



2008 Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania Rural Residents



2008 Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania Rural Residents

By:
Fern K. Willits, Ph.D., A.E. Luloff, Ph.D., and Michael W-P Fortunato
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology
Pennsylvania State University

November 2010

This project was sponsored by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

Information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the views of individual Board members or the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. For more information, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 625 Forster St., Room 902, Harrisburg, PA 17120, telephone (717) 787-9555, fax (717) 772-3587, email: info@rural.palegislature.us.

Executive Summary

About one fourth of all Pennsylvanians live in rural communities. Over the years, rural Pennsylvanians have experienced some challenges that differ from their urban counterparts. For example, declines in farming, forestry, mining, and manufacturing have meant higher rates of unemployment; low population densities tend

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5
Goals and Objectives	5
Methodology	5
Results.....	7
Conclusions.....	12
References.....	14

to increase the cost/availability of local services; distances from urban centers restrict access to specialized facilities; and lagging communication networks limit links to the global economy.

To learn more about how rural Pennsylvanians view the issues facing the state and their local communities, how their perceptions differ from urban residents, and how these views have changed across time, the researchers surveyed more than 1,200 rural Pennsylvanians in 2008. They also surveyed more than 1,000 urban residents. The researchers then combined the responses with information from previous rural surveys conducted in 1999, 2000, and 2003 to gauge changes over time.

The research found that while 56 percent of rural respondents were at least “more or less satisfied” with the way things were going in the state in 2008, they were not as satisfied as they were in 1999, when 88 percent indicated the same level of satisfaction. The percentage of respondents who indicated that “things would get worse in the next year or so” also increased from 18 percent in 1999 to 60 percent in 2008.

In 2008, rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to be dissatisfied with their current situation and more pessimistic about improvements in the state’s economy. While there were many areas of concern, jobs, health care, and energy resources were the top issues.

Rural respondents were more likely (82 percent) than urban (72 percent) to feel job availability should be given higher priority in the future in terms of public policy issues. Among rural respondents, there was popular support for virtually all strategies for creating jobs, including promoting small businesses and providing incentives to attract, expand, and develop new businesses. The single exception was the absence of support for lowering environmental standards to keep/attract business and industry.

Rural respondents were more likely than urban to support traditional activities such as manufacturing and

oil, gas, or coal extraction, and less likely to see recreation, travel, e-commerce, and biotechnology as viable means for strengthening the state’s economy.

Rural and urban respondents did not differ in the importance they gave to health care and energy issues. More than 80 percent of all respondents felt development of alternative energy resources needed greater priority and 78 percent felt health care needed greater priority.

Among rural respondents, concern for health care was greatest among those with lower education and income levels, but the high priority given to developing energy resources did not differ by the respondents’ gender, age, education, or income.

Solar and wind energy sources were seen as the most important areas of new energy development by both rural and urban respondents, although rural respondents were more likely than urban to support oil, coal, and gas development and less likely to endorse nuclear and biodiesel fuels.

Overall, rural respondents felt their local communities were desirable and at least fairly safe, and that they would likely remain much the same in the foreseeable future. However, feelings of community desirability and safety had declined across time, with 49 percent giving “very desirable” ratings in 2000 compared to 33 percent in 2008, and 74 percent giving “very safe” ratings in 1999 versus 39 percent in 2008.

Rural respondents saw their communities as good places to raise children and to retire and rated them highly in terms of the quality of the natural environment. However, they were critical of the lack of local job opportunities, available health care, housing, and recreational facilities. Local issues of greatest concern focused on human service needs, including strengthening schools and attracting additional health care providers.

Rural respondents were more likely than urban to participate in local organizations, to do volunteer work in the local community, and to serve on government commissions or boards.

In 2008, more than half of the rural respondents expressed little or no confidence in the legislature or the governor. Local governments were seen as somewhat more trustworthy, but were not rated highly for competency in attending to citizen concerns, managing public funds, or planning for the future.

Despite their overall distrust of the governor and legislature, rural respondents tended to see the state as having a major responsibility for meeting the critical need of increasing job opportunities, developing new energy sources, and enhancing overall well-being.

Introduction

In Pennsylvania, more than 3 million people live in rural counties, accounting for roughly one quarter of the state's population.

Although outnumbered by urban residents, rural residents represent a large and critical minority within the commonwealth. Rural areas are the repositories for, and rural people the stewards of, many of the state's natural resources, including agricultural lands, recreational locales, historical settings, wildlife habitats, and scenic vistas – all priceless amenities prized by rural and urban residents alike (Frey, 2001).

During the years, opinion polls of rural residents have monitored current and changing views of rural Pennsylvanians to provide information about the nature of rural attitudes and perceptions to state and local decision makers, educators, and the public.

However, society continues to change as the nation and state are faced with new challenges. Economic fluctuations and long-term demographic trends may impact the views of both rural and urban residents toward state and local issues, and contribute to shifts in perceptions and attitudes. Ongoing research about such shifts in citizen views is important to policymakers at the state and local levels and to the public.

To that end, the researchers conducted a survey in 2008 (prior to the presidential election) to provide a more recent view of the opinions of rural Pennsylvanians.

Goals and Objectives

This research was conducted to increase public understanding of the views of rural Pennsylvanians about a wide range of issues facing their communities and the commonwealth, and to assess how these views have changed across time.

The project goals were to: assess current attitudes and perceptions of rural Pennsylvanians about issues related to the economy, government, the environment, personal well-being, volunteerism, charitable giving, and estate planning; compare the attitudes of rural residents with those of their urban counterparts and determine how, if at all, these attitudes relate to citizen involvement in their communities; and track changes in rural citizens' views over the past seven to eight years.

Methodology

Assessing Attitudes and Perceptions

To accomplish the first goal, the researchers mailed surveys to 3,000 adults living in rural¹ counties of the commonwealth in 2008. Because the response rates were low and included a disproportionate number of respondents over 65 years of age, the researchers surveyed an additional sample of 750 adults from the same rural counties. This survey was targeted to younger households. Of the 3,750 total addresses obtained for the survey, 270 were incorrect or incomplete. Of the remaining 3,480 possible rural respondents, 1,251 returned usable information (a 36 percent response rate).

The researchers compared the sample in terms of gender, age, education, and income with estimates for rural counties available from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 American Community Survey. Information for six of the 48 counties included in the rural survey (Cameron, Forest, Fulton, Montour, Potter, and Sullivan) were not included in the American Community Survey data. However, responses from these counties were small (there were only 21 cases in the sample from these six counties combined) and in many ways similar to several of their neighboring counties, which were included.

The researchers found that the sample differed significantly from the population for all four variables tested (See Table 1 on Page 6). Females were somewhat overrepresented in the sample, as were those with higher education and income levels. However, the most striking difference between the sample and the 2007 American Community Survey was in age distribution. The sample contained fewer respondents who were under age 35 (13 percent) than the 2007 American Community Survey (43 percent), and more respondents who were 55 years old and older (46 percent) than the 2007 American Community Survey (28 percent).

To account for any biases that may occur because of these differences, the researchers weighted the survey data to match the age distribution in the 2007 American Community Survey. This weighting meant the resulting statistics were more likely to accurately reflect Pennsylvania's total rural population. However, it also added to the error variance in the estimates and reduced the usable sample size for this analysis. Weighting meant each individual case in the sample was treated as if it were either more than or less than a single observa-

¹ The research used the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's definition of rural: a county is rural when the number of persons per square mile within the county is less than 274 (the average statewide population density per square mile). Forty-eight of the state's 67 counties were considered rural by this definition.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Overall Rural Pennsylvania Population and the 2008 Survey Sample of Rural Pennsylvanians

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Rural Population^a (%)	2008 Sample (N=1,251)^b (%)
Gender**		
Male	49	45
Female	51	55
Age***		
< 35 Years	43	13
35- 44 Years	14	19
45-54 Years	15	23
55-64 Years	12	20
65 Years and Over	16	26
Education***		
< HS Grad	15	6
HS Grad	46	31
Some post high school	21	32
College grad and over	12	16
Post bachelor's degree	7	16
Household Income***		
< \$20,000	22	14
\$20,000 - 39,999	26	23
\$40,000 - 59,999	20	24
\$60,000 and over	32	39

Source of rural population characteristics data is from the 2007 American Community Survey.

** Sample and population differ significantly at the .01 level.

*** Sample and population differ significantly at the .001 level.

^a Population figures were compiled for “adults” in 42 of the 48 counties defined as “rural” for this study. The meaning of “adults” varied somewhat depending upon available census calculations. For gender and age, the data were for all persons 18 years and older. Education was for persons 25 years and older. The data were drawn from the American Community Survey (ACS) 3-Year Estimates. These estimates were generated by the U.S. Census Bureau based on ACS data collected between 2005 and 2007 for all counties with more than 20,000 residents, which did not include Cameron, Forest, Fulton, Montour, Potter, or Sullivan counties. Since these counties have very small total populations and are generally surrounded by similar counties included in these figures, their omission was not expected to change the distributions substantively or significantly.

^bActual number of cases varies from the total due to missing data.

tion. For example, each individual in the “less than 35 years” age category (underrepresented in the sample) was treated as if he/she was 3.4 cases. Weighting assumes the additional cases did not differ from those that would have been obtained had a larger number of individuals in this age category been included in the sample – an un-testable assumption. Conversely, each case in the “65 years and older” category was counted as only about 0.6 of a person, thus sacrificing some of the power of that sample.

Frequency distributions of data from the weighted sample were calculated and summarized to provide a general picture of rural Pennsylvanians’ attitudes, per-

ceptions and concerns about state and local issues related to the economy, government, the environment, their own well-being, and other issues. The margin of error for the data was plus-or-minus 3 percent.

Because the current study looked to chart changes in rural attitudes across time, the researchers chose items that were drawn largely from previous surveys of rural Pennsylvanians carried out in 1999, 2000, and 2003. Questions dealt with the respondents’ views on a variety of statewide issues, local community issues, and personal concerns. In addition to the issues addressed in the previous surveys, the research sought information on the extent of volunteerism, civic engagement, and local versus national/international charitable giving. Information was also obtained on estate planning and the nature of the intergenerational transfer of property – issues expected to impact patterns of land use in rural areas in the years ahead.

Methodology for the Rural/Urban Comparison

The research also included a mail survey of urban residents. Of the 3,500 sample names and addresses obtained for residents in urban counties, 255 were undeliverable. Of the remaining 3,145 possible respondents, 1,024 returned completed survey forms (a 33 percent response rate).

Data from this study were compiled and merged with the rural sample and the researchers assessed the differences between the rural and urban responses.

Additional analysis, using only the rural sample, addressed the relationships of selected personal characteristics of the rural respondents (such as gender, age, marital status, education, income, and residence location) to their answers to the various attitude questions. For the rural/urban comparison, unweighted sample data were used.

The .05 level was used to determine statistical significance. When relationships were judged to be statistically significant at the .05 level, there was less than a 5 percent chance of obtaining such a pronounced relationship simply by chance if no relationship existed in the population.

Methodology for Comparing Past and Present Survey Results

The researchers merged data from 1999² and 2003³ surveys sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and a 2000 survey⁴ sponsored by Penn State, with data from the 2008 rural sample to assess changes in rural attitudes on issues for which comparable data across these time periods were available.

Methodology for Ascertaining Current Attitudes of Rural Pennsylvanians

Data from the 2008 survey were used to assess current attitudes and perceptions of rural Pennsylvanians about issues related to the economy, government, environment, personal well-being, volunteerism, charitable giving, and estate planning. Three areas of concern were analyzed: statewide issues, local community issues, and personal concerns and involvement.

In the descriptive analysis of these issues that follows, the distributions of the responses given by the rural sample members were weighted to adjust for the disproportionate number of older persons in the sample. For each item, a few subjects (generally between 1 percent and 2 percent) failed to answer the question and these cases were deleted from the frequency tallies.

For some items, “don’t know” alternatives were presented on the survey form and included in the tables and in the calculation of percentages. The numbers of these “don’t know” answers were small and, with only a few exceptions, are not discussed in the results.

Results

Statewide Issues

At the time of the survey in 2008, rural respondents were less than satisfied with the way things were going in the state. Although the majority indicated they were “more or less satisfied,” more than four out of 10 expressed dissatisfaction, and very few reported satisfaction. Moreover, most were pessimistic about the future, with nearly 60 percent reporting the economy would worsen in the next year or so.

While rural respondents expressed the need for the state to give higher priority to a wide range of social, economic, and environmental issues, the topics that dominated their list of concerns were the availability of

jobs, developing alternative energy sources, and health care. Moreover, there was popular support for virtually all strategies that might create jobs and develop the state’s economy. The single exception to this generalization was the general absence of support for lowering environmental standards to keep and attract business and industry.

Rural respondents expressed widespread preferences for promoting small, rather than large businesses, for providing incentives to attract out-of-state businesses and to expand existing industries, and for increasing the technical skills of workers in the state. Promoting new businesses through start-up funding and supporting new and existing businesses with technical assistance were also viewed by many as strategies deserving priority. Some types of economic activity were seen as meriting greater emphasis than others, with health care, oil and gas extraction, educational services, and agriculture heading the list of priority industries. There was much less support for such things as telecommunications and e-commerce, outdoor/wilderness recreation, and tourism/travel.

Although rural respondents expressed concern for protecting/conserving the environment, they were most likely to emphasize environmental issues related to food safety and clean water. However, they were not likely to support environmental regulation of agriculture. Rural respondents expressed concern about the nation’s ability to meet its energy needs in the future, and were supportive of developing new sources of energy as a means for doing so. Solar and wind energy received the greatest support.

When asked who should be responsible for creating jobs and developing Pennsylvania’s economy, for protecting the commonwealth’s natural resources, and for developing new energy sources, rural respondents were most likely to indicate state government (not the federal government, private industry, or citizen groups). However, very few of those surveyed felt they had a great deal of trust in the governor, state legislature, or the state courts.

Local Community Issues

Most rural respondents felt their local communities were desirable and safe, and that they would likely remain the same in the foreseeable future. They saw their communities as good places to raise children and

² The Center for Rural Pennsylvania. (2000) *An Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania’s Rural Residents*. Harrisburg, Pa.

³ The Center for Rural Pennsylvania. (2004) *2003 Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania Rural Residents*. Harrisburg, Pa.

⁴ Pennsylvania State University. (2003) *Citizens’ Viewpoint*. Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. <http://citypt.aers.psu.edu>.

to retire, and they rated the areas highly in terms of the quality of the natural environment. However, they were critical of the lack of local job opportunities, available health care, housing, recreational facilities, and level of citizen involvement. Local issues of greatest concern focused on human service needs, including strengthening schools, attracting additional health care providers, increasing services for seniors, and providing affordable daycare for children. Other high priority issues for future consideration were repairing local streets and roads, strengthening protective services, adding retail and service businesses, and improving the quality and safety of drinking water. Although they expressed concern over protecting open spaces from development, rural respondents were somewhat ambivalent about land use regulations that might infringe on the individual rights of landowners.

While local governments engendered much greater confidence and trust than state government, few respondents rated local government performance as “excellent.” Local officials were most often described as doing a “fair” job in improving the quality of life for residents, paying attention to citizen concerns, managing public funds and facilities, and planning for future change.

Personal Concerns and Involvement

Although the majority of rural respondents expressed satisfaction with their financial situation, a sizable minority indicated they were not satisfied, reporting they were worse off this year than last, and/or believing their situation would get worse in the coming year.

Most had friends living in the area, and more than one third had 10 or more relatives, in addition to those in their own household, in the community. Nearly half described themselves as “somewhat active” in their communities, and more than seven out of 10 said they engaged in various volunteer activities through their churches or other organizations. Almost all indicated they or other members of their household gave cash or property to charitable causes or nonprofit organizations last year. This amount varied widely, with some people reporting no donations, while others contributed thousands of dollars. The vast majority contributed to local groups and causes, especially religious and human service organizations and private/community foundations.

Less than half had engaged in estate planning by talking with their family/heirs about their wishes, and only a little more than one in four had actually drawn up a will. Owners of open space lands overwhelmingly believed their heirs would maintain the property as

open space, but also said the decision would be up to those who inherited the land. Only 7 percent of these landowners had made legal arrangements to maintain property as open space.

Most had high speed, broadband access to the Internet, and used it primarily as a source of information and for maintaining e-mail contact with friends and family members. Access to broadband connections was associated with greater use of the Internet, although it was not clear whether broadband access led to greater use, or whether those who made the most use of the Internet chose to subscribe to broadband connections.

Exploring Differences in the Attitudes of Pennsylvanians

The second analysis of the study assessed the differences between rural and urban respondents in their views concerning the state and local issues described above; and the differences within the rural population related to the individual’s age, gender, education, income, and community participation. For this analysis, all of the variables were converted to the following categories:

- **Rural vs. urban** – According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s definition, respondents living in the 48 counties with population densities of less than 274 persons per square mile in 2000 were designated as rural; those living in the 19 counties with population densities of 274 persons or more per square mile were classified as urban. Among rural counties, population densities ranged from 12 persons per square mile (Forest County) to 263 persons per square mile (Lawrence County); for urban counties, the range in densities was from 333 (Lebanon County) to more than 11,000 (Philadelphia County).
- **Personal characteristics were categorized as follows** – Age (<45 years/45-64 years/65 years and older); gender (male/female); education (high school graduate or less/some post high school education/college graduate or more); and income (<\$40,000/\$40,000-\$79,999/\$80,000 and over).
- **Community involvement** – Measured as participation in formal organizations (seldom or never/occasionally/often); volunteer activities for no monetary pay to help others in the community (seldom or never/occasionally/often); and self report on how “active” the subjects indicated they were in their communities (not at all active/not very active/somewhat active or very active).

Statewide Issues

Rural and Urban

There were significant and important differences between the views of rural and urban respondents concerning statewide issues.

Rural residents were less likely to be satisfied with the way things were going in the state, and more pessimistic about the future of the economy. Although both rural and urban respondents felt that increasing the number of jobs available should be the highest priority, rural respondents were even more likely than those living in urban counties to underscore the need for jobs, with more than 80 percent indicating there should be greater emphasis given to job creation.

Moreover, rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to support the development of oil/gas extraction industries, agriculture, heavy and light manufacturing, and coal mining as means of increasing job availability. These industry sectors are traditionally associated with rural areas. They were less supportive than urban respondents of developing educational services, biotechnology, telecommunications/e-commerce, recreation, and travel/tourism as means for increasing employment opportunities.

Personal Characteristics

There were differences in views based on gender, age, education, and income of rural respondents on statewide issues. Women were consistently more likely than men to support nearly all of the statewide issues assessed in this study, as women said these issues deserved “higher” priority in the future, with the largest gender differences in responses to the human service areas of elder care, health care, and education for children and youth. Women also were more likely than men to indicate emphasis should be given to job creation in the areas of health care and education, while men were more likely to give priority to manufacturing, development and mining. Women were more likely than men to support increasing the technical skills of workers, providing start-up funds for new businesses, revitalizing downtown areas, and providing entrepreneurship education as strategies for strengthening the state’s economy.

Older respondents, particularly those 65 years old and older, were most likely to give higher priority to combating crime/violence and drug/alcohol abuse, to assuring safe drinking water and the food supply, to assuring safe disposal of industrial wastes, and to providing elder care. They placed somewhat lower priority than younger respondents on health care, job avail-

ability, and the education of youth and children. Older respondents, more than younger ones, also supported making the extractive industries of oil/gas drilling, coal mining, and light manufacturing priority areas and thought that attracting new industries from outside Pennsylvania and promoting the state’s international trade were strategies that should be used to strengthen the economy. Older respondents also tended to provide more support for meeting the state’s energy needs through increased use of oil/gas, coal, and nuclear energy, and less support for solar energy.

Respondents with lower education and income levels gave higher priority to issues such as health care, crime and violence, drug and alcohol abuse, safe drinking water and food supplies, care of the elderly, safe disposal of industrial wastes, preservation of farmland, and homeland security/safety.

College graduates were more likely than those with less education to support developing biotechnology, e-commerce, recreation, and tourism industries as a means for strengthening the economy and creating jobs.

Those who had no schooling beyond high school were more likely than those with more education to endorse oil/gas extraction, heavy industrial manufacturing, coal mining, and agriculture as priority industries for job creation.

Respondents with lower income levels were more likely to support providing start-up funds for new businesses, providing technical assistance to new/existing businesses, providing entrepreneurship education, promoting public transportation, revitalizing downtown areas, and lowering environmental standards to attract/keep industries as strategies for creating jobs.

Respondents with lower levels of education and less income were also more likely to support various practices supportive of ensuring food and water quality and protecting the environment.

Community Involvement

The researchers looked at the relationships of three different measures of community involvement (frequency of participation in community clubs/organizations, frequency of volunteering to help others in the community, and a self-assessment of the respondent’s involvement in local activities) to determine whether those who were most engaged in community affairs would express differing views than those who participated little or not at all.

Those who reported that they occasionally or often participated in community clubs/organizations were

less likely than those who seldom or never participated to give higher priority to: health care, safe drinking water, safe food supplies, bridge and road maintenance, and homeland security. They were more likely to support biotechnology and tourism/travel as industries that should be developed to create jobs and to support the promotion of small businesses as a strategy for strengthening the economy.

Respondents who frequently volunteered and who rated their involvement in the community as high were more likely to endorse the promotion of small businesses and the provision of entrepreneurship education to citizens. Other than these associations, community involvement had little relationship to the views of rural respondents about statewide issues addressed in the study.

Local Community Issues

Rural and Urban

While rural respondents overwhelmingly reported their communities were desirable places to live, they were less likely than their urban counterparts to rate them as “very desirable” overall. Relative to urban residents, rural residents were more likely to see their communities as having relatively low costs of living, as good places to retire, and as having desirable natural environments. However, they were less likely to rate their schools, housing, health care, and job opportunities highly. While only a small proportion of both rural and urban respondents said their communities rated highly in terms of jobs, urban respondents were more than three times as likely as rural respondents to do so.

Respondents from rural and urban counties also differed in the priority they placed on different community issues. Rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to value adding retail and service businesses to their communities, attracting additional health care providers, and strengthening drug/alcohol programs. Urban respondents placed higher priority on strengthening protective services (police, fire, etc.), providing public transportation within the community, providing specialized educational programming (alternatives to public schools, literacy education) protecting open spaces, and using land use planning to guide community growth than rural respondents.

Rural respondents were more likely to rate their local governments as doing a poor to fair job in paying attention to citizen concerns, improving/preserving the community’s quality of life, managing public funds and facilities, and planning for future change than urban respondents. Rural respondents were also less likely than urban to place high levels of trust in local law enforcement.

Personal Characteristics

The survey found variation among rural respondents in how they viewed their communities and their governments, and what priorities they indicated were most important.

Older citizens and those who were most active in their communities were somewhat more likely than their opposites to view positively their communities as places to live. They were more likely than younger community members to give priority to public transportation, services for seniors, drug/alcohol abuse programs, and repairing streets and roads, and were more accepting of land use planning.

Younger respondents were more interested than older respondents in developing parks and recreation facilities.

Women were less likely than men to rate their communities highly on recreation facilities, freedom from crime, and health care; and tended to place higher priority than men on addressing human service and family issues.

Respondents with lower education and income levels were somewhat less likely to feel safe in their communities than respondents with higher education and income levels. They were also less likely to give high ratings to their communities, in terms of the cost of living, as a place to raise children, the natural environment, neighborliness, freedom from crime, available housing, recreation, and citizen involvement. They also placed higher priority on strengthening protective services, and on enhancing social services, such as services for seniors, affordable daycare for children, emergency food and shelter, and substance abuse programs.

Community Involvement

Rural respondents who were involved in their local communities tended to report higher evaluations of those communities, both overall and in terms of a wide range of specific factors, than those who were less active. Whether involvement fostered positive perceptions, or whether feeling good about the area enhanced personal involvement could not be determined from the present data, although it is likely both occurred. Participation also seemed to affect the priority given to various community issues. For example, those who volunteered frequently were more likely than those who did not to place high priority on activities such as strengthening drug/alcohol abuse programs, combating domestic violence, providing temporary housing for the homeless, providing emergency food, and providing

literacy programs for those with limited English proficiency – all programs that can be and often are staffed by volunteers.

Involvement in the community, participation in formal organizations, and frequency of volunteering also were associated with greater support for coordination of planning efforts among municipalities, perhaps reflecting greater skill and confidence in group processes for achieving social ends. Persons who participated more through formal organizations, volunteering, or simply being active in their communities also tended to evaluate their local governments more positively, and place greater confidence and trust in local officials, local law enforcement, and local schools.

Personal Concerns and Involvements

A substantial minority of both rural and urban respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their current financial situation, and an even greater proportion predicted their situations would get worse over the next year. Overall, the majority of rural and urban respondents did not differ significantly in their expressed levels of satisfaction with their financial situations at the time of the survey or their perceptions concerning their financial future.

The levels of community engagement in terms of the number of friends living in their communities for rural and urban respondents were similar. However, rural residents were more likely than their urban counterparts to have extended family members living in their communities. They were also more likely to have participated in community clubs/organizations, engaged in volunteer work, worked on various local governing bodies and served as officers in community organizations during the prior two years.

Although the survey information did not allow for comparing the per unit dollar values of charitable contributions from rural and urban respondents, the proportions of respondents reporting they made charitable donations to causes and/or nonprofit organizations did not differ significantly for rural and urban respondents. Rural respondents were, however, slightly less likely than urban to make contributions to human service organizations, environmental groups, political organizations or the arts, humanities, or history.

Relative to those living in urban counties, rural respondents' use of the Internet was limited on two fronts. First, although there was no significant difference in the proportions of people in rural and urban areas able to access the Internet, fewer rural respondents had broad-

band/high speed connections than urban respondents. Second, rural respondents made more limited use of the service they had, tending disproportionately to focus their Internet use on information retrieval, e-mail, and online purchasing.

There was also variation among rural respondents concerning their economic well-being, the extent of their community involvement, charitable giving, estate planning, and Internet use.

Women were somewhat more likely than men to be dissatisfied with their current financial situation, to have had trouble getting access to credit or loans, to have volunteered through the church, and to have contributed to human service causes. They also were frequent users of e-mail.

Men were more likely than women to have served as an officer in a community organization or on a local government board, to have donated to political causes, and to have participated in at least some estate planning.

Older residents, particularly those 65 years old and older, were more likely than younger people to be satisfied with their current financial situations. However, young people (age 44 and under), although less satisfied and more likely to have trouble getting credit or loans, were the most likely to see their lot improving over time. Conversely, middle-aged individuals (age 45-64) were the most likely to report their situation was worse than last year, and would likely be worse next year.

Older residents also were less likely to report they were active in their communities, but attended religious services more frequently, donated to religious organizations, had engaged in some estate planning, and accessed the Internet less frequently than younger people.

In general, increasing education and income were positively associated with satisfaction levels, optimism about the future, participation in one's community, charitable giving, estate preparation, and Internet access and use. The more involved residents were in their communities through formal organizational participation, volunteering, or general activity level, the more satisfied they were with their financial situations, the more friends they had in the area, and the more likely they were to have contributed to charitable causes and nonprofit organizations, done estate planning, and used the Internet for e-mail, business and education related work.

Assessing Changes in the Attitudes of Rural Pennsylvanians

The third goal of the study was to compare the views of rural Pennsylvanians as measured in the 2008 survey with those in prior studies. Although none of the earlier studies contained all of the items in the 2008 survey, each included some similar questions. The responses to the replicated items provided baseline data for addressing change. Questions dealing with meeting energy needs, charitable giving, estate planning, and other topics were new to the 2008 survey, and so no comparable data were available for comparative analysis.

Between 1999 and 2008, rural respondents became increasingly less satisfied with the way things were going in the state, and increasingly pessimistic about the future of the economy. Concern for job availability and the need for improved health care consistently topped the list of concerns. Virtually all options for creating jobs and promoting the state's economy were seen as high priority areas, and emphasis on these increased over the years, while concern for most other issues remained steady or waned. Trust and confidence in state government, and to a somewhat lesser extent local government, declined during the period.

Nevertheless, throughout the survey periods, rural respondents overwhelmingly rated their communities as desirable places to live, now and in the future. Among all issues, respondents placed an increasing priority on only a few, such as jobs, crime, and food safety. Most respondents continued to be very or somewhat satisfied with their current financial situation, and predicted that they would likely be either the same or better off next year. And, rural respondents, more than their urban counterparts, were active in their communities and engaged in volunteer work, and these involvements did not decline across time.

Conclusions

The major conclusions drawn from the study can be grouped into six general categories: issues associated with employment and income, health care, additional energy resources, low levels of confidence and trust in government, the existence of diversity in viewpoints among rural people, and community and personal involvement and engagement. Within these categories, job availability, energy development, and health care were specific issues seen as needing higher priority in the future by more than eight out of 10 rural respondents, regardless of their gender, age, education, income, or level of community involvement.

Employment and Income

The importance rural respondents place on the need for improved employment opportunities cannot be overstated. More than 80 percent of rural respondents identified improved employment opportunities as a high priority issue, and, in this regard, it outranked all other issues. It was also the most often mentioned issue in 2003 and placed second only to health care in 2000. Moreover, rural people were significantly more likely than their urban counterparts to see the enhancement of job availability as an issue and much less likely to rate their communities highly in regard to the presence of employment opportunities. Pessimism about the future of the state's economy over the next year or so was widespread and more pervasive among rural than urban respondents. More than one third of rural respondents believed their financial situation was worse than a year ago, and most felt it would stay the same or get worse in the coming year. Clearly these rural respondents feel the need for more job opportunities and an expanded rural economy.

When asked about their views concerning appropriate strategies for creating jobs and strengthening the economy, both rural and urban respondents were supportive of promoting small businesses, with more than 70 percent indicating this as a high priority, and an additional 25 percent saying it was at least worthy of being a medium priority. This overwhelming support for small business development was true regardless of a respondent's gender, age, education, or income level, and has persisted over the entire eight years surveyed.

Rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to look to traditional industries such as oil/gas extraction, coal mining, manufacturing, and agriculture, and to support economic expansion through providing incentives to attract out-of-state industries and to expand existing Pennsylvania industries, and to promote the development of large businesses. There was little support for promoting travel/tourism, e-commerce, or recreation-related activities as a means for strengthening the economy.

Health Care

Concerns over health care were widespread among both rural and urban respondents, with 79 percent of rural and 78 percent of urban respondents viewing health care as a high priority issue. Moreover, these concerns have clearly not diminished from 2000 to 2008, with the percentages of rural respondents giving higher priority ratings rivaling, or sometimes exceeding, those given to job availability across time.

Health care was also the economic activity mentioned most often by respondents to the current survey as deserving high priority as a means of creating jobs and developing the state's economy. At the local level, nearly one third of rural respondents gave "low" quality ratings to their community's health care; only 12 percent rated it highly. Compared to their urban counterparts, rural respondents were significantly more likely to give low ratings to current health care in their communities, to indicate that attracting additional health care providers to their local areas should be given high priority, and to emphasize the need for attention to local health-related issues, such as drug/alcohol abuse.

Additional Energy Resources

Questions about the need for additional energy resources were not included in prior surveys, reflecting the lack of popular recognition of this as a public issue at that time. However, increases in fossil fuel costs over the past few years have focused public attention on the growing need for accessing domestic energy sources, both through enhancement of the nation's existing energy industries and by developing various alternative resources. Political turmoil and unrest in the Middle East and less-than-cordial relationships with major oil producing nations may have increased the public's sense of urgency in this area. In 2008, additional energy resource development was second only to the need for more jobs as an issue in need of higher priority in the future – more than four out of five (81 percent) rural respondents indicated this was an issue in need of higher priority at the state level in the years ahead.

Although rural respondents were significantly more likely than their urban counterparts to suggest that increasing domestic oil and gas production held the greatest promise for meeting the energy needs of the state (one third supported this course of action), the majority of both rural and urban respondents felt developing new sources of energy to replace oil and gas held the greatest promise.

However, there was little consensus over which of the possible sources should receive the highest priority for development. Respondents from both rural and urban counties were most likely to indicate high priority should be given to solar and wind energy, and somewhat less supportive of nuclear energy, biodiesel and ethanol development, although a majority felt even these options should receive at least medium priority. Many respondents wrote in comments that all alternatives should be explored. However, which form(s) of alternative energy development should be funded by

the state remains a pertinent question. Decisions in this area will need additional information on the relative costs, availability, and social and environmental impacts associated with various forms of energy development.

Confidence and Trust in Government

Public confidence and trust in both state and local government declined sharply over the period studied. From 2000 to 2008, the percentages of rural respondents expressing a great deal or some confidence and trust in the governor declined from 75 percent to just 48 percent, and, for trust in the state legislature, the decrease was from 65 percent to 50 percent. Some of the state level changes may reflect the backlash from citizens for the self-voted pay raises passed by the state legislators in 2005 and the Governor's assent to these and/or the allegations of misuse of power by various state government officials. However, it also seems likely the loss of trust reflects citizen frustration with the faltering economy and the government's inability to quickly provide remedies to slow or reverse the trend.

Rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to express low levels of confidence in the governor. Half of rural and urban residents alike indicated they had little or no confidence and trust in the state legislature, and more than one third had little or no confidence and trust in the state courts.

Although local municipal governments fared somewhat better than state officials in the extent to which respondents indicated they had confidence and trust in them, these ratings also declined between 2000 and 2008. Rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to distrust local law enforcement, and four out of 10 respondents, regardless of residence area, had little or no trust in local officials. Asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their local governments, rural respondents were significantly more likely than urban respondents to give low performance ratings. About seven out of 10 rural respondents evaluated their local governments' performance as fair or poor in regard to managing public funds/facilities, improving/preserving the quality of life in their communities, and paying attention to citizen concerns. The percentage indicating their municipal government did a fair or poor job in planning for future change was even lower. Rural respondents involved in local formal organizations/clubs in the community, engaged in volunteer work, and/or who reported high general involvement in community life were all significantly more likely than their urban counterparts to rate the quality and effectiveness of their local governments highly. The degree of local

involvement was not statistically related to evaluations of state level government.

Differences in Viewpoints

While rural and urban respondents had different attitudes and opinions across a wide range of state and local issues, respondents' socio-demographic characteristics more strongly influenced their opinions and attitudes. For example, women were more concerned than men with human service issues, safety, education, the environment, services for youth and seniors, recreation, the arts, and the availability of jobs.

Older rural respondents were more likely than younger ones to put higher priority on health care and safety concerns, such as combating crime and violence, drug and alcohol programs, safe water and food supplies, safe disposal of industrial wastes, regulation of mining/drilling and storm water runoff. They were most likely to believe that strengthening traditional industry sectors was the ideal strategy for developing the local economy, indicating extractive industries and manufacturing as the best ways to create jobs in rural areas. They also were more likely than their younger counterparts to express high levels of satisfaction with their communities, to want to maintain the community as it is, and to support land use planning to guide community growth.

There were marked differences in the priority rural respondents gave to a wide spectrum of social, economic, and environmental issues depending on their education and income. In general, as education and income levels increased, respondents expressed less concern for improving health care, crime and violence, eldercare, safety of food and water supplies, drug and alcohol abuse, farmland preservation, and homeland security. They were also less likely than those with lower education levels and income to support strengthening the economy by promoting traditional industry sectors, and more likely to endorse biotechnology, telecommunications/e-commerce, tourism, and recreational activities as viable sectors for development.

Those with higher education levels and more income were less likely than those with less schooling and lower incomes to give high priority to strengthening protective services (police, fire, etc.), schools, drug and alcohol abuse programs, combating domestic violence, and providing emergency food and shelter for the homeless. They were more supportive of protecting open space from development, using land use planning to guide community growth, and encouraging multi-municipal coordination in planning.

Those with high education levels and incomes also

were most likely to report their communities as very desirable places to live and the most likely to believe it would become even more desirable over the next 10 years.

Community and Personal Involvement/Engagement

Survey items dealing with the respondents' engagement in their local communities offered a glimpse into the public lives of rural Pennsylvanians. Almost half of rural respondents said they had participated in one or more community clubs or organizations over the past two years and more than 70 percent had done volunteer work, either through their religious organization or in the larger community, in the same time period. Moreover, these rural respondents were more likely than their urban counterparts to have participated often in community clubs/organizations, to be engaged in voluntary activities for no monetary pay, to have been an officer in a community organization, and/or to have served on a government commission, committee, or board. The proportion of persons indicating they attended church and/or did volunteer work through their church, declined somewhat between 2003 and 2008, but other forms of engagement did not. Although the level of involvement in one's community had little relationship to how he/she viewed statewide issues, such involvement was associated with a greater likelihood of giving high priority to a variety of local human service issues, being more likely to support coordinated land use planning, contributing to charitable causes, and having greater trust in local government. Those with greater involvement in their local communities were also more likely than those who were less involved to have more friends and to be happier with their current situations. Although some of these overall differences probably reflect educational and income differences related to levels of participation, the consistency and strength of the links between involvement and these circumstances surrounding involvement *per se* were factors affecting rural respondents' satisfaction and well-being.

REFERENCES

- Citizens' Viewpoint: A Study by Penn State University, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology.* (2003) <http://citvpt.aers.psu.edu>.
- Frey, R.S. (2001) *The Environment and Society Reader*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- The Center for Rural Pennsylvania. (2000) *An Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania's Rural Residents*. Harrisburg, PA.

**The Center for Rural Pennsylvania
Board of Directors**

Senator John R. Gordner
Chairman

Representative Tina Pickett
Vice Chairman

Senator John Wozniak
Treasurer

Dr. Nancy Falvo
*Clarion University
Secretary*

Representative Tim Seip

Dr. Livingston Alexander
University of Pittsburgh

Dr. Theodore R. Alter
Pennsylvania State University

Dr. Stephan J. Goetz
Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

William Sturges
Governor's Representative

Dan A. Surra
Governor's Representative



*The Center for Rural Pennsylvania
625 Forster St., Room 902
Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone: (717) 787-9555
Email: info@rural.palegislature.us
www.rural.palegislature.us
1P1110-450*