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## 2012 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll: Rural issues and quality of life

J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr.

*Iowa State University*, [arbuckle@iastate.edu](mailto:arbuckle@iastate.edu)

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farmers, compared to 63 percent in 2012 (Table 1). The importance rating of water pollution also declined, from 79 percent important or very important in 1982 to 56 percent in 2012.

### Socioeconomic issues

Several questions that had not been asked since the first year that the Farm Poll was conducted – 1982 – were included in the 2012 survey. Farmers were asked to rate the importance of several

socioeconomic issues, including interest rates, inflation and unemployment. At the time the 1982 survey was mailed, the country was at the tail end of a deep recession, the prime interest rate was over 20 percent, the inflation rate was close to six percent, and unemployment was above 10 percent. By comparison, in February 2012 both the prime rate and the inflation rate were close to 3 percent, and the national unemployment rate was 8.3 percent.

**Table 1. Perspectives on rural issues over time**

		Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
— Percentage —						
Declining number of farms in the state	2012	3	9	24	43	21
	2002	1	2	13	22	62
	1993	2	3	17	21	57
	1982	2	5	11	36	47
Young people not being able to start farming	2012	1	5	12	38	44
	1982	1	3	7	32	57
Loss of competitive markets for farm products	2012	2	11	24	43	21
	2002	1	1	5	17	76
	1993	1	1	9	26	64
Market concentration of large-scale agribusiness	2012	1	7	24	44	24
	1993	2	3	21	31	43
Overproduction of agricultural products	2012	8	23	33	29	7
	1982	2	4	11	36	47
Conversion of farmland to non-farm use	2012	6	18	23	34	20
	1982	4	8	18	34	36
Soil erosion	2012	3	11	23	38	25
	1982	1	3	8	37	51
Water pollution	2012	3	15	26	35	21
	1982	1	5	14	44	35
Inflation	2012	5	16	29	34	16
	1982	1	2	7	31	59
Interest rates	2012	9	20	26	29	17
	1982	1	1	4	24	70
Unemployment	2012	8	22	27	31	13
	1982	2	4	12	36	46
Rural crime	2012	6	22	31	29	12
	1982	2	6	18	46	30
Consolidation of rural services, such as public schools, the court system, hospitals, etc.	2012	3	10	29	44	14
	2002	4	7	28	29	32

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Not surprisingly, farmers were significantly less concerned about interest rates and inflation in 2012 than they were in 1982. In 1982, over 90 percent of farmers rated interest rates and inflation as important or very important (Table 1). In 2012, just 50 percent were concerned about inflation and 46 percent expressed concern about interest rates. Although 2012 national unemployment levels were similar to those in 1982, the proportion of farmers who rated it as an important or very important issue in 2012 – 44 percent – was about half the 82 percent who did so in 1982.

Finally, concern about rural crime has declined, from an important/very important rating of 76 percent in 1982 to 41 percent in 2012 (Table 1). Concern about consolidation of rural services has remained steady (around 60 percent important/very important) since 2002, when it was first measured.

**Quality of life**

Every two years since 1982, the Farm Poll has asked farmers to evaluate changes in quality of life, defined as “the degree of satisfaction with all aspects of life,” for their families and families in their communities. Given the difficult national economic situation over the last several years, the 2012 results were of particular interest.

Ninety-one percent of participants reported that quality of life for their families either stayed the

same or improved over the last five years (Table 2). This represents the highest level ever reported in the history of the Farm Poll. Seventy-seven percent indicated that quality of life among families in their communities had either remained the same or improved, also a Farm Poll high. Farmers were also optimistic about the future: 86 percent predicted that quality of life will stay the same or improve for their families over the next five years; 76 percent believed the same about families in their communities; and 65 percent predicted that overall economic prospects for Iowa farmers will remain steady or improve over the same time period.

**About the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll**

Conducted every year since its establishment in 1982, the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll is the longest-running survey of its kind in the nation. ISU Extension and Outreach, the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service are partners in the Farm Poll effort.

The 2012 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll summary report (PM 3036) and previous Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll summary and topical reports are available to download from the ISU Extension and Outreach Online Store, and Extension Sociology, <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/extension/farmpoll2012.html>.

**Table 2. Quality of life**

	Become Much Worse	Become Somewhat Worse	Remained the Same	Become Somewhat Better	Become Much Better
	— Percentage —				
During the past five years, has the quality of life for families in your community	2	21	35	36	6
During the past five years, has the quality of life for your family	1	9	37	42	12
In the next five years, will the quality of life for families in your community	2	23	53	22	1
In the next five years, will the quality of life for your family	1	13	54	29	3
In the next five years, will the overall economic prospects for Iowa farmers	3	32	38	25	2