

Nebraska Rural Poll Collaborates to Provide Statewide Survey

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Last year, the Nebraska Rural Poll celebrated its 25th anniversary. This year will be another special milestone for the survey. Within the next month, the Rural Poll will once again arrive in mailboxes of 7,000 Nebraskans living in rural parts of the state, just as it has each year since 1996. However, this year 7,000 households in the metropolitan parts of Nebraska will also receive the same survey. The Nebraska Business Development Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha has provided funding to expand the survey to the counties in the Omaha and Lincoln metropolitan areas that are typically excluded from the sample of the Nebraska Rural Poll.

The Rural Poll has historically given rural Nebraskans an opportunity to voice their opinions on wide-ranging and important topics including agricultural policy, energy, climate change, crime, education, health care, housing, immigration, taxes, community development strategies, and technology. In addition, questions about personal and community well-being and satisfaction are asked every year. These core questions give city and state leaders, economic developers and others who use this poll data the ability to measure changes over time in rural Nebraskans' sense of well-being and satisfaction with their communities.

This year, in addition to those core questions, households across the state will be asked about impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as their levels of trust in various media and institutions. This is a critical year to expand the survey statewide so that those impacts can be measured in both urban and rural areas of the state. Given the historic pandemic, it will be important to see how households across the state are coping. How were various aspects of their life disrupted by the pandemic? Did they experience changes in their employment or income? Did their internet service limit their ability to work from home or for children to participate in online learning? What changes do they anticipate making in the future?

Despite many challenges faced last year (ongoing impacts from the bomb cyclone in 2019, low commodity prices and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic), rural Nebraskans remained optimistic about both their current situation as well as their future. Whether that sense of optimism will remain in 2021 remains to be seen.

Each year, findings from the Rural Poll are distributed in a series of reports which can be found online at <http://ruralpoll.unl.edu> – organized by both survey year and topic. This data is used widely by economic development groups; local, state and federal lawmakers; and nonprofits, among others. Findings from the poll are also regularly highlighted in local and state media.

The university's Department of Agricultural Economics conducts the poll with funding from Rural Prosperity Nebraska and UNL's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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