RURAL POLL

2025 NEBRASKA RURAL POLL RESEARCH REPORT

Well Being

The Rural Poll now offers a way for you to find the exact data you're looking for, for your research, policy decisions, or business proposals.
To purchase questions for the 2026 Poll, contact Survey Manager Becky Vogt at rvogt2@unl.edu.

Nebraska Rural Poll Research Report 25-3, October 2025.

Cover photo used with permission from Craig Chandler, University Communications.

All of the research reports detailing Nebraska Rural Poll results are located on its webpage at: http://ruralpoll.unl.edu

Funding for this project was provided by Nebraska Extension's Rural Prosperity Nebraska of the Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The demographic profile of **Rural Poll Resondents** can be found at *allthingsnebraska.unl.edu*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past year continued to be challenging for rural Nebraskans. Inflation continues to impact household budgets. Lower agricultural commodity prices have pointed to a projected decline in farm income. Given these challenges and opportunities, how do rural Nebraskans believe they are doing and how do they view their future? How satisfied are they with various items that influence their well-being? Have these views changed over the past 30 years? How do they view their mental health and do they experience feelings of loneliness? Do they identify with rural communities? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 943 responses to the 2025 Nebraska Rural Poll, the 30th annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their well-being. Trends for some of the questions are examined by comparing data from the 29 previous polls to this year's results. Comparisons are made among different respondent subgroups, that is, comparisons by age, occupation, region, etc. Based on these analyses, some key findings emerged:

- **This year, rural Nebraskans are much more optimistic about their current situation than they were last year.** The proportion believing they are better off than they were five years ago is 53 percent, up from 36 percent last year. This increase in optimism was matched with a sharp decrease in pessimism. This year, just 16 percent of rural Nebraskans believe they are worse off compared to five years ago, down from 33 percent last year.

- **Similarly, this year rural Nebraskans are more optimistic about their future than they were last year.** Almost one-half (46%) of rural Nebraskans believe they will be better off ten years from now. This is an increase from 34 percent last year. The proportion of respondents stating they will be worse off ten years from now declined slightly from last year (from 26 percent to 20 percent this year).

    - Younger persons are more likely than older persons to believe they are better off compared to five years ago and will be better off ten years from now. Over six in ten persons aged 19 to 39 believe they are better off than they were five years ago, compared to just under four in ten persons aged 65 and older (37%). Similarly, over six in ten persons aged 19 to 29 (63%) think they will be better off ten years from now, while less than one-quarter of persons aged 65 and older (24%) share this opinion.

- **This year, fewer rural Nebraskans agree with the statement that people are powerless to control their own lives as compared to last year**. The average proportion of respondents who strongly agree or agree with that statement has been approximately 31 percent across all 30 years of the study. There was a steady increase between 2019 and 2024 from 24 percent to 40 percent (the highest proportion in all years of the study). But this year that proportion declined to 32 percent.

    - Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than the persons with higher incomes to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. Almost one-half of the persons with household incomes under $40,000 (45%) agree with the statement, compared to just over two in ten persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more (22%).

- **Rural Nebraskans expressed more satisfaction with many economic items this year than they did last year.** Many items saw increases in the level of satisfaction this year as compared to last year: general quality of life, general standard of living, job satisfaction, job security, current income level, the ability to build assets/wealth, financial security during retirement, and job opportunities. As an example, last year 45 percent of rural Nebraskans were satisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. That proportion increased to 55 percent this year.

    - Persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. Almost seven in ten persons with these types of occupations (69%) say they are dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth, compared to just over two in ten persons with occupations in agriculture (21%).

    - Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than the persons with lower incomes to express satisfaction with their general quality of life. Almost nine in ten persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more (89%) are satisfied with their general quality of life, compared to approximately two-thirds of persons with household incomes less than $40,000.

- **Most rural Nebraskans describe their mental health or emotional well-being as good (52%) or excellent (34%).** This question has been asked since 2023. The proportion rating their mental health as excellent is higher than it has been the past two years (increasing from 27 percent last year to 34 percent this year).

    - Persons with healthcare support or public safety occupations are more likely than persons with other occupations to rate their mental health or emotional well-being as excellent. Just under one-half (46%) of persons with these occupations rate their mental health as excellent, compared to 13 percent of persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations. Almost four in ten persons with construction, installation or maintenance occupations (37%) rate their mental health as only fair.

- **A slight majority of rural Nebraskans say they hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness.** Just over one-half responded that they hardly ever or never experience the following: feel isolated from others (60%), feel that they lack companionship (58%), and feel left out (52%).

    - The youngest persons (aged 19 to 29) are more likely than older persons to often feel isolated from others (17%).

- **Most rural Nebraskans identify with rural communities: they see themselves as belonging to a rural community, they identify with people who live in rural communities, they believe they are typical of people who live in rural communities, and say their general attitudes are similar to people who live in rural communities.** Approximately two-thirds of rural Nebraskans agree or strongly agree that their general attitudes and opinions are similar to people who live in rural communities (66%) and they are typical of people who live in rural communities (68%). Just over three-quarters agree or strongly agree that they identify with people who live in rural communities (78%) and they see themselves belonging to a rural community (78%).

REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The past year continued to be challenging for rural Nebraskans. Inflation continues to impact household budgets. Lower agricultural commodity prices have pointed to a projected decline in farm income. Given these challenges and opportunities, how do rural Nebraskans believe they are doing and how do they view their future? How satisfied are they with various items that influence their well-being? Have these views changed over the past 30 years? How do they view their mental health and do they experience feelings of loneliness? Do they identify with rural communities? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 943 responses to the 2025 Nebraska Rural Poll, the 30th annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their well-being.

Methodology and Respondent Profile

This study is based on 943 responses from Nebraskans living in 86 counties in the state.[1] A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in June and July to 6,745 randomly selected households. Metropolitan counties not included in the sample were Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and Washington. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to well-being, community, energy resources, agricultural security, trust in institutions, algorithms, and trade policy. This paper reports only results from the well-being section.

A 14% 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 manager approximately two weeks later.
3. A reminder postcard was sent to those who had not yet responded approximately two weeks after the questionnaire had been sent.
4. Those who had not yet responded within approximately 30 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 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey). 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. Thus, 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 three percent.

Since younger residents have typically been under-represented by survey respondents and older residents have been over-

1 In the spring of 2013, the Grand Island area (Hall, Hamilton, Howard and Merrick Counties) was designated a metropolitan area, though Howard County was no longer considered a metropolitan county in 2023. To facilitate comparisons from previous years, these four counties are still included in our sample. In addition, the Sioux City area metropolitan counties of Dixon and Dakota were added in 2014 because of a joint Metro Poll being conducted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha to ensure all counties in the state were sampled. Although classified as metro, Dixon County is rural in nature. Dakota County is similar in many respects to other "micropolitan" counties the Rural Poll surveys.

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 2020).

The average age of respondents is approximately 50 years. Sixty-seven percent are married (Appendix Table 1) and 64 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 26 years. Fifty percent are living in or near towns or villages with populations less than 5,000. Ninety-seven percent have attained at least a high school diploma.

Sixteen percent of the respondents report their 2024 approximate household income from all sources, before taxes, as below $40,000. Seventy percent report incomes over $60,000. Seventy-eight percent were employed in 2024 on a full-time, part-time, or seasonal basis. Seventeen percent are retired. Twenty-eight percent of those employed reported working in a management, professional, or education occupation. Ten percent indicated they were employed in agriculture.

TRENDS IN WELL-BEING, 1996-2025

Comparisons are made between the well-being data collected this year to the 29 previous studies. These comparisons show a clearer picture of the trends in the well-being of rural Nebraskans.

General Well-Being

To examine perceptions of general well-being, respondents were asked four questions.

1. "All things considered, do you think you are better or worse off than you were five years ago?" (Answer categories were worse off, about the same, or better off).
2. "All things considered, do you think you are better or worse off than your parents when they were your age?"
3. "All things considered, do you think you will be better or worse off ten years from now than you are today?"
4. "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Life has changed so much in our modern world that most people are powerless to control their own lives."

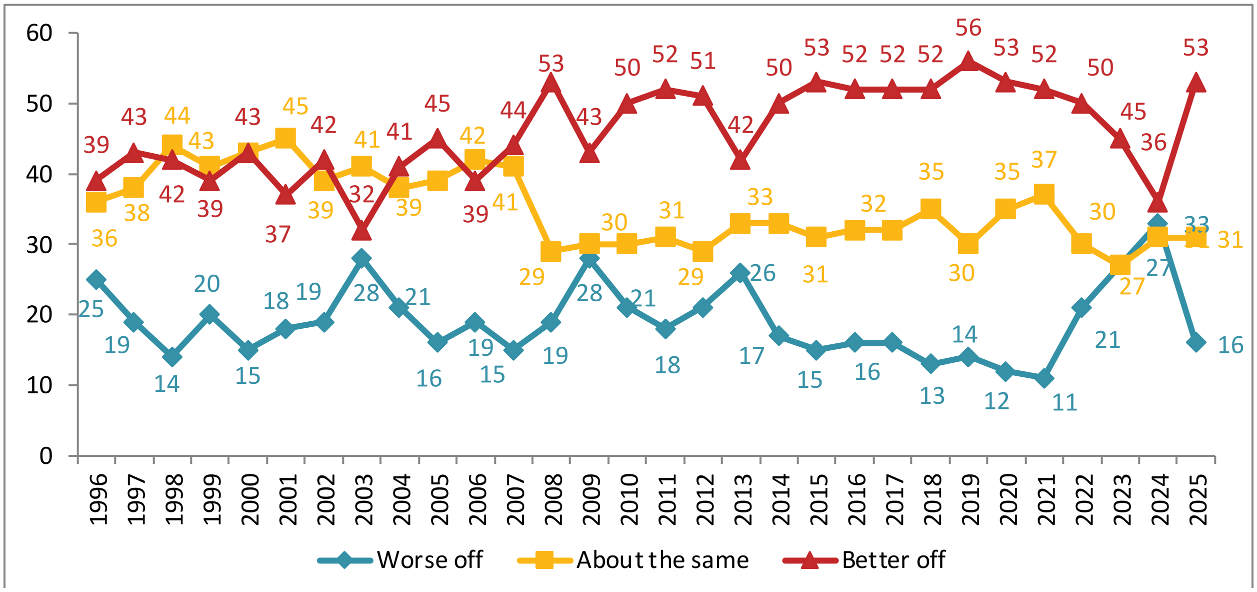
The responses to the first three questions were expanded in 2009 to a five-point scale, where responses included much worse off, worse off, about the same, better off, and much better off. To compare the data to prior years, the much worse off and worse off categories are combined as well as the better off and much better off categories.

When examining the trends over the past 30 years, rural Nebraskans have generally given positive reviews about their current situation. Each year the proportion of rural Nebraskans that say they are better off than they were five years ago has been greater than the proportion saying they are worse off than they were five years ago (Figure 1). The gap between these had generally widened since 2013 but narrowed considerably between 2021 and 2024. The average proportion across all years of the study saying they are better off than they were five years ago has been approximately 46 percent. The average proportion believing they are worse off has been approximately 19 percent.

This year, rural Nebraskans are much more optimistic about their current situation than they were last year. The proportion believing they are better off than they were five years ago is 53 percent, up from 36 percent last year. This increase in optimism was matched with a sharp decrease in pessimism. This year, just 16 percent of rural Nebraskans believe they are worse off compared to five years ago, down from 33 percent last year.

When asked to compare themselves to their parents when they were their age, the responses had generally been very stable over time (Figure 2). However, between 2020 and 2024, there was a steady decline in the proportion saying they are better off compared to their parents when they were their age, decreasing from 62 percent in 2020 to 44 percent last year. However, this year that proportion increased to 53 percent. The proportion stating they are better off has averaged approximately 57 percent over the 30-year period. The

Figure 1. Well-Being Compared to Five Years Ago: 1996 - 2025



proportion feeling they are worse off than their parents has averaged approximately 19 percent during this period. This proportion of worse off responses increased from 20 percent in 2022 to 35 percent last year before dropping to 25 percent this year.

When looking to the future, respondents' views have also been generally positive (Figure 3). The proportion saying they will be better off ten years from now has always been greater than the proportion saying they will be worse off ten years from now. In fact, the gap between the two gradually widened between 2013 and 2019. However, that gap narrowed considerably between 2020 and 2024 before widening again this year.

This year, rural Nebraskans are more optimistic about their future than they were last year. Almost one-half (46%) of rural Nebraskans believe they will be better off ten years from now. This is an increase from 34 percent last year. The proportion believing they will be better off has averaged approximately 43 percent across all 30 years.

Figure 2. Well-Being Compared to Parents: 1996 - 2025

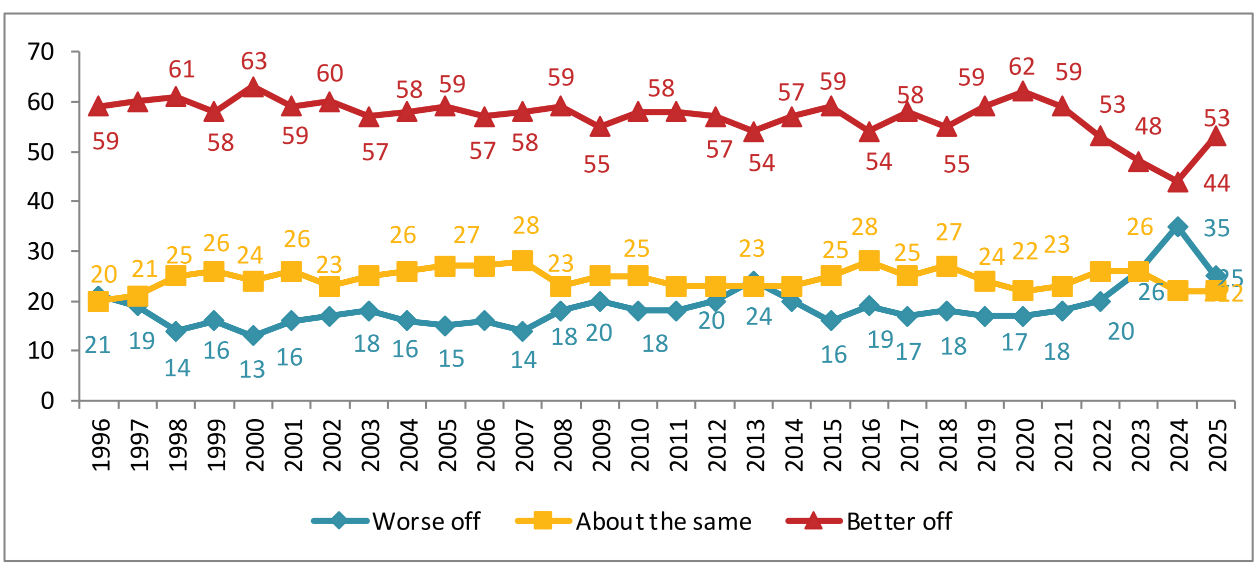
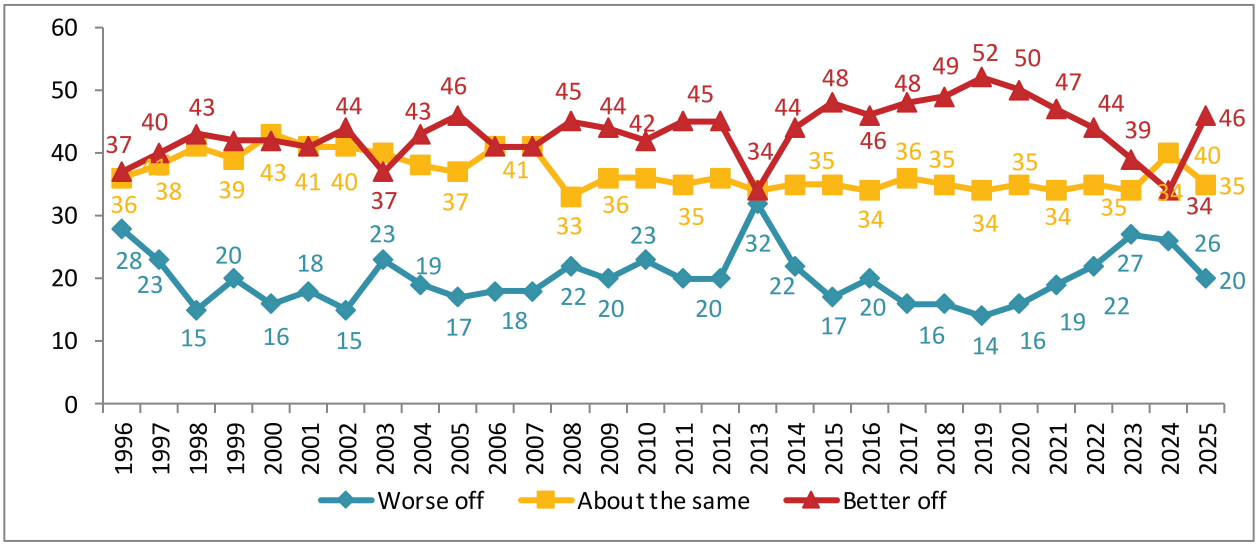


Figure 3. Well-Being Ten Years from Now: 1996 - 2025



The proportion of respondents stating they will be worse off ten years from now declined slightly from last year (from 26 percent to 20 percent this year). This proportion has averaged around 20 percent during the 30-year period.

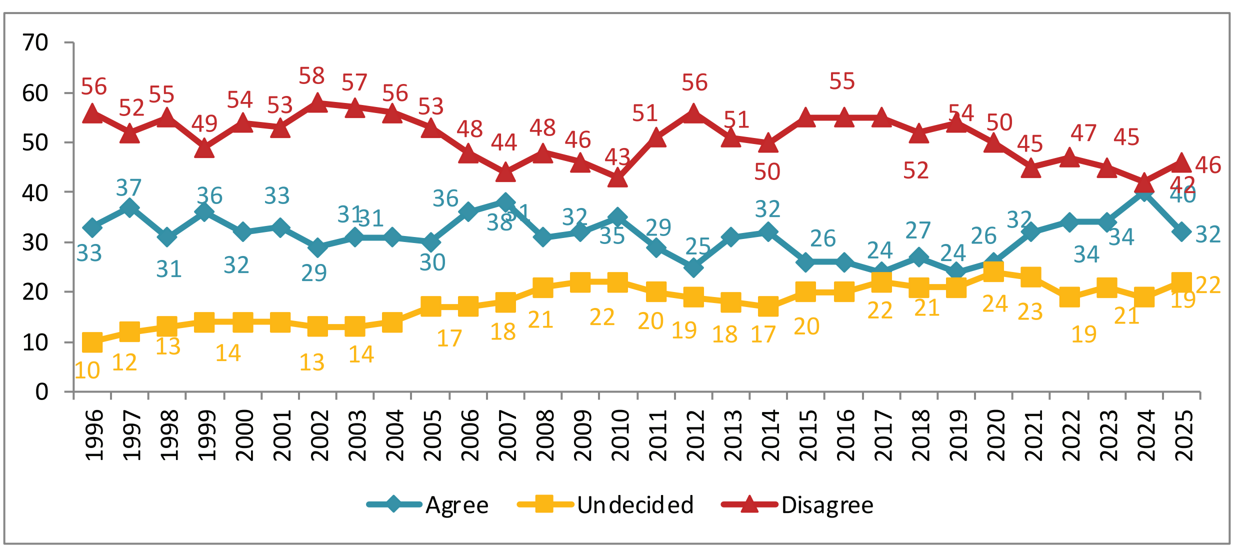
The proportion stating they will be about the same ten years from now has remained fairly steady over the 30-year period.

In addition to asking about general well-being, rural Nebraskans were asked about the amount of control they feel they have over their lives. To measure this, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

"Life has changed so much in our modern world that most people are powerless to control their own lives."

Each year, more rural Nebraskans disagree that people are powerless to control their own lives than agree with that statement (Figure 4). However, the two proportions were within the margin of error last year. The proportion that either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement generally declined between 2002 and 2010, from 58 percent to 43 percent. However, the proportion then increased to 56 percent in 2012 before generally declining to 46 percent this year. The average proportion across all 30 years is approximately 51 percent.

Figure 4. . "...People are Powerless to Control Their Own Lives": 1996 - 2025



The proportion of rural Nebraskans that either strongly agree or agree with the statement has been somewhat stable across all 30 years of the study. The average proportion has been approximately 31 percent. There was a steady increase between 2019 and 2024 from 24 percent to 40 percent (the highest proportion in all years of the study). But this year that proportion declined to 32 percent.

The proportion of those who were undecided each year first increased over time, from 10 percent in 1996 to 22 percent in 2010. It then declined to 17 percent in 2014 before generally increasing to 22 percent this year.

Satisfaction with Specific Aspects of Life

Each year, respondents were also given a list of items that can affect their well-being and were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with each using a five-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied). They were also given the option of checking a box to denote "does not apply."

The rank ordering of the items has remained relatively stable over the years (Table 1). In addition, the proportion of respondents stating they were very or somewhat satisfied with each item also has been fairly consistent over the years, with the exception of some financial items which have seen more fluctuation.

Items generally fall into three levels of satisfaction ratings. Family, friends, the outdoors, their safety, and their general quality of life continue to be items given high satisfaction ratings by respondents. Items in the middle category include job satisfaction, their education, spirituality, job security, their health, and their spare time. On the other hand, respondents continue to be less satisfied with their community, job opportunities, their current income level, their ability to build assets/wealth, and financial security during retirement.

Many items saw increases in the level of satisfaction this year as compared to last year: personal safety, family, general quality of life, general standard of living, friends, job satisfaction, job security, spare time, health, community, current income level, the ability to build assets/wealth, financial security during retirement, and job opportunities. As an example, last year 45 percent of rural Nebraskans were satisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. That proportion increased to 55 percent this year.

GENERAL WELL-BEING BY SUBGROUPS

In this section, the 2025 data on the general measures of well-being are analyzed and reported for the region in which the respondent lives, by the size of their community, and for various individual characteristics (Appendix Table 2).

Residents of the Southeast region (see Appendix Figure 1 for the counties included in each region) are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to believe they are better off compared to their parents when they were their age and will be better off ten years from now. Just over one-half of Southeast region residents (52%) think they will be better off ten years from now, compared to just over four in ten residents of both the North Central and Northeast regions.

Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than persons with lower incomes to think they are better off compared to five years ago, are better off compared to their parents when they were their age, and will be better off ten years from now. Almost two-thirds of the persons with the highest household incomes (64%) believe they are better off than they were five years ago, compared to just over one-third of persons with the lowest household incomes (36%).

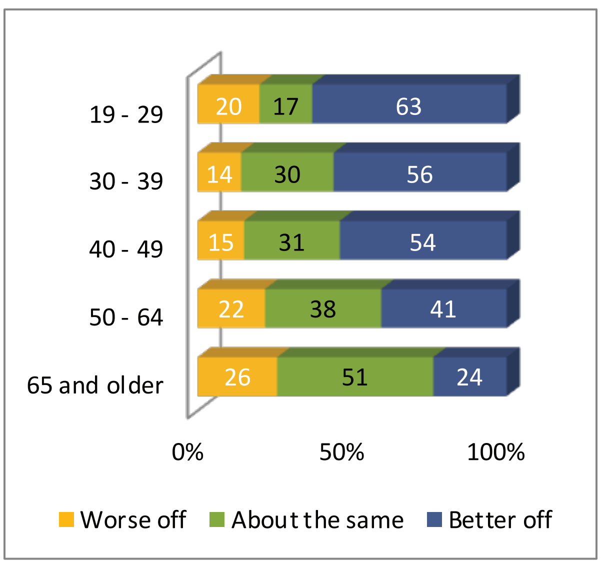
Younger persons are more likely than older persons to believe they are better off compared to five years ago and will be better off ten years from now. Over six in ten persons aged 19 to 39 believe they are better off than they were five years ago, compared to just under four in ten persons aged 65 and older (37%). Similarly, over six in ten persons aged 19 to 29 (63%) think they will be better off ten years from now, while less than one-quarter of persons aged 65 and older (24%) share this opinion (Figure 5).

Persons with higher education levels are more
likely than the persons with less education to believe they are better off compared to five years ago and think they will be better off ten years from now.

When comparing the marital groups, the persons who have never married are the group most likely to believe they are better off than they were five years ago and think they will be better off ten years from now. Over six in ten persons who have never married (63%) believe they will be better off ten years from now, compared to just under two in ten widowed persons (17%).

Respondents with food service or personal care occupations are the occupation group most likely to believe they are better off compared to their parents when they were their age.

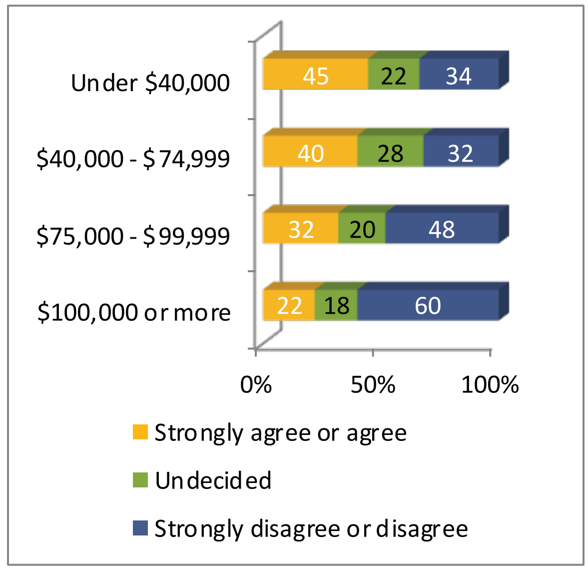
Figure 5. Expected Well-Being Ten Years from Now by Age



The respondents were also asked if they believe people are powerless to control their own lives. Just under one-half of rural Nebraskans (46%) disagree with that statement, compared to just over three in ten (32%) who agree. When analyzing the responses by region, community size, and various individual attributes, many differences emerge (Appendix Table 3).

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than the persons with higher incomes to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. Almost one-half of the persons with household incomes under $40,000 (45%) agree with the statement, compared to just over two in ten persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more (22%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Belief that People are Powerless to Control Their Own Lives by Household Income



Younger persons are more likely than older persons to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. Just under one-half of persons between the ages of 19 and 29 agree with that statement (47%), compared to just under two in ten persons between the ages of 40 and 49 (19%).

Persons with lower education levels are more likely than the persons with more education to believe that people are powerless to control their own lives. Almost one-half of the persons having a high school diploma or less education (45%) agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. However, one-quarter of the persons with at least a four-year college degree (25%) share this opinion.

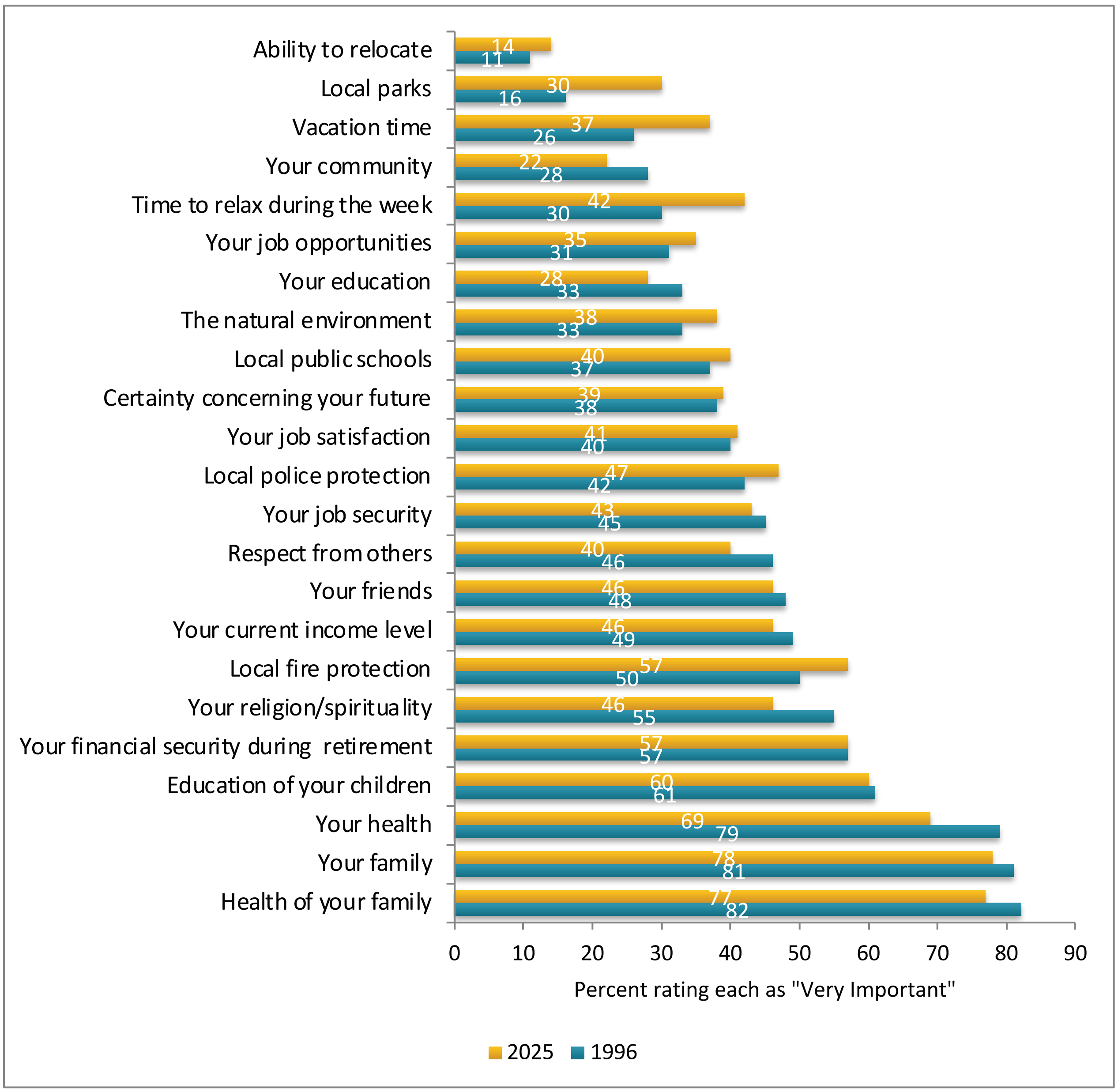
The other groups most likely to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives include: persons living in or near the largest communities, persons who are divorced or separated, widowed persons, and persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations.

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF WELL-BEING BY SUBGROUPS

The respondents were given a list of items and were asked how important each are in determining their own well-being. Respondents were also asked this question in the inaugural Rural Poll in 1996. The rankings of the items (as determined by the proportions rating each item as very important) were fairly similar to 1996 (Figure 7). Some of the items showed declines in the proportions rating each as very important during the two time periods: health of your family, your health, your religion/spirituality, respect from others, your education, and your community. As one example, the proportion rating their religion/spirituality as very important declined from 55 percent in 1996 to 46 percent this year.

Other items saw increases in the proportions rating each as very important: local fire protection, local police protection, the natural environment, time to relax

Figure 6. Importance of Factors Affecting Individual Well-Being, 1996 and 2025



during the week, vacation time, and local parks. In 1996, 16 percent rated local parks as very important to their well-being, and that increased to 30 percent this year.

The complete ratings for each item are listed in Appendix Table 4. At least one-half say the following items are very important in determining their well-being: your family (78%), health of your family (77%), your health (69%), education of your children (60%), local fire protection (57%), and your financial security during retirement (57%).

The top five items people rate as important (determined by the largest proportions of "very important" and "important" responses) are examined in more detail by looking at how the different demographic subgroups view each item. These comparisons are shown in Appendix Table 5.

Females are more likely than males to rate the health of their family as important. Married persons are the marital group most likely to rate the health of their family as important.

Both married persons and the persons with at least a four-year college degree are the groups most likely to rate their family as important.

Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than the persons with lower incomes to rate their health as important. Females are more likely than males to rate their health as important to their well-being.

The groups most likely to rate the education of their children as important include: persons with higher household incomes, persons between the ages of 30 and 49, and persons with healthcare support or public safety occupations.

Panhandle residents are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to rate local fire protection as important to their well-being. Over nine in ten Panhandle residents (96%) rate local fire protection as important.
The other groups most likely to rate local fire protection as important include: persons living in or near communities with populations ranging from 500 to 999, persons with lower household incomes, older persons, and persons without a four-year college degree.

The respondents were next given a list of items that may influence their well-being and were asked to rate their satisfaction with each. The complete ratings for each item are listed in Appendix Table 6. At least four in ten respondents are very satisfied with their family (55%), their marriage (49%), their day-to-day personal safety (47%), their friends (40%), greenery and open space (40%), and their religion/spirituality (40%). Items receiving the highest proportion of very dissatisfied responses include: financial security during retirement (16%), ability to build assets/wealth (15%), and ability to afford their residence (11%).

The top five items people are dissatisfied with (determined by the largest proportions of "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied" responses) are examined in more detail by looking at how the different demographic subgroups view each item. These comparisons are shown in Appendix Table 7.

Respondents' satisfaction level with their financial security during retirement differs by most of the characteristics examined.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than the persons with higher incomes to be dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement. Just over one-half of the persons with household incomes under $40,000 (55%) report being dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement, compared to 17 percent of the persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more.

Persons without a four-year college degree are more likely than the persons with at least a four-year degree to express dissatisfaction with their financial security during retirement. Over four in ten persons without a four-year degree are dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement, compared to just under one-quarter of persons with at least a four-year degree.

Other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement include: persons living in or near communities with populations ranging from 5,000 to 9,999; younger persons; females; persons who are divorced or separated; persons with food service or personal care occupations; and persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations.

Many of these same groups are most dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than the persons with higher household incomes to express dissatisfaction with their ability to build assets/wealth. Almost six in ten persons with household incomes under $40,000 (57%) are dissatisfied with their ability to build assets/wealth. In comparison, only 15 percent of the persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more share this dissatisfaction.

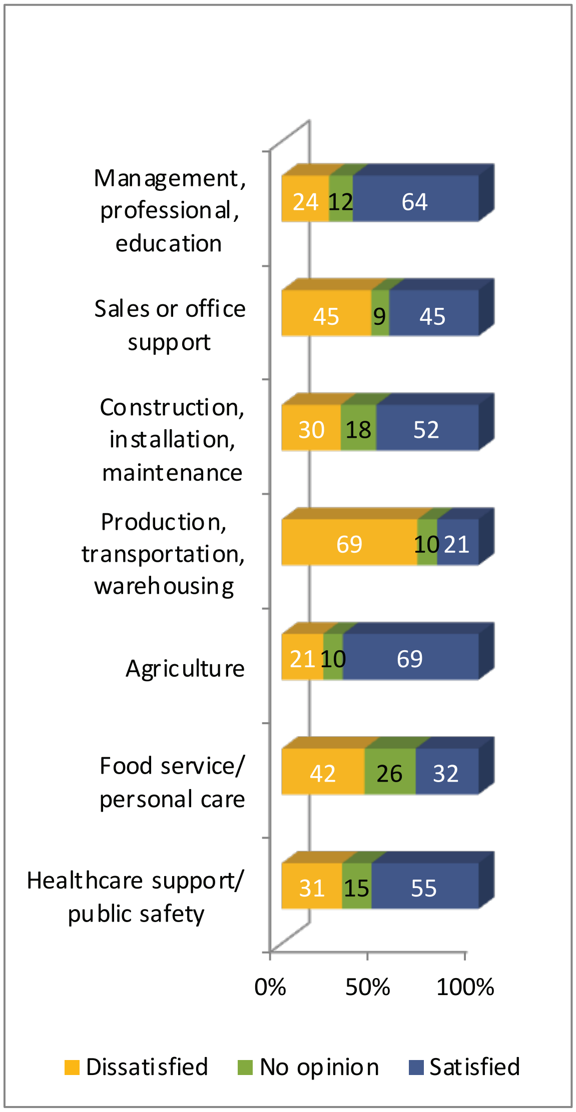
Persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. Almost seven in ten persons with these types of occupations (69%) say they are dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth, compared to just over two in ten persons with occupations in agriculture (21%) (Figure 8).

Other groups most likely to express dissatisfaction with their ability to build assets or wealth include: residents of the Panhandle, younger persons, females, persons without a four-year college degree, and persons who have never married.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than persons with higher household incomes to be dissatisfied with their current income level. Almost six in ten persons with household incomes under $40,000 (57%) report being dissatisfied with their current income level, compared to 12 percent of persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more.

Persons who are divorced or separated are the marital group most likely to express dissatisfaction with their current income level. Over one-half of the persons who are divorced or separated (53%) are dissatisfied with their current income level, compared

Figure 8. Satisfaction with Ability to Build Assets/ Wealth by Occupation



to 24 percent of married persons.

Other groups most likely to report being dissatisfied with their current income level include: younger persons, females, persons having a high school diploma or less education, and persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations are more likely than the persons with different occupations to say they are dissatisfied with their ability to afford their residence. Just over three-quarters of persons with these types of occupations (76%) are dissatisfied with this item, compared to 19 percent of persons with occupations in agriculture.

Panhandle residents are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to express dissatisfaction with their ability to afford their residence. Almost one-half (47%) of Panhandle residents are dissatisfied with their ability to afford their residence, compared to just over two in ten residents of the Southeast region (22%).

Other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with their ability to afford their residence include: the persons living in or near the largest communities, the persons with lower household incomes, younger persons, the persons without a four-year college degree, and persons who are divorced or separated.

Persons with food service or personal care occupations are more likely than the persons with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their job opportunities. One-half (50%) of the persons with these occupations express dissatisfaction with their job opportunities, compared to six percent of persons with occupations in agriculture.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than persons with higher incomes to express dissatisfaction with their job opportunities.

The top five items people are satisfied with (determined by the largest proportions of "very satisfied" and "satisfied" responses) are also examined by these characteristics (Appendix Table 8).

Married persons are more likely than other marital groups to be satisfied with their family. Over nine in ten married persons (92%) are satisfied with their family, compared to just under eight in ten persons who have never married (78%).

Other groups most likely to be satisfied with
their family include the persons with higher household incomes and the persons with the highest education levels.

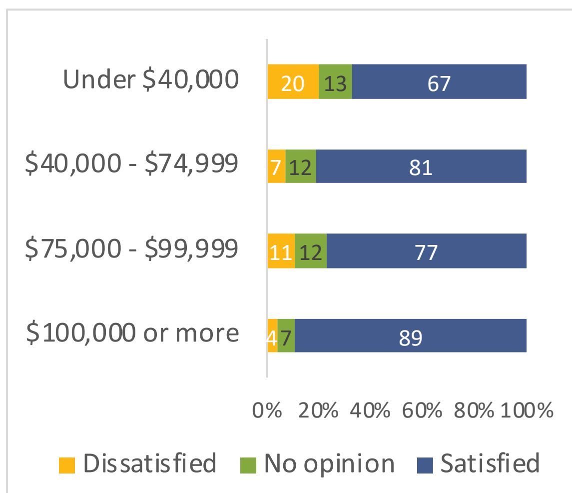
Married persons are more likely than other marital groups to express satisfaction with their day-to-day personal safety. Nine in ten married persons (90%) are satisfied with their personal safety, compared to just over three-quarters of the persons who have never married (76%).

Other groups most likely to express satisfaction with their day-to-day personal safety include the persons with higher household incomes, older persons, females, and the persons with at least some college education.

Persons with sales or office support occupations are more likely than the persons with different occupations to say they are satisfied with their general quality of life. Just over nine in ten persons with these occupations (91%) are satisfied with their general quality of life, compared to just over one-half (54%) of persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations.

Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than the persons with lower incomes to express satisfaction with their general quality of life. Almost nine in ten persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more (89%) are satisfied with their general quality of life, compared to approximately two-thirds of persons with household incomes less than $40,000 (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Satisfaction with General Quality of Life by Household Income



The other groups most likely to be satisfied with their general quality of life include persons age 40 and older, females, the persons with at least some college education, married persons, and widowed persons.

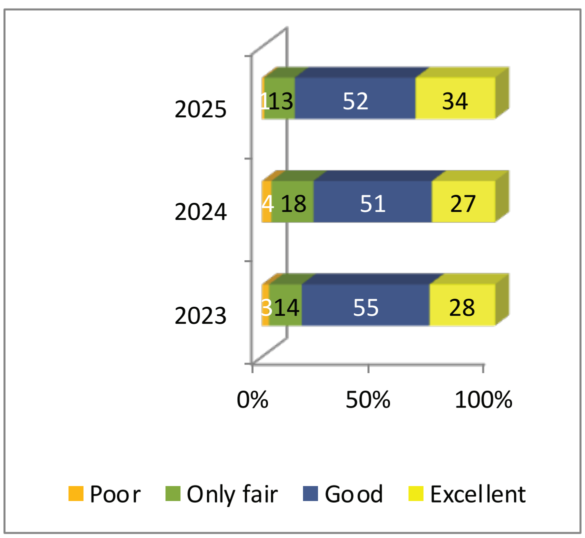
Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than the persons with lower incomes to be satisfied with their marriage. Other groups most likely to be satisfied with their marriage include: the persons living in or near smaller communities, residents of the North Central region, and males.

Females are more likely than males to express satisfaction with their friends. Over eight in ten females (85%) are satisfied with their friends, compared to just under three-quarters of males (74%).

RATINGS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Respondents were next asked how they would describe their mental health or emotional well-being at the time of completing the survey. Most rural Nebraskans describe their mental health or emotional well-being as good (52%) or excellent (34%) (Figure 10). This question has been asked since 2023. The proportion rating their mental health as excellent is higher than it has been the past two years (increasing from 27 percent last year to 34 percent this year). The responses to this question are examined

Figure 10. Self-Evaluation of Mental Health: 2023 - 2025



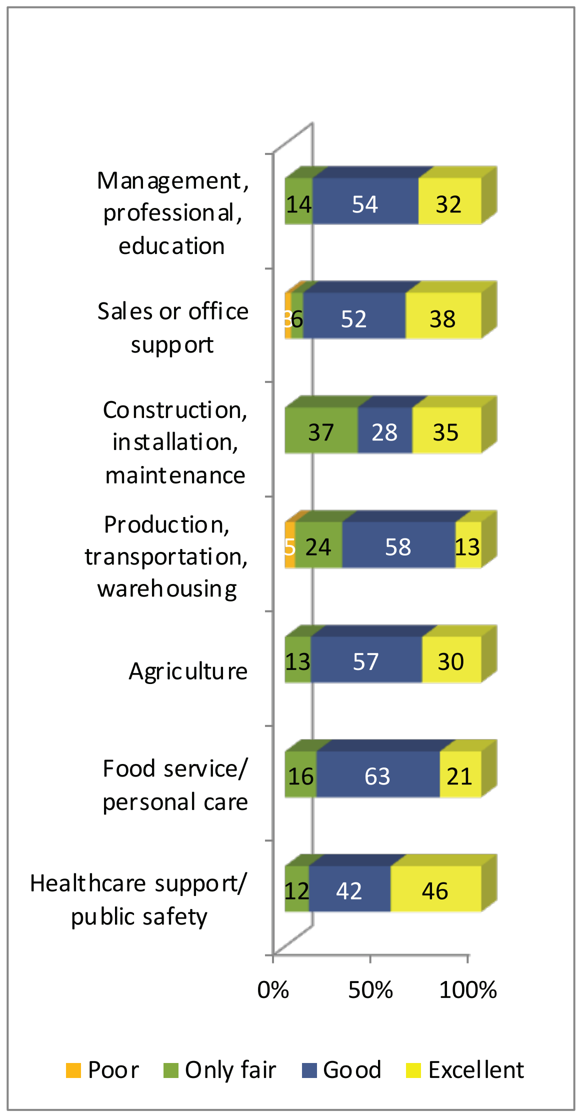
by community size, region, and various individual attributes (Appendix Table 9). Many differences are detected.

Persons with lower household incomes are less likely than persons with higher incomes to describe their mental health as excellent. Just over four in ten persons with the highest household incomes ($100,000 or more) rate their mental health as excellent, compared to just over two in ten persons with the lowest household incomes (less than $40,000).

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to rate their mental health as excellent. Over four in ten persons aged 65 and older (45%) rate their mental health as excellent, compared to two in ten persons aged 19 to 29.

Persons with healthcare support or public safety occupations are more likely than persons with other occupations to rate their mental health or emotional well-being as excellent. Just under one-half (46%) of persons with these occupations rate their mental health as excellent, compared to 13 percent of persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Evaluation of Mental Healthy by Occupation

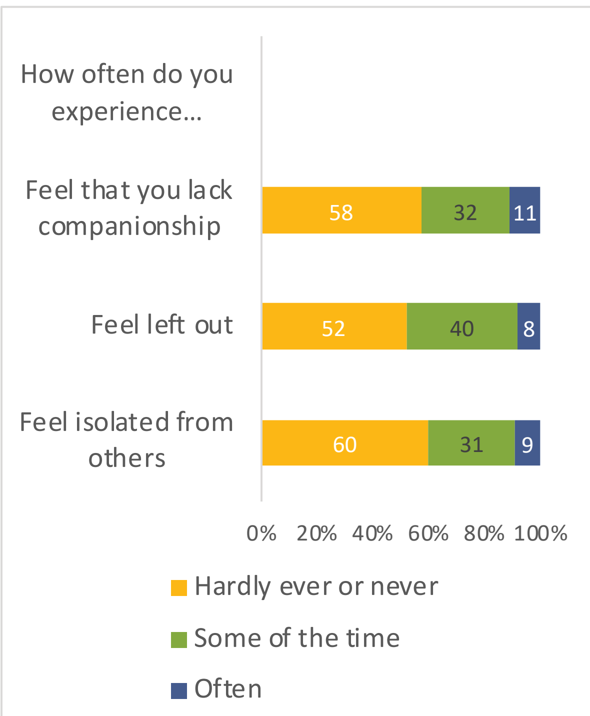


Almost four in ten persons with construction, installation or maintenance occupations (37%) rate their mental health as only fair.

The other groups most likely to describe their mental health as excellent include: males, married persons, widowed persons, and persons with at least a four-year college degree.

Respondents were also asked how often they experience various feelings of loneliness. A slight majority of rural Nebraskans say they hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness. Just over one-half responded that they hardly ever or never experience the following: feel isolated from others (60%), feel that they lack companionship (58%), and feel left out (52%) (Figure 12).

Figure 11. Feelings of Loneliness



The frequency of experiencing these feelings are examined by community size, region, and various individual attributes (Appendix Table 10). Some differences are detected.

Persons with the lowest household incomes are more likely than the persons with higher household incomes to say they often experience feeling that they lack companionship. Almost two in ten persons with household incomes under $40,000 (19%) often feel they lack companionship, compared to less than one in ten persons with household incomes of $100,000 or more (8%).

Younger persons are more likely than older persons to say they often feel that they lack companionship. Just under two in ten persons aged 19 to 29 (17%) often feel they lack companionship.

When comparing marital groups, married persons are the least likely to say they often feel they lack companionship. Persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations are the occupation group most likely to say they often feel they lack companionship (23%).

The youngest persons are more likely than older persons to say they often feel left out. Just under two in ten persons aged 19 to 29 (17%) say they often feel left out.

Persons who have never married are the marital group most likely to say they often feel left out. Just under two in ten persons who have never married (18%) often feel left out, compared to four percent of married persons.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than the persons with higher incomes to say they often feel isolated from others. Just under two in ten persons with household incomes under $40,000 (16%) often feel isolated from others, compared to six percent of the persons with incomes of $100,000 or more.

The youngest persons (aged 19 to 29) are more likely than older persons to often feel isolated from others (17%). When comparing marital groups, married persons are the group least likely to say they often feel isolated from others.

RURAL IDENTITY

Finally, respondents were given some statements about rural communities and were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with each.

Most rural Nebraskans identify with rural communities: they see themselves as belonging to a rural community, they identify with people who live in rural communities, they believe they are typical of people who live in rural communities, and say their general attitudes are similar to people who live in rural communities. Approximately two-thirds of rural Nebraskans agree or strongly agree that their general attitudes and opinions are similar to people who live in rural communities (66%) and they are typical of people who live in rural communities (68%) (Figure 13). Just over three-quarters agree or strongly agree that they identify with people who live in rural communities (78%) and they see themselves belonging to a rural community (78%).

The extent to which respondents agree or disagree with these statements are examined by community size, region, and various individual attributes (Appendix Table 11). Some differences are detected.

Persons over the age of 40 are more likely than younger persons to agree that their general attitudes and opinions are similar to people who live in rural communities. Approximately seven in ten persons aged 40 and over agree with this statement, compared to just over one-half (53%) of persons aged 19 to 29.

The other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: the persons living in or near communities with populations between 500 and 999, the persons with higher household incomes, married persons, widowed persons, and the persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations.

Persons with agricultural occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to agree that they are typical of people who live in rural communities. Just over nine in ten (91%) persons with occupations in agriculture agree with this statement, compared to just under four in ten persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Persons over the age of 40 are more likely than younger persons to agree that they are typical of people who live in rural communities. Approximately three-quarters of persons aged 40 and over agree with this statement, compared to just under one-half (47%) of persons aged 19 to 29 (Figure 14).

The other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: the persons living in or near communities with populations between 500 and 999, the persons with lower education levels, and widowed persons.

Figure 13. Perceptions of Rural Identity

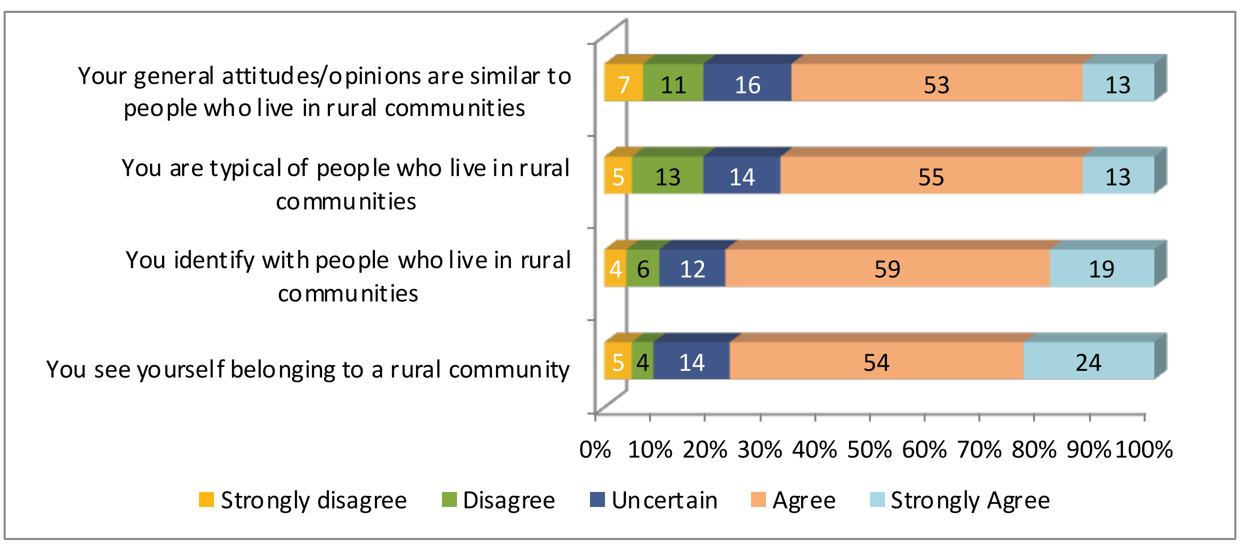
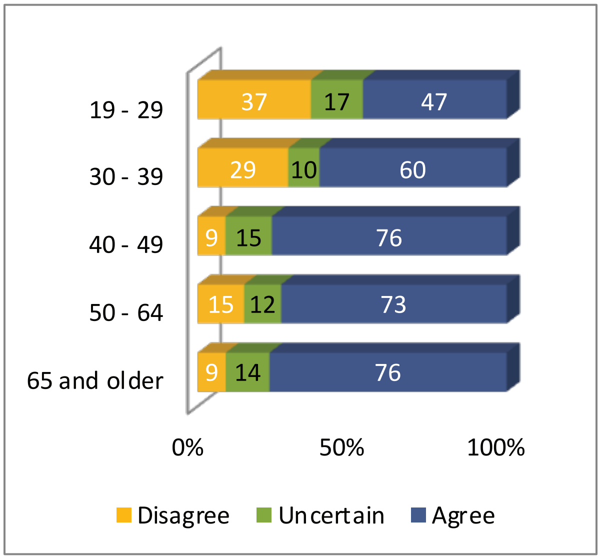


Figure 14. Belief They are Typical of People Who Live in Rural Communities by Age



Residents of the North Central region are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to agree that they identify with people who live in rural communities. Almost nine in ten residents of this region (85%) agree with the statement, compared to just over seven in ten residents of the South Central region (71%).

The other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: the persons living in or near communities with populations between 500 and 999, the persons aged 40 and older, widowed persons, and the persons with occupations in agriculture.

Persons living in or near smaller communities are more likely than persons living in or near larger communities to agree that they see themselves belonging to a rural community. Over eight in ten persons living in or near communities with populations under 5,000 agree with this statement, compared to just under seven in ten persons living in or near communities with populations of 10,000 or more (69%).

Residents of the North Central region are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to agree that they see themselves belonging to a rural community. Almost nine in ten residents of this region (86%) agree with the statement, compared to just over seven in ten residents of the South Central region (72%).

The other groups most likely to agree with this statement include: the persons with lower education levels, widowed persons, and the persons with occupations in agriculture.

CONCLUSION

This year, rural Nebraskans are much more optimistic about their current situation than they were last year. The proportion believing they are better off than they were five years ago is 53 percent, up from 36 percent last year. This increase in optimism was matched with a sharp decrease in pessimism. This year, just 16 percent of rural Nebraskans believe they are worse off compared to five years ago, down from 33 percent last year.

This trend continued when looking to the future. This year rural Nebraskans are more optimistic about their future than they were last year. Almost one-half (46%) of rural Nebraskans believe they will be better off ten years from now. This is an increase from 34 percent last year. The proportion of respondents stating they will be worse off ten years from now declined slightly from last year (from 26 percent to 20 percent this year).

In similar fashion, fewer rural Nebraskans agree with the statement that people are powerless to control their own lives as compared to last year, declining from 40 percent to 32 percent.

Even with the overall rise in optimism, there are certain groups that are more likely to be optimistic about their current situation as well as the future. Younger persons are more likely than older persons to believe they are better off compared to five years ago and will be better off ten years from now. Persons with higher household incomes and education levels are also most likely to be optimistic.

Perhaps one explanation of the increased feelings of optimism is found when rural Nebraskans expressed more satisfaction with many economic items this year than they did last year. Some items that saw increases in the level of satisfaction this year as compared to last year include: general quality of life, general standard of living, job satisfaction, job security, current income level, the ability to build assets/

wealth, financial security during retirement, and job opportunities.

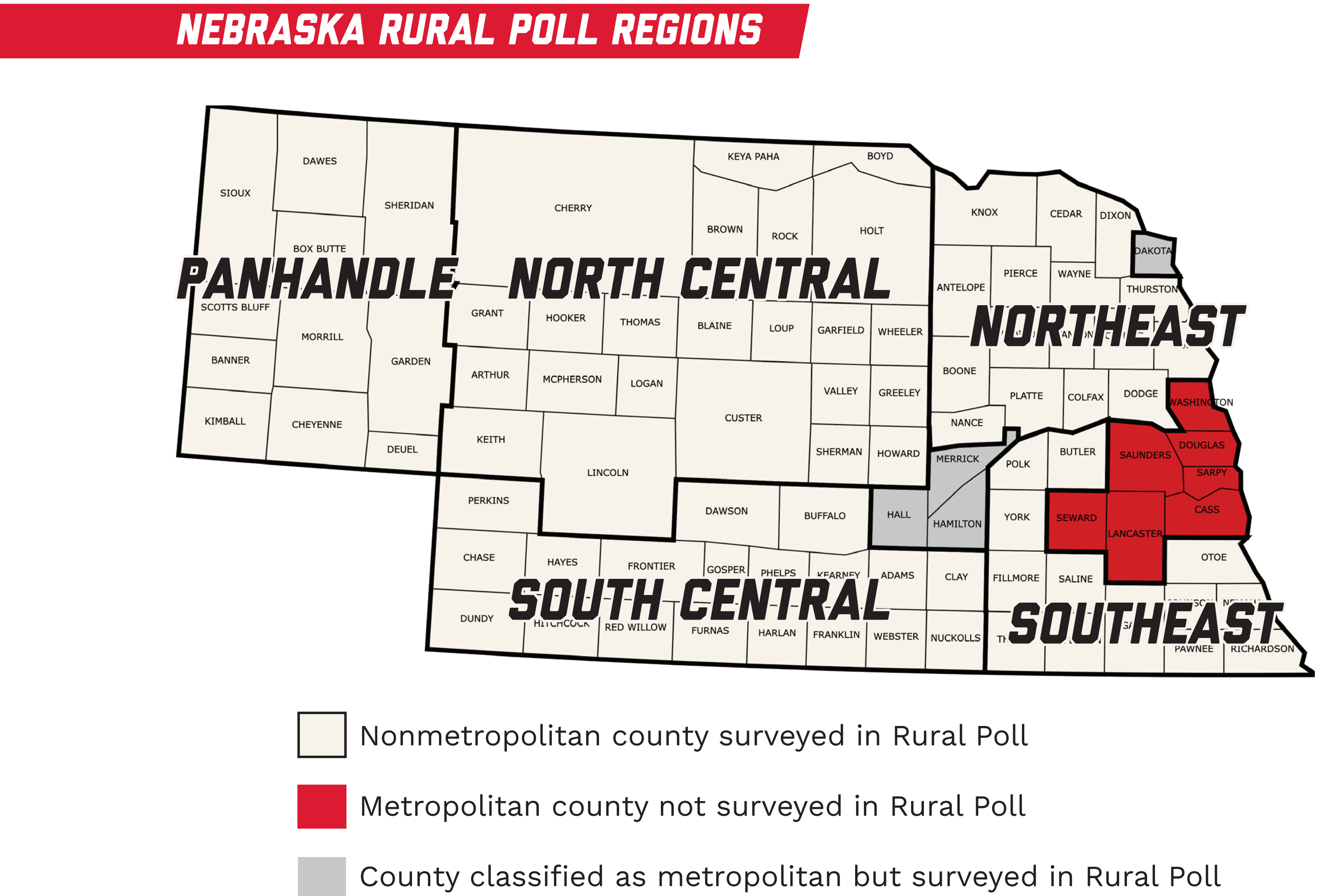
Some occupation classes did not share this increased satisfaction. Persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are more likely than persons with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth, their ability to afford their residence, and their job opportunities. This occupation class is also most likely to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives.

And even though most rural Nebraskans describe their mental health or emotional well-being as good (52%) or excellent (34%) (even seeing the biggest proportion of people rating their mental health as excellent during the past three years), this occupation class was less likely to do so.

A different measure of mental health showed that a slight majority of rural Nebraskans say they hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness. Just over one-half responded that they hardly ever or never experience the following: feel isolated from others (60%), feel that they lack companionship (58%), and feel left out (52%). However, the youngest persons (aged 19 to 29) were more likely than older persons to say they often experience these feelings..

Most rural Nebraskans identify with rural communities: they see themselves as belonging to a rural community, they identify with people who live in rural communities, they believe they are typical of people who live in rural communities, and say their general attitudes are similar to people who live in rural communities.

Appendix Figure 1. *Regions of Nebraska*



RURAL POLL

Nebraska Rural Poll
Research Report 25-1
results compiled by:

Heather Akin
Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel
Mary Emery
Katelyn Larson
Bradley Lubben
L.J. McElravy
Rebecca Vogt

University of Nebraska Lincoln