

THE CENTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

A Research Report*

**Rural Nebraska Tomorrow: The Gap Between
the Preferred and Expected Future**

1999 Nebraska Rural Poll Results

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Preferences for the Future of Rural Nebraska	2
<i>Table 1. Preferences for the Future of Rural Nebraska</i>	3
Expectations for the Future of Rural Nebraska	6
<i>Table 2. Expectations for the Future of Rural Nebraska</i>	7
Differences Between Preferences and Expectations	10
<i>Figure 1. Preferences and Expectations for Population, Community, Employment and Family</i>	10
<i>Figure 2. Preferences and Expectations for Agriculture, Government and Technology</i>	11
Differences in Preferences Among Groups	12
<i>Figure 3. Preference of Future Farm Market by Income</i>	13
<i>Figure 4. Preference of Size of Business Providing Employment by Occupation</i> ...	13
<i>Figure 5. Preference of Economy's Dependence on Agriculture by Income</i>	14
<i>Figure 6. Preferences for the Future Funding for Public Education by Age</i>	15
<i>Figure 7. Preference of Local Government Structure by Education</i>	16
<i>Figure 8. Preference of Provider of Local Government Services by Community Size</i>	17
<i>Figure 9. Preferences Regarding Telemedicine by Income</i>	18
<i>Figure 10. Preferences Regarding Biotechnology Use by Occupation</i>	19
Differences in Expectations Among Groups	19
<i>Figure 11. Expectations About Future Farm Size by Occupation</i>	20
<i>Figure 12. Expectations About Future Employment Patterns by Age</i>	21
<i>Figure 13. Expectations About Distribution of Population by Age</i>	23
<i>Figure 14. Expectations About Family Structure by Marital Status</i>	24
Conclusion	24

List of Appendix Tables and Figures

Appendix Figure 1. Regions of Nebraska 27

Appendix Table 1. Demographic Profile of Rural Poll Respondents Compared to 1990
Census 28

Appendix Table 2. Preferences for the Future of Rural Nebraska by Community Size,
Region, and Individual Attributes 29

Appendix Table 3. Expectations for the Future of Rural Nebraska by Community Size,
Region, and Individual Attributes 37

Executive Summary

Many changes have occurred in rural Nebraska in the past twenty years. Globalization, centralization of agriculture, and an increase in telecommunication technologies have prompted many adjustments for rural Nebraskans. Given all these changes, what do they prefer to happen in the next twenty years? What do they prefer agriculture, their communities, their family structure and local government to look like? Also, are the futures they prefer similar to those they expect to see?

This report details results of 3,036 responses to the 1999 Nebraska Rural Poll, the fourth annual effort to take the pulse of rural Nebraskans. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their preferences and expectations for the future in the following areas: agriculture, population, employment, community, government, family and technology. Comparisons are made among different subgroups of the respondents, e.g., comparisons by community size, region, age, occupation, etc. Based on these analyses, some key findings emerged:

- ***One-half of rural Nebraskans prefer the population of rural Nebraska increase by 150,000 during the next twenty years, and more than three-fourths of rural Nebraskans prefer (a) the rural population be evenly distributed across the state, (b) the continued existence of all of the state's smaller towns, and (c) the traditional variety of businesses within Nebraska's rural communities.*** While 50% of the respondents prefer a hypothetical increase of 150,000 in the state's rural population during the next twenty years, only 13% prefer a population decrease of the same amount. Eighty-four percent prefer that the majority of the rural population be evenly dispersed throughout the state (rather than clustered along the interstate corridor); 85% prefer that all of Nebraska's rural communities with less than 500 people continue to exist twenty years from now; and 88% prefer that Nebraska's rural communities have all of the traditional variety of businesses such as banks and grocery stores.
- ***Preferences for the future relative to the role of agriculture and small non-agricultural businesses in the rural economy were somewhat mixed.*** Nearly one-half (48%) of rural Nebraskans prefer a future in which the state's rural economy becomes more dependent upon agriculture and the majority of the non-agricultural employment in rural Nebraska is concentrated in businesses with ten or fewer employees. At the same time, approximately one-half (52%) of the respondents were either (a) undecided about their preferences on these two issues or (b) preferred a future rural economy that was less dependent upon agriculture and in which the majority of non-agricultural employment was provided by businesses with at least 100 employees.
- ***More than three quarters of rural Nebraskans prefer that no farms in the state be owned by non-family corporations twenty years from now. Less consensus in preferences exists in three other areas related to agriculture: preferred farm size, the role of biotechnology, and producing for global markets.*** Eighty percent of the

respondents prefer that no farms in Nebraska be owned by non-family corporations twenty years from now. When asked about the future size of Nebraska's farms, 38% were undecided about their preferences, 33% prefer the average farm size to increase by 200 acres, and 29% prefer it to decrease by the same amount. Similarly, 43% were undecided about the use of biotechnology by Nebraska's farms twenty years from now, 36% prefer that it be in use, and 21% prefer it not be used. Slightly more than one-half (56%) of the respondents prefer a future in which Nebraska's farms are producing for a global market, 23% prefer a market structure in which Nebraska's farms are producing for local and regional markets, and 21% are undecided about their preferences in this area.

- ***While rural Nebraskans were generally more positive toward telecommuting and telemedicine than toward biotechnology, a significant proportion of rural Nebraskans were also undecided as to where they stood relative to these two technological applications.*** Fifty-six percent of the respondents prefer a future twenty years from now in which telecommuting by rural Nebraskans is commonplace and 49% prefer the widespread application of telemedicine in rural Nebraska. However, at least one-third were undecided about their preferences relative to a future in which telecommuting and telemedicine would be commonplace in rural Nebraska.
- ***The vast majority of rural Nebraskans would like to see traditional, two-parent families in the future.*** Eighty-nine percent prefer that most families in rural Nebraska be traditional, two-parent families twenty years from now. Only four percent prefer that most families be non-traditional.
- ***Most rural Nebraskans would like to see funding for public education (K - 12) increased in the future, a continuation of independent county governments, and government providing the majority of local governmental services.*** Sixty-seven percent prefer the funding for public education be increased in the future. When asked about their preferred structure for local government, seventy-three percent prefer keeping independent county governments rather than moving to a regional government system. Seventy percent prefer local government continue to provide the majority of local governmental services, while fifteen percent prefer these services be privatized (contracted to private firms).
- ***For many aspects of rural Nebraska's future, what rural Nebraskans prefer to see is not what they expect to see.*** A considerable gap exists between rural Nebraskans' preferences and expectations about the future of rural Nebraska. This difference is greatest in terms of the future role of corporate farming and the continued existence of the state's smaller communities. Specifically, 80% prefer that twenty years from now none of the farms in the state will be owned by non-family corporations, but only 29% expect that to be the case. And, 85% prefer that all communities with fewer than 500 people will still exist twenty years from now, but only 35% expect this to happen. Three other areas where the divergence between future preferences and expectations is very large follow:

84% prefer that the majority of the rural population be evenly dispersed throughout the state twenty years from now, but only 37% believe that will occur; 88% prefer that all rural communities will have the traditional variety of businesses, but only 44% expect that to happen; and 89% prefer most families in rural Nebraska will be traditional two-parent families, but only 48% expect this will occur.

Introduction

Many changes have been occurring in rural Nebraska throughout the past twenty years. In agriculture, the number of farms have decreased while the average size has increased. Globalization and changes in the farm program have made farmers more dependent on world demand for their products.

Communities in rural Nebraska have experienced change as well. Many small towns have experienced depopulation which has resulted in consolidation of some services. An increase in technological innovations has introduced new opportunities for rural communities and citizens. Such phenomena as telecommuting and the use of biotechnology is becoming more common.

Given all these changes, what do rural Nebraskans prefer to happen in the future? What do they prefer agriculture, their communities, their families and local government to look like? Do they prefer changes in employment patterns or population trends? How do they feel about the use of new technological applications in rural Nebraska? Also, are the futures rural Nebraskans prefer similar to those they expect to see?

This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their preferences and expectations for the future in the following areas: agriculture, population, employment, community, government,

family, and technology. Comparisons are made among different subgroups of the respondents, e.g., comparisons by community size, region, age, occupation, etc.

Methodology and Respondent Profile

This study is based on 3,036 responses from Nebraskans living in the 87 non-metropolitan counties in the state. A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in February and March to approximately 6,100 randomly selected households. Metropolitan counties not included in the sample were Cass, Dakota, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy and Washington. The 18 page questionnaire included questions pertaining to well-being, community, work, the future of rural Nebraska and local finance issues. This paper reports only results from the future of rural Nebraska portion of the survey.

A 50% response rate was achieved using the total design method (Dillman, 1978). The sequence of steps used were:

1. A pre-notification letter was sent requesting participation in the study.
2. The questionnaire was mailed with an informal letter signed by the project director approximately seven days later.
3. A reminder postcard was sent to the entire sample approximately seven days after the questionnaire had been sent.
4. Those who had not yet responded within approximately 14 days of the original mailing were sent a replacement questionnaire.

The average respondent was 54 years of age. Seventy-six percent were married (Appendix

Table 1¹) and fifty-one percent lived within the city limits of a town or village. On average, respondents had lived in Nebraska 47 years and had lived in their current community 34 years. Eighty-one percent were living in or near towns or villages with populations less than 5,000.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents reported their approximate household income from all sources, before taxes, for 1998 was below \$40,000. Twenty-seven percent reported incomes over \$50,000. Ninety-two percent had attained at least a high school diploma.

Seventy-six percent were employed in 1998 on a full-time, part-time or seasonal basis. Twenty percent were retired. Twenty-nine percent of those employed reported working in a professional/technical or administrative occupation. Twenty-six percent indicated they were farmers or ranchers.

Preferences for the Future of Rural Nebraska

Respondents were given several pairs of contrasting statements describing possible future directions for rural Nebraska using a bi-polar question format. Respondents were asked their preferences regarding agriculture, population, employment, community, government, family and technology.

The exact question wording was as follows. "Listed on the following pages are several

¹ Appendix Table 1 also includes demographic data from previous rural polls, as well as similar data based on the entire non-metropolitan population of Nebraska (using 1990 U.S. Census data).

pairs of contrasting statements describing possible future directions for rural Nebraska. For each pair, please indicate which one of the two directions you would prefer for rural Nebraska's future - the one in the left-hand column or the one in the right-hand column - by circling the appropriate number on the line between them."

The answer categories were described as:
1 = strongly agree with statement in left-hand column
2 = mildly agree with statement in left-hand column
3 = undecided
4 = mildly agree with statement in right-hand column
5 = strongly agree with statement in right-hand column

The sixteen pairs of statements are shown in Table 1 along with the proportions of respondents preferring each alternative view.

One-half (50%) of the respondents prefer that the population of rural Nebraska increase by 150,000 in twenty years. Thirteen percent prefer that it decrease by 150,000 and thirty-seven percent are undecided.

The vast majority of rural Nebraskans (84%) prefer that the population of rural Nebraska be evenly dispersed throughout the state. Only six percent prefer that the majority of the population of rural Nebraska be located along the interstate corridor. Eleven percent are undecided.

Respondents were also asked questions about their communities. They were asked

Table 1. Preferences for the Future of Rural Nebraska

	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with LH statement</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with RH statement</i>
Population and Community:			
I prefer that the population of rural Nebraska decrease by 150,000 in twenty years.	13%	37%	50%
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the majority of the population of rural Nebraska be located along the interstate corridor.	6%	11%	84%
I prefer that one-half of Nebraska's rural communities that currently have fewer than 500 people will no longer exist 20 years from now.	7%	9%	85%
Twenty years from now, I prefer that communities in rural Nebraska have all the traditional variety of businesses (banks, grocery stores, etc.)	88%	7%	5%
The Rural Economy:			
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the majority of the non-agricultural employment in rural Nebraska be provided by small businesses (10 or fewer employees.)	48%	27%	25%
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the economy of rural Nebraska be less dependent upon agriculture.	29%	23%	48%
Agriculture:			
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the majority of farms in the state be owned by non-family corporations.	9%	11%	80%
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the average farm size in Nebraska increase by 200 acres.	33%	38%	29%

	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with LH statement</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with RH statement</i>	
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the farms in Nebraska produce for a global market.	56%	21%	23%	Twenty years from now, I prefer that the farms in Nebraska produce for local/regional markets.
I prefer that most of the food produced by Nebraska farms use biotechnology applications 20 years from now.	36%	43%	21%	I prefer that none of the food produced by Nebraska farms use biotechnology applications 20 years from now.
Technology: I prefer that telecommuting by rural Nebraskans will be commonplace 20 years from now.	56%	33%	12%	I prefer that telecommuting by rural Nebraskans will be rare 20 years from now.
I prefer that the technological application of telemedicine be commonplace in rural Nebraska 20 years from now.	49%	37%	14%	I prefer that the technological application of telemedicine be rarely used in rural Nebraska 20 years from now.
Family: Twenty years from now, I prefer that most families in rural Nebraska be traditional, two-parent families.	89%	8%	4%	Twenty years from now, I prefer that most families in rural Nebraska be non-traditional families.
Education and Government: Twenty years from now, I prefer that funding for public education (K - 12) be decreased.	13%	20%	67%	Twenty years from now, I prefer that funding for public education (K - 12) be increased.
Twenty years from now, I prefer that all of the counties in the state be part of a regional government system.	13%	13%	73%	Twenty years from now, I prefer that all the counties in the state continue to have independent county governments.
Twenty years from now, I prefer that the majority of local governmental services be privatized (contracted to private firms.)	15%	15%	70%	Twenty years from now, I prefer that the majority of local governmental services continue to be provided by local government.

their preference about the future of smaller communities. Eighty-five percent prefer that all communities that currently have fewer than 500 people will still exist twenty years from now. Only seven percent prefer that one-half of these smaller communities would no longer exist in twenty years. Nine percent are undecided on this issue.

When asked what businesses should be located in these communities, most rural Nebraskans (88%) prefer that rural Nebraskan communities have all the traditional variety of businesses (banks, grocery stores, etc.) Only five percent prefer that the communities only have convenience or large retail stores, and seven percent are undecided.

Almost one-half (48%) of rural Nebraskans prefer that the majority of the non-agricultural employment in rural Nebraska be provided by small businesses with 10 or fewer employees. Twenty-five percent prefer that most non-agricultural employment be provided by larger businesses with at least 100 employees. Twenty-seven percent are undecided.

When asked how dependent the economy of rural Nebraska should be on agriculture, almost one-half (48%) prefer the economy be more dependent on agriculture. Twenty-nine percent prefer that rural Nebraska's economy be less dependent on agriculture and twenty-three percent are undecided.

Respondents were more certain about their preferences for the ownership of the state's farms twenty years from now. Eighty percent prefer that none of the farms in the state be owned by non-family corporations twenty years from now. Only nine percent

prefer that the majority of farms in the state be owned by non-family corporations. Eleven percent are undecided.

Opinions are mixed on the preferred trend for the size of farms in Nebraska in the next twenty years. One-third (33%) of the respondents prefer the average farm size in Nebraska to increase by 200 acres. Twenty-nine percent prefer that the average farm size decrease by the same amount. Thirty-eight percent are undecided.

When asked about the future market for farmers' products, over one-half (56%) prefer that farms in the state produce for a global market. Twenty-three percent prefer they produce for local/regional markets and twenty-one percent are undecided.

Respondents were also asked their preferences regarding the use of biotechnology applications by Nebraska's farms. Thirty-six percent of rural Nebraskans prefer that most of the food produced by Nebraska farms use biotechnology applications twenty years from now. Twenty-one percent prefer that none of the food produced by Nebraska farms use these applications and forty-three percent are undecided.

Respondents were generally more positive about telecommuting and telemedicine than toward biotechnology. Fifty-six percent of rural Nebraskans prefer that telecommuting by rural Nebraskans will be commonplace twenty years from now. Twelve percent prefer that telecommuting by rural Nebraskans will be rare in twenty years. Thirty-three percent are undecided.

Almost one-half (49%) of rural Nebraskans

prefer that telemedicine be commonplace in rural Nebraska twenty years from now. Fourteen percent prefer that this application be rarely used in rural Nebraska in twenty years and thirty-seven percent are undecided.

When asked what type of families they would like to see in rural Nebraska twenty years from now, most rural Nebraskans (89%) prefer the families be traditional, two-parent families. Only four percent prefer that most of the families in rural Nebraska be non-traditional families. Eight percent are undecided.

Finally, respondents were asked their preferences regarding local government. Two-thirds (67%) of rural Nebraskans prefer that funding for public education (K - 12) be increased twenty years from now. Thirteen percent prefer that the funding be decreased and twenty percent are undecided.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of the respondents favor keeping independent county governments. Thirteen percent prefer that counties be part of a regional government system. Thirteen percent are undecided.

When asked who should provide local governmental services, seventy percent of rural Nebraskans prefer that the majority of these services continue to be provided by local government. Fifteen percent prefer that the majority of these services be privatized (contracted to private firms) and fifteen percent are undecided.

Expectations for the Future of Rural Nebraska

Now that we have examined rural Nebraskans' preferences for the future, we will now look at their expectations. Respondents were given the same set of statements as before, but were now asked to give their expectations for the future. The exact question wording was as follows. "Now we would like to know what your expectations are for the future of rural Nebraska. For each pair of statements, please indicate which one of the two directions you expect in the future - the one in the left-hand column or the one in the right-hand column - by circling the appropriate number on the line between them." The answer categories were the same as for the preference question (see page 2). The responses to these questions are shown in Table 2.

Almost one-half (46%) expect the population of rural Nebraska to decrease by 150,000 in twenty years. Thirty-one percent expect the population of rural Nebraska to increase by 150,000 in twenty years. Twenty-three percent are undecided.

Just under one-half (46%) of rural Nebraskans expect the majority of the population of rural Nebraska will be located along the interstate corridor twenty years from now. Thirty-seven percent expect most of the population will be evenly dispersed throughout the state.

Many rural Nebraskans expect one-half of the smaller communities in rural Nebraska will no longer exist twenty years from now and are mixed about the type of businesses

Table 2. *Expectations for the Future of Rural Nebraska*

	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with LH statement</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with RH statement</i>
<i>Population and Community:</i>			
I expect the population of rural Nebraska to decrease by 150,000 in twenty years.	46%	23%	I expect the population of rural Nebraska to increase by 150,000 in twenty years. 31%
Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of the population of rural Nebraska to be located along the interstate corridor.	46%	18%	Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of the population of rural Nebraska to be evenly dispersed throughout the state. 37%
I expect that one-half of Nebraska's rural communities that currently have fewer than 500 people will no longer exist 20 years from now.	52%	13%	I expect that all of Nebraska's rural communities that currently have fewer than 500 people will still exist 20 years from now. 35%
Twenty years from now, I expect communities in rural Nebraska to have all the traditional variety of businesses (banks, grocery stores, etc.)	44%	14%	Twenty years from now, I expect communities in rural Nebraska to have only convenience or large retail stores. 43%
<i>The Rural Economy:</i>			
Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of the non-agricultural employment in rural Nebraska to be provided by small businesses (10 or fewer employees.)	32%	18%	Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of the non-agricultural employment in rural Nebraska to be provided by larger businesses (with at least 100 employees.) 50%
Twenty years from now, I expect the economy of rural Nebraska to be less dependent upon agriculture.	52%	18%	Twenty years from now, I expect the economy of rural Nebraska to be more dependent upon agriculture. 29%
<i>Agriculture:</i>			
Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of farms in the state will be owned by non-family corporations.	53%	19%	Twenty years from now, I expect none of the farms in the state will be owned by non-family corporations. 29%
Twenty years from now, I expect the average farm size in Nebraska to increase by 200 acres.	66%	16%	Twenty years from now, I expect the average farm size in Nebraska to decrease by 200 acres. 18%

	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with LH statement</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Strongly/ mildly agree with RH statement</i>	
I expect the farms in Nebraska will be producing for a global market twenty years from now.	75%	14%	11%	I expect the farms in Nebraska will be producing for local/ regional markets twenty years from now.
I expect most of the food produced by Nebraska farms will use biotechnology applications 20 years from now.	65%	27%	8%	I expect none of the food produced by Nebraska farms will use biotechnology applications 20 years from now.
Technology: I expect telecommuting by rural Nebraskans to be commonplace 20 years from now.	68%	26%	6%	I expect telecommuting by rural Nebraskans to be rare 20 years from now.
I expect the technological application of telemedicine to be commonplace in rural Nebraska 20 years from now.	59%	33%	9%	I expect the technological application of telemedicine to be rarely used in rural Nebraska 20 years from now.
Family: Twenty years from now, I expect most families in rural Nebraska to be traditional, two-parent families.	48%	17%	34%	Twenty years from now, I expect most families in rural Nebraska to be non-traditional families.
Education and Government: Twenty years from now, I expect funding for public education (K - 12) to be decreased.	32%	18%	51%	Twenty years from now, I expect funding for public education (K - 12) to be increased.
Twenty years from now, I expect all of the counties in the state to be part of a regional government system.	39%	19%	41%	Twenty years from now, I expect all of the counties in the state to continue to have independent county governments.
Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of local governmental services to be privatized (contracted to private firms.)	30%	22%	48%	Twenty years from now, I expect the majority of local governmental services to continue to be provided by local government.

that will be located in the communities. Fifty-two percent of rural Nebraskans expect that one-half of Nebraska's rural communities that currently have fewer than 500 people will no longer exist twenty years from now. Thirty-five percent expect all of these smaller communities will still exist twenty years from now. Opinions were mixed when asked their expectations regarding the types of businesses that will be in the communities. Forty-four percent expect the communities to have all the traditional variety of businesses (banks, grocery stores, etc.) Almost an identical proportion (43%) expect the communities to have only convenience or large retail stores.

When asked about employment patterns in the future, many rural Nebraskans expect the majority of employment will be provided by larger businesses and the economy will be less dependent upon agriculture. One-half (50%) of the respondents expect the majority of non-agricultural employment in rural Nebraska will be provided by larger businesses (with at least 100 employees) twenty years from now. Thirty-two percent expect the majority of non-agricultural employment will be provided by small businesses (10 or fewer employees). Just over one-half (52%) expect the economy of rural Nebraska will be less dependent upon agriculture twenty years from now. Twenty-nine percent expect the economy will be more dependent upon agriculture.

When asked their expectations regarding agriculture in the next twenty years, the majority of rural Nebraskans expect the farms to be owned by non-family corporations, bigger, producing for a global market and using biotechnology applications. Over one-half (53%) of rural Nebraskans

expect the majority of farms in the state will be owned by non-family corporations in twenty years. Twenty-nine percent expect none of the farms in the state will be owned by non-family corporations in the future. Two-thirds (66%) of rural Nebraskans expect the average farm size to increase by 200 acres twenty years from now. Only eighteen percent expect the average farm size to decrease by that same amount. Three-quarters (75%) of the respondents expect the farms to be producing for a global market. Only eleven percent expect the farms to be producing for local/regional markets. Almost two-thirds (65%) expect most of the food produced by Nebraska farms will use biotechnology applications. Only eight percent expect that none of the food produced will use biotechnology applications.

Rural Nebraskans were asked their expectations regarding the use of other technological applications in the future. Most expect telecommuting and telemedicine to be common in rural Nebraska. Sixty-eight percent expect telecommuting to be commonplace twenty years from now. Six percent expect telecommuting to be rare. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents expect telemedicine to be commonplace twenty years from now. Only nine percent expect it to be rarely used in the future.

Almost one-half (48%) expect most families in rural Nebraska will be traditional, two-parent families. Thirty-four percent expect most of the families will be non-traditional.

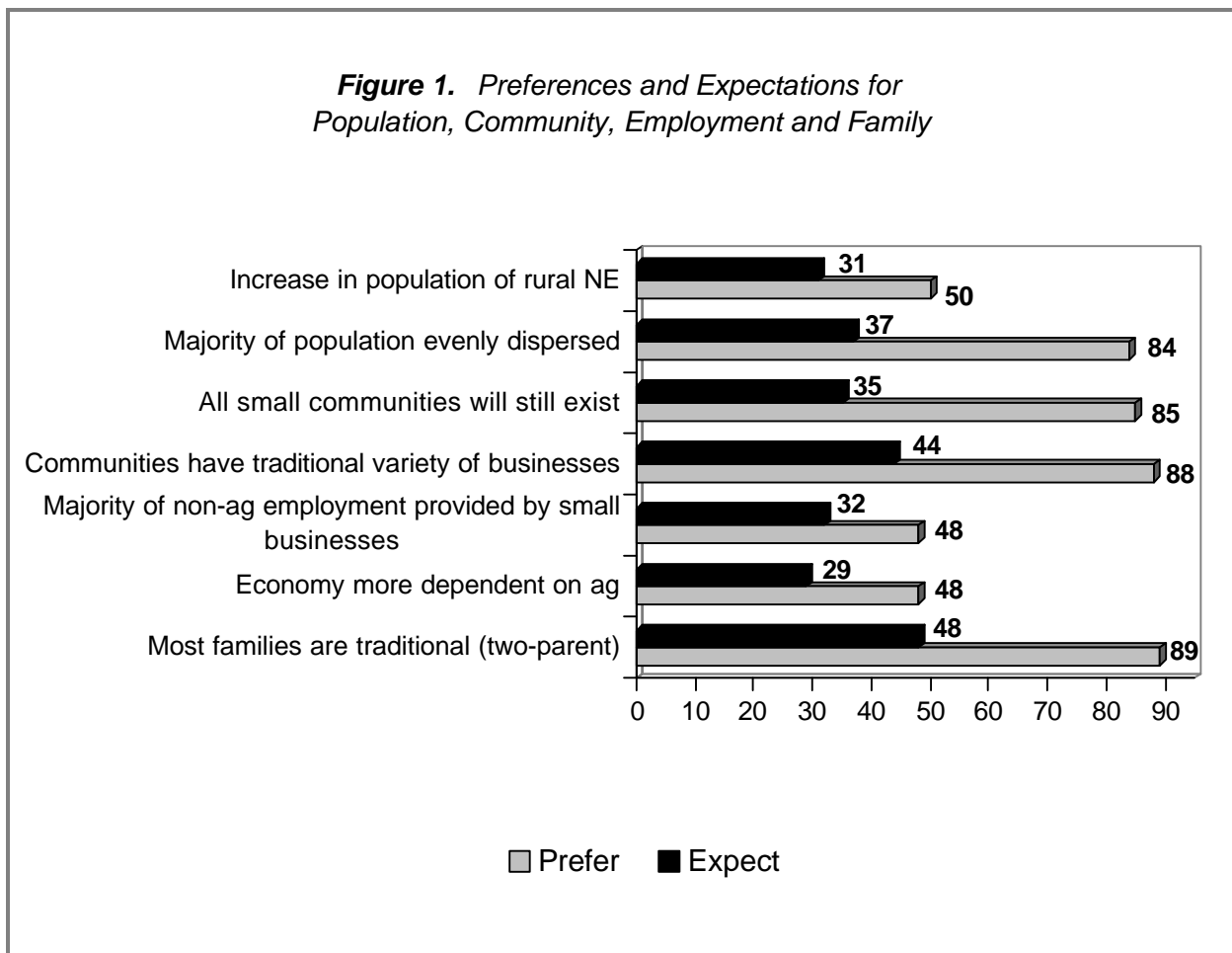
Opinions were mixed when asked their

expectations about the structure of government in the future. Just over one-half (51%) expect funding for public education (K - 12) to be increased. Thirty-two percent expect the funding to be decreased. Forty-one percent expect that all the counties in the state will continue to have independent county governments. Thirty-nine percent expect the counties to be part of a regional government system. When asked about local governmental services, just under one-half (48%) expect they will continue to be provided by local government. Thirty percent expect the majority of these services will be privatized.

Differences Between Preferences and Expectations

Now that we have examined both the respondents' preferences and expectations for the future, we will examine where these two differ. Figure 1 includes both the percentage preferring certain trends in population, community, the economy and family as well as the percentage of those expecting it. Some large differences are evident. For all these areas, more people prefer to see a trend than expect to see it.

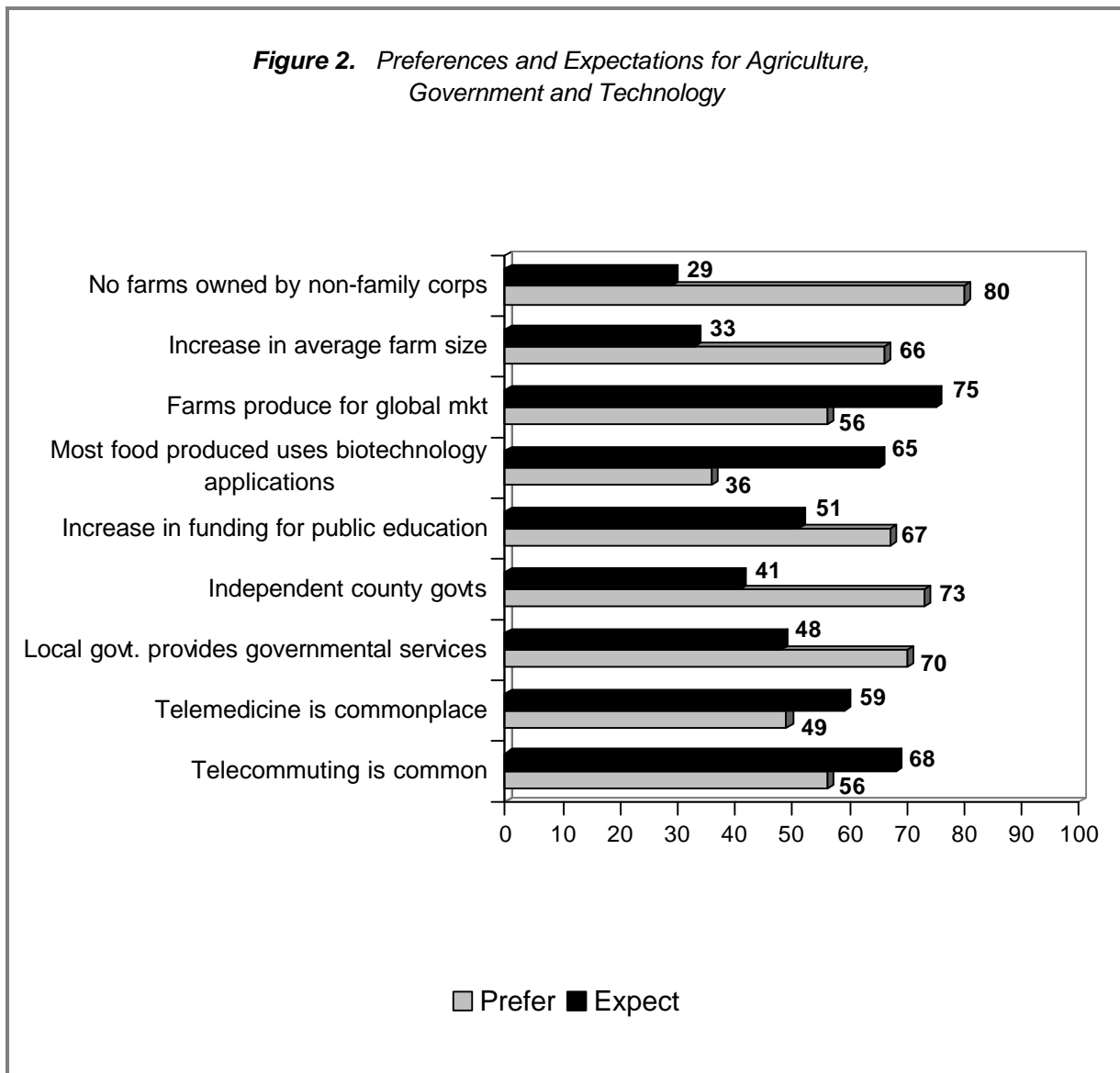
Figure 2 shows the preferences and



expectations for certain trends in agriculture, government and technology. Again we see that many trends have more people preferring to see it than those expecting it. These trends include: no farms owned by non-family corporations, an increase in the funding for public education (K - 12), independent county governments, and local governmental services provided by local government.

When these differences occur, this represents an area of possible future conflict for rural Nebraskans. In these areas, they are not expecting to see the type of future they would prefer.

For other trends, more people are expecting to see the trend than prefer to see it. These trends include: an increase in the average farm size, farms producing for a global market, the common use of biotechnology,



telecommuting is common and the common use of telemedicine.

Differences in Preferences Among Groups

Many of the respondents' preferences for the future differed by community size, region, income, age, gender, education, marital status and occupation (Appendix Table 2). Respondents living in the Northeast part of the state were more likely than those living in other regions to prefer that the average farm size decrease by 200 acres (see Appendix Figure 1 for the counties included in each region). Thirty-five percent of the respondents in this region preferred the average farm size would decrease, while only twenty-two percent of the respondents living in the Panhandle agreed.

When comparing the preferences for farm size by income, the respondents with lower incomes were more likely than those with higher incomes to prefer that the average farm size would decrease. Thirty-four percent of the respondents with incomes under \$20,000 preferred the average farm size would decrease by 200 acres twenty years from now; however, only twenty-one percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more felt the same.

Farmers and ranchers were the occupational group most likely to prefer that the average farm size in the state would decrease by 200 acres. Thirty-six percent of the farmers or ranchers preferred the decrease in farm size, compared to twenty-four percent of the respondents with professional occupations.

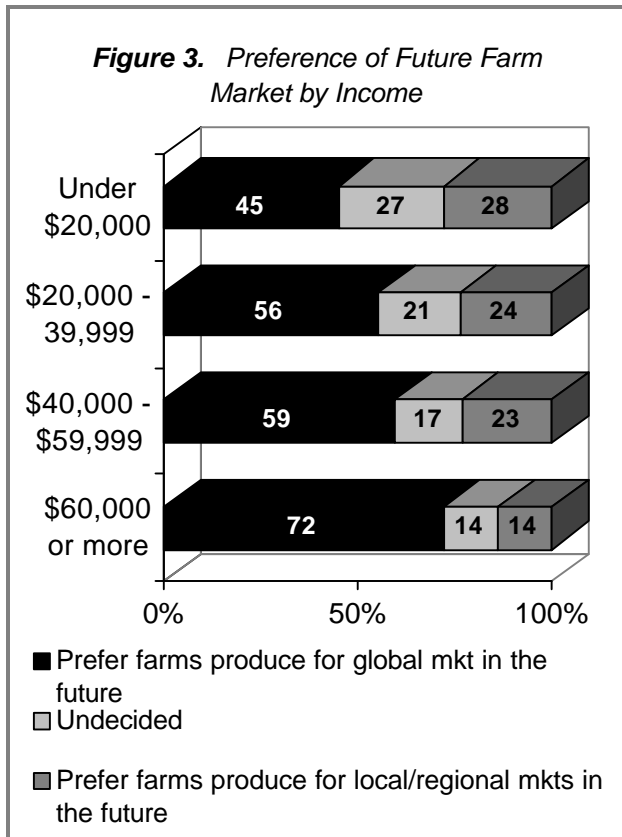
Other groups more likely to prefer a decrease in average farm size include: those living in the smaller communities, older

respondents, males, those with lower education levels, and the married respondents.

When asked about the preferred ownership of the farms, responses differed based on all of the characteristics except gender. The groups most likely to prefer that none of the farms in the state be owned by non-family corporations twenty years from now include: those living in smaller communities, those with incomes between \$20,000 and \$59,999, younger respondents, those with higher educational levels, married respondents and farmers/ranchers. When comparing the regional groups, those living in the Panhandle were *less* likely to prefer that none of the farms would be owned by non-family corporations in the future.

When asked if they would prefer the farms in Nebraska to produce for a global market versus local/regional markets, some groups were more likely than others to prefer a global market. Respondents with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower incomes to prefer that the farms produce for a global market. Seventy-two percent of the respondents with incomes of at least \$60,000 preferred that the farms produce for a global market, compared to only forty-five percent of those with incomes under \$20,000 (Figure 3).

Respondents with higher education levels were more likely than those with less education to prefer that farms produce for a global market in the future. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents with a college degree preferred farms produce for a global market, compared to fifty percent of the respondents with a high school diploma or less.



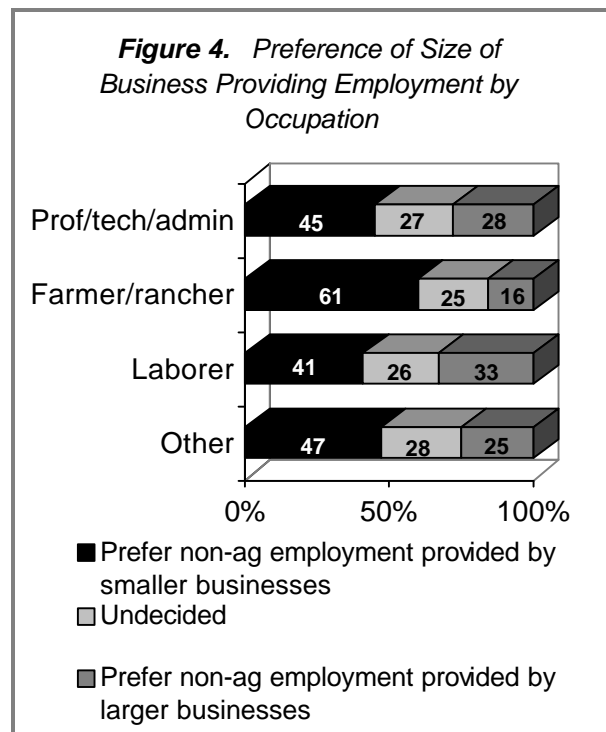
Nebraska increase in the future included those with higher incomes and the respondents living in the smaller communities.

When asked which types of businesses should provide the majority of non-agricultural employment in the future, some groups were more likely to prefer that this employment be provided by small businesses. Farmers and ranchers were the occupation group more likely to prefer smaller businesses providing the majority of non-agricultural employment. Sixty-one percent of the farmers and ranchers preferred having employment provided by smaller businesses, while only forty-one percent of the laborers agreed (Figure 4).

Regional differences also emerged. Respondents living in the North Central region were more likely than those living in other regions to prefer that smaller

Other groups more likely to prefer that Nebraska farms produce for a global market in the future include: respondents living in larger communities, those between the ages of 40 and 64, males, respondents who have never married, and those with professional occupations.

Preferences regarding future population trends in rural Nebraska differed by community size, income, and age. Older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to prefer that the population of rural Nebraska increase by 150,000 in twenty years. Fifty-seven percent of those age 65 and older preferred the population increase, compared to forty percent of the respondents under the age of 40. The other groups more likely to prefer that the population of rural



businesses provide the majority of non-agricultural employment in the state. Sixty-one percent of the respondents in this region preferred smaller businesses provide this employment, compared to forty-four percent of those living in the Southeast region of the state.

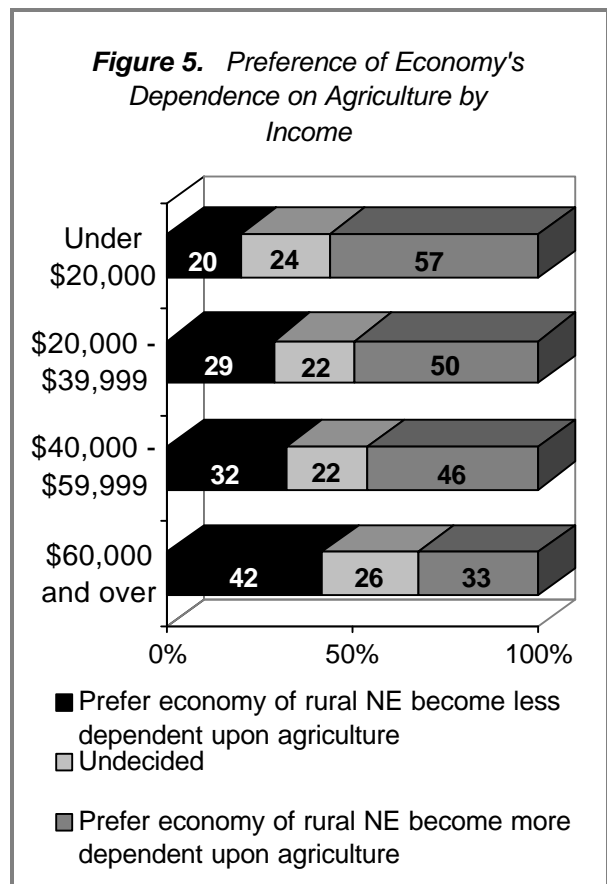
Those living in smaller communities were more likely than those living in larger communities to prefer having smaller businesses provide the majority of non-agricultural employment. Approximately one-half (50%) of those living in communities with less than 5,000 people preferred having smaller businesses provide the employment; however, only thirty-nine percent of those living in communities with populations of 5,000 or more preferred having smaller businesses provide the majority of employment.

Other groups more likely to prefer having smaller businesses provide much of the non-agricultural employment included: respondents with incomes ranging from \$20,000 to \$39,999, males, and those with college degrees.

When asked if the economy of rural Nebraska should be more or less dependent upon agriculture in the future, some groups were more likely to prefer that it be more dependent. Farmers and ranchers were the occupation group more likely to prefer the increased dependence on agriculture in the future. Sixty-four percent of the farmers or ranchers preferred that the economy of rural Nebraska be more dependent upon agriculture in the future, compared to only thirty-four percent of the respondents with professional occupations.

Respondents with lower incomes were more likely than those with higher incomes to prefer the economy become more dependent upon agriculture. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents with incomes under \$20,000 preferred the increased dependence, while only thirty-three percent of those with incomes of at least \$60,000 shared this opinion (Figure 5).

Respondents with lower education levels were more likely than those with more education to prefer the increased dependence upon agriculture. Fifty-four percent of the respondents with a high school diploma or less preferred the economy be more dependent on agriculture in the future, compared to thirty-eight percent of the respondents with a college degree. Other



groups more likely to prefer that the economy be more dependent on agriculture included: those living in the smaller communities, respondents living in the North Central or Northeast region of the state, the older respondents, and the respondents who are widowed.

Certain groups were more likely to prefer the continued existence of the smaller communities in rural Nebraska.

Respondents living in smaller communities were more likely than those living in the larger communities to prefer that all of the rural communities that currently have less than 500 people will still exist in twenty years. Ninety percent of the respondents currently living in communities with less than 500 people preferred these communities still exist in the future, compared to seventy-nine percent of the respondents living in communities with at least 5,000 people.

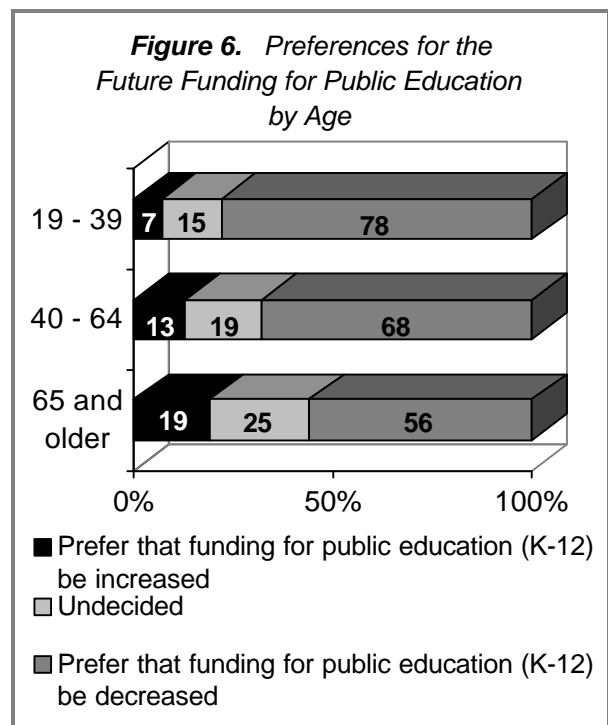
Other groups more likely to prefer the continued existence of the smaller communities include: those living in the North Central region, respondents with incomes ranging from \$20,000 to \$59,999, younger respondents, the farmers/ranchers and laborers.

Preferences about the geographic location of the population in rural Nebraska differed by community size, region, income, age, education and occupation. The groups more likely to prefer that the majority of the population be evenly dispersed throughout the state twenty years from now include: those living in smaller communities, those in the Northeast region, respondents with higher incomes, respondents with some college education, and laborers.

Groups more likely to prefer that communities in rural Nebraska have all the traditional variety of businesses in the future include: those living in the smaller communities, those with higher incomes, and the younger respondents.

Some groups were more likely to prefer that funding for public education (K - 12) be increased twenty years from now. Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to prefer that the funding for public education be increased. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents under the age of 40 preferred that the funding be increased, while only fifty-six percent of those age 65 or older felt the same (Figure 6).

Respondents with professional occupations were more likely than those with different occupations to prefer the increase in funding for public education. Seventy-five percent of the respondents with professional



occupations preferred that the funding be increased, compared to only sixty percent of the farmers or ranchers.

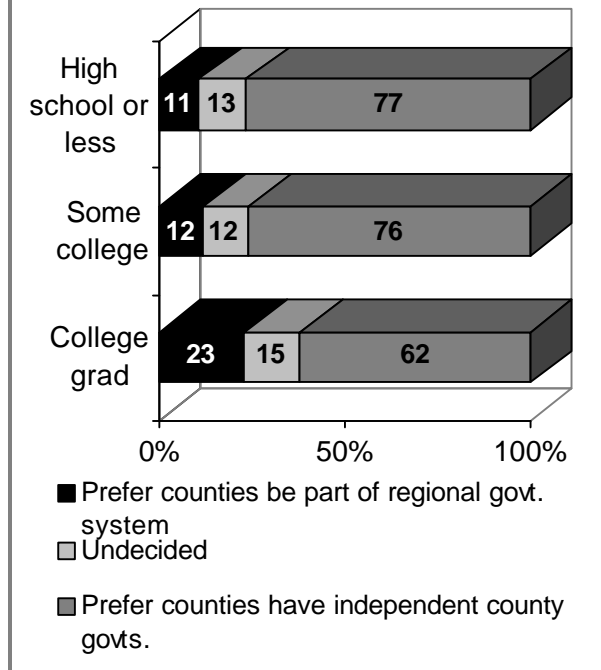
Other groups more likely to prefer that the funding be increased include: those living in the smaller communities, those with incomes between \$40,000 and \$59,999, females, and those with higher education levels.

When asked about the structure of local government in the future, certain groups were more likely to prefer that all counties in the state continue to have independent county governments. Respondents with less education were more likely than those with more education to prefer the continued existence of independent county governments. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents with a high school education or less preferred independent county governments, compared to sixty-two percent of those with a college degree (Figure 7).

Those with lower income levels were more likely than those with higher incomes to prefer keeping independent county governments. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents with incomes under \$20,000 preferred the independent county governments, while only sixty-five percent of those with incomes of at least \$60,00 shared this opinion.

Respondents living in smaller communities were more likely than those living in larger communities to prefer the continuation of independent county governments. Seventy-seven percent of those living in communities with less than 500 people preferred keeping the independent county governments, compared to sixty-six percent of those living in communities with at least 5,000 people.

Figure 7. Preference of Local Government Structure by Education

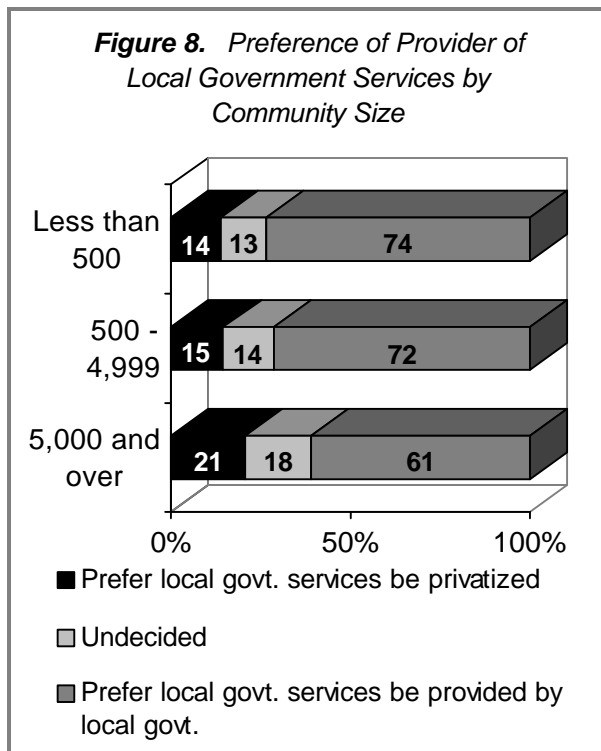


Other groups more likely to prefer keeping independent county governments include farmers/ranchers and laborers. Of the marital groups, those who have never married were the least likely to prefer the continuation of independent county governments.

Certain groups were more likely to prefer that the majority of local governmental services should continue to be provided by local government. Respondents with lower education levels were more likely than those with higher educational levels to prefer that local government continue to provide most governmental services. Seventy-six percent of the respondents with a high school education or less preferred that the services be provided by local government, compared to sixty-two percent of the respondents with a college degree.

Respondents living in smaller communities were more likely than those living in larger communities to prefer that these services continue to be provided by local government. Seventy-four percent of the respondents living in communities with less than 500 people preferred that local government provide these services, while only sixty-one percent of the respondents living in communities with at least 5,000 people agreed (Figure 8).

Respondents with lower income levels were more likely than those with higher incomes to prefer that local government continue to provide the majority of local governmental services. Seventy-three percent of those with incomes under \$40,000 preferred local government provide these services, while sixty percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more shared this opinion.



Other groups more likely to prefer government continue to provide these services include: older respondents, females, those who are widowed and respondents who are laborers.

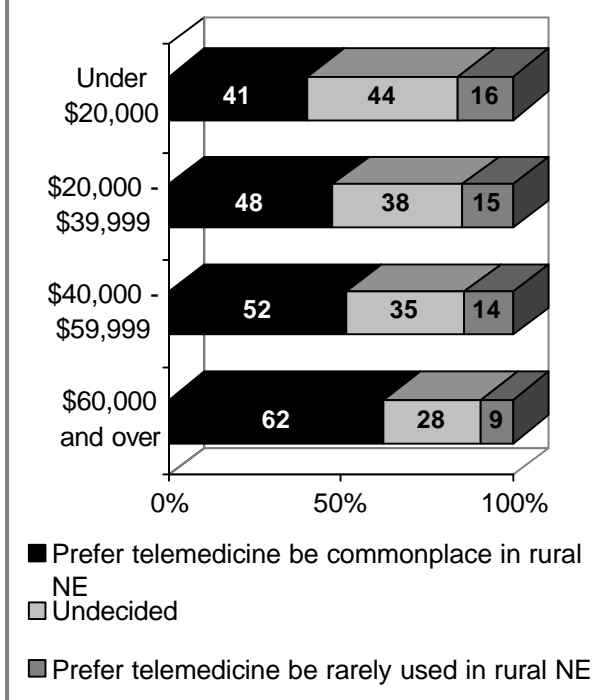
Preferences regarding family structure differed by income, age, gender, education, marital status, and occupation. The respondents who are married were more likely than those not married to prefer that the majority of families in rural Nebraska be traditional, two-parent families. Ninety-one percent of the married respondents preferred this family structure, compared to seventy-seven percent of the widowed respondents.

Respondents with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower income levels to prefer the traditional two-parent family structure. Ninety-four percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more preferred this structure, while eighty-two percent of the respondents with incomes under \$20,000 agreed.

Other groups more likely to prefer the traditional, two-parent family include: those between the ages of 40 and 64, males, those with more education, and farmers/ranchers.

When asked how common telemedicine should be in the future, responses differed by income, age, education, marital status and occupation. Respondents with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower incomes to prefer that telemedicine be commonplace twenty years from now. Sixty-two percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more preferred this technological application be commonplace, compared to forty-one percent of the

Figure 9. Preferences Regarding Telemedicine by Income



respondents with incomes under \$20,000 (Figure 9).

Those with higher education levels were more likely than those with less education to prefer that telemedicine be commonplace in rural Nebraska twenty years from now. Sixty-one percent of the respondents with a college degree preferred telemedicine be commonplace in the future, compared to forty-one percent of those with a high school education or lower.

Of the occupational groups, those with professional occupations were most likely to prefer telemedicine be common in the future. Sixty percent of the respondents with this type of occupation preferred it be common, while only forty-two percent of the laborers shared this belief.

Other groups more likely to prefer that telemedicine be commonplace in the future include those between the ages of 40 and 64 and those who have never married.

Preferences regarding telecommuting by rural Nebraskans differed by community size, income, age, education and occupation. Those with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower income levels to prefer that telecommuting by rural Nebraskans be commonplace twenty years from now. Seventy-three percent of those with incomes of \$60,000 or more preferred telecommuting to be common, compared to forty-five percent of the respondents with incomes under \$20,000.

Those with higher education levels were more likely than those with lower education levels to prefer that telecommuting be commonplace in the future. Seventy-two percent of the respondents with a college degree preferred this scenario, while only forty-six percent of the respondents with a high school education or less agreed.

Respondents with professional occupations were more likely than those with other types of occupations to prefer the increase in telecommuting by rural Nebraskans. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents in this occupational group preferred telecommuting be common, compared to only forty-eight percent of the laborers.

The other groups more likely to prefer that telecommuting be commonplace in the future include those living in larger communities and the respondents between the ages of 40 and 64.

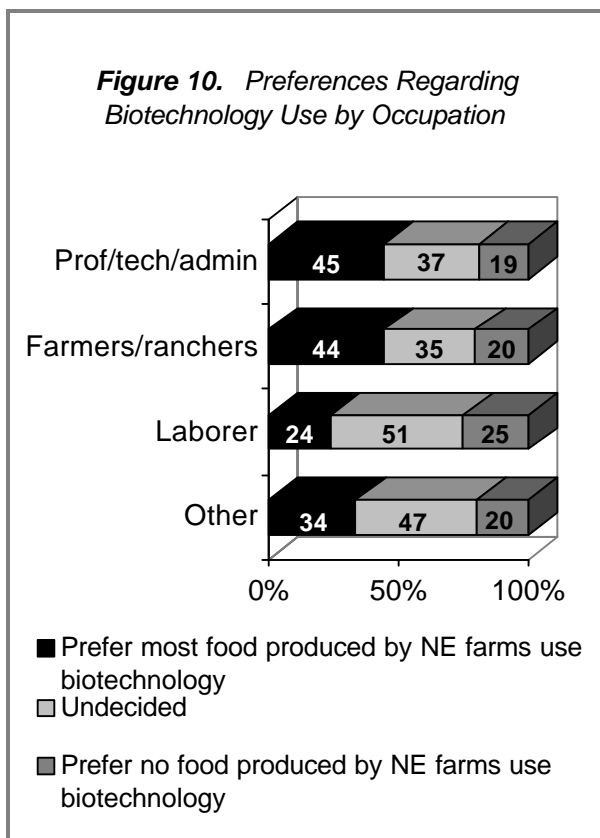
When asked about the use of biotechnology applications by Nebraska farms, preferences differed by all of the characteristics except by region. Respondents with professional occupations and those who are farmers or ranchers were the occupational groups most likely to prefer that most of the food produced by Nebraska farms use biotechnology applications in twenty years. Approximately forty-four percent of these two occupational groups preferred this common use of biotechnology, compared to only twenty-four percent of the laborers (Figure 10).

Respondents with higher income levels were more likely than those with lower incomes to prefer that most of the food produced by Nebraska farms use biotechnology applications. Forty-seven percent of the

respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more preferred the common use of biotechnology applications in food production, compared to only twenty-eight percent of the respondents with incomes under \$20,000.

Persons with higher educational levels were more likely than those with less education to prefer the use of biotechnology applications. Forty-nine percent of the respondents with a college degree preferred the use of biotechnology in food production, while only thirty percent of the respondents with a high school education or less felt the same.

Other groups more likely to prefer that most of the food produced by Nebraska farms use biotechnology applications include: those living in larger communities, respondents between the ages of 40 and 64, and males. When comparing responses by marital status, the widowed respondents were *less* likely than the other groups to prefer this use of biotechnology.

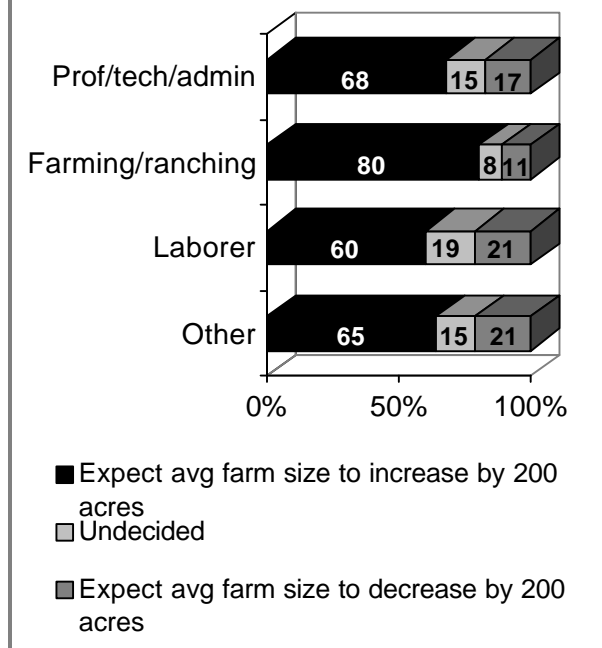


Differences in Expectations Among Groups

The responses to the expectation questions were also analyzed by community size, region, income, age, gender, education, marital status and occupation (Appendix Table 3). Farmers and ranchers were more likely than those with different occupations to expect that the average farm size in the state will increase by 200 acres twenty years from now. Eighty percent of the farmers and ranchers expect this increase in farm size, while only sixty percent of the laborers expect the increase (Figure 11).

The respondents who have never married were more likely than the other marital status

Figure 11. Expectations About Future Farm Size by Occupation



groups to expect that the average farm size would increase in the future. Seventy-two percent of those who have never married expect this size increase, compared to fifty-two percent of those who are widowed.

When comparing responses by income, it was found that those with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower incomes to expect the increase in farm size. Seventy-five percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more expect the average farm size to increase, while only fifty-eight percent of those with incomes under \$20,000 felt the same.

Other groups more likely to expect the average farm size to increase in the future include: the respondents living in the smaller

communities, those between the ages of 40 and 64, males, and the respondents with more education.

Expectations about the ownership of the farms differed by income, age, education and marital status. The respondents who have never married were more likely than the other marital groups to expect the majority of farms in the state to be owned by non-family corporations twenty years from now. Fifty-nine percent of this group expect most of the farms to be owned by non-family corporations, in comparison to only thirty-five percent of the respondents who are widowed.

The younger respondents were more likely than the older respondents to expect most of the farms to be owned by non-family corporations. Sixty-two percent of those between the ages of 19 and 39 expect this ownership structure, while only thirty-nine percent of the respondents age 65 and older shared this belief. The respondents with higher incomes and those with more education were the other groups more likely to expect non-family corporations to own most of the farms in the state twenty years from now.

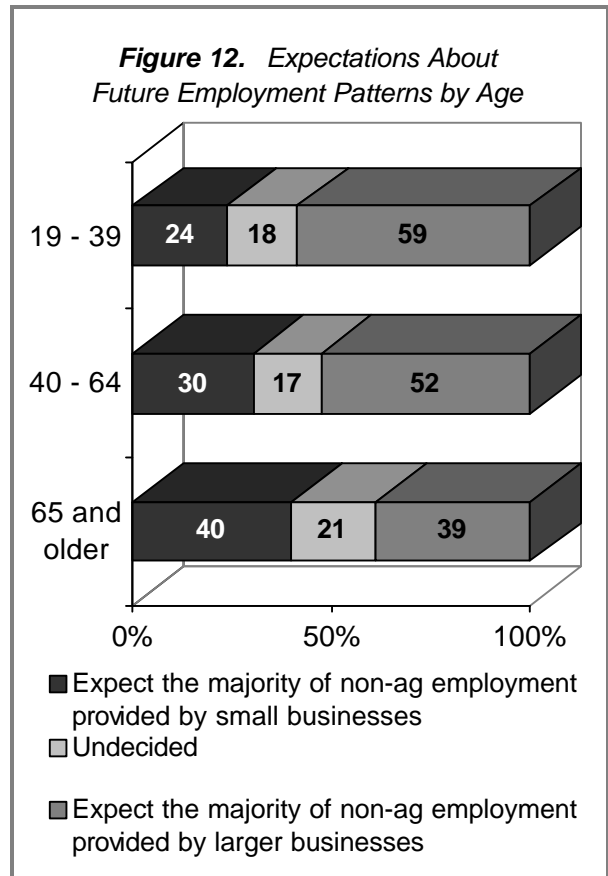
Certain groups were more likely to expect the farms in the state to be producing for a global market twenty years from now. The respondents with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower incomes to expect the farms to be producing for a global market. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more expect this trend, compared to sixty-one percent of those with incomes under \$20,000. Other groups more likely to expect the farms to produce for a global market

include: the younger respondents, males, those with higher education levels, the married respondents, and those with professional occupations.

Expectations about future population trends differed by community size, income, age, education, and occupation. The groups more likely to expect the population of rural Nebraska to decrease by 150,000 in twenty years include: those living in communities with less than 5,000 people, those with higher incomes, respondents between the ages of 40 and 64, those with higher education levels, and farmers/ranchers.

When asked what types of businesses they expect to provide the majority of non-agricultural employment in the future, certain groups were more likely to state that they expect larger businesses (at least 100 employees) to provide it. The younger respondents were more likely than the older respondents to expect larger businesses to provide most of the non-agricultural employment in the future. Fifty-nine percent of those between the ages of 19 and 39 expect this employment pattern, while only thirty-nine percent of those age 65 and older agreed (Figure 12).

The respondents who are married and those who have never married were more likely than the other marital groups to expect larger businesses to provide most of the employment in the future. Approximately fifty-two percent of these two groups expect this employment pattern, while only thirty-seven percent of the widowed respondents shared this belief. Other groups more likely to expect larger businesses to provide most of the non-agricultural employment include: those in the Northeast region of the state,



those with incomes between \$40,000 and \$59,999, those with more education, farmers/ranchers and laborers.

Certain groups were more likely to expect the economy of rural Nebraska to be less dependent upon agriculture twenty years from now. Respondents with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower incomes to expect less dependence upon agriculture in the future. Sixty-four percent of the respondents with incomes of \$60,000 or more expect the economy to be less dependent upon agriculture, compared to forty-three percent of those with incomes under \$20,000.

Respondents with higher educational levels were more likely than those with less

education to expect the economy to be less dependent upon agriculture. Sixty-three percent of the respondents with a college degree expect this decreased reliance on agriculture in the future, while only forty-five percent of those with a high school education or less felt the same.

Other groups more likely to expect the economy to be less dependent upon agriculture twenty years from now include: those living in the larger communities, respondents between the ages of 40 and 64, those who are married, and respondents with professional occupations.

When asked their expectations regarding the viability of smaller communities in rural Nebraska, certain groups were more likely to state that they expect one-half of the communities that currently have fewer than 500 people to no longer exist twenty years from now. Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to expect some of these towns will no longer exist in the future. Fifty-nine percent of those between the ages of 19 and 39 expect one-half of these smaller communities will no longer exist twenty years from now, compared to thirty-nine percent of those age 65 or older.

Respondents with higher education levels were more likely than those with less education to expect fewer smaller communities will exist in the future. Sixty-one percent of the respondents with a college degree expect this trend, while forty-four percent of those with a high school education or less felt the same.

Other groups that were more likely to expect one-half of these towns will no longer exist twenty years from now include: those living

in the larger communities, persons with higher income levels, those who have never married, and farmers/ranchers.

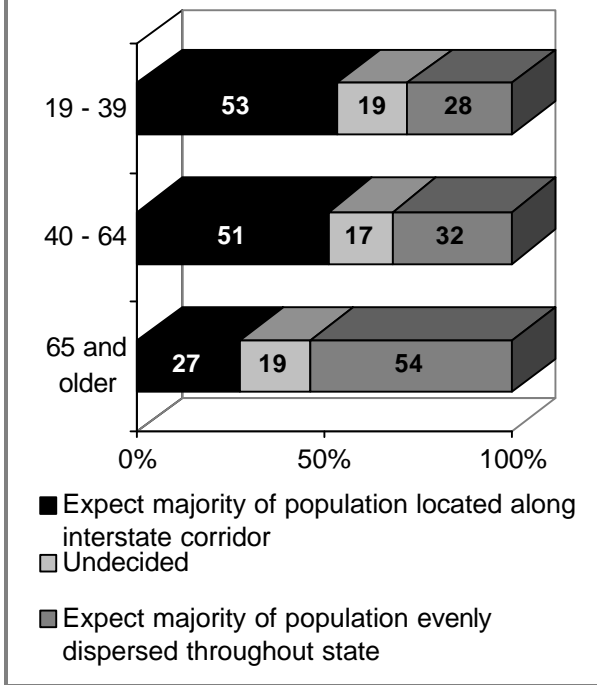
Most of these same groups were also those most likely to expect the majority of the population of rural Nebraska to be located along the interstate corridor twenty years from now. Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to expect this population concentration along the interstate. Fifty-three percent of those between the ages of 19 and 39 expect most of the population of rural Nebraska to locate along this corridor. Only twenty-seven percent of those age 65 or older expect this same trend (Figure 13).

Those with higher education levels were more likely than those with less education to expect the concentration of the population along the interstate. Fifty-eight percent of those with a college degree expect the concentration of the population of rural Nebraska along this corridor, compared to thirty-five percent of those with a high school education or less.

Other groups more likely to expect this population distribution trend include: those with higher incomes, males, those with professional occupations and farmers/ranchers. When comparing the marital groups, the widowed respondents were *less* likely than the other groups to expect this trend.

Respondents' expectations regarding the types of businesses that the communities in rural Nebraska will have differed for some of these groups. Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to expect the communities will only have convenience

Figure 13. Expectations About Distribution of Population by Age



or large retail stores twenty years from now.

Forty-nine percent of those age 19 to 39 expect only these types of businesses in the communities, compared to thirty percent of those age 65 and older. Other groups more likely to expect only these type of businesses in the community include: those with higher incomes, persons with higher education levels, and farmers/ranchers. When comparing the marital groups, the widowed were less likely than the others to expect this trend.

The groups most likely to expect funding for public education (K - 12) to be decreased twenty years from now include: those with higher incomes, younger respondents, females, those with higher education levels, and those who are married.

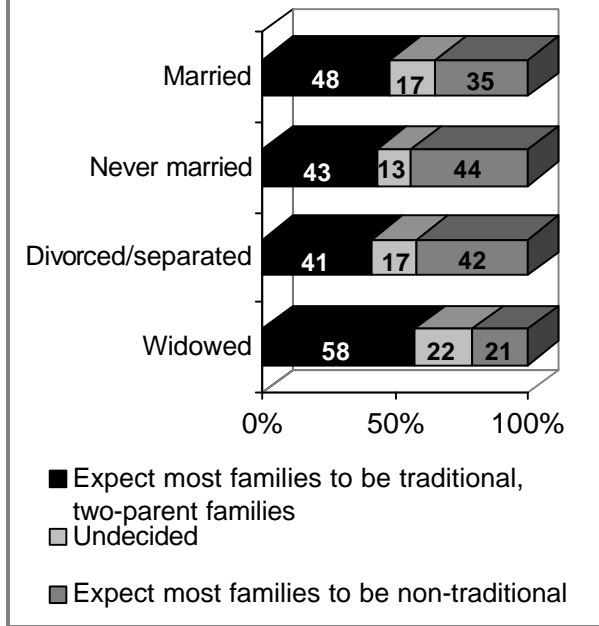
Certain groups were more likely to expect all counties to continue to have independent county governments in the future. Older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to expect the independent county government structure to continue. Fifty-five percent of those age 65 and older expect independent county governments to continue to exist in the future, compared to only thirty-four percent of those between the ages of 19 and 39. Respondents living in communities with populations ranging from 500 to 4,999, those with lower income levels, persons with lower education levels, and the widowed respondents were the other groups more likely to expect independent county governments to continue twenty years from now. These same groups were also more likely to expect the majority of local governmental services will continue to be provided by local government twenty years from now.

Differences also emerged when asked what type of family structure they expect twenty years from now. Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to expect most families in rural Nebraska will be non-traditional families. Forty-seven percent of those age 19 to 39 expect these non-traditional families, while only twenty percent of those age 65 and older shared this belief.

The respondents who have never married were the marital group most likely to expect most families to be non-traditional twenty years from now. Forty-four percent of those who have never married expect this trend, compared to twenty-one percent of those who are widowed (Figure 14).

Other groups more likely to expect non-traditional families include: those with higher

Figure 14. Expectations About Family Structure by Marital Status



income levels, females and those with higher educational levels.

Certain groups were more likely to expect telemedicine to be commonplace in rural Nebraska twenty years from now. These groups include: persons living in the South Central region of the state, those with higher income levels, persons between the ages of 40 and 64, respondents with higher education levels, and those with professional occupations. Of the marital groups, those who are widowed were less likely to expect telemedicine to be common twenty years from now.

Many of these same groups were also more likely to expect telecommuting and the use of biotechnology applications to be common in the future. These groups include: those with

higher incomes, persons between the ages of 40 and 64, and those with higher education levels. The widowed respondents were less likely to expect either of these technological applications to be common in the future.

When comparing occupational groups, the laborers were less likely than the other groups to expect telecommuting to be commonplace twenty years from now. The laborers and those with occupations classified as “other” were less likely to expect the use of biotechnology applications to be common in future food production. Farmers/ranchers were the occupational group most likely to expect most food produced by Nebraska farms will use biotechnology applications twenty years from now.

Gender differences emerged on the biotechnology question. Males were more likely than females to expect the common use of biotechnology applications in food production twenty years from now.

Conclusion

When asked what type of future they prefer for rural Nebraska, approximately one-half of rural Nebraskans would prefer to see the following: the population base of rural Nebraska increase by 150,000, small businesses would provide the majority of the non-agricultural employment and the economy would be more dependent upon agriculture.

They were more certain about their preferences for the distribution of the population and regarding their future communities. The majority of respondents would prefer the population would be evenly dispersed throughout the state, all the smaller

communities would continue to exist twenty years from now, and the traditional variety of businesses would be located in these communities.

Concerning agriculture, most respondents would like to see no farms owned by non-family corporations and the farms would produce for a global market. Opinions were mixed on their preferences for the size of farms twenty years from now and the use of biotechnology applications by the farms.

Regarding the use of various technological applications, most would like to see telemedicine and telecommuting to be common in rural Nebraska in the future. Yet, a significant proportion were undecided. Their preferences for the future families in rural Nebraska would be that most be traditional, two-parent families. Most would also like to see funding for public education (K - 12) increased twenty years from now. When asked about the structure of local government in the future, many would like to see a continuation of the current structure. Most prefer to see counties continue to have independent county governments and local government would still provide the majority of local governmental services.

When asked what type of future they expect, many of these trends are not the same. Almost one-half expect the population of rural Nebraska to decline and for it to be concentrated along the interstate corridor.

Regarding the economy of rural Nebraska and the future communities, approximately one-half expect the majority of non-agricultural employment will be provided by larger businesses, the economy to be less

dependent upon agriculture, and one-half of the smaller communities will no longer exist. Opinions were mixed on the type of businesses they expect to see in the communities.

In agriculture, over one-half expect the majority of farms will be owned by non-family corporations, the average farm size will increase, they will be producing for a global market, and will be using biotechnology applications.

When asked about the use of technology in rural Nebraska twenty years from now, most see telemedicine and telecommuting being widely used. They have mixed opinions about the future structure of families.

Most expect that funding for public education (K - 12) will be increased twenty years from now. Opinions were mixed regarding their expectations for the future structure of local government. But, almost one-half expect that local government will continue to provide the majority of local governmental services.

When comparing these preferences and expectations, many differences emerge. In many areas, more people would prefer to see a trend than expect to see it. The larger discrepancies occurred in the areas of agriculture, family, community and government. For example, eighty percent of the respondents prefer that no farms in the future be owned by non-family corporations. But, only twenty-nine percent expect that no farms will be owned by non-family corporations in the future. As another example, eighty-five percent prefer that all communities with less than 500 people will still exist twenty years from now, but only

thirty-five percent expect to see this happen. In these areas, rural Nebraskans have indicated that they don't prefer what they foresee happening in the future.