



## PUBLIC SUPPORT, CONT.

That support is not unconditional, however.

Nearly 85 percent of Americans think farmers receiving federal aid should be required to apply conservation practices, or that those who did so should receive more of the money.

Support for conservation payments is beyond theoretical. In fact, 63 percent say they would be willing to forgo part of a federal income tax rebate if the money were put toward protection of waterways, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Similarly, nearly 60 percent say that they are willing to pay higher property or sales taxes to help farmers ensure safer drinking water; 49 percent would pay more in taxes to protect farms that grow produce in their area from development; and 40 percent would pay more taxes simply to protect particularly scenic farmlands.

A majority of Americans (53 percent) state clearly that they want to see more federal dollars spent to keep farmland from being developed.

## METHODOLOGY

American Farmland Trust commissioned Dr. J. Dixon Esseks, Northern Illinois University, to conduct a two-phase telephone survey of 2,213 registered voters nationwide. Households were contacted through random digit dialing. The interviewers asked to speak with a registered voter in each home, alternating between male and female voters. A random sample of this type is likely to yield a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.3 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases. Responses to the survey were gathered between June 2 through July 26, 2001. The Tarrance Group, Inc., provided consulting and analytical services.

Enough calls were made to be able to extrapolate the results for seven of the eight regions. Because of funding and time constraints, we did not complete enough calls in the Central Plains region to summarize the results (includes: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota). The following regional farming profiles highlight how voters in different regions across the country see farm policy.

# T H E N O R T H E A S T

The Northeast region holds 21.8 million acres of farmland, representing about 19 percent of the region. The average farm is 157 acres and only 68,266 full-time farmers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$11.5 billion. Nursery, poultry, fruit, dairy and other crops dominate those sales. Key conservation concerns include water quality, the loss of northeastern forest lands which are home to many species of animals and birds, farmland protection and higher rental payments for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$181 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of just 2 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.<sup>3</sup>

Every spring the families show up at Susan Butler's farm in Montgomery County, Maryland, and tell the same story.

"My mother and father used to bring me here to pick strawberries," they tell their children as they prepare to introduce them to this little bit of rural America perched on the outskirts of the nation's capital, just 25 miles outside of Washington, D.C.

That is very gratifying to Butler and her brothers, who in 1983 joined the family farm their parents founded in 1950. The siblings later took advantage of a local farmland protection program and added 200 acres to the farm. Since then, they have used the land to grow pick-your-own strawberries, blueberries, pumpkins, peas and Christmas trees.

"We know that our farm is of value to people for the fresh produce it provides, but it is more than that," Butler says. "In addition to those who come for produce, we have

walkers, photographers, art classes and educational tours—like the families who come to pick their own produce, they want the farm experience."

Providing that experience in such a fast growing community gets tougher every year, she says. If it's not a developer wanting to build homes, or a power company trying to build a substation, it's a phone company wanting to erect a cell tower.

"We work hard to maintain our atmosphere, but there is just endless pressure from developers," Butler says.

Based upon the survey by American Farmland Trust, it appears her neighbors appreciate those efforts.

Registered voters in the Northeast are the most likely in the nation (45 percent) to say they would be willing to pay more in taxes to protect scenic farmland. Similarly, those voters are the most concerned





CONNECTICUT  
 DELAWARE  
 MAINE  
 MARYLAND  
 MASSACHUSETTS  
 NEW HAMPSHIRE  
 NEW JERSEY  
 NEW YORK  
 PENNSYLVANIA  
 RHODE ISLAND  
 VERMONT

“All across America there are farmers like us. Valued and cherished by their community, they need help providing the environmental products that people want along with the strawberries, blueberries and pumpkins.”

of the seven regions surveyed when it comes to wildlife habitat, with 45 percent saying the government should spend more to protect wildlife habitat on farms.

Those voters also appear to care deeply about the treatment farmers in their region receive. Nearly 80 percent are aware of federal farm programs; 80 percent approve of payments to farmers to cover low market prices for crops, and 90 percent favor them for weather damage. More importantly, two-thirds of those voters agree that farm payments should not be limited to the currently supported commodity crops, an important distinction in a region where farmers benefit little from such programs.

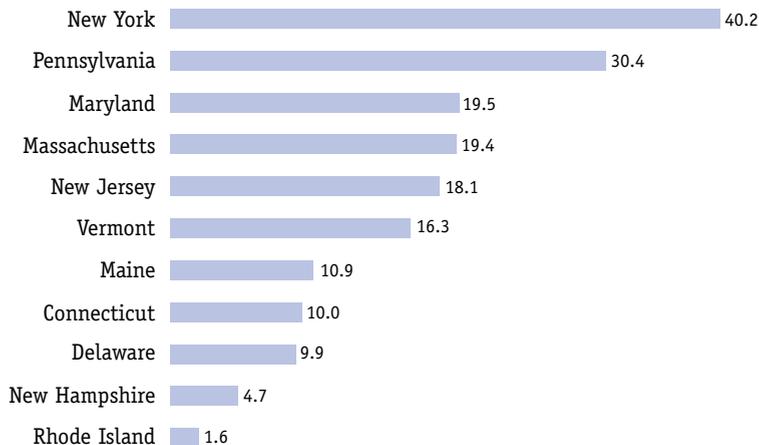
However, like voters across the country, they also feel that stewardship should be a condition of receiving such funds. More than

three-quarters (77 percent) say that farm payments should be tied to a farmer’s willingness to take steps to protect land and water. In particular, 59 percent believe that farmers should be required to take steps to protect water quality, 66 percent expect land conservation measures in return for the funding, and 57 percent want to make those funds contingent upon greater protection of wetlands.

While encouraged by such results, Butler was hardly surprised—those are the types of things her customers tell her all the time. She simply hopes Congress will listen, as well.

“All across America there are farmers like us,” she says. “Valued and cherished by their community, they need help providing the environmental benefits that people want, along with the strawberries, blueberries and pumpkins.”

**Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001<sup>4</sup>**



Millions of Dollars

# T H E M I D W E S T

The Midwest region has 81 million acres of farmland, about 53 percent of the region. The average farm is 256 acres and 160,733 full-time farmers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$27.6 billion. Corn, dairy, soybeans, hogs and cattle make up the bulk of the sales. Conservation concerns include surface water quality, soil erosion, more technical assistance and farmland protection. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$190 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of 11 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.<sup>3</sup>

**B**ob and Fred Uphoff work hard at being good neighbors.

The brothers, who raise about 2,000 hogs a year on their farm just outside of Madison, Wisconsin, work practically in the shadow of strip malls and subdivisions. Consequently, they continuously strive to reduce manure odors and to ensure nearby waterways aren't contaminated.

They are happy to do these things for the benefit of their neighbors, but they would be quite pleased if those neighbors didn't creep any closer. That is why the Uphoffs helped establish, and were the first to participate in, a purchase of development rights (PDR) program in their township.

"This is our home base, and we wanted to keep it going," says Bob, noting that Uphoffs have worked the land since 1866. "We also wanted to

find a way that allowed older farmers to capitalize on the value of their property while keeping the land in farming."

That locally funded PDR program, pioneered in 1996, so far has protected about 1,500 acres of farmland in their township. That is a success by any measure, but it is only a fraction of what could be done.

"There is so much more interest than there is money," Uphoff says. "So many people would prefer to leave the land in farming than see it cut up into lots for houses, but the funding isn't there."

Voters in the Midwest favor the federal government stepping in and giving that process a boost. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of registered voters contacted in American Farmland Trust's recent poll worry that too much farmland is being developed.





ILLINOIS  
INDIANA  
MICHIGAN  
OHIO  
WISCONSIN

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Furthermore, 55 percent (more than in any other region of the country) support the idea of more federal funding to protect farmland from sprawl.

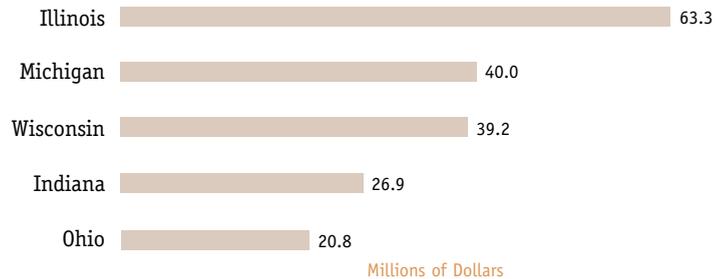
In a region where more than half of the land is in farming, perhaps it is not surprising that Midwest respondents were among the most knowledgeable in the nation when it came to farm payments. Seventy-nine percent are familiar with the payments, and the same percentage support using them to offset low market prices, while 90 percent support payments for weather damage.

However, that support comes with some strings attached. Nearly nine out of 10 Midwesterners (88 percent) say farm payments somehow should be linked to a farmer’s willingness to take proven steps to protect land and water resources.

Perhaps the biggest surprise from this region, in which currently assisted crops such as corn make up the greatest percentage of farming, was the level of support demonstrated for extending farm payments to a wider variety of farmers. Seventy-one percent of respondents favor making the payments available to growers of fruits, vegetables and other farm products largely excluded under the present farm bill. Nowhere else in the country did voters voice such strong support for that concept.

Support for more federal funding to develop biofuels (such as ethanol) was also far higher in the Midwest (74 percent) than anywhere else in the country.

#### Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001<sup>4</sup>



# T H E S O U T H E A S T

The Southeast region has 57 million acres in farming, about 35 percent of the region. The average farm is 197.5 acres and 129,768 full-time farmers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$21.8 billion. Poultry, tobacco, hogs, cattle and cotton make up much of those sales. Top environmental challenges include water, both quality and quantity, the loss of wildlife habitat by the clear-cutting of private forestlands and urban sprawl. The decreasing production of tobacco has created more demand for conservation programs in general as an alternative use for land while alternatives to tobacco are being explored. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$258 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of 5 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.<sup>3</sup>

Bob Wilson had given up any hope of getting federal assistance to help make improvements on his farm.

He had applied again and again, only to be rejected.

This year would be different, he was told. This year, they said, there was plenty of money to go around. So this year, for the first time in ages, Wilson applied for assistance to help offset the cost of fencing in a spring and piping water to a dry field. Doing so would allow him to rotate his beef cattle through pastures more effectively, cutting costs while protecting the water supply.

But this year, like most every year he tried in the past, he was turned down.

Now his attitude is once again like that of his neighbors in Jessamine

County, Kentucky. "Everybody feels pretty much the same. Why bother applying? You are just going to be rejected," he says.

It is little wonder that they feel that way. Nationally, 70 percent of farmers looking for assistance to improve water quality were turned down last year.

The recent poll sponsored by American Farmland Trust indicates that the problem concerns voters throughout the Southeast. The survey found voters there wholeheartedly support government payments to farmers to offset low market prices for their crops (78 percent) or to protect them from weather damage (88 percent). However, 82 percent of voters say farm payments somehow should be tied to a farmer's willingness to protect land and water resources. In particular, 65 percent believe such

