

Recapping **Rural America's Role** in the Presidential Election

By Sara Wyant, Agri-Pulse Communications

Most articles in our Today magazine focus specifically on crop insurance and agricultural topics as they relate to crop insurance. Obviously, the Presidential election was the major news story for 2016 and Rural America ultimately played a prominent role in the outcome. It was during 2016 that Agri-Pulse Communications conducted a series of farmer surveys and we are pleased that Sara Wyant, President of Agri-Pulse, has agreed to share these results with our readers. We hope you find this educational and informative.

Editor's Note:

Sara Wyant is President of Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc., a diversified communications firm with offices in Washington, D.C., and Camdenton, MO. As a veteran farm policy reporter, she is well recognized on Capitol Hill, as well as with farm and commodity associations across the country. Her newsletter and website, Agri-Pulse, includes the latest updates on farm policy, commodity and conservation programs, trade, food safety, rural development, and environmental and regulatory programs.

November 8 has come and gone and President-Elect Donald J. Trump is ready to take office on January 20. But many people are still doing some soul searching, trying to figure out how Trump won the election.

Granted, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote count by about 2.9 million votes. But her campaign strategy failed to put her over the top in several of the so-called "swing" states and she lost in the Electoral College. Consider these facts:

- Trump voters came out in droves in 26 states, most of which usually vote Republican with the exception of Iowa and Ohio. Voters in both of those states went for President Obama in both 2008 and 2012. Trump won in 2016.
- Trump carried Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan. Obama won all four states in 2012. And even more surprising, Wisconsin had not voted for a Republican president since 1984. Pennsylvania and Michigan had not voted for a Republican president since 1988.
- The GOP also kept control of the U.S. Senate and House. And on the state level, Republicans increased their control of governorships, from 31 to 33 states, and picked up five state House chambers and two state Senate chambers. All in all, November 8 was a big night for the GOP.

Revenge of flyover country?

Most national pundits and pollsters didn't catch the fact that Donald Trump was building a broad swath of support in parts of the United States — often referred to as "flyover" country. These are the regions of the country between the coasts that are often ignored.



After November 8, it quickly became apparent that most national polling firms weren't asking the right people. Our nationwide poll of farmers and ranchers in October indicated that Donald Trump was a clear favorite over Hillary Clinton by a 37 percent margin.

Compared to a similar *Agri-Pulse* poll conducted in late January, respondents indicated an even greater dissatisfaction with the direction of the country, the farm economy and the regulatory environment. But those numbers were consistently higher among Republicans.

When asked if they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country, a whopping 86 percent said they were "somewhat" or "very dissatisfied." That indicates an up-tick from

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another *Agri-Pulse* poll conducted in late January 2016. At that time, slightly over three-quarters of the voters surveyed were dissatisfied with the di-

rection of the country. Those levels of dissatisfaction were at 90 percent or higher in Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

Part of the dissatisfaction could be based on concerns about the overall U.S. economy, and the farm economy, with low prices for many commodities and livestock products. Net farm income is forecast to be \$70 billion in 2016, down 17 percent. If realized, the 2016 figure would be the lowest since 2009. In the most recent poll, 60 percent of the farmers and ranchers expressed dissatisfaction with the ag economy, compared to about 50 percent in January. Among Democrats surveyed in October, the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the ag economy was more equally split, with 49 percent satisfied versus 50 percent dissatisfied.

Still, despite the economic downturns and tightening farm credit conditions, almost half of those surveyed are planning to "stay the course" over the next year. About 16 percent said they would be borrowing more money, 4 percent said they would be selling off assets or renting out their land and only 3 percent said they had plans to terminate their operation. That means risk management strategies, including crop insurance, are likely to be even more important.

If there is one thing that farmers and ranchers agree on — across party lines, geography, age and farm size — it's that federal regulatory policies related to agriculture are moving in the wrong direction. Over 70 percent of those surveyed said that regulatory policies are on the wrong track — up from 66 percent in January. Nationally, over three-quarters of respondents in the 25-34 age group agreed that things were on the wrong track.

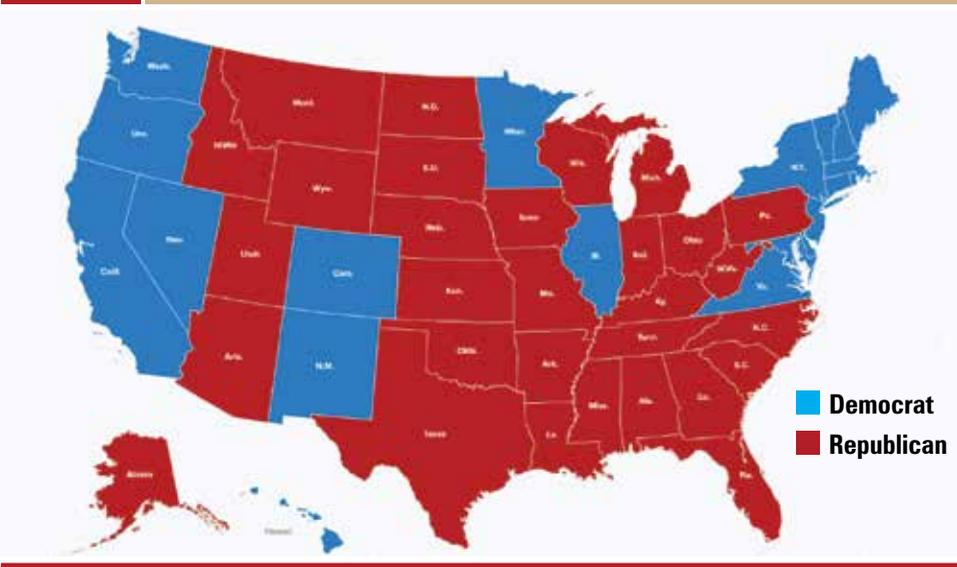
Asked to list which types of federal regulations are most burdensome, about one-third of those responding cited federal pesticide regulations, while regulations over water quality and farm labor each garnered 20 percent of the vote, respectively.

Looking for change

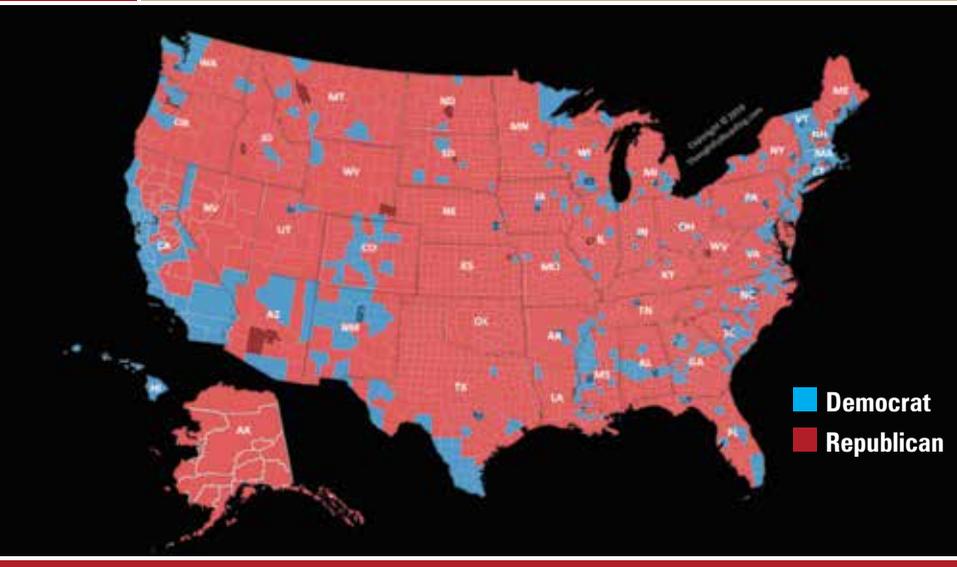
It seems obvious that voters in farm country wanted something different than what they currently had for White House leadership and what they believed Hillary Clinton would deliver.

But we also know that farmers and ranchers make up less than two percent of the population. So for Donald Trump to win, he needed not only farmers and ranchers to show up at voting booths, but he needed a lot of their rural neighbors and small-town citizens — both Republicans and

2016 Presidential Election Results by State



2016 Presidential Election Results by County



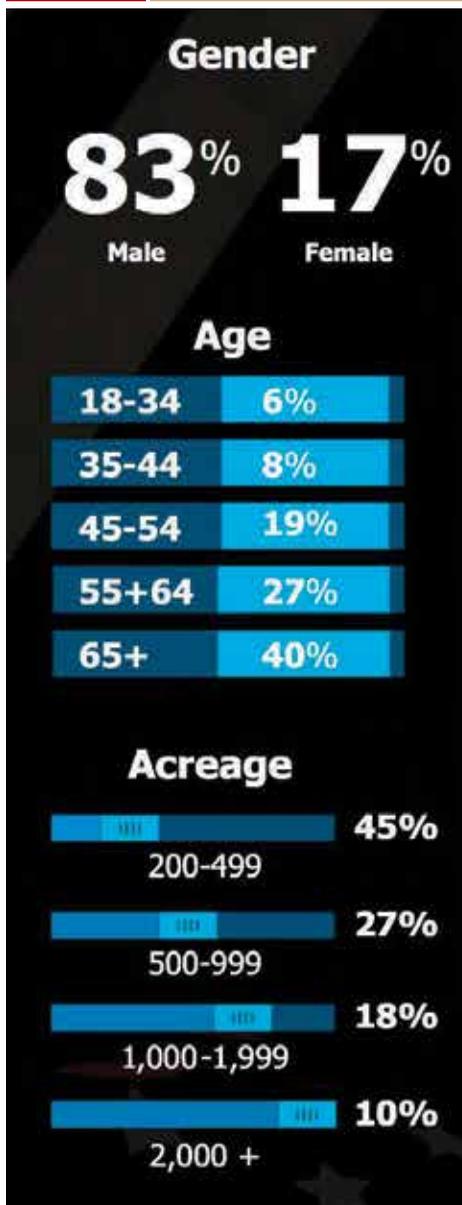
Democrats. And that they did, turning a handful of traditionally democratic “blue” states to red.

National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson told *Agri-Pulse* that Trump’s anti-trade message resonated with many of his members. Even though both Trump and Clinton opposed major trade deals, his NFU members believed that Trump would stand tall and defend his position, while Clinton would change course.

Johnson said he knew of NFU members — who have long supported Democratic candidates — that voted for Trump because of his stance on trade.

“That’s largely, I believe, the reason he was elected,” Johnson said.

2016 Presidential Election Results by Gender, Age & Acreage



The Agri-Pulse Poll, which was conducted by Aimpoint Research from Oct. 5-18, reached out to 750 commercial operations of 200 acres or more. The sample was not selected to favor one party over another, but, reflecting the more conservative nature of farmers and ranchers in recent elections, about 67 percent of our sample identified as Republican or leaning Republican. Democrats or those leaning Democrat made up 20 percent of the 750 farmers and ranchers who picked up the phone during what is still a very hectic harvest season for many. Just 12 percent of respondents identified themselves as Independent.

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Luxury issues

University of Maryland political scientist James Gimpel says the polarization between rural and urban voters has been growing, in part because of the rural hostility toward the “Obama/Clinton rhetoric on the rural economy, pipelines, environmental protection and climate change.”

Gimpel says he doesn’t buy the theory that Trump stirred up racism in the nation’s heartland.

“I don’t think rural residents are any more racist than other sectors of the population,” he said.

In states where coal is produced, like West Virginia, Kentucky, and Wyoming, the percentage of GOP voters “shot through the roof,” Gimpel said. “It was not so much about Trump as a candidate but that she had to be stopped. And he was the lesser of two evils.”

There is a sense that the Democrat’s envi-

ronmental policy is a “luxury” issue for the rich, Gimpel said.

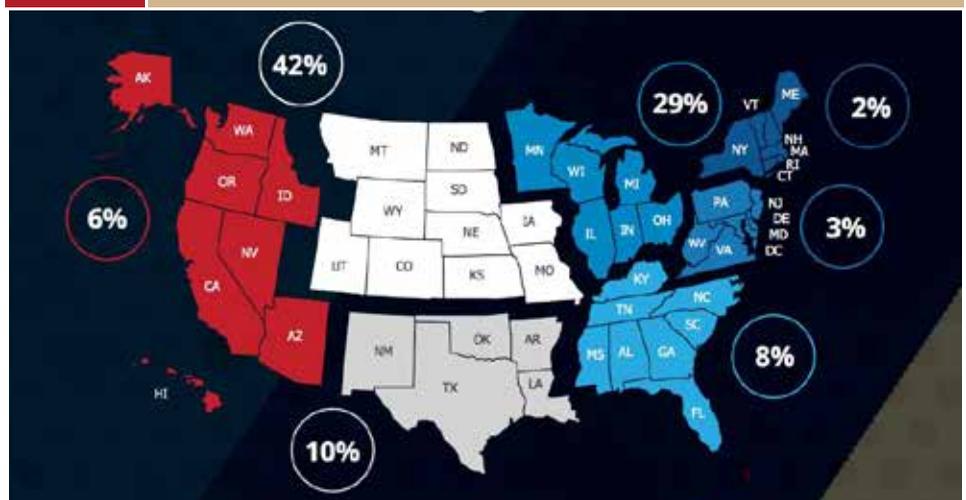
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Need to rebuild bridges?

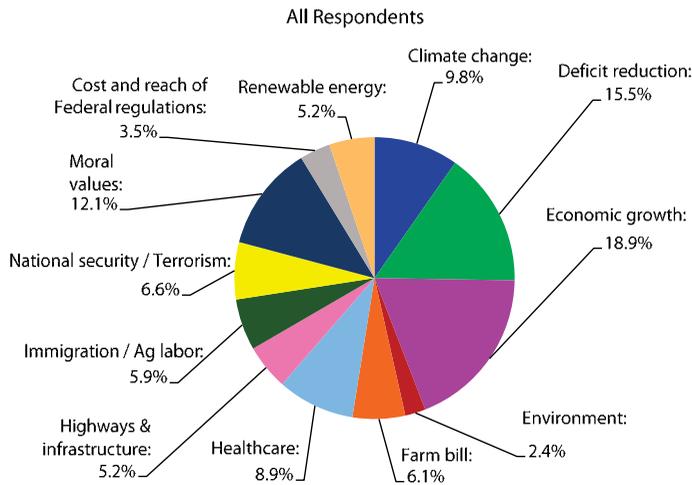
Former Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, a democrat who represented Kansas in the U.S. Congress for 18 years, is encouraging fellow Democrats to build bridges back to rural America and work on a 50-state strategy — similar to the one proposed by former Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean in 2005.

“The simple fact is the national Democratic Party and the presidential campaign didn’t pri-

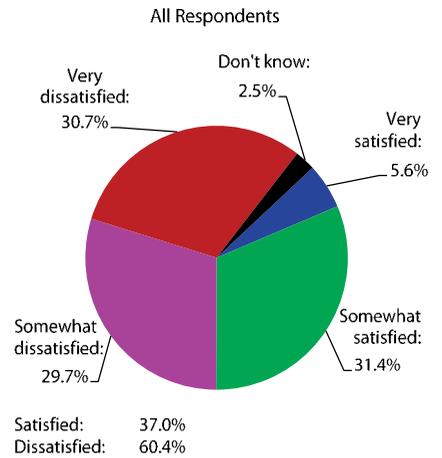
Producer Profile of Respondents by Region



As we head into the 2016 presidential election, what do you view as the one most important issue facing the U.S.?



Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the overall condition of American agriculture today?



criticize visiting rural America or talk about rural issues. This is notwithstanding the fact that Secretary Vilsack has been a forceful leader on these issues and the USDA team has performed in outstanding fashion during the past eight years,” Glickman wrote in an opinion piece.

“A big reason Secretary Clinton lost, and Democrats are reeling, having lost many seats across Federal, state and local governments over

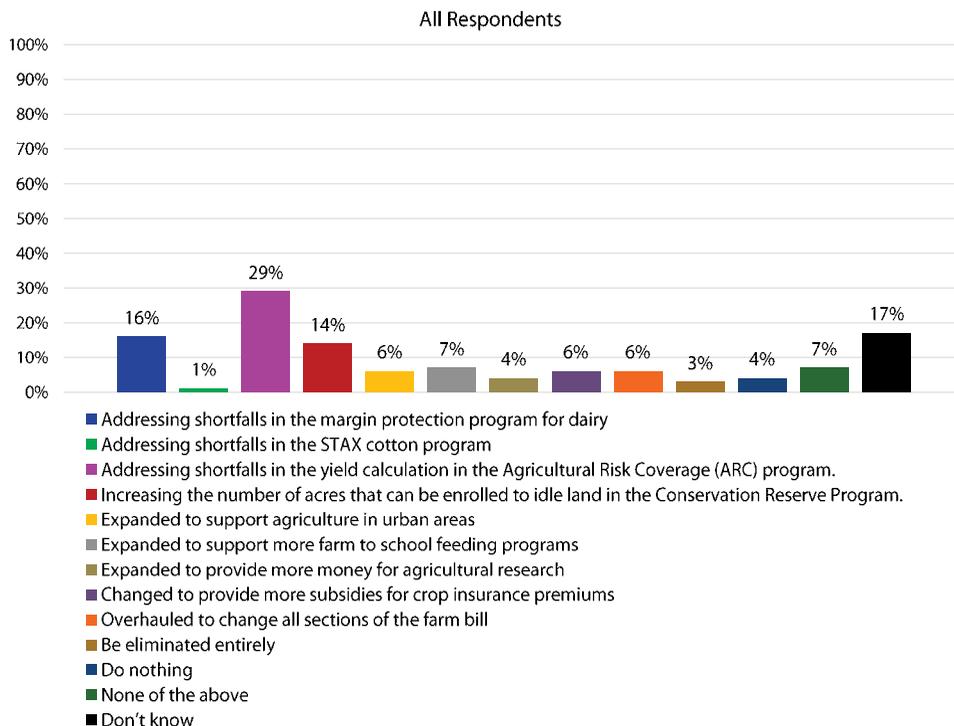
the last eight years, is because of the neglect of rural America by the Party,” Glickman wrote. “The result this time was a reduced number of votes in rural counties of Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan, which may have been the electoral difference in each state.

Glickman says the bulk of Democrats’ 50-state strategy must be a “real effort to visit small towns and rural America more frequently, listen to their

concerns, and make them part of the political process. Millions of people live in smaller communities and rural America; they have been and remain an important part of our national political process.”

In closing, the history of the 2016 Presidential election will, no doubt, be of continued interest to many. And the role of the Rural American vote will be analyzed by both political parties for years to come.

Discussions are already ongoing about the next Farm Bill. In your opinion, which of the following topics should be considered? (select all that apply):



Farm credit conditions are tightening in many parts of the U.S. In the next year do you plan to (select only one):

