

**The North Dakota Survey of Food, Agricultural, Energy and Environmental Issues:  
A Prospectus that was Submitted to Contributors on Re-branding the ND Rural Life Poll  
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## **Introduction**

The North Dakota Rural Life Poll was begun at the University of North Dakota in 1987. Initially, it was composed of surveys of two populations: farm operators and rural residents. Surveys of these populations were conducted again in 1988, 1989 and 1993. In 1999 and 2006 only farm operators were studied. The results from the Rural Life Polls can be found at <http://www.ndrurallife.net/blank/> Because of renewed interest among former sponsors as well as among a variety of rural advocates and activists, the principal investigator (PI) was encouraged to reinstate the poll.

## **Continuation as the Survey of Food, Agricultural, Energy and Environmental Issues**

Pending funding commitments, the PI proposed that the poll be reconfigured as a statewide telephone survey. The PI also proposed that the survey be re-branded the North Dakota Survey of Food, Agricultural, Energy and Environmental Issues. Because North Dakota's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, energy and tourism, these issues affect all citizens of the state. A statewide survey of the opinions, views, and concerns of all citizens about issues concerning food, agriculture, energy, and the environment would be of interest to state and national policy makers.

The purpose of the survey was to assess the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of North Dakotans related to emerging -- and potentially contentious -- food, agricultural, energy and environmental issues. A variety of topics were to be explored including residents' views of agriculture and energy's importance; attitudes about the environment and land use; food safety concerns; attitudes and behaviors related to local and organic foods; attitudes about animal welfare; concerns about large-scale livestock development; opinions and concerns about renewable and non-renewable energy development, and views about tourism and recreational development.

The telephone survey was to have been conducted biennially. In the years between surveys, the sponsors of the survey and the PI would have held a conference to discuss the results of the survey as well as to involve residents, activists, politicians, and sponsors in a dialogue about the implications of the survey results.

## **Funding**

To conduct the ND Survey of Food, Agricultural, Energy and Environmental Issues, the Social Science Research Institute estimated that it would cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000 to conduct a telephone survey of 1000 respondents. The costs of succeeding surveys would have been higher depending on increases in telephone survey costs. The PI was to receive no compensation for conducting the survey. It was neither expected nor required by the University that the PI conduct this survey. The time to conduct this survey was to be considered as part of the PI's

service load, and it would necessitate a reduction in effort towards teaching and research. The following categories for sponsors of the survey were to be recognized in all poll press releases and publications.

- **Benefactors:** \$10,000 and more
- **Sponsors:** \$5000-9999
- **Patrons:** \$2500-4999
- **Contributors:** <\$2500

## **Methodology**

The telephone survey was to involve a disproportionate stratified random sample with one stratum composed of all households located within the state's core metropolitan cities (Fargo, West Fargo, Bismarck, Mandan, Minot and Grand Forks) and the other stratum consisting of the remaining households located in metropolitan fringe of metropolitan counties and in the nonmetropolitan counties. The data was to be probability weighted to account for unequal chances of representation. The total sample size was to be 1000. A random digit dialing program was to be used to select telephone numbers from metropolitan and non-metropolitan exchanges.

## **Content**

The theme of the surveys was to be decided in conjunction with the sponsors of the survey and those knowledgeable about food, agricultural, energy and environmental issues. The questions were to be accomplished within the time limitations of a telephone survey. Although it is difficult to allocate questions on the basis of contributions, those sponsors with larger donations were to be given more consideration in both the topics and questions. The PI was to have final decision on the wording and formatting of questions and responses.

## **Administration**

At the time of consideration, the PI was only asking for a commitment. If the PI was able to secure commitments sufficient to conduct the survey, then he would have asked sponsors to send a check for their contribution to the Department of Sociology to be placed in a university account. The PI was to have been the principal investigator for the surveys, and the PI would have contracted with the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) at UND to conduct the telephone survey.

## **Time Frame for the Survey**

Secure funding for the survey:	July – August, 2008
Select survey topic(s):	September, 2008
Begin survey construction:	October – November, 2008
Finalize survey	December, 2008
Begin telephone survey	January, 2009
Complete telephone survey	February, 2009
Analyze data	March, 2009

Distribute results in press releases April, 2009  
Distribute executive summary May, 2009  
Post executive summary on website May, 2009

### **Products from the Survey**

For previous surveys, the PI had provided an in-depth report to all sponsors that included not only the frequency distribution for survey questions, but an analysis by demographic categories. For instance, we would have determined whether responses were significantly different by region, by residence, by occupation, by income, by education, etc. The PI would have prepared a summary of the results for general distribution.

### **Possible Sponsors**

North Dakota Farmers Union  
North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives  
North Dakota Association of Rural Telecommunications Cooperatives  
Minn-Kota Power Cooperative  
Basin Electric Power Cooperative  
Farm Credit Services of Mandan, Ag Country Farm Credit Services  
North Dakota Farm Bureau  
Cenex Harvest States Foundation  
Land O'Lakes Cooperative  
Forum Communications: Fargo Forum, Grand Forks Herald/AgWeek, Jamestown Sun, Dickinson Press.

### **Outcome**

After the North Dakota Farmers Union (NDFU) declined to fund the survey, it just wasn't feasible to conduct the poll. The NDFU Board of Directors asked whether it could have control over the themes of the survey, the content of the survey questions, and control over distribution of the results, especially if the results weren't favorable to their interests. Because no sociologist would ever agree to such terms, especially when NDFU would not have been the only sponsor, I could not agree to NDFU's terms, and subsequently they declined to support the survey.