



Blandin Foundation

Rural Pulse™ 2010

October 2010

Russell Herder



Contents

Project Goal	3
Methodology	4
Demographics	6
Findings	10

Project Goal

The Blandin Foundation, Minnesota's largest rural-based private foundation, is dedicated to strengthening rural Minnesota communities through grants, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives. As a part of its efforts, the organization periodically commissions research called Rural Pulse™, designed to gain a deeper understanding of the issues of critical importance to rural Minnesotans.

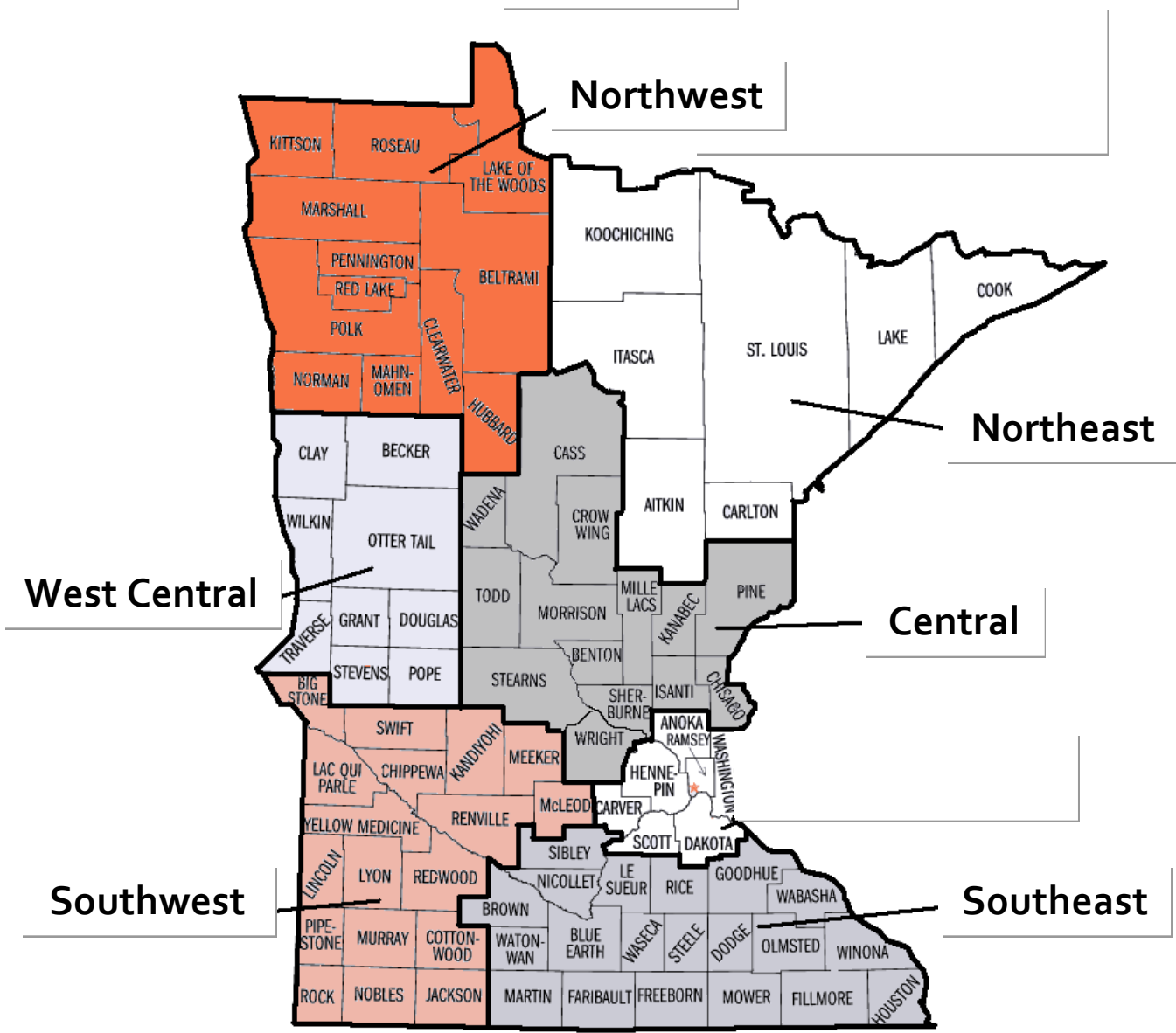
Methodology

Independent research and communications consultants, Russell Herder, were retained to conduct this study. The survey instrument for Rural Pulse™ 2010 was developed in cooperation with Blandin Foundation leadership. Where possible and relevant, certain questions from past studies were repeated for comparison purposes.

Telephone interviews were conducted with rural Minnesotans in September 2010. A random sample of landline and wireless phone numbers across Minnesota were purchased for use in this study, excluding the seven-county Twin Cities metro area and those in zip codes with populations of 35,000 or more. In addition, participation in the survey was invited via a ListServ to Minnesota Newspaper Association members. The resulting total of 1,064 rural residents provides a statistical reliability of +/-3.2 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

All completed questionnaires were processed and analyzed using SPSS software. The data was sorted by gender, age, income, region and business ownership, and weighted to reflect state demographics.

REGIONS

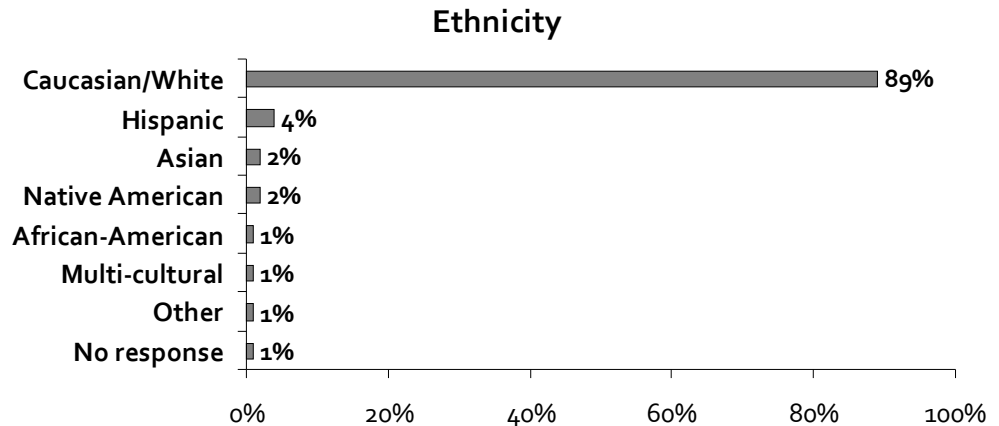
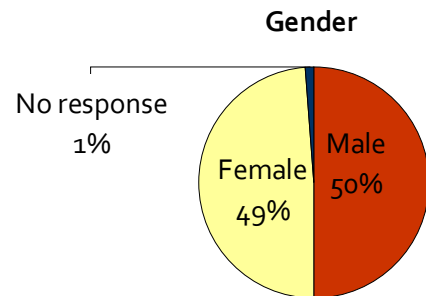
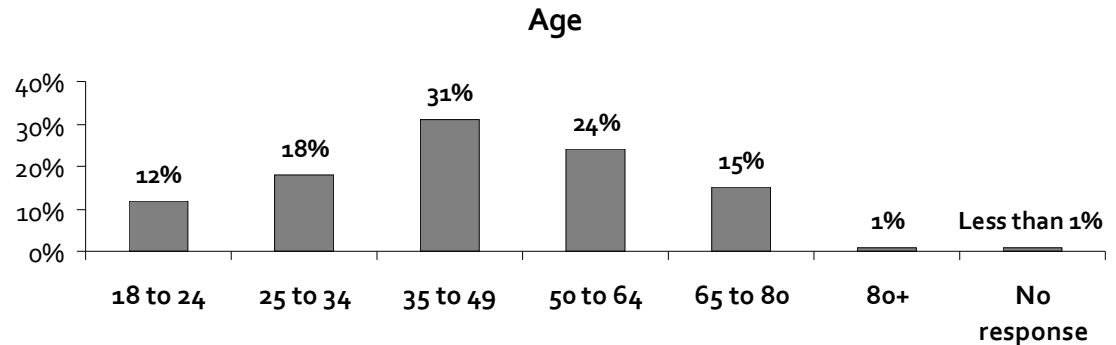


Demographics

Age categories were broken down as follows: 31 percent ages 35 to 49; 24 percent ages 50 to 64; 18 percent ages 25 to 34; 15 percent ages 65 to 80; 12 percent ages 18 to 24; and one percent ages 80+. Less than one percent did not provide their age.

Gender was nearly equally represented, with 50 percent men and 49 percent women. One percent did not note their gender.

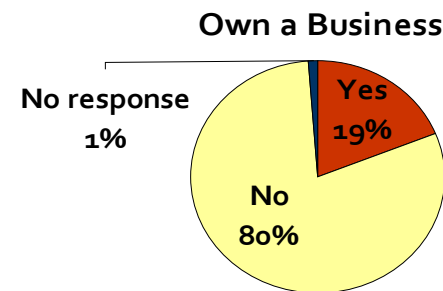
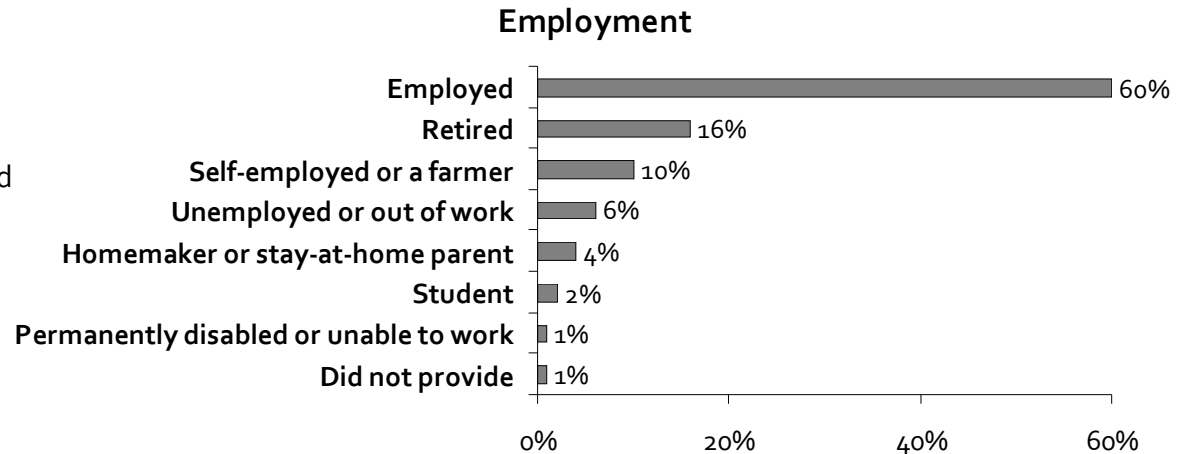
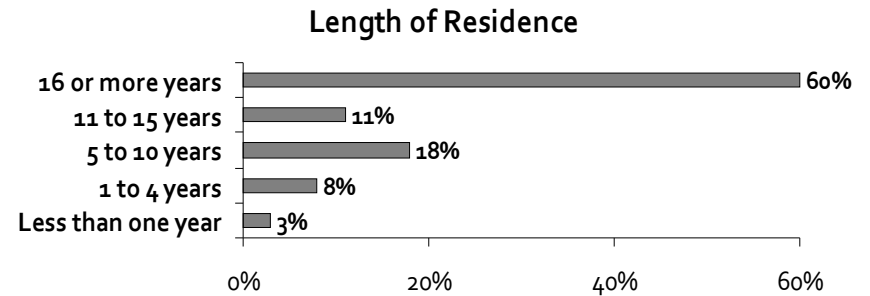
Nine in 10 (89%) respondents were Caucasian. Ethnicities responding included Hispanic (4%); Asian and Native American (2% each); African-American (1%); and one percent cited other nationalities. Another one percent considered themselves multi-cultural, while one percent did not provide this information.



Three in five (60%) respondents said they have lived in their community for 16 or more years, followed by five to 10 years (18%), 11 to 15 years (11%), one to four years (8%), and less than one year (3%).

Sixty percent of respondents said they are employed and 10 percent noted self-employment or farming. Of those who said they do not work, 16 percent said they are retired, six percent unemployed, four percent homemakers, two percent students and one percent cited a permanent disability or that they are unable to work for another reason.

Nearly two in five (19%) respondents said they own a business of some type. Men were the most likely to say such (23%, men; 16%, women).

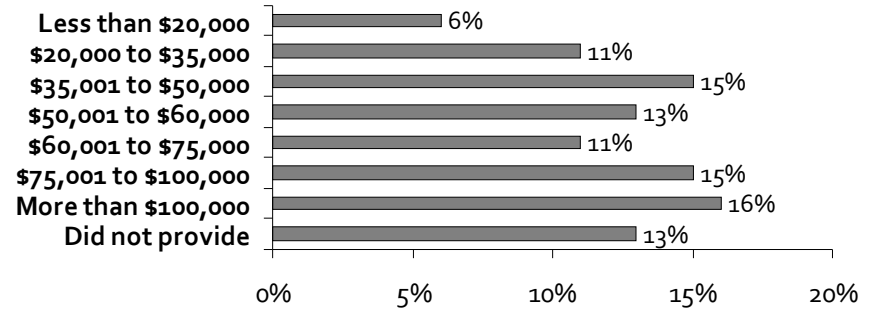


Sixteen percent of respondents cited their family income as more than \$100,000, followed by \$75,001 to \$100,000 and \$35,001 to \$50,000 (15% each), \$50,001 to \$60,000 (13%), \$60,001 to \$75,000 and \$20,000 to \$35,000 (11% each), and less than \$20,000 (6%). Thirteen percent did not provide income information.

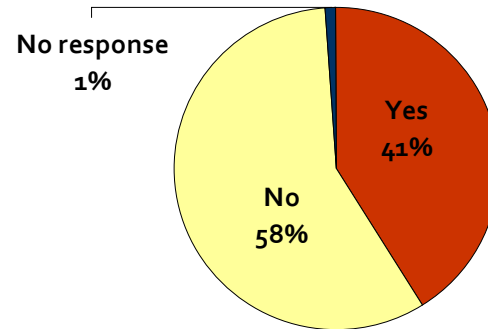
Two in five rural Minnesotans (41%) noted at least one child 18-years-old or younger resides in their household.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents said the community they live in or nearest to has a population of between 500 and 4,999 people. Another 30 percent cited a population size of 5,000 to 14,999, followed by 15,000 to 24,999 (14%), less than 500 (11%), and 25,000 to 34,999 (3%). Four percent were unsure.

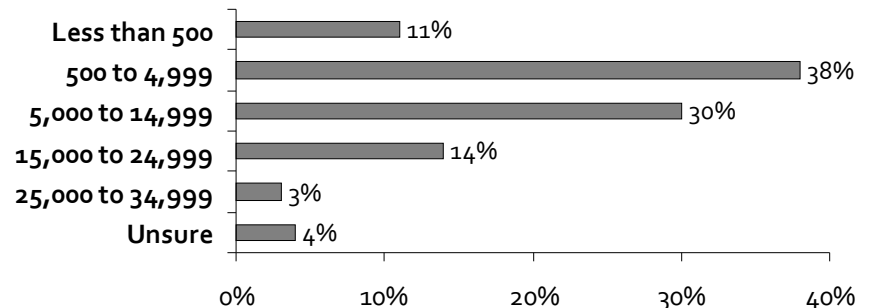
Family Income



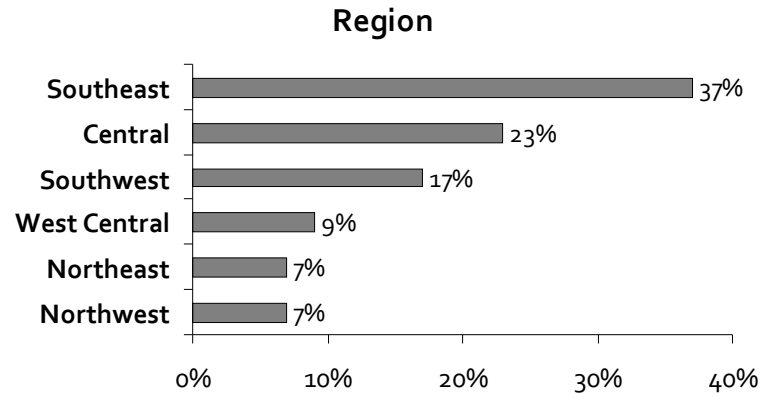
Children in Household



Community Population



Regional breakdowns for respondents were as follows: Southeast (37%), Central (23%), Southwest (17%), West Central (9%), and Northeast and Northwest both at seven percent.



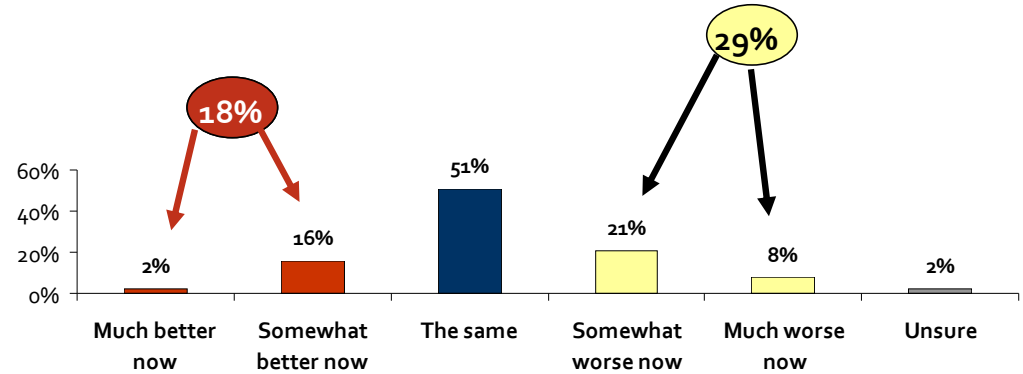
FINDINGS

Economic Concerns Continue.

Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community's economy now compared to a year ago. Eighteen percent said they felt it had improved, 51 percent said it had stayed the same, and 29 percent indicated that their local economy had worsened over the last year. Belief that the economic condition had declined was 12 percent greater than opinions expressed 10 years ago in Rural Pulse 2000.

Older residents (age 50+) and those residing in Central Minnesota voiced the least confidence in their community's current economy in this year's study.

Condition of Community's Economy Right Now, Compared With Its Condition One Year Ago



Change in Condition of Economy		
	2010 Rural Pulse™	2000 Rural Pulse™
Better	18%	38%
Same	51%	44%
Worse	29%	17%

Condition of Economy Versus a Year Ago						
	Region					
	Northeast	Northwest	West Central	Central	Southwest	Southeast
Better	18%	25%	36%	15%	13%	16%
Same	62%	59%	46%	38%	54%	54%
Worse	18%	16%	16%	44%	32%	28%

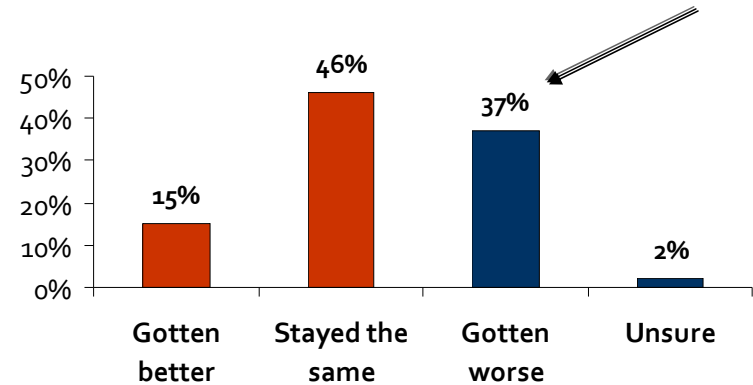
Condition of Economy Versus a Year Ago					
	Age				
	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65+
Better	26%	19%	17%	17%	16%
Same	46%	62%	52%	46%	45%
Worse	21%	17%	30%	37%	38%

Quality of Life has Softened, but Optimism Exists.

Rural Minnesotans were also queried about their perceptions of community quality of life. Fifteen percent felt local quality of life had improved over the past five years, 46 percent felt it was essentially the same, and 37 percent said it had declined. By comparison, results in Rural Pulse 2000 found that only nine percent felt local quality of life had decreased.

Rural residents ages 35 to 64 and those earning \$35,000 or less were the least confident in local quality of life.

Quality of Community Life Over Past Five Years



Change in Quality of Life		
	2010 Rural Pulse™	2000 Rural Pulse™
Better	15%	26%
Same	46%	65%
Worse	37%	9%

Quality of Life Over Past Five Years					
	Age				
	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65+
Better	17%	13%	15%	13%	18%
Same	51%	56%	42%	42%	47%
Worse	33%	27%	41%	44%	34%

Quality of Life Over Past Five Years				
	Income			
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
Better	12%	15%	17%	20%
Same	40%	48%	45%	45%
Worse	47%	36%	37%	34%

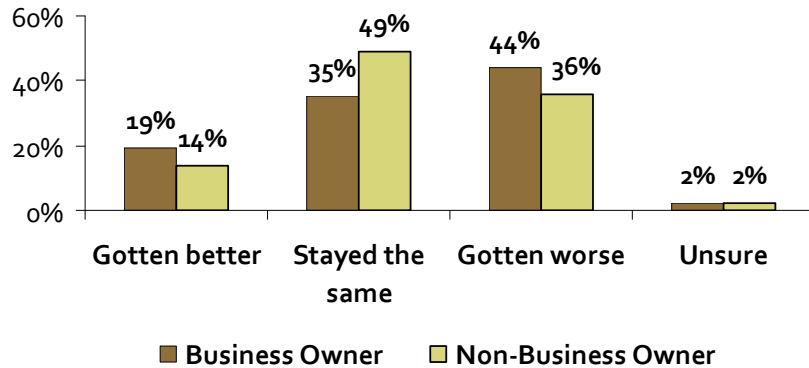


Likewise, those residing in Central Minnesota and business owners were the most likely to observe decreased quality of life.

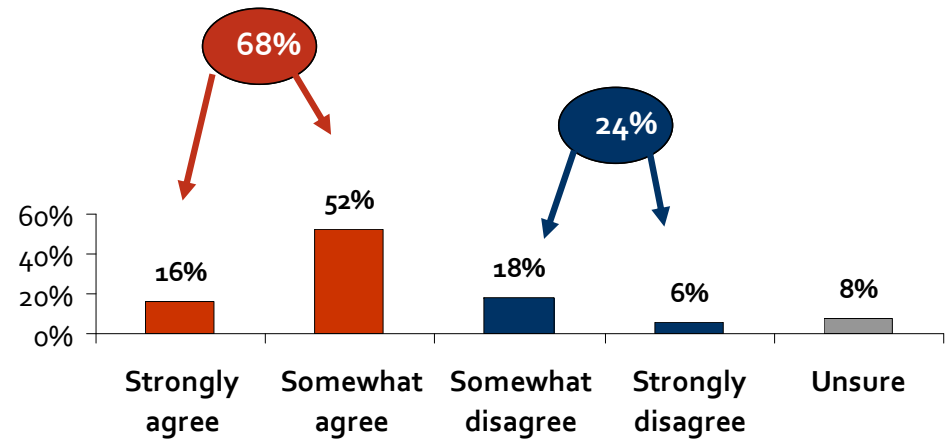
Looking forward, however, nearly seven in 10 rural Minnesotans felt optimistic about the prospects for improvement. Sixty-eight percent said they believe quality of life will improve in their community over the next five years, while 24 percent felt it would not.

Quality of Life Over Past Five Years						
	Region					
	Northeast	Northwest	West Central	Central	Southwest	Southeast
Better	10%	18%	17%	14%	20%	13%
Same	55%	52%	42%	38%	43%	51%
Worse	35%	29%	39%	47%	35%	34%

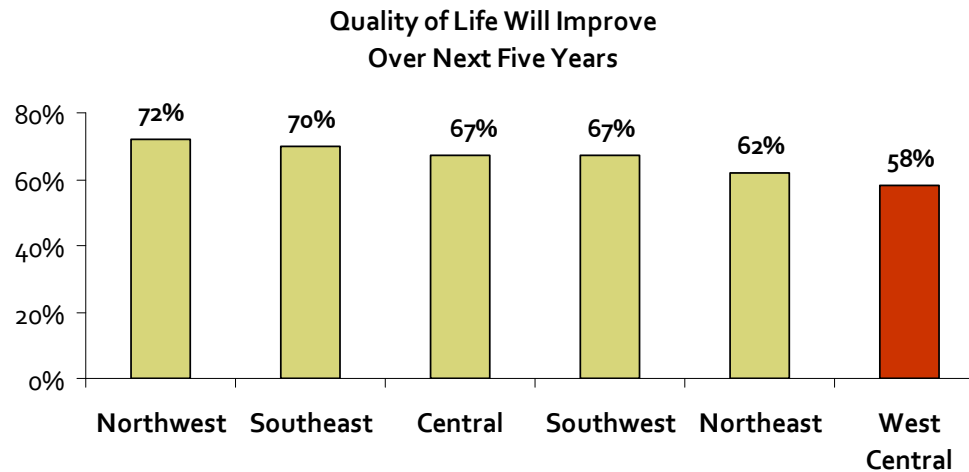
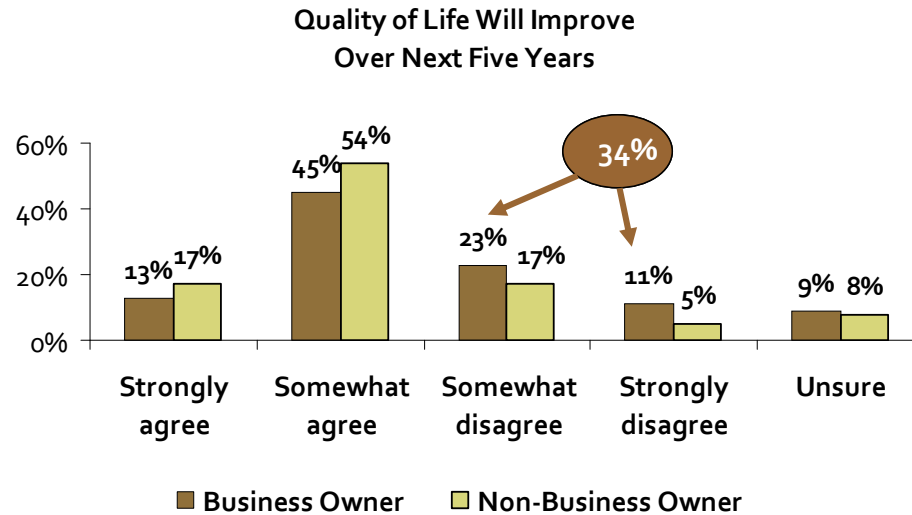
Quality of Life Over Past Five Years



Quality of Life Will Improve Over Next Five Years



Business owners were less confident (58% vs.71%) that quality of life would improve. Residents in the West Central region were also the least confident of such (58%).

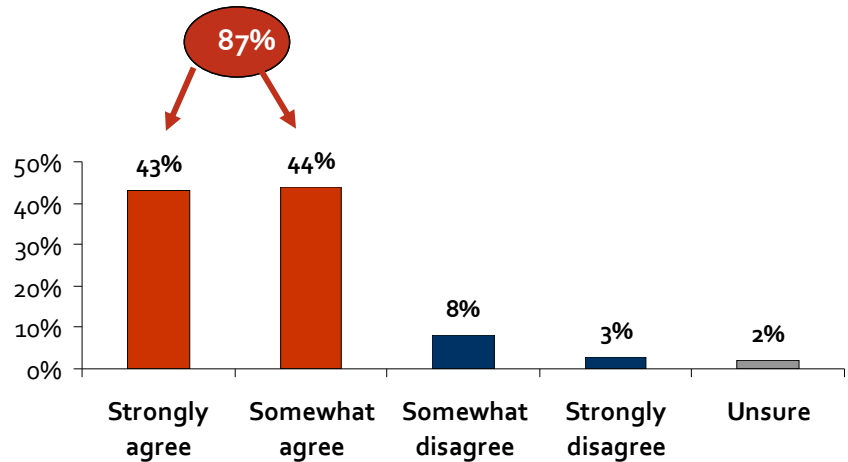


Personal Ability to Affect Change Exists, As May a Lack of Collaboration.

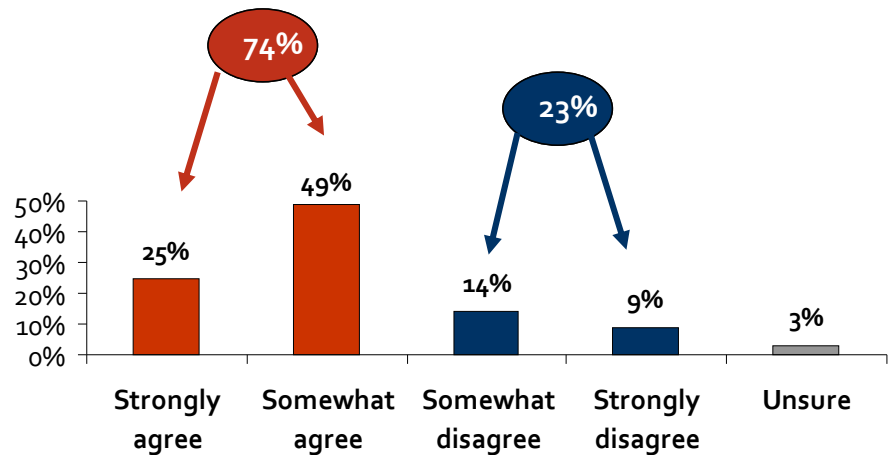
While rural Minnesotans expressed some concern about the economy and quality of life in their local communities, they were far more optimistic about their ability to personally impact change. Those surveyed were asked whether they felt people like themselves are able to make an impact and improve local quality of life. Eighty-seven percent said they could, with only 11 percent believing they did not have the ability to influence local change. Women were the most likely (91% vs. 84%) to agree with the statement.

When asked whether they felt their community members worked well together, however, confidence was not nearly as great. Nearly one in four (23%) said they did not feel their community worked together cohesively, compared to 74 percent who said that they felt it does.

People Like Me Are Able to Make an Impact and Make Our Community a Better Place to Live



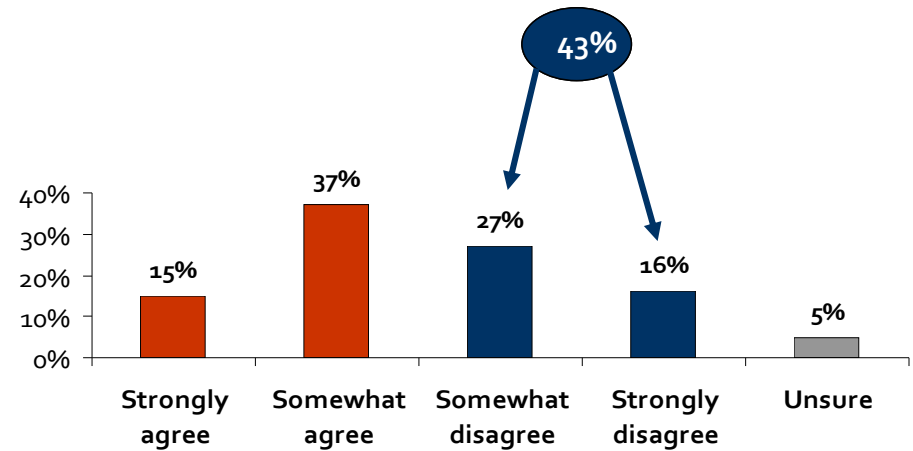
Residents In My Community Work Together Effectively to Address Local Issues



While approximately half (52%) of rural residents said they felt local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds, 43 percent noted that it is not.

Perhaps noteworthy were the differences in opinions based on age, income and regionality. Younger residents – those ages 18 to 24 – were the most confident in their ability to personally impact change and local leadership diversity, while those with lower incomes (\$35,000 or under) were the least likely to believe this was true.

People From Different Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within My Community



Collaboration and Leadership					
	Age				
	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65+
People like me are able to make an impact and make our community a better place to live.	96%	92%	87%	85%	82%
People from different backgrounds fill leadership roles within my community.	67%	48%	48%	50%	58%

Strongly or Somewhat Agree

Collaboration and Leadership				
	Income			
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
People like me are able to make an impact and make our community a better place to live.	15%	9%	10%	8%
Residents in my community work together effectively to address local issues.	31%	19%	23%	17%

Strongly or Somewhat Disagree

Those in northeastern Minnesota were most concerned about their community's ability to work together, while those in the southwest felt local leadership was the least diversified.

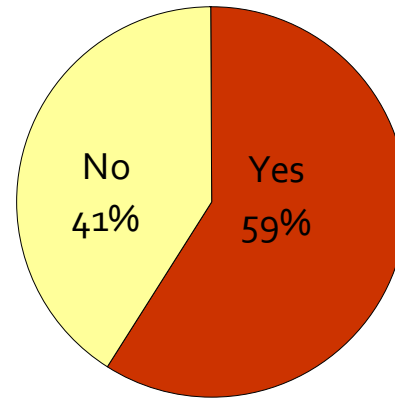
Collaboration and Leadership						
	Region					
	Northeast	Northwest	West Central	Central	Southwest	Southeast
Residents in my community work together effectively to address local issues.	31%	15%	22%	23%	25%	23%
People from different backgrounds fill leadership roles within my community.	41%	34%	41%	41%	53%	42%

Strongly or Somewhat Disagree

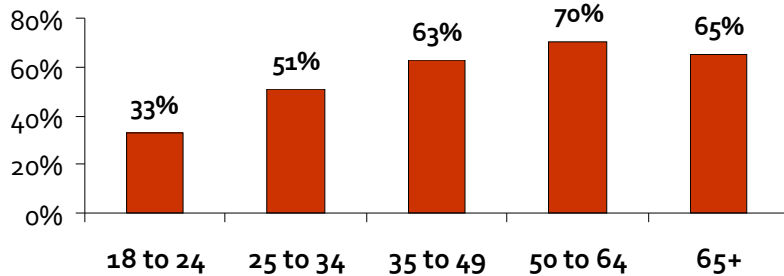
Interestingly, while many rural Minnesotans do not believe the leadership in their community is adequately diversified, 41 percent said they have never been approached to serve in a leadership role in any capacity from youth sports to city government or with a local nonprofit organization.

Demographics clearly appear to play a role in likelihood to being asked to serve. Older residents, those with high incomes and business owners were the most likely to say their leadership was requested. Residents of the West Central region were the least likely rural Minnesotans to say such.

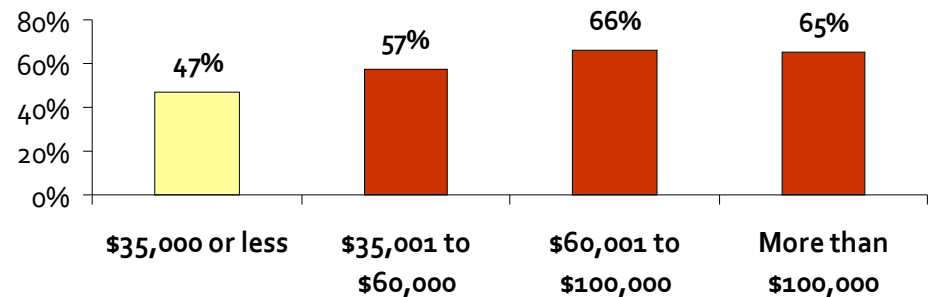
Have You Ever Been Invited to Serve In A Leadership Role In Any Way In Your Community?



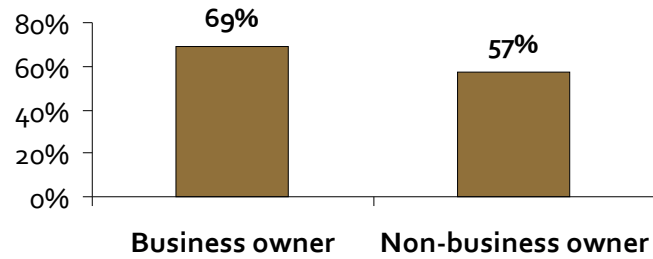
Invited to Serve In a Leadership Role By Age



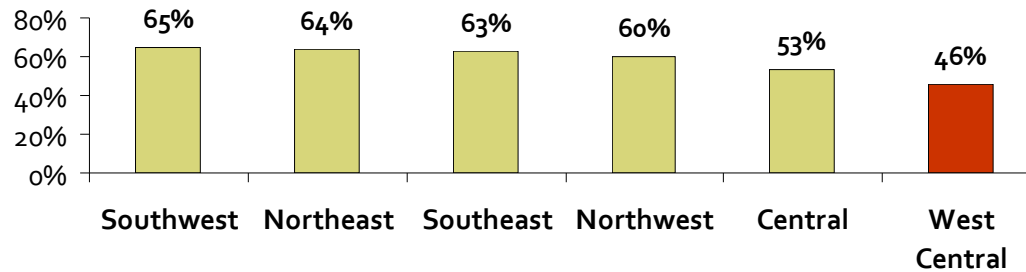
Invited to Serve in a Leadership Role By Income



Invited to Serve in a Leadership Role



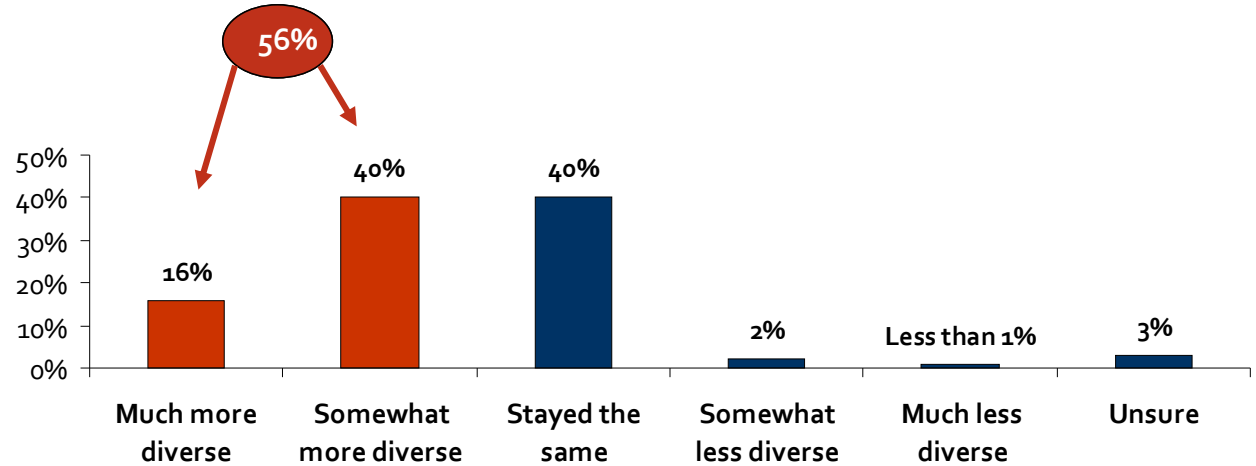
Invited to Serve in a Leadership Role By Region



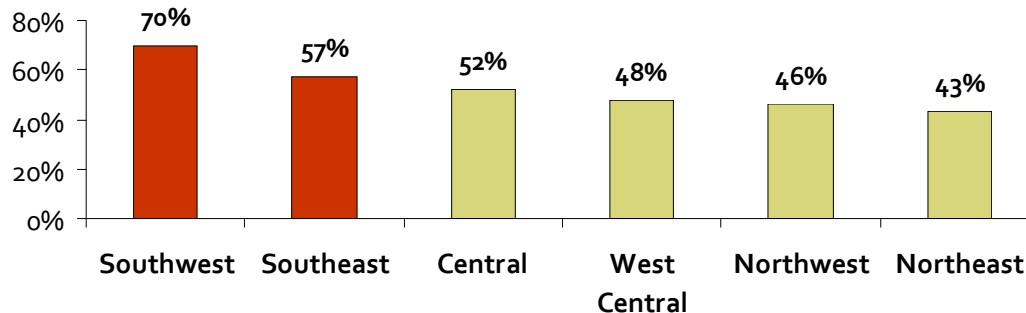
A Changing Rural Landscape.

More than half of rural residents said their community's ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse. In fact, 56 percent agreed with this, versus 40 percent who said it had stayed the same. Those in southern Minnesota were most likely to have felt this way.

To What Degree Has Your Community's Ethnic or Racial Make-up Changed in the Past Five Years?



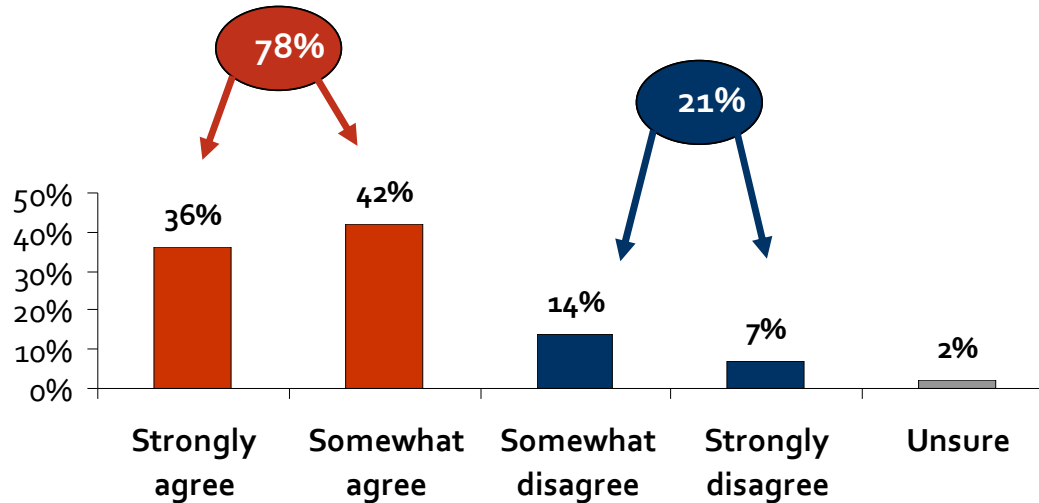
More Diverse Ethnic or Racial Make-Up Over Past Five Years By Region



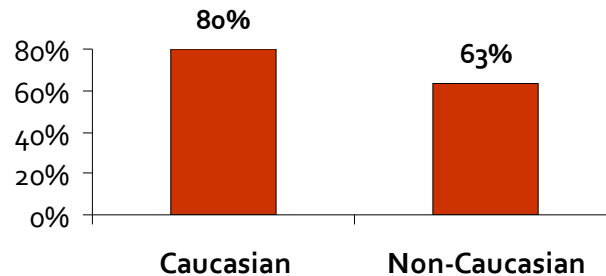
Somewhat More or Much More Diverse

Though there is belief that diversity is increasing in rural Minnesota, 21 percent believe their community is not welcoming to people of varying backgrounds and perspectives. Most (78%), however, said they felt their community is inviting. This was an opinion held to a significantly greater degree by Caucasians (80%) versus those of other cultural backgrounds (63%).

My Community Is a Welcoming Place for People of All Backgrounds and Perspectives



Community Is Welcoming for People of All Backgrounds and Perspectives By Ethnicity

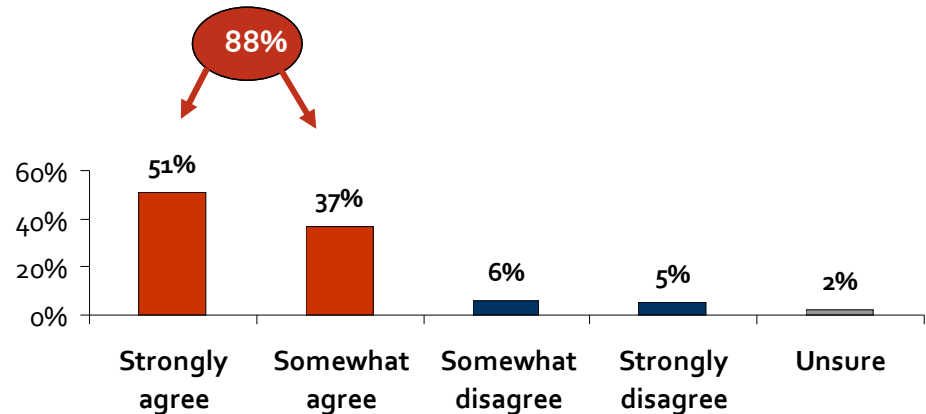


Strongly or Somewhat Agree

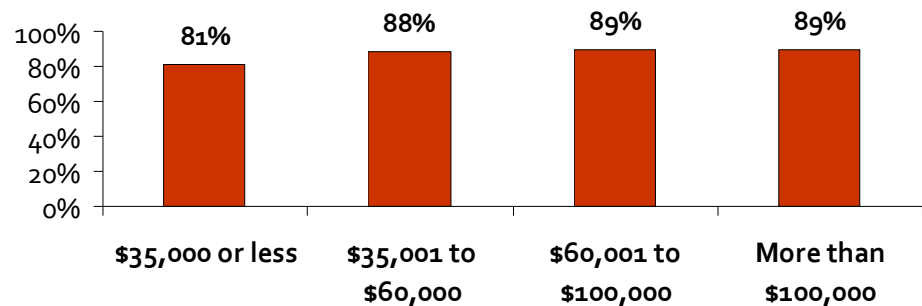
Confidence Generally Good Regarding Service Quality, Access.

On average, most rural residents (88%) believe that their community offers equal access to essential services versus those who do not (11%). Those with lower incomes and from West Central Minnesota were the least likely to agree that all sectors within their community are equally served.

All Residents Have Equal Access to Essential and Basic Services



Residents Have Equal Access to Essential and Basic Services By Income



Strongly or Somewhat Agree

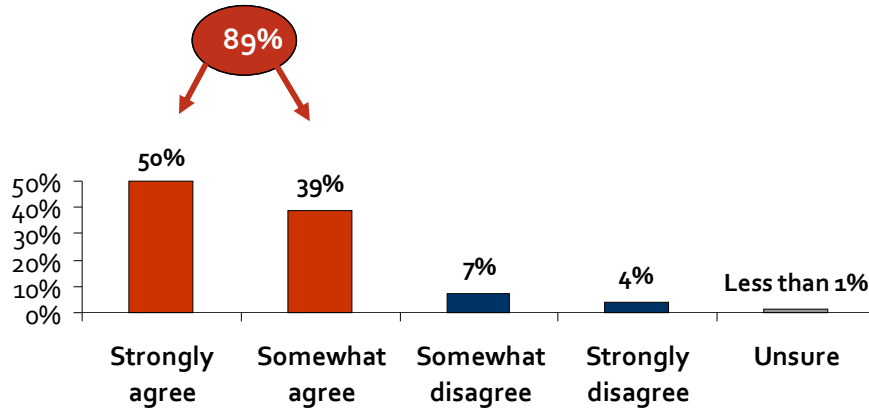
	Northeast	Northwest	West Central	Central	Southwest	Southeast
My community is a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and perspectives.	66%	83%	64%	80%	81%	80%
The quality of life in my community will improve over the next five years.	62%	72%	58%	67%	67%	70%

Strongly or Somewhat Agree

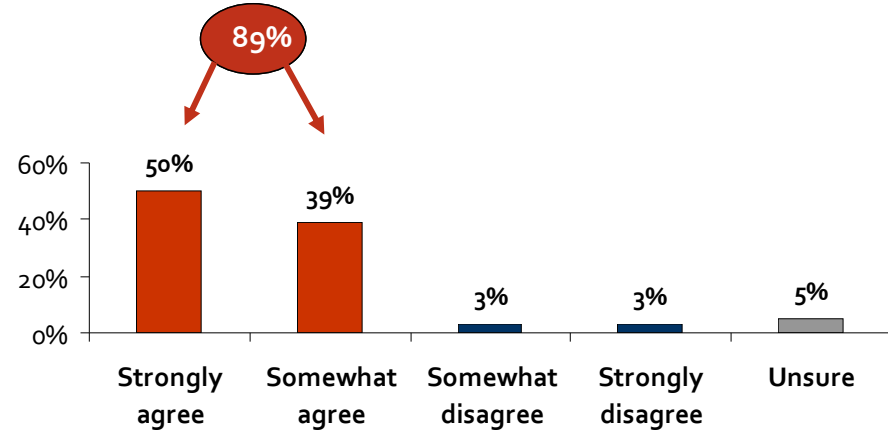
Crime Control, Services for the Elderly and the Environment

The vast majority (89%) of rural Minnesotans have confidence in their community's ability to control crime, provide services for the elderly and protect the environment.

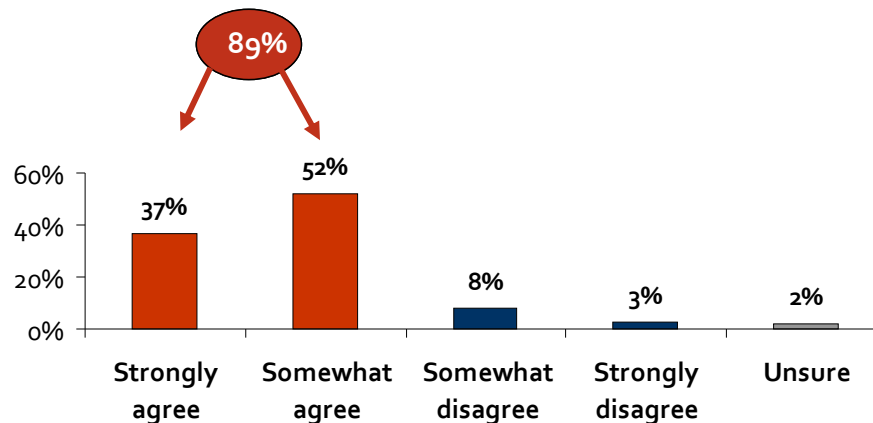
Controlling Crime



Services for Elderly



Good Stewards of the Environment



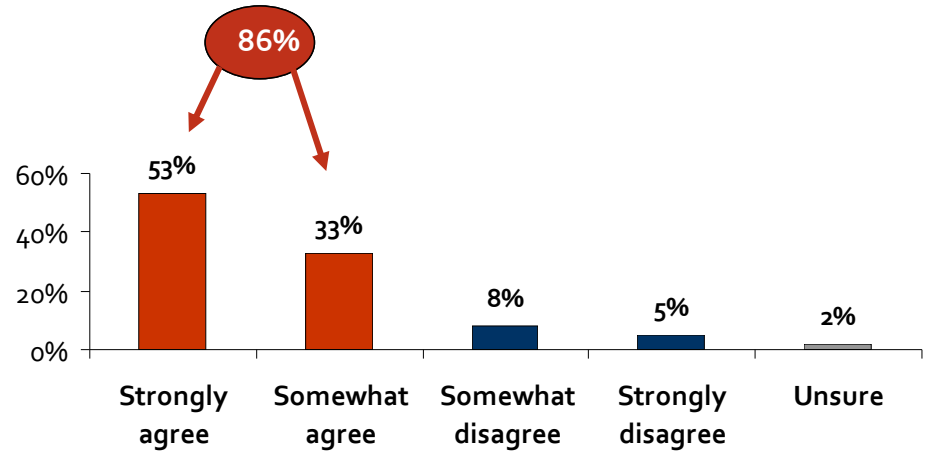
Technology and Infrastructure

Likewise, most – more than four in five – believe they have adequate access to technology and strong infrastructure (e.g., bridges, sewer system, roads).

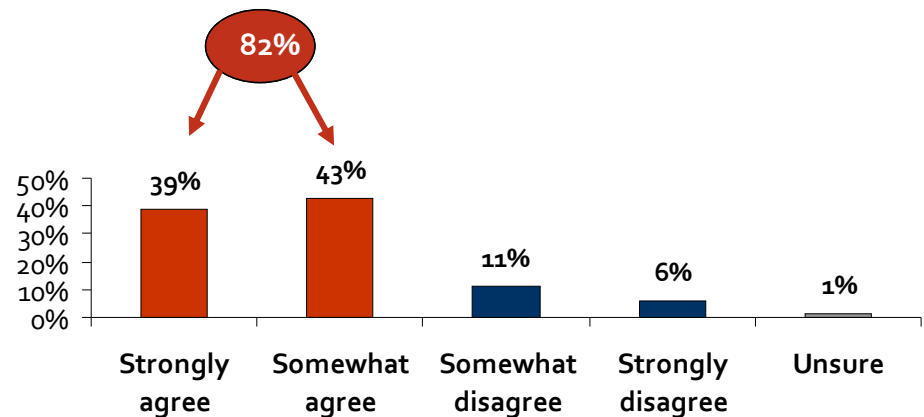
Fifty-three percent of rural residents strongly agreed and 33 percent somewhat agreed that their community has adequate access to technology, with 13 percent disagreeing with that belief.

Eighty-two percent of rural residents indicated that their local bridges, roads, sewer system and other infrastructure was good, with 17 percent disagreeing that this is the case.

Access to Technology
Such as the Internet and Cellular/Wireless



Local Community Infrastructure
Such as Roads, Sewers and Bridges



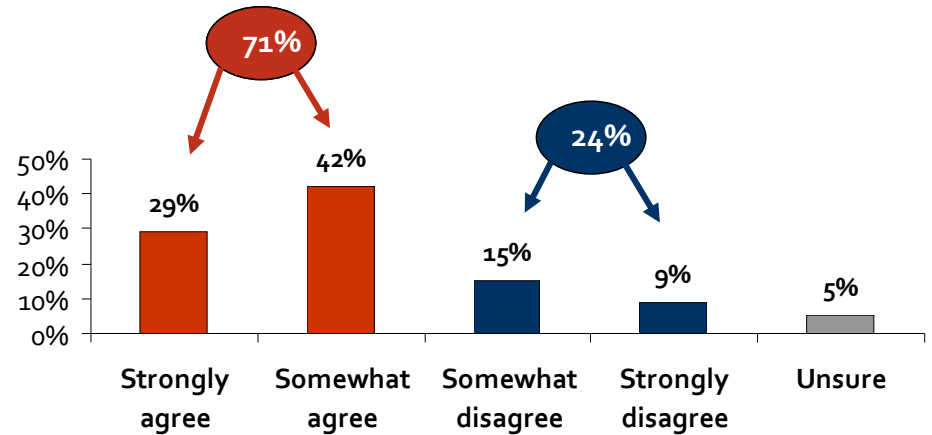
Healthcare

Healthcare is a concern for one in four rural Minnesotans. While 71 percent agreed their community provides adequate healthcare opportunities, 24 percent did not feel this is the case.

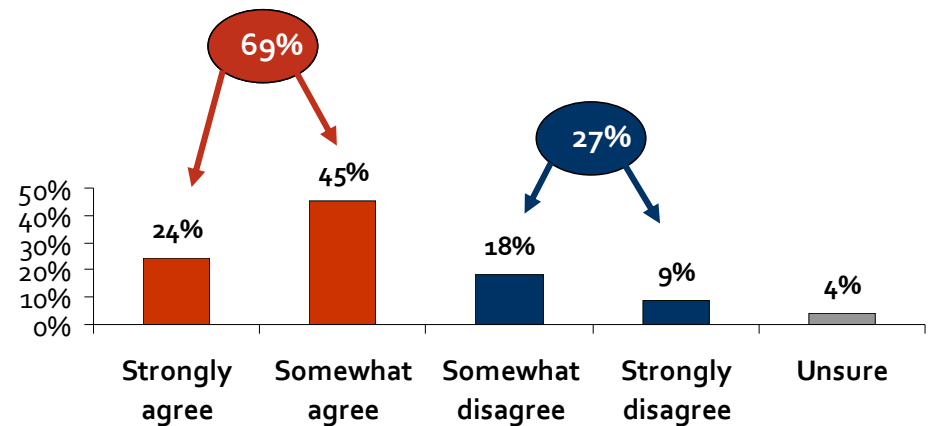
Culture and the Arts

Availability of adequate cultural and arts opportunities was a concern for 27 percent of rural Minnesotans, with 69 percent having felt local needs are being met.

Adequate Healthcare Opportunities



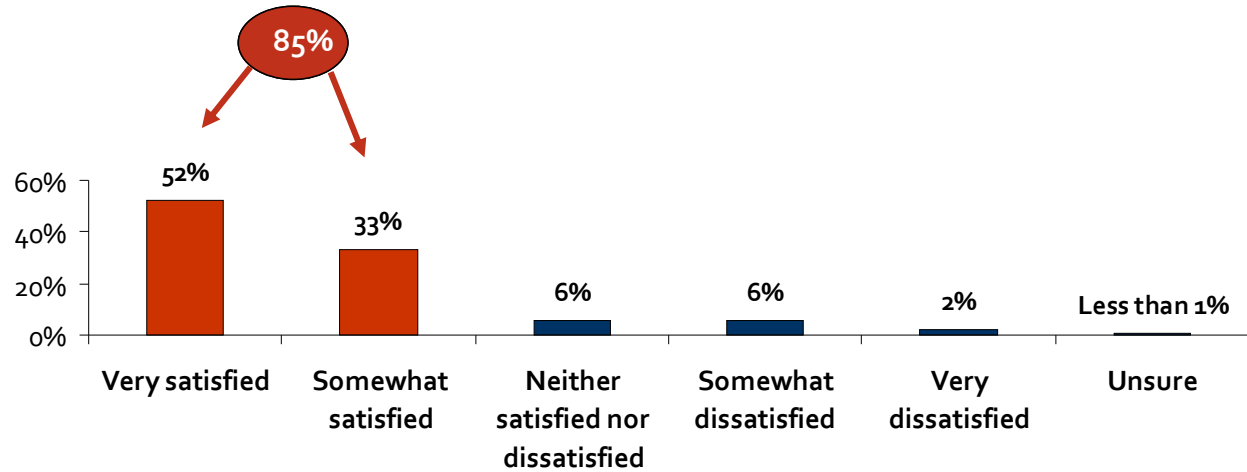
Cultural Opportunities and the Arts



Local Food

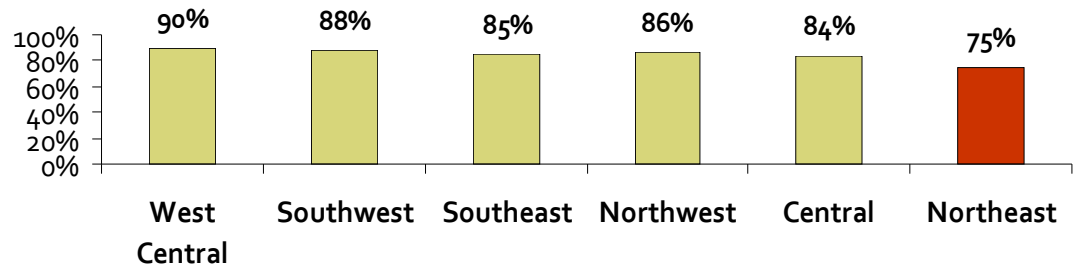
The majority of rural Minnesotans said they are satisfied with the availability of fresh, local food in their community. Fifty-two percent indicated that they were very satisfied, 33 percent said somewhat satisfied, six percent were neutral on the question, and eight percent said they were dissatisfied with local fresh food options.

Satisfaction With Availability of Fresh, Local Food in Community



Those in Northeastern Minnesota were somewhat less satisfied than others with availability of fresh, local food.

Satisfied with Fresh, Local Food Availability By Region



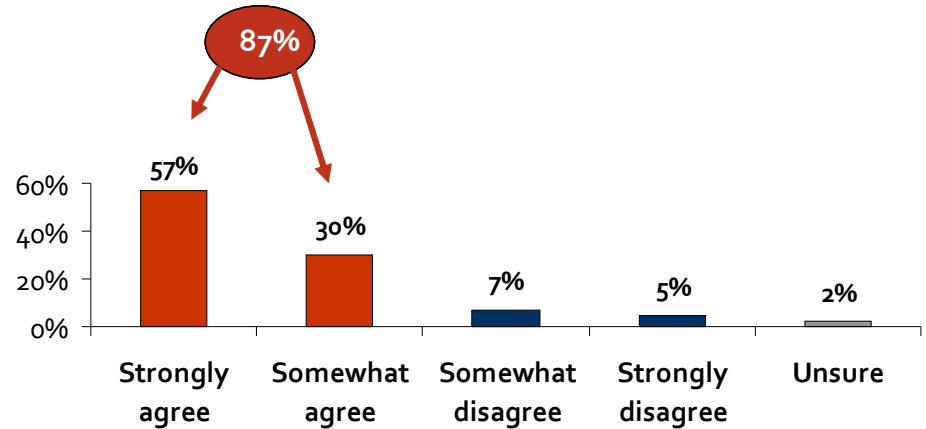
Very or Somewhat Satisfied

Education

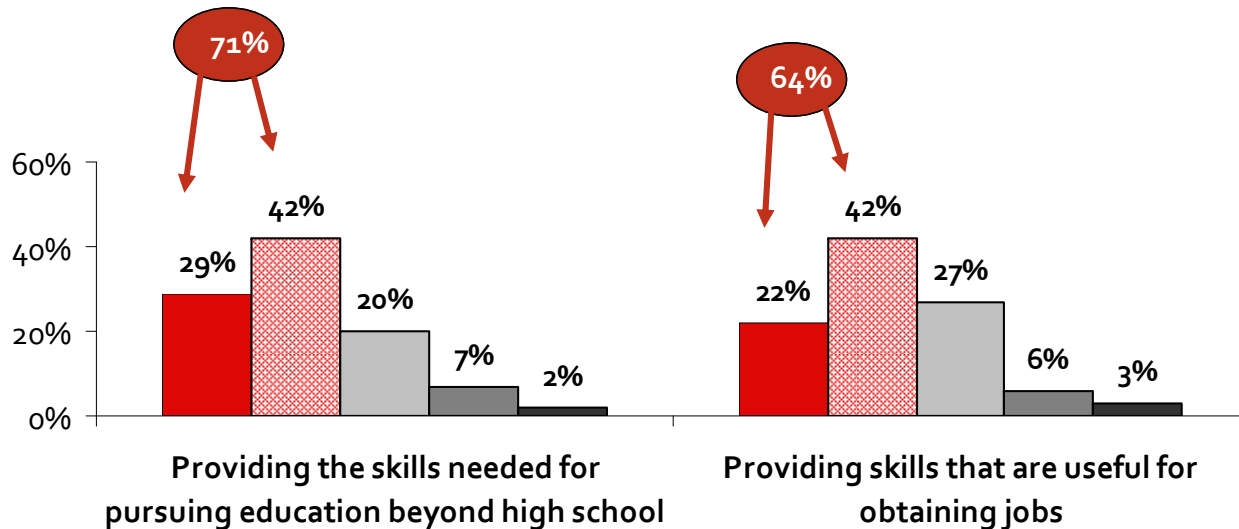
Nearly nine in 10 (87%) of rural Minnesotans believed their community provides quality educational opportunities, with 57 percent strongly agreeing and 30 percent somewhat agreeing. Twelve percent disagreed that their community provides adequate educational opportunities.

A majority of rural Minnesotans gave good grades to their local public schools. Seven in 10 (71%) said they feel their schools provide the skills needed for pursuing education beyond high school, while two-thirds (64%) felt enough is being done to train youth for the workforce.

Quality Educational Opportunities

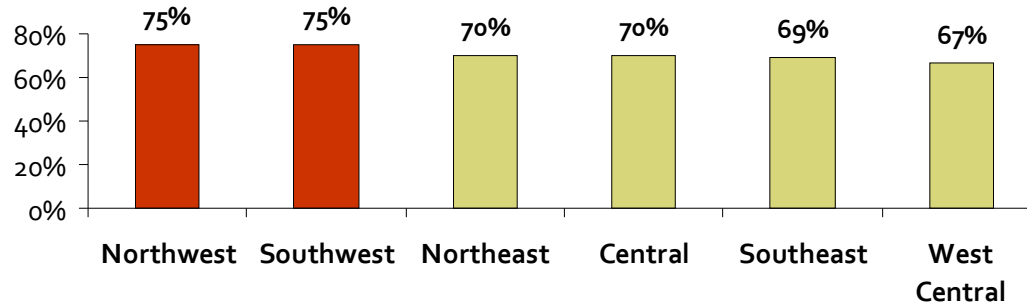


How Well Do You Think the Public Schools In Your Community Do In Terms of ...



While residents in northern Minnesota were the most confident in their schools, those with incomes of \$35,000 or less question the ability of their public schools to provide skills needed for pursuing education and careers.

Performance of Local Public Schools with Job Providing Skills Useful for Pursuing Education Beyond High School By Region



Good or Excellent

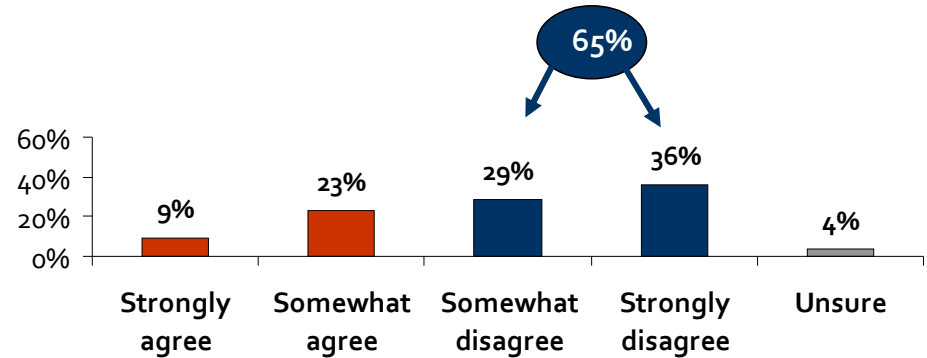
Performance of Public Schools				
	Income			
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
Providing the skills needed for pursuing education beyond high school	59%	66%	75%	85%
Providing skills that are useful for obtaining jobs	48%	63%	69%	69%

Good or Excellent

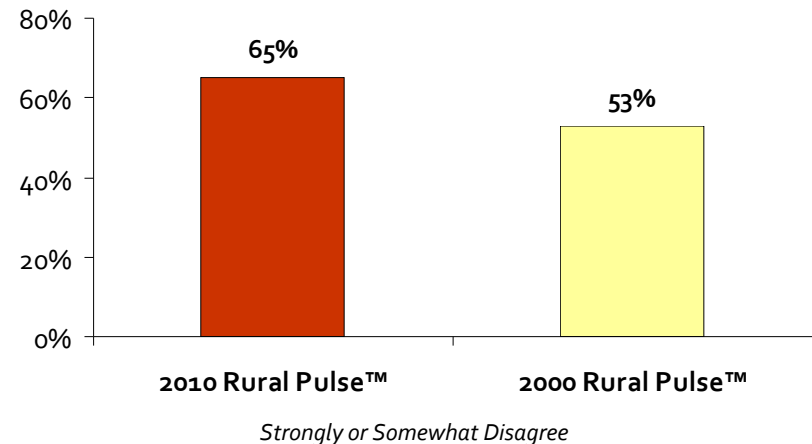
Jobs: An Overwhelming Concern.

In Rural Pulse™ 2000, half (53%) of rural Minnesota residents felt their community did not provide adequate living-wage job opportunities – a sentiment that increased 12 percentage points in the 2010 study. Two-thirds (65%) of rural Minnesotans indicated employment opportunities are insufficient on a local level.

Adequate Job Opportunities In My Community That Pay Household-Supporting Wages

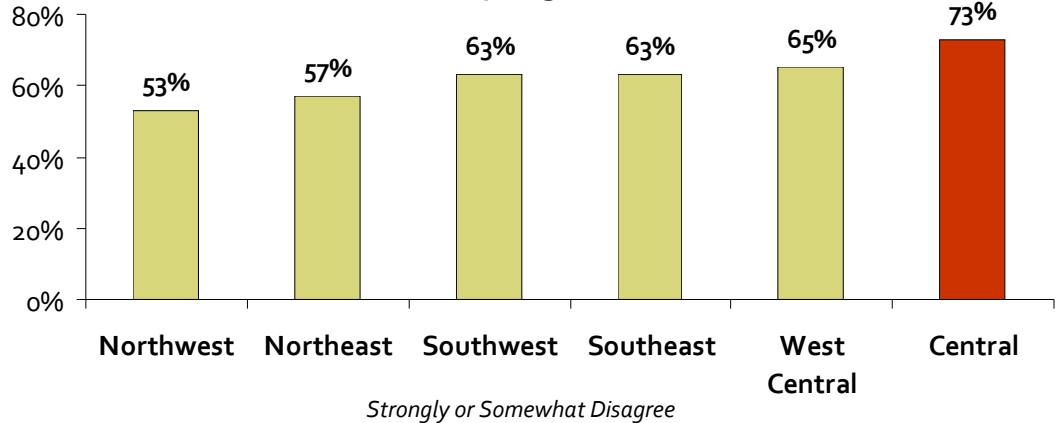


Percent Who Disagree That Their Community Provides Adequate Job Opportunities with Household-Supporting Wages

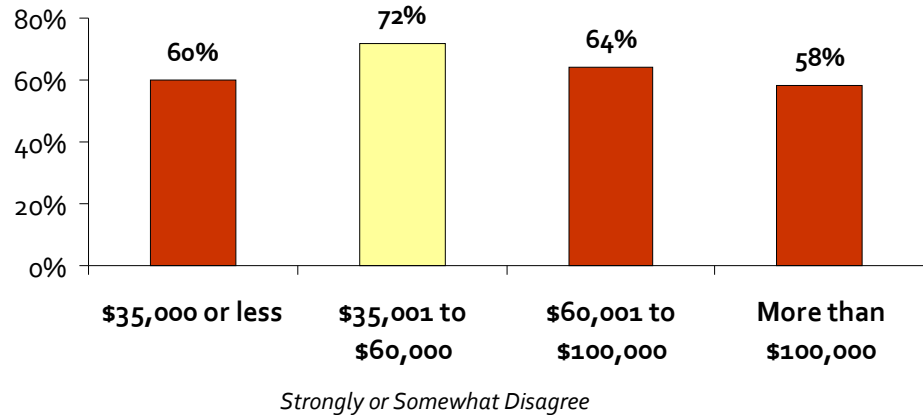


Central Minnesota residents and those with incomes of \$35,001 to \$60,000 were the least satisfied with their community's ability to provide living-wage jobs.

Percent Who Disagree That Their Community Provides Adequate Job Opportunities with Household-Supporting Wages By Region



Percent Who Disagree That Their Community Provides Adequate Job Opportunities with Household-Supporting Wages By Income

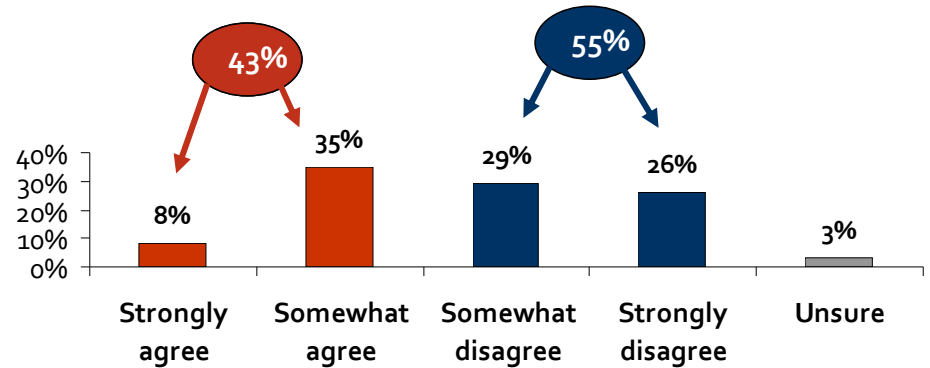


At the same time, 55 percent of rural Minnesota residents felt that their community does not do an adequate job attracting businesses with high-quality jobs, with only 43 percent saying that they do. Those in Northeast Minnesota were the least supportive of their local community's ability to grow the employment base (24%). Women were less likely than men to feel their community does a good job attracting high-quality jobs (39%, women; 46%, men).

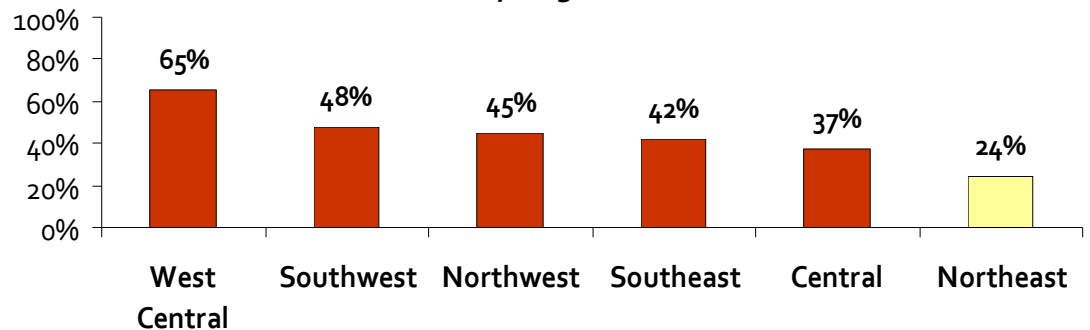
Other issues mentioned by rural Minnesotans that were considered important to their community included:

- Taxes, spending and governance
- Recreational opportunities
- Social/moral issues
- Agriculture
- Church/religion
- Race/diversity issues
- Youth opportunities
- Immigration
- Housing
- Parks/playgrounds

Attracting Local Businesses That Provide High-Quality Jobs



Community Does Good Job of Attracting Businesses that Provide High-Quality Jobs By Region



Strongly or Somewhat Agree

Across the board, lower-income residents gave the lowest ratings to their communities when it comes to providing services.

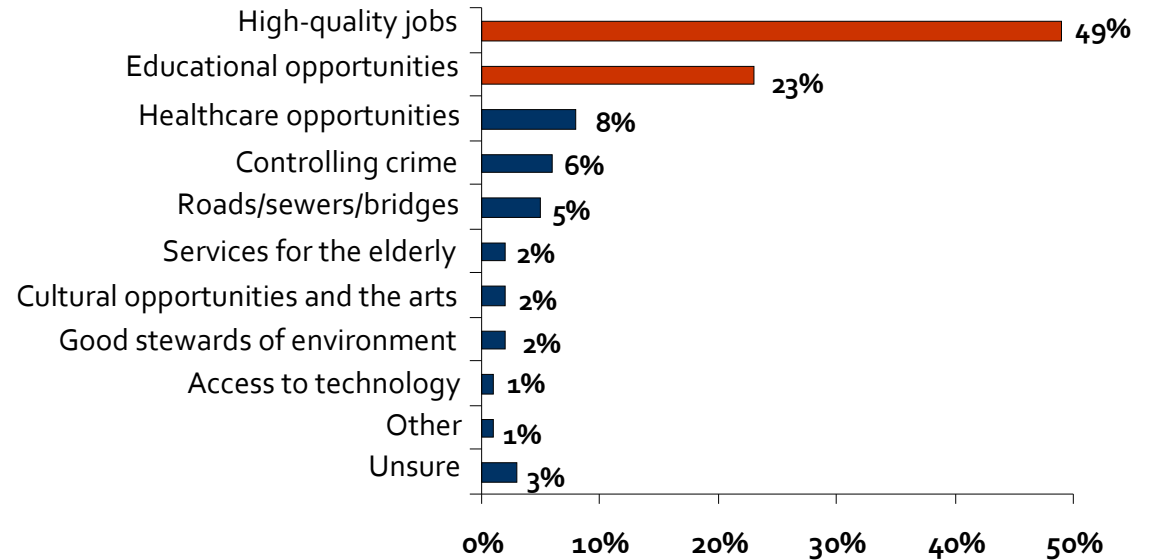
	Income			
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
Controlling crime	84%	87%	92%	93%
Providing quality educational opportunities	81%	87%	90%	92%
Providing access to technology such as the Internet and cellular/wireless	83%	86%	86%	91%
Building and maintaining local infrastructure such as roads, sewers and bridges	75%	86%	82%	84%
Providing adequate healthcare opportunities	68%	73%	74%	75%
Offering cultural opportunities and the arts	65%	69%	67%	80%

Strongly or Somewhat Agree

Perhaps most significantly, the need for high-quality jobs was considered the top priority by half (49%) of rural Minnesotans – slightly more than twice as important as the next most important issue. This was a considerable increase from the 2000 study, where although high-quality jobs was the top issue, only 19 percent of the rural population believed such.

Men placed a stronger emphasis on jobs than women, while women were somewhat more supportive of education as a key priority for rural Minnesota.

Most Critical Issue to Your Community



Most Critical Issue to Address		
	2010 Rural Pulse™	2000 Rural Pulse™
High-quality jobs	49%	19%
Educational opportunities	23%	15%

Most Critical Issue to Address		
	Men	Women
High-quality jobs	53%	42%
Educational opportunities	18%	28%

Note: Issue options provided in 2000 varied somewhat, which may impact differential somewhat.

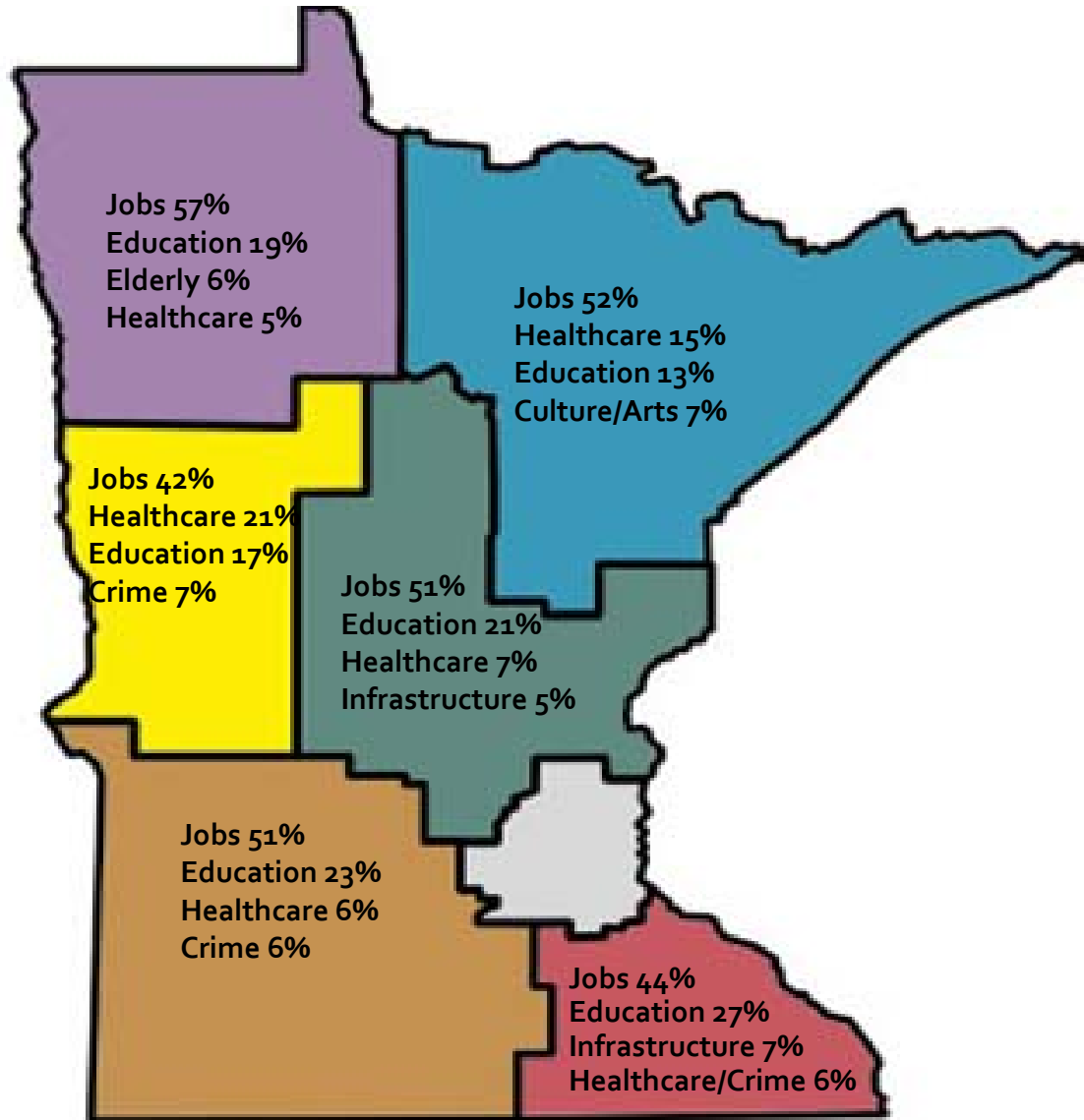
Age, income and regionality also played a role in perception of priorities in this year's study.

Most Critical Issue to Address					
	Age				
	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65+
High-quality jobs	38%	48%	48%	54%	46%
Educational opportunities	26%	26%	27%	19%	13%
Healthcare opportunities	20%	5%	6%	7%	9%

Most Critical Issue to Address				
	Income			
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
High-quality jobs	48%	51%	45%	53%
Educational opportunities	11%	24%	27%	31%
Healthcare opportunities	19%	7%	5%	4%

Most Critical Issue to Address						
	Region					
	Northeast	Northwest	West Central	Central	Southwest	Southeast
High-quality jobs	52%	57%	42%	51%	51%	44%
Educational opportunities	13%	19%	17%	21%	23%	27%
Healthcare opportunities	15%	5%	21%	7%	6%	6%

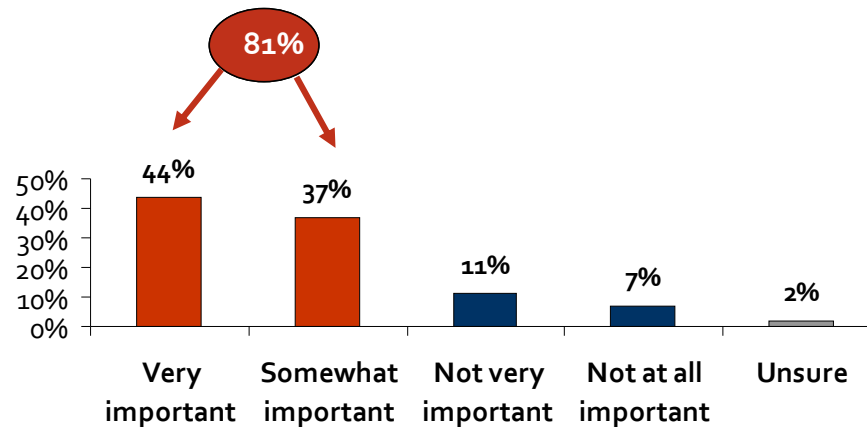
Top Four Concerns of Rural Minnesotans by Region: 2010



Alternative Energy Resources

Eight in 10 (81%) rural Minnesotans said it is important for residents and businesses to seek ways to replace existing energy sources with alternatives such as solar, wind and biofuels. Women were the most supportive of diversifying the energy landscape (88% women, 76% men).

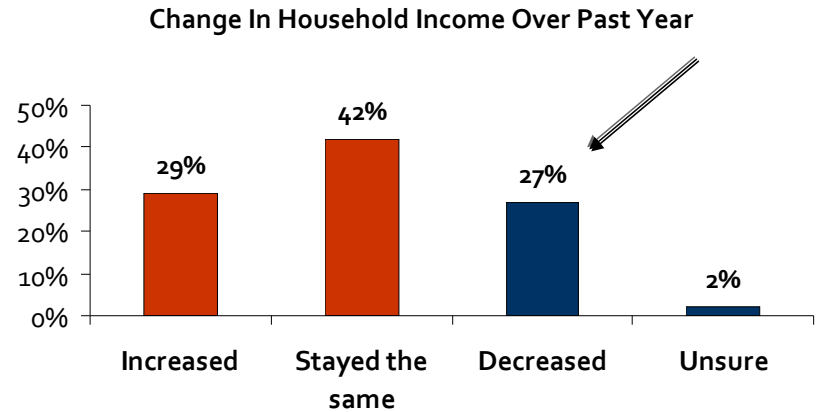
Importance of Replacing Existing Energy Sources
With Alternative Options Such as Solar, Wind and Biofuels



Impact of the Economy on a Personal Level

One in four (27%) rural Minnesotans said their household income had decreased over the past year, 42 percent said it stayed the same, and 29 percent indicated their family's economic situation has improved in the past 12 months.

Those most likely to be feeling negative financial impact were those with lower incomes and ages 35+.

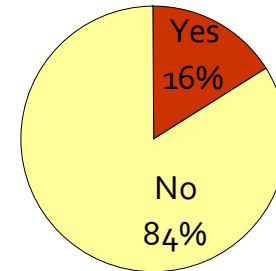


Change in Household Income Over Past Year					
	Age				
	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65+
Increased	34%	47%	28%	25%	12%
Stayed the same	38%	29%	43%	41%	59%
Decreased	16%	24%	28%	34%	28%

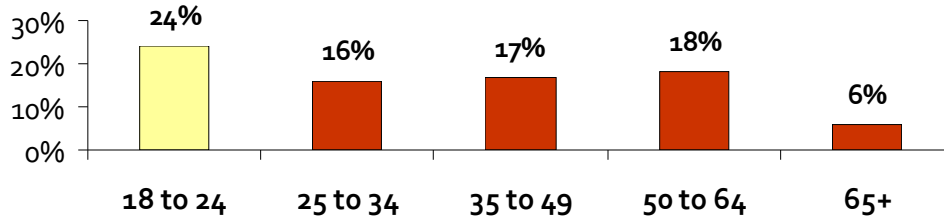
Change in Household Income Over Past Year				
	Income			
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
Increased	14%	24%	31%	56%
Stayed the same	42%	43%	46%	35%
Decreased	43%	33%	22%	9%

On a more specific basis, 16 percent said that someone in their household has lost a job in the past year, while 84 percent said they had not. Residents most likely to have experienced such a loss were younger (ages 18-24) and with household incomes of \$35,000 or less.

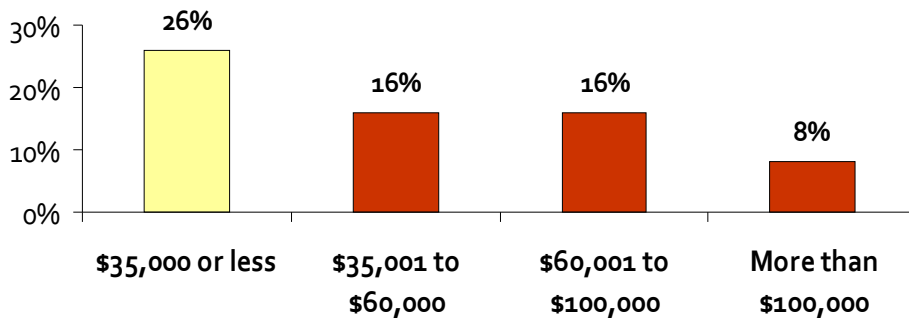
Lost a Job In Household In Past Year



**Lost Job in Household in the Past Year
By Age**

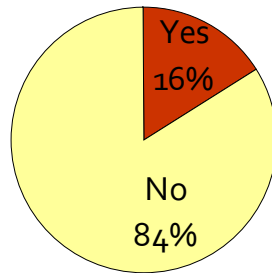


**Lost Job in Household in the Past Year
By Income**

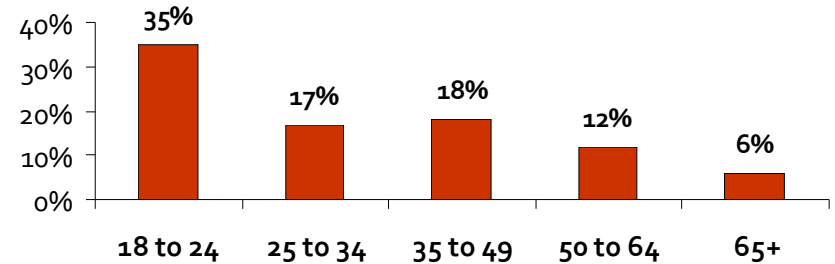


Similarly, 16 percent of rural Minnesotans also indicated that they have considered leaving their community for a larger city/metro area within the past two years. A third (35%) of those ages 18 to 24 said they have contemplated such a move. Those in West Central and Southeastern Minnesota were also more inclined than others to consider moving to a metropolitan area.

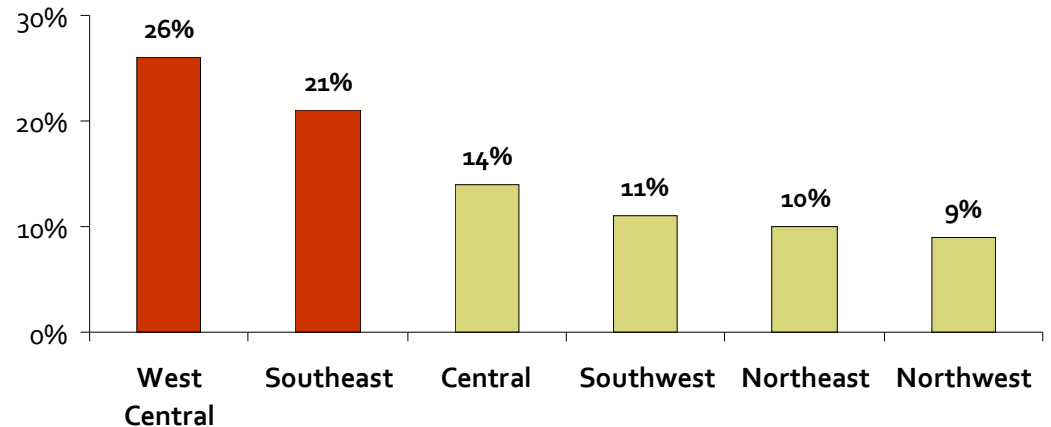
Considered Moving to a Larger City or Metropolitan Area Within Past Two Years



Considered Moving to Metropolitan Area By Age



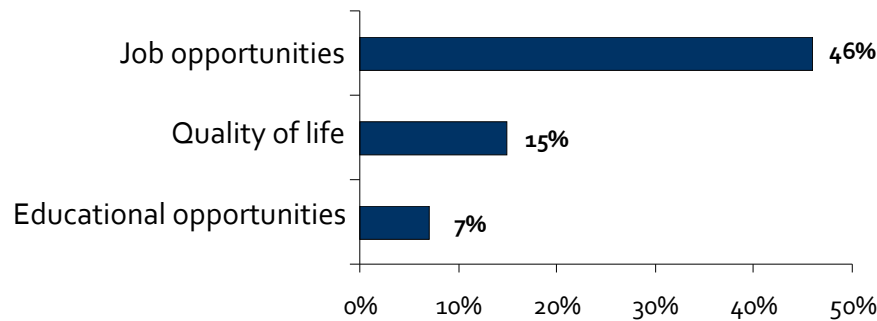
Considered Moving to Metropolitan Area By Region



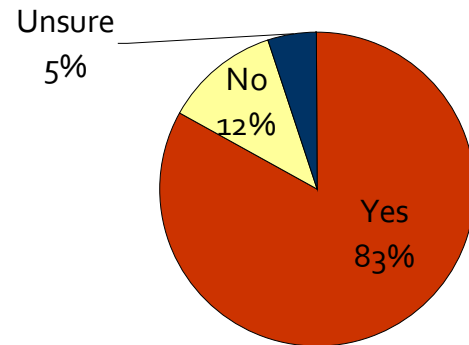
The primary reasons rural residents said they have considered moving were to pursue job opportunities (46%), for improved quality of life (15%) or for education (7%). Other responses included being closer to family, climate and convenience.

Looking forward, 12 percent of rural Minnesotans did not believe they will continue living in their community five years from now.

Main Reason Cited for Considering Moving to a Larger City or Metropolitan Area

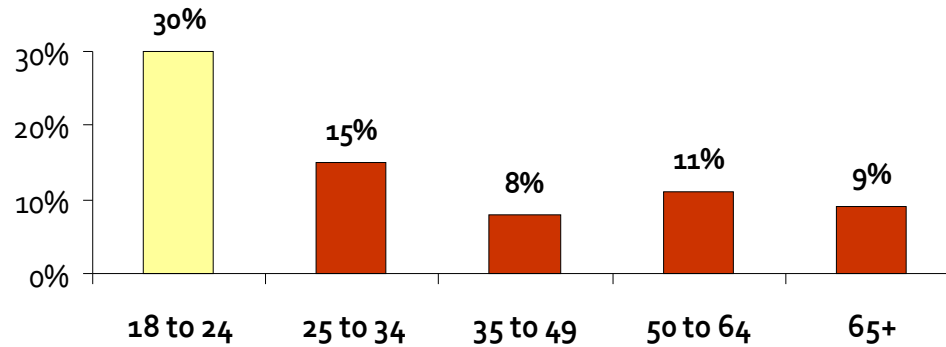


Expect to Live In Their Community Five Years From Now

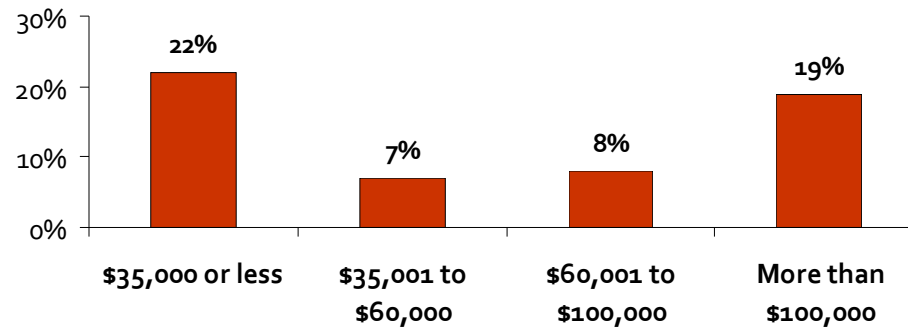


Most notable among rural Minnesotans, 30 percent of those ages 18 to 24 and lower-income residents (22%) said they would likely relocate.

**Do Not Expect to Live in Same Community
Five Years from Now
By Age**



**Do Not Expect to Live in Same Community
Five Years from Now
By Income**

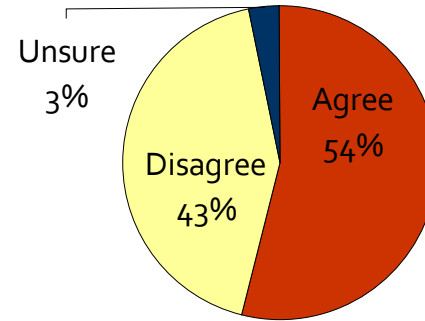


The Desire to Be Heard

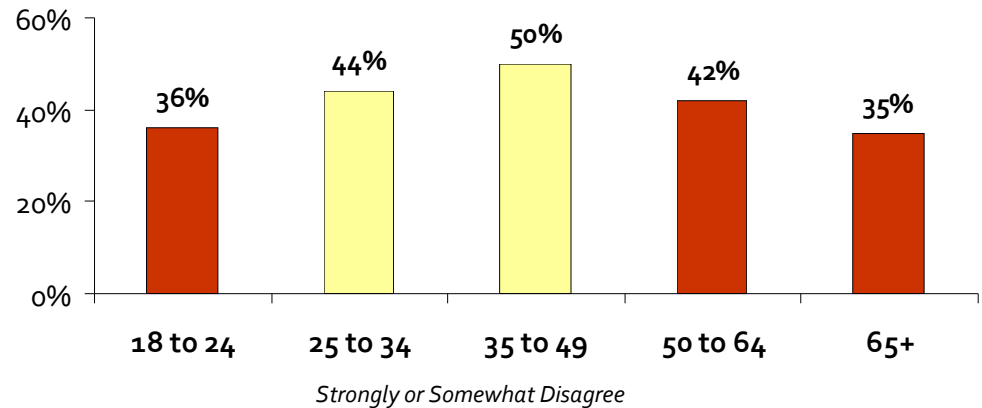
Rural Minnesotans expressed concerns about the priority placed on their interests. When asked if the needs and well being of rural Minnesota communities are as important to legislators and policymakers as those in metropolitan cities, 43 percent were of the opinion that they were not versus 54 percent who were comfortable that their voice is being heard.

Those ages 25 to 49 were the least likely to believe the needs of rural communities are adequately prioritized.

Rural Community Needs and Well Being are as Important to Legislators and Policymakers as the Needs of Communities In Metropolitan Areas



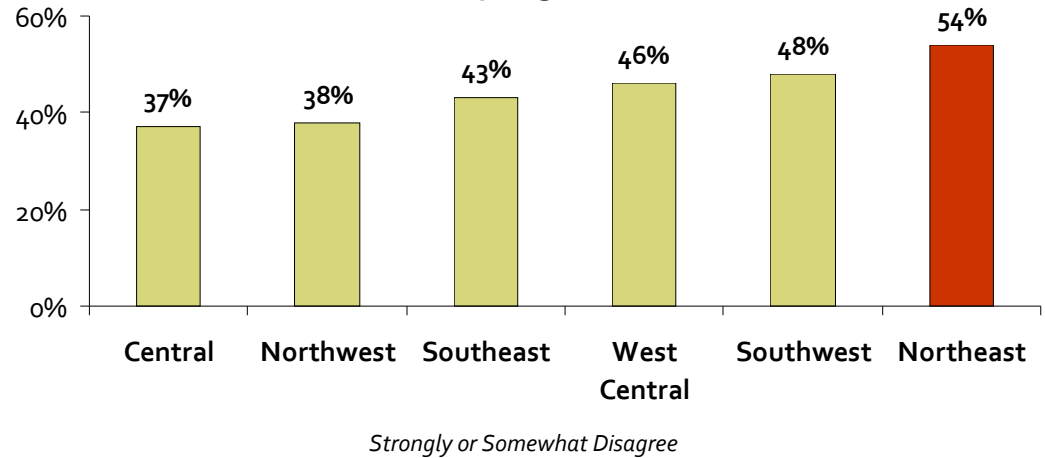
Percent Who Disagree That Rural Minnesota Communities Are As Important to Legislators and Policymakers as Metropolitan Areas
By Age



Northeastern Minnesotans expressed the greatest concern (54%) about how their needs are perceived.

As importantly, 94 percent of rural Minnesotan residents said it is important to support political candidates who actively address rural issues.

Percent Who Disagree That Rural Minnesota Communities Are As Important to Legislators and Policymakers as Metropolitan Areas
By Region



Importance of Support Political Candidates Who Actively Address Rural Issues

