



10 N. Progress Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17109
Phone: (717) 233-8850
Email: james@susquehannapolling.com
www.susquehannapolling.com

To: Lancaster Farmland Trust
From: Jim Lee
Re: **Poll Highlights**

Karen and Karen –

All polls have good and bad news so to speak – although this poll has a lot more to celebrate given how well many of the results came back. Here is an overview of what we think are the key takeaways:

Q2 (asking what comes to mind when respondents think of Lancaster County) is noteworthy in and of itself when you consider how many references there are that illustrate the heritage of the county – things like “locally sourced foods”, the importance of “agriculture” and “farmland”, “open space”, the “Amish”, etc. Although qualitative in nature, when used in connection with Q1 showing the good quality of life most people think they have in the county this question serves as an excellent backdrop for how good people realize they have it. It kind of puts LFT in a “defensive” posture from a strategic perspective because it suggests much of your communications materials should be designed to help convince people that LFT serves a useful role to help “preserve” and “protect” everything that people like about Lancaster County. In other words, the “status quo” is good – too much change visa-view unmanaged growth is not.

Q4 (most important problem facing Lancaster) shows only two issues are really “top of mind”. Crime/public safety, which is media-driven by coverage of Lancaster City and related urban areas and “growth and traffic”, which is a quality of life that people are reminded of on a daily basis. But for these two, you’d have to conclude there is not much of a focus on economic issues since property taxes (9%) and concern about jobs/economy (6%) are mentioned much more infrequently than in many other areas of the state. Q5 (pace of new growth, etc.) obviously dovetails with Q4.

Q6 – Q10 (ratings for county officials on numerous issues) – this section tells us that voters seem to distinguish between “open spaces” and “farmland” since the results show only 48% think the county has done a good job (compared to a much higher 62% dealing with open space). This suggests more work can/should be done on farmland preservation. Plus, the fact that voters are split on how well local officials are doing managing growth/development (38/36) dovetails perfectly with your mission that these issues are related – and causal.

Q11 (level of concern for loss of farmland) – the fact that 83% are either very or somewhat concerned shows its’ an issue that most can identify with in some respect. However, the fact that most have no idea how many acres of farmland are lost each year is very telling. Aside from the sheer educational value, the poll seems to suggest most people know that farmland is kind of disappearing even before their very eyes, partly because they see more and more sprawl and know it has to come from somewhere – but the fact that most could not even venture a guess as to how many acres are lost yearly shows just how difficult it is for people to quantify what the true net effects are. This spells opportunity for LFT.

Q12/Q13 (should county officials increase/decrease efforts on farmland, etc.) – Results to these questions show little change (from one another that is) primarily because voters previously indicated they don’t perceive there to be a problem with “open space” preservation per se. As a result, adding the phrase “open space” has no impact on the results. Nonetheless, Q13 is the key question you’ll want to use because it deals primarily with farmland – and it shows broad-based political support since Republicans (72%), Democrats (84%) and even Republican households who have

A proven winner in survey research and public opinion polling

vote history in past GOP primary elections (71%) support an increase in farmland preservation. This question has great PR value I would think.

Q14 (support/oppose continued use of public funds for farmland) – the 77/14 ratio on this is as good as it gets, including bipartisan support like on Q13. However, take note that what I call the “intensity” of support, or the percent who “strongly” support at 34%, could be much higher. This shows that while this issue is one that most voters can get behind, the lack of “strong” support suggests it’s simply not a front-burner or “wedge” issue that most voters are overly concerned about day in and day out of their lives.

Q15/Q16 (willing to pay more) – At 61%, the numbers are strong enough to say you are outside the poll’s margin of error and therefore, have statistical validity. It’s also worth noting that in a county like Lancaster where economic issues like property taxes and jobs are not being mentioned by most as pressing problems, you tend to have a higher groundswell of support for county initiatives like this that can have real and measurable impacts on quality of life. For instance, last November we were involved in a county referendum issue in St. Johns County Florida, a county similar to Lancaster in that most people realize they have good quality of life and schools, relatively low taxes and a healthy economy. Last November they approved an increase in county taxes in a ballot referendum to fund school improvement projects. I bring this up simply to make the case that a healthy economy and low concern for property taxes means people are more likely to consider quality of life “enhancements”.

Q20 – Q28 section (agree/disagree) – these questions all come back very strong and anytime you have total support in the seventy or eighty percent range and “intensity” of support at fifty percent or higher it means you have strong universal support and consensus. Each of these meets both these tests to varying degrees so in our professional opinion are you are strong ground to use any and all of these from a public relations standpoint.

Q29 (LFT awareness/recognition) – your 61% awareness is pretty good as far as I’m concerned, although I don’t have longitudinal data to compare this to. Nonetheless, a 1% unfavorable rating, which is only 4 respondents in the entire sample of N=400 had something bad to say about LFT. It doesn’t get much better than this. It’s worth noting however that your awareness is weakest among respondents who have only lived in the county for less than 5 years (36% aware) compared to an average awareness of 67% among respondents who have lived in their primary residences for more than 5 years (this is statistically significant difference). If we can assume most respondents who have only lived at their residences for up to 5 years have recently migrated to the county, this suggests they aren’t as likely to be familiar with the history of the county or aren’t as tuned in to organizations like LFT that have active or visible roles in the community.

If you are planning any kind of public release of the poll results, and perhaps a redacted version of the topline report showing only select questions, following are the key questions: Q1, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q11, Q13, Q14, Q20-Q28 and Q35.