



Date: July 21, 2005
To: Interested Parties
From: The Kellogg Foundation

**RE: SURVEY RESULTS ON FARM STATE VOTERS' REACTION TO
AGRICULTURE CUTS¹**

Voters in three farm states (Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota) express clear and unambiguous views concerning potential cuts and changes in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its farm subsidy programs according to a recent survey of 900 registered voters (300 per state).

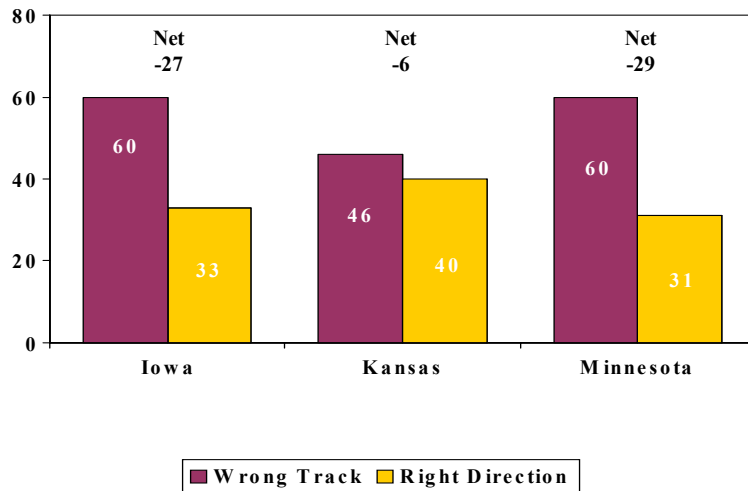
- A strong bi-partisan majority oppose any cuts in USDA jobs programs, nutrition programs, and programs to protect land and water.
- Nearly two-thirds of voters resist cuts in commodity subsidy programs (wheat, corn, soybeans, rice and cotton).
- But more than a two-to-one margin (67 percent to 31 percent) voters in these states support limiting direct payments to single farms to no more than \$250,000. *Interestingly, support is higher among farm income households and Republicans than among voters as a whole.*
- Almost two-thirds of voters describe themselves as less likely to support a member of Congress who votes to cut jobs programs in rural communities, as well as environmental and nutrition programs.
- In contrast, a majority of voters in each state describe themselves as more likely to support a member who supports limiting direct payments to single farms to no more than \$250,000 and at least a third describe themselves as “much more likely” to support such a member.

¹ This report is based on a survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research Inc. of 900 registered voters in Iowa, Minnesota and Kansas conducted from June 27 to 30th, 2005. At individual state level, the margin of error for a 300 sample size is +/- 5.67 points.

Discontent in the Heartland

Voters in as a whole Iowa and Minnesota, and to a lesser degree, Kansas, betray a decidedly downcast mood in assessing the direction of the country. Cuts that would effect the economic well-being of the farm community face strong, bi-partisan, resistance. Large differences emerge in how Republicans and Democrats view the direction of the country as only 27 percent of Republicans believe things are off on the wrong track, compared to 82 percent among Democrats. Other key constituencies in these three states share the Democrats’ point of view: 61 percent wrong track among Independents, 44 percent among farm income voters, 58 percent among rural voters, 58 percent among seniors.

Figure 1: Direction of Country
(Percent Responding)



“Generally speaking, do you think that things in this country are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?”

USDA Cuts

Voters in all three states oppose cuts in USDA jobs programs, nutrition programs and programs to protect the land and water, often by convincing margins. However, they support limiting direct payments to any single farm to no more than \$250,000. Notably, support for limits on single farm payments jumps to 68 percent among farm income households and to 70 percent among Republicans. In contrast, just 40 percent of farm income houses and 40 percent of Republicans support cuts in nutrition programs.

Figure 2: Reactions to USDA Cut Proposals
(Percent Responding)

	Iowa		Kansas		Minnesota	
	Approve	Dis approve	Approve	Dis approve	Approve	Dis approve
Limit direct payments by the federal government to any single farm to no more than 250,000 dollars	65	25	66	23	56	30
Reduce spending on programs to create jobs in rural communities	28	70	30	67	32	62
Reduce spending on programs that pay farmers to protect land and water	40	56	36	58	41	52
Reduce spending on nutrition programs like food stamps or programs that help special groups like poor women with infants or seniors on limited incomes	25	71	31	65	32	64

“As you may know, the U.S. Department of Agriculture or USDA may cut several billion dollars from its budget due to the federal budget deficit. I am going to read you a list of proposals Congress may consider cutting, and for each, please tell me if you approve or disapprove of the proposal?”

Commodity Cuts

The same pattern emerges when we ask voters to assess commodity cuts. Voters reject both across the board cuts in commodities and the elimination of some subsidy programs altogether. However, as above, they support limiting payments to single farms.

Figure 3: Reactions to Farm Subsidies Cuts
(Percent Responding)

	Iowa		Kansas		Minnesota	
	Approve	Dis approve	Approve	Dis approve	Approve	Dis approve
Limit direct payments by the federal government to any single farm to no more than 250,000 dollars	72	24	65	30	63	29
Cut subsidies to all commodities programs like wheat, corn, soybeans, rice and cotton	27	66	29	66	29	62
Eliminate subsidies altogether for one or more of the commodity programs like wheat, corn, soybeans, rice or cotton	27	67	27	64	29	64

"Now I would like you to imagine that Congress decides to cut farm subsidies. Farm subsidies are federal payments to certain farmers to offset low prices for specific products or commodities they grow like wheat, corn, soybeans, rice and cotton, which help support farm income. I am going to read you a list of ways Congress may cut farm subsidies, and for each, please tell me if you approve or disapprove of the proposal?"

Electoral impact

These decisions carry some electoral sting as well. Nearly two-thirds of voters in the three states report they would be less likely to support a member of Congress who voted to cut jobs programs in rural communities, nutrition programs and environmental programs. In contrast, a slim majority of voters are more likely to support a member who votes to limit payments to a single farm to \$250,000, including 60 percent of Republicans and 63 percent of farm income voters.

Figure 4: Likelihood of Support for Subsidy-Cutting Candidate

(Percent Responding)

<i>“More Likely” – “Less Likely”</i>			
	Iowa	Kansas	Minnesota
Limit direct payments by the federal government to any single farm to no more than 250,000 dollars	+21	+21	+15
Reduce spending on programs to create jobs in rural communities	-36	-32	-29
Reduce spending on programs that pay farmers to protect land and water	-26	-21	-22
Reduce spending on nutrition programs like food stamps or programs that help special groups like poor women with infants or seniors on limited incomes	-42	-38	-33

“Would you be more likely or less likely to support your member of Congress if you learned he or she voted in favor of the following cuts?”

Conclusion

Only rarely does survey data deliver as sharp and clear a message as is the case in this study. Large bi-partisan majorities oppose cuts in USDA and commodity programs that underlie the economic well-being of the rural communities, specifically, cuts in nutrition programs, land and water programs and jobs programs. Moreover, an appreciable number of voters in these states convey willingness to hold members of Congress accountable in the voting booth for supporting these cuts.

In contrast, voters support limiting payments to single farms to \$250,000. It would be wrong to conclude this is some sort of desire on the part of voters in these states to punish those associated with farming. Again, the sentiment for limiting payments rises higher among farm income voters than among voters as a whole. Instead, it would seem to be the case that in tight fiscal times, voters in these states believe it is time to draw a line as to what is and is not reasonable for the government to directly give to any single farm.