

A Survey of the Issues Facing Animal Agriculture in Louisiana

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Introduction

There are many issues that can affect the management, profitability and sustainability of beef, dairy and poultry operations as they produce their products. University extension and research faculty need to be aware of the issues that affect livestock and poultry producers (Morse, 1995), and work to help producers improve the production practices that are profitable and sustainable. This only can be done by knowing what issues are important to the industries and its producers. Then we can develop research and extension programs to address these issues, and ultimately, educating livestock producers who do understand that unbiased, science-based information is needed (Nordstrom et al., 2000).

Therefore, this work was conducted to survey individuals in careers related to the beef, dairy and poultry industries to determine their opinions and attitudes concerning economic, environmental, public policy and production issues facing animal agriculture in Louisiana.

Materials and Methods

A survey with four categories of issues and 10 items per issue category was developed. The four categories were: economic, environmental, public policy and production issues. Additionally, demographic information was included. The surveys were administered at group meetings with beef, dairy and poultry producers throughout Louisiana.

Respondents were asked to rate each item as 5 (extremely important), 4 (substantially important), 3 (moderately important), 2 (slightly important) or 1 (not important). Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

A total of 230 surveys were completed in 2008. Of the respondents, 85 worked in the beef industry, 71 worked in the dairy industry and 74 worked in the poultry industry. One hundred thirty-six respondents were producers/growers, 18 worked in allied animal agriculture industries (industries that supply products or services to the beef, dairy, and/or poultry industries), 13 worked for state agencies, 52 worked for the LSU AgCenter serving the animal agriculture industries and 11 worked in other animal agriculture positions (primarily poultry integrator employees). There were 150 males and 80 females who took the survey. There were four African-Americans, 219 Caucasians, four Hispanics and three "other" race that completed the survey. Also, 63 of the respondents worked in animal agriculture for more than 40 years, 73 worked for 30 to 39 years, 40 worked for 20 to 29 years, 40 worked for 10 to 19 years and 14 worked for less than 10 years.

Results and Discussion

Overall, Beef, Dairy and Poultry Respondents

The survey items and the average ratings of overall (beef, dairy and poultry combined), beef, dairy and poultry industry respondents are in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, respectively. For economic issues, all groups rated the issues substantially important. Overall average ratings were 4.2, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.2 for overall, beef, dairy and poultry respondents, respectively (Table 1). "Rising input costs" is the item that received the numerically highest rating for all groups of respondents. This is in agreement with beef producers surveyed by Steinberg and Comerford (2009) and Troxel et al. (2007). "Global competition" received the numerically lowest rating for overall and for dairy respondents, "global competition" and "maintaining industry infrastructure" received the lowest ratings for beef industry respondents and "land prices" received the numerically lowest rating for poultry industry respondents.

Table 1. Average Ratings of Economic Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Overall, Beef, Dairy and Poultry Respondents^{1, 2}

	Industry				Greatest Degree of Difference
	Overall	Beef	Dairy	Poultry	
Economic Issues:					
Rising input costs (ie., feed, fertilizer, fuel, etc.)	4.8	4.7	4.8	4.9	0.2
Prices producers/growers receive for their animal products	4.6	4.5	4.8	4.6	0.3
Acquiring capital and resources	4.2	4.2	4.0	4.3	0.3
Equipment and machinery costs	4.2	4.0	4.2	4.4	0.4
Land prices	4.2	4.4	4.1	3.9	0.5
Price volatility for animal products	4.2	4.1	4.5	4.2	0.4
Maintaining industry infrastructure (availability of input suppliers)	4.1	3.8	4.4	4.2	0.6
Marketing options	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.0	0.2
Labor needs	4.0	3.9	4.2	4.1	0.3
Global competition	3.8	3.8	3.7	4.0	0.3
Average	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.2	0.1

¹A total of 230 surveys were completed. Of the respondents, 85 indicated that they work primarily in the beef industry, 71 indicated that they work primarily in the dairy industry and 74 indicated that they work primarily in the poultry industry.

²Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

For environmental issues, the average ratings of overall respondents and poultry respondents were substantially important, whereas the average of beef and dairy respondents was moderately important. The average ratings of the 10 items combined were 3.6, 3.4, 3.3 and 4.0 for overall, beef, dairy and poultry respondents, respectively (Table 2). "Public perception of the environmental effects with animal agriculture" received the numerically highest average for all groups of respondents. This agrees with Jones et al. (2000) in which surveyed animal agriculture "neighbors" reported concerns about bacterial contamination, rainwater runoff from manure storage and pesticide residues coming from animal operations. The numerically lowest rating for overall respondents was for "impact of animal agriculture on air quality" and "tillage practices," for beef producers the lowest average was for "impact of animal agriculture on air quality," for dairy producers the lowest average was for "mortality disposal" and for poultry producers the lowest average was for "tillage practices." The greatest degree of difference in responses was for "animal waste disposal/utilization," "mortality disposal," "impact of animal agriculture on water quality" and "impact of animal agriculture on air quality." The poultry industry rated these issues numerically higher than the beef and dairy industries. The poultry industry ratings are in agreement with a survey conducted by Radhakrishna et al. (1991). In their survey, farmers indicated that water pollution, manure management, nutrient management and ground water quality were serious issues related to agricultural production.

Table 2. Average Ratings of Environmental Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Overall, Beef, Dairy and Poultry Respondents^{1,2}

	Industry				Greatest Degree of Difference
	Overall	Beef	Dairy	Poultry	
Environmental Issues					
Public perception of the environmental effects with animal agriculture	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.5	0.5
Use of Best Management Practices to minimize effects of animal agriculture on the environment	3.8	3.8	3.6	4.1	0.5
Animal waste disposal/utilization	3.7	3.2	3.5	4.3	1.1
Conservation/sustainability programs	3.7	3.7	3.5	4.0	0.5
Impact of animal agriculture on water quality	3.7	3.4	3.3	4.2	0.9
Pesticide/chemical use	3.6	3.7	3.3	3.8	0.5
Management of wetlands and riparian zones	3.3	3.2	3.0	3.5	0.5
Mortality disposal	3.3	3.0	2.8	4.1	1.3
Impact of animal agriculture on air quality	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.8	0.9
Tillage practices	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.2	0.1
Average	3.6	3.4	3.3	4.0	0.7

¹ A total of 230 surveys were completed. Of the respondents, 85 indicated that they work primarily in the beef industry, 71 indicated that they work primarily in the dairy industry and 74 indicated that they work primarily in the poultry industry.

² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important, and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

The average ratings were 4.0, 4.0, 3.9 and 4.0, respectively, for public policy issues for overall, beef, dairy and poultry respondents (Table 3). All groups rated these issues substantially important. For all groups, the numerically highest rating was for “consumer confidence in food and animal product safety”. Jones et al. (2000) also reported that food safety issues were a concern for the non-agriculture respondents of their survey. “Government subsidies of animal products” received the lowest numerical rating for all of the public policy issues items for overall, beef and poultry respondents and “government regulation of animal agriculture production practices” received the numerical lowest average for dairy respondents.

Table 3. Average Ratings of Public Policy Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Overall, Beef, Dairy and Poultry Respondents^{1, 2}

	Industry				Greatest Degree of Difference
	Overall	Beef	Dairy	Poultry	
Public Policy Issues:					
Consumer confidence in food and animal product safety	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.5	0.1
Consumer confidence concerning animal agriculture practices	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.3	0.1
State and federal government funding for research and extension education	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.1	0.3
Urban encroachment and land use	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.0	0.3
Source verification of animal products (country of origin labeling)	4.0	3.9	4.2	4.0	0.3
Animal welfare	3.9	3.7	3.8	4.1	0.4
Contingency plans for relief and recovery after a disaster	3.9	3.8	4.1	4.0	0.3
Financial support from commodity groups for research and extension education	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.9	0.3
Government regulation of animal agriculture production practices	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.7	0.3
Government subsidies of animal products	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.5	0.2
Average	4.0	4.0	3.9	4.0	0.1

¹ A total of 230 surveys were completed. Of the respondents, 85 indicated that they work primarily in the beef industry, 71 indicated that they work primarily in the dairy industry and 74 indicated that they work primarily in the poultry industry.

² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

For production issues, the average ratings of all groups were substantially important. The ratings were 3.8, 3.8, 3.7 and 4.0 for overall, beef, dairy and poultry industry respondents, respectively (Table 4). All groups of respondents gave the highest numerical rating to “improving production efficiency” which is in agreement with Steinberg and Comerford (2009). All groups gave the lowest numerical rating to “natural and organic production methods.” The greatest degree of difference in responses was for “biosecurity.” The poultry industry rated this issue higher than the beef and dairy industries.

Table 4. Average Ratings of Production Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Overall, Beef, Dairy and Poultry Respondents^{1, 2}

	Industry				Greatest Degree of Difference
	Overall	Beef	Dairy	Poultry	
Production Issues:					
Improving production efficiency	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.7	0.4
Adapting herd/flock size to maintain profitability	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.2	-
Adoption of improved animal production practices	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.3	0.2
Biosecurity	3.9	3.7	3.5	4.5	1.0
Product safety regulations	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	-
Ethical treatment of animals	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.8	0.2
Use of biotechnology and other technological advances	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.7	0.1
Vertical integration/coordination of animal production	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.6	0.2
National animal identification system	3.4	3.6	3.2	3.4	0.4
Natural and organic production methods	3.1	3.2	2.7	3.2	0.5
Average	3.8	3.8	3.7	4.0	0.3

¹ A total of 230 surveys were completed. Of the respondents, 85 indicated that they work primarily in the beef industry, 71 indicated that they work primarily in the dairy industry and 74 indicated that they work primarily in the poultry industry.

² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

Producers/Growers, Allied industry, State Agency, LSU AgCenter and Other Respondents

The average ratings of producers/growers, allied industry, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other respondents are in Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8, respectively. For economic issues, the average ratings were 4.3, 4.2, 4.2, 4.0 and 4.0 for producers/growers, allied industry, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other respondents, respectively (Table 5). All groups rated these issues substantially important. All groups of respondents gave the highest numerical rating to “rising input costs.” State agency respondents rated “prices producers/growers receive for their animal products” as high as they rated “rising input costs.” Growers/producers, state agency and LSU AgCenter respondents gave “global competition” the lowest numerical rating. Allied industry respondents gave “marketing options” the lowest average rating and other respondents gave “land prices” the lowest average rating. The greatest degree of difference in responses was for “price volatility for animal products” and “land prices.” The group of other respondents rated these issues numerically lower than the rest of the respondents.

Table 5. Average Ratings of Economic Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Occupation of Respondents^{1, 2}

	Occupation of Respondents					Greatest Degree of Difference
	Producers	Allied	State Agency	LSU AgCenter	Other	
Economic Issues:						
Rising input costs (i.e., feed, fertilizer, fuel, etc.)	4.9	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.9	0.3
Prices producers/growers receive for their animal products	4.8	4.5	4.8	4.3	4.3	0.5
Price volatility for animal products	4.5	4.1	4.5	3.8	3.7	0.8
Equipment and machinery costs	4.4	4.1	4.2	3.8	4.0	0.6
Maintaining industry infrastructure (availability of input suppliers)	4.3	4.1	3.7	3.7	3.7	0.6
Marketing options	4.3	3.8	4.1	3.9	3.8	0.5
Land prices	4.2	4.1	4.0	4.4	3.5	0.9
Acquiring capital and resources	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.1	0.2
Labor needs	4.1	4.0	4.3	4.0	3.9	0.4
Global competition	3.9	3.9	3.6	3.5	3.7	0.4
Average	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.0	4.0	0.3

¹ A total of 230 surveys were completed. One hundred thirty-six respondents were producers/growers, 18 worked in allied industry (industries that supply products or services to the beef, dairy and/or poultry industries), 13 worked for state agencies, 52 worked for the LSU AgCenter and 11 worked in other animal agriculture positions (primarily poultry integrator employees).

² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

Producers/growers, allied industry, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other respondents gave ratings for the environmental issues of 3.6, 3.8, 3.4, 3.4 and 3.7, respectively (Table 6). Producers/growers, allied industry and other respondents rated environmental issues substantially important, and state agency and LSU AgCenter respondents rated these issues moderately important. All groups gave “public perception of the environmental effects with animal agriculture” the highest numerical rating. This is in agreement with the respondents surveyed by Jones et al. (2000) and Capper et al. (2009). “Tillage practices” received the lowest numerical rating from allied industry, LSU AgCenter and other respondents. “Impact of animal agriculture on air quality” received the lowest rating from allied industry respondents. “Mortality disposal” received the lowest rating from state agency respondents. “Management of wetlands and riparian zones” received the lowest rating from producers/growers. The greatest degree of difference was for “mortality disposal” in which state agency respondents rated it numerically lower than all other respondents.

Table 6. Average Ratings of Environmental Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Occupation of Respondents^{1, 2}

	Occupation of Respondents					Greatest Degree of Difference
	Producers	Allied	State Agency	LSU AgCenter	Other	
Environmental Issues:						
Public perception of the environmental effects with animal agriculture	4.1	4.7	3.9	4.1	4.3	0.8
Conservation/sustainability programs	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.4	3.8	0.5
Use of Best Management Practices to minimize effects of animal agriculture on the environment	3.9	4.0	3.5	3.7	4.0	0.5
Impact of animal agriculture on water quality	3.7	3.8	3.5	3.5	4.2	0.7
Animal waste disposal/utilization	3.6	4.2	3.6	3.5	3.8	0.7
Pesticide/chemical use	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.8	0.4
Mortality disposal	3.4	3.8	2.7	3.0	3.3	1.1
Tillage practices	3.4	3.4	3.3	2.8	2.8	0.6
Impact of animal agriculture on air quality	3.3	3.4	3.0	2.9	3.6	0.7
Management of wetlands and riparian zones	3.2	3.6	3.1	3.3	3.1	0.5
Average	3.6	3.8	3.4	3.4	3.7	0.4

¹ A total of 230 surveys were completed. One hundred thirty-six respondents were producers/growers, 18 worked in allied industry (industries that supply products or services to the beef, dairy, and/or poultry industries), 13 worked for state agencies, 52 worked for the LSU AgCenter and 11 worked in other animal agriculture positions (primarily poultry integrator employees).

² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

For public policy issues, the average ratings were 4.0, 4.0, 3.9, 3.8 and 3.8 for producers/growers, allied industry, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other respondents, respectively (Table 7). All groups rated these issues substantially important. All groups gave “consumer confidence in food and animal product safety” the highest numerical rating. Beef producers surveyed by Steinberg and Comerford (2009) and Troxel et al. (2007) reported that human health and animal welfare were important issues too. The allied industry respondents rated “consumer confidence concerning animal agriculture practices” as high as they did “consumer confidence in food and animal product safety.” “Government subsidies of animal products” was given the lowest numerical rating by all groups of respondents. Producers/growers and other respondents also gave “government regulation of animal agriculture production practices” their lowest numerical rating.

Table 7. Average Ratings of Public Policy Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Occupation of Respondents^{1, 2}

	Occupation of Respondents					Greatest Degree of Difference
	Producers	Allied	State Agency	LSU AgCenter	Other	
Public Policy Issues:						
Consumer confidence in food and animal product safety	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.3	0.3
Consumer confidence concerning animal agriculture practices	4.3	4.6	4.3	4.0	4.2	0.6
Contingency plans for relief and recovery after a disaster	4.2	3.9	3.8	3.4	3.7	0.8
Source verification of animal products (country of origin labeling)	4.2	3.9	4.2	3.7	3.8	0.5
State and federal government funding for research and extension education	4.1	3.9	4.3	4.3	3.5	0.8
Urban encroachment and land use	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.1	0.2
Animal welfare	4.0	4.1	3.4	3.5	4.2	0.8
Financial support from commodity groups for research and extension education	3.9	3.6	3.9	4.0	3.7	0.4
Government regulation of animal agriculture production practices	3.5	3.8	3.5	3.7	3.4	0.4
Government subsidies of animal products	3.5	3.3	3.0	3.2	3.4	0.5
Average	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8	0.2

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² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

For production issues, the average ratings were 3.9, 4.0, 4.0, 3.7 and 3.6 for producers/growers, allied industry, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other respondents, respectively (Table 8). All groups of respondents rated these issues substantially important. Producers/growers, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other respondents gave their highest numerical rating to “improving production efficiency,” and allied industry respondents gave their highest numerical rating to “biosecurity.” Producers/growers, allied industry, LSU AgCenter and other respondents gave their lowest numerical rating to “natural and organic production methods.” “National animal identification system” received the lowest numerical ratings by state agency and other respondents. The greatest degree of difference was for “biosecurity” and “use of biotechnology and other technological advances”. For both of these issues, allied industry respondents rated them numerically higher than the other groups of respondents.

Table 8. Average Ratings of Production Issues Facing Animal Agriculture by Occupation of Respondents^{1, 2}

	Occupation of Respondents					Greatest Degree of Difference
	Producers	Allied	State Agency	LSU AgCenter	Other	
Production Issues:						
Improving production efficiency	4.6	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.5	0.3
Adapting herd/flock size to maintain profitability	4.4	4.1	4.4	4.0	3.9	0.5
Adoption of improved animal production practices	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	0.2
Product safety regulations	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7	0.3
Biosecurity	3.8	4.7	3.9	3.8	4.4	0.9
Ethical treatment of animals	3.8	4.1	3.9	3.4	3.5	0.7
Use of biotechnology and other technological advances	3.8	4.1	4.0	3.6	3.1	1.0
National animal identification system	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.3	2.8	0.8
Vertical integration/coordination of animal production	3.5	3.9	4.0	3.5	3.5	0.5
Natural and organic production methods	3.1	3.3	3.5	2.8	2.8	0.7
Average	3.9	4.0	4.0	3.7	3.6	0.4

¹ A total of 230 surveys were completed. One hundred thirty-six respondents were producers/growers, 18 worked in allied industry (industries that supply products or services to the beef, dairy and/or poultry industries), 13 worked for state agencies, 52 worked for the LSU AgCenter and 11 worked in other animal agriculture positions (primarily poultry integrator employees).

² Average ratings of 5 to 4.6 were considered extremely important, 4.5 to 3.6 were considered substantially important, 3.5 to 2.6 were considered moderately important, 2.5 to 1.6 were considered slightly important and 1.5 and below were considered not important.

Summary and Implications

The average ratings of all groups of respondents for all items ranged from 2.7 to 4.9. Respondents rated most individual items as moderately, substantially or extremely important. There was agreement among all groups of respondents in rating the most important item for economic, environmental, public policy and production issues. These items were:

- Rising input costs
- Public perception of the environmental effects with animal agriculture
- Consumer confidence in food and animal product safety
- Improving production efficiency

While respondents considered each of the four categories of issues as important, it appeared that economic issues received the most substantially important and higher average ratings by all groups.

The results of this survey indicate that producers and others working in animal agriculture in Louisiana understand that there are many issues that affect the production of animal products and that these issues are important production considerations. Producers should be willing to work toward addressing these four issues as well as others in this survey since they are in-line with their motivation (Koelsch et al., 2000). Koelsch et al. (2009) reported that producers' motivation to make changes is their desire to improve environmental stewardship, to reduce farm expenses and meet regulations. Future animal agriculture research and extension programs need to address the highly rated items, such as: maintaining profitability with rising input costs; means of marketing products for producers to receive the best price for their products; being a "good neighbor" to ensure that the public perceives the animal agriculture industries as good stewards of the land and that animals are treated humanely; developing, implementing and continually practicing optimum quality control on farm to maintain consumer confidence in animal agriculture products; and evaluating practices to increase the efficiency of production throughout all phases of animal production.

The issue items that were given the lower numerical ratings were still at least moderately or substantially important to respondents. These issues also should be considered in research and extension programs. Respondents may need more education on what these issues are, what effect they can have on production or how they relate to the items that were rated higher. It may be that the respondents need more information to properly understand these issue items, or they may not be as important as respondents thought.

Respondents indicated that economic, environmental, public policy and production issues are important to animal agriculture production in Louisiana. University faculty should consider the survey results reported in the development of their research and extension programs.

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Abstract

Beef, dairy and poultry producers/growers, allied industry, state agency, LSU AgCenter and other persons in these industries were surveyed on the economic, environmental, public policy and environmental issues affecting animal agriculture in Louisiana to determine their opinions on these issues. The results indicate that these respondents believe these issues are moderately, substantially, or extremely important to animal agriculture production. University research and extension faculty should utilize this information to develop animal agriculture programs to address the more highly rated issues, such as: input costs, public perception, consumer confidence, or production efficiency.

Keyword List

animal agriculture, economic issues, environmental issues, production issues, public policy issues

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