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## THE PULSE OF RURAL AMERICA

Our 2018 Zogby poll reveals opinions on business plans, health insurance, elections and more.

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# **THE PULSE**

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## **OF RURAL AMERICA**

Farmers and ranchers helped to send Donald Trump to the White House. Two years later, does that strong support remain as the country prepares for midterm elections?



PHOTO: ROB LAGERSTROM

**R**ural America is widely credited with giving now-President Donald Trump his margin of victory over Hillary Clinton two years ago. By the results of our newest DTN/*The Progressive Farmer* Zogby Analytics poll, rural America does not regret the decision—and it is motivated to vote to show support for him again in the midterm elections, just five weeks away. The Zogby survey shows support for Republican candidates, for President Trump, himself, and for his trade policies. **TWO-PEAT.** It would be bold to predict history is about to repeat itself given the gale-force winds blowing against the president. But, two DTN/*The Progressive Farmer* Zogby polls, one conducted in 2016 and the newest poll conducted this August, include similar results.

With only weeks remaining before the 2016 presidential election, that Zogby poll showed Trump leading Clinton by nearly 2-to-1 among voting rural residents and farmers. It seemed a fairly unbelievable result at the time.

**STILL SATISFIED.** Our newest poll shows rural residents remain satisfied with Trump's win by

a margin of 54.4% to 35.2%. Zogby polled 1,271 rural residents and farmers for this survey (margin of error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points).

Zogby asked rural residents if, given a chance, they would cast their ballots differently than they had in 2016. More than 70% said no, although that endorsement may not sound deeply felt.

**LESSER EVIL.** "I think we got the lesser of two evils for the presidential race," Adam Winkelman says. "I think we have a lot of room for improvement. But, I would say as a whole, I am more satisfied now than I was." Winkelman Farms, Arenzville, Illinois, includes 700 acres of soybeans and 200-acre corn. The Cass County farmer also manages hogs, cattle and trucking enterprises.

"[It was] disappointing that those are the only two choices we had," Cody Goodknight says. Goodknight Farms is 6,000 acres near Chattanooga, Oklahoma. His is a diversified business of wheat, wheat seed, soybeans, cotton, sesame and sorghum. He also runs bred heifers and stocker calves.

Regionally, there are differences in rural satisfaction with the ▶

## THE PRESIDENT

Are you satisfied with the outcome of the 2016 election for president?

Yes	No	Not Sure
54%	35%	10%

Are you satisfied with the direction the Trump administration is taking on farm policy?

Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Not Sure
16%	29%	13%	18%	24%

Does the president devote enough attention to rural America?

Yes	No	Not Sure
30%	47%	23%



PHOTO: MICHAEL WADON

SOME NUMBERS MAY NOT ADD UP TO 100 DUE TO ROUNDING.

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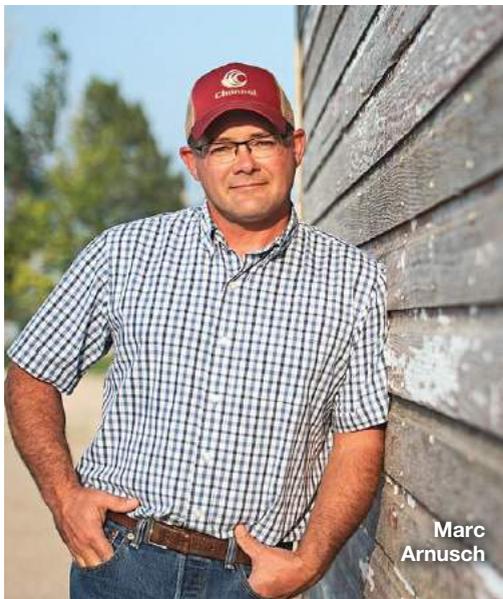
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president. Voters in the South, West and Central/Great Lakes areas of the U.S. are satisfied with the outcome of the presidential election. Eastern farmers and rural residents are more nearly split on the question. More than half of younger voters (aged 18 to 29) are not happy with the election. **SOUND DIRECTION.** Rural residents and farmers say they are satisfied with the current direction of the United States—52.4% express satisfaction, 40.7% are dissatisfied. The margin tightens when respondents are asked if they are satisfied with the president’s work on farm policy—45.5% are very

or somewhat satisfied, 30.7% are somewhat or very dissatisfied. Respondents to the Zogby poll do not give the president or GOP a free pass on rural issues. Only 30.2% believe President Trump devotes enough attention to rural America. Forty-seven percent believe he misses the mark. That sentiment is especially true in the East (53.6% say no); in the Central U.S. (48.6% say no); and among younger voters (53.4% say no). “We get put on the back burner. And, quite frankly, that needs to change,” Marc Arnusch says. “I think, at the end of the day, we have to be talking more about rural

attention to rural issues, while 67.9% say the U.S. House and Senate fall far short of their expectations. Rural residents are closely split on their view of the House—39% are satisfied, 34.1% are not. They are unsatisfied with the makeup of the Senate—34.3% are satisfied, 39.2% are not. **MORE COOPERATION.** Goodknight, a registered Democrat, is disappointed with the Republican-backed tax plan and corporate tax breaks. He’s disappointed that President Trump pulled out of trade agreements and the climate accord. “I think we need to work together, especially among

PHOTO: JOEL REICHENBERGER



Marc Arnusch

“... most farmers are less interested if their state is ‘Red’ or ‘Blue,’ and are more interested in what is best for their farm.” —Marc Arnusch

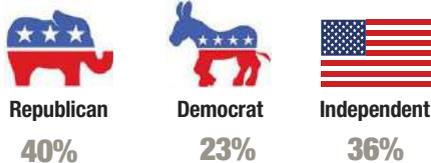
economic prosperity—beyond the farm. That includes rural economies, Main Street businesses, our rural way of life.” Farming atop the Lost Creek Water Basin, near Keenesburg, Colorado, Arnusch manages corn for grain and silage, certified wheat seed, alfalfa, sugar beets, wheat and straw. From his 3,000-acre operation, Arnusch also produces malt barely for craft breweries.

**SUPPORTIVE NOW.** Jeff Wuebker appreciates the president’s focus on rural America. “Definitely more [supportive] than the last president, because he is visiting and talking about rural America,” he says. Wuebker farms near Versailles, Ohio, and manages a sow and farrow-to-wean operation, steers, corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa. He’s politically active—past chairman of the Ohio Soybean Association and served on the Ohio Farm Bureau board of trustees. “The world is run by those who show up,” he says.

Asked how well Congress—both Republicans and Democrats—focus on rural issues, the reply to the Zogby question is dismal. Only 9.1% say Congress devotes enough

powerful nations, better than our president is doing.” The survey indicates a deciding minority of rural residents are willing to give President Trump time for his China trade gambit to work, even as China orders retaliatory tariffs on American farm products. Nearly 37% say the “U.S. action is necessary to fix trade imbalances with China.” Another 10.9% are satisfied with the administration’s plans to compensate farmers for lost income because of retaliatory Chinese tariffs, and 7.3% believe the tariffs represent only short-term disruption. There are detractors—21.3% want Trump to reverse his decision to place tariffs on Chinese imports. Foreign policy, trade and tariffs are important to about a third of those responding to the Zogby survey.

**KEEP IT UP.** Arnusch appreciates President Trump’s focus on building market environments more advantageous to U.S. producers. “As someone who has 20 to 25 years of production ahead of me, I may never see this level of trade negotiations in my career again. We have to get it right this time around,” he says. ▶

**What is your political party preference?**

**Are you more likely to support Democrats or Republicans this year?**


Zogby finds 40.3% of the respondents to this poll identify themselves as Republicans, 23.4% as Democrats and 36.3% as Independents. Asked for which party respondents intend to vote, 47.4% plan to vote for Republican candidates, and 27.2% will vote for Democratic candidates. A large group, 25.4%, are not sure if they will vote. Independents and

they are more or less likely to vote this year compared to a presidential election year, 57.4% said they are more likely to vote this year. Only 20.7% said they are less likely to vote. Voters in the western United States and those 65 years and older are more motivated than other regions and age groups to vote in the coming election. Voters 29 years old or younger are less inclined to vote in this election, Zogby finds.



Cody Goodnight

## TOP ISSUES

As you go to vote in November, which issues are most important to you?

Health care	Taxes	Immigration	Foreign policy	New Markets/ exports	Environmental rules/regulations	Trade policy/ tariffs	Local Schools
72%	65%	52%	31%	18%	42%	31%	32%
Property taxes	Rising interest rates	Cost of production	Availability of internet/ broadband services	Condition of farm-to-market roads, rail and barge service			
48%	38%	25%	27%	20%			

unknowns appear poised to decide rural midterm elections.

Voter enthusiasm in this midterm election cycle is high. When asked if

Among all respondents, it is clear that farm comes before party. More than 72% of respondents say policies affecting their farms are more important than party.

Matthew Efrd farms in the San Joaquin Valley, a few miles south of Fresno, California. He manages 1,500 acres of almonds, walnuts and raisins. Efrd aligns with Republicans and their values. “But, I’m not a Republican ticket person. I have nothing against voting for a Democrat if I feel their platform aligns with our issues.”

Efrd is satisfied with the nation’s direction. Republicans frustrate him, however. “Every time Republicans get control of Congress, they circle the wagons and fire in,” he says. “But, I have no complaints with any of our regional representatives

making agricultural a priority. I think it’s clearly evident that the president recognizes ag issues and sees them as a priority.”

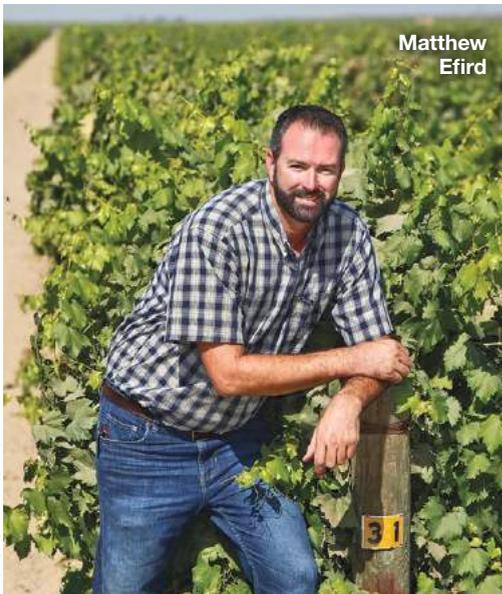
Arnusch agrees. He leans Republican but does not tie his vote to any single party. “I would say most farmers are less interested if their state is ‘Red’ or ‘Blue,’ and are more interested in what is best for their farm,” he says.

## FARM VS. PARTY

Are issues that affect your farm more important to you than political party?

Yes	No	Not Sure
72%	17%	11%

The Zogby poll reveals some differences in voting patterns by region, age and gender. Of men, 58.6% say they are more likely to vote for Republican candidates this year. Eastern U.S. rural and farm voters identify evenly as Democrat and Republican. Younger voters, 18 to 29, will likely vote for Democratic candidates. Voters in every other



Matthew Efrd

PHOTO: GARY KAZANJIAN



## HEALTH INSURANCE

In the last five years, how much have your health insurance costs risen?

5-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%
19%	11%	11%	6%	6%	3%
61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-99%	Over 100%	Not sure
1%	1%	1%	1%	5%	35%

## RURAL FOCUS

Does Congress devote enough attention to rural America?

Yes	No	Not Sure
9%	68%	23%

category from 30 years to 65-plus lean Republican.

Women plan to show up in large numbers for Republicans but only marginally more than women who intend to mark their ballots for Democrats. The Zogby poll finds that 36.6% of women respondents plan to vote for GOP candidates,

“I think we got the lesser of two evils for the presidential race.”

—Adam Winkelman

while 34.4% say they will vote for Democratic candidates. Only 19.8% of men plan to vote Democratic.

Rural respondents have a long list of concerns for Washington to tackle. Taxes are a high priority (64.5%), immigration (51.5%), followed by property taxes (48.4%), environmental rules and regulations (42%) and rising interest rates (38.3%). Broadband service, production costs, local roads and new markets and exports are lower on the list—26.5%, 25.2%, 19.5%, 18.4%, respectively. Asked which issues will be important to them as they enter

the polling booth, 31.3% said trade and tariff policies would be a factor in their voting decision.

“Two [issues] I would put at the very top—trade and immigration reform; I call it ‘farm labor reform,’” Arnusch says. “We have to have access to an affordable workforce, one that has a skill that no one recognizes, the ability to work long hours with repetition.”

**HERE OR NOT.** Is it important that fruits and vegetables are harvested in this country? “Without a doubt,” Arnusch says, answering his own question. “Those will be harvested by hands of immigrants. We just need to decide whether that’ll happen in this country or in a foreign nation.”

Of all the issues, most important to rural residents and farmers is health care. Nearly 72% of Zogby respondents mark health care as their top concern. Seventy-nine percent of respondents say they have been able to find health insurance that meets their needs. But, 15.2% say they have been unable to find suitable health insurance for their families. More, 25.2% say their access to health insurance has declined in the past five years (14.7% say access to health insurance has improved; 54.7% say it has stayed the same).

Health-insurance costs have risen sharply for some. More than 11% of respondents say their premiums have risen 21 to 30% during the past five years. Another 10.7% saw costs rise at least 11%, while 18.8% of respondents say their premiums have increased 5 to 10% over the last five years. Shockingly, 4.7% of those answering the Zogby poll say their costs have



Jeff Wuebker

PHOTO: JODI MILLER

grown more than 100% in the past five years.

Zogby reports that 68.7% of those surveyed have confidence they will find the health care they need for change-of-life illnesses. Thirty-eight percent have family health insurance through an off-farm employer. But, 59.3% have no such benefit.

“We have health insurance through my wife. She’s a teacher at the local school, and we have pretty good coverage,” Wuebker says. “We see nurse practitioners, and I don’t see the doctor much.” He likes this form of medical delivery. “You can ask them questions, and they answer in much more real terms.”

Wuebker carries workers’ comp on himself and his employees. “I’m not covered by her insurance if I get hurt on the farm. They won’t insure me as a self-employed farmer.” ●

## PLAN TO VOTE?

Are you more or less likely to vote in a midterm election compared to a presidential election year?



**MORE LIKELY**  
57%

**LESS LIKELY**  
21%



Adam Winkelman