

1996-1997

# Illinois Rural Life Panel Survey

## Final Report

Applied Social Research Unit/Community Research Services  
Illinois State University

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# Summary

Since 1989, the Illinois Rural Life Panel Survey (IRLPS) project has annually surveyed approximately 2,000 adult residents of Illinois' non-metropolitan counties about a wide range of quality of life issues. In the winter of 1996-1997, Panelists were asked for information about their experience of or opinions about:

- Community development and services;
- Services from pharmacies;
- Property tax caps;
- Computers and the Internet;
- Recycling; and
- Energy efficiency and housing.

In November 1996 survey questionnaires were mailed to 4,576 residents of Illinois' non-metropolitan counties. Information from the 1,845 completed surveys supports the following conclusions:

## Community development and services

In keeping with the strong national economy, Illinois Rural Life Panelists are positive and optimistic about the quality of life in their communities and families. Three-quarters indicate their financial situations are the same or better than five years ago; over 80 percent expect the quality of life of their families to stay the same or improve during the next five years. Most respondents report that the quality of public services in their communities has remained about the same as five years ago. Some services—emergency medical services, hospitals, libraries, and fire protection—are improving. Panelists report the services most lacking in their communities are clothing stores, public transportation, and appliance repair.

## Property tax caps

Panelists were asked about the probable affects of property tax caps in downstate Illinois. Nearly half said they are unsure, while 19 percent indicate this change would have little, if any, effect on property taxes and 16 percent said it would cause property taxes to increase less rapidly. The large number of respondents who responded “don't know/unsure” indicates a need for more public information about this complicated issue.

## Services from pharmacies

Over one-half of Illinois Rural Life Panelists (55%) get most of their prescriptions from pharmacies located less than five miles from their homes. Other Panelists travel farther distances (31%) or use mail order (5%) to get their prescriptions. The most important factor influencing choice of pharmacy is convenience. However, significant numbers of Panelists also mentioned cost, requirements of their insurance company or HMO, and quality of service as reasons for getting prescriptions from a particular source. For the majority of Panelists, the cost of prescription drugs is a major expense; nearly one-half spend over \$300 per year on prescriptions.

Low-income and elderly Panelists are more likely to regard this expense as significant than their more prosperous or younger counterparts.

## Computers and the Internet

Information technology offers rural communities, businesses, and residents powerful tools with which to meet the challenges posed by distance and isolation. Thus, residents' access to and knowledge about computers and the Internet are matters of concern. Just over one-third of Panelists have computers in their homes and 18 percent have used the Internet. Most users have accessed the Internet from home rather than from work and use local rather than long-distance service. The top three reasons Panelists use the Internet are information (91%), e-mail (70%), and business (54%). The most frequent reasons Panelists cite for not using the Internet are lack of interest (65%), lack of computer facilities (63%), and costly telephone charges (55%).

## Recycling

Over 70 percent of Panelists recycle some items. The main reason they recycle is concern about the environment. However, many respondents say recycling is inconvenient. This problem, along with lack of access to recycling facilities, keeps some Panelists from recycling. Curbside pick-up or readily available drop-off facilities would increase recycling. More enforcement of recycling regulations and the opportunity to recycle a greater range of materials would also increase the number of rural residents who recycle. Finally, public information linking recycling to local community development goals, such as beautification and tourism, might encourage participation in this activity.

## Energy efficiency and housing

Illinois Rural Life Panelists make energy efficiency improvements to their homes for financial and comfort reasons rather than because of environmental concerns. Policy-makers wishing to encourage homeowners to make energy efficient improvements could address Panelists' perceptions of the disincentives presented by historic preservation regulations and property tax assessments. More Panelists oppose deregulation of electric service utilities than favor this measure.

# Who are the Illinois Rural Life Panelists?

See Figures 1a, 1b, and 1c in Appendix A for a demographic profile of Illinois Rural Life Panelists.

Rural Life Panelists live in each of Illinois' 74 non-metropolitan counties. The geographical distribution of Panelists mirrors that of the state's rural population. With the exception of two counties, the county distribution of responding Panelists mirrors the non-metropolitan county population distribution.<sup>1</sup> More respondents live in Southern (30%) and Western (30%) Illinois than in Eastern (22%) and Northern (18%) regions of the state. (See Figure 2 for Illinois Rural Life Panel Survey regions and counties.)

Two-fifths of Panelists live in communities with fewer than 2,500 residents; one-quarter live in communities with over 10,000 residents. The great majority (70%) of survey respondents has lived in their communities for 21 years or more; only 13 percent have lived in their communities for fewer than ten years. The majority (64%) of Panelists live in town; however, over one-quarter live in the country (15%) or on farms (11%).

The majority of Rural Life Panelists are white (88%) and male (58%). Panelists tend to be older than the state's non-metropolitan residents in general, with 55 percent being between the ages of 50 and 79, and seven percent being over age 80. (See Figure 3.) Three-quarters of Panelists are married and 11 percent are widowed; only 13 percent are single, separated, or divorced.

## ADD FIGURE 3 AGE COMPARISON

Compared to Illinois' total non-metropolitan population, Rural Life Panelists are well educated. Only eight percent of Panelists have less than a complete high school education. Thirty percent are high school graduates; 37 percent have some college education; and more than one-tenth (14%) have graduate or professional degrees. According to census data, about one-quarter on Illinois' non-metropolitan population (18 years and older) have not completed high school and only three percent have some graduate education or a graduate or professional degree.<sup>2</sup>

Half of the survey respondents are employed full-time and 11 percent work part-time. One-fifth of Panelists are homemakers and over one-third are retired. The largest number of Panelists work in executive, managerial and professional jobs (15%) or craft, repair, operator, and labor positions (15%).

Rural Life Panelists are prosperous relative to Illinois' non-metropolitan population. Most (41%) Panelists indicated 1996 household incomes of between \$25,000 and \$49,999; 18 percent

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing, STF3A, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

have household incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999; and eight percent have household incomes of over \$75,000. While 30 percent of Illinois' non-metropolitan households report having incomes of less than \$15,000, about ten percent of Panelists report this same income.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## What Rural Life Panelists Think About . . .

# Community Development and Services

The 1980s witnessed widespread population and economic decline in rural Illinois. In the 1990s, these trends were reversed in many non-metropolitan counties, where populations grew and unemployment decreased. Nonetheless, 28 rural counties have continued to lose population during this decade, and unemployment and low wages remain more prevalent in rural than in urban areas.<sup>4</sup> Are these conditions reflected in rural residents' perceptions and attitudes?

Illinois Rural Life Panelists were asked about the quality of life of their families and communities over the past five years and invited to speculate about what the future will bring. In addition, Panelists compared their present financial situations to their circumstances of one year ago. Finally, Panelists gave their opinions about the overall economic prospects for rural Illinois families in the years to come.

### Quality of life and economic prospects

The general improvement in the national economy has affected Rural Life Panelists, who are both more positive about their current circumstances and more optimistic about the future than they were in 1991. In 1991, 18 percent of respondents reported that the quality of life in their communities had improved during the past five years compared to 28 percent in 1996-1997. Panelists indicated similar experience with quality of life for their families during the past five years, with 37 percent reporting improvement in 1991 compared to 43 percent in 1996-1997.<sup>5</sup> The youngest Panelists, aged 20 to 34, perceived greater improvements in the quality of family life than all older age groups. One-third of all 1996-1997 Panelists say their personal financial circumstances are better or much better than they were one year ago. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

While life has gotten better for a large minority of Panelists (43%), it has stayed the same or worsened for more. About 44 percent of Rural Life Panelists report that the quality of family life has remained the same during the past five years and will stay the same in the future. The remaining 10 to 12 percent report a decline in the quality of life for their families. (See Figure 4.)

[Add Figure 4](#)

Panelists were even less optimistic about the quality of life in their communities. About a quarter of Panelists both say community life had gotten worse over the past five years and will continue to worsen. It is not surprising then, that about a third of Panelists believe the economic prospects for rural Illinois families will decline. It is noteworthy that the oldest Panelists (80 years

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<sup>4</sup> Rural Illinois: Making the Partnership Work, Prepared by Governor's Rural Affairs Council and Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Western Illinois University (1996), pp. 1-5; Kenneth Johnson and Norman Walzer, "Rural Illinois in the 1990s: On the Rebound?" Rural Research Report, Volume 7, Issue 3, Spring 1996.

<sup>5</sup> See also "Quality of Life In Rural Areas," Community Economics, No. 254, Cooperative Extension Services, University of Wisconsin-Extension, December 1997.

and older) were more positive about future improvements in rural family economics than people aged 35 to 64. (See Figure 5.)

### Add Figure 5

In the 1990s, larger communities and those in closer proximity to urban centers have experienced greater vitality and prosperity than smaller and more remote communities. It is not surprising, then, that community size is related to Panelists' experiences and expectations about community life, overall economic prospects for rural families, and personal finances. Panelists from large communities with 10,000 or more residents were more likely to report improvements in these areas than Panelists from the smallest rural communities with populations of less than 1,500.

It is also not surprising that income is related to experience and expectations of rural family life and personal financial status. Compared to Panelists with lower incomes, Panelists with higher incomes are more positive about their own family's quality of life and more confident that family life will improve in the future. Panelists with incomes of less than \$15,000 more often report a worsening financial situation than respondents with higher incomes. It is noteworthy that respondents' incomes did not statistically relate to their perceptions or expectations about the quality of life in their communities.

### Jobs

The pessimism about the future expressed by some Illinois Rural Life Panelists may be related to the availability and quality of jobs in many rural areas.<sup>6</sup> Panelists' comments reveal that a variety of factors are associated with the employment issue.

One respondent commented on conditions that force many people to leave rural communities to find better employment opportunities: "There are no good jobs with decent pay and benefits closer than 40 to 60 miles for my adult children. They both are starting their own families in poverty! This frightens and angers me." Another Panelist wrote, "Like many, I plan to leave the Midwest to find good living wage employment. I have watched, in the past 15 years, jobs disappear in the area. . . . It seems like jobs that stay pay less with no benefits or very little. As a driver, [my] income went from \$13.65 to \$7.00/hr. in 1997. The very same driving job." A third commented, "I don't understand how a family of four is supposed to live on low to average wages with the cost of living rising every day and the wages of hardworking middle-aged workers staying the same. There are no good paying jobs with good benefits, which creates the problem of both mother and father having to work just to get by, and in return this causes family problems because the kids have no parental guidance while parents are working and it also complicates marriages because of conflicting work schedules."

Several Panelists commented on the low wages paid to women, one writing, "I feel like there is still a lot of discrimination against women in the work force as far as wages for years

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<sup>6</sup> Although the 1996-1997 Illinois Rural Life Panel Survey included a question on the local job situation, responses to the question were not analyzed because the question was not asked clearly. However, respondents' comments indicate that this is an important issue for rural residents.

worked.” Another respondent wrote, “We need more job opportunities in this town, not minimum wage, for women. My wife drives 35 miles (one way) to work each day.”

### ?? CLIP ART OF ZOOMING CAR ??

Other respondents referred to the difficulties older people experience in the job market. One Panelist commented, “I have found that at age 49, it is almost impossible to find employment in this community.” Another wrote, “There are no job opportunities in this area after you reach middle age unless you are on welfare . . . .

Rural Life Panelists’ concerns reflect the realities: wages are lower in rural than in urban Illinois. Furthermore, there are fewer jobs available to job-seekers in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Rural Illinois faces significant challenges in creating and retaining the employment necessary to stem the drain of people of working age, to offer jobs for welfare recipients, and to provide a high quality of life for all residents.

### Quality of public services

High quality services are necessary to attract industry and create jobs for rural residents. To monitor this issue, Panelists were asked to compare the quality of selected public services now and five years ago. Local streets and roads, county and township roads, and state highways, were more often rated as worsening than other services. One Panelist probably spoke for many rural Illinoisans, writing, “In our area of the state I see an increasing need for better roads, especially state routes and country roads. Poor maintenance is a problem more than the need for 'new' roads.” Nonetheless, the fact that between one-fifth and one-third of respondents report improvements in roads and highways indicates that repairs are ongoing. Panelists over age 50 more often rate road conditions as improving than do Panelists under 50. (See Figure 6.)

### ADD 5-BAR, 3 SEGMENT (ANSWER CATEGORIES) 100% GRAPH FOR ROADS, ETC.

Following roads, the service most often rated as worsening is drinking water. Panelists ratings vary by region. Respondents living in Eastern Illinois were more likely to rate drinking water quality as worsening; those living in Northern Illinois were least likely to say water quality is improving. Older Panelists more often than younger Panelists rate the quality of drinking water as improving. (See Figure 7 for Panelist's perspectives on drinking water and waste water and sewage treatment.)

### ADD 3 SEGMENT, 100% 2 BAR

Other services are viewed more favorably by Panelists. Emergency medical services, library, and hospital services are more often rated as improving than other services. Respondents living in Northern Illinois more often reported that emergency medical services had improved than

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Kleppner and Nikolas Theodore, Work after Welfare: Is Illinois' Booming Economy Creating Enough Jobs? The Midwest Job Gap Project (1997).

those living in other regions. Of all rated community services, fire protection and libraries are least often rated as “worsening.” (See Figure 8.)

### ADD 3 segment, 100% BAR FOR EMT, LIBRARY, AND HOSPITAL, AND PROTECTIVE (2)

The larger the Panelist’s community, the more likely the community is to have medical and social services and the more positive the Panelist’s rating of these services is likely to be. More Panelists living in the largest communities rate hospital services as improving than Panelists from smaller communities. Ten percent of Panelists are without hospital services. Only a small percentage of Panelists lack services for the needy or emergency medical services in their communities (four percent and two percent, respectively). Eighty percent of Panelists without services for the needy and eighty five percent of those without emergency medical services live in communities with 1,500 or fewer people. (See Figure 9.)

### ADD FIGURE, % WITHOUT SERVICES BY SERVICE

More Panelists are without public transportation in their communities than any other service (37 percent). (See Figure 9.) Compared to other regions, residents of Western Illinois more often report a lack of public transportation. According to a resident of a larger community, “Accessible, convenient, round-the-clock transportation is an issue that should be addressed in depth and made more efficient/effective/available—including within the city, between smaller communities, rail/trains, inter-community buses. In our community, large buses ramble half-full most of the time and are not seen as convenient to most residents, despite receiving a subsidy. A good bus service would make the service travel within 2-3 blocks of every home; smaller but more frequent rolling stock based on route participation; clearly marked pick-up points; hourly service; subsidized to encourage ridership; continuous oversight by city staff to keep it full and flexible to meet needs.”

??clip art of rolling stock goes here??

Panelists’ opinions about community services for the needy are related to their incomes. The higher the Panelist’s income, the more likely he or she is to report that the quality of services for the needy is improving. Of all rated community services, Panelists most often had “no opinion” about the quality of services for the needy (12 percent had “no opinion”).

Over three-quarters of Panelists rate educational services at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels as the same or improved compared to five years ago. There is slight difference between the quality ratings for the three school levels with a greater number of Panelists rating elementary education as improving. Nonetheless, survey respondents perceive a need for improvement, one Panelist commenting, “Rural communities need help to improve school buildings. Turn-of-the-century buildings were not made for new technology. Our schools lack computers, new textbooks, and basic supplies. If we can build new prisons, it’s time to build some new schools.” (See Figure 10.)

ADD EDUCATIONAL FIGURE 3 SEGMENT, 3 BAR, 100%

Access to services or businesses

In addition to being asked about the quality of public services, Panelists were asked about the availability of professional, retail, and financial services in their communities. Over eighty percent of Panelists' communities have a plumber, electrician, carpenter, exterior home repair, grocery store, service station, bank, funeral home, and restaurant. Most Panelists without local services travel less than twenty miles to obtain services.

It is noteworthy that although communities have witnessed an overall decline in service availability since 1992, some types of businesses appear to be making a comeback. Only clothing stores appear to have continued disappearing from rural Illinois communities. The following table illustrates trends in service availability.

Figure 11: Percentage of Panelists Reporting Selected Types of Businesses in Their Communities

<b>Business</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1992</b>
Bank	93%	89%	95%
Service Station	92%	89%	95%
Restaurant	91%	89%	95%
Grocery Store	88%	86%	94%
Hardware Store	79%	78%	85%
Clothing Store	59%	61%	68%

This table represents Panelists' knowledge of service availability.

Appliance repair, hardware stores, and clothing stores are the least available services in Panelists' communities. Perhaps predictably, Panelists must also travel further to obtain these services. Twenty percent of Panelists without appliance repair and clothing stores drive more than twenty miles for these services.

See Appendix B for Panelists written comments about Community and Economic Development issues.

## What Rural Life Panelists Think About . . . Property Tax Caps

Panelists were asked for their opinions about the impact caps on property taxes would have in downstate Illinois. One-fifth of Panelists (19 percent) say caps would “have little, if any, effect on property taxes.” The smallest number of Panelists (3 percent) think caps will “lower property taxes.” Almost one-third of Panelists believe caps will cause property taxes to increase—13 percent thought property taxes will increase more rapidly and 16 percent thought property taxes will increase less rapidly due to caps. One respondent commented, “On the issue of tax caps—I’m a school board member—small districts are suffering because of state funding and tax caps will only hurt us more. I do believe we have to get the state to provide more funding so the burden isn’t on the property owners. I think tax caps are a good concept, but not for the poorer districts.”

When asked for their opinions about this issue, almost half of Panelists (48 percent) responded “don’t know/unsure.” Male Panelists and higher income Panelists more often have an opinion about the impact caps would have on property taxes than female Panelists and lower income Panelists. These response patterns indicate a need to inform rural residents about the effect caps will have on property taxes. (See Figure 12.)

**FIGURE HERE, STALE DOUGHNUT**

Appendix B presents Panelists’ comments about taxes in the section, “What Rural Panelists Think About . . . Community and Economic Development.”

## What Rural Life Panelists Think About . . . Pharmacy Services and Costs

The Rural Life Panel Survey traditionally asks Panelists about health care issues. The 1996-1997 Survey collected information about access to and cost of services provided by pharmacies. Three-quarters of Panelists (77 percent) have a drug store in their community—down from 80 percent in 1992. The larger the community the more likely it is to have a drug store or pharmacy. About half of Panelists (55 percent) drive five miles or less to get prescriptions from a local pharmacy or a pharmacy in a nearby town. Just over one quarter of Panelists (28 percent) drive between six and 25 miles to get prescriptions filled. A few Panelists (5%) obtain prescriptions by mail. One-tenth of Panelists obtain prescriptions from multiple sources. (See Figure 13.)

### FIGURE 13 OF SOURCE of prescriptions, SMALL BAR

How do Panelists choose their provider of prescription medications? Convenience is the factor cited most often by Panelists (45%). Almost two fifths make their choice based on either cost (17%) or insurance requirements (16 %). Finally, quality of service is the most important consideration for 14 percent of Panelists. (See Figure 14.)

### FIGURE 14 OF REASONS, SMALL PIE

Panelists want health information and information about their prescriptions from their pharmacies. Most Panelists receive information about drug effects (91%) and generic drug equivalents (80%) from pharmacists. Almost all Panelists consider this information to be important. A smaller percentage of Panelists receive general health information (57%) or recommendations about nonprescription treatments (41%). Yet, receiving this information is important to over two thirds of Panelists. Receiving recommendations about nonprescription treatments is important to more young than old Panelists. (See Figure 15.)

The majority (82%) of Panelists' pharmacies keep records of personal or family prescriptions. An even greater number of Panelists (89%) say this service is important to them. The pharmacists of 38 percent of Panelists ask about the effects prescribed drugs have on Panelists or their family members. Almost three-quarters of respondents (71%) consider this questioning to be important. (See Figure 15.)

### FIGURE 15 OF SERVICES RECEIVED and important, BAR

Panelists' income is directly related to their evaluation of the importance of receiving certain types of information from their pharmacies. More low-income than high-income Panelists want information about generic drug equivalents and general health.

## Cost of prescription drugs

Just over one quarter of Panelists' households spend \$500 or more annually on prescription drugs (insured and out-of-pocket costs). Almost half of Panelists have insurance that covers 80 to 100 percent of prescription drug costs. Another third of Panelists have insurance that covers as much as 10 percent of drug costs. More than half of Panelists (58 percent) say the out-of-pocket cost of prescription drugs is a moderate or significant expense for their households. Most Panelists (81%) spend less than \$300 annually for nonprescription drugs and medical devices. (See Figures 16 and 17.)

### FIGURE OF COSTS, 16 and figure of significance of costs,17, SMALL PIES

Older and poorer Panelists most often view their out-of-pocket drug costs as significant. Panelists with lower incomes have less prescription insurance coverage. Seventy percent of Panelists with annual incomes of less than \$15,000 have insurance that covers no more than 10% of prescription drug costs. (See Figure 18.)

### FIGURE 18 OF INSURANCE COVERAGE, SMALL PIE

Panelists' comments reveal how devastating prescription costs and other medical expenses can be. One respondent wrote, "I am concerned about the high cost of prescription drugs (also nonprescription drugs) and health insurance. We spend about \$6,000 a year on prescription drugs (of which our insurance company will pay \$2,000). We also pay out-of-pocket money on oxygen (about \$70 per month) and quite a lot on nonprescription drugs (Tylenol, cough syrup, Maalox, etc.). Our health insurance premiums are \$309 per month and scheduled to go up in January. My husband and I are both on Social Security, so you can see medical bills take a big portion of our checks. My husband is disabled and on oxygen all the time, so he can't get a job, and I feel like I need to stay home to take care of him, so I can't go to work either."

Appendix B presents Panelists' comments about health care costs, access, and availability.

## What Rural Life Panelists Think About . . . Computers and the Internet

Information technology offers rural communities, businesses, and residents powerful tools with which to meet the challenges posed by distance and isolation. Thus, residents' access to and knowledge about computers and the Internet are matters of concern.

Over one-third of Rural Life Panelists (37%) have a computer at home. Panelists with higher incomes and more education are more likely than their less prosperous and less educated counterparts to have computers and use the Internet. Only 17 percent of all Panelists say they have ever accessed the Internet.

How do rural residents access the Internet? Panelists most often use a modem at home (60%) or a computer at work (38%). A computer in town was the least utilized Internet access point (6 percent). About 40 percent of Panelists who use the Internet must dial long distance. About one-third of Panelists have local phone access to the Internet. Most remaining Panelists do not know if there are plans to bring this service to their communities.

Why do rural residents use the Internet? Panelists who access the Internet do so for the reasons in Figure 19.

Figure 19, COMPUTER ART WITH REASONS IN MONITOR SCREEN

- information (91%)
- email (70%)
- business (54%)
- discussion groups (31%)
- games (30%)
- other (29%)
- shopping (21%)

Why do Panelists not use the Internet? The most important reasons are lack of interest (65%), not having access to a computer with Internet software (63%), costly phone charges (55%), and not knowing how (48%). Less than a quarter of Panelists say they do not know what the Internet is and/or are unable to find needed information on the Internet. One respondent commented, "I do not know what the Internet is. I have asked many people and they didn't know either."

Appendix B presents Panelists' comments about computers and the Internet.

## What Rural Life Panelists Think About . . . Recycling

In 1990 and 1995, Rural Life Panelists provided information about trash disposal, including recycling. In 1990, over one-half of Panelists and in 1995, approximately one-third of Panelists lacked access to recycling facilities of any kind.<sup>8</sup> Almost half of 1996-1997 respondents cite lack of recycling services as the most important reason they do not recycle.

What materials are being recycled? Most Panelists (77%) recycle aluminum cans. Over one-half recycle newspaper; more than 40 percent recycle plastic and glass. Approximately one-third of survey respondents recycle “other cans” (34%) and oil (31%), while 28 percent respectively recycle “other paper” and cardboard. (See Figure 20.)

### FIGURE 20 OF YES RESPONSES TO RECYCLING

Panelists’ responses indicate a weak but significant positive association between age and recycling. As people age, they are more likely to recycle. This is not the case with the recycling of oil. Residents of larger communities are more likely to recycle items compared to residents living in smaller communities. The large number of recyclers who live in communities with 10,000 or more residents likely influences this finding.

Why or why not recycle? Figure 21, lists, in order, the reasons why people recycle or do not recycle.

### figure 21, table WITH REASONS AND RANK

Panelists chose the most important reason that would encourage them to begin recycling or to recycle more. These reasons are ranked in order of importance as follows:

- for environmental concerns (34%);
- because recycling is available (31%);
- to dispose of waste (16%);
- for “other reasons” (16%); and
- because local law requires recycling (3%).

Panelists’ comments reveal recycling is an important and emotional issue for rural residents. One respondent identified a link between recycling programs and economic development, writing, “We have no recycling available within 75 miles. All we have left is to promote tourism for income, but with trash dumped in every ditch and blowing all over it is not a pretty sight to see. There are no education programs available to stop litter. Of course, when there’s no place to take it, what are the people supposed to do with it? A real problem.”

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<sup>8</sup> Community Research Services, Illinois State University, “Rural Life Panel 1995: Summary Report,” Volume 6, Issue 1, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, July 1995.

Several Panelists mention the inconvenience associated with recycling. One respondent refers to infrequent collection, writing, “We have a once-a-month drop off site, but I just don’t take the time to participate. Also, we have plastic to recycle, but I don’t like to take the space to hold it for the once-a-month pick ups.” Another commented on the travel needed for recycling, saying, “We drive 50 miles to recycle cans, glass, aluminum. Oil is picked up at the farm. We can recycle steel within 15 miles.”

Other comments were concerned with the management and economics of recycling. One Panelist wrote, “I have recycled as much as possible since 1970. The biggest problem I see is lack of market for byproduct and the piecemeal approach efforts to recycle are taking. Everything that goes to a landfill should be processed on an industrial scale and suitably recycled or properly disposed of.” Another respondent commented, “I would love to see some recycling industries developed.” Still another wrote, “There needs to be incentives for recycling companies to accept plastic along with the profits available with other materials.”

One Panelist mentioned the need for recycling for additional materials, writing, “Recycling is a concern of mine, all the many times I have hauled asphalt roofing to the nearest landfill, it makes me think every time I go. What would we do without a landfill location? All homes or most of them use asphalt roofing. Roofing takes a lot of space in a landfill.” Another Panelist referenced landfill space and an opposition to recycling, saying, “As you may perceive, I feel that the recycling fetish has created more problems than it has solved. Most of the trash is just that, trash. The only scarcity to be dealt with on this subject is landfill space, and that is a transportation problem, not an environmental problem.”

Several respondents commented on the need for both laws mandating recycling and enforcement of existing legislation. One Panelist wrote, “Would like to see mandatory recycling in every community soon.” Another commented, “I was told the law says if you sell motor oil you have to accept used motor oil for recycling. Why isn’t this enforced?”

Finally, one Panelist commented on the values associated with recycling, “As long as it is cheaper to throw away resources than to save them, recycling will not be done on a large scale. Most people don’t care about the environment and in my business of farming, neither does the government. Example: 1966 Plow up the conservation reserve and plant it in corn. Forget erosion, conservation, etc. To hell with the future consequences! Major recycling will reduce the need for new material. Bad for big business suppliers.”

## **RECYCLING CLIP ART SYMBOL SOMEWHERE IN COMMENTS**

See Appendix B for Panelists’ written comments about recycling.

## What Rural Life Panelists Think About . . .

# Housing

Many rural Illinois residents live in older homes that could be made more energy efficient. Thus, the 1996-1997 Illinois Rural Life Panel Survey explores consumers' experience, knowledge, practices, and plans related to housing, utility services, and energy efficiency.

Almost all (94%) of Rural Life Panelists live in houses; three percent live in trailers, apartments, or condominiums. Most respondents are owner-occupiers, with over half (54%) owning their dwellings outright and 38 percent paying mortgages. (See Figure 22.)

### FIGURE 22, PIE OF HOME PAYMENT HERE

Most of the Panelists' homes are older, with the majority (69%) having been built before 1970 and just over one-fifth built between 1970 and 1984. Fewer than 10 percent of homes were built after 1985. Forty-three percent of Panelists have lived at their current addresses for more than 21 years; over one-quarter have lived at their current addresses for between 11 and 20 years.

## Heating and cooling

Most Rural Life Panelists use natural gas (68%) to heat their homes. Fifteen percent of respondents heat their homes with propane gas, while 13 percent use electricity for this purpose. Only three percent and two percent respectively heat with solid fuel or oil. (See Figure 23.) Most Panelists have furnaces or boilers as the main heating system in their homes (90%); gas-powered water heaters (72%); and central air conditioning units (78%).

### FIGURE 23 , BAR WITH PERCENTAGE USING AS MAIN FUEL TYPE TO HEAT HOME

Three companies supply the lion's share of natural gas or propane used by Panelists, with CIPS supplying 24 percent, Illinois Power supplying 23 percent, and Northern Illinois Gas supplying 20 percent of these customers. Other significant gas suppliers are cities, which supply 13 percent of Panelists, and "other" providers, which supply 17% of Panelists. Electricity is provided mainly by CIPS (32%) and Illinois Power (20%), with Commonwealth Edison providing power to 13 percent of Panelists. Cooperatives provide electricity to eight percent of respondents and "other" suppliers account for 28 percent of this market. (See Figures 24 and 25.)

### TWO FIGURES HERE, 1 PIE ELECTRICITY--24; 1 PIE NATURAL GAS--25

## Deregulation of electric service utilities

Illinois Rural Life Panelists were asked for their opinions about deregulation of electric service utilities. Most Panelists with an opinion oppose deregulation (34%), while an even larger number (38%) don't know what they think about this issue. Only 18 percent favor deregulation and 13 percent neither favor nor oppose this measure. (See Figure 26.)

## figure 26, PIE OF DEREGULATION

One Panelist commented, “Deregulating electric will put a lot of people out of work. Small electric co-op will be sold out.” Alternatively, another respondent said, “I favor deregulation of electric service as I believe that competition and free enterprise should bring lower prices. But, as has been show in the past with other services such as telephone and cable, this has not always proven to be true. Perhaps another way needs to be looked at in the dispersion of monopolized or community-contract services.”

## Energy efficiency improvements

The survey explored respondents' knowledge about energy efficiency. Panelists think insulation upgrades are most important for increasing energy efficiency in their homes, closely followed by reducing or stopping air leakage. They ranked window replacement as only moderately important. Compared to the methods already mentioned, cooling system upgrades and the addition of storm windows were considered as least important for improving energy efficiency. Panelists also indicated the energy efficiency they have made to their homes in the last five years. (See Figure 27.)

### Figure 27, TABLE WITH ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE RANK, AND PERCENTAGE MAKING IMPROVEMENTS--WITH NOTE ABOUT BASE FOR PERCENTAGES

When asked to rank reasons for considering making energy efficient improvements to their homes, Panelists noted finance and comfort as primary motivations. In order of importance, Panelists indicated they would make improvements for the following reasons:

1. save on utility bills;
2. make their homes more comfortable;
3. make their homes safer;
4. increase their home's appraisal value; and
5. protect the environment.

Panelists' comments indicate that cost considerations limit the home improvements they can make. One respondent wrote, "There are lots of improvements that could be (need to be) done to our house and neighborhood, but costs limit you. Every year you think you will be able to afford something, but everything costs more, but wages remain the same." Tax considerations were also mentioned by several respondents—for example, "When we fix our house up, the county wants to raise your taxes. I personally feel they are penalizing me for trying to have a nice house."

One Panelist commented on the difficulty of improving older properties, writing, "We live in a Victorian house—over 100 years old—which is listed as a landmark house. Consequently, we cannot change the outside appearance of the house. The walls are 18 inches thick and are of stone and two courses of brick (one-inch sheathing over four-inch studs) and plaster lath (difficult to insulate). The house has 96 windows, most of which are eight feet tall. We have single storm windowed all and double storm windowed windows on the north side of the house." Another wrote, "In [community], the property taxes are too high considering everything is considered historical and you pay hell to try to improve anything—especially to side a home with vinyl and add insulation."

Appendix B presents Panelists' comments about housing and energy efficiency.

## Illinois Rural Life Panelists Say . . . There is a need for planning

Both survey results and Panelists' comments on topics ranging beyond survey questions suggest the need for rural communities to monitor changes; assess needs on a regular basis; and make plans to position themselves to take advantage of the opportunities and meet the challenges of the future. One respondent indicated frustration with complacency in local government, writing, "The people in high places are more concerned about trees on Main Street, flowers in flower boxes, getting together to eat as often as possible, and, in general, ignoring the working availability in our area. We are not on an Interstate, so towns much smaller than [ours] bring in industry. Their [the towns on an interstate] developmental parks have factories as the promise of additional business that benefits the entire community."

Rural communities are particularly dependent on major employers. Results of a downsizing, company move, or business closure can be devastating. One respondent wrote, "In the past year, the largest employer in the county was closed, putting over 200 employees directly and indirectly out of work and there are no jobs available here. Most people will have to leave the community to find work or go on our already overloaded welfare rolls. This in turn will have a domino effect on our school, hospital, and other businesses."

Another Panelist commented on the need for more childcare and better educational facilities. "We live in a rural area where it takes two incomes just to pay the bills, yet we have very few licensed daycare facilities. Where are the children? . . . Our schools are getting less tax funding and more requirements yearly. Our children and grandchildren are not getting the education they deserve and we have paid for. I fear for their futures, and ours, for children not properly educated won't become the workers and leaders our country needs. Instead, we'll be building prisons to house them." Another respondent wrote, "Would like more vocational schools for graduates from high school, i.e., blue collar workers. More opportunities for employment for the young adults so they remain in our small community instead of going to the big city for employment."

Several respondents commented on the increasing problem of working poverty in rural communities. One Panelist wrote, "I feel there is a need to address housing needs for families whose income 'falls between the cracks.' Too little to receive some loans and too much to get other loans available. The "too much" then have to spend all they have on rent and can never save enough to have a down payment on a home and all their years of rent payment is lost with no equity, etc., to show for all that expense." Another wrote, "[There is a] Great need for local college . . . to be able to offer courses to allow full-time working people of age to complete degree (BA, BS). This would enable salary to increase . . . . A 50-year-old divorced woman with no children at home and no four-year degree makes wages that are lower than some people on public aid and government handouts."

Rural communities are already experiencing the "graying of America." In Illinois' non-metropolitan counties, persons over age 60 represent 22 percent of the total population,

compared to 16 percent in urban counties.<sup>9</sup> With relatively fewer younger people available to meet the needs of an expanding group of seniors, rural communities must plan innovative ways to address this challenge. One Panelist commented, “We really need some help to get a better senior citizens center. . . . Just heard today they no longer have anyone to fix the meals. [There is] no restaurant or building available. We also really need housing for seniors.” An older respondent wrote, “Our health care services are expensive, more so than other places, and quality is fair to poor. Pharmacies refuse to bill Medicare, so most of our Medicare patients go out of town or mail order to those that do take care of paper work. Our telephone system in rural areas is way too expensive for the service we receive, areas are too small. Making most calls long distance charges even to close neighbors.”

Finally, some rural communities face the challenge of dealing with success. What if development strategies work? One Panelist wrote, “We live in a community that is historic and beautiful. This has brought the mixed blessing of tourism and many second homes to our area. While enjoying the interesting mix of people and “extras” we have, such as theater, music, restaurants, arts, etc., we also mourn some of the losses our community has [sustained]. I miss having a regular downtown as the heart of our city. I worry about the souring real estate prices and property taxes. The community is becoming too expensive for the pocketbook for some who grew up here. We have good community spirit and support, but I very much worry about the future of the community. We have a lot of jobs, but too many people surviving by working 2 or 3 part-time jobs at low wages and often no benefits. We’ve seen the heart of town move from the center to the outskirts and an ugly sprawl is being created along the highway. We’ve of necessity become more auto-dependent and are poorer, in more ways than one, because of it.”

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<sup>9</sup> Profile of Illinois’ Elderly, Illinois Department on Aging (1994).