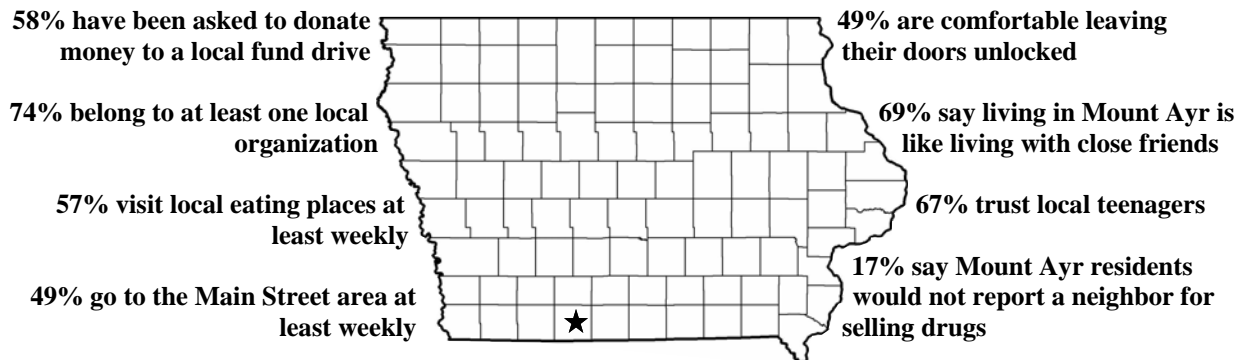


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN MOUNT AYR

In February 2004, the Rural Development Initiative Project at Iowa State University conducted a survey designed to look at changes in the social conditions in Iowa's rural towns. The survey was mailed to nearly 15,000 households in 99 towns, one of which was Mount Ayr. Ten years ago, residents of these same 99 communities were asked to complete a similar survey. The households for both surveys were selected randomly from local telephone directories (150 households per community). In 1994, 102 Mount Ayr residents responded to the survey, and 104 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Mount Ayr residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN MOUNT AYR IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

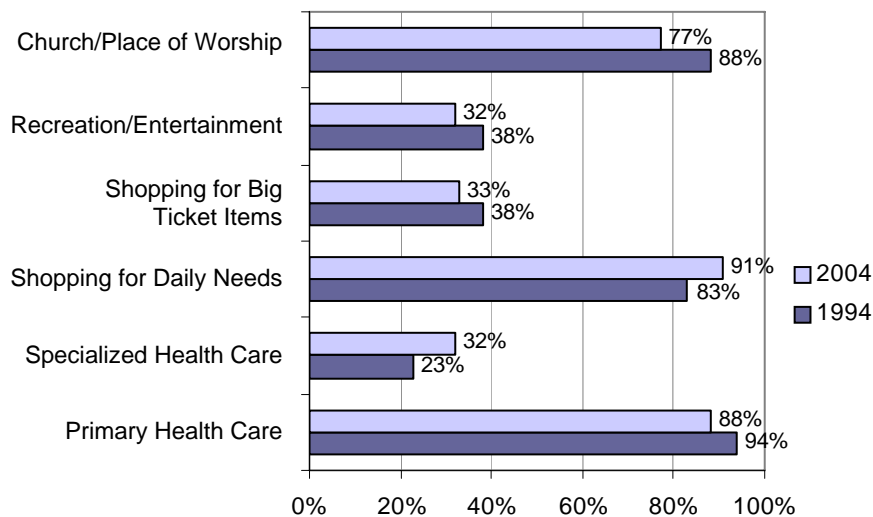


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey show that Mount Ayr residents remain in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Mount Ayr. Most residents stayed in Mount Ayr to attend church or a place of worship, while only about one-third remained for recreation or entertainment.

A large majority reported that they shop for their daily needs in Mount Ayr, while about one-third said they stay local to shop for "big ticket" items. Similarly, most residents said they obtain primary health care in Mount Ayr, whereas only 32 percent remained for specialized health care. None of these patronage patterns changed significantly over the past decade.

A Note on Interpretation: For Mount Ayr, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 12 percent should be considered a statistical "dead-heat." That is, they fall within the margin of error range, which occurs whenever samples are used to draw conclusions about a larger group. With the modest sample sizes used in this study, the differences must be relatively large before we can be confident that they are real. Throughout the report, differences that are equal to or exceed 12 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

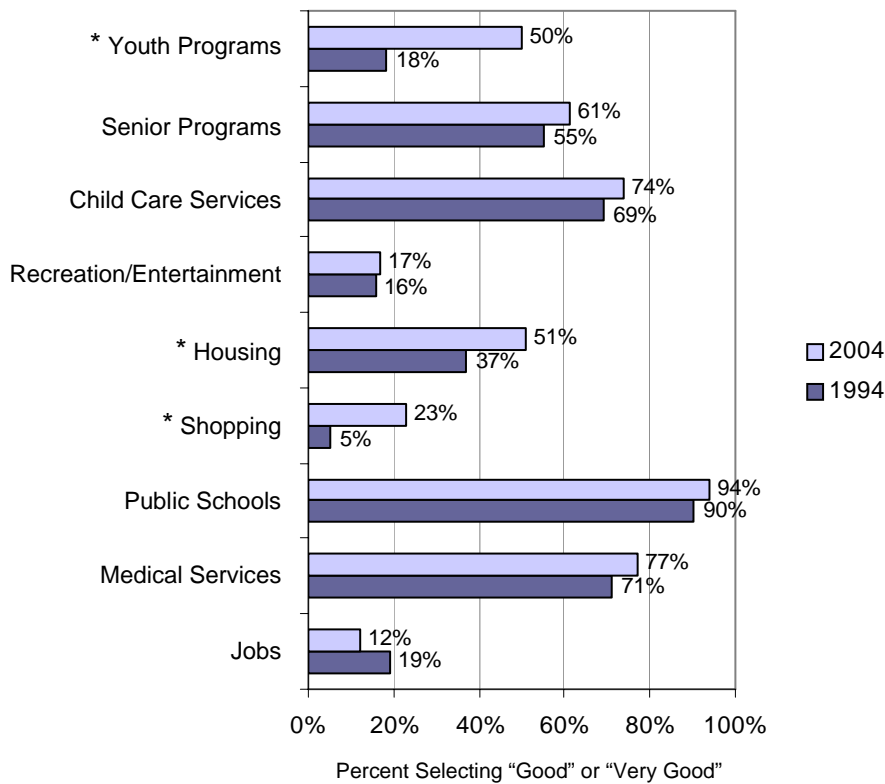


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

Nine local services were listed on the questionnaire along with instructions to rate each as “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” or “not available.” Figure 2 shows the percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. Nearly all Mount Ayr residents rated the public schools as good or very good, while over half assigned positive ratings to senior programs, child care services, housing, and medical services. Far fewer rated recreation, shopping, and jobs favorably. Ratings for senior programs, child care services, recreation/entertainment, public schools, medical services, and jobs did not change significantly over the past ten years, but the percentage of positive ratings increased significantly for youth programs, housing, and shopping.

RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to provide ratings for seven services normally provided by local governments. Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents rating each service as “good” or “very good” for 2004 and 1994. Overall, Mount Ayr residents were satisfied with their government services. A large majority rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, the condition of the parks, and police protection as good or very good. Water and the condition of the streets were rated favorably by about half of the residents in 2004, although ratings for both changed significantly—positive ratings increased for the condition of the streets, but decreased for water.

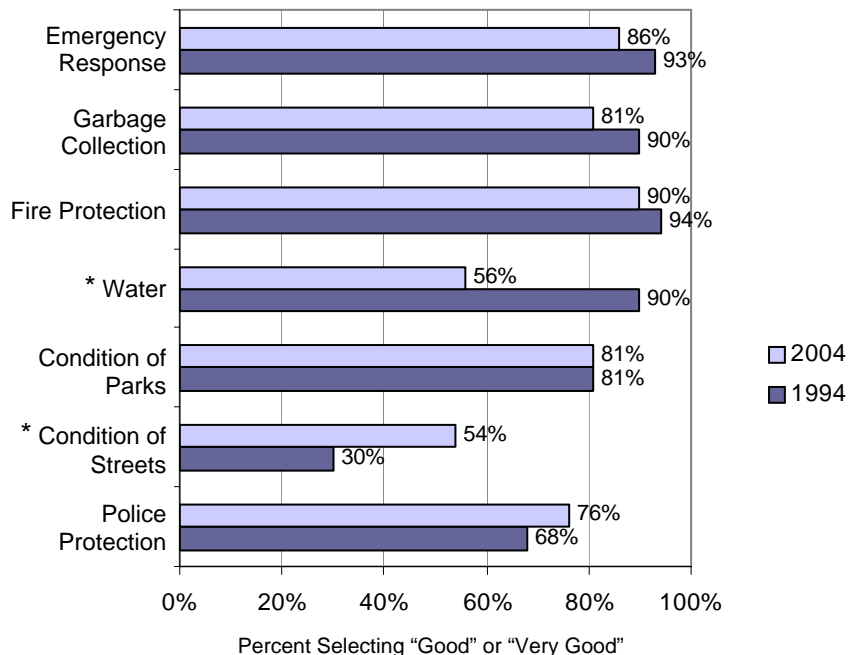


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

MOUNT AYR'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are regularly praised for having favorable social climates. A main goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's rural towns possess favorable social environments. Accordingly, a variety of questions were included on the survey asking residents to evaluate various social attributes of their communities.

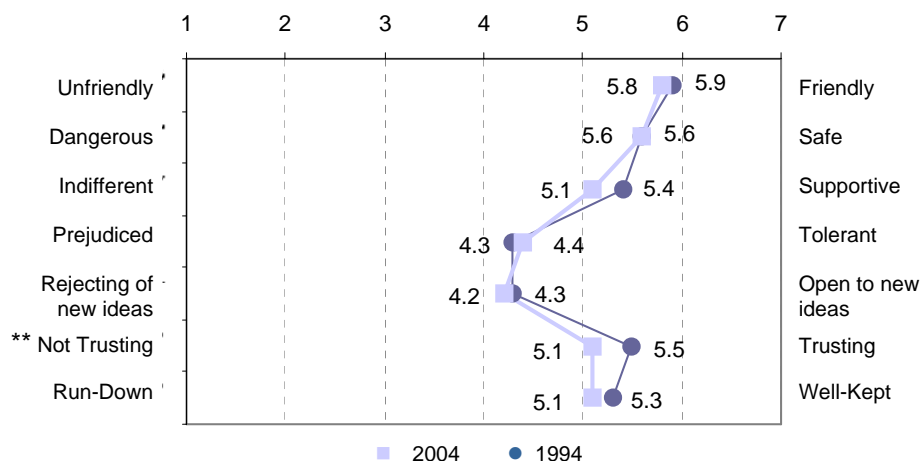


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in both years, residents assigned the highest ratings to the friendliness, safety, and trusting nature of Mount Ayr. The lowest ratings were given to the extent to which residents view Mount Ayr as tolerant and open to new ideas. Ratings for most of these qualities are the same as they were ten years ago—the only significant change is that residents now view Mount Ayr as less trusting.

** The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only those items designated by double asterisks (**) have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and can thus be considered to have changed since 1994.

SOCIAL TIES

“Everybody knows everybody” is often cited as a feature of small towns. The extent to which people know and interact with each other influences commitment to the community and interest in its well-being. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 71 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Mount Ayr, compared to 63 percent in 1994. Seventy-four percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 75 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 32 percent of residents in 2004 and 33 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Mount Ayr. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Mount Ayr residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most residents said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 87 percent indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Mount Ayr residents still feel attached to their community.

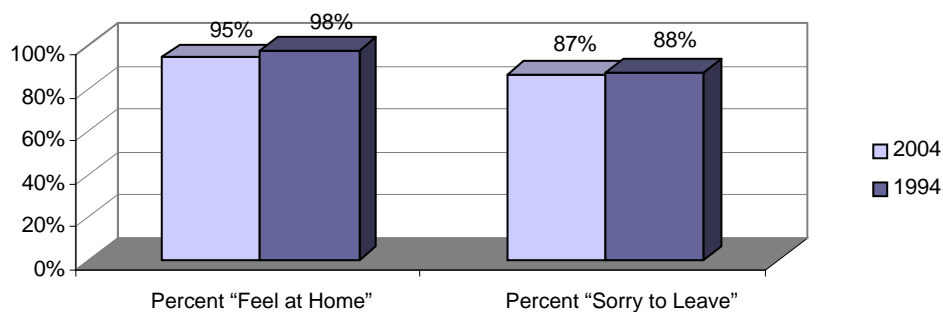


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Mount Ayr, 84 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Additionally, over half of the residents indicated in both years that they had participated in a community improvement project during the years prior to each survey, and in 2004, 43 percent described themselves as active in community activities and events (see Figure 6). These levels of community involvement did not change significantly over the past ten years. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in Mount Ayr projects and events, the top three selected by residents were lack of time (58%), not being asked by others to volunteer (34%), and lack of interest in becoming involved (23%).

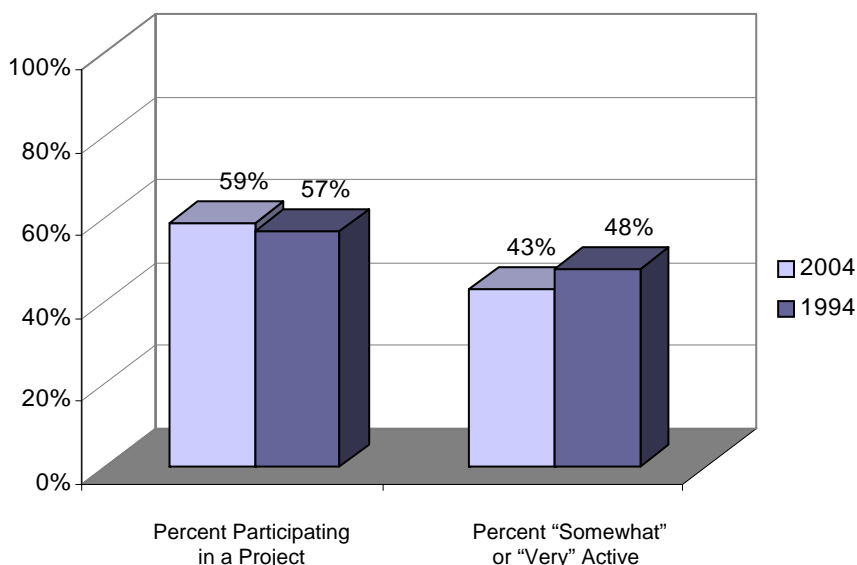


Figure 6: Community Involvement

SUMMARY

A major goal of this project is to examine changes in the social conditions in rural Iowa over the past decade. As previously discussed, the differences between 2004 and 1994 shown in this report must be interpreted to account for the margin of error—that is, we cannot say with confidence that a change has occurred unless the difference is equal to or greater than 12 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Mount Ayr over the past decade? Patronage patterns remain unchanged, with most residents staying in Mount Ayr to attend church, to shop for daily needs, and for primary health care. Still, many seek recreation, shop for big ticket items, and obtain specialized health care outside of the community. Evaluations of the quality of youth programs, housing, and shopping increased significantly. Evaluations of local government services remain high, and ratings increased for the condition of the streets. However, there was a decrease in ratings for water services.

The social environment has changed very little. Ratings for the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, and appearance are the same as they were in 1994, although residents did report that Mount Ayr is now less trusting. The extent to which people know each other in Mount Ayr remains unchanged as well. Mount Ayr residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Mount Ayr and would be sorry to leave. Finally, levels of community involvement are about the same as they were ten years ago, with over half reporting that they had participated in a community project, and about four in ten considering themselves to be active in the community.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Mount Ayr’s future. **We wish to thank the Mount Ayr residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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RDI-194 — This report was prepared through the **Rural Development Initiative** Project, Iowa State University and funded by the National Research Initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 2003-35401-13828.