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# Executive Summary

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The manner in which food animals are produced, shipped and processed has been in the news lately. Specifically at question is whether or not current livestock practices adequately ensure the welfare of food animals. With a sizable animal agriculture production sector in the state of Nebraska, this is an important issue. How do rural Nebraskans feel about animal welfare issues? Do their opinions differ by age, education or their experience with livestock production? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 2,490 responses to the 2011 Nebraska Rural Poll, the sixteenth annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about animal welfare. For all questions, comparisons are made among different respondent subgroups, that is, comparisons by age, occupation, region, etc. Based on these analyses, some key findings emerged:

- **Almost all rural Nebraskans recognize the importance of livestock and poultry production to the state's economy.** Ninety-seven percent agree or strongly agree with the statement that livestock and poultry production are important to Nebraska's economy.
- **Most rural Nebraskans are familiar with livestock care practices.** Over one-half (62%) of rural Nebraskans agree or strongly agree with the statement, "I am familiar with current animal care practices used to raise livestock and poultry."
  - ✓ *Many rural Nebraskans have experience raising beef cattle, poultry and swine. They have less experience with dairy production.* Four in ten rural Nebraskans are currently raising beef cattle or have in the past. One-third (33%) are currently raising poultry or have in the past and one in three have experience raising swine. Sixteen percent of rural Nebraskans have experience with dairy production.
- **Most rural Nebraskans believe animal welfare means providing adequate exercise, space and social activities for the animals in addition to food, water and shelter.** The vast majority of rural Nebraskans (95%) agree that animal welfare means providing adequate food, water and shelter to livestock animals. Most rural Nebraskans (69%) agree, though, that animal welfare means more than providing adequate food, water and shelter; that it also includes adequate exercise, space and social activities for the animals.
- **Most rural Nebraskans trust livestock farmers, especially on family farms, and their veterinarians to care for their animals.** Most rural Nebraskans (84%) believe livestock farmers and their veterinarians know how best to care for their animals. And, almost three-quarters (74%) believe the welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms.
- **Most rural Nebraskans believe that current regulation of the state's livestock practices is adequate to ensure animal welfare.** Just over one-half (56%) of rural Nebraskans agree that

current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals. And, over one-third (36%) *disagree* that more regulation is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals. One in three (30%) of rural Nebraskans agree with that statement. A sizeable proportion of rural Nebraskans (approximately one-third), though, have no opinion about the adequacy of current regulation or the need for additional regulation.

- ✓ *Persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to agree that current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals.* Just over three-quarters (77%) of persons with agriculture occupations agree with this statement, compared to 44 percent of persons with sales or office support occupations.
  - ✓ *Persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to disagree with the statement that more regulation of livestock practices is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals.* Almost seven in ten (69%) persons with agriculture occupation disagree with this statement, compared to 20 percent of persons with food service or personal care occupations.
- ***Most rural Nebraskans believe regulation will impact the cost of food.*** Over one-half (57%) agree that regulation of Nebraska livestock practices will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food.
    - ✓ *Persons working in agriculture are more likely than persons with different occupations to believe regulation will impact food prices.* Three-quarters (75%) of persons with agriculture occupations agree that regulation of Nebraska livestock practices will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food. In comparison, only 41 percent of persons with food service or personal care occupations agree with this statement.

## Introduction

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The manner in which food animals are produced, shipped and processed has been in the news lately. Specifically at question is whether or not current livestock practices adequately ensure the welfare of food animals. With a sizable animal agriculture production sector in the state of Nebraska, this is an important issue. How do rural Nebraskans feel about animal welfare issues? Do their opinions differ by age, education or their experience with livestock production? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

The 2011 Nebraska Rural Poll is the sixteenth annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about animal welfare.

### *Methodology and Respondent Profile*

This study is based on 2,490 responses from Nebraskans living in the 84 non-metropolitan counties in the state. A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in March and April to approximately 6,400 randomly selected households. Metropolitan counties not included in the sample were Cass, Dakota, Dixon, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and Washington. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to well-being, community, animal welfare, technology and work. This paper reports only results from the animal welfare portion of the survey.

A 39% response rate was achieved using the total design method (Dillman, 1978). The sequence of steps used follow:

1. A pre-notification letter was sent requesting participation in the study.
2. The questionnaire was mailed with an informal letter signed by the project director approximately seven days later.

3. A reminder postcard was sent to the entire sample approximately seven days after the questionnaire had been sent.
4. Those who had not yet responded within approximately 14 days of the original mailing were sent a replacement questionnaire.

Appendix Table 1 shows demographic data from this year's study and previous rural polls, as well as similar data based on the entire nonmetropolitan population of Nebraska (using the latest available data from the 2000 U.S. Census). As can be seen from the table, there are some marked differences between some of the demographic variables in our sample compared to the Census data. Certainly some variance from 2000 Census data is to be expected as a result of changes that have occurred in the intervening eleven years. Nonetheless, we suggest the reader use caution in generalizing our data to all rural Nebraska. However, given the random sampling frame used for this survey, the acceptable percentage of responses, and the large number of respondents, we feel the data provide useful insights into opinions of rural Nebraskans on the various issues presented in this report. The margin of error for this study is plus or minus two percent.

Since younger residents have typically been under-represented by survey respondents and older residents have been over-represented, weights were used to adjust the sample to match the age distribution in the nonmetropolitan counties in Nebraska (using U.S. Census figures from 2010).

The average age of respondents is 51 years. Sixty-six percent are married (Appendix Table 1) and 69 percent live within the city limits of a town or village. On average, respondents have lived in Nebraska 43 years and have lived in their current community 28 years. Fifty-four

percent are living in or near towns or villages with populations less than 5,000. Ninety-six percent have attained at least a high school diploma.

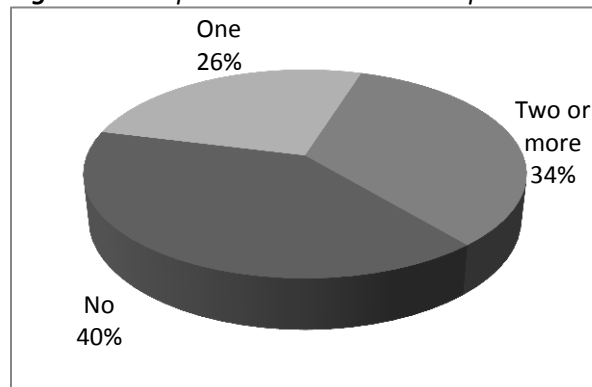
Forty-three percent of the respondents report their 2010 approximate household income from all sources, before taxes, as below \$40,000. Forty-seven percent report incomes over \$50,000.

Seventy-three percent were employed in 2010 on a full-time, part-time, or seasonal basis. Eighteen percent are retired. Thirty-five percent of those employed reported working in a management, professional, or education occupation. Twelve percent indicated they were employed in agriculture.

## Companion Animal and Livestock Experience

Rural Nebraskans were asked a series of questions to determine their experience with animals. First, they were asked if they currently have a companion animal (household pet). Most rural Nebraskans have a companion animal. Sixty percent of rural Nebraskans have one or more companion animals (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Companion Animal Ownership**

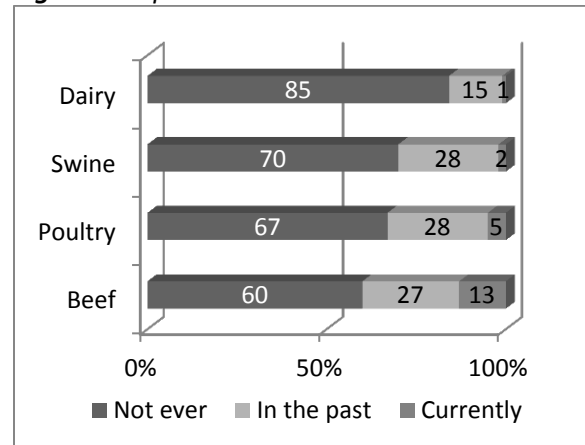


Just over one-quarter (26%) have one companion animal and approximately one-third (34%) have two or more companion animals.

Ownership of companion animals differs by every characteristic examined (Appendix Table 2). The groups most likely to have companion animals include: persons living in or near smaller communities, Panhandle residents (see Appendix Figure 1 for the counties included in each region), persons with higher household incomes, persons under the age of 65, females, married persons, persons with higher education levels, persons with healthcare support or public safety occupations, and persons with sales or office support occupations.

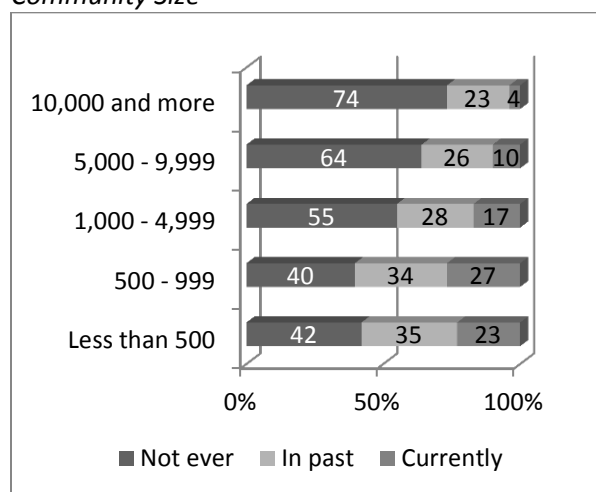
Next, respondents were asked if they or members of their household currently raise various types of livestock and poultry or if they had in the past. Many rural Nebraskans have experience raising beef cattle, poultry and swine. They have less experience with dairy production. Four in ten rural Nebraskans are currently raising beef cattle or have in the past (Figure 2). One-third (33%) are currently raising poultry or have in the past and one in three rural Nebraskans have experience raising swine. Sixteen percent of rural Nebraskans have experience with dairy production.

**Figure 2. Experience with Livestock Production**



Experience with livestock production differs by most of the characteristics examined (Appendix Table 3). People living in or near smaller communities are more likely than those living in or near larger communities to have experience with livestock production. Over one-half (approximately 58%) of persons living in or near communities with populations less than 1,000 are currently raising beef cattle or have in the past (Figure 3). In comparison, just over one-quarter (27%) of persons living in or near communities with populations of 10,000 or more have experience raising beef cattle. Approximately one-quarter of persons living in or near the smallest communities are currently raising beef cattle.

**Figure 3. Experience with Beef Production by Community Size**



Persons living in the North Central region are more likely than persons living in other regions of the state to have experience raising beef cattle. One-half (50%) of North Central residents are currently raising beef cattle (22%) or have in the past (28%). In comparison, just over one-third (36%) of Panhandle residents have experience raising beef cattle. Residents of the Northeast region are the regional group most likely to have experience raising dairy cattle (21%) as well as swine (34%). When examining experience with poultry production,

residents of both the Panhandle and South Central regions are the groups *least* likely to have experience.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than persons with higher incomes to have experience raising dairy, swine and poultry. Older persons are more likely than younger persons to have experience raising all types of livestock listed: beef, dairy, swine and poultry. Males are more likely than females to have experience raising beef, dairy and swine.

Persons with lower education levels are more likely than persons with more education to have experience raising all types of livestock. And, not surprisingly, persons with occupations in agriculture are more likely than persons with different occupations to have experience raising all types of livestock. Just under one-half (49%) of persons with agriculture occupations are currently raising beef cattle, 11% are currently raising poultry and 10% are currently involved in swine production.

## Opinions about Animal Welfare

To find out how rural Nebraskans view issues regarding animal welfare, respondents were given a series of statements and were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with each.

Almost all rural Nebraskans believe livestock and poultry production are important to the state's economy. Ninety-seven percent agree or strongly agree with this statement (Table 1). The vast majority (95%) also agree that animal welfare means providing adequate food, water and shelter to livestock animals. Most rural Nebraskans (69%) agree, though, that animal welfare means more than providing adequate food, water and shelter; that it also includes

**Table 1. Opinions about Animal Welfare**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Livestock and poultry production are important to Nebraska's economy.	1%	0.3%	1%	16%	81%
Animal welfare means providing adequate food, water, and shelter to livestock animals.	1	2	2	24	71
I am familiar with current animal care practices used to raise livestock and poultry.	6	9	24	28	34
Animal welfare means more than providing adequate food, water and shelter; it also includes adequate exercise, space, and social activities for the animals.	6	9	17	31	39
The welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms.	2	5	19	30	44
Current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals.	2	5	37	34	22
Regulation of Nebraska livestock practices will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food.	2	6	35	32	25
Livestock farmers and their veterinarians know how best to care for their animals.	1	3	12	40	44
Food safety is strongly dependent on the care provided to food animals.	1	6	15	42	35
More regulation of livestock practices is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals.	18	18	34	17	13
Consumer demand for animal welfare assurances will create a market niche that will benefit small Nebraska livestock producers.	9	11	43	24	13

adequate exercise, space and social activities for the animals. Given that many rural Nebraskans have had experience with livestock production, it is not surprising that most rural Nebraskans believe they are familiar with current animal care practices used to raise livestock and poultry. Over one-half (62%) of rural Nebraskans agree with that statement.

Most rural Nebraskans (84%) believe livestock farmers and their veterinarians know how best to care for their animals. And, almost three-quarters (74%) believe the welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms. Over three-quarters (77%) think food safety is strongly dependent on the care provided to food animals.

When asked about regulation, just over one-half (56%) of rural Nebraskans agree that current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals. And, over one-third (36%) disagree that more regulation is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals. One in three of rural Nebraskans (30%) agree with that statement and 34 percent neither agree nor disagree. Most rural Nebraskans believe regulation will impact food prices. Over one-half (57%) agree that regulation of Nebraska livestock practices will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food. A sizeable proportion of rural Nebraskans have no opinion about the adequacy of current regulations, the need for additional regulation or the impact of



regulation on the cost of livestock production and food. At least one-third of rural Nebraskans neither agree nor disagree with all the statements regarding regulation.

Opinions are mixed on whether or not consumer demand for animal welfare assurances will create a market niche that will benefit small Nebraska livestock producers. Over one-third (37%) agree with this statement, 20 percent disagree and 43 percent neither agree nor disagree.

Opinions about animal welfare issues differ by many of the characteristics examined (Appendix Table 4). Persons living in or near smaller communities are more likely than persons living in or near larger communities to agree that they are familiar with current animal care practices used to raise livestock and poultry. Almost eight in ten persons living in or near communities with less than 500 people (79%) agree with this statement, compared to one-half (50%) of persons living in or near communities with populations of 10,000 or more.

Persons living in the North Central region are more likely than persons living in other regions of the state to say they are familiar with current animal care practices. Seventy percent of North Central region residents are familiar with current animal care practices, compared to 59 percent of Panhandle residents.

Other groups most likely to agree that they are familiar with current animal care practices used to raise livestock and poultry include: older persons, males, persons with agriculture occupations and persons with experience raising livestock.

Persons with agriculture occupations are *less* likely than persons with different occupations to agree that animal welfare means more than providing adequate food, water and shelter but

also includes adequate exercise, space and social activities for the animals. Sixty-one percent of persons with agriculture occupations agree with this statement, compared to 73 percent of persons with sales or office support occupations and persons with healthcare support and public safety occupations. The groups most likely to agree with this statement include: Panhandle residents, persons with lower household incomes, persons age 65 and older, females, persons with lower education levels, and persons with companion animals.

Persons who have had experience raising livestock are more likely than persons with no livestock production experience to agree that the welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms. Over three-quarters (78%) of persons with livestock experience agree with this statement, compared to 70 percent of persons with no experience raising livestock.

However, persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to *disagree* with the statement that the welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms. Fourteen percent of persons with occupations in agriculture disagree with this statement, compared to five percent of persons with management, professional or education occupations and persons with production, transportation and warehousing occupations.

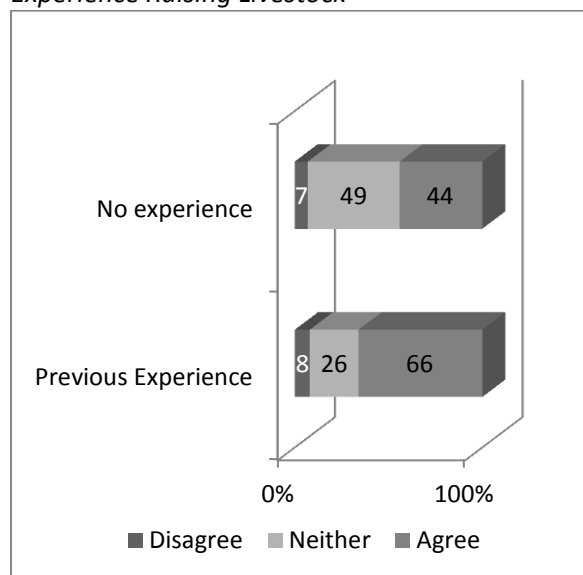
Older persons are more likely than younger persons to agree that the welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms. Eighty-two percent of persons age 65 and older agree with this statement, compared to 68 percent of persons age 30 to 39. Other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: persons living in or near smaller communities, persons with lower

household incomes, persons with lower education levels and persons with companion animals.

Persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to agree that current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals. Just over three-quarters (77%) of persons with agriculture occupations agree with this statement, compared to 44 percent of persons with sales or office support occupations.

Persons with experience raising livestock are more likely than persons with no livestock production experience to agree that current regulation is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals (Figure 4). Approximately two-thirds (66%) of persons with livestock production experience agree with this statement, compared to 44 percent of persons with no experience raising livestock. Almost one-half (49%) of persons with no livestock

**Figure 4.** *Belief that Current Regulation Is Adequate to Ensure Welfare of Food Animals by Experience Raising Livestock*



production experience neither agree nor disagree with this statement.

Other groups most likely to agree that current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals include: persons living in or near smaller communities, persons with lower household incomes, older persons, males, persons with lower education levels and persons without companion animals.

Three-quarters (75%) of persons with agriculture occupations agree that regulation of Nebraska livestock practices will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food. In comparison, only 41 percent of persons with food service or personal care occupations agree with this statement.

Persons with livestock experience are more likely than persons with no livestock experience to agree that regulation will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food. Sixty-four percent of persons with livestock experience agree with this statement, compared to 50 percent of persons with no previous livestock experience.

Persons living in both the North Central and South Central regions are more likely than persons living in other regions of the state to agree that regulation will raise the cost of livestock production and the cost of food. Approximately 60 percent of residents of these two regions agree with this statement, compared to 52 percent of Northeast region residents.

Other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: persons living in or near smaller communities, older persons, males, and persons without companion animals.

Persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to agree that livestock farmers and their veterinarians know how best to care for their animals. Ninety-one percent of persons with occupations in agriculture agree with this statement, compared to 77 percent of persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Persons with livestock experience are more likely than persons without livestock experience to agree that livestock farmers and their veterinarians know how best to care for their animals. Ninety percent of persons with livestock experience agree with this statement, compared to 80 percent of persons without livestock experience.

Other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: persons living in or near the smallest communities, persons age 65 and older, and males.

The groups most likely to agree with the statement that food safety is strongly dependent on the care provided to food animals include: persons with lower household

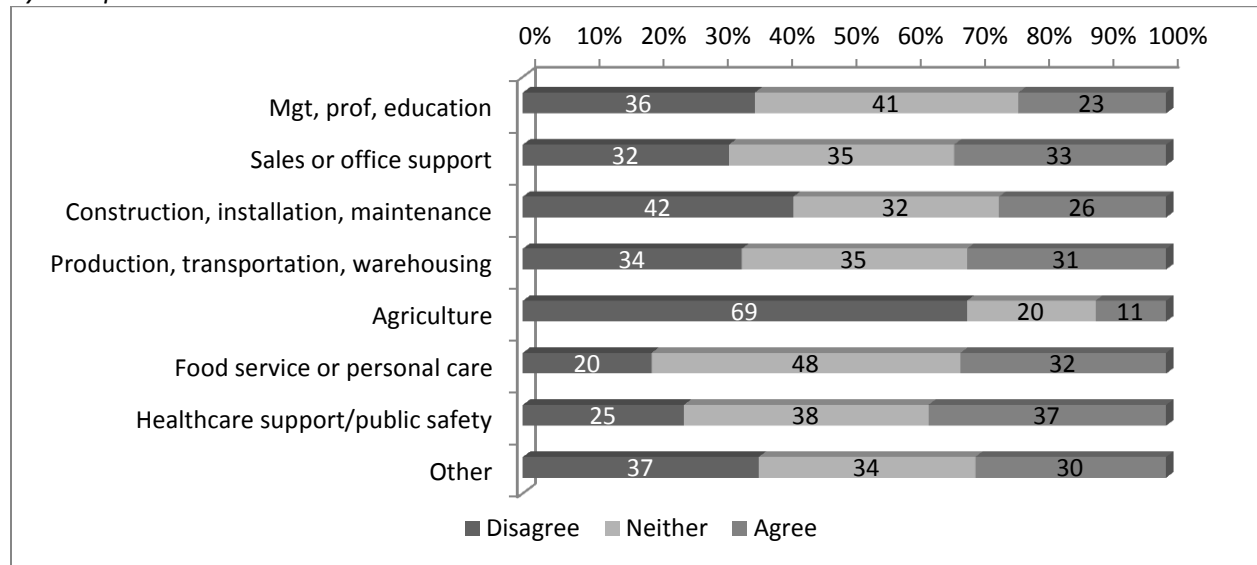
incomes, persons age 65 and older, persons with lower education levels and persons with occupations classified as other.

Persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to *disagree* with the statement that more regulation of livestock practices is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals (Figure 5). Almost seven in ten persons with agriculture occupation (69%) disagree with this statement, compared to 20 percent of persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Just under one-half (48%) of persons with experience raising livestock *disagree* with the statement that more regulation of livestock practices is needed. In comparison, just under one-quarter (24%) of persons without livestock experience disagree with this statement.

Other groups most likely to disagree with the statement that more regulation of livestock practices is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals include: persons living in or near smaller communities, residents of the North Central region, persons with higher household

**Figure 5. Belief that More Regulation of Livestock Practices is Needed to Ensure Welfare of Food Animals by Occupation**



incomes, older persons, males, persons with higher education levels, and persons without companion animals.

Persons with food service and personal care occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to agree with the statement that consumer demand for animal welfare assurances will create a market niche that will benefit small Nebraska livestock producers. One-half (50%) of persons with food service or personal care occupations agree with this statement, compared to 28 percent of persons with occupations in agriculture. Just over one-third (36%) of persons with agriculture occupations *disagree* with this statement. Similarly, persons with livestock experience are more likely than persons without livestock experience to *disagree* with this statement. Twenty-nine percent of persons with livestock experience disagree with this statement, compared to 13 percent of persons without livestock experience.

## Conclusion

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Almost all rural Nebraskans recognize the importance of livestock and poultry production to the state's economy and most rural Nebraskans are familiar with livestock care practices. In fact, many rural Nebraskans have experience raising beef cattle, poultry and swine. They have less experience with dairy production.

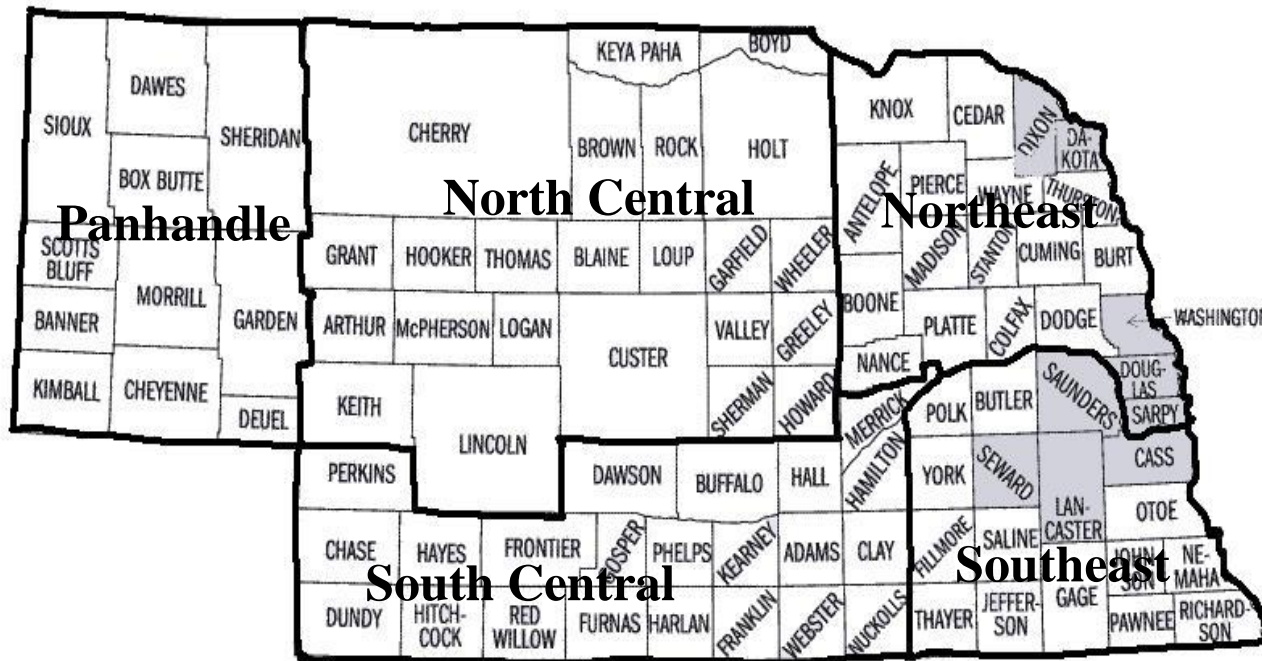
Most rural Nebraskans believe animal welfare means providing adequate exercise, space and social activities for the animals in addition to food, water and shelter. However, the vast majority of rural Nebraskans agree that animal welfare means at least providing adequate food, water and shelter to livestock animals.

Most rural Nebraskans trust livestock farmers and their veterinarians to care for their animals. And, most believe the welfare of animals is better protected on family farms than on large, corporate farms.

Most rural Nebraskans believe that current regulation of the state's livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals. And, over one-third *disagree* that more regulation is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals. A sizeable proportion of rural Nebraskans (approximately one-third), though, have no opinion about the adequacy of current regulation or the need for additional regulation. Persons with agriculture occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to agree that current regulation of Nebraska livestock practices is adequate to ensure the welfare of food animals and they are more likely than persons with different occupations to *disagree* that more regulation of livestock practices is needed to ensure the welfare of food animals.

Most rural Nebraskans believe regulation will impact the cost of livestock production and food. Persons working in agriculture are more likely than persons with different occupations to believe regulation will impact these costs.

# Appendix Figure 1. Regions of Nebraska



■ Metropolitan counties (not surveyed)