

**The North Dakota Survey of Food, Agricultural, Energy and Environmental Issues:  
A Prospectus Submitted to the Office of the President  
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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 in again in 1988, 1989 and 1993. In 1999 and 2006 only farm operators were studied. The results from the 1999 and 2006 Rural Life Polls can be found at <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/ND%20Rural%20Life%20Poll.htm> Because of renewed interest among former sponsors as well as among a variety of rural advocates and activists, the principal investigator (PI) has been encouraged to reinstate the poll.

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

The PI proposes that the poll be reconfigured as a statewide telephone survey. The PI also proposes 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 would be 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 could 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 would be conducted biennially. In the years between surveys, the PI, working with the Office of Conference Services, would organize 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 estimates that it will cost \$20,000 to conduct a telephone survey of 1000 respondents. A approximate cost to sponsor a conference on the issues covered by the survey would be \$5000. The PI receives no compensation for conducting the survey. The time to conduct this survey would be considered as part of the PI's service and research obligations.

Initially, the PI inquired of previous funders of the ND Rural Life Poll to see if they were interested in being a sponsor of the reconfigured Survey of Food, Agriculture, Energy and Environmental Issues. Representatives from the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives and Basin Electric Power Cooperative indicated any interest as these organizations conduct their own membership surveys for internal planning purposes. The board of directors of the North Dakota Farmers Union, which had been a supporter of long standing, declined to become a sponsor largely because of an uncertain financial environment. When these three former major

sponsors declined to support the survey, the PI concluded that without their support he was unlikely to raise the \$20,000 to fund the survey.

### **Methodology**

The telephone survey would 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 would be probability weighted to account for unequal chances of representation. The total sample size would be 1000. A random digit dialing program would be used to select telephone numbers from metropolitan and non-metropolitan exchanges.

### **Content**

The theme of the surveys would be decided in conjunction with an advisory panel of rural activists and advocates who are currently subscribed to ND Rural Life, a Google Group maintained by the PI as well as other persons knowledgeable about food, agricultural, energy and environmental issues. The questions would have 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 will be given more consideration in both the topics and questions. The PI will have final decision on the wording and formatting of questions and responses.

### **Administration**

The Sociology Department's Administrative Assistant would oversee the administration of the account, and the PI would contract with the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) at UND to conduct the telephone survey.

### **Products from the Survey**

For previous surveys, the PI has provided an in-depth report to all sponsors that include not only the frequency distribution for survey questions, but an analysis by demographic categories. For instance, the PI could determine whether responses were significantly different by region, by residence, by occupation, by income, by education, etc. The PI will also prepare a summary of the results for general distribution. In conjunction with University Relations, the PI would develop press releases from the data. Examples of past polls can be found at <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/ND%20Rural%20Life%20Poll.htm>

### **Benefits to the University of North Dakota**

Previous ND Rural Life surveys conducted at the University received considerable media attention from television, radio and daily newspapers. Presently there are no other statewide surveys on an ongoing basis that deal with issues of food, agriculture, energy and the environment. If the University were to fund the survey and the conference, it would demonstrate to the rest of the state that the entire state is the University's campus and that the University is indeed interested in issues of concern to a state heavily dependent on agriculture and energy. Furthermore, the data from the survey could be used by the PI and graduate students for professional presentations and used as data for articles for professional journals.