities than suburban and urban residents, while only 6 percent (including 8 percent of





rural respondents) believe rural residents have more opportunities. Non-rural residents tend to recognize that cities offer their residents an array of choices when it comes to hospitals, universities, and libraries.

If you live in a major city, you have access to a lot of things. The libraries and the school facilities, the colleges and businesses and other such things that make it possible to choose. They can choose, whereas in rural areas, there will be the one library, there will be the one school and...there are limited choices (urban Jackson).

Maybe rural has less [opportunities] because they are secluded from a few of the things that go on in the cities and it is hard for them to make the money in farming and they can't get scholarships and things like that to further their education, as opposed to doctors' and lawyers' kids (suburban Des Moines).

I think there's a variety of quality of life issues, you don't get the choices that you get in the cities or suburbs, you don't have convenience of living to get to the city and suburbs, you have to drive a good distance to get anything outside of the bare minimum. Access to hospitals and that kind of thing (suburban Raleigh-Durham).

Rural respondents are keenly aware of their limited access to health-care, compared to cities and their limited educational resources. Education remains an ongoing challenge, in part because the sparsely populated areas cannot support bigger school systems either with students or revenue.

I have a granddaughter who lives with me. She has to go a long way to school. And there's just not a lot, you have to come in for everything (rural Little Rock)

We don't necessarily have the revenue that most of the city places have. That leads to smaller schools or schools that don't have the same level of technology as some of the ones in the city or urban areas (suburban New Mexico).

Our quality issue is going to be lack of proper fundamental education. It's hard to get teachers in the small school systems (rural Jackson).

Moreover, many rural respondents also worry about the departure of their youth due to lack of access to higher education.

Finding a job or going to a good educational school. Because you would have to go to a city to go to a nice good college after high school (rural Albuquerque).

The children's future. Public housing, there's no college here. Nowhere to work here. You have to go to the big city to work (rural Atlanta).

In fact, rural participants (22 percent) are significantly less likely to have a college degree than suburban (42 percent) and urban participants

(39 percent). This gap between rural and urban/suburban education levels is substantiated by national survey data.

Other Issues

Rural and non-rural residents alike see large-scale, corporate farms in a negative light. The following comments offer a flavor of respondents' feelings about these large-scale, corporate farms:

I would have to go back to farming, because the small farmer, they can't really take advantage of the economy of scale of other industries...economy of scale, they just couldn't compete (suburban Albuquerque).

I think the biggest ones are that you have large companies that are elbowing out small farms. They can't make it. If you have a guy that's making milk and he has 1,000 cows and you have 10, he's selling his milk for a lot less than you. You get elbowed out of the business and your farm goes down (urban Pittsburgh).

I guess the main problem with farming here is trying to make a living with it. And I think the problem facing the farmer is they can no longer make a living of a family farm. Well, there's plenty of land, there's just, they're going to corporate farming and the small guy don't have a chance (rural Des Moines).

Respondents see corporate farms as putting family farmers out of business, mainly by taking over their businesses and purchasing their land.

They take so much, it is down to the point now that you've got to be so competitive that you've got to own or work on or be part of one of these big corporate farms in order to survive. The big business is not helping much because they can afford to buy up all the land, because they can force the farmers out ... It's always been that way (rural Atlanta).

I think that corporate farming – the conglomerate – just to survive, you have to become a large conglomerate of other farms and I think that is eating up the small family farms. It is basically, you are either with us or you are not (urban Des Moines).

...Big companies taking over the little guy.... They buy their land and then it squeezes out the little guy and they can't make a living (suburban, Riverside-San Bernadino).

Many respondents are also concerned about over-development of rural areas. Rural respondents, in particular, accurately perceive increased in-migration from metro areas – according to the RURPI, between 1990 and 1999, 2.2 million urban residents moved into rural counties, turning many of them into bedroom communities. This in-migration produces a myriad





of negative consequences, in the minds of rural respondents. Residential development inflates land prices beyond the range of many rural Americans.

What I see happening is in a lot of the cities, people coming out to the country because they want to live the country life and they want to leave the restrictions and amenities and the evil life that they have in the city. For example, in Putnam County, they're building a development; I think it's called Reynolds Plantation. Some of the lots are going for like a million dollars, and people are complaining about having to pass through farm-lands where they see tractors and bails of hay and sheds (rural Atlanta).

Around here there are a lot of new homes going up, plans of houses, great big houses and you have to be rich to have these houses and what was here before is just like one family homes, small homes, but now it is getting to be built up pretty good. They are building homes and farmers are selling their property to these people to build homes so there goes your farm lands and your dairy cows and big gardens and stuff like that (rural Pittsburgh).

Given that respondents tend to associate rural America with trees and pastures, this land use pattern differs from their image of rural America.

Mostly it's cities moving out. And then you're not rural American anymore...that's a tough one. The people coming in, people selling their land and people coming in (rural Jackson).

We don't have any farmland any more...I mean you can't grow land, you can grow beans and corn, but we don't have enough land (rural Atlanta).

I think a lot of [rural areas] are growing faster than they are ready to accept and so they are growing out of their britches too fast, so it is hard for them to keep up with their growth (suburban, Riverside-San Bernadino).

I don't blame the farmers for selling their ground to industry when they can get a higher price for their ground, to sell it to someone that's gonna either make it a housing development or something like that. But I think taking ground out of production for housing developments and for buildings; I think that is a huge problem. I think they're going to find in the future that it's really going to be a huge problem. I mean American farmers feed the world, and they keep taking farm ground of out of production by tens of thousands of acres each year (suburban Des Moines).

Many respondents believe these land use patterns also bring in "city" values that are out of step with the rural tradition. As one respondent from suburban Albuquerque put it, the biggest challenge is, "maintaining ideas in the face of suburban sprawl." As noted earlier, many people believe that city and rural values are different. One woman from suburban Jackson conveys this in saying, "when you're not city, you're rural. You know, if you're in the city you're citified, and if you're in the country, you're ruralified."

The Government

When asked who is responsible for solving rural America's problems, only 17 percent say the federal government. Forty three percent say individuals (26 percent) or local communities (17 percent) should help themselves. As one rural respondent from Little Rock labeled it, "*big government controlling what they grow and how much they grow*" and another rural Pittsburgh resident complained about the "*restrictions on what they could use to grow with and everything.*" These sentiments are particularly strong in the West, where the federal government owns such a great deal of public land and places a variety of restrictions on water use.

The EPA. That's their biggest problem. Over regulation (suburban Jackson).

Environmental problems that face rural America are the restrictions put on them by the government and the various agencies that want to take their farms and ranches away from them and turn them into parks (suburban Albuquerque).

The government trying to tell us how to...we should run our land and take care of our land, environmentalist problems and sometimes-financial problems (rural Albuquerque).

I think they're very radical, they don't want to, they consider everything except people they're affecting. In other words, they'd rather save the silvery minnow than the farmers (rural Albuquerque).

The subsidy system also comes in for criticism because many rural respondents mention that it disproportionately helps corporate farms and prevents the free market from working, as it should. As one resident of suburban Jackson complains, "*government price control, artificially controlling the free market. It's a negative thing.*"

Sometimes subsidies can actually be a hindrance...they end up helping corporations rather than the farmers. Having water rights and water usage adequate for their needs. I have seen reports where people were buying someone's water so that they wouldn't farm (suburban Albuquerque).

I think if the government would keep their nose out of it, we wouldn't be in the mess we are today on farming. First they want you to plant crops fence row to fence row and then we're over produced and they think you have to have subsidies to get by. Well, what do you do now to get by because they've got the market so fouled up you can't make a living (rural Des Moines).

I think the biggest problem that they have right now is the fact that the government tries to control all of the crops that go to market.... Our government sets the prices of the individual crops and that is all you can charge if you want to keep being able to grow your crops (suburban, Raleigh-Durham).



Rural Tensions and Solutions

Perceptions of rural America are strongly positive, with the vast majority of survey participants offering a vision of serene and peaceful country living where people work hard to supply the nation with food and incubate traditional American values such as individualism and self-sufficiency. At the same time, people paint a bleak picture about the decline of the family farm, fleeting job opportunities and limited access to basic services such as medical care. Rural Americans, not surprisingly, are more in touch with the daily struggles of rural regions, but non-rural residents have considerable empathy for the plight of their rural neighbors. This is particularly true when urban and suburban areas maintain connections to rural areas, such as in Des Moines and Albuquerque.

Many respondents talk about problems facing rural America that are symbolic of broader challenges our society faced throughout the 1990s, whether that means the problems of urban sprawl, job insecurity, inadequate access to healthcare or the inability to afford higher education. It is clear that these shared interests and the considerable admiration of and sympathy with rural Americans create the potential to advance the issues facing rural America on policymakers' agenda, if these policy concerns can be successfully connected with the preservation of the values that make rural America such an important part of American society.



Questionnaire

(ref:UOTA TALLY)

Q.1 Hello, my name is (Interviewer Name). I'm calling for the National Opinion Surveys and the Kellogg Foundation. I would like to ask you a few questions facing our nation, state and local community. I am not selling anything and I will not ask you for a donation. Your opinions are very important and will help with this research that is designed to improve our communities.

Since this is a scientific survey, we need a balance of men and women. May I speak to the youngest man, 18 years or older, who is at home right now?

(IF RESPONDENT, CONTINUE) (IF YES, REPEAT INTRODUCTION FOR NEW RESPONDENT AND CONTINUE) (IF NO MALE) Okay, may I speak to the youngest woman, 18 years or older, who is at home right now? (REPEAT INTRODUCTION OR CONTINUE WITH INTERVIEW)

Once qualified respondent is on the phone:

Prior to beginning this survey I would like to assure you that your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any point, but we think that you will find this survey very interesting. Your phone number was randomly selected and we do not know your name or address. We will be recording the interview, so we can study all the responses. Once the study is complete all interview tapes will be erased. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent of the law.

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 Logoff

(ref:0)

Q.2 Sex of respondent (INTERVIEWER CODE—DO NOT ASK RESPONDENT)

- 01 Male
- 02 Female

(ref:GENDER)

Q.3 We also need to include people of different racial backgrounds. What is your race?

- 01 White
- 02 Black
- 03 Hispanic
- 04 (Other)
- 05 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:RACE)

Q.4 (DO NOT ASK IF HISPANIC ON PREVIOUS QUESTION) Do you consider yourself an Hispanic, Latino or a Spanish-speaking American?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:RACE2)

Q.5 Now I have a few general questions. Thinking about the country, do you think that things are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

- 01 Right direction
- 02 Wrong track
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:DIRECT)

Q.6 How about your own community and communities nearby: do you think things in this area are going in the right direction or are they on the wrong track?

- 01 Right direction
- 02 Wrong track
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:DIRCTLOC)

Q.7 How long have you personally lived in the area of the country you currently live in?

(FOLLOW UP IF DON'T KNOW): What's your best guess about how long you have lived there?)

(DON'T READ ANSWERS, BUT PRE-CODE)

- 01 (Less than 1 year)
- 02 (1-4 years)
- 03 (5-9 years)
- 04 (10-19 years)
- 05 (20 years or more)
- 06 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:HOWLONG)

Q.8 Why do you live where you live?

(OPEN END - ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

(ref:WHYLIVE)

Q.9 What do you like about where you live?

(INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR SPECIFICS)

(INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

(ref:LIKE)

Q.10 What do you not like about where you live?

(INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR SPECIFICS)

(INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

(ref:NOTLIKE)

Q.11 (ONLY ASK OF RURAL RESPONDENTS) Have you ever thought about leaving this region?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:LEAVE)

Q.12 (ONLY ASK IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED YES TO PREVIOUS QUESTION)
Why have you thought about leaving this region?

(INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR SPECIFICS)

(ref:WHYLEAVE)

Q.13 Now, I want to ask some questions about rural America. When you hear the phrase “rural America,” what is the first thing that comes to mind?

(INTERVIEWER: LOOKING FOR TOP-OF-MIND RESPONSE, BUT ALLOW RESPONDENT TO SAY A FEW THINGS IF THEY WANT TO)

(ref:TOPMIND)

Q.14 What images or pictures do you see when you think of rural America?

(INTERVIEWER: ALLOW RESPONDENT TO THINK ABOUT IT FOR A FEW SECONDS, BUT DON'T PROBE IF THEY SAY “NOTHING”)

(ref:IMAGES)

Q.15 Are these mostly positive or negative images?

(FOLLOW-UP:) Why?

- 01 (Mostly positive)
- 02 (Mostly negative)
- 03 (Both)
- 04 (Neither)
- 05 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:POSNEG)

Q.16 (ONLY ASK OF NON-RURAL RESPONDENTS) Do you know anyone who lives in a rural area?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:KNOWRUR)

Q.17 Have you ever seen or heard a story on the news about rural areas or small towns?

(FOLLOW-UP IF YES): Where did you see or hear that story? What was the story about? (OPEN-END)

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:STORIES)

Q.18 Have you ever seen a television show or movie set in a rural area or small town?

(FOLLOW-UP IF YES): What was it about? What impression did it give you about rural America? (OPEN-END)

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:MOVIES)

Q.19 Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether you associate that word or phrase with people who live in rural areas and small towns or with people who live in cities and suburbs.

(RANDOMIZE, BUT KEEP BEHIND THE TIME AND LACKING INITIATIVE AT THE END AND RANDOMIZE THE ORDER OF THOSE 2 AS WELL)

Okay, the first one is (). Do you associate () more with people who live in rural area areas and small towns OR more with people who live in cities and suburbs?

- ___ 19 Commitment to community
- ___ 20 A strong sense of family
- ___ 21 Strong religious beliefs
- ___ 22 Hard working
- ___ 23 Loyal to their country
- ___ 24 Tolerant of others
- ___ 25 Sophisticated
- ___ 26 Tough or resilient
- ___ 27 Self-sufficient
- ___ 28 Behind the times
- ___ 29 Lacking initiative

(ref:WORDBATT)

Q.30 From the list you just heard, which words or phrases do you think best characterize rural America?

(INTERVIEWER: ACCEPT UP TO 3 RESPONSES)

(INTERVIEWER PROBE: Why? What does that mean about the values of people who live in rural America?) -

- 01 33 (Commitment to community)
- 02 34 (A strong sense of family)
- 03 35 (Strong religious beliefs)
- 04 36 (Hard working)
- 05 37 (Loyal to their country)
- 06 38 (Tolerant of others)
- 07 39 (Sophisticated)
- 08 40 (Tough or resilient)
- 09 41 (Self-sufficient)
- 10 42 (Behind the times)
- 11 43 (Lacking initiative)

Q.31 What are the main industries of rural America?

(INTERVIEWER: ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES)

(ref:INDUSTRY)

Q.32 What problems do you think rural America faces?

(INTERVIEWER: GET ONE RESPONSE AND PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, THEN GET 2ND RESPONSE AND PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, THEN GET 3RD RESPONSE AND PROBE FOR SPECIFICS)

(ref:PROBLEMS)

Q.33 What do you think are the biggest agriculture and farming problems facing rural America?

(IF RESPONDENT SAYS THEY NAMED THESE ALREADY, MOVE ON TO NEXT QUESTION)

(PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, BUT ACCEPT "DON'T KNOW" WITHOUT PROBING)

(ref:FARMING)

Q.34 What do you think are the biggest environmental problems facing rural America?

(IF RESPONDENT SAYS THEY NAMED THESE ALREADY, MOVE ON TO NEXT QUESTION)

(PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, BUT ACCEPT "DON'T KNOW" WITHOUT PROBING)

(ref:ENVRMNT)

Q.35 What do you think are the biggest economic problems facing rural America?

(IF RESPONDENT SAYS THEY NAMED THESE ALREADY, MOVE ON TO NEXT QUESTION)

(PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, BUT ACCEPT "DON'T KNOW" WITHOUT PROBING)

(ref:ECON)

Q.36 What do you think are the important issues facing quality of life in rural America?

(IF RESPONDENT SAYS THEY NAMED THESE ALREADY, MOVE ON TO NEXT QUESTION)

(PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, BUT ACCEPT "DON'T KNOW" WITHOUT PROBING)

(PROBE: Atlanta and Delta interviews only): What about racial issues?

(PROBE: New Mexico interviews only): What about immigration?

(ref:QUALIFE)

Q.37 Do you think people who live in rural areas have more or fewer opportunities than people who live in cities and suburbs?

(PROBE FOR SPECIFICS, BUT ACCEPT "DON'T KNOW" WITHOUT PROBING)

(ref:OPPRNTY)

Q.38 Who do you think is responsible for providing solutions to the problems facing rural America?

(ROTATE)

- 01 Federal government
- 02 State government
- 03 City or county government
- 04 Religious organizations
- 05 Local community organizations
- 06 Employers or businesses
- 07 Individuals
- 08 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:SOLUTION)

Q.39 Finally, I would like to ask you a few questions for statistical purposes.

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat or what?

- 01 Democrat
- 02 (Independent)
- 03 Republican
- 04 (Other)
- 05 (Don't know)

(ref:PTYID1)

Q.40 Would you call yourself a strong \@PTYID1\ or a not very strong \@PTYID1\?

- 01 Strong
- 02 Not strong
- 03 (Don't know)

(ref:PTYID2)

Q.41 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?

- 01 Closer to Democrats
- 02 Closer to Republicans
- 03 (Neither/independent)
- 04 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:PTYID3)

Q.42 Thinking in political terms, would you say that you are Conservative, Moderate, or Liberal?

- 01 Liberal
- 02 Moderate
- 03 Conservative
- 04 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:IDEO1)

Q.43 Many people weren't able to vote in the election this past November for President. How about you? Were you able to vote, or for some reason were you unable to vote?

- 01 Voted
- 02 Ineligible/too young
- 03 Did not vote
- 04 (Can't remember/Don't know/Refused)

(ref:DIDVOTE)

Q.44 (ONLY ASK IF RESPONDENT VOTED IN 2000) In the 2000 election for president, did you vote for Democrat Al Gore, Republican George W. Bush, or Green Party candidate Ralph Nader?

- 01 Democrat Al Gore
- 02 Republican George W. Bush
- 03 Green Party candidate Ralph Nader
- 04 (Other)
- 05 (Don't remember/refused)

(ref:VOTE00)

Q.45 In what year were you born? (DON'T KNOW = 0000)

____ Year

(ref:AGE)

Q.46 What is the last year of schooling that you have completed?

- 01 1 - 11th grade
- 02 High school graduate
- 03 Non-college post H.S.
- 04 Some college
- 05 College graduate
- 06 Post-graduate school
- 07 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:EDUC)

Q.47 Are you married, single, separated, divorced, or widowed?

- 01 Married
- 02 Single
- 03 Separated/divorced
- 04 Widowed
- 05 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:MARITAL)

Q.48 Do you have any children 18 years of age or younger?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:KIDS)

Q.49 Do you own your own home or do you rent?

- 01 Own
- 02 Rent
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:RENT)

Q.50 In terms of your job status, are you employed, unemployed but looking for work, retired, a student, or a homemaker?

- 01 Employed
- 02 Unemployed
- 03 Retired
- 04 Student
- 05 Homemaker
- 06 (Other)
- 07 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:EMPLOY)

Q.51 (IF RETIRED) Before you retired, did you work?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:RETIRED)

Q.52 (IF WORK OR WORKED) What is/was your occupation?

(IF NECESSARY): What exactly does that work involve?

- 01 (Professional)
- 02 (White collar managerial)
- 03 (White collar clerical)
- 04 (Service employee)
- 05 (Farmer)
- 06 (Unskilled blue collar)
- 07 (Skilled blue collar)
- 08 (Other)
- 09 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:OCCUPTN)

Q.53 What is your religion?

- 01 (Protestant - INTERVIEWER ACCEPT: Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist)
- 02 (Catholic)
- 03 (Jewish)
- 04 (Other)
- 05 (None)
- 06 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:RELIGION)

Q.54 Aside from wedding and funerals, how often do you attend church or religious services — every week, once or twice a month, several times a year, or hardly ever?

- 01 Every week
- 02 Once or twice a month
- 03 Several times a year
- 04 Hardly ever
- 05 (Never)
- 06 (Don't know/refused)

(ref:CHURCH)

Q.55 And finally, strictly for verification purposes, can I have just your first name?

(ref:NAME)

Photos on pages 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, and 16
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