

Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)

**A benchmark survey of public opinion on the environment
in relation to farming and the quality of life in
Norfolk County.**

By

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Prepared on behalf of:

**Norfolk Federation of Agriculture
Ontario Stewardship (OMNR)
Norfolk Land Stewardship Council
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
TD Canada Trust- Friends of the Environment
Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
Ontario Wildlife Foundation
Norfolk County Soil & Crop Improvement Association**

July 18, 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Norfolk Federation of Agriculture (NFA) is leading the development of an Alternative Land Use Services or “ALUS” approach to conserving the environment on farmlands in Norfolk County, Ontario. Under ALUS, producers would receive incentives for environmental services, which would provide benefits such as clean air, water and wildlife habitat.

Ecometrica Communications Inc. was engaged by ALUS partners to conduct a survey of baseline demographic information in relation to farming and the environment, as part of an ALUS pilot project evaluation. Farm, rural non- farm and urban population segments were surveyed using mail questionnaires in 2005.

To qualify for the survey, respondents had to be residents of Norfolk County and at least 18 years of age. A total of 6200 mail questionnaires were forwarded and 731 (11.7%) were sufficiently completed to include in the survey. Of these, 250 were from farm respondents, 211 from rural non- farm and 270 from urban respondents.

Profiles of Respondents

The average length of residency in Norfolk County for farmers was 45.8 years, which was significantly longer than the rural non- farm group (36.1 years) and the urban residents (33.3 years). The vast majority of all residents intended on remaining in Norfolk County. Two- thirds of respondents were male, with a higher proportion of females responding in the urban audience. The mean age of respondents (56-57) was the same for all three groups.

There was little difference in education levels for each group, with the exception that many more university graduates appeared in the non- farm segments. 40% of rural non- farm and urban residents were retired, but only 12.2% of farmers. Farmers, professionals, skilled trades- people and sales- service industry were the occupational categories most reported.

Two- thirds of farm respondents reported their incomes had decreased over the past year, while incomes in more than half of the non- farm groups remained the same. More respondents in all groups reported their incomes decreasing than increasing over the past year.

Views on the State of the Rural Environment

Farm residents viewed the environment in Norfolk County more positively than did rural non-farm and urban residents, suggesting that farmers and non- farm

residents may differ in their perspective on what comprises a high quality environment on farmland. Farm residents were also more likely to feel that farming had a positive impact on the rural environment.

Air quality was the most important environmental issue mentioned by half of urban and one-third of farm and rural non-farm respondents. Water quality was the second highest ranking environmental issue for all groups. Several other environmental issues were cited, but at a much lower frequency than air and water quality.

Respondent groups were pessimistic about the outlook for the environment in Norfolk County. Few respondents thought that the quality of the environment would improve over the next three years.

Appearance of the Rural Countryside in Norfolk County

Almost three-quarters (72%) of the survey respondents rated the countryside as somewhat or very attractive and 74% indicated that the appearance of the countryside was very important to them.

The Economy in Norfolk County

Respondents in all groups agreed that the economic health of Norfolk County was less than ideal. Overall, the same proportion of respondents (39%) indicated that the economy was poor or very poor, or were neutral on the issue (neither poor nor good)(39%). Few residents thought the economy would improve over the next three years, although twice as many urban residents (14%) thought the economy would improve than farmers (7%). Both farmers (56%) and rural non-farm residents (50%) predicted the economy would decline. Urban respondents (58%) were more optimistic, and predicted that the economy would either stay the same or improve.

Predictions for the future health of the economy may be driven by changes in personal income in the recent past. Among farm respondents, 40% reported both that their own income had declined over the past year, **and** they predicted that the economic health of the county would decline. Among the other groups, only 18% of rural non-farm and 11% of urban respondents showed this dual pattern of responses.

Social Well-Being in Norfolk County

Respondents agreed that social well-being or quality of life in Norfolk County was good. 57% of the respondents rated the quality of life as good or very good, and 33% of respondents felt it was neither good nor poor. Although social well-being is often linked to the economy and income, there were no differences

detected among the three groups in their perceptions of social well-being ***at this time***, in spite of significant differences in the direction of personal incomes among the three groups. Approximately three-quarters of the respondents in all residence groups indicated that quality of life was very important to them.

Groups differed in how they predicted quality of life would change over the next few years. A similar proportion in each of the three residence groups predicted no change in quality of life over the next three years, but 42% of farm respondents thought it would decline, compared to only 26% of urban respondents. This mirrors perceptions concerning the health of the economy among the three groups, and suggests that economic health may play a particularly important role in quality of life ***in the future*** for those respondents who depend on farming for their livelihood.

Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)

The ALUS concept was first introduced into Norfolk County in 2002, and an ALUS workshop was held in the county early in 2003. The Norfolk Federation of Agriculture has continued to develop and promote an ALUS pilot project. At the time of the survey in 2005, little implementation on the ground had taken place. Accordingly, 46% farm respondents indicated some awareness of ALUS, compared to 30% of rural non-farm and 25% of urban residents. Very few respondents were participating in the pilot project in 2005.

Farmers were much more likely than those in other groups to be aware of the efforts that farmers are making to maintain the environment on their land. Two-thirds of urban residents and half of rural non-farm respondents were unaware of these efforts.

The perceived effectiveness of environmental stewardship efforts undertaken by farmers was naturally affected by awareness. Farm respondents rated these stewardship efforts quite positively, but almost one-half of urban and over one-third of rural non-farm respondents had no opinion, or just didn't know about the effectiveness of these efforts. The uncertainty of urban and rural non-farm groups about the effectiveness of farmers' environmental efforts, was the single largest knowledge gap between farmers and other residents of Norfolk County identified in the survey results.

Farm respondents believed quite strongly that farmers should be paid to produce environmental services on their land. Farm respondents viewed incentives and compensation as relatively more important to achieving environmental benefits than other groups.

A majority of non- farm residents in Norfolk County believed that farmers should be, or possibly could be paid to deliver environmental services. Two- thirds of both urban and rural non- farm residents responded “yes” or “maybe” when asked if they believed farmers should be paid to produce environmental services. 29% of rural non- farm, 23% of urban residents and 6% of farmers did not think farmers should be paid for producing these services.

Farm respondents were more aware of the ALUS concept and could identify more positive aspects than the rural non- farm and urban respondents. Farmers indicated that ALUS incentives would provide recognition for environmental efforts and financial support for farmers who choose to dedicate a portion of their land for conservation. Some farmers felt that such services benefit everyone, and everyone should pay for the services.

Lacking awareness, few non- farm respondents could or would identify a positive aspect of initiatives such as ALUS. Non- farm respondents most frequently suggested that ALUS would provide financial support and recognition to farmers for environmental efforts, and benefits to the environment.

52% of all survey respondents did not raise a single concern when asked about paying farmers to provide environmental services under ALUS. No single issue was raised by more than 13% of respondents in any group, and most concerns were mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents for the entire sample.

One in ten farm respondents were concerned about the eligibility requirements for compensation under ALUS, and whether this compensation is dispensed fairly and equally, in amounts that adequately compensate for the loss of farm income. A few farm respondents (8%) voiced concerns about government over-involvement, interference and bureaucracy. A further 6% raised concerns about possible abuse or cheating, and 6% feared that farmers may lose control of their own land if they accept payment from a government.

Rural non-farm (13%) and urban (9%) respondents expressed concern about monitoring the program, ensuring compliance and project evaluation. Similarly, 12% of rural non- farm and 8% of urban groups registered concern about potential abuse or cheating the program. Approximately one in ten non- farm respondents raised concerns about where the money was coming from and who is paying and the possibility of tax increases. About the same number of non- farm respondents thought that farmers had a moral obligation to the environment and should provide services without being paid.

A majority (71%) of farmers believe they should be compensated for crop or livestock damage caused by wildlife, while 21% suggested the issue may need further consideration. Approximately two- thirds of non- farm audiences responded with “yes” or “maybe” to the notion of compensating farmers for these

losses. In contrast, 26% of the non- farm group and 31% of the urban respondents did not believe farmers should be compensated for wildlife damage.

The ALUS benchmark survey has demonstrated considerable public support in Norfolk County for the concept of paying farmers to produce environmental benefits on their land. Residents are highly aware of some environmental issues in the county and realize there is a close relationship between farming and the environment. Most residents also believe the environment will remain the same or decline further over the next three years. The environment, like the economy and social well- being, is extremely important to all residents of the county, as a life support system, a contributor to the economy and quality of life, and an outdoor re- creational haven.

While the prospect of delivering ecological goods and services on farmland has a good foundation of public support in Norfolk County, it is important not to overstate this support. If the overall survey sample is weighted to reflect the residential composition of Norfolk County, almost one-quarter (24%) of county residents would be opposed to paying farmers to provide environmental services on their land (see Appendix A). A similar proportion of the population (26.0%) would not feel the need to compensate farmers for crops or livestock damaged by wildlife on their land. However, that leaves a large proportion of the population who either support the concept of paying farmers for environmental services, or who could perhaps be persuaded with proper marketing of the concept and education. On these premises, an effective, well- run and properly communicated ALUS project would most likely receive good support from the majority of Norfolk County residents.