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ABSTRACT Findings from a 1987 telephone survey of Louisiana residents are reported. Opinions of 701 persons were gathered using a weighted probability sample across the state. Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics were used to identify regional clusters of parishes to determine differences among regions of the state. The results point to a paradox. While the clusters exhibited extreme variation in socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, there was surprising similarity in the responses regarding opinions on agricultural issues. Support for agriculture was uniformly strong across all regions, with over 80 percent of respondents agreeing that both the state and federal governments should do a lot more to help farmers. Public concern for the future of farming was evident. Of the survey respondents, 40 percent felt that the financial future of farming will get worse, while only 30 percent felt it would improve. While opinions on specific resource-allocation measures to help agriculture were less definite, the findings show that residential location has little effect on respondents' opinions regarding agricultural issues.

Introduction

Agriculture is a key segment of Louisiana's economy. More than 18,500 farms generate over $1,562.4 million in farm sales and an additional $107.3 million in farm wages for the state (United States Department of Agriculture, 1986). Recently, the business of farming has changed. Farming supports considerably fewer families today than 25 years ago (Huffman and Vandeveer, 1985) and off-farm jobs supplement the income of many farmers (Deseran, in press). Often the cost of production exceeds the price of commodities. Government subsidies, which have helped farmers remain in business, are under political attack as being too expensive for the American taxpayers. Researchers at the state's universities attempt to support agriculture by developing new cropping systems, expanding genetic engineering techniques to produce higher yielding seed varieties and more efficient livestock production, and conducting marketing research on worldwide competition. The findings reported here support this overall research effort by evaluating opinions of Louisiana residents regarding the future of agriculture.

Government assistance to farmers has been considerable given the fact that only 2.2 percent of the U.S. population now live on farms. For

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example, in 1986, total commodity price supports amounted to between $11,000 and $12,500 per farmer in the United States (Calomiris et al., 1986). The foundation for approval of such special interest help has been identified as the American Agrarian Ideology (e.g., Lyson and McMullen, 1987; Wilkening, 1981).

While many Americans approve of government assistance for family farms, the recent farm crisis was not identified as a priority for national concern (Lyson, 1986). Lyson identifies three reasons for this general apathy regarding the farm crisis: (1) the lack of personal contact with farming for most americans; (2) the failure to identify grocery prices with financial conditions of the family farm; and (3) the cyclical nature of agriculture's success and failure, which has been given wide media coverage.

The research reported here begins with the premise that public opinion regarding the future of agriculture exhibits regional variation. Following Lyson, it is expected that urban areas, because of lower levels of personal contact with farming, will be less supportive. Added to this, it is expected that varied opinions about agriculture will be grounded in the economic base of the region. Thus, those areas most dependent on agriculture should express greater concern over the future of farming and greater support for additional government assistance.

The many Louisianas

Before conducting the survey, five clusters of parishes (counties) were identified based on similar socioeconomic and demographic patterns. The regions are illustrated in Figure 1. The clusters reflect a long-standing interest in cultural variation across the state of Louisiana (e.g., Bertrand, 1955; Zachetmayr et al., 1983). They represent dramatically different economic, cultural, and social areas of the state. The key issue addressed here is the extent to which support for agriculture is evenly distributed across the state.

Identification of clusters

Earlier research (Acock et al., 1988) identified 23 socioeconomic variables that are important in differentiating regions of the state. The variables for each parish are percentage black, percentage urban, percentage Catholic, percentage under 18 years, percentage over 55 years, percentage high school graduation, median family income, the gini index of inequality, percentage from each of 12 major occupational categories used by the U.S. census, crude birth rate for each parish, crude death rate, percentage home owner, and percentage living in a home that is less than 10 years old.

Each of the 64 parishes was assigned values on the set of variables through a factor and cluster analysis. A factor analysis with varimax rotation resulted in five factors with eigen variables greater than 1.0. This result was entered into the SAS cluster analysis program producing the five clusters. These procedures have been discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Acock et al., 1988).

Figure 1. Louisiana Survey, 1987

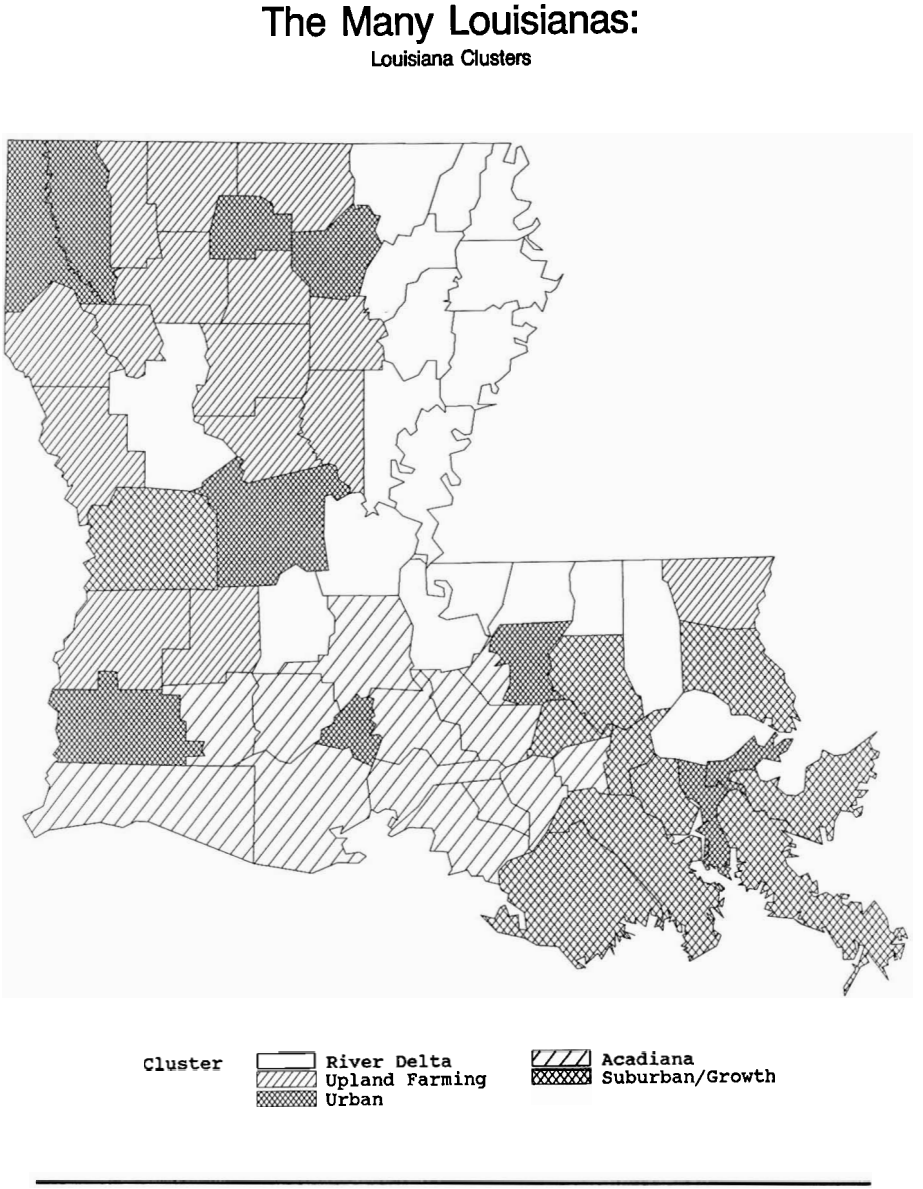

Table 1. Descriptions of five regions based on five factors

Factor	Characteristic	Cluster rating*				
		River	Acadiana	Timber	Suburban	Urban
Agri-culture	High on number of farmers, farm labor, older pop., economic inequality. Low on med. Income and H.S. graduation.	++	-	+		
Urban	High on urban pop., professionals, managers, and sales. Low on home owner-ship, operatives and labor occupations.		-	+/-	+	++
Race/ Service	Highest on % black, service and craft occupations. Low on home ownership.	+	+/-	+/-	-	+
Youth	High on pop. under 18, birth rate, and % Catholic.	-	++	+/-	+	+/
High Growth	High on new houses. Low on older pop. and crude death rate.	+/-	+/-	--	+	+

*A rating of ++ indicates major defining characteristic, + means characteristic, +/- means approximately average on characteristic, - means below average, and -- means far below average on characteristic.

Table 1 shows the cultural variation among the clusters across the factors of Agriculture, Urban, Race/Service, Youth, and Growth[2]. The five clusters appear as columns in the table. Because there are several indicators of each row (e.g., Agriculture includes being high on number of farmers, farm labor, older population, economic inequality, low median income and low high school graduation), the rating applies generally, but not necessarily, to each individual variable.

[2]The numerical loadings on the factors are available from the authors. Since the primary focus of this paper is on variation in support for agriculture, the factors are only summarized in the text.

The River Delta area is very high on the agriculture factor and high on percentage black. It is low on both the urban and the youth factors. The River Delta is an area along or near the Mississippi, largely forming the northeastern edge of the state. Acadiana is very high on the youth factor (and percentage Catholic) and below average on agriculture and percentage urban. Much of this area is widely recognized as "Cajun Louisiana." The Timber and Upland Farming cluster is very low on the growth factor and above average on agriculture. This area is in the northwest and north central part of the state. The Suburban/Growth parishes are high on urban, youth, and growth, while they are low on agriculture and percentage black. Most of these parishes are suburbs surrounding either New Orleans or Baton Rouge. Finally, the Urban cluster is highest on the urban factor, but also high on percentage black and growth. It is understandably low on the agriculture factor. This factor includes the seven largest urban areas in the state.

Survey design

A statewide telephone survey conducted in the summer of 1987 used a weighted probability sample of 701 Louisiana residents to determine regional similarities and differences regarding opinions on agricultural issues and the allocation of state resources. The survey was designed so that each of the clusters included at least 125 interviews. Because the clusters vary widely in population, this survey over-samples rural areas. This was necessary in order to obtain reliable estimates of clusters in rural areas.

The survey followed procedures outlined in Dillman (1978). Up to seven attempts were made for each of 1658 randomly generated telephone numbers. When a household was reached, a random selection procedure was used to pick one person age 18 or above from the household. The final result of each number was coded.

Many of the randomly generated numbers were ineligible (nonresidential, not in service, double wrong connection). This was the result for 30.1 percent of the 1658 telephone numbers. Overall, 39.4 percent of the 1658 numbers resulted in a completed interview. Fifteen percent of the numbers produced eligible respondents, but interviews were not completed for a variety of reasons (initial contact refused, selected respondent refused, terminated interview, selected respondent eligible but incapable because of language barrier, or call back arranged but not completed by end of survey). The remaining 15.5 percent did not have their eligibility determined (no answer, line busy, recording) after seven attempts. Some of these numbers may have eligible respondents and others may not. A conservative response (usable questionnaires, eligible), where eligible includes completed interviews, not completed eligible, and not determined, is 56.4 percent. A less conservative estimate is 72.5 percent, where eligible includes completed interviews and not completed eligible.

Results

It is instructive to see how the clusters vary. Table 2 lists means for several variables, most of which were not part of the initial factor analysis.[3] There are dramatic differences between regions. Indeed, between 30 percent and 70 percent of the variance (R^2) in most of the variables is explained by cluster.[4] For convenience we have grouped the variables into four general categories: (1) agriculture, (2) family/housing, (3) population, and (4) economy.

Not surprisingly, the agriculture variables show major differences between regions. Very few of the farms in the River Delta, Acadiana, or Timber and Upland Farming regions are small (under 11 acres), but such farms are relatively more common in the Suburban Growth and Urban regions. Many large farms are in the River Delta and Acadiana parishes. While farming is important to the Timber and Upland Farming parishes, fewer of the farms have large sales (12.7 percent) than in the River Delta (28.7 percent) or Acadiana (32.9 percent) areas. Only 19.3 percent of the Timber and Upland Farming total land area is farmed, compared with 55.3 percent of the River Delta and 40.6 percent of the Acadiana area. The importance of rice production in the Acadiana parishes is evident by the substantial amount of irrigated farm land. It is interesting that three-fourths of the farm land in the River Delta and Acadiana is planted in crops.

There are important differences between clusters in each of the other sets of variables shown in Table 2, but space does not permit detailed discussion of the results. The important point for present analysis is that we are comparing views on the future of agriculture across areas of the state that have widely different economic, social, and cultural characteristics. Some of the areas are urbanized with little involvement in farming and even less personal contact with farming. Others have economies that are heavily involved in agricultural production and have a large farm population.

The financial future of farming

One concern regarding the future of agriculture in America is the decline in the number of family farms. Our survey results appear in Tables 3, 4, and 5. The view that the financial future of farming will be worse

[3]The differences here are not an artifact of the way the clusters were identified. Indeed, only 3 of the 26 variables shown in Table 2 were involved in identifying the clusters. The results show that the differences in clusters are substantial and generalize to many important variables that were not involved in the initial identification of the clusters. Thus, the clusters are robust with respect to variables used to identify them.

[4]The R^2s are computed using dummy variable multiple regression. For each equation, a variable from the first column in Table 2 is the dependent variable. The independent variables are a series of four (k - 1) dummy variables used to represent the five regions of the state. In this way, the five regions are treated as unordered categories.

Table 2. Comparison of clusters[a]

Variable	Region						
	River Delta	Acadiana	Timber & Upland Farming	Suburban Growth	Urban	R^{2} [b]	Prob.
Agriculture							
% farms <11 acres	3.6	5.3	3.6	11.0	8.0	.36	.0001
% farms >500 acres	21.5	23.9	9.1	11.6	12.0	.32	.0001
% farms sales <2500	77.2	75.5	56.8	59.6	58.1	.51	.0001
% farms sales >40000	28.7	32.9	12.7	13.1	13.3	.40	.0001
% all land in farms	55.3	40.6	19.3	14.2	29.6	.49	.0001
% farm land irrig.	3.8	10.2	2.9	.6	3.2	.15	.0387
% farm land crops	73.2	75.1	52.4	41.8	59.9	.39	.0001
Family/Housing							
% births under 20	25.3	21.4	25.8	19.1	19.0	.47	.0001
% fem. head fam.	17.1	13.4	14.0	10.4	16.8	.31	.0002
% owner occupied	73.1	74.8	77.6	75.1	63.9	.36	.0001
% with no plumbing	6.8	3.3	6.1	1.6	1.8	.41	.0001
% crowded (>1.1/rm)	9.3	10.3	6.5	7.7	5.8	.51	.0001
% fam. in poverty female-headed	35.9	37.0	33.1	34.6	48.2	.30	.0003
Divorce per 100,000	36.2	30.8	32.1	39.1	44.5	.07	.3588
Population							
% pop. over 64	12.7	9.5	14.8	6.8	9.1	.71	.0001
Pop. growth rate	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.2	.33	.0001
% pop. born La.	82.5	90.7	82.9	77.2	73.2	.34	.0001
% urban	28.2	41.0	27.5	55.4	80.5	.51	.0001
% black	39.7	29.1	28.1	17.5	29.2	.27	.0010
Dr. per 100,000	506	503	462	442	1668	.47	.0001
Crimes per 100,000	1560	2084	1759	2329	5900	.57	.0001

(continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Economy							
Md H.H. Inc (1000s)	10.2	15.6	11.4	18.2	15.9	.69	.0001
Per Cap Inc (1000s)	6.2	8.9	6.7	9.1	10.0	.60	.0001
Md rent (dollars)	131	162	138	224	224	.76	.0001
Md vale owner occ. (1000s)	27.6	35.1	24.1	46.4	45.0	.69	.0001
% families in pov.	26.4	15.8	19.2	11.6	13.1	.72	.0001

[a] Based on census data for 64 Louisiana parishes from 1980 unless otherwise noted.
[b] R^2 and probabilities based on dummy variable multiple regression of variables in column 1 on "Region."

than it is now is expressed by 40.3 percent of the respondents; 29.8 percent see the financial future of farming to be better (Table 3).

Given the great variation across the regions of Louisiana, it is remarkable that the concern about farming's financial future is so evenly distributed. Only in cluster one (River Delta) did a third or more of respondents (34.8 percent) feel that the financial future of farming will get better. Importantly, this cluster is the most dependent on agriculture for its economic base. However, even the cluster of parishes which is most urban follows the statewide concern for agriculture, with 40.2 percent of the respondents expressing the opinion that the financial future of farming will get worse and only 29.9 percent saying it will get better.

Where people live does not strongly affect their opinions regarding the financial future of farming. We expected that people living in agriculturally dependent areas would be more pessimistic. This is not the case. Concern is statewide.

While region is not important, some individual characteristics show variation. Only one of these, family income, is statistically significant. Marital status, although not statistically significant ($p = .068$), shows some differences in our sample. Among married respondents, 42.0 percent feel the future of farming will get worse and 30.4 percent say it will get better. Never marrieds are slightly more inclined to think things will stay the same. Divorced people are most polarized, with only 17.6 percent thinking things will stay the same.

Household size appears to make some difference in the respondent's opinion regarding the financial future of farming although these differences are not statistically significant. As seen in Table 3, the tendency is for larger families to be less optimistic about the future of farming. Also, men are slightly less optimistic about the financial future of farming than women. While 43.6 percent of the men say farming will get worse, 38.1 percent of the women feel this way. About the same proportion of men and women feel that the future will be better; 29.0 percent of men and 30.3 percent of women.

Most of the survey respondents are white (74.9 percent), and 43.0 percent of these people feel farming will be worse off financially in the future. Black respondents tend to be less pessimistic with 32.8 percent believing it will be worse and 35.1 percent believing it will get better. This difference is not statistically significant.

The relationship between income of respondents and their opinions on the future of farming is interesting and significant ($p = .006$). For respondents with annual household incomes below $10,000, 42.9 percent feel the financial future of farming will improve. This contrasts with those respondents with annual household incomes between $20,000 and $39,999 who feel less optimistic. Only 26.1 percent of these people believe the financial future of farming will get better. People with annual household incomes over $40,000 are more evenly distributed in their opinions: 39.7 percent of them feel the future will be worse, while 32.8 percent feel it will be better.

Respondents with less than 12 years of education tend to be more optimistic; this category has the highest percentage who believe that the financial future will be better. While 34.8 percent of the least educated are optimistic, only 27.0 percent of respondents holding high school degrees, and 28.8 percent of those with more than high school education

Table 3. Views on the future of agriculture

	In the future farming will			
	Get worse	Same	Get better	N
Overall distribution	40.3%	29.9%	29.8%	618
Cluster (p=.373)*				
Red River	29.6%	35.7%	34.8%	115
Acadiana	44.7	30.9	24.4	146
Timber/Upland	44.9	26.3	28.8	118
Suburban/Growth	41.6	27.2	31.2	125
Urban	40.2	29.9	29.9	114
Income category (p<.006)				
under $10,000	31.1%	26.0%	42.9%	119
10,000-19,999	42.2	36.6	21.1	142
20,000-39,999	44.6	29.4	26.1	184
40,000 plus	39.7	27.6	32.8	116
Education (p=.368)				
less than 12	35.5%	29.7%	34.8%	155
12 years	44.9	28.1	27.0	196
13 years plus	39.7	31.5	28.8	267
Race (p=.229)				
Black	32.8%	32.1%	35.1%	134
White	43.0	27.4	28.7	463
Sex (p=.360)				
Female	38.1%	31.6%	30.3%	370
Male	43.6	27.4	29.0	248
Marital status (p=.068)				
Never married	33.6%	41.1%	25.2%	109
Married	42.0	27.6	30.4	388
Divorced	47.0	17.6	35.3	68
Widowed	31.4.	41.2	27.4	51
Household size (p=.497)				
One	29.8%	39.3%	31.0%	84
Two	38.8	28.2	33.0	188
Three	41.5	31.5	26.9	130
Four	43.4	27.1	29.5	129
Five plus	50.9	25.4	23.7	86

*Values in parentheses are significance levels based on chi-square tests.

are optimistic. While interesting, these differences are not statistically significant.

While we have reported some degree of variation among individuals, the general pattern is consistent. Most people, regardless of region, race,

marital status, income, or education, are not optimistic about the financial future of agriculture in Louisiana.

Federal government support

The federal government provides direct help to agricultural producers primarily in the form of commodity price supports. These commodity programs provide cash support to farmers making up the difference between the market price of the product and an artificially set parity level. During 1986 the estimated budget for commodity assistance programs was $11 billion. Actual expenditures for the commodity program amounted to $63 billion (Calomiris et al., 1986). Support for such a costly program is based on the belief that this help reaches the target population of family farmers and realizes the goal of keeping them in business.

Whether farmers can maintain such a favored position is debatable. Therefore, public opinion regarding federal government support for agriculture is a key item in the Louisiana survey. Specifically, we asked if the federal government should do more to support farmers. Results appear in Table 4.

Louisianans overwhelmingly endorse federal governmental support for farmers. Fully 83.2 percent agree or strongly agree with federal government help for agriculture. The 5.0 percent who strongly disagree with federal government support are evenly divided on whether the future of farming will improve (41.6 percent feel it will improve and 39.5 percent feel it will get worse). Those who strongly agree with federal support are more concerned about the future of farming (36.4 percent feel it will get better and 44.6 percent feel it will get worse).

There are some differences based on individual characteristics. Men are significantly more likely than women to strongly oppose more support—9.2 percent of the men, but only 2.1 percent of the women ($p = .001$). Blacks' support for federal aid was significantly stronger than that of whites ($p = .001$). Virtually none of the blacks surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed with more federal help, compared with 21.1 percent of the whites.

We have access to data from two other states for comparison. The North Carolina Farm Survey (Lilley et al., 1987) reports that 59 percent of the respondents saw their continued future in farming as doubtful. A 1986 survey of 900 farmers and former farmers in North Dakota measured opinions regarding agriculture and federal assistance (Leistritz et al., 1987). Over 90 percent agreed with the statement that "the proportion of farmers who are now in financial trouble is much greater than at most times in the past," and 72.8 percent agreed with the statement that "the family farm is rapidly going out of existence." While 42.6 percent felt that government involvement in agriculture is a very important cause of the current farm financial situation, 39.3 percent felt that farmers in financial trouble should receive help from the federal government and 34.6 percent felt that they should not.

Table 4. Views on more federal support for agriculture

	Support for more federal assistance				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
Overall distribution	5.0%	11.7%	46.2%	37.0%	640
Cluster (p=.504)*					
Red River	8.6%	12.0%	41.9%	37.6%	117
Acadiana	5.5	11.7	48.8	39.0	128
Timber/Upland	4.6	14.6	46.9	33.8	130
Suburban/Growth	.8	10.5	52.4	36.3	124
Urban	5.7	9.9	46.1	38.3	141
Income category (p=.001)					
under $10,000	.8%	5.5%	48.8%	46.9%	127
10,000-19,999	5.4	11.0	43.5	41.0	147
20,000-39,999	4.3	12.2	47.9	35.6	188
40,000 plus	9.9	19.8	41.3	28.9	121
Education (p<.001)					
less than 12	4.2%	7.8%	51.5%	36.5%	167
12 years	2.5	8.55	4.8	34.2	299
13 years plus	7.3	16.4	36.9	39.4	274
Race (p<.001)					
Black	0.0%	2.2%	56.1%	42.7%	139
White	6.5	14.6	43.4	35.5	479
Sex (p=.001)					
Female	2.1%	8.7%	49.5%	39.7%	380
Male	9.2	16.2	41.5	33.1	260
Marital status (p=.572)					
Never married	3.6%	9.1%	46.4%	40.1%	112
Married	6.4	13.3	44.9	35.3	405
Divorced	3.0	10.6	47.0	29.4	66
Widowed	0.0	5.6	53.7	40.7	54
Household size (p=.254)					
One	4.5%	11.2%	46.1%	38.2%	89
Two	5.7	13.9	44.6	35.8	193
Three	5.3	11.4	54.6	28.8	132
Four	5.9	11.8	40.4	41.9	136
Five plus	1.6	4.8	48.4	45.2	89

*Values in parentheses are significance levels based on chi-square tests.

State support for farming

There is considerable support for state assistance to agriculture. When asked if they agree with the statement "the state government should do a lot more to help farmers," over 80 percent either agree or strongly agree. Again this support is evenly distributed across the clusters. Every region uniformly supports state help, and there are no statistically significant differences among regions. Detailed results appear in Table 5.

For those 4.2 percent of respondents strongly disagreeing with state support for farmers, a high percentage, 41.6 percent, feel the financial future of farming will be worse. These people do not wish to "throw good money after bad." Those "in support of the underdog," the 37.5 percent who strongly agree that the state government should do a lot more to help farmers, have an even higher percentage (45.5 percent) who feel that farming will be worse in the future.

Among men, 7.0 percent strongly disagree with state support for agriculture while 31.9 percent strongly agree. Women are significantly more supportive ($p = .0001$). For women, 2.4 percent strongly disagree and 41.3 percent strongly agree that the state should provide aid to farmers. Race is also significant ($p = .011$). Among black respondents, 44.8 percent strongly agree with more state aid and none strongly oppose it. One-third of the white respondents strongly support state help while 5.4 percent oppose it. Thus, both women and blacks are more positive regarding state support for farming.

So far we have described the general support for helping agriculture, but now we turn to the much more specific issue of what to do with state tax dollars. A separate series of questions (not shown in Tables 1 through 5) asked where the state should reassign tax dollars. Specifically, we consider state spending for agricultural research and promotion of agriculture outside the state.

While there is uniform support for state help, the kind of assistance varies. Only 20 to 30 percent of respondents support reassigning state tax dollars for agricultural research. Among those persons who believe the financial future of agriculture will worsen, 40.9 percent support more funding for agricultural research, while 43.1 percent feel fewer tax dollars should be spent on agricultural research. For those believing the financial future of agriculture is brighter, 31.8 percent still support more tax resources for agricultural research, while 40.1 percent feel there should be less. For those who support additional allocation of tax resources to agricultural research, 85.9 percent are willing to pay more taxes for this priority. Also, although most did not support more spending on agricultural research, very few respondents believe there should be fewer tax dollars spent on agricultural research.

About half of the respondents believe the allocation of tax dollars to promote Louisiana agricultural products outside the state should stay the same. Among respondents who feel grim about the financial future of agriculture, 41.5 percent feel that fewer taxes should be spent on product promotion. For those who feel there should be an increase in product promotion outside the state, 39.2 percent feel the future of farming will be worse and 29.5 percent feel it will be better.

A context for interpreting these results is provided by comparing them to the level of support for tax dollars going to other areas. Support for state tax revenues going to industry is much higher. Nearly 60

Table 5. Views on more state support for agriculture

	Support for more state assistance				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
Overall distribution	4.2%	12.0%	46.3%	37.5%	635
Cluster (p=.593)*					
Red River	6.0%	11.2%	42.2%	40.5%	116
Acadiana	3.2	13.6	42.4	40.8	125
Timber/Upland	5.5	11.8	44.9	37.8	127
Suburban/Growth	.8	13.3	51.6	34.4	128
Urban	5.8	10.0	51.6	34.5	139
Income category (p=.020)					
under $10,000	.8%	8.1%	45.2%	46.0%	124
10,000-19,999	3.4	9.7	46.5	40.3	144
20,000-39,999	4.3	12.3	46.0	37.4	187
40,000 plus	8.2	17.2	47.5	27.0	122
Education (p=.006)					
less than 12	3.1%	9.4%	50.3%	37.1%	159
12 years	1.5	9.5	52.5	36.5	200
13 years plus	6.9	15.2	39.5	38.4	276
Race (p=.011)					
Black	0.0%	4.5%	50.8%	44.8%	134
White	5.4	14.4	45.3	31.9	481
Sex (p<.001)					
Female	2.4%	9.3%	47.1%	41.3%	378
Male	7.0	16.0	45.1	31.9	257
Marital status (p=.723)					
Never married	4.6%	9.1%	46.4%	40.0%	112
Married	5.2	12.7	46.9	35.2	403
Divorced	1.5	13.8	27.7	26.1	65
Widowed	0.0	7.7	50.0	42.3	52
Household size (p=.063)					
One	3.5%	8.2%	54.1%	34.1%	85
Two	5.7	15.0	42.0	37.3	193
Three	3.8	12.8	50.4	33.1	133
Four	5.2	12.7	42.5	39.6	134
Five plus	1.6	1.6	54.8	42.0	89

*Values in parentheses are significance levels based on chi-square tests.

percent of the respondents support more tax resources going for industrial promotion, and 85 percent of those in support are willing to pay higher taxes for this. Interestingly, the support for more tax dollars to promote

industry is greater in the farming areas of the River Delta, Acadiana, and Timber and Upland Farming than in the Suburban/Growth and major Urban clusters.

U.S. opinions on agriculture and agricultural issues

A 1986 survey of nearly 4,000 Americans asked similar questions regarding agriculture and agricultural issues.[5] The national survey included proportionally more farmers than the Louisiana survey. In Louisiana, only about 4 percent of the respondents were farmers, compared to over 8 percent in the national survey.

The national study also shows strong support of agriculture. The majority responding disagreed with the statement that "farmers get too much government money." Interestingly, however, for those respondents who were farmers, 64.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. This is inconsistent with Lyson's (1986) contentions that involvement in agriculture and contact with farming are important ingredients in the American Agrarian Ideology.

When asked whether government policies should ensure that family farms survive, both farmers and nonfarmers agreed. Twenty-one percent of the total sample strongly agreed, compared to 28.1 percent of the farmers.

Most Americans share the beliefs of most Louisianans: fully 72.8 percent agreed with the statement that "more farmers are in financial trouble now than in the past." As with our Louisiana survey, nationally, women are more likely than men to believe that farmers are in financial trouble today. Almost 60 percent of the women agreed with the statement, while only 40.7 percent of the men agreed. For those who felt strongly that more farmers are in financial trouble, 75.8 percent disagreed with the statement that "farmers get too much government money." Among those who supported or strongly supported government policies to assure the survival of the family farm (66 percent of the respondents), nearly 80 percent felt that more farmers are in financial trouble today. For those against policies assuring the family farms' survival (13.5 percent of the respondents), only half felt that farmers are in financial trouble.

Conclusion

Our research began with the premise that public opinion regarding the future of agriculture exhibits regional variation. Following Lyson (1986), we argued that level of personal contact and dependence on agriculture should account for regional variation. While our regions are clearly different on a wide range of demographic, social, and economic factors, there is a consensus to support increased federal and state support for agriculture. At least 80 percent of respondents from every region support increased state and national support. This does not mean there is no

[5]This is from the Farming in American Life Survey. USDA Regional Project S-198, 1986. Preliminary results are published in Acock et al., 1988.

variation in support. However, support is explained by individual characteristics (i.e., support is positively associated with the characteristics "black," "female," "poor," and "less educated").

The Louisiana survey results point to a policy paradox. There is almost overwhelming support for agriculture in the state of Louisiana. The public's concern for agriculture is also evident in that 40 percent feel that the financial future of farming will get worse, compared with only 30 percent who feel it will get better. In contrast, there is less support for specific measures to assist agriculture. While Louisianans want to help farmers, they are hesitant to suggest reallocation or increased tax dollars for this assistance.

Interestingly enough, the state's agricultural areas are even more strongly committed to increased expenditures for promoting industrial development than the urban areas. This indicates the importance of rural economic development and diversification for the agricultural regions in the state.

Louisianans are more likely to support state and federal assistance to agriculture than are North Dakota farmers. This difference may reflect a generally more conservative attitude among North Dakota residents or a greater concern over personal costs of additional government spending.

Finally, the survey shows the public's awareness of the changes in the structure of agriculture and the decline of the family farm. There is little optimism that the situation will improve soon, and continued strong support for governmental assistance is important.

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