



2003 Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania Rural Residents



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a report by
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INTRODUCTION

Rural people represent a critical component of the Commonwealth. Their views on issues such as the economy, community development, enhancement of human capital, and preservation and use of the state's abundant natural resources should be of concern to all Pennsylvanians. However, their opinions are often overlooked and/or undervalued because rural people are dispersed throughout the Commonwealth, are inadequately politically organized, and, in statewide public opinion assessments, are seldom separated from the numerically dominant urban sector for description and analysis (Princeton Survey Research Associates Intl., 2003).

Data from three recent studies, however, including the 1999 Center for Rural Pennsylvania project on which this study is based, provide information specifically on attitudes of residents of rural Pennsylvania. These are used here to analyze changes in rural attitudes over time.

This study addresses two main points. First, issues facing the state in general and rural areas in particular can be expected to have changed over time, particularly after the events of September 11, 2001. New research is continually needed to provide timely and relevant information for policymakers and the public on questions such as: What are rural Pennsylvanians' attitudes concerning critical issues facing their communities and the state? How much trust do they have in state and local governments to deal with these issues? How have their views changed across time?

Second, it is also critical to understand the differences that exist *within* Pennsylvania's rural sector. Rural persons and communities differ from one another in their problems, relevant issues, and residents' views.



Project Goals and Methodology

The project had four goals:

1. Ascertain the current attitudes and perceptions of the residents of rural areas in Pennsylvania related to the economy, government, the environment, and other issues.
2. Assess changes in the attitudes of rural Pennsylvanians over the last few years.
3. Explain the diversity in the views of rural Pennsylvanians.
4. Suggest how knowledge of the current and changing nature of attitudes of rural Pennsylvanians can be used by state and local policy-makers to develop and implement more effective programs targeted to addressing quality of life issues in rural areas.

The Survey

A mail survey of a representative sample of adults living in rural counties in Pennsylvania was carried out in 2003. Using the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's definition, rural refers to those 48 counties in which the number of persons per square mile, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, was less than 274 (the statewide population density).

Because an objective of the study was to chart changes in rural attitudes across time, survey items chosen for inclusion were drawn largely from the three previous surveys of rural Pennsylvanians mentioned above¹. Questions dealt with respondents' views concerning a variety of state, local, and personal issues as well as some general social issues and computer use.

¹The three previous surveys are: *An Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania's Rural Residents (1999)* - funded by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg; *Citizens' Viewpoint 2000* - conducted by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at Penn State University; and *Citizens' Viewpoint 2002* - a second Citizens' Viewpoint survey.

A total of 4,000 names and addresses were obtained from a commercial sampling organization, with the number of names in each county determined by the proportion of the state's total rural population residing in that county. In May 2003, a pre-notice letter was sent to these persons, followed by the initial mailing of the survey materials with a cash incentive. A reminder post card and two follow-up contacts with duplicate copies of the questionnaire were used to increase response rates. Although 704 of the addresses were undeliverable, 1,737 subjects returned usable information for a 52.7 percent response rate.

About the Respondents

Of the 1,737 rural respondents, 48 percent were male, 52 percent were female. The median age of subjects was 54 years. Half of those who reported their household incomes earned less than \$40,000, and one in five earned \$20,000 or less. Just 3 percent were currently unemployed and looking for work. Forty-six percent had no formal education beyond high school, while 23 percent had a four-year college degree.

Characteristics of the respondents did not differ significantly from those in the 2000 U.S. Census. The percentages of males and females matched, while persons less than 45 years old were under-represented in the sample; those with education beyond high school and those with higher incomes were somewhat over-represented.

The Analysis

Once survey data were collected, frequency distributions of the responses were created to provide a general picture of rural Pennsylvanians' attitudes, perceptions, and concerns. The margin of error for the data varied but was never greater than plus-or-minus 3 percentage points.

To examine diversity among rural residents, the researchers compared attitudinal responses to characteristics of respondents as well as to Census and other secondary source data. All quantitative measures were converted to the following categories:

Personal characteristics:

- Age – under 45 years; 45-64 years; and 65 years and older
- Gender – male and female
- Education - high school graduate or less; some post high school education; and college graduate or more
- Income – less than \$20,000; \$20,000 to 39,999; and \$40,000 and over

County-level characteristics:

- Population density – less than 100; 100 to 199; and 200 or more persons per square mile
- Median household income - less than \$32,250; \$32,250 to 35,249; and \$35,250 and over
- Percentage employed in extractive industries (farming, forestry, fishing, and mining) - less than 1.2 percent; 1.2 percent to 2.4 percent; and 2.5 percent or more
- Population change 1990-2000 - Decrease (-6.5 percent to -0.6 percent); Stable (-.4 percent to +3.5 percent); and Increase (+4.0 percent and over)
- Changes in total employment 2001-2002 - Decline (a decrease of 2.0 percent or more); Stable (plus or minus 1.5 percent or less); and Increase (2.0 percent increase or more).

RESULTS

Current Attitudes of Rural Pennsylvanians

Attitudes were divided into four areas of concern: (1) *State-Level Issues*, including the attitudes and perceptions rural people hold about Pennsylvania and the importance of various issues facing the Commonwealth in the coming years; (2) *Local Community Issues*, including how rural people evaluated their communities and the priorities they believed should be given to various local facilities, human services, and land use issues; (3) *Personal Concerns* related to individual well-being; and (4) *General Social Issues* facing people everywhere.

State-Level Issues

Satisfaction

When asked how satisfied they were with the way things were going in Pennsylvania, 67 percent reported that they were at least more or less satisfied, but 33 percent indicated that they were not satisfied. Moreover, only 17 percent felt that the economy would get better over the next year, 44 percent indicated that it would stay the same, and 39 percent felt that it would get worse.

Priority issues

When asked to indicate what priority various state issues should have in the future, as compared to what is being done now, respondents gave the greatest percentages of higher priority ratings to availability of jobs and health care, each at more than 80 percent. Access to telecommunications and the Internet, preservation of historical and cultural resources and construction of new state highways received the smallest percentages of higher priority ratings, each below 25 percent. (See Figure 1)

These evaluations did not necessarily reflect the *absolute* importance given to each item, but whether the current emphasis given to a particular issue should be increased, stay about the same, or be decreased. Indeed, a majority of respondents saw all of the issues as deserving at least the same priority in the future.

From the total list of issues, subjects were asked to select the *one* that they felt was the most important or most in need of higher priority in the future. By far the largest percentage of those who responded to this question indicated that the availability of jobs was the most important issue at 37 percent. Health care was second at 15 percent, followed by education for youth and children, care of the elderly, and reform of Pennsylvania's local tax structure, each at 7 percent, and preservation of farmland at 6 percent. The remaining 20 percent of the answers were scattered over the other 16 items with no single issue receiving more than 5 percent.

FIGURE 1. PRIORITY FOR VARIOUS STATE ISSUES

What priority do you want each of the following to have in the future?	Higher Priority
Availability of jobs	87 %
Health care	81 %
Crime & violence	69 %
Care of the elderly	68 %
Education for youth & children	64 %
Drug & alcohol abuse	64 %
Safe drinking water	63 %
Safe disposal of industrial wastes	61 %
Reform of PA's local tax structure	60 %
Safe food supply	54 %
Preservation of farmland	53 %
Clean up of polluted sites	47 %
Homeland security/public safety	46 %
Protection & conservation of environment	44 %
Reduce out-migration of professionals	42 %
Preserve wildlife habitats	40 %
Reduce out-migration of youth	39 %
Air quality	39 %
Child-care	34 %
Construction of new state highways	24 %
Preservation of historical & cultural resources	20 %
Access to telecommunications & Internet	15 %

Regional responses were examined to discover whether views differed across rural Pennsylvania on the 11 issues for which at least 50 percent felt higher priority was needed. While there was not much variation among regions, the following regional differences were uncovered.

- Concerns about job availability were highest in the northwest and lowest in the south central and north-east regions.
- Concerns about crime and violence were highest in the western regions and lowest in the south central and northeast.
- The south central and northeast regions were the most likely to give higher priority to preserving farmland.
- The northwest and southwest regions were the most likely to endorse higher priority for reforming the state’s local tax structure.
- Safe disposal of industrial wastes had the most support as a higher priority issue in the northeast and the least in the southwest.

State spending

Rural subjects were also asked whether the state government is spending too much, too little, or just the right amount of money on various programs. Responses paralleled the priority responses mentioned above.

- Three areas were seen as receiving too little money by a majority of those surveyed: creating jobs and economic opportunity (71 percent), problems of the aging (56 percent), and improving and protecting citizens’ health (55 percent). Nearly half (47 percent) felt that more should be spent on improving the state’s educational system.
- Sizeable percentages felt that state government should be spending additional money on: dealing with crime and safety (37 percent), child-care for working parents (34 percent), improving/protecting the environment (25 percent), and public transportation (24 percent). Larger percentages felt that current spending was about right or too high in these areas.

Priorities for job creation and the economy

To create jobs and develop Pennsylvania’s economy, a majority of rural Pennsylvanians saw high merit in providing incentives to industries, increasing worker skills, and promoting small businesses.

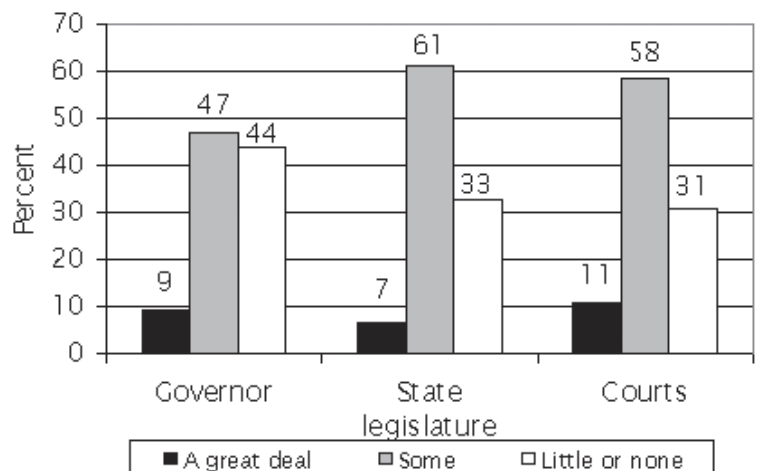
- Sixty-eight percent felt that high priority should be given to providing incentives to attract new industries to the state, 60 percent to promoting the development of small businesses, 59 percent both to increasing the technical skills of Pennsylvania workers and to increasing incentives to expand existing industries.
- Additional high priority support was given to strengthening the economy by: promoting Pennsylvania’s agricultural products (47 percent), promoting the development of large businesses (45 percent), promoting international trade (42 percent), and promoting Pennsylvania’s lumber and wood products (33 percent).
- Few people endorsed giving high priority to: expanding web-based e-commerce (22 percent), promoting tourism in rural areas (19 percent), or lowering environmental standards to attract industry (13 percent).

Priorities for the environment and natural resources

Although rural Pennsylvanians expressed concern for protecting/conserving the environment, they were most likely to give high priority to issues related to water and food.

- At least half of the respondents indicated that high priority should be given to: monitoring and regulating drinking water (63 percent), monitoring food production and processing (57 percent), improving the water quality of streams and lakes (54 percent), and strengthening regulation of landfills (49 percent).
- Other issues rated by sizeable minorities as high priority were: preserving woodlands and wilderness

FIGURE 2. DEGREE OF TRUST IN VARIOUS BRANCHES OF PENNSYLVANIA STATE GOVERNMENT



areas (48 percent), helping communities pay for water and sewage treatment (44 percent), strengthening regulation of mining and drilling (40 percent), and strengthening environmental regulation of industries (37 percent).

- There was less support for: reducing storm water runoff and flooding (32 percent), regulating large-scale animal feeding operations (31 percent), reducing suburban sprawl (29 percent), strengthening environmental regulation of agriculture (28 percent), or requiring higher anti-pollution standards (24 percent).

Overall, most rural people liked their local communities, felt safe living there, and believed that their communities were unlikely to change over the next decade.

Trust in state government

Many rural Pennsylvanians had little or no trust in state government, although the majority indicated that they had at least some confidence and trust in the governor, the legislature, and the state courts. (See Figure 2 at left.)

Local Community Issues

Two-thirds (68 percent) of the survey respondents indicated that they had lived in their present communities 15 years or more, with 28 percent indicating that they had lived there all of their lives. Just 22 percent reported living in their community less than 10 years.

Community desirability

Overall, most rural people liked their local communities, felt safe living there, and believed that their communities were unlikely to change over the next decade.

- Respondents tended to rate their communities as either very desirable (42 percent) or somewhat desirable (47 percent) places to live. Only 9 percent reported that their communities were somewhat undesirable and just 2 percent felt that they were very undesirable.
- Fifty-four percent thought their communities would stay about the same during the next 10 years, and 17 percent felt they would become more desirable. However, 22 percent reported that they expected their communities to become less desirable in the next decade.
- Forty-four percent reported that they felt very safe in their communities, and an additional 52 percent said they felt somewhat safe.

Rural people were most likely to rate their communities highly as places to raise a family and to retire. They were also more likely to evaluate the natural environment, neighbors, and local schools positively.

- Fifty-seven percent gave their communities high evaluations as places to raise children, and only 6 percent gave low ratings.
- Forty-six percent gave high and 36 percent gave medium ratings for their communities as places to retire.
- Forty percent rated the natural environment

high, and 53 percent rated it as medium.

- Thirty-two percent rated neighborliness high and 57 percent gave it medium ratings; schools were similarly rated.
- Respondents gave fewer high ratings in their evaluations of: job opportunities (2 percent), community leadership (12 percent), health care (12 percent), citizen involvement (14 percent), and recreation (17 percent).

Local governments

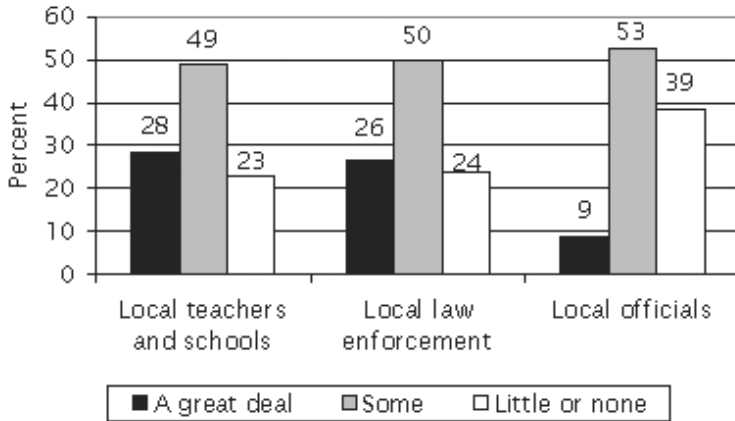
Local governments were not rated highly on any of the following six items: managing public funds, attention to citizen concerns, planning for future change, citizen participation, communicating government decisions to local citizens, and improving/preserving the quality of life.

- In each of these areas, fewer than 4 percent of respondents gave their local governments a rating of excellent. Evaluations of attention to citizen concerns, improving/preserving the quality of life, and managing public funds/facilities were the most positive, but less than one-third of respondents gave excellent or good ratings in even these areas.
- In each of the other three areas, fewer than 25 percent rated their local governments as good or excellent.

Many rural Pennsylvanians indicated that high priority should be given in their communities to improving local facilities.

- Forty-five percent gave high priority to repairing local streets; 44 percent to improving the quality and safety of drinking water; 42 percent to adding retail and service businesses to the community; and 40 percent to strengthening protective services.
- There was comparatively little interest in encouraging cultural arts activities, providing public access to computers, and providing public transportation

FIGURE 3. DEGREE OF TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



within the community. Each of these items was given high priority ratings by less than one in five respondents (15 percent, 16 percent, and 17 percent, respectively).

Many of the concerns that were designated as areas of high priority for the state as a whole were also seen as important local government, family and human service issues.

- The issues receiving the largest proportion of high priority designations were: strengthening local public schools (56 percent), attracting additional health care providers (55 percent), increasing services to senior citizens and strengthening programs to deal with drug and alcohol abuse (50 percent each), and combating domestic violence and abuse (48 percent).
- Less emphasis was given to providing opportunities for computer/internet training (22 percent high ratings), encouraging alternatives to public schools (26 percent), providing shelters for the temporarily homeless (29 percent), providing emergency food (30 percent), and providing affordable day care for children (38 percent).

Local land use issues receiving the highest proportion of high priority ratings were maintaining open spaces and maintaining the community the way it is.

- Forty percent gave high priority to protecting open space in their communities from development, and 35 percent gave it medium priority.
- Thirty percent gave high and 43 percent gave medium priority

ratings to the idea of maintaining the community the way it is.

- Only 20 percent felt that using local land use planning to guide community change should have high priority and just 27 percent indicated that high priority should be given to planning coordination with nearby municipalities.
- Only 19 percent rated providing more parks, playgrounds and hiking paths as an issue in need of high priority; 43 percent gave it a medium rating.

Rural Pennsylvanians gave priority to maintaining open space in their communities, but they were ambivalent about municipal land use regulation and planning. When asked

directly about sprawl (generally viewed as uncontrolled development without planning), respondents were more likely to see it as an issue for local government action (59 percent) than for state intervention (37 percent). Seventy-two percent agreed that local government should regulate changes in land use to limit negative impacts on the community. However, 51 percent indicated that property owners should have an unrestricted right to use and sell their land as they see fit, a direct contradiction to the idea of public restrictions placed on land use by planning activities.

Trust in local government

Rural people in the state were likely to express confidence and trust in local law enforcement and in local teachers and schools; they were somewhat less likely to have the same confidence and trust in their local officials. (See Figure 3.)

Personal Concerns

Financial situation

Although many rural Pennsylvanians were concerned about statewide economic issues, most expressed satisfaction with their own current financial situation and expected that it would improve even more in the coming year.

FIGURE 4. EXPERIENCE OF VARIOUS DAY-TO-DAY PROBLEMS

How often during the past two years have you experienced each of the following?	Seldom or never	Occasionally	Often
Had problems getting credit or loans	89 %	6 %	5 %
Had problems dealing with local government	89 %	9 %	2 %
Had problems with health insurance claims	82 %	14 %	5 %
Received poor medical services	82 %	15 %	2 %
Had difficulty understanding utility charges	72 %	20 %	8 %
Purchased goods that were not as advertised	71 %	24 %	5 %

- Nineteen percent were very satisfied and 61 percent were more or less satisfied with their family's current financial situation; 20 percent were not at all satisfied.
- Fifty-seven percent reported that their family's financial situation was about the same as a year ago, 19 percent were better off, and 24 percent were worse off.
- Looking ahead, 62 percent expected that their financial situation would remain about the same, 23 percent felt they would be better off, and 15 percent believed they would be worse off in a year.
- Ninety-five percent of those responding to the survey reported that they had health insurance, with 61 percent participating in a plan through an employer.

Day-to-day issues

Day-to-day issues were the exception rather than the rule, although a sizable minority did report unfavorable experiences. Issues of understanding utility charges and purchasing goods that were not as advertised were more common than problems with local government or getting credit or loans, although even the former were seldom or never problems for the majority of respondents. (See Figure 4.)

General Social Issues

The survey form also included a list of a dozen general issues that have become topics of concern to Pennsylvanians and citizens across the nation. Subjects were asked to indicate whether certain activities should be required or prohibited. Respondents overwhelmingly supported four of the issues posed.

- Eighty-seven percent indicated that public school teachers should be required to periodically pass performance tests to retain their certification to teach.
- Eighty-three percent indicated that students should be required to pass a test of basic skills for high school graduation.
- Seventy percent indicated that public school teachers should be prohibited from going on strike during the school year.
- Seventy-four percent indicated that the death penalty should not be abolished.
- Meanwhile, more than half opposed both giving same-sex domestic partners the same legal rights and benefits as married couples (60 percent oppose, 26 percent support) and eliminating criminal penalties for the possession and use of marijuana (59 percent oppose, 30 percent support).

There was somewhat less agreement regarding the other six items. As above, some had no opinion.

- Fifty-three percent felt the current flat rate state income tax should be changed to a graduated tax rate; 37 percent disagreed.
- Forty-nine percent indicated that tax-supported after school activities should be provided for children and youth; 37 percent disagreed.
- Fifty percent approved of legalizing casino gambling; 39 percent did not.
- Forty-six percent felt that doctors should be legally permitted to help terminally ill patients end their lives; 38 percent opposed this idea.
- Forty-two percent answered that tax supported day-care facilities should be provided for children; 42 percent disagreed.
- Thirty-seven percent said that Sunday liquor store sales should be permitted, 53 percent did not agree.

Summary

Although most of the rural Pennsylvanians surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with the way things were going in the state, one-third reported that they were not satisfied, and nearly four in 10 felt that the economy would get worse in the next year or so. While respondents tended to see many issues needing attention, they were most likely to emphasize increasing job opportunities, improving health care and elder care, decreasing crime and violence, strengthening education, combating drug/alcohol abuse, insuring safe drinking water, safely disposing of industrial wastes, and reforming local tax structures.

Most people felt that their local communities were desirable and safe. They tended to report favorable evaluations of their communities as places to raise children and to retire, and gave similarly positive ratings for the quality of the natural environment. However, they were critical of local job opportunities, community leadership and local government, health care, and recreational opportunities. They also felt that more should be done to attract jobs, improve schools, and combat drugs and violence.

These opinions did not necessarily mean that increased spending or government involvement was necessary. Numerous respondents wrote notes on their survey forms indicating that many of the higher priority issues were viewed as properly the responsibility of volunteers, private agencies and foundations, businesses, individuals, and citizen groups.

While about one in five reported that they were dissatisfied with their family's current financial situa-

tion and nearly one in four indicated that they were worse off than a year ago, most were at least more or less satisfied with their current situation, and almost one in four felt it would get better within the year.

Rural Pennsylvanians' opinions about the general social issues assessed in the survey reflected modestly traditional viewpoints, although half were accepting of legalized casino gambling, more than 40 percent supported permitting euthanasia, nearly as many endorsed Sunday liquor sales, three out of 10 supported legalizing marijuana use, and more than one in four were accepting of same-sex unions.

Changes Over Time in the Attitudes of Rural Pennsylvanians

An important piece in the examination of rural attitudes is to discover whether and how they change over time. To do this, the researchers compared responses from this survey to those from three previous surveys. The four studies, referenced below, will be referred to in this section by their year:

- *Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania's Rural Residents (1999)* – a 1999 survey funded by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and carried out by the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg;
- *Citizens' Viewpoint 2000* – a survey conducted by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at Penn State in 2000;
- *Citizens' Viewpoint 2002* – a second Citizens' Viewpoint survey carried out in 2002; and
- *2003 Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvania Rural Residents* – this current 2003 survey funded by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and carried out by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at Penn State.

As a first step in comparing the survey data over time, socio-demographic characteristics of the samples were compared to the 2003 sample with the following results:

- The *1999 Attitudinal Survey* subjects were younger, less educated, earned less money, and were more likely to be female.
- The *Citizens' Viewpoint 2000* respondents were less likely to be female and had lower incomes.
- The *Citizens' Viewpoint 2002* sample was significantly older and less likely to be female.

Previous analyses found that age, gender, educational level, and income were associated with differences in people's views about many of the issues addressed. In the assessment of changes over time,

these differences in sample composition were controlled. As in the previous section, state-level issues, local community issues, personal concerns, and general social issues are discussed.

State-Level Issues Satisfaction

Compared to 1999, the 2003 respondents were less satisfied with the way things were going in Pennsylvania and more pessimistic about the future economy of the state.

- In 1999, 88 percent were somewhat or very satisfied with the way things were going in the state; in 2003, just 67 percent were similarly satisfied.
- In 1999, 33 percent believed the economy would get better in the next year or so and only 18 percent thought it would get worse. In 2003, just 17 percent felt the economy would improve in the next year or so, while 39 percent believed it would get worse.

Priority issues

In 2000 and 2003, 19 items asked whether higher, the same, or lower priority should be given in the next decade to a variety of state-level issues. For nine items, there were significant shifts in the proportions of respondents indicating higher priority needs.

- The percentage of subjects indicating that higher priority should be focused on fostering the availability of jobs increased from 76 percent to 87 percent, and the percentage of higher priority responses for health care increased from 78 percent to 81 percent.
- The percentage of respondents giving higher priority ratings to the issues of crime and violence, protection/conservation of the environment, safe drinking water, safe disposal of industrial wastes, farmland preservation, air quality, and child-care all declined significantly over the three-year period.
- For most issues, higher priority responses did not differ significantly between 2000 and 2003. These issues included care of the elderly, education for youth and children, drug and alcohol abuse, reforming the state's local tax structure, safe food supply, and cleaning up polluted sites.

State spending

Eight questions asked in 1999 and 2003 dealt with whether the state government was spending too much, too little, or just about the right amount on selected issues. Six had significantly different responses in the two surveys.

- Creating jobs and economic opportunity was the only area where the proportion of respondents indicating that too little money was being spent was higher in the 2003 survey (71 percent) than in the 1999 study (66 percent).

- The percentage of persons reporting that too little money was being spent was significantly lower in 2003 for the

following issues: problems of the aging, improving the state's education system, child-care for working parents, improving/protecting the environment, and public transportation.

- There were no significant differences in the proportion of respondents who felt that too little was being spent on improving citizen health and dealing with crime and safety.

The percentage reporting that they were very satisfied with their family's financial situation declined from 29 percent in 1999 to 16 percent in 2003.

Priorities for job creation and the economy

There were significant changes between 2000 and 2003 in the priority that rural people gave to various ways to create jobs and develop Pennsylvania's economy.

- The proportion indicating that high priority was needed to promote small businesses, provide incentives for expansion of existing businesses, and promote the development of large businesses increased significantly.
- Providing incentives to attract new industries was the most widely endorsed means for increasing jobs in both time periods, and there was a slight increase in the percentage of people giving high priority to this idea, but the increase was not statistically significant.
- People were less likely in 2003 than in 2000 to give high priority to increasing the technical skills of workers, promoting agricultural or wood/lumber products, and promoting Pennsylvania's international trade.
- There was little support and no significant differences in the proportion of high priority responses from 2000 to 2003 for expanding web-based e-commerce, promoting tourism in rural areas, or lowering environmental standards to keep and attract business and industry.

Priorities for the environment and natural resources

For the 11 items dealing with the protection and the effective use of natural resources and the environment that were included in both 2000 and 2003, the proportion of persons giving high priority to these issues declined, and 10 of these decreases were statistically

significant.

- Support for giving high priority declined significantly for: monitoring and regulating drinking water quality, monitoring food production/processing, improving the water quality of streams and lakes,

strengthening regulation of landfills, preserving wilderness/woodland areas, strengthening regulation of mining and drilling, strengthening environmental regulation of industries, reducing storm water runoff and flooding, strengthening environmental regulation of agriculture, and requiring higher pollution standards for cars and trucks.

- The proportion of people giving high priority to helping communities pay for water and sewage treatment facilities did not change significantly.

Trust in state government

- About 68 percent of respondents in both 1999 and 2003 reported that they had at least some trust in the state legislature, and nearly 70 percent indicated that they had at least some trust in the courts. The remainder reported little or no trust in these institutions.
- The proportion of respondents who reported trust in the governor declined across time, with 75 percent expressing some or a great deal of trust in 1999, but only 58 percent doing so in 2003.

Local Community Issues

Community desirability

Although rural people overwhelmingly felt that their communities were desirable places to live and they felt safe living there, the proportion of such positive responses declined somewhat across time.

- Ninety-three percent of those surveyed in 2000 reported that their community was somewhat or very desirable as a place to live; in 2003, about 90 percent indicated the same. Although this decline was not statistically significant, when only the response of

very desirable was compared, there was a significant decline – from 48 to 42 percent.

- Eighty-two percent in 2000 felt that their community would stay the same or become more desirable in the next decade; by 2003, only 71 percent felt as positive about the future.
- In 1999, 73 percent felt very safe in their communities. In 2003, this declined to 44 percent.

The percentages of people giving high ratings to the quality of various aspects of their communities changed little between 2000 and 2003.

- Thirty-two percent of respondents in 2000 rated their communities highly in terms of freedom from crime; in 2003, this percentage declined to 27 percent.
- While only 5 percent of the respondents in 2000 rated their communities as high quality for job opportunities, by 2003, the percentage of high ratings was significantly lower at 2 percent.
- There were no significant differences in the percentage of high quality ratings for communities as places to raise children or to retire and in terms of the natural environment, schools, neighborliness, cost of living, recreation, citizen involvement, health care, and community leadership.

In 2000 and 2003, respondents indicated what priority their communities should give to a variety of issues related to local facilities, family and human service, and land use. For 21 of the 22 items (as presented in other sections), the incidence of high priority ratings was lower in 2003.

- The sole item that did not change significantly asked about maintaining the community the way it is; 31 percent of the subjects in both time periods gave this item a high priority rating.

Local governments

The evaluations that the 2003 respondents had about their local governments, as presented in the previous section, did not differ markedly from the evaluations in the 2000 survey.

- There was a slight decline in the excellent or good ratings for local government’s work in planning for future change (26 percent in 2000, 23 percent in 2003).

Respondents’ confidence and trust in their local officials, local law enforcement, and local teachers and schools declined between 1999 and 2003.

- In 1999, 74 percent had some or a great deal of trust in local officials versus about 62 percent in 2003.
- In 1999, 87 percent had some or a great deal of trust in local law enforcement, compared to 75 percent in 2003.
- The proportion expressing a great deal or some trust in local teachers and schools declined from 88 percent in 1999 to 77 percent in 2003.

Personal Concerns

Financial situation

Most respondents in both 1999 and 2003 were more or less satisfied with their family’s financial situation,

FIGURE 5. CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Do you do more, about the same, or less of the following?	Percent in 2003			Percent in 2002
	Less	About the same	More	More
Feel proud to be an American	2	32	66	75
Display a US flag	3	42	55	61
Pay close attention to the news	3	46	51	55
Worry about the future	8	59	33	41
Worry about loss of civil liberties	7	66	27	29
Donate money or time to support local community services/activities	5	82	12	14
Attend religious services	7	84	9	9
Spend time with friends/family in your local community	2	90	8	9
Participate in organizations that serve the local community	6	85	9	7
Visit with friends/family living outside your local community	4	91	6	7

but that percentage declined from 87 percent to 80 percent. More striking was the following:

- The percentage reporting that they were very satisfied with their family's financial situation declined from 29 percent in 1999 to 19 percent in 2003.
- The proportion of respondents who saw themselves as worse off today than a year ago doubled, with nearly one in four indicating that they were worse off in 2003 than they had been a year before. Those who saw themselves better off than a year before declined from 33 to 19 percent.
- Looking ahead a year, people were more likely to see themselves as becoming better off rather than worse off, although the percent with this positive outlook was less in 2003 than in 1999.

Day-to-day issues

- The proportion reporting that they had problems getting credit or loans rose from 7 percent in 2000 to 11 percent in 2003, and there was a slight decline in the percentage reporting that they had purchased goods that were not as advertised.
- The incidence of people reporting that they had problems with health insurance claims, difficulty understanding utility charges, problems with local government, or poor medical services did not vary significantly between 2000 and 2003.

General Social Issues

Eleven items addressing general social issues were included in both the 2000 and 2003 studies. For three of these items, the proportion of people in support of the issues changed between the two time periods.

- Adjusting for differences in sample composition, support for legalizing casino gambling increased from 36 percent to about 50 percent.
- The proportion of subjects agreeing that same-sex domestic partners should have the same legal rights and benefits as married couples increased from about 1 in 5 in 2000 to 1 in 4 in 2003.
- Support for providing tax-supported day care for children declined from 52 percent to about 42 percent.
- There were no significant changes in support of: requiring teachers to periodically pass performance

tests in order to remain certified; requiring students to pass a basic skills test to graduate from high school; prohibiting public school teachers from going on strike during the school year; permitting doctors to help terminally ill patients end their lives;

abolishing the death penalty; legalizing marijuana, or changing the state income tax to a graduated rate.

In 2003, subjects were asked how their day-to-day

lives had changed since the events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent happenings. Specifically, the respondents were requested to indicate whether they did more, about the same, or less of each of a list of 10 things.

For half of the items, at least 87 percent reported that they do these things about the same amount or less than before September 11, 2001. For the top five items listed in Figure 5, many reported increased activity.

These same questions were also asked in 2002. Comparisons between the responses over time revealed some significant differences.

- The proportion reporting that they felt proud to be an American since the events of September 11, 2001 declined somewhat from the levels reported in 2002, although the number remained high.
- There was also a small decline in the percentage of persons reporting that they displayed the flag more than before September 11, 2001.
- The percentage reporting that they worried about the future more than before September 11, 2001 declined significantly between 2002 and 2003.

Summary

Rural Pennsylvanians in 2003 were less likely than their counterparts in 1999 to be satisfied with the way things were going in the state and more likely to believe that the economy would worsen in the next year or so. In 2003, they were more likely to report that greater priority should be directed to increasing the availability of jobs and health care than in 2000. The incidence of high priority designations for most other issues, particularly those related to local facilities, environmental protection, community services, and land use regulation declined during the same time period. There was increasing emphasis on promoting both small and large business development as a means

Rural Pennsylvanians in 2003 were less likely than their counterparts in 1999 to be satisfied with the way things were going in the state and more likely to believe that the economy would worsen in the next year or so.

for increasing jobs and developing the state's economy, but declines in priority were given to increasing worker skills and promoting agricultural or lumber products and international trade.

Although most rural people evaluated their communities as desirable and safe places to live, there was evidence of some declines in these favorable ratings across time. The perceived availability of local job opportunities, always limited, decreased further from 2000 to 2003, and crime was seen as a problem by an increasing number of rural residents. Although most people expressed confidence and trust in state government, the legislature, the courts, local officials, law enforcement, and teachers, there were significant declines in the confidence and trust that rural people had in the governor and in local officials, law enforcement, and schools.

Persons under 45 years of age were more likely than older subjects to give higher priority ratings to education of youth and children, child-care, and the preservation of wildlife habitats.

The level of satisfaction with their families' financial situations, while high, decreased across time, with the proportion of those reporting that they were worse off financially than a year ago more than doubling between 2000 and 2003.

Rural persons' opinions about general social issues changed little since 2000. Support for teachers being required to pass performance tests, for students to pass basic skills tests, and the prohibition of teachers striking during the school year were endorsed by most rural people in both time periods. Few respondents in either 2000 or 2003 advocated eliminating the death penalty, and over 45 percent of the rural people surveyed in both time periods endorsed permitting doctors to help terminally ill patients end their lives. There was a sizable increase in support for legalizing casino gambling in the state and a lesser shift toward support for giving same-sex domestic partners the same legal rights as married couples. Support for tax-supported day care for children declined between 2000 and 2003.

The events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath were seen as having little effect on people's day-to-day lives, although a majority of the rural people surveyed reported pride in being an American, frequent display-

ing of the nation's flag, paying more attention to the news, and concerns about the future and the possible erosion of civil liberties.

Effects of Population Diversity on Rural Pennsylvanians' Attitudes

The third piece of the project explored how attitudes and perceptions of rural Pennsylvanians differed depending upon their personal characteristics (gender, age, education, and income) and the characteristics of the county in which they lived (population density, median household income, the percentage of the labor force engaged in extractive industries, population growth/decline, and recent changes in employment).

State-Level Issues

Satisfaction

The extent to which rural Pennsylvanians were satisfied with the way things were going in the state was associated with the respondent's income and age and with several county characteristics.

- As personal household income increased, the proportion of respondents that were very satisfied or more or less satisfied with the way things were going in the state increased. The same relationship existed with median household income of the county.
- The higher the proportion of the labor force engaged in extractive industries (farming, forestry, and fishing), the more likely people were to express at least some degree of satisfaction with the way things were going in the state.
- Residents of counties where the population increased between 1990 and 2000 were more likely than counties with stable or declining populations to be satisfied with the way things were going.
- Persons in the 45 to 64 age category were less satisfied than either younger or older residents.
- Those living in areas with population densities between 100 and 199 persons per square mile were more satisfied than those in more or less densely settled areas.

Looking ahead to the next year or so, older people, men, and people living in counties with relatively high median incomes were more optimistic than their counterparts.

- Twenty-four percent of those over age 65 predicted that the economy would get better in the near future, compared with only 14 percent of those under 65.
- Twenty percent of males predicted better economic times in the next few years; 15 percent of the women did so.

- Residents of counties with relatively high median incomes and stable or increasing employment were more likely than their counterparts to predict that the state's economy would get better.

Priority issues

When considering whether higher priority should be given in the next decade to 22 state-level issues, the rural Pennsylvanians surveyed offered significantly different responses depending on their personal characteristics and those of the counties in which they lived.

On most issues, as age increased, the proportion of persons who indicated that the issue deserved higher priority in the years ahead increased.

- Older people were more likely to feel that the following issues should have higher priority in the next decade: care of the elderly, drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence, construction of new state highways, safe disposal of industrial wastes, reform of Pennsylvania's local tax structure, air quality, maintaining a safe food supply, safe drinking water, reducing out-migration of youth and professionals, and the preservation of historical and cultural resources.
- Persons under 45 years of age were more likely than older subjects to give higher priority ratings to education of youth and children, child-care, and the preservation of wildlife habitats.
- Responses to the two issues receiving the largest proportions of higher priority ratings (availability of jobs and health care) did not differ significantly by age category.

Women were more likely than men to feel that higher priority should be given to most of the 22 issues.

- The largest differences by gender were that priority should be given to the following issues: drug and alcohol abuse (56 percent higher priority ratings by men vs. 71 percent by women); care of the elderly (61 vs. 75 percent); child-care (27 vs. 40 percent); health care (75 vs. 86 percent); cleaning up polluted sites (40 vs. 53 percent); safe food supply (48 vs. 59 percent); homeland security/ public safety (39 vs. 52 percent); education for youth and children (58 vs. 69 percent); air quality (34 vs. 45 percent); and safe drinking water (57 vs. 68 percent).
- Females were also somewhat more likely to feel that the following should have higher priority in the future: crime and violence, job availability, protec-

tion/conservation of the environment, and safe disposal of industrial wastes.

- Reform of Pennsylvania's local tax structure was the only item for which males were significantly more likely than females to indicate that a higher priority should be given (65 percent of males compared to 55 percent of females).

Educational levels affected the higher priority reporting for 14 state-level issues. In general, the higher an individual's educational level the less likely she/he was to indicate that higher priority should be given.

Women were more likely than men to feel that there was too little being spent on improving and protecting citizens' health, improving the state's education system, assisting with child-care for working parents, improving and protecting the environment, and dealing with crime and safety.

- College graduates were the least likely and those with no post high school education were the most likely to feel that higher priority should be given to the following: safe food supply, drug and alcohol abuse, care of the elderly, crime and violence, safe drinking water, preservation of farmland, child-care, safe disposal of industrial wastes, homeland security/ public safety, construction of new state highways, preserving wildlife habitats, and cleaning up polluted sites.
- The higher the subjects' educational level, the more likely they were to express concern about the out-migration from the state of youth, professionals and the highly educated.

Household income level was significantly related to higher priority for 14 issues. In every case, higher income was associated with fewer persons giving the issue higher priority for the future.

- Respondents with household incomes of \$40,000 or more were less likely to indicate that higher priority should be given to: care of the elderly, safe drinking water, safe food supply, safe disposal of industrial wastes, cleaning up polluted sites, combating drug and alcohol abuse, child-care, preserving wildlife habitats, reducing crime and violence, air quality, protecting/conserving the environment, homeland security, preserving farmland, and preserving historical/cultural resources.

Responses to only three issues were significantly related to county population density.

- The proportion of persons rating crime and violence as needing higher priority in the future increased as the population density of the county increased.

- Although the differences were small, respondents living in counties with fewer than 100 persons per square mile were less likely to report that cleaning up polluted sites and

protecting/conserving the environment were deserving of higher priority in the future.

As the median household income in the county increased, the percentage of respondents in favor of higher priority in the future declined for eight issues but increased for one.

- As median household income increased, the proportion of people indicating that higher priority should be given declined for enhancing job availability, reducing out-migration of young people, constructing new state highways, combating drug and alcohol abuse, health care, education of youth and children, child-care, and the out-migration of professionals and the highly educated.

- However, as county household income increases, so did the priority given to farmland preservation.

As the percentage of workers engaged in extractive industries increased, the proportion of higher priority responses declined for safe food, preservation of wildlife habitats, preservation of historical and cultural resources, reducing out-migration of youth, professionals and the highly educated, and cleaning up polluted sites.

Population change in the county between 1990 and 2000 was related to seven issues.

- The percentage of higher priority ratings was significantly lower in population growth counties with respect to the availability of jobs, health care, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, construction of new state highways, and reducing the out-migration of youth and professionals.

- Preservation of farmland was of greater priority in growing counties than in other counties.

Those more likely to support new business incentives were people in counties with a relatively low median household income, residents of counties with declining total employment, those in declining growth counties, and those in counties with lower proportions engaged in extractive industries.

Percentage change in total employment between 2001 and 2002 was associated with six issues.

- Areas with declines in total employment were more likely than stable or increasing employment counties to want higher priority for job availability and for reducing the out-migration of youth.

- Counties with declining or stable employment were less likely to feel that crime and violence, safe drinking water, or the preservation of farmland were issues deserving of higher priority.

- Residents of stable employment areas

were the least likely to endorse giving higher priority to construction of new state highways.

State spending

- Older persons were more likely to feel that too little money was being spent on problems of the aging and on public transportation; younger respondents were more likely to report that too little was being spent on improving/protecting the environment, improving the state's education system, creating jobs and economic opportunity, and assisting in child-care for working parents.

- Women were more likely than men to feel that there was too little being spent on improving and protecting citizens' health, improving the state's education system, assisting in child-care for working parents, improving and protecting the environment, and dealing with crime and safety.

- As education and income increased, so did the likelihood that people would report too little spending on improving the state's education system, while the percentage believing that too little was being spent on citizens' health and on problems of the aging declined. Those with less education were more likely to feel that more state money should be directed towards dealing with crime and safety, and those with lower incomes were more likely to support greater state funding for public transportation.

Several county characteristics were also associated with thoughts on spending, but the number and strength of these relationships were somewhat lower than those involving personal characteristics.

- People in more densely settled counties were more

likely to indicate that too little was being spent to improve and protect the environment and to provide public transportation.

- As median household income in the county increased, there was a declining percentage of subjects indicating that the government spent too little on creating jobs and economic opportunities, improving and protecting citizens' health, and dealing with crime and safety.
- In counties with declining populations, higher percentages of people felt that too little money was being spent to create jobs/economic opportunities, deal with problems of the aging, and improve/protect citizen's health.
- Declining total employment in the county was associated with higher proportions of persons indicating that too little was being spent to create jobs and economic opportunities, while increasing employment areas were more likely to want more spending for crime and safety issues.

Priorities for job creation and the economy

Although there were high levels of agreement concerning the need for increasing economic opportunities in the state, people differed somewhat in placing priorities on ways to accomplish this.

- While providing incentives to attract new industries received the greatest proportion of high priority ratings, college graduates were somewhat less likely to endorse this means.
- Those more likely to support new business incentives were people in counties with a relatively low median household income, residents of counties with declining total employment, those in declining growth counties, and those in counties with lower proportions engaged in extractive industries.
- The majority of those surveyed indicated that high priority should be given to increasing the technical skills of workers. Older subjects, especially those over age 65, were more likely to indicate that this was an important means for developing the state's economy.
- Most felt that it was important to provide incentives for the expansion of existing industries, but older people, women, those who did not graduate from college, people living in areas with lower median household incomes, and those in counties with stable or decreasing populations were more likely than their opposites to give such incentives a high priority rating.

- Promoting Pennsylvania's agricultural products received more high priority ratings from older respondents and those with lower education and income.
- Promoting the development of large businesses as a means of increasing job availability was less widely endorsed than was promoting small businesses. Those with higher levels of education and people living in counties with relatively high median household incomes, relatively more people engaged in extractive industries, increasing populations, and stable or increasing employment tended to give less support to developing large businesses.
- Men and older people were more likely to view promoting international trade as a high priority as were people living in counties with low median income levels and counties with declining populations.
- Promoting lumber and wood products was endorsed more by those with low levels of education and those living in counties with a low population density.
- Promoting tourism in rural areas was not a popular means for increasing job opportunities, although older subjects, those in low density areas, and those living in areas with low median incomes and/or stable or declining populations were more accepting of such promotion.
- Lowering environmental standards to keep and attract business and industry received the lowest proportion of high priority ratings. However, there was some variation among different groups. Respondents over age 65 were nearly twice as likely as those under age 45 to give high priority to lowering pollution standards (19 vs. 10 percent); those with a high school education or less were more than three times as likely to rate this as a high priority alternative than those who graduated from college (17 vs. 5 percent); respondents with lower household incomes and those living in lower income counties were more likely to give high priority to reducing environmental standards as a means of getting and maintaining industries.

Priorities for the environment and natural resources

Although support for environmentally protective practices varied, with widespread support for monitoring and regulating food and water supplies, lesser support for strengthening regulations of landfills,

mining and drilling operations and industries, and even less support for strengthening environmental regulation of agriculture and requiring higher pollution standards, there was considerable consistency in the personal characteristics associated with differing levels of support for these activities.

- In general, older people, females, and those with lower levels of education and income were more likely than their counterparts to give high priority to environmentally protective practices.
- As population density increased, there was increased concern for monitoring food production and processing and reducing suburban sprawl.
- The lower the median household income of the county, the more subjects felt that communities should receive help in paying for water and sewage treatment and the less likely they were to give high priority to reducing sprawl.
- Counties with relatively low proportions of employees in agriculture/forestry/fishing/mining were more likely to endorse strengthening the regulation of mining and drilling and to support monitoring drinking water and food production/processing.
- A decreasing county population was associated with greater support for helping communities to pay for water and sewage treatment.
- Areas with increasing total employment were more likely to support reducing suburban sprawl.

Younger people were more likely to endorse more parks and playgrounds, while support for encouraging greater planning coordination with nearby municipalities increased with age.

Trust in state government

Placing little or no trust in the governor, state legislature, and Pennsylvania courts varied somewhat by the respondent's age, gender, and education and by the median income of their county of residence.

- The middle-aged (45 to 64 years) were more likely to express little or no trust in the governor than were either younger or older residents.
- Males were more likely than females to report little or no trust in both the governor and the state legislature.
- People with no post-high school education were more likely than their more highly educated peers to hold little or no trust in the courts of the state.

Local Community Issues

Community desirability

There were age, gender, income and county characteristic differences in how respondents viewed their local communities.

- Older people were more likely than younger people to evaluate their local communities as very desirable places to live, as were respondents living in counties with higher median income, higher proportions of people engaged in extractive industries, increasing populations, and stable employment than their opposites.
- People with higher education levels and incomes as

well as those living in counties with high median incomes, counties with increasing populations, and counties with stable or increasing employment were most likely to believe that their communities would

become more desirable in the future.

- The respondent's education level, household income, and the percentage of workers engaged in extractive industries in the county were all positively related to people feeling very safe in their communities. As population density increased, however, the proportion of residents indicating that they felt very safe declined. Counties with stable and declining employment were more likely to view their communities as safe than were those with increasing total employment.
- Older persons, particularly those over age 65, rated the quality of schools and health care in their communities higher, were more positive toward the area as a place to retire, and rated community leadership more highly than did younger persons. As age increased, there was a decline in the quality ratings of the natural environment and in seeing the area as free from crime.
- Men rate their communities more highly than women with respect to recreation and as places that are free from crime.
- The higher the respondents' educational levels, the more likely they were to view their communities positively in terms of the natural environment, neighborliness, freedom from crime, recreation, citizen involvement, community leadership, and as a place to raise children.

- Those with higher household incomes rated their communities higher as places to raise children and in terms of the natural environment, neighborliness, recreation, and freedom from crime. However, those with lower incomes were more likely to rate the cost of living in their communities positively. Although very few people rated local job opportunities highly, those earning less than \$20,000 a year tended to be slightly more positive than those earning more.
- The greater the population density, the less likely respondents were to rate their communities highly in terms of the natural environment, recreation, and as a place to raise children.
- Respondents in counties with high median household incomes were more likely to give high quality ratings for the natural environment, schools, recreation, and job opportunities.
- The higher the proportion of workers in extractive industries, the more positively residents rated their communities in terms of the natural environment and as good places to retire and raise children.
- Persons living in counties with population growth were more likely to give high ratings to the natural environment, recreation, citizen involvement, and job opportunities.
- Counties with stable and declining total employment were more likely than those in counties with increasing employment to give high ratings as places to raise children.

Men, those with some post high school education but no college degree, and residents of counties with higher population densities, increasing population, and increasing employment, were more likely to indicate that students should have to pass a basic skills test to graduate from high school.

Local governments

Responses varied by personal attributes and county characteristics in the priority given to community issues related to local facilities, family/human services, and land use.

- Persons age 65 and older were more likely to give high priority to providing public transportation within the community, increasing the quantity and quality of public water supplies, repairing local streets and roads, and strengthening protective services as well as to increasing services for senior citizens, strengthening programs to deal with substance abuse, and combating domestic violence abuse.
- Persons under age 45 were more likely to give high priority to strengthening the local public schools and providing affordable day care for children.
- Younger people were more likely to endorse more parks and playgrounds, while support for encouraging greater planning coordination with nearby municipalities increased with age.
- Women were more likely (mostly with statistically significant differences) than men to give high priority on every issue except a few related to land use. In terms of land use issues, women were more supportive of providing additional parks and playgrounds while men were more likely to give high priority to encouraging planning coordination with nearby municipalities.
- Persons with lower levels of education and income were more likely to give high priority to increasing the quantity and quality of drinking water supplies and strengthening protective services. Those with low income were more likely to give high priority to providing public transportation within the community while those with college degrees were more likely to support cultural arts activities.
- The lower the educational and income levels, the higher the priority given to human service issues, such as providing emergency food, strengthening programs to deal with drug and alcohol abuse, providing shelters for the temporarily homeless, increasing services to seniors, combating domestic violence and abuse, providing affordable child-care, attracting additional health care providers, encouraging alternatives to public schools, and providing opportunities for computer/Internet training.
- People with more education were more likely to want to protect open space from development, use local land use planning to guide community change, and encourage greater planning coordination with nearby municipalities. Respondents with lower educational and income levels were more likely to want to maintain the community as it was.
- Areas with low population density were more likely to place high priority on adding retail and service businesses and adding health care providers.
- As the population density of the county increased, so did the emphasis on strengthening protective

services, providing public transportation within the community, protecting open space from development, encouraging greater planning coordination with nearby municipalities, attracting additional health care providers, using local land use planning to guide community change, and providing more parks and playgrounds.

- The lower the county median income, the greater emphasis residents gave to attracting additional health care providers, adding retail and service businesses, providing public access to computers, strengthening local public schools, strengthening programs to

Rural Pennsylvanians did not, in general, support abolishing the death penalty.

deal with substance abuse, and providing emergency food. As median income

in the county increased, residents were more likely to give high priority to protecting open space from development and using local land use planning, including coordination of planning with nearby municipalities.

- Areas with higher proportions of extractive industry workers were less likely to give high priority to improving the quality and safety of drinking water, adding retail and service businesses, strengthening protective services, encouraging cultural arts activities, encouraging greater planning coordination with nearby municipalities, and providing more playgrounds and parks.

- Counties with decreasing populations were more likely to give high priority to adding retail and service businesses. Counties with stable populations were the most likely to resist land use planning and to give high priority to strengthening local public schools and attracting additional health care providers. Counties with increasing populations were most likely to give high priority to protecting open space from development and maintaining the community the way it is.

- Residents of counties with declining employment were the most likely to give high priority to adding retail and service businesses and the least likely to give high priority to protecting open space and to land use planning. Those in counties of stable employment were least likely to give high priority to strengthening protective services, providing public access to computers, attracting additional health care

providers, providing shelters for the homeless, and providing emergency food.

Trust in local government

A sizable minority of all subjects reported that they had little or no trust in their local officials, local law enforcement and/or local teachers and schools.

- Persons in the 45 to 64 age category and those areas with few people working in extractive industries were more likely to report little or no trust in local officials.
- People under age 45 were more likely than older subjects to report little or no trust in local law enforcement.
- Men, the less educated, those with low income, and those from low density areas were more likely than their counterparts to report little or no trust in local teachers and schools.

Personal Concerns

Financial situation

Age, gender, education, and income affected satisfaction with one's current financial situation.

- College graduates and those with higher incomes reported significantly greater satisfaction with their financial situation than did those with less than a college degree and those earning less than \$40,000.
- Increasing age was related to increasing levels of financial satisfaction, and men were more satisfied than women with their current financial situation.

There were differences in how people evaluated their current financial situations compared to a year ago depending on the person's age, education, and household income.

- Older respondents were less likely than their younger counterparts to report that their current financial situation had improved in the last year (8 percent vs. 32 percent).
- The higher a person's education and income, the more likely he/she was to report being better off this year than last.

Looking ahead to the future, nearly one in four people, overall, felt that they would be better off financially in a year than at present.

- Those with higher educational and income levels, younger people, and residents of counties with stable and increasing total employment were more likely to express optimism about their future family financial situation than were their counterparts.

Day-to-day issues

- Younger people were somewhat more likely to report that they at least occasionally purchased goods that were not as advertised, had problems with health insurance claims, and had trouble getting credit.
- Males were more likely to have had difficulty understanding utility charges and dealing with local government. Females were more likely to report having had problems getting credit or loans.
- The higher the education level, the lower the occurrence of problems understanding utility charges and receiving poor medical care. Those with some post high school education (but not college graduates) reported the highest rates of problems dealing with local government.
- The lower the household income, the more problems with receiving adequate medical care and getting credit or loans.
- Residents of counties with relatively high population densities were somewhat more likely to report difficulty understanding utility charges.
- Persons living in counties with low median incomes were more likely to report problems getting loans, difficulty understanding utility charges, and problems with health insurance claims.

General Social Issues

Although people overwhelmingly felt that teachers should be required periodically to pass performance tests to retain certification, students should pass basic skills tests for high school graduation, and teachers should not be permitted to strike during the school year, there was some variation in responses to all three issues.

- Females, college graduates, and older respondents were somewhat less likely to endorse the idea that teachers' proficiency should be tested periodically.
- Men, those with some post high school education but no college degree, and residents of counties with higher population densities, increasing population, and increasing employment, were more likely to indicate that students should have to pass a basic skills test to graduate from high school.
- People over age 65, those who had not graduated from college, and residents of stable or declining areas were the most likely to feel that public school teachers should be prohibited from going on strike during the school year.

Views on tax issues also varied by certain demographic characteristics.

- Younger respondents and women were significantly more likely to favor both tax-supported day care for children and tax-supported after school activities. Also, the lower the household income of the respondent, the more likely he/she was to support tax supported day care for children.
 - Women and those with lower incomes were more likely to support changing the tax structure to a graduated state income tax.
- Support for allowing casino gambling, Sunday liquor sales, legalizing marijuana, same-sex unions, euthanasia, and the death penalty varied by the personal characteristics of the subjects.

In both analyses, males and older people were more likely to endorse giving higher priority to reforming the state's local tax structure.

- The legalization of casino gambling was supported more by men, younger people, persons with less than a college education, and people living in counties with declining populations and lower percentages of the workforce engaged in extractive industries.
- Sunday liquor sales were more likely to receive support from younger people, males, college graduates, those with high incomes, and those residing in counties with lower percentages of workers engaged in extractive industries.
- The idea that same-sex domestic partners should have the same legal rights as married people was twice as likely to be supported by people under age 45 than by those age 65 and older. Women were more supportive than were men, and as education, household income, and median household income of the county increased, support rates also increased.
- Although a sizable minority of the population supported the idea that doctors should be legally permitted to help terminally ill persons end their lives, support for this idea was more widespread among younger subjects, men, higher income persons, and those with some education beyond high school.
- Eliminating criminal penalties for the use of marijuana was endorsed more by males, younger people, and college graduates and by those living in counties with higher incomes, greater population change, and increasing total employment.

- Rural Pennsylvanians did not, in general, support abolishing the death penalty, although women and college graduates were more likely to feel that it should be eliminated. The higher the proportion of workers in extractive industries in the county, the less support there was for eliminating the death penalty.

Summary

While rural Pennsylvanians shared many views about a wide range of state and local issues, there were also important differences in their attitudes and perceptions depending upon their socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, and income), and, to a lesser extent, the characteristics of the counties in which they lived. A more detailed future analysis might uncover important ethnic, religious, or other community variations within Pennsylvania's rural population. Also unanswered by the current analysis is the extent to which rural and urban residents differ.

In addition to the assessment of the relationships of personal and county characteristics to rural people's views about these issues, two additional lines of analysis were performed: 1) Regional differences in priority given to each of the 11 leading state issues were assessed as reported on page 8; and 2) The net relationships of the personal and county-level characteristics to the priority responses to these same 11 items were explored using multivariate models as follows.

Exploring Interrelated Factors

While the previous analysis, which focused on one personal or county characteristic at a time, helps describe persons holding differing views, it can also be misleading. Many of the factors used in this analysis were interrelated. For example, people with higher educational levels tended also to have greater household incomes. Thus, when relationships between income and attitudes were found, we cannot be certain whether the associations resulted from income per se or from the effects of education. To help untangle the net effects of the variables assessed in the earlier analysis, the researchers examined the same relationships using statistical models that allow for the analysis of multiple factors at once. This step included all of the same variables used earlier. Within this framework, the separate effects of each of these variables were assessed, adjusting for the effects of the other variables.

Methodology

This analysis was limited to the 11 state-level issues receiving "higher" priority ratings from more than half of the respondents. In order of priority, these were:

- availability of jobs
- health care
- crime and violence
- care of the elderly
- education for youth and children
- drug and alcohol abuse
- safe drinking water
- safe disposal of industrial wastes
- reforming the state's local tax structure
- safe food
- preservation of farmland

Priority was assessed in two categories: the responses of "same priority", "lower priority", and "do not know" were combined into one category called "not higher priority." The second category was "higher priority."

Analysis

As a preliminary step, the correlations among the characteristics were assessed to determine how or if these variables were interrelated. Older respondents tended to have lower levels of education and income. Also, women were younger than men. Higher education and household income were related not only to each other, but also to a lesser extent, to living in a county with a higher median income and living in a population growth county. Education was positively correlated with both county income and population change. Lower county population densities were associated with lower median county incomes and a larger proportion of workers in extractive industries. County population change was strongly correlated with median income in the county and percent change in total employment.

Availability of jobs

In the earlier analysis, women and residents of counties with lower median household incomes, stable or decreasing populations, and declining total employment figures were more likely than their counterparts to give higher priority ratings to the availability of jobs.

In this analysis, only gender and median household income in the county were related. Women expressed greater concern than men about job availability, although it was not clear whether women were worried about their own ability to find work or were concerned for others. As income level of the county decreased, the

likelihood that residents felt that higher priority should be given to jobs increased. The facts that more than 85 percent of all respondents indicated that job availability should have higher priority in the future and that few factors were related to variation in this response suggest that concern for this issue was widespread and pervasive among rural people in Pennsylvania.

Health care

Previously, it was found that women and people living in counties with stable or declining populations and lower median incomes were more likely to indicate that health care issues needed additional priority.

This analysis was similar. Females again gave health care higher priority, as did respondents with lower household incomes and those living in counties with lower median incomes.

Crime and violence

In the previously reported analysis, older people and women were more likely to assign higher priority to the issue of crime and violence. Increasing educational and income levels were associated with decreasing priority. In addition, increasing population density and increasing total employment led to more higher priority ratings.

This analysis showed some of the same relationships. Older persons and females were more likely to feel that combating crime and violence was in need of higher priority in the years ahead as were residents of counties with greater population density. Those with higher educational levels, however, did not rate this issue highly.

Care of the elderly

In the previous case, older people, women, and those with lower levels of education and less income were more likely to endorse higher priority ratings for elder care in the years ahead. This analysis found the same results.

Education for children and youth

The previous analysis found younger people, women, and residents of low median income counties more likely to rate this issue as needing higher priority. Findings from this analysis were similar but added increasing population size to the other variables significantly associated with a tendency to give higher priority to education.

Drug and alcohol abuse

In the previous analysis, combating drug and alcohol abuse was most likely a higher priority for older people, women, those with less education and lower incomes, and by persons living in counties with relatively low median incomes and stable or decreasing populations.

Findings from this analysis supported the previously presented relationships in regard to age, gender, and education. However, household income and population change were not significant and two additional variables were. Lower population density and lower county median household income were both related to giving higher priority to drug and alcohol abuse issues.

Safe Drinking Water

In the earlier analysis, age, gender, education, household income, and county-level change in total employment were all related to the belief that higher priority was needed for safe drinking water.

Here, age had no affect, but women were more likely to give this issue higher priority ratings. The higher a person's education and income, the less likely they were to report that safe drinking water should be given higher priority. The greater the increase in total employment in the county, the more likely residents were to report that safe drinking water should have higher priority in the years ahead.

Safe disposal of industrial wastes

Significant relationships between giving higher priority to safe disposal of industrial wastes and age, gender, education, and income were uncovered in the first analysis. However, only age and income were found to be significant in the second analysis. Increasing age was associated with higher priority ratings, while increases in income were associated with declining rates of higher priority responses.

Reforming Pennsylvania's local tax structure

In both analyses, males and older people were more likely to endorse giving higher priority to reforming the state's local tax structure.

Safe food

In the previous analysis, age, gender, education, household income, and workers engaged in the extractive industries were all associated with giving safe food higher priority ratings.

Of these, only age declined to non-significance when the effects of the other variables were controlled.

Women gave higher priority to safe food. Increasing education, income, and proportion of workers in the county engaged in extractive industries were associated with declining concern for this issue.

Preservation of farmland

Both analyses found that giving higher priority to preserving Pennsylvania’s farmland was least likely to be endorsed by persons with relatively high incomes and higher educational levels, regardless of their counties’ income level.

Summary

Results from this analysis, in general, supported the findings presented earlier, although in several instances, the number of significant associations was reduced, and, in two instances, a relationship that was previously suppressed was uncovered.

Analysis of Computer Usage

The survey also included questions dealing with the respondents’ access to a computer and the Internet and the extent to which Internet access was used for various activities.

Computer and Internet Access

Sixty-six percent of respondents had computers in their homes in 2003, and an additional 8 percent had access to a computer at work, a library, a school, or another location. One in four did not have such access. Almost everyone who had a home computer also had an Internet connection of some kind (94 percent). However, counting those who did not have a home computer, 38 percent of all subjects did not have Internet access from home. Although a small number of respondents indicated that they could access the Internet from a location other than home (at work, school, library, etc.), 30 percent of all subjects in the 2003 survey were unable to access the Internet at all.

The comparative data using the 1999 study indicated significant increases in the availability of home computers and access to the Internet. Respondents with computers at home increased from less than half to nearly two-thirds and Internet access from home doubled.

Of those with home Internet access, 76 percent accessed the

FIGURE 6. COMPUTER AND INTERNET ACCESS FROM HOME, 1999-2003

	1999	2003
Computer in the home	48 %	66 %
Access to Internet from home	30 %	61 %

Internet using a dial-up modem, 17 percent had cable connections, 3 percent did not know how they connected, and the remaining 4 percent used DSL, wireless, or other means.

Those who were able to access the Internet, either at home or at another location, were asked how often they used it to do a number of activities.

- Looking up information about topics of interest and using e-mail were the most common uses.
- More than half occasionally or often use the Internet for school or education-related activities, to purchase consumer goods online, to carry out business-related work, and to download music, graphics, or software.

Relationships of Personal Characteristics to Computer/Internet Access

- Eighty-eight percent of respondents under age 45 had a computer at home; only 38 percent of those age 65 or older did. Similar to computer access, 33 percent of those age 65 or older accessed the Internet from their homes, while 83 percent of those under age 45 did so.
- Fifty-three percent of those with a high school education or less had a home computer; 87 percent of college graduates had computers in their homes. Additionally, 48 percent of those with no formal

FIGURE 7. USES OF THE INTERNET

If you can access the Internet, how often do you do each of the following?	Occasionally or often
Look up information about topics that interest you	90 %
E-mail friends, family, or business associates	83 %
Carry out school or education-related activities	45 %
Purchase consumer goods	40 %
Carry out business-related work	39 %
Download music, graphics, or software	27 %
Visit chat rooms, meet people on-line, make friends	7 %
Buy/sell stocks, mutual funds, securities	7 %

education beyond high school could access the Internet from home, while 84 percent of college graduates could.

- Although 85 percent of persons with household incomes of \$40,000 or more reported a home computer, only 32 percent of those with less than \$20,000 did. At the same time, 81 percent of those with household incomes of \$40,000 or more had Internet access, while only 26 percent earning less than \$20,000 had such access.

- The analysis of interrelated factors also showed differences only by age, education, and income. Region had no effect on home computer or Internet access.

The same factors – age, education, and income – were also related to the frequency of usage for specific activities among Internet users, but gender was also a factor.

- Younger people and those with higher educational and income levels more frequently used the Internet to look up information about topics that interested them, purchase consumer goods, and carry out business related work.

- Females and those with higher educational levels were more likely than their opposites to use email.

- Age, gender, and education were related to using the Internet for school or education related activities, with younger people, women, and the more highly educated most likely to do so.

- Younger people were more likely to visit chat rooms and download music, graphics, and software. Those with less income were also more likely to do these activities.

- There were no significant differences among regions.

Summary

Clearly, computer use and Internet access have increased markedly during the last five years, but sizable numbers of people have not yet entered the information age in which electronic communication and web access are day-to-day occurrences. Moreover, the priority that rural Pennsylvanians gave in 2003 to expanding telecommunications and Internet access and to expanding web-based employment opportunities was relatively low; only 15 percent indicated that higher priority should be given. And, despite the plea for increasing job opportunities, only about one in five rural residents reported that high priority should be given to expanding web-based business and employ-

ment opportunities, and this figure had not increased since the 2000 survey. A similar percentage, 23 percent, felt that communities should give high priority to providing opportunities for computer training, but this was among the lowest percentages of high priority responses given to any of the community human service activities assessed. An even smaller number, 16 percent, reported that priority should be given to providing public access to computers.

CONCLUSIONS

The attitudes of rural Pennsylvanians are not homogeneous. Some differences are linked with personal attributes such as age, gender, education, and income. Others are related to the contextual characteristics of the local area such as population density, economic prosperity, and the nature of the economic base. Still other differences reflect larger regional or geographical areas within the state. An understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of rural Pennsylvanians requires recognition of the diversity in views within the state's rural sector and of the personal, social, and contextual characteristics that are associated with such differences.

The dominant finding of the data analysis was the overwhelming importance placed on jobs and economic issues facing the state. Regardless of geographical area or personal and county characteristics, jobs and employment opportunities were seen as the biggest and most critical need in rural Pennsylvania.

The dominant finding of the data analysis was the overwhelming importance placed on jobs and economic issues facing the state.

Actions to facilitate job creation, retention, and expansion should take precedence over, but also be made in light of, other areas of activity and concern. Importantly, survey respondents indicated that job creation could be linked to other actions across areas of concern like the environment, agriculture, and leadership.

Pennsylvania's long-term population stability (roughly 12 million residents since 1970) masks important demographic shifts. There has been significant development

related to population redistribution that has led to high rates of growth in townships, declines in cities, and a renewed out-migration from rural distressed areas. This has especially been the case in a regional context – for much of this period the western half of the state suffered job and population loss while the eastern half experienced population stability or moderate growth. Further, the loss of young adults coupled with an aging population creates difficult scenarios for policy formation. The problem has been exacerbated by the movement of higher income families into small ex-urban communities and the continued out-migration of youth.

This study focused on the concerns, attitudes, and opinions of rural residents by addressing a range of issues and incorporating comparative data from earlier studies to highlight the following trends and/or shifts in public opinion among rural Pennsylvanians.

Employment and Income

Weakness in the state economy was reflected in the level of concern expressed by rural residents about economic issues. Nearly nine in 10 respondents rated job availability as deserving higher priority than it currently is given. Ironically, while 71 percent of respondents believed that too little money was being spent by the state on creating jobs and economic opportunities for rural residents, Pennsylvania's investment per capita in job creation and business expansion is among the highest in the nation, according to the Brookings Institution. Despite such expenditures, rural residents feel that more needs to be done in this area as indicated by their support of providing more incentives to attract new industries, promoting the development of small businesses, and expanding existing industries.

State and Local Policy Issues

Rural perceptions of state-level policy issues were linked to both individuals' household incomes and the economic health of the counties in which they lived and worked. Residents with high incomes and those in counties with relatively high median incomes and increasing populations were more likely to express satisfaction with the way things are going in the state than were those with lower incomes and those from poorer and declining areas. Rural residents in counties with higher median household incomes were also more optimistic that the state's economy would improve in the next year or so than were residents in lower income counties and those with decreasing employment.

Concern about the way things were going in the Commonwealth was common. One-third were not satisfied, and 39 percent believed Pennsylvania's economy would get worse in the next year.

This could be a problem for the state. Dissatisfied rural residents may be more likely to migrate in search of jobs and an improved quality of life. Indeed, many of the Commonwealth's youth have voted with their feet over the past three decades. It is not surprising that rural residents saw reducing out-migration of professionals (42 percent) and youth (39 percent) as high priority issues.

Land Use, Sprawl and Migration

During the 1990s, the state's population growth was concentrated in townships while the population of cities and boroughs declined. Such shifts have created increased pressure on smaller and rural townships to control land use and provide services to this wave of new residents. At the same time, local leaders, especially in declining older neighborhoods, face the problem of maintaining existing services in the face of a declining tax base. Because of the range of issues faced by the state's municipalities, different and more refined land use, planning, and developmental policies need to be established.

About 60 percent of respondents identified reforming Pennsylvania's local tax structure and more than half indicated that preservation of farmland were high priority issues for the state. About 44 percent expressed a high level of concern for protection and conservation of the environment. Farmland preservation was linked to household income: those from counties with higher income levels gave a higher priority to farmland preservation while higher income individuals gave lower priority to farmland preservation.

On the other hand, higher population density was associated with lower ratings of one's community in terms of natural environment, recreation opportunities, and as a place to raise children. Rural residents clearly perceived that open space and lack of congestion are essential for a good quality of life. Without adequate protection from development pressures and resources to address planning and zoning issues, rural and small communities are threatened with losing these treasured amenities.

Health Care

Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated that health care deserved higher priority, second only to availability of jobs. More than half (55 percent) felt that too little money was being spent by the state on improving and protecting citizen health and that high priority needed to be placed on attracting additional health care providers to their communities. Only 12 percent gave high ratings to the quality of health care in

Regardless of geographical area or personal and county characteristics, jobs and employment opportunities were seen as the biggest and most critical need in rural Pennsylvania.

their areas. That nearly all respondents (95 percent) currently had health insurance and 61 percent participated in their plan through an employer, does not lessen the centrality of this issue – rural residents are very concerned about health care.

Environment

The survey results demonstrate that rural residents are concerned about protecting their environment. More than six in 10 respondents identified safe drinking water (63 percent) and safe disposal of industrial wastes (61 percent) as deserving higher priority. More than half indicated that safe food supplies (54 percent) and preservation of farmland (53 percent) deserve higher priority in the future. Many respondents also felt higher priority was needed to clean up polluted sites (47 percent), for protection/conservation of the environment (44 percent), and to preserve wildlife habitats (40 percent).

Despite such high levels of interest in environmental protection, there was limited consensus on how best to achieve this goal. Regardless of the high level of concern for safe drinking water, and the fact that more than half of the respondents indicated high priority should be given to improving water quality of lakes and streams (54 percent), only 37 percent said high priority should be given to strengthening environmental regulation of industries, and less than one in three gave high priority to reducing storm water runoff and flooding (32 percent) or heightened regulation of large-scale

animal feeding operations (31 percent). Even fewer said that high priority should be given to raising anti-pollution standards for cars and trucks (24 percent).

Taken together, these findings indicate that rural Pennsylvanians want to protect their environment, but their opinions become more ambiguous when faced with potential economic trade-offs. Thus, while few (13 percent) gave high priority to lowering environmental standards to attract and keep industry, 37 percent reported that this should receive medium priority, suggesting that jobs might indeed take precedence over environmental purity for many rural residents. The contradictions between economic growth and environmental protection indicate the difficulty of developing policy that will be effective and embraced by the Commonwealth's rural constituency.

Trust in State Institutions

Respondents displayed a high level of cynicism toward state elected officials and state institutions. Relatively few rural residents expressed high levels of confidence in the governor (9 percent), the state legislature (7 percent), or the state justice system (11 percent). At the same time, about one in three rural residents had little or no confidence in the state legislature (33 percent) or the state justice system (31 percent), and more than four in 10 expressed the same about the governor (44 percent).

Local Community Issues

Pennsylvania rural residents view their communities as desirable places to live. More than half of the respondents (57 percent) rated their communities highly as places to raise children and 46 percent gave them high ratings as places to retire. Four in 10 rated the quality of their natural environment as high. Considerably lower ratings were given to their communities' local economy. Only 2 percent rated their community high on local job opportunities. Access to amenities (including the natural environment), feeling at least somewhat safe from crime, and neighborliness clearly contribute to the attractiveness of rural Pennsylvania. At the same time, small and rural communities apparently are difficult places to earn a living and/or develop a high wage career.

Rural residents, while generally satisfied with their communities and local environment, expressed much less confidence in their local government's ability to manage community affairs effectively. This, in part, likely reflects the intersection of faltering local economies with heightened expectations for services and opportunities by new residents moving there. Not surprisingly, local government was not rated highly in terms of managing public funds, planning for change, communication, or improving local quality of life.

There may also be uncertainty about how local officials should respond to community problems, especially land use issues. Twice as many respondents

put a high priority on protecting open space (40 percent) as did on using local land use planning to guide community change (20 percent). Similarly, while almost three-quarters agreed that local government should regulate land use to limit negative impacts on the community, 51 percent believed that property owners should have an unrestricted right to use and sell their land as they see fit.

This suggests that rural residents are concerned about recent changes in their communities and want local government to take action, but they lack confidence in land use planning and want to retain private property rights. As more people migrate to such communities in search of a better life, the problems facing rural residents and their elected officials will intensify and require a more coherent response to the combined problems of sprawling land use and increased public expenditures.

Personal Concerns

Levels of concern expressed about the economy are reflected in a range of personal issues including household finances and day-to-day dealings. The vast majority of rural respondents were more or less satisfied with their families' current financial situation (61 percent). However, 20 percent were not at all satisfied, and 24 percent reported being worse off than they were a year before. Those with higher education and incomes were the most satisfied with their families' financial situation, both in comparison with last year and in terms of their financial future; those with the lowest incomes and least education were the least satisfied.

Pennsylvania rural residents view their communities as desirable places to live.

General Social Issues

Rural Pennsylvanians indicated overwhelming support for requiring teachers to periodically pass performance tests to retain certification (87 percent) and for requiring students to pass a basic skills test for high school graduation (83 percent). Seven in 10 were in favor of prohibiting public school teachers from striking during the school year. About half favored changing the flat rate tax to a graduated tax rate (53 percent), legalizing casino gambling (50 percent), supporting tax-supported after-school activities for children and youth (49 percent), and permitting doctors to help terminally ill patients end their lives (46 percent). Moreover, significant minorities indicated support for the provision of tax-supported day care facilities for children (42 percent), Sunday liquor sales (37 percent), the elimination of criminal penalties for possession and use of small amounts of marijuana (30 percent), and providing same-sex domestic partners the same legal rights and benefits as married couples (26 percent).

Differences by age, gender, education, and income make it difficult to use this mosaic of attitudes in policy formation. However, it is clear that the concerns of the rural population cannot be reduced to simple platitudes as in viewing rural Pennsylvania as the bastion of conservatism in the state. This reflects the fact that the socio-demographic structure of the Commonwealth's small and rural communities is changing, bringing significant changes in local attitudes and opinions.

Gender Gap on Key Social Issues

There were clear distinctions between female and male rural residents' perceptions about the importance of state-level policy issues. For most items for which highly significant gender differences emerged, women were more likely to indicate a higher priority than men. This included availability of jobs, health care, crime and violence, care of the elderly, education for youth and children, drug and alcohol abuse, safe drinking water, safe food supply, cleaning up polluted sites, homeland security/public safety, air quality, and child care. Only for reforming Pennsylvania's local tax structure did men indicate a higher preference than women.

Local and state policies that support children, the elderly, and families were consistently rated as more important by the women than the men of rural Pennsylvania. Elected officials in rural areas need to increase their awareness of this "gender gap" in rural attitudes.

Trends

One of the more disturbing trends revealed in the study was an increasing level of dissatisfaction and pessimism among rural Pennsylvanians regarding their current and future economic prospects. Between 1999 and 2003, there was a nearly 20 percentage point decrease in rural residents reporting that they were satisfied with the way things were going in the state, and a similar increase in the proportion who believed the state economy would get worse in the next year or so. This change in attitude could be associated with the continued out-migration from distressed rural areas. Despite high levels of satisfaction with the local quality of life, many residents continue to face declining employment prospects. This can contribute to the exodus of some of the Commonwealth's best and brightest youth.

Economic growth and the expansion of jobs is the most pressing issue facing many rural residents. Between 1999 and 2003, there was a significant increase in the proportion of residents who wanted to see more state resources invested in creating jobs and economic opportunity. In both 2000 and 2003, more than two-thirds of respondents supported giving high priority to providing incentives to attract new industries to the state, making it the most popular means of strengthening the economy. Between 2000 and 2003, there were significant increases in the support for other means of job creation – promoting small businesses, providing incentives for the expansion of existing businesses, and promoting the development of large businesses. Indeed, the emphasis given to increasing job availability has supplanted much of the public's concern about other matters, including the priority given to many environmental and social issues. Interestingly, while work-related priorities were clearly most important to rural Pennsylvanians, there was little support for expanding web-based e-commerce or promoting rural tourism – two means of job creation that have been espoused by some as representing potentially important means for developing rural economies.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The conclusions drawn from the data analysis suggest a number of policy considerations for state officials and agency staff.

- *State and local leaders need to focus more attention on attracting new industries and on developing, retaining, and expanding small businesses in rural counties.*

Rural residents feel vulnerable about their local economic base and future job prospects. Across the Commonwealth, manufacturing jobs have been lost and available service sector jobs make it difficult for rural Pennsylvanians to maintain their standard of living. While Pennsylvania has dedicated significant resources to job creation over the last decade, the survey findings suggest that these efforts have not reassured rural workers. Not only are new and inventive programs called for, but careful assessment of the nature and effectiveness of existing efforts are needed to determine how those resources might achieve greater impact.



- *Leadership training at the state and local level is needed to develop new ways to respond to the needs of rural municipalities.*

Residents of rural municipalities are concerned about their natural environment, recreation amenities, and the overall quality of life. At the same time, they are dissatisfied with how their local officials are handling public finances and managing change in their communities as they struggle to maintain municipal services in the face of economic decline and demographic change. Programs directed at training local government officials and increasing their access to educational materials may help them evaluate their options and respond to changing economic and social realities.

- *There is a pressing need for renewed focus on retaining and expanding health care providers in rural areas across the state, using whatever legislative reforms and incentive programs necessary to increase the number of rural health providers.*

Health care is a major priority for rural residents. Most rural residents have health insurance, but they are concerned about finding trained health care professionals in their communities. With the continued aging of the rural population, state health agencies need to promote the expansion of health care facilities in rural communities in collaboration with the major health insurance providers. Concern for health care was second only to jobs as an area in need of higher priority in the future. Solutions should be sought now, before the matter assumes crisis proportions.

- *Rural residents need more educational opportunities to learn about their local environment and how it can be protected and improved.*

There is a serious disconnect between the level of concern over fundamental environmental issues (i.e. water quality, industrial waste, food supplies) and the lack of consensus on how to address these issues. There are indications that rural communities need assistance in developing educational programs that allow residents to explore the roots of current environmental problems and consider the range of options available for solving these problems at the local level. Without a better understanding of these issues in rural communities, local elected officials will be hard pressed to work proactively and effectively with new or existing state environmental protection programs.

- *State and local officials need to improve their methods and increase their effectiveness in communicating with their constituents about their efforts to improve the quality of life in rural communities.*

Elected officials are facing an epidemic of “political cynicism” among rural residents. Rural Pennsylvanians are not only increasingly pessimistic about their economic prospects, but they also have little or no confidence in state or local elected officials to solve the persistent economic and environmental

problems in their communities. In some respects, we are seeing a widespread breakdown in the trust that rural residents have in their political institutions at all levels—and these attitudes can only be turned around with public understanding of successful political, economic, and social outcomes.

- *State and community leaders need to reacquaint themselves with their constituents as rural attitudes are clearly changing in regard to a wide range of social issues.*

Rural residents, and especially rural women, are changing their minds about a wide range of social issues including Sunday liquor sales, decriminalization of marijuana, domestic partnerships, and the legalization of casino gambling. In particular, women are more likely to see a role for the public sector in the areas of economic growth, health care, elder care, youth development, environmental protection, homeland security and inter-municipal planning. These changing attitudes mean that representatives need to be more proactive in listening to the concerns of their constituents or risk being caught in a wave of popular dissatisfaction in these communities that are changing demographically and politically.



Potential Policy Scenarios

There are several interconnected policy scenarios that can be drawn from this study to pull together general policy themes and suggest how state and local agencies might explore new programs or policies to address the concerns of rural residents.

- *Focus on Regional Economic Development*

New state policies that focus on jobs and employment opportunities in the Commonwealth's myriad rural and small towns are needed. However, current fiscal realities demand that new efforts create employment synergies across entire regions when possible. A traditional focus on increasing the numbers of jobs without considering where such jobs are located does little to improve rural livelihoods. In many cases, rural municipalities vie against each other to attract major industries, sometimes manufacturing firms, but more recently, retail and service firms. What is needed is a mechanism for neighboring municipalities to pool their

resources to attract such firms and then share the benefits.

- *Strengthen Economic Development Collaboration*

Creating incentives for inter-municipal planning, in the form of tax incentives and access to state development grants, could do much to facilitate cooperation. Further, using existing state agencies (including the Department of Community and Economic Development) to provide trained staff for coordinating such efforts would allow municipalities to focus more of their resources on attracting businesses that will make a long-term commitment to the host communities.

- *Build Links Between Economic-Environmental Programs*

Because of high levels of concern for local amenities,

state agencies charged with protecting the Commonwealth's environment (such as the Bureau of Forestry and State Parks, the Game Commission, the Fish and Boat Commission, and the Department of Environmental Protection) could be more proactive in avoiding most "either/or" policies. In other words, when those seeking

economic development and/or environmental protection work together to find solutions to the need for jobs and protecting the environment, more sustainable uses of the natural resource base are likely to emerge and rancorous conflict and expensive mitigation be avoided.

- *Enhance Access to Health Care*

Attention needs to be given to the creation of policies that couple the need for jobs and employment opportunities to the growing health-care vulnerabilities of living in a rural community. Access to quality health care is an increasingly important issue in rural Pennsylvania. In light of an aging rural population and rural communities being the home to much of the state's new residential development and being increasingly identified as retirement destinations, efforts at encouraging job creation in the growing allied health care area would be prudent. Such efforts would meet multiple needs of residents including allaying heightened concerns over health care issues.

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