



2026 NEBRASKA RURAL POLL RESEARCH REPORT



Well-being



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The past year continued to be challenging for rural Nebraskans. Inflation continues to impact household budgets. However, farm income was projected to increase due to government payments and a strong cattle market. 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 31 years? How do they view their mental health and do they experience feelings of loneliness? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 881 responses to the 2026 Nebraska Rural Poll, the 31st 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 30 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 more pessimistic about their current situation than they were last year.** The proportion believing they are better off than they were five years ago is 47 percent, down from 53 percent last year. And, this year, 19 percent of rural Nebraskans believe they are worse off compared to five years ago, compared to 16 percent last year.
 - *Middle-aged persons are more likely than both younger and older persons to believe they are better off compared to five years ago.* Over one-half of persons age 30 to 64 believe they are better off compared to five years ago, compared to just under one-third of persons age 65 and older (32%). Just over one-third of the youngest persons (34%) believe they are worse off compared to five years ago.
- **This year, rural Nebraskans' optimism about their future was about the same as last year.** Over four in ten rural Nebraskans (44%) believe they will be better off ten years from now. This is similar to the 46 percent reported last year.
 - *Younger persons are more likely than older persons to think they will be better off ten years from now.* Just over one-half of persons under the age of 50 believe they will be better off ten years from now, while just over two in ten persons age 65 and older (21%) share this opinion. Just over one-half of this age group (65 and older) (54%) believe they will be about the same ten years from now.
- **This year, rural Nebraskans had an increase in their feeling of powerlessness as compared to last year.** Overall, the proportion of rural Nebraskans that either strongly agree or agree with the statement has been somewhat stable across all 31 years of the study. The average proportion has been approximately 31 percent. However, that proportion increased to 38 percent this year.
 - *Younger persons are more likely than older persons to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives.* Just over one-half of persons between the ages of 19 and 29 agree with that statement (54%), compared to just over three in ten persons between the ages of 50 and 64 (32%).
- **Rural Nebraskans' evaluations of their mental health declined this year, compared**

to last year. Those rating their mental health as excellent declined from 34 percent last year to 24 percent this year. Those rating it as good remained at 52 percent. The proportion who rated their mental health as only fair increased from 13 percent last year to 22 percent this year.

- *Older persons are more likely than younger persons to rate their mental health as either good or excellent.* Almost nine in ten persons age 65 and older (89%) rate their mental health as either good or excellent, compared to one-half of persons age 19 to 29 (50%). Almost one-half (46%) of persons age 19 to 29 rate their mental health as only fair.
- **Many items saw decreases in the level of satisfaction this year as compared to last year:** family, friends, clean water, job satisfaction, job security, their health, community, current income level, financial security during retirement, and job opportunities. As an example, last year 77 percent of rural Nebraskans were satisfied with their job. That proportion decreased to 65 percent this year.
 - *Older persons are more likely than younger persons to express satisfaction with their general standard of living.* Approximately eight in ten persons age 30 and over are satisfied with their general standard of living, compared to just under six in ten persons age 19 to 29 (58%). One-third of the youngest persons are dissatisfied with their general standard of living.
 - *Persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are more likely than the persons with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their job opportunities.* Two-thirds (66%) of the persons with these occupations express dissatisfaction with their job opportunities, compared to seven percent of persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations.
- **A slight majority of rural Nebraskans say they hardly ever or never experience certain feelings of loneliness.** Approximately one-half responded that they hardly ever or never experience the following: feel isolated from others (55%), feel that they lack companionship (52%), and feel left out (49%).
 - *When comparing marital groups, persons who have never married and persons who are divorced or separated are the groups most likely to report often feeling that they lack companionship and often feel left out.* Persons who are divorced or separated are the group most likely to say they often feel isolated from others. Just over two in ten persons who are divorced or separated (22%) say they often feel isolated from others, compared to approximately seven percent of both married and widowed persons.



INTRODUCTION

The past year continued to be challenging for rural Nebraskans. Inflation continues to impact household budgets. However, farm income was projected to increase due to government payments and a strong cattle market. 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 31 years? How do they view their mental health and do they experience feelings of loneliness? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 881 responses to the 2026 Nebraska Rural Poll, the 31st annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their well-being.

Methodology & Respondent Profile

This study is based on 881 responses from Nebraskans living in 86 counties in the state. (See footnote.) A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in April and June to 6,894 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, community leadership, artificial intelligence, access to health care and social drivers of health, trails, sustainable products and practices, and the Nebraska Forest Service. This paper reports only

results from the well-being section.

A 13% 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.

There are some marked differences between some of the demographic variables in our sample compared to U.S. 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-represented, weights were used to adjust the sample to match the age distribution in

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.

the nonmetropolitan counties in Nebraska (using U.S. Census figures from 2020).

The average age of respondents is approximately 51 years. Sixty-three percent are married and 66 percent live within the city limits of a town or village. On average, respondents have lived in Nebraska 42 years and have lived in their current community 27 years. Forty-eight percent are living in or near towns or villages with populations less than 5,000. Ninety-eight percent have attained at least a high school diploma.

Seventeen percent of the respondents report their 2025 approximate household income from all sources, before taxes, as below \$40,000. Sixty-nine percent report incomes over \$60,000. Seventy percent were employed in 2025 on a full-time, part-time, or seasonal basis. Twenty percent are retired. Thirty-two percent of those employed reported working in a management, professional, or education occupation. Nineteen percent indicated they were employed in agriculture.

TRENDS IN WELL-BEING (1996 - 2026)

Comparisons are made between the well-being data collected this year to the 30 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."

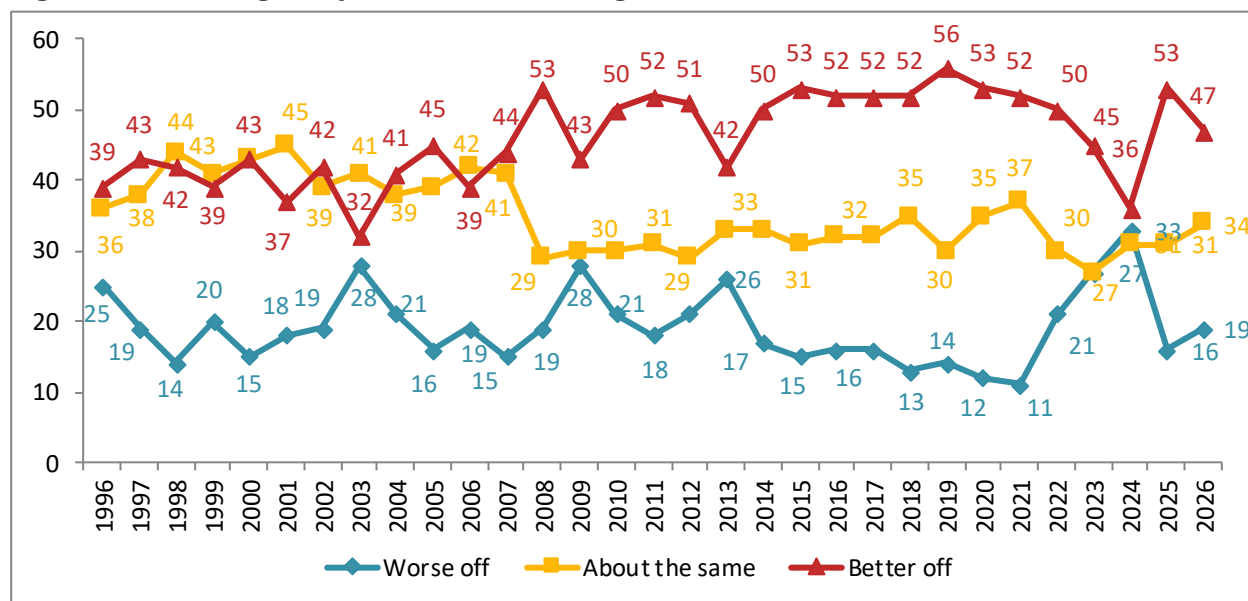
The responses to the first three questions were expanded in 2009 to a five-point scale, where responses included much worse off, worse off, about the same, better off, and much better off. To compare the data to prior years, the much worse off and worse off categories are combined as well as the better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

When examining the trends over the past 31 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 more pessimistic about their current situation than they were last year. The proportion believing they are better off than they were five years ago is 47 percent, down from 53 percent last year. And, this year, 19 percent of rural Nebraskans believe they are worse off compared to five years ago, compared to 16 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 in 2024. However, that proportion has since increased to

Figure 1. Well-Being Compared to Five Years Ago: 1996 - 2026



55 percent. The proportion stating they are better off has averaged approximately 57 percent over the 31-year period. The 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 in 2024, dropped to 25 percent last year and then increased to 28 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 in the past two years.

This year, rural Nebraskans' optimism about their future was about the same as last year. Over four in ten rural Nebraskans (44%) believe they will be better off ten years from now. This is similar to the 46 percent reported last year. The proportion believing they will be better off has averaged approximately 43 percent across all 31 years.

The proportion of respondents stating they

Figure 2. Well-Being Compared to Parents: 1996 - 2026

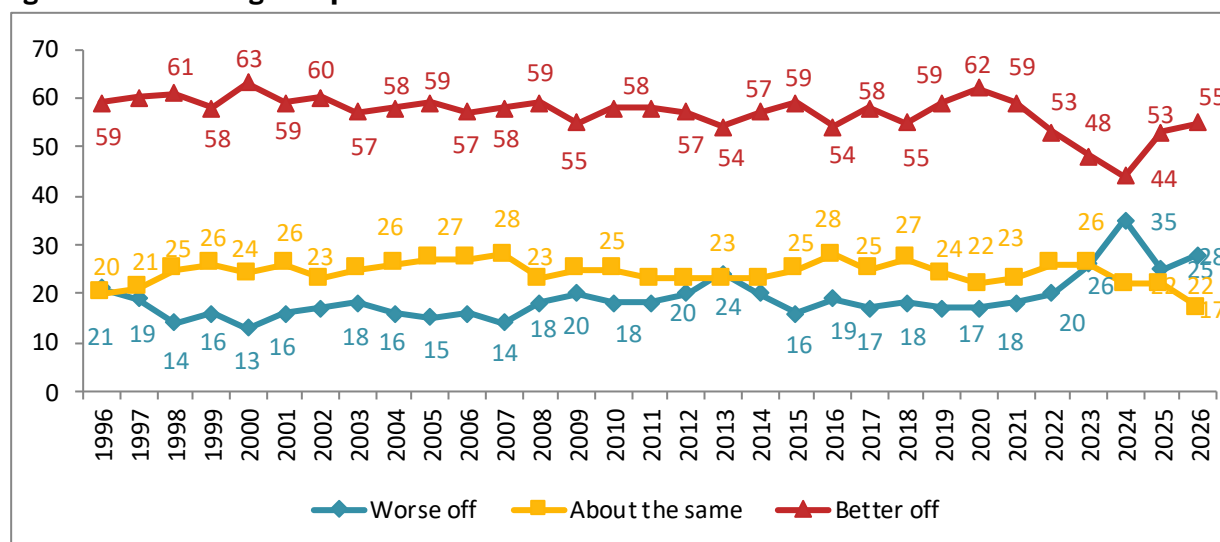
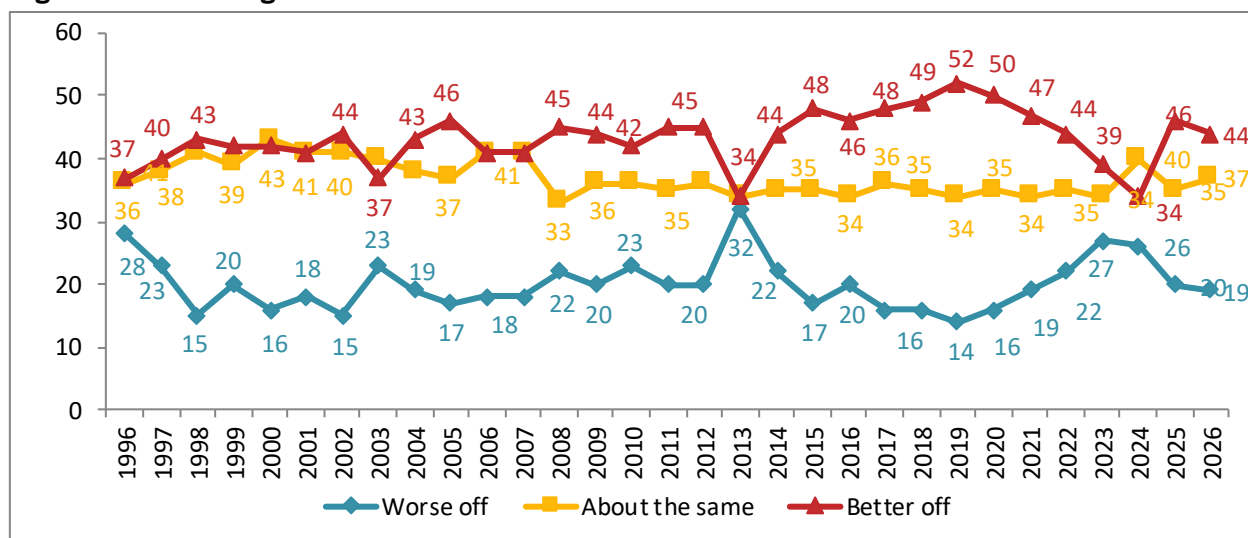


Figure 3. Well-Being Ten Years from Now: 1996 - 2026



will be worse off ten years from now was also similar to last year (20 percent this year compared to 19 percent last year). This proportion has averaged around 20 percent during the 31-year period.

The proportion stating they will be about the same ten years from now has remained steady over the 31-year period.

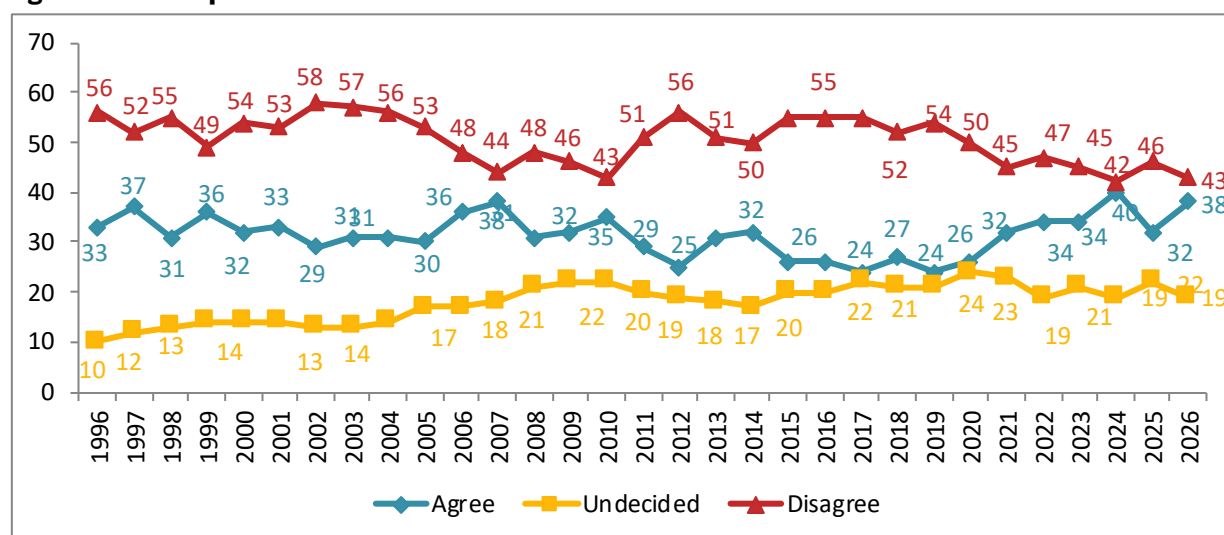
In addition to asking about general well-being, rural Nebraskans were asked about the amount of control they feel they have over their lives. To measure this, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Life has changed so much in our modern world 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 converged in 2024. 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 43 percent this year. The average proportion across all 31 years is approximately 51 percent.

This year, rural Nebraskans had an increase in their feeling of powerlessness as compared to last year. Overall, the

Figure 4. "...People are Powerless to Control Their Own Lives": 1996 - 2026



proportion of rural Nebraskans that either strongly agree or agree with the statement has been somewhat stable across all 31 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). However, that proportion declined to 32 percent last year before increasing to 38 percent this year.

The proportion of those who were undecided each year first increased over time, from 10 percent in 1996 to 22 percent in 2010. However, it has been pretty stable over time.

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.

One item, marriage, saw an increase in the level of satisfaction compared to last year. However, many items saw decreases

in the level of satisfaction this year as compared to last year: family, friends, clean water, job satisfaction, job security, their health, community, current income level, financial security during retirement, and job opportunities. As an example, last year 77 percent of rural Nebraskans were satisfied with their job. That proportion decreased to 65 percent this year.

Evaluations of Mental Health

During the past four years, rural Nebraskans were also asked to describe their mental health or emotional wellbeing at the time of the survey.

Rural Nebraskans’ evaluations of their mental health declined this year, compared to last year. Those rating their mental health as excellent declined from 34 percent last year to 24 percent this year. Those rating it as good remained at 52 percent. The proportion who rated their mental health as only fair increased from 13 percent last year to 22 percent this year.

GENERAL WELL-BEING BY SUBGROUPS

In this section, the 2026 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.

Residents of the North Central region (see

Figure 5. Ratings of Mental Health: 2023 - 2026

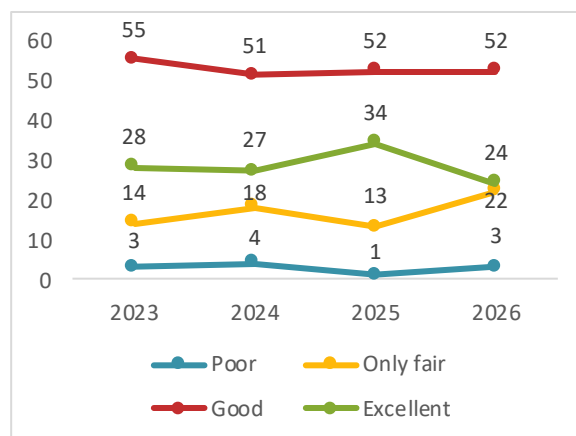


Table 1. Satisfaction with Aspects of Life, 1996 – 2026
% very satisfied or somewhat satisfied. N/A responses are excluded.

Item	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
Marriage			91	92	93	92	93	92	94	92	94	90	92	92	90	90	90	91	91	93	91	91	91	93	92	92	89	92	82	80	89	
Pers. safety																			87	88	87	87	84	89	85	86	84	85	83	87	86	
Family	90	93	92	89	93	89	90	90	90	89	91	88	91	85	89	89	87	86	87	87	89	87	87	87	87	84	86	86	88	82	88	83
Gen. quality of life														82	84	86	81	83	83	83	84	82	82	85	84	82	81	80	76	81	77	
Gen. std. of living														77	79	83	79	79	80	80	80	80	78	83	82	81	77	79	73	79	78	
Greenery/ open space			90	87	86	86	87	82	80	83	85	80	82	80	81	82	84	74	82	82	83	83	81	84	81	80	82	81	80	78	81	
Clean air					80	81	82	79	78	79	80	74	80	75	79	82	79	76	85	80	81	80	80	83	76	80	80	72	77	75	75	
Your friends	84	85	87	84	87	86	85	85	86	83	84	82	85	82	84	84	81	80	79	80	81	80	78	82	79	79	78	77	75	80	74	
Clean water					73	75	76	75	73	73	74	68	76	72	77	78	76	77	80	76	75	76	76	80	75	77	75	70	72	75	69	
Your housing		75	81	80	80	78	78	79	77	78	76	73	77	73	76	77	74	74	76	77	75	72	73	77	76	76	76	80	73	73	75	
Your education	73	73	74	74	76	72	74	74	72	71	74	74	77	67	74	77	74	73	77	77	75	77	71	80	76	75	74	76	77	79	77	
Your job	68	69	69	66	70	69	70	68	72	72	69	68	76	71	70	72	71	72	73	74	75	71	70	77	73	75	71	73	70	77	65	
Job security	63	64	63	59	68	66	65	62	66	65	66	64	73	59	66	67	67	65	73	72	71	70	68	75	71	74	77	74	68	73	66	
Ability to afford residence																			65	70	68	69	67	71	69	72	68	70	61	61	63	
Religion/ spirituality	79	79	81	78	83	79	79	78	78	75	75	78	79	75	77	76	78	76	75	77	74	72	73	76	76	71	71	64	74	76	72	
Spare time			71	65	71	66	67	67	66	65	68	68	71	66	67	72	70	66	66	70	68	66	67	71	71	69	64	65	64	69	67	
Health	78	81	78	75	77	74	74	75	73	71	73	74	77	66	73	75	70	71	72	73	72	69	71	75	67	67	63	66	65	75	67	
Community	65	64	70	67	70	67	63	62	64	66	62	62	66	63	64	65	59	58	64	64	63	60	58	61	61	59	54	54	52	60	49	
Current income level	54	58	53	46	51	48	48	47	49	48	50	50	53	47	50	55	53	53	55	56	54	53	52	57	56	59	53	57	51	60	55	
Ability to build assts/wealth																			51	51	50	51	50	56	54	58	54	50	45	55	53	
Fin. security in retirement	43	47	43	38	43	37	38	30	34	38	39	39	38	24	32	38	35	35	39	41	40	42	42	48	41	49	41	43	46	53	46	
Job opp.	39	41	38	37	36	38	37	35	34	39	43	40	48	32	42	38	46	44	44	46	43	43	41	49	45	48	47	47	44	50	43	

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 than they were five years ago. Almost six in ten residents of the North Central region (59%) believe they are better off compared to five years ago (Figure 6). In comparison, just over three in ten residents of the Panhandle (31%) believe they are better off than they were five years ago.

Residents of the South Central region are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to say they will be better off ten years from now. One-half (50%) of residents of this region believe they will be better off ten years from now, compared to just under three in ten residents of the Panhandle (28%).

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 six in ten persons with the highest household incomes of \$100,000 or more (56%) believe they are better off than they were five years ago, compared to just over three in ten persons with the lowest household incomes (31%).

Middle-aged persons are more likely than both younger and older persons to believe

they are better off compared to five years ago. Over one-half of persons age 30 to 64 believe they are better off compared to five years ago, compared to just under one-third of persons age 65 and older (32%) (Figure 7). Just over one-third of the youngest persons (34%) believe they are worse off compared to five years ago.

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to believe they are better off than their parents when they were their age. But, younger persons are more likely than older persons to think they will be better off ten years from now. Just over one-half of persons under the age of 50 believe they will be better off ten years from now, while just over two in ten persons age 65 and older (21%) share this opinion. Just over one-half of this age group (65 and older) (54%) believe they will be about the same ten years from now.

Males are more likely than females to think they are better off compared to five years ago. Persons with higher education levels are more likely than persons with less education to believe they are better off compared to five years ago, better off than their parents when they were their age, and think they will be better off ten years from now.

When comparing the marital groups, married persons are the group most likely to believe they are better off than they

Figure 6. Well-Being Compared to Five Years Ago by Region

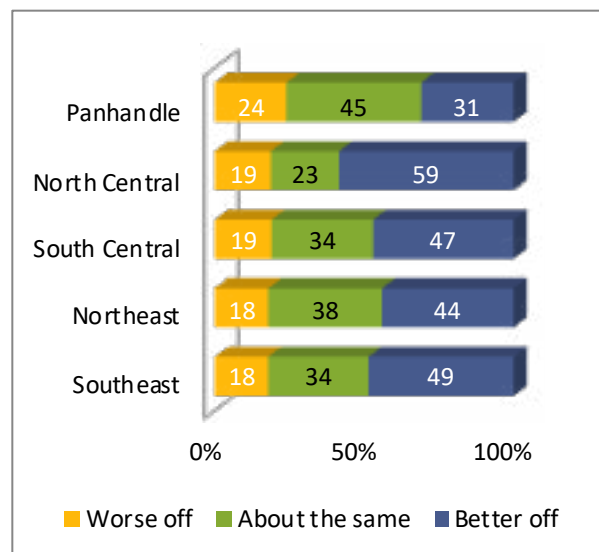
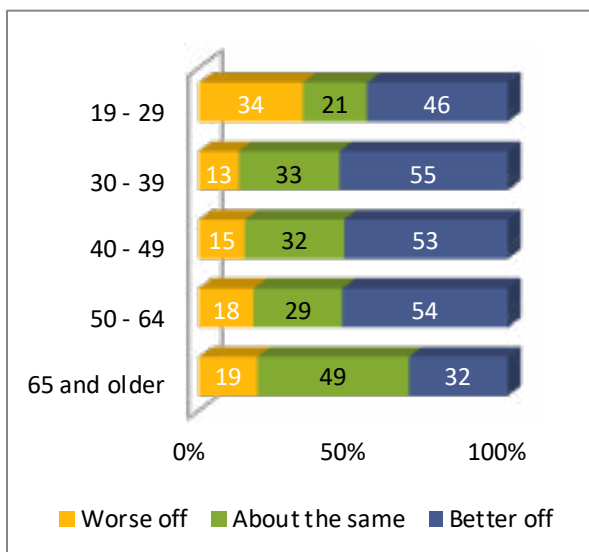


Figure 7. Well-Being Compared to Five Years Ago by Age



were five years ago, better off compared to their parents when they were their age, and think they will be better off ten years from now. Over one-half of married persons (52%) believe they will be better off ten years from now, compared to just two in ten widowed persons (20%).

Respondents with sales or office support occupations are the occupation group most likely to believe they will be better off ten years from now.

The respondents were also asked if they believe people are powerless to control their own lives. Just over four in ten rural Nebraskans (43%) disagree with that statement, compared to just under four in ten (38%) who agree. When analyzing the responses by region, community size, and various individual attributes, many differences emerge.

Younger persons are more likely than older persons to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. Just over one-half of persons between the ages of 19 and 29 agree with that statement (54%), compared to just over three in ten persons between the ages of 50 and 64 (32%) (Figure 8).

Persons with lower education levels are more likely than persons with more education to believe that people are powerless to control their own lives. Almost

one-half of persons having a high school diploma or less education (48%) agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. However, just under three in ten persons with at least a four-year college degree (29%) 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 have never married, and persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations.

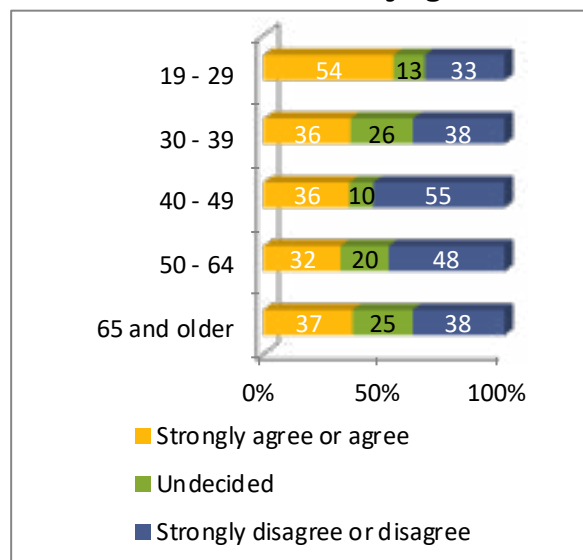
SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF WELL-BEING BY SUBGROUPS

The respondents were next given a list of items that may influence their well-being and were asked to rate their satisfaction with each. At least four in ten respondents are very satisfied with their family (47%), their day-to-day personal safety (44%), their marriage (41%), their religion/spirituality (41%), and their education (40%). Items receiving the highest proportion of very dissatisfied responses include: financial security during retirement (19%), their job opportunities (15%), current income level (14%), ability to afford their residence (14%), their community (13%), clean water (12%), and ability to build assets/wealth (12%).

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 five items include: their financial security during retirement, their ability to build assets/wealth, their current income level, their job opportunities, and their community.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than persons with higher incomes to be dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement. Just over six in ten persons with household incomes under \$40,000 (63%) report being dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement, compared to 26 percent of the persons with household incomes of

Figure 8. Belief that People are Powerless to Control Their Own Lives by Age



\$100,000 or more.

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

Other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with their financial security during retirement include: residents of the Panhandle region, persons who are divorced or separated, and persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Many of these same groups are most dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. Younger persons are more likely than older persons to express dissatisfaction with their ability to build assets or wealth. Almost one-half of persons age 19 to 29 (46%) are dissatisfied, compared to just under two in ten persons age 65 and older (18%).

Persons with food service or personal care occupations are more likely than those with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth. Almost three-quarters (74%) of persons with these types of occupations say they are dissatisfied with their ability to build assets or wealth, compared to just over two in ten persons with management, professional, or education occupations (22%) (Figure 9).

Other groups most likely to express dissatisfaction with their ability to build assets or wealth include: persons living in or near larger communities, residents of the Panhandle, residents of the Northeast region, persons without a four-year college degree, persons who have never married, and persons who are divorced or separated.

Persons with lower household incomes are more likely than persons with higher household incomes to be dissatisfied with their current income level. One-half of persons with household incomes under \$40,000 (50%) report being dissatisfied

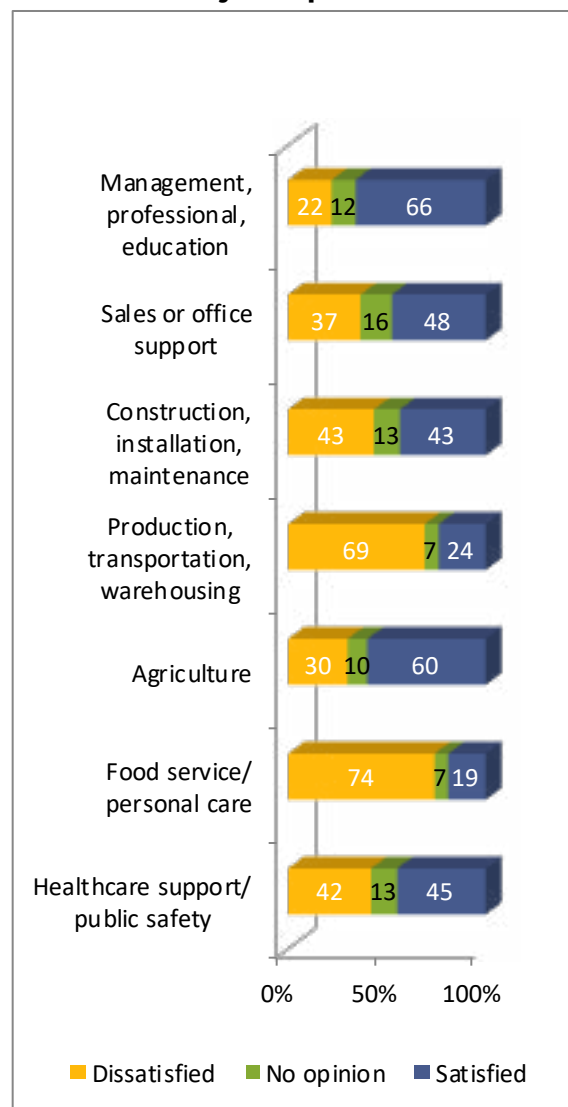
with their current income level.

Persons who have never married are the marital group most likely to express dissatisfaction with their current income level. Just over one-half of persons who have never married (52%) are dissatisfied with their current income level, compared to 19 percent of widowed persons.

Other groups most likely to report being dissatisfied with their current income level include: residents of the Northeast region, younger persons, persons having less than a four-year degree, and persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Younger persons are more likely than older persons to be dissatisfied with their job

Figure 9. Satisfaction with Ability to Build Assets/Wealth by Occupation



opportunities. Almost one-half (47%) of persons age 19 to 29 are dissatisfied with their job opportunities, compared to 13 percent of persons age 65 and older.

Persons who have never married are the marital group most likely to express dissatisfaction with their job opportunities. Almost six in ten persons who have never married (57%) are dissatisfied with their job opportunities, compared to 14 percent of widowed persons.

Persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are more likely than the persons with different occupations to be dissatisfied with their job opportunities. Two-thirds (66%) of the persons with these occupations express dissatisfaction with their job opportunities, compared to seven percent of persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations.

Younger persons are more likely than older persons to be dissatisfied with their community. Almost one-half (46%) of persons age 19 to 29 are dissatisfied with their community, compared to 18 percent of persons age 65 and older.

The other groups most likely to express dissatisfaction with their community include: persons living in or near larger communities, persons with lower education levels, persons who have never married, and persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations.

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. These items include: their marriage, their day-to-day personal safety, their family, greenery and open space, and their general standard of living.

Both married persons and widowed persons are more likely than the other marital groups to express satisfaction with their day-to-day personal safety. Approximately nine in ten persons of these two groups are satisfied with their personal safety, compared to just under seven in ten persons who have never married (69%).

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

Married persons are more likely than other marital groups to be satisfied with their family. Almost nine in ten married persons (88%) are satisfied with their family, compared to approximately seven in ten persons who have never married or persons who are divorced or separated.

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

Persons with occupations in agriculture are the occupation group most likely to express satisfaction with greenery and open space. Almost nine in ten persons with occupations in agriculture (88%) are satisfied with greenery and open space, compared to just over one-half of persons with food service or personal care occupations (53%).

The other groups most likely to be satisfied with greenery and open space include: persons living in or near smaller communities, persons with higher household incomes, married persons, and widowed persons.

Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than persons with lower incomes to express satisfaction with their general standard of living. Just over eight in ten persons with household incomes of \$75,000 or more are satisfied with their general standard of living, compared to just over six in ten persons with household incomes less than \$40,000.

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to express satisfaction with their general standard of living. Approximately eight in ten persons age 30 and over are satisfied with their general standard of living, compared to just under six in ten persons age 19 to 29 (58%) (Figure 10). One-third of the youngest persons are dissatisfied with their general standard of living.

The other groups most likely to be satisfied with their general standard of living include: persons living in or near smaller communities, persons with at least a four-year degree; married persons; widowed persons; persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations; and persons with management, professional, or education occupations.

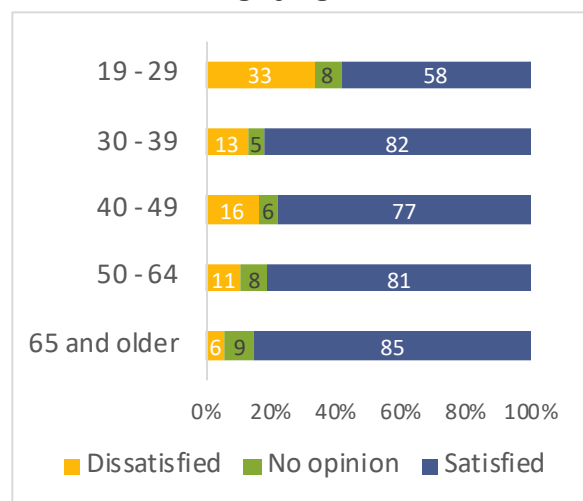
RATINGS OF MENTAL HEALTH

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 (24%). Approximately one-quarter rate it as only fair (22%) or poor (3%).

The responses to this question are examined by community size, region, and various individual attributes. Many differences are detected.

Residents of the Northeast region are less likely than residents of other regions of the state to rate their mental health as either good or excellent. Just under seven in ten residents of the Northeast region (68%) rate their mental health as either good or excellent. In comparison, almost nine in ten Panhandle residents rate their mental health as good or excellent (87%).

Figure 10. Satisfaction with General Standard of Living by Age



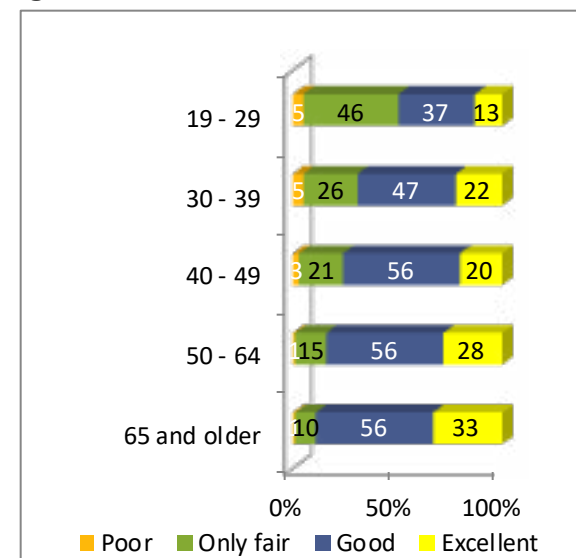
Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than persons with lower incomes to rate their mental health as either good or excellent.

Older persons are more likely than younger persons to rate their mental health as either good or excellent. Almost nine in ten persons age 65 and older (89%) rate their mental health as either good or excellent, compared to one-half of persons age 19 to 29 (50%) (Figure 11). Almost one-half (46%) of persons age 19 to 29 rate their mental health as only fair.

When comparing marital groups, persons who have never married are the group least likely to rate their mental health as either good or excellent. Just over one-half (53%) of persons who have never married rate their mental health as either good or excellent. In comparison, approximately eight in ten persons of other marital groups.

Persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations are more likely than persons with other occupations to rate their mental health or emotional well-being as either good or excellent. Over nine in ten persons with these occupations (97%) rate their mental health as either good or excellent, compared to 43 percent of persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Figure 11. Evaluation of Mental Health by Age



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 certain feelings of loneliness. Approximately one-half responded that they hardly ever or never experience the following: feel isolated from others (55%), feel that they lack companionship (52%), and feel left out (49%) (Figure 12).

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

When comparing responses by region, residents of the Southeast region, South Central region, and Panhandle are the groups most likely to report feeling that they often lack companionship. Residents of both the South Central and Southeast regions are the groups most likely to say they often feel isolated from others.

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, feel left out, and feel isolated from others. As an example, almost one-quarter of persons with

household incomes under \$40,000 (24%) often feel they lack companionship, compared to approximately one in ten persons with household incomes of \$40,000 or more.

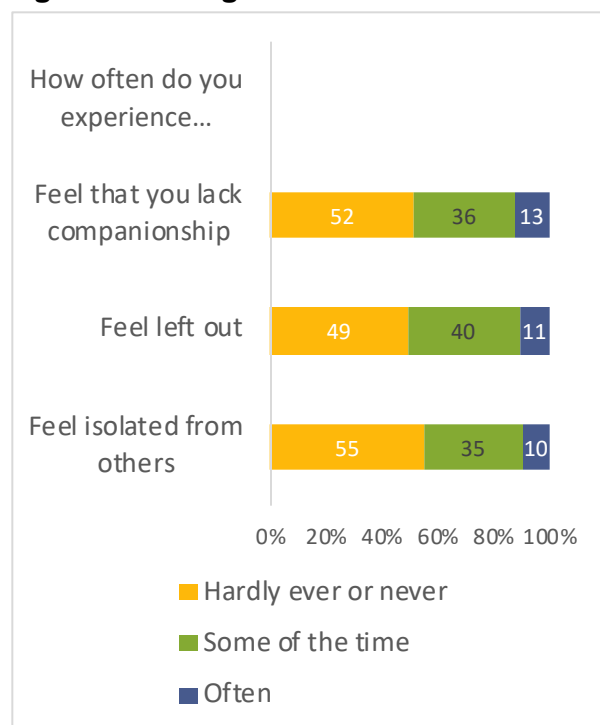
Persons age 30 to 49 are the age group most likely to say they often feel that they lack companionship. Females are more likely than males to report that they often feel isolated from others.

Persons with lower education levels are more likely than persons with more education to say they often feel left out and often feel isolated from others. Just over two in ten persons with a high school diploma or less education (22%) say they often feel left out, compared to five percent of persons with at least a four-year college degree.

When comparing marital groups, persons who have never married and persons who are divorced or separated are the groups most likely to report often feeling that they lack companionship and often feel left out. Persons who are divorced or separated are the group most likely to say they often feel isolated from others. Just over two in ten persons who are divorced or separated (22%) say they often feel isolated from others, compared to approximately seven percent of both married and widowed persons.

Persons with food service or personal care occupations are the occupation group most likely to say they often feel left out and often feel isolated from others. Just over one-quarter (27%) of persons with these types of occupations often feel left out, compared to three percent of persons with construction, installation or maintenance occupations.

Figure 12. Feelings of Loneliness



CONCLUSION

This year, rural Nebraskans are more pessimistic about their current situation than they were last year. The proportion believing they are better off than they were five years ago is 47 percent, down from 53 percent last year. And, this year, 19 percent of rural Nebraskans believe they are worse

off compared to five years ago, compared to 16 percent last year.

However, their optimism about their future was about the same as last year. Over four in ten rural Nebraskans (44%) believe they will be better off ten years from now. This is similar to the 46 percent reported last year.

Rural Nebraskans had an increase in their feeling of powerlessness as compared to last year and their evaluations of their mental health declined this year, as compared to last year. Those rating their mental health as excellent declined from 34 percent last year to 24 percent this year. Those rating it as good remained at 52 percent. The proportion who rated their mental health as only fair increased from 13 percent last year to 22 percent this year.

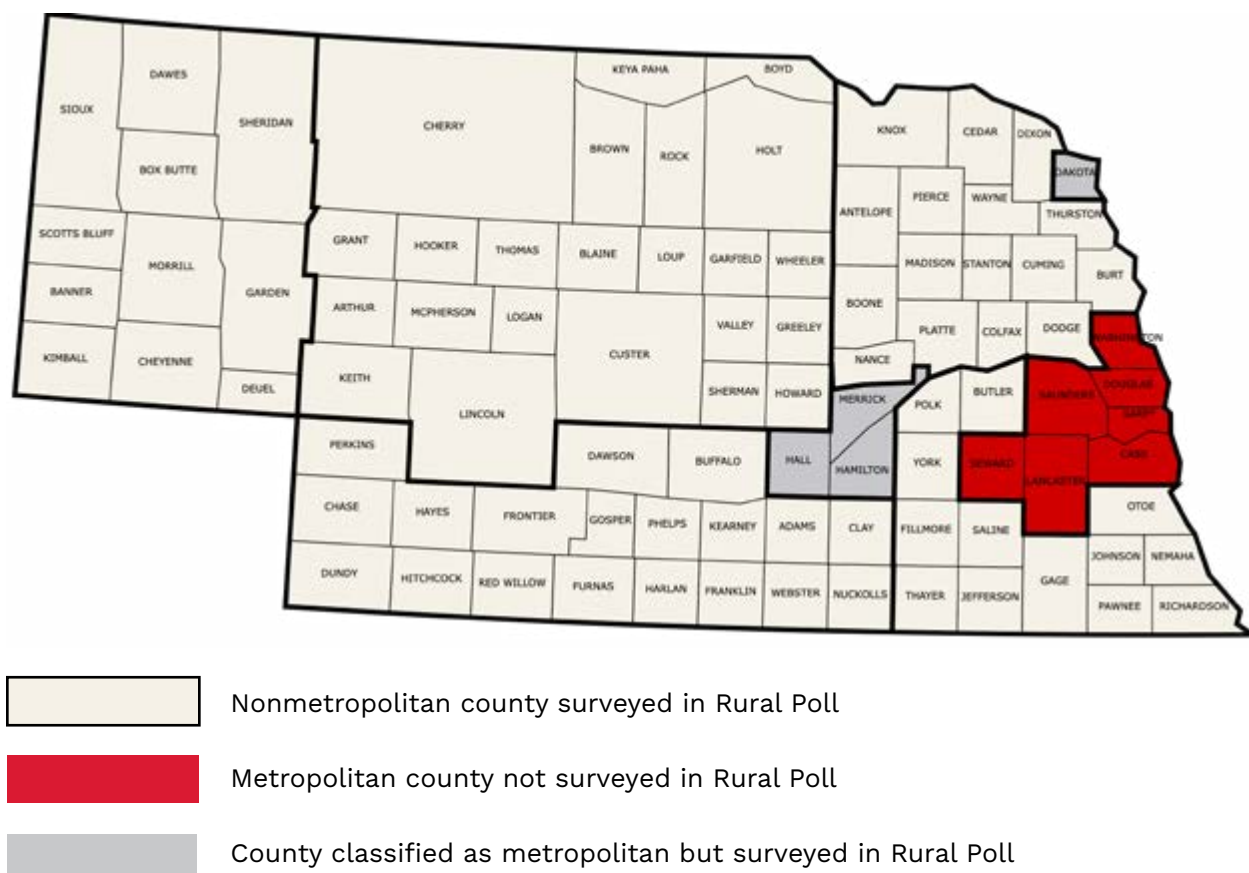
There were many differences detected in feelings of wellbeing by age. Middle-aged persons are more likely than both younger and older persons to believe they are better off compared to five years ago. Furthermore, just over one-third of the youngest persons believe they are worse off compared to five years ago. However, the younger persons are more likely than older persons to think they will be better off ten years from now. Younger persons are more likely than older persons to agree that people are powerless to control their own lives. And, older persons are more likely than younger persons to rate their mental health as either good or excellent. Almost one-half of persons age 19 to 29 rate their mental health as only fair.

When examining specific items that may impact their wellbeing, many items saw decreases in the level of satisfaction this year as compared to last year: family, friends, clean water, job satisfaction, job security, their health, community, current income level, financial security during retirement, and job opportunities.

A different measure of mental health showed that a slight majority of rural Nebraskans say they hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness. Approximately one-half responded that they hardly ever or never experience the following: feel isolated from others (55%),

feel that they lack companionship (52%), and feel left out (49%).

Appendix Figure 1. Nebraska Rural Poll Regions
Top left to Bottom Right: Panhandle, North Central, Northeast, South Central, Southeast





RURAL POLL

**Nebraska Rural Poll
Research Report 26-1
results compiled by:**

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