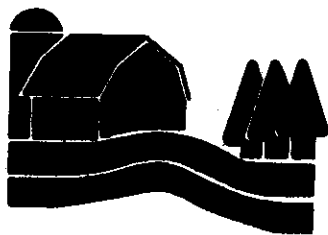


**iowa
farm and
rural life
poll**



1987 Summary

Introduction

Since 1982, Iowa State University has conducted a series of public opinion surveys among a cross-section of Iowa farm families. This project is jointly funded by the ISU Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station and the ISU Cooperative Extension Service.

This report summarizes the Spring 1987 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll, the ninth poll in this ongoing project. Purpose of the project is to gain farm families' opinions on a wide range of important agricultural and rural issues.

Results of these surveys are made available to state, national and local leaders through research reports, news releases and Extension bulletins. A special note of appreciation is made to the farm families that participated in the survey - without their help this project would not be possible.

Methodology

Mail questionnaires were sent to a statewide random sample of 3,527 farm families in March. Usable questionnaires were received from 1,920 farm families, a response rate of 55 percent.

This survey focused on general directions needed in agricultural policy, assessments of specific farm legislative proposals and international trade policies, opinions on biotechnology and univer-

sity-industry linkages, conservation tillage practices, risk management, and demographic information of respondents and their farms.

Agricultural Policy

To assess farmers' opinions on future direction of agricultural policy, the survey asked about 13 policy issues. Proposals shown in Table 1 are listed by level of support. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support or agreement with each item, rather than making choices or ranking proposals. As a result, one must be careful in making direct comparisons between the items listed in Table 1.

Farmers were quite decisive in their opinions about limiting government subsidies to \$50,000 per farm. Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents strongly supported and an additional 17 percent somewhat supported limiting annual government payments to \$50,000.

Expanding the use of PIC (payments in certificates) was supported by three-fourths of Iowa farmers. Thirteen percent oppose expanding the PIC programs and 12 percent indicated they were uncertain about this program.

Iowa farmers generally support targeting of commodity programs to farms that have gross sales of less than \$250,000. Seventy-two percent of the respondents support this type of targeting. However, 17 percent were opposed and 11 percent were undecided.

Prepared by Paul Lasley, Extension Sociologist, Department of Sociology. Mark Edelman, Steve Padgitt and Gordon Bultena assisted in designing the questionnaire. Gary Huber and Brad Wharton assisted in the data analysis. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Statistics, provided valuable assistance to this survey.

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Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (72%) supported requiring farmers to have an approved conservation plan implemented by 1995 in order to receive government program payments. Seventeen percent opposed this idea and the remaining 11 percent were uncertain about its merits.

Seventy percent of Iowa farmers support expanding the long-term conservation reserve program to include less-erodible land. Seventeen percent opposed expanding the CRP program and 13 percent were undecided.

Fifty-eight percent of the farmers supported expanding the marketing loan program to wheat, feed grains and soybeans. This would allow growers of these commodities to repay loans at world market

prices, as cotton and rice growers are now permitted to do. However, one-third (33%) of the respondents were unsure of this proposal and the remaining 9 percent were opposed.

Farmers are nearly equally divided in their assessments on whether commodity programs should be available to all farms regardless of size or sales. Forty-one percent believe commodity programs should be available to all farms and 42 percent opposed this position. Nearly one in five producers (17%) were uncertain.

In addition to opinions on specific programs, producers were also asked their opinions on longer-term policy choices (Table 2). These items are listed by level of support.

Table 1. Agricultural policy preferences of Iowa farmers.

Congress and the Administration are considering new directions in farm policy and possible changes in the 1988 farm program. What is your opinion on the following provisions?

Policy	Percent				
	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Uncertain	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
The government should move toward a strict enforcement of the \$50,000 annual limit on government subsidies that any one farm can receive.....	67	17	5	6	5
Expanding the use of PIC (payment in certificates) in making program payments and thereby reducing government grain reserves.....	39	36	12	6	7
Commodity programs should be targeted to farms that have annual gross sales of less than \$250,000.....	45	27	11	10	7
To receive government program payments, farmers with erodible soils must have an approved conservation plan implemented by 1995	42	30	11	9	8
Expanding the long-term conservation reserve program to include less-erodible land.....	32	38	13	10	7
Marketing loans that are now available for cotton and rice allow producers to repay their price support loans at world market prices. This program should be expanded to include wheat, feed grains and soybeans.....	27	31	33	4	5
Commodity programs should be available to all farms regardless of size or sales.....	18	23	17	21	21

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents either strongly or somewhat supported making only minor revisions in the 1985 Farm Bill. One-fourth (24%) were uncertain and 17 percent opposed this policy.

Fifty-one percent expressed support for "de-coupling" which would allow producers to receive government payments without producing a crop. Twenty-six percent were uncertain about this proposal and the remaining 23 percent were opposed.

Forty-two percent of the respondents supported moving towards a more market-oriented policy over the next five years by reducing target prices and loan rates on corn and soybeans. But almost an equal number (37%) were opposed to this policy direction. Nearly one in five farmers (21%) are uncertain about moving this direction.

Farmers were divided on implementing mandatory production controls if approved in a producer referendum. Thirty-nine percent support this proposal, while 47 percent are opposed. Fourteen percent were uncertain about this approach.

Elimination of all price supports, production reduction programs and government storage by 1995 also received a mixed reaction. One-third (32%) supported this approach, 29 percent were uncertain and 39 percent opposed this proposal.

The survey also sought farmers' opinions on establishing a two-tiered pricing system. Nearly one-third (29%) supported this direction in agricultural policy, 32 percent were opposed and almost 4 out of 10 producers were uncertain about this policy.

Table 2. Longer-term policy preferences of Iowa farmers.

Long-term Policy	Percent				
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Uncertain	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
It would be best to make only minor revisions in the price support and acreage reduction programs that are in the 1985 Farm Bill.....	18	41	24	11	6
Income support for farmers should be "de-coupled" from current production. Under this proposal farmers would receive government payments based upon past production, but they would not have to produce a crop to receive payments	21	30	26	12	11
Moving toward a more market oriented policy over the next 5 years by reducing target prices and loan rates on corn and soybeans.....	15	27	21	18	19
If approved in a producer referendum, the government should implement price supports and production control programs, with all farmers required to participate.....	16	23	14	17	30
By 1995, the government should eliminate all price supports, production reduction programs and government storage.....	16	16	29	20	19
The government should establish a two-tiered price system, in which only the proportion of farm production used in domestic markets would be supported by target prices and deficiency payments.....	7	22	39	18	14

International Trade Policy

Because of the importance of export trade to Iowa agriculture, farmers were asked about directions they felt our country should pursue (Table 3). Sixty percent support the U.S. pursuing an open market system of trade by reducing all trade barriers.

Seventy-five percent supported entering into production agreements with other exporting nations to bring world supply in line with demand.

Fifty-one percent of the producers support increasing export incentives to enable U.S. grain companies to undercut prices being offered by foreign competitors.

Sixty-six percent support developing domestic markets for our farm products and de-emphasizing international trade as a solution to low prices.

In summary, responses to these four policy strategies suggest that producers want our country to pursue all strategies. Respondents were not asked to rank each strategy against all others, thus comparison is risky. It appears that in response to current low commodity prices, farmers are saying "pursue all strategies to increase our prices."

Opinions on Biotechnology

In the last couple of years there has been much interest in biotechnology. In this survey, several questions were included to assess how farmers view biotechnology.

The first interest was to assess respondents' knowledge of biotechnology, its benefits and problems. Only three percent of the respondents said they were very well informed about biotechnology and 42 percent felt they were somewhat informed. The remaining respondents indicated they were either relatively uninformed (37%) or not at all informed (18%) about biotechnology.

However, in the follow-up question, nearly two-thirds (65%) reported they had read some or a great deal about biotechnology. One-quarter (24%) indicated they hadn't read or heard much about it, and 11 percent said they were not familiar with biotechnology.

Respondents were then asked to provide their opinions on 14 possible impacts of biotechnology by checking a five-point scale that ranged from very desirable to very undesirable (Table 4). In the top one-half of Table 4, the impacts have been

Table 3. International trade policy preferences of Iowa farmers.

Strategy	What strategies do you believe the U.S. ought to pursue in international trade?				
	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Uncertain	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
	----- Percent -----				
Pursue an open market system of trade for all food exporting and importing countries, by reducing all trade barriers	26	34	21	13	6
Enter into production agreements among major exporting nations to bring world supply in line with world demand	29	46	16	6	3
Increase export incentives to enable grain companies to undercut prices being offered by foreign competitors to expand the U.S. market share	15	36	28	14	7
Develop domestic markets for U.S. farm products and de-emphasize international trade as a solution to low prices.....	26	40	20	10	4

Table 4. Assessment of biotechnology by Iowa farmers.

Listed below are some predictions about the likely impacts of biotechnology on U.S. agriculture. What are your opinions about the desirability of these impacts?

Probable Impact	Very desirable	Somewhat desirable	Uncertain	Somewhat undesirable	Very undesirable
	Percent				
Biotechnology will enable farmers to become less dependent upon agricultural chemicals.....	54	28	15	2	1
Through genetic changes, new varieties of corn will be able to fix their own nitrogen from the atmosphere, thus reducing the need for commercial fertilizer.....	49	32	14	3	2
Through biotechnology, scientists will be able to engineer new crop varieties.....	37	44	14	3	2
Research in biotechnology will increase the efficiency of feed conversion in livestock production.....	27	46	18	6	3
Biotechnology will help solve the problem of farm surpluses by finding new uses for crops and livestock.....	35	28	28	4	5
Biotechnology will bring improved levels of living for most farm families.....	31	30	33	3	3
Biotechnology will help meet the growing world-wide demand for food products.....	21	31	34	8	6

The number of farms in the U.S. will decline from the present 2.2 million to 1.2 million by the year 2000.....	2	6	16	27	49
Biotechnology will lead farmers to become more dependent upon large corporations for many of their inputs, such as seeds, growth hormones, and feed additives.....	3	7	19	35	36
By the year 2000, it is estimated that 50,000 farms (about four percent of all farms) will produce 75 percent of the nation's foodstuffs.....	2	8	21	28	41
Advances in biotechnology will probably benefit persons with large farm operations more than persons on middle-sized and small farms.....	4	7	25	30	34
Through embryo transfers, gene inserts, and growth hormones, milk production from individual cows will be doubled in the next 15 years.....	5	24	25	27	19
Increased production of foodstuffs - i.e., greater quantities of crops and livestock products - will be available for sale and export.....	5	19	31	27	18
Through biotechnology, scientists will be able to develop new species of animals.....	7	17	44	15	17

ordered by percent responding that the potential impacts of biotechnology would be desirable.

Fifty-four percent felt that enabling farmers to become less dependent upon agricultural chemicals was very desirable and an additional 28 percent viewed this as somewhat desirable. Nitrogen fixation capability in corn was viewed as either very or somewhat desirable by 81 percent of the respondents. Scientists being able to engineer new crop varieties was seen as desirable by 81 percent of the respondents.

Nearly three-fourths (73%) indicated it is desirable if biotechnology will increase the efficiency of feed conversion in livestock. Finding new uses for crops and livestock through biotechnology was viewed as positive by 63 percent of the respondents.

Sixty-one percent of respondents felt biotechnology would be desirable if it resulted in improved levels of living for most farm families. Fifty-two percent indicated biotechnology would have a desirable impact if it helped meet growing world demand for food products.

However, farmers also perceive that biotechnology may have some undesirable impacts as well. On the bottom one-half of Table 4 are listed, in descending order, the negative impacts.

The most negatively perceived impact was that farm numbers will decline by one million by the year 2000. Seventy-six percent of Iowa farmers felt this would be either somewhat or very undesirable. Seventy-one percent felt it would be undesirable if biotechnology resulted in farmers becoming more dependent upon large corporations for many of their inputs.

Sixty-nine percent agreed it was undesirable if 50,000 farms produce 75 percent of the nation's foodstuffs. Two-thirds of the respondents (64%) indicated it would be undesirable if advances in biotechnology benefited large farm operations over small or medium sized ones.

Forty-six percent viewed doubling milk production per cow in the next 15 years as undesirable. Forty-five percent of the respondents felt it would be undesirable if biotechnology resulted in increased production of foodstuffs.

Farmers were quite uncertain in their responses to the statement, "through biotechnology, scientists will be able to develop new species of animals." One-fourth (24%) view the development of new species of animals as desirable, one-third (32%) viewed this as undesirable, and the remaining 44 percent were uncertain.

University-Industry Linkages

In recent years there has been much discussion on how closely Iowa State University should work with the private sector. Some people feel ISU should work very closely with agricultural producers, suppliers and marketers as one way of stimulating economic development. Others believe that close ties between ISU and the private sector can compromise the autonomy of the university and lead to a misdirection of scientific research. The survey sought farmers' opinions on what should be the relationship between the university and the private sector (Table 5).

Respondents generally agreed that scientific research today is determined more by who can pay than by what is needed by society. Nearly eight out of ten (78%) agreed with this statement.

Respondents generally agreed that ISU should work more closely with private business and industry (76%) and that the insights and resources of industry can improve the quality and value of university research (75%). Three-fourths of the respondents agreed that more public funds should be used to support the development of new uses for agricultural commodities. Seventy percent agreed that closer linkages between university scientists and industry need to be encouraged.

One-half of the farm respondents agreed that university scientists are often more interested in helping private industries than in serving the state's citizens. One-third of the respondents were uncertain about this statement and 18 percent disagreed with it.

Respondents were nearly equally divided on whether new discoveries by university scientists should be available without restriction to any companies that wish to market these products. Forty percent agreed companies should have access, 37 percent disagreed, and the remaining 23 percent were uncertain.

Table 5. Iowa farmers' views of university-industry linkages.

Historically, land grant colleges have worked closely with agricultural producers, suppliers and marketers. Some people feel that there needs to be even stronger ties between Iowa State University and private business and industry as a way of stimulating economic development in Iowa. Others feel that establishment of such ties can compromise the autonomy of the university and lead to a misdirection of scientific research. Please indicate how strongly you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements that have been made about the potential benefits and costs of ISU becoming more closely linked to private business and industry, including agricultural producers.

Statement	Percent				
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Uncertain	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Scientific research today is determined more by who can pay than by what is needed by society.....	30	48	14	6	2
Iowa State University should work more closely with private business and industry, including agricultural producers.....	27	49	14	7	3
The insights and resources of industry can help improve the quality and value of university research.....	16	59	21	3	1
More public funds should be used to support the development of new uses for agricultural commodities.....	30	45	16	6	3
Closer linkages between university scientists and industry need to be encouraged.....	19	51	19	8	3
University scientists are often more interested in helping private industries than in serving the state's citizens.....	17	33	32	15	3
New discoveries by university scientists should be available without restriction to any companies that wish to market these products.....	12	28	23	27	10
New discoveries by university scientists should be patented by the university and sold to the highest bidder who would then make these products commercially available.....	12	27	27	20	14
The amount of private consulting of university scientists should be curtailed.....	5	20	44	25	6
Scientists, rather than the agri-business community, should determine what types of problems need to be investigated.....	6	17	22	38	17
Scientists should select their research problems on the basis of scientific criteria rather than whether or not this research will benefit economic development in the state.....	4	18	29	37	12

This mixed opinion is also evident in reactions to the statement that new discoveries by university scientists should be patented by the university and sold to the highest bidder who would make these products commercially available. Thirty-nine percent agreed with the statement, 27 percent were unsure and 34 percent disagreed.

The statement, 'the amount of private consulting

of university scientists should be curtailed' also drew a diverse opinion. Twenty-five percent agreed that private consulting should be curtailed, 44 percent indicated an uncertainty and 31 percent disagreed.

Fifty-five percent of the respondents disagreed with the assertion that scientists, rather than the agribusiness community, should determine what

Table 6. Iowa farmers' views of conservation tillage advantages and disadvantages.

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of conservation tillage? (Let conservation tillage refer to a practice where at least one-third of the previous crop residue is left on the surface, as compared to conventional tillage where all the crop residue is turned over.)

Factor	Percent					
	Considerable advantage	Moderate advantage	Almost the same	Moderate disadvantage	Considerable disadvantage	Unsure
Wind erosion control.....	64	29	6	0	0	1
Soil erosion due to water run-off.....	65	27	6	1	0	1
Fuel required.....	44	44	10	1	0	1
Time spent in the field.....	43	44	11	1	0	1
Moisture conservation.....	30	54	12	2	0	2
Labor required.....	40	43	15	1	0	1
Soil compaction.....	26	48	17	5	2	2
Overall profitability.....	15	44	32	4	1	4
Equipment needs/investment.....	15	41	30	8	4	2
Yields.....	3	13	62	17	2	3
Germination/stand.....	4	11	49	30	2	4
Fertilizer placement.....	4	11	44	31	6	4
Weed control.....	3	8	33	39	15	2
Disease control.....	1	4	33	43	13	6
Insect control.....	1	5	31	43	15	5

types of problems need to be investigated. About one in five farmers (23%) agreed that scientists should select problems, while 22 percent were uncertain.

Twenty-two percent of the farm operators agreed that scientists should select problems on the basis of scientific criteria, rather than whether the research would benefit economic development. However, nearly one-half (49%) disagreed with this position. Almost one-third (29%) were uncertain about how research problems should be selected.

Conservation Tillage Evaluation

More than 90 percent of the respondents indicated that conservation tillage (see Table 6 for definition) provides advantages in controlling soil erosion due to either wind or water. Nearly nine out of ten farmers indicated that fuel savings and time spent in the field were advantages of conservation tillage.

Moisture conservation and labor required were viewed as an advantage, according to more than 80 percent of the respondents. About three-fourths (74%) of the respondents reported conservation tillage holds advantages in soil compaction.

Conservation tillage was judged as advantageous for overall profitability by 59 percent of the farmers, and held advantages in equipment needs according to 56 percent of the respondents.

Nearly six out of ten (62%) felt that yields were about the same with conservation tillage. About one-half (49%) indicated that germination was about the same when using conservation tillage, although one-third judged this a disadvantage. Thirty-seven percent reported that fertilizer placement was a disadvantage of conservation tillage and 44 percent felt fertilizer placement was about the same when using conventional tillage.

Respondents identified three disadvantages of conservation tillage. Fifty-four percent indicated weed control is a problem, 56 percent felt disease control is a disadvantage, and 58 percent reported insect control is a problem with conservation tillage.

Risk Management

The survey inquired about farmers' opinions about risk in farming. Fifty-seven percent reported they believe risk in farming has greatly increased in the past five years, and an additional 28 percent felt risk had somewhat increased. Eleven percent indicated that risk had remained the same over the past five years, while only 4 percent felt that risk had decreased.

As a follow-up, the poll asked farmers how concerned they were about the level of risk in their operations. Forty percent report they were very concerned and 35 percent indicated they were somewhat concerned. Seventeen percent reported they were slightly concerned and only 8 percent reported they were not concerned about the risk in their farming operations.

Table 7 presents data on the type of adjustments that farmers have made in the past two years to reduce risk in their farming operations. Eighty-two percent reported they are paying closer attention to marketing. Seventy percent reported they have reduced their long-term debt and the same proportion reported they have reduced short-term debt. More attention to marketing, and debt reduction stand out as the most dramatic adjustments farmers have made to reduce operating risk.

About one-third reported they have diversified their operation by producing a mix of livestock or have built on-farm storage for grain. Other strategies used by farmers to reduce risk were taking an off-farm job (26%), started using forward contracting to buy inputs (24%), and using the futures market or forward contracting to hedge prices (22%).

Other less frequently cited adjustments to reduce risk included reducing size of farm operation (16%), moving from cash rent to crop share (13%), and implementing a detailed computer analysis (10%). Ten percent also reported they had diversified their operation by additional crops. The remaining risk reduction strategies were implemented by less than 10 percent of the respondents.

Table 7. Risk management adjustments by Iowa farmers.

What have you done to reduce the risk in your farming operation in the past two years?

Adjustment	Yes -Percent-	No
Paying closer attention to marketing ..	82	18
Reduced long-term debt	70	30
Reduced short-term debt	70	30
Diversified farm operation by		
producing a mix of livestock	32	68
Built on-farm storage for grain	31	69
Taken an off-farm job	26	74
Started using forward contracting		
to buy farm inputs	24	76
Using the futures market or forward		
contracting to hedge prices	22	78
Reduced size of farming operation ...	16	84
Moved from cash rent to crop share ...	13	87
Have implemented detailed computer		
analysis	10	90
Diversified farm operation by adding		
additional crops	10	90
Diversified farm operation by		
producing specialty crops	4	96
Have taken on a limited partner	4	96
Producing crops under contract		
with a processor	3	97
Producing livestock under contract		
with a processor	2	98
Hired a professional farm manager	1	99
Installed irrigation	1	99

Contract Farming

Some people propose that contract farming offers advantages to both farmers and food processors by offering a steady supply of products to the processor and reducing market uncertainty for producers. However, Iowa farmers generally did not express high levels of interest in contract farming (Table 8).

Forty percent reported they were very or somewhat interested in producing specialty crops under contract with a food company. One-fifth (21%) indicated they were either very or somewhat interested in producing livestock under contract with a farm supply or food company. Seven percent of Iowa farmers reported they were interested in producing poultry under contract with a food company.

Table 8. Iowa farmers' views of contract farming.

Item	Percent			
	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested	Not sure
How interested are you in producing specialty crops under contract with a farm supply or food company?	7	33	48	12
How interested are you in producing livestock under contract with a farm supply or food company?	4	17	70	9
How interested are you in producing poultry under contract with a farm supply or food company?	1	6	87	6

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CRD, 7 Rural Development**

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