

Teaching Tips/Notes



What Does the Public Think of Agriculture?

According to the US Department of Agriculture, there are over 285,000,000 people living in the United States. Of that population, less than 1% claim farming as an occupation (and about 2% actually live on farms). There are only about 960,000 persons claiming farming as their principal occupation and a similar number of farmers claiming some other principal occupation.

Agriculture students at Wright State University Lake Campus enrolled in a class "Ag Society" are learning about trends and issues in agriculture. As part of their curriculum, Dr. Greg Homan, worked with them to develop and administer a survey of local residents to explore local perceptions of agriculture. Students visited local restaurants and stores to discuss agriculture with a random sample of local residents in St. Marys, Celina and Coldwater.

When residents were asked what they thought of farmers, their replies were varied, but positive. One respondent replied "Farmers are good, hard-working people." Another individual commented, "They work very hard to feed the country and help the economy a lot."

When ranking the impact of four possible impacts on their food buying choices, the averages in order of predominance of response were: 1) Nutrition, 2) Taste, 3) How it was Produced and 4) Cost. When asked how their food buying/consumption was different from their parents, most respondents indicated they were purchasing more of their food (versus raising it), were selecting more convenience items (packaged/prepared foods) and had a much wider variety of items to select from than their parents.

Consumers were asked "Your food price includes a variety of costs such as processing, shipping, marketing, etc. How much of every \$1 spent on food in the United States do you think goes to the farmer that produces it?" Typical responses ranged from approximately 40-60 cents per food dollar. According to the American Farm Bureau, approximately 16 cents of every food dollar is earned by the farm producer to pay for their labor, supplies, land, etc. The students also explored with respondents how they thought agriculture had changed over the past 100 years. Common perceptions of agriculture change included modernized technology, larger farms and bigger equipment.

When asked about the potential prospect of an increasingly larger share of the United States food being produced in another country and imported to the United States, most respondents weren't very positive. One respondent commented, "I don't trust food produced in another country as much." Another participant replied, "I don't think their safety is as good (in other countries)."

According to student, Alyssa Muhlenkamp of Coldwater, *"By surveying people buying groceries about agriculture, I learned that many people feel farming importance has declined and don't realize everything that goes into it."* Levi Krouskop of Spencerville replied, *"The area I surveyed surprisingly knew more about agriculture than I expected. I expected uneducated responses but, many of the people were somehow connected to agriculture, knew a great deal about it and respected those involved in it."*

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