

energy interests- rural and urban differences

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Urban residents believed there's an energy crisis and were concerned that energy supplies are decreasing. Rural dwellers may not be as convinced there's an energy crisis, but, still indicated they're more likely to cut back on energy use than urban residents. Two Colorado Extension researchers compared urban and rural attitudes and actions and found differences in the way these two groups viewed energy problems.

We're challenged as Extension staff to make better use of our energy resources and educate others to better understand their own energy needs. We must help ourselves and others satisfy energy needs in a more conservation-oriented, efficient manner.

Methodology

In November, 1977, 200 Larimer County residents were randomly selected from an Extension consumer newsletter mailing list.¹ Each person received a two-page energy questionnaire. In February, 1978, a slightly revised copy of the same questionnaire was sent to residents in two rural counties.² Extension consumer newsletter mailing lists provided 230 names from Baca County and 250 names from Logan County. Response rates were 30.5%, 15.7%, and 40.8%, respectively, for the three locations.

Larimer County is defined as a metropolitan county, with over 72,000 urban residents in Fort Collins.³ Baca

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and Logan Counties are classified as rural counties—their largest cities have fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.

Findings

These studies weren't representative of all residents of the three counties, but indicated trends in rural/urban attitudes about the energy situation. The findings point to a need for Extension agents to examine attitudes of people in their own counties to better plan energy programs.

The greatest differences between rural and urban people were in the following areas: (1) belief about an energy problem, (2) sources of energy-saving information used, (3) interest in learning more about energy conservation, (4) support for alternate energy sources and acceptance of government involvement in energy conservation, and (5) steps taken to conserve energy.

Belief About Energy Problem

A greater portion of urban residents felt there would be energy shortages in the year 2000 (urban 62%, rural 44%). Thirty-five percent of the rural people blamed oil and natural gas companies for causing the energy problem (compared to 21% of urban residents).

Energy-Saving Info Sources

Newspapers and magazines were popular sources of energy information for both groups. Urban residents used a greater variety of information sources than rural residents (see Table 1).

Table 1. Useful sources of energy information.

Sources	Respondents' choices ^a	
	Rural (N=138)	Urban (N=61)
Newspapers	56%	74%
Magazines	53	59
Newsletters	28	54
Radio	31	34
Television	49	44
Utility company literature	42	64
Meetings	9	18

^a Respondents selected as many sources as they wished.

Interest in Energy Info

Both groups indicated interest in attending small group meetings to learn more about energy conservation. Seventy-five percent of the urban residents and 61% of the

rural residents checked at least 1 meeting place. Although schools were the most popular meeting locations, the variety of responses suggests that to reach a greater part of the public, meetings should be held in many different places.

A greater proportion of urban residents said they'd be willing to analyze their home energy use with an energy checklist (see Table 2).

Table 2. Interest in small group meetings and energy checklists.

Energy information choices	Respondents' choices ^a					
	Rural (N=138)			Urban (N=61)		
<u>Attending small group meetings</u>						
Schools	30%			56%		
Neighbors' homes	25			30		
Libraries	25			25		
Churches	16			34		
	Agree	Dis- agree	Don't know	Agree	Dis- agree	Don't know
<u>Energy checklist</u>						
I would be willing to spend several hours using an energy checklist to evaluate my family's energy use.	59%	13%	28%	84%	5%	11%

^a Respondents selected as many choices as they wished.

Alternate Sources

Among alternate energy sources, solar energy received the largest amount of support from both rural and urban groups. Over 60% of the urban residents indicated support for all alternate sources of energy, except nuclear.

More urbanites than rural respondents supported tax rebates for energy conservation efforts. Sixty-four percent of the urban residents compared to 28% of the rural group supported taxing less gas efficient cars. Only a small number of either group supported gasoline and natural gas rationing.

Three-fourths of the urban residents and one-half of the rural residents supported the proposal to change the utility pricing structure (see Table 3).

Table 3. Acceptance of alternate energy sources and government regulations.

Energy proposals	Respondents' choices ^a	
	Rural (N=138)	Urban (N=61)
Alternate energy sources		
Solar	77%	92%
Wind	60	80
Biomass	55	70
Geothermal	29	61
Nuclear	28	38
Government enforcement of energy conservation through:		
Higher taxes on less efficient autos	28	64
Rationing:		
Gasoline	12	16
Natural gas	5	8
Tax rebates:		
Insulation	51	79
Solar installation	49	67
Favor switch in utility costs that would charge MORE per unit of energy to those who use more		
Yes	55	75
No	25	... ^b
Don't know/no answer	20	25

^a Respondents selected as many choices as they wished.

^b Urban questionnaire instructions asked respondents to check space if they agreed or to leave space blank if they didn't know or didn't agree with the statement.

**Steps To
Conserve Energy**

A greater proportion of rural than urban residents said they'd spent money to conserve energy. On the other hand, over 90% of both groups said they'd turned down their thermostats and turned off unneeded lights and appliances. Less than one-half of either group had turned down water heater thermostats. Almost three-fourths of the rural and two-thirds of the urban residents said they were using their kitchen ranges more efficiently (see Table 4).

**Implications
for Extension**

These studies show that differences exist in the way rural and urban people think and act about the current energy situation. Understanding these differences will help agents plan energy programs to meet their clients' needs.

Table 4. Energy conservation steps taken.

Conservation steps taken	Respondents' choices ^a	
	Rural (N=138)	Urban (N=61)
<u>By spending money</u>		
Insulation	56%	48%
Storm windows	48	41
<u>Without spending money</u>		
Turn off unneeded lights and appliances	96	97
Turn heat down	91	93
Use kitchen range more efficiently	74	67
Turn water heater temperature down	31	41

^a Respondents selected as many choices as they wished.

One major educational thrust of Extension agents can be to inform people about the tax credits and energy loan opportunities included in the national energy act. Considering that only one-half of the rural residents in this study supported tax rebates, they may be more reluctant to take advantage of the energy benefits available to them.

In rural areas, where long distances must be traveled to attend meetings, it's recommended that energy programs be scheduled along with other planned meetings. For example, an agent may try to have a program before a social event, during employee lunch hours, or at a shopping area. Consider the irony of asking people to use energy to travel to a program on energy conservation.

It isn't enough to understand only local needs. The energy picture can't be seen from an urban or rural point of view. Urban residents need to understand the intensive energy needs in agricultural production that are important to the country as a whole. Rural residents need help in appreciating that fossil fuels are limited and decreasing supplies of energy will change their business and personal lives. Lack of understanding of the total energy picture can lead to one-sided, short-sighted energy decisions by both rural and urban individuals and families.

In addition to understanding energy attitudes of local people, Extension staff needs to be far-sighted . . . to look at energy demands in all future program efforts. We should consider using methods that don't take as much energy as our traditional Extension meetings. It was estimated that one

Colorado district staff meeting would cost \$4,000—which raised the following questions: Was it necessary to meet? Could Extension staff car pool to cut energy use and expenses? Could related business be conducted in three days, maximizing travel expense, instead of the one or two days used in the past? Could letters and telephone calls substitute for the high cost and energy use of travel?

We're challenged as Extension staff to make better use of our energy resources and educate others to better understand their energy needs. We must help ourselves and others satisfy energy needs in a more conservation-oriented, efficient manner.

Footnotes

1. Judy McKenna, *Evaluation of Consumer Attitudes Toward Energy and Energy Conservation in Larimer County* (Fort Collins: Colorado State University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1978).
2. Jan Nixon, *Rural-Urban Attitudes Toward Energy Conservation* (Fort Collins: Colorado State University, 1978).
3. U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976).