

Center for Rural Policy and Development

**Minnesota Rural Policy Poll  
2001**

Survey questions and results

February 2001

## The Minnesota Rural Policy Poll

The Center for Rural Policy and Development's Minnesota Rural Policy Poll was conducted between January 21 and February 2, 2001, at St. Cloud State University. Surveyed were 1,200 randomly selected households from non-metropolitan Minnesota counties using random-digit dialing. The poll has an estimated margin of error of  $\pm 2.8$  percent.

The following is a compendium of press releases, data tables and graphs summarizing rural Minnesotans' views on the three areas of the survey: work force development, taxes and the surplus, and computer and Internet usage. The three sections were released between Feb. 19 and Feb. 26, 2001.

Additional data interpretation and quotes are available by calling:

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**For Immediate Release**

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**New Poll Released on Workforce Development in  
Rural Minnesota**

**Mankato** – In a newly released survey, 11 percent of rural, non-retired residents reported that while they are currently employed full-time, they would prefer holding a job that better fits their skills and education. Further the study estimates that more than one out of every five rural workers would be a good candidate for work force development efforts. These are among the findings of the Rural Minnesota Policy Poll released by the Center for Rural Policy and Development at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The poll, conducted at St. Cloud State University, used random-digit dialing to randomly sample 1,200 rural Minnesota households between January 21 and February 3. Rural residents were defined as those living in Minnesota counties that are not designated by the U.S. Census as Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Consequently, in addition to those living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, residents living in counties such Olmsted (Rochester), Stearns (St. Cloud) and St. Louis (Duluth) were also excluded from the sample. Given the large sample size, the poll has a relatively low estimated margin of error of plus or minus 2.8 percent, 95 percent of the time.

“There has been much discussion regarding the extent to which ‘underemployment’ exists throughout rural Minnesota. Accordingly, we wanted to draw a large enough rural sample to feel confident in our results,” said Dr. Jack Geller, president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development.

In an examination of employment status, 61 percent of rural workers reported that they were employed full-time in a job that fit their skills and education; 16 percent worked part-time by choice; 3 percent worked part-time, but preferred full-time employment; and a surprising 9 percent of non-retired residents reported being currently unemployed. “We have to be careful how we interpret that unemployment figure as it represents both those who are unemployed and are currently looking for employment, as well as people such as homemakers and others who are not currently looking for employment,” Geller noted. “However, when looking at those who might be good candidates for employment and work force development programs, one should look at all working-age residents who are potentially available.”

Other significant findings from the survey include:

- 49 percent of rural, non-retired residents considered receiving additional education and/or training within the past 12 months;
- 32 percent actually received some additional education and/or training in the past 12 months;
- The most common places where workers reported going to receive additional education and/or training were 4-year colleges and universities (28%); at their current employment location (26%); and 2-year community/technical colleges (17%).

The survey also asked all non-retired respondents, “If they were to look for additional training opportunities in their area, where would they go?” To that question, 43 percent reported that they would look to a 4-year college or university and 32 percent would look to a 2-year community or technical college. The findings are quite interesting in light of the current budget debate surrounding higher education and its role in work force development. “If an overwhelming majority (75%) of the rural work force is looking toward Minnesota’s 4-year and 2-year institutions for additional education and training, legislators may have to

reconsider the level and distribution of resources they plan to appropriate for these activities,” Geller said.

Lastly, the survey asked respondents how far they would have to travel to receive additional education and/or training from the source they identified. Thirty percent reported they would have to travel 10 miles or less; 23 percent reported having to travel between 11 and 25 miles; and 46 percent of rural workers reported having to travel more than 26 miles.

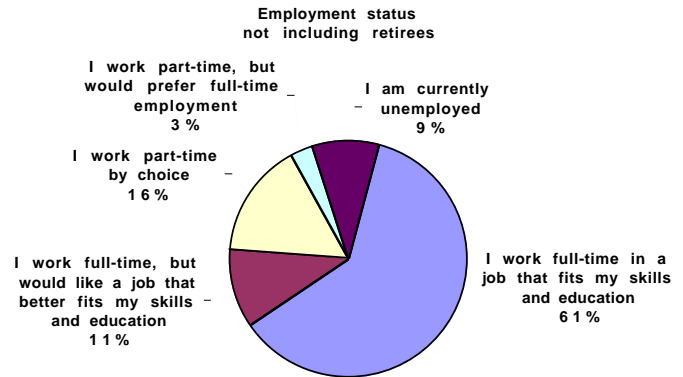
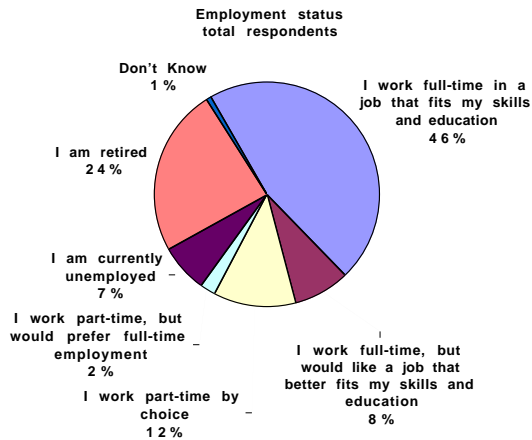
**-- Tables and charts follow --**

###

**Table 1:  
Employment Status**

*“Which of the following best describes your employment status?”*

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	Total percent	Percent non-retired
I work full-time in a job that fits my skills and education	562	46%	61%
I work full-time, but would like to hold a job that better fits my skills and education	99	8%	11%
I work part-time by choice	144	12%	16%
I work part-time, but would prefer full-time employment	26	2%	3%
I am currently unemployed	85	7%	9%
I am retired	295	24%	n/a
Don't Know	7	1%	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>1219</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

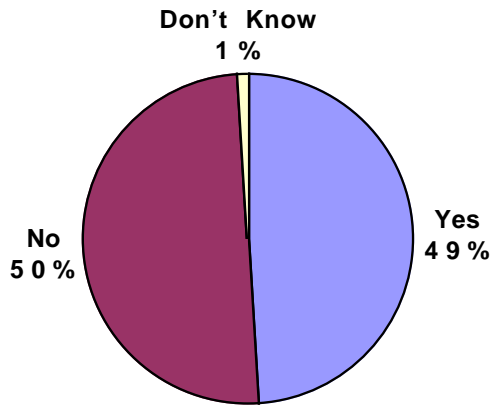


**Table 2:  
Considered Additional Job Training and Education**

*“Within the past year, have you considered receiving additional training and education to improve your job skills and enhance your employment opportunities?”*

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Yes	457	49
No	454	50
Don't Know	9	1
<b>Total</b>	924	100

**Would consider job training**



**Table 3:  
Why Not Consider Additional Training and Education**

*“Why did you not obtain additional training and education?”  
(Respondents allow to select multiple responses)*

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	<b>PCT. RESPONSES</b>
Too Expensive	39	8
No Time	77	17
Don't Know What to Train For	23	5
Training Opportunities Too Far Away	1	0
No Child Care	12	2
Didn't Want to Go	88	19
Probably Will Not Matter For Future	35	7
Why Train, No New Good Jobs	5	0
I Lack the Ability to Train For New Job	5	0
Family Commitments Come First	17	3
Need to Go But Not Provided By Work	5	0
Other	138	31
Don't Know	40	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>100</b>

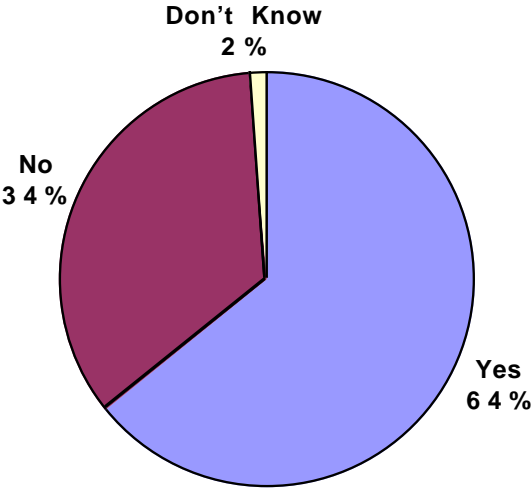


**Table 4:  
Received Job Skill Training**

***“Within the past year have you received any additional training to improve your job skills and enhance your employment opportunities?”  
(Of those saying they have considered seeking training)***

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Yes	298	64
No	160	34
Don't Know	7	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>100</b>

**Received job skill training**



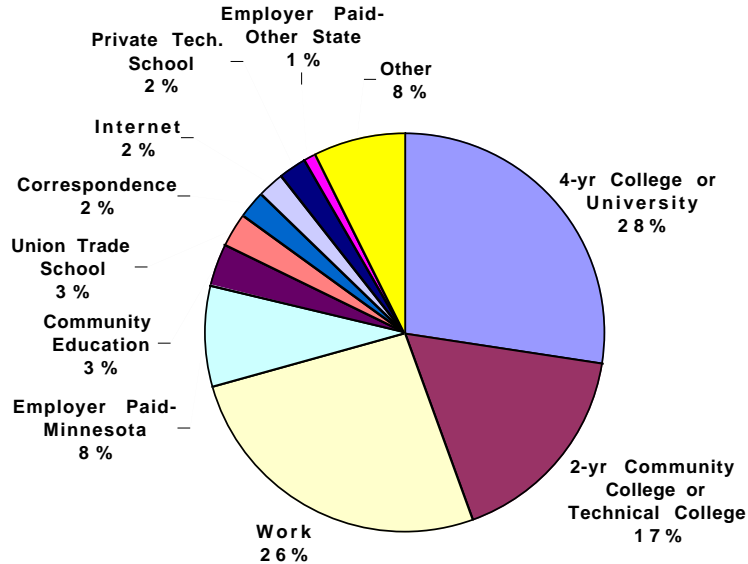
**Table 5:  
Location of Training Received**

***“Where did you receive your training?”***

***(Respondents were allowed to select multiple responses)***

4-yr College or University	88	28%
2-yr Community College or Technical College	54	17%
Work	83	26%
Employer Paid-Minnesota	27	8%
Community Education	10	3%
Union Trade School	9	3%
Correspondence	7	2%
Internet	7	2%
Private Tech. School	7	2%
Employer Paid-Other State	3	1%
Don't Know	1	0%
Other	24	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100%</b>

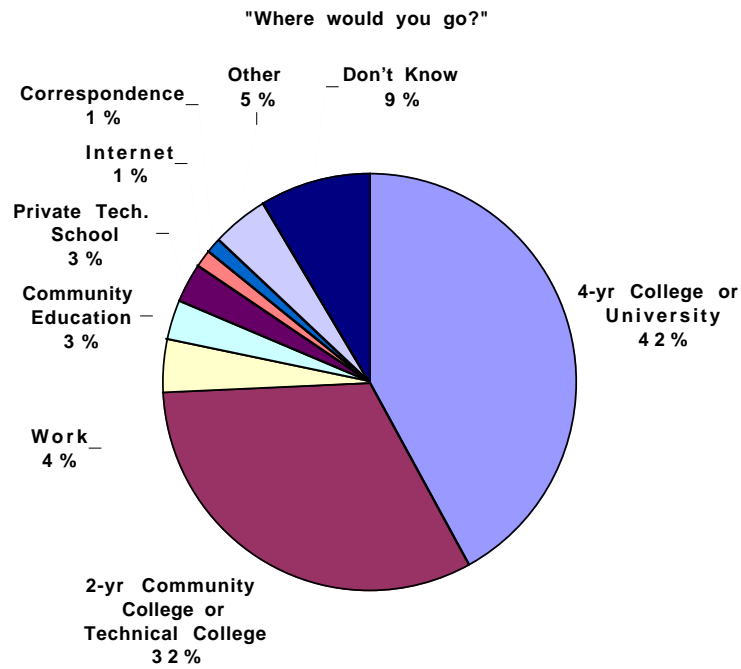
Received training at...



**Table 6:  
Location of Training Opportunity**

***“If you were to look for additional training opportunities in your community or region, where would you go?”***  
***(Respondents allowed to select multiple responses)***

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	<b>PCT. RESPONSES</b>
4-yr College or University	419	42%
2-yr Community College or Technical College	322	32%
Work	43	4%
Community Education	31	3%
Private Tech. School	30	3%
Internet	13	1%
Correspondence	11	1%
Union Trade School	5	0%
Military	1	0%
Other	46	5%
Don't Know	85	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1006</b>	<b>100</b>

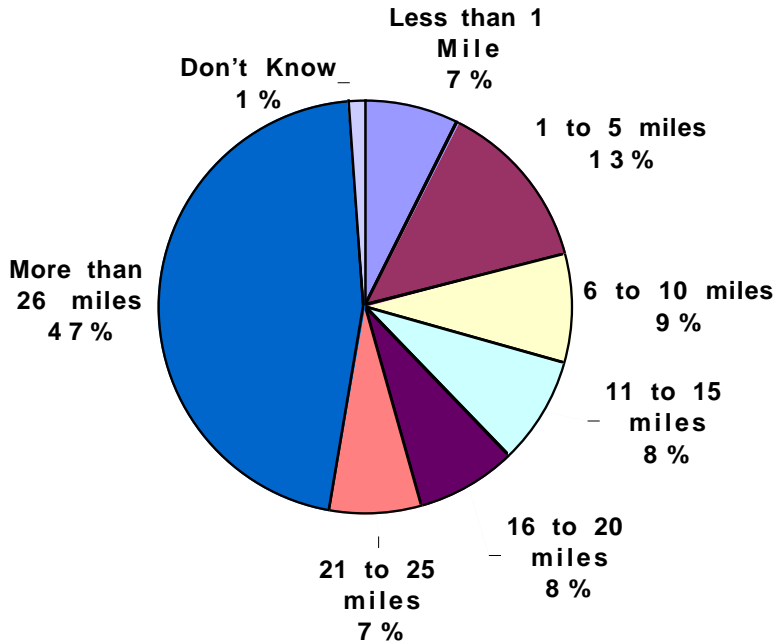


**Table 7:  
Miles to Location of Training**

*“How many miles from your home would you have to travel to receive this training?”*

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Less Than 1 Mile	61	7
1 to 5 Miles	111	14
6 to 10 Miles	72	9
11 to 15 Miles	67	8
16 to 20 Miles	66	8
21 to 25 Miles	60	7
More Than 26 Miles	378	46
Don't Know	11	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>100</b>

**Miles to Location of Training**



For Immediate Release  
Feb. 26, 2001

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### **Rural Minnesota Speaks Out on Surpluses and Tax Initiatives**

**Mankato** – When asked their preferences about what should be done with the budget surplus, 75 percent of rural Minnesotans said they would prefer seeing the surplus used to make needed investments in education and transportation, rather than receiving a sales tax rebate. Those are among the findings of the first Rural Minnesota Policy Poll, released today by the Center for Rural Policy and Development at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The poll, which was administered between January 21<sup>st</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, surveyed 1,200 randomly selected rural Minnesota households. Due to the large sample size, the estimated margin of error for the survey is  $\pm 2.8$  percent.

According to Dr. Jack Geller, president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development, the Center was concerned that rural Minnesota's voices not get lost in the current tax policy debate. "The discussion going on right now about the Governor's budget and property tax reform is extremely important to the future of the state. Consequently, we wanted to make sure that rural Minnesota's view is heard, and we wanted to draw a large enough sample to ensure that an accurate estimate of those views were made," Geller said.

Respondents to the poll were asked if they agreed that legislators should make greater investments in K-12 education, higher education, transportation and other areas instead of distributing the surplus as tax rebates. Three-quarters of the rural respondents agreed, 19 percent disagreed and 6 percent were uncertain. Asked whether instead of rebates, the state should use the surplus to create an endowment from which one-time needs could be addressed, 57 percent agreed, 32 percent disagreed, with 11 percent uncertain. And lastly, when asked if they agreed with simply maintaining the tax rebates as they are, 43 percent agreed, 46 percent disagreed, and 11 percent were uncertain.

"Clearly, there seems to be sizeable support in rural Minnesota to make some degree of strategic investments with the current surplus," Geller said. "But considering that 43 percent preferred to simply leave the rebates alone, it appears that some middle-ground strategy, balancing investments with rebates, would be a logical solution."

Poll respondents were also asked about their views on the administration's proposal to take over a greater percentage of K-12 general instruction, thereby lowering property taxes. To that proposal 60 percent agreed, 26 percent disagreed, and 14 percent were uncertain. Further, respondents were split when asked whether they were concerned that financing a greater share of K-12 education with state funds might lead to a greater loss of local control. To that question, 42 percent agreed and 42 percent disagreed.

Poll respondents were also quite clear on their views regarding the broadening of the state sales tax to services currently exempt. When asked, 34 percent agreed to a broadening of the sales tax, while 60 percent disagreed with that strategy. When asked whether they would increase their support for a broadening of the sales tax if the overall tax rate was reduced from 6.5 percent to 6 percent, 37 percent said yes, while 55 percent said no.

"The data seems to suggest that rural Minnesotans support greater financial participation by the state in K-12 education and the reduced property tax that would result. However, it also appears that rural Minnesotans don't support a broadening of the sales tax as the necessary trade-off," said Geller.

Finally, rural respondents were asked whether it was more important to them to have a tax system where citizens could understand which taxes pay for which programs, or whether they were more concerned with the overall tax burden. To that question, 45 percent reported that it was important to understand which tax supports which program, 35 percent reported that the overall tax burden was more important, and 14 percent reported that both were important.

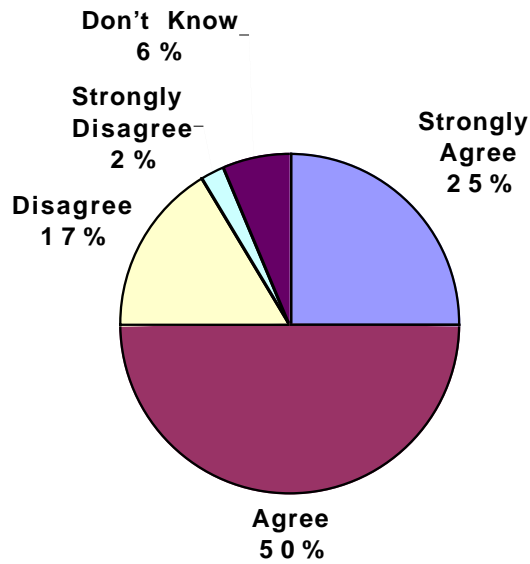
**-- Tables and charts follow --**

**Table 1:  
Invest in Education, Transportation and Other Program Areas  
Instead of Tax Rebates**

*“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that instead of tax rebates, Minnesota’s legislature should make greater investments in K-12 education and higher education, transportation and other needed areas?”*

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Strongly Agree	305	25
Agree	601	50
Disagree	202	16
Strongly Disagree	25	2
Don't Know	78	7
<b>Total</b>	1211	100

**Invest in education and transportation  
instead of rebates?**

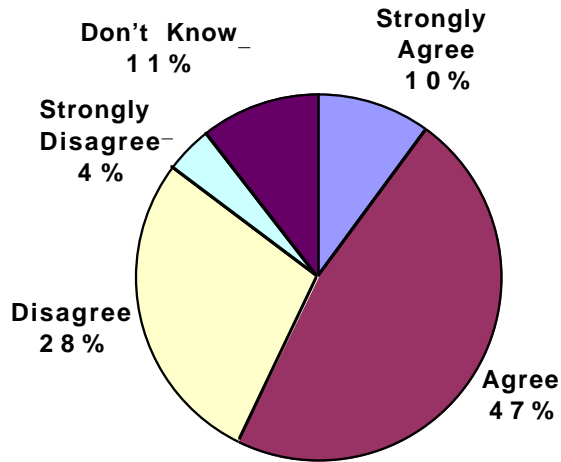


**Table 2:  
Use the Surplus to Establish a State Endowment**

***“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that Minnesota’s legislature should use the surplus to establish a state endowment, where the interest could be used for a variety of one-time needs in areas such as education and transportation?”***

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Strongly Agree	121	10
Agree	571	47
Disagree	341	28
Strongly Disagree	51	4
Don't Know	128	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>1212</b>	<b>100</b>

**Use the surplus to establish a state endowment?**



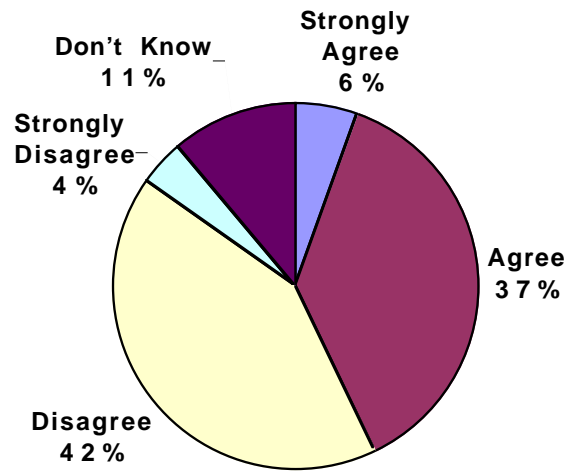


**Table 3:  
Maintain Existing Tax Rebates**

*“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that Minnesota’s legislature should maintain the tax rebates as they are?”*

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Strongly Agree	67	6
Agree	452	37
Disagree	511	42
Strongly Disagree	49	4
Don't Know	135	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>1214</b>	<b>100</b>

**Maintain existing tax rebates?**

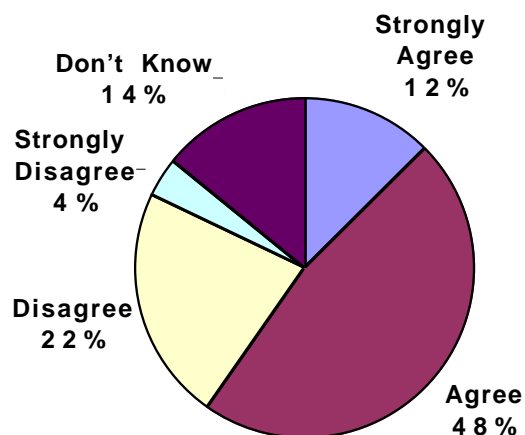


**Table 4:  
Lowered Property Taxes for 100% State Funding of Local Education Costs**

*“The Ventura administration has proposed lowering local property taxes for K-12 education and replacing it with an increase in direct state funding. The state currently pays about 70% of local education costs. The Ventura proposal would raise state aid to 100% of local education costs. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with this proposal?”*

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	150	12
Agree	571	48
Disagree	271	22
Strongly Disagree	45	4
Don't Know	170	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>1206</b>	<b>100</b>

**Lower property taxes in exchange for 100% state funding of basic education?**

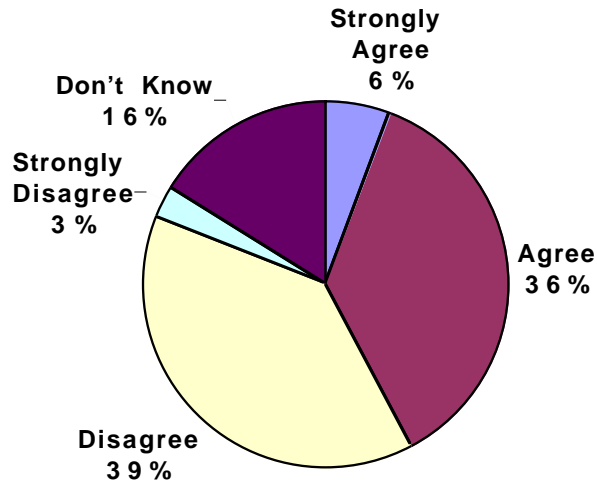


**Table 5:  
Does Increased State Funding of Local Education Mean  
Increased State Control of Local Education**

*“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree as some school officials have suggested, that if the state pays a greater percentage of funding for basic instruction, that local school districts will lose a greater amount of local control?”*

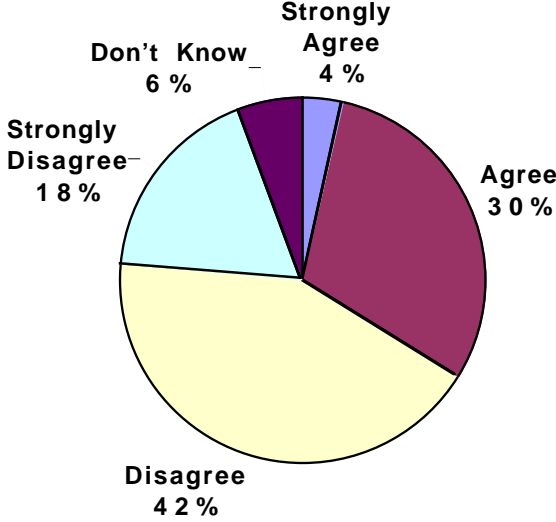
RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	71	6
Agree	440	36
Disagree	472	39
Strongly Disagree	31	3
Don't Know	196	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>1210</b>	<b>100</b>

**Does increased state funding mean  
increased state control?**



<p align="center"><b>Table 6:</b>  <b>Extend State Sales Tax to Services to Cover Increased State Funding to Basic Education</b></p>		
<p align="center"><i>“The Ventura administration estimates that it would cost the state an additional \$900 million per year to increase state aid for basic instruction from 70% to 100%. One way to generate the estimated \$900 million is to broaden the sales tax to include various services such as haircuts, car washes and legal services that are currently exempt. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree the state should broaden the sales tax to new services?”</i></p>		
RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	45	4
Agree	366	30
Disagree	514	42
Strongly Disagree	215	18
Don't Know	71	6
<b>Total</b>	1212	100

**Broaden sales tax to cover basic education?**

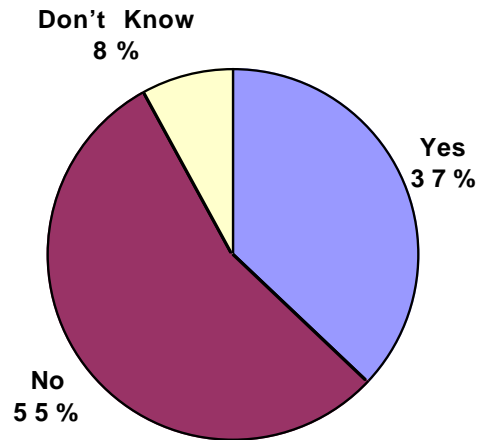


**Table 7:  
Tax Services if Tax Rate is Lowered**

***“Would you change your answer from a disagree to an agree if the overall tax rate were lowered from 6 1/2% to 6%?”***

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Yes	268	37
No	401	55
Don't Know	59	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>100</b>

**Put sales tax on services if overall sales tax is lowered?**

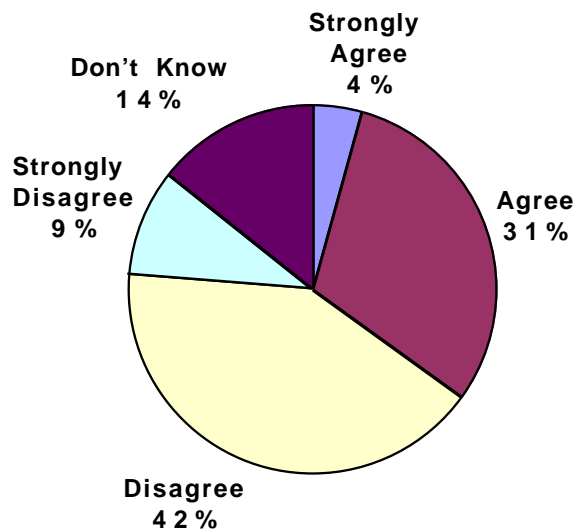


**Table 8:  
Reduce State Aid to Cities and Counties and Use Those Funds for State Funding  
of Local Education Costs**

*“Another way to generate some of the estimated \$900 million is to reduce existing state aid to cities and counties and use those savings to increase the state’s funding for K-12 education. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree the state should reduce state aid to cities and counties and use those savings to increase state funding for K-12 education?”*

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	52	4
Agree	368	31
Disagree	500	42
Strongly Disagree	113	9
Don't Know	170	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>100</b>

**Reduce state aid to cities and counties to  
increase funding for education?**

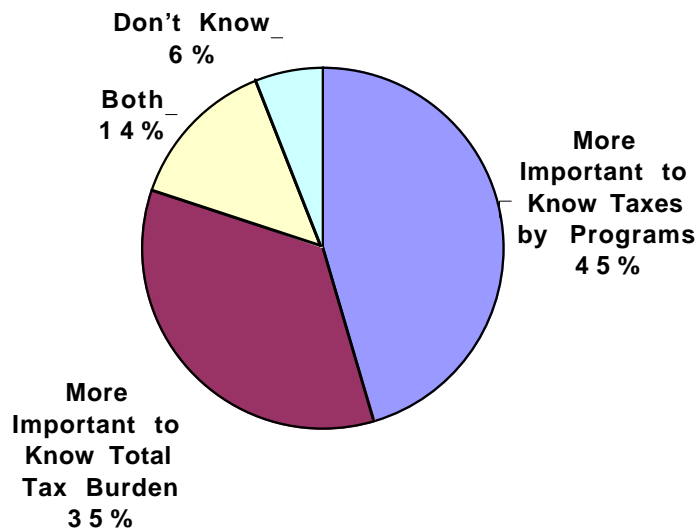


**Table 9:  
Taxes by Program or Total Tax Burden**

*“Is it more important for you to understand which tax is used to support which state program or are you more interested in knowing your total tax burden?”*

<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
More Important to Know Taxes by Programs	544	45
More Important to Know Total Tax Burden	423	35
Both	166	14
Don't Know	72	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1205</b>	<b>100</b>

**More important to know your taxes by program or total tax burden?**



For Immediate Release

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### **New Poll Studies Internet Use Patterns of Rural Minnesotans**

**Mankato** – While only 60 percent of rural Minnesota households possess a working computer, of those that do, 80 percent are connected to the Internet. Those are among the findings of the first Rural Minnesota Policy Poll, released today by the Center for Rural Policy and Development at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The poll, which was administered between January 21<sup>st</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, surveyed 1,200 randomly selected rural Minnesota households. Due to the large sample size, the estimated margin of error for the survey is 2.8 percent.

According to Dr. Jack M. Geller, president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development, the Center has been studying the advances in the telecommunications industry and the implications for rural Minnesota for well over a year now. “But we kept going back to the fact that we didn’t have good data on the basic Internet use patterns of rural residents,” said Geller. “The findings from this poll help fill a large part of that void.”

Other key findings from the poll document that of those rural residents who are online:

- They are “online” an average of 8 hours per week;
- 55 percent have purchased items over the Internet within the past 12 months; and
- 94 percent regularly send email messages to friends and relatives;

“One area that we were particularly interested in was the adoption and diffusion of high-speed services throughout rural Minnesota, so we asked respondents how they connect to the Internet,” said Marnie Werner, program manager for telecommunications at the Center. The poll documented that of those rural households that have an Internet



connection, 78 percent connect through a dial-up connection, 8 percent reported connecting through a high-speed DSL connection and 5 percent utilize a high-speed cable modem. The remaining 7 percent of respondents reported that they were either uncertain or did not know how their computer connected to the Internet.

When those with a dial-up connection were asked at what price they would consider upgrading to a high-speed connection, a surprising 55 percent reported that they were not interested in upgrading their connection. Slightly more than one-third (35 percent) reported that they would upgrade to a high-speed connection if the monthly costs were less than \$30 and the remaining 10 percent reported that they would upgrade at higher monthly rates.

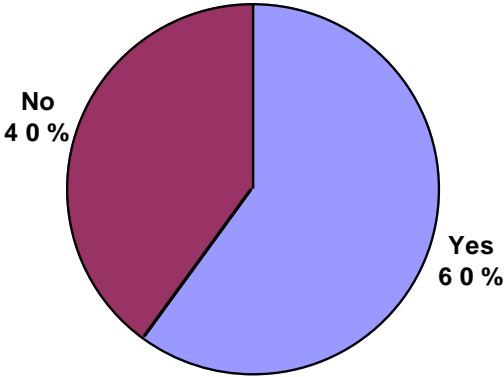
"This new data clearly tells us that most rural households go online primarily to send email and to surf the web for recreation. This presents an interesting challenge to those companies that provide, or want to provide, high-speed services to rural users," Geller said. "While rural businesses, schools, governments and potential telecommuters clearly need high-speed services, the bulk of rural residents have yet to find a good reason to upgrade. Telecommunications providers will need to lower prices, conduct better marketing, and most importantly, develop the applications that will lead to more high-volume users," he added.

###

**Table 1:** Home personal computer ownership

<i>“Do you have a working personal computer in your home?”</i>		
RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Yes	723	60
No	488	40
Total	1211	100

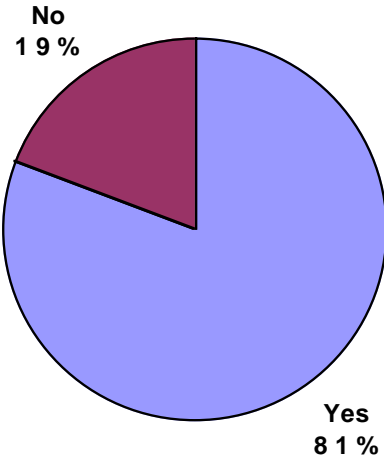
**Percent with personal computer in home**



**Table 2:** Home Internet connection  
Of those responding that they have a working computer in their home.

<i>"Is your computer connected to the Internet?"</i>		
<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Yes	582	81
No	137	19
Don't Know	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>100</b>

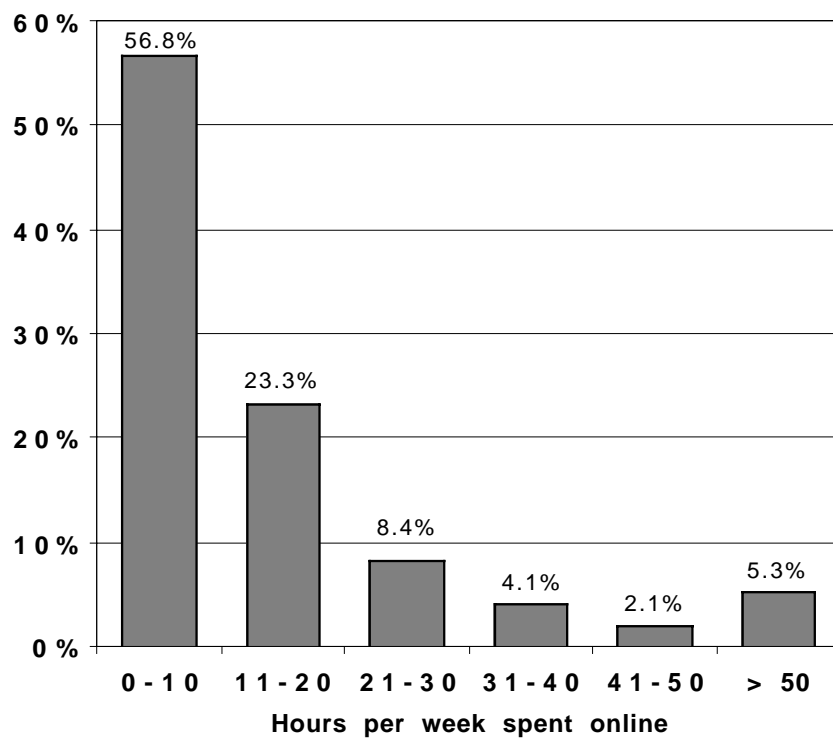
**Percent connected to Internet**



**Table 3:** Hours per week spent online

Of those responding that their computer is connected to the Internet.

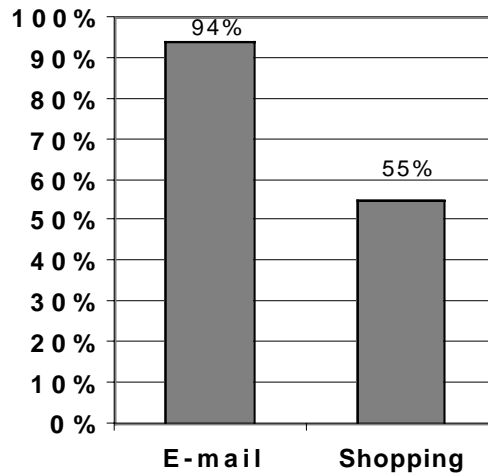
<i><b>“How many hours per week do members of your household spend online?”</b></i>		
<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
<b>0-10 hours</b>	332	56.8%
<b>11-20 hours</b>	136	23.3%
<b>21-30 hours</b>	49	8.4%
<b>31-40 hours</b>	24	4.1%
<b>41-50 hours</b>	12	2.1%
<b>More than 50 hours</b>	31	5.3%
<b>Mean response is 8.81, with a standard deviation of 12.55. Median is 4. Don't know responses are not included in mean, median and standard deviation.</b>		



**Table 4:** Online usage

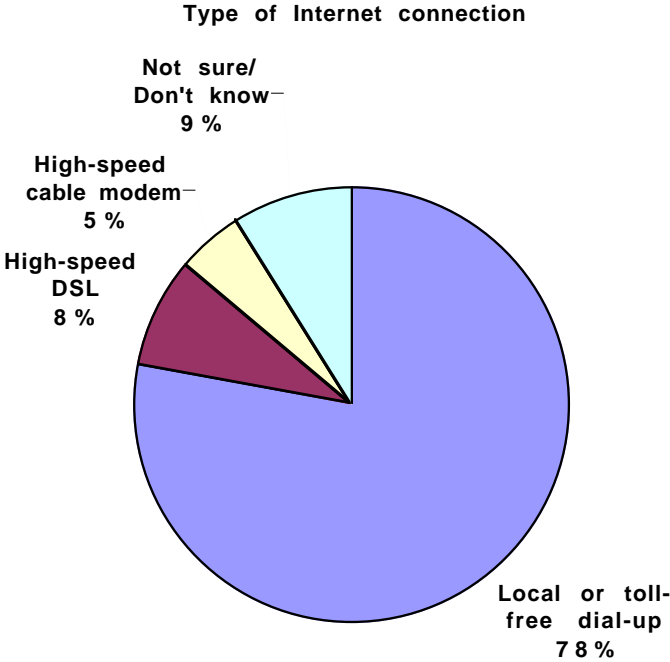
<i>“Within the past year, have you or anyone in your household purchased anything over the internet?”</i>		
<i>“Do you are anyone in your household regularly send email messages to friends and relatives?”</i>		
<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
<b>E-mail</b>	549	94%
<b>Shopping</b>	321	55%
<b>Out of:</b>	582	100%

**Internet use**



**Table 5:** Type of Internet connection

<i>“Do you connect your computer to the internet by.....?”</i>		
<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Dialing a local or toll-free number	453	78
Going through a high-speed DSL connection	49	8
Going through a high-speed connection provided by your cable TV provider	31	5
Not certain/Don't know	47	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>581</b>	<b>100</b>



**Table 6:** Willingness to pay for high-speed Internet connection

<i><b>“High-Speed internet service is more expensive than dial-up service. If available in your community, at what monthly price would you consider upgrading to a higher-speed connection?”</b></i>		
<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
\$25-30 Per Month	160	35
\$30-40 Per Month	24	5
\$40-50 Per Month	8	2
\$50-60 Per Month	5	1
More than \$60 Per Month	0	0
I’m Happy with my Dial-Up Connection and not Interested in Upgrading	245	55
Don’t Know	10	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100</b>

**Willingness to pay for high-speed service**

