

**Press Release
Delta Rural Poll
December 16, 2003**

The Center for Community and Economic Development at Delta State University is pleased to announce the completion of the first annual Delta Rural Poll. The poll was conducted in October and November, 2003. The Delta Rural Poll is a survey of residents of eleven counties in northwestern Mississippi (Bolivar, Coahoma, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tunica, Washington). The poll is administered by the Center for Community and Economic Development at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS.

Researchers at Delta State University prepared the questions for the Delta Rural Poll, and the information was collected through telephone interviews with Delta residents, conducted by the Survey Research Unit in the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University. A total of 809 randomly selected individuals provided the responses to the poll. These responses provide a reliable means of assessing current conditions in the Delta and current attitudes of Delta residents, with a sampling error of no greater than $\pm 3.4\%$.

The Delta Rural Poll will be repeated annually, providing an opportunity to track changes in Delta communities and opinions.

This year's Delta Rural Poll questioned residents about their individual and community well-being, their employment, their access to and use of health care, their opinions on schools in their communities, and their use of modern technologies. Some interesting findings from this year's poll are presented below.

Community Stability and Change

The 2003 Delta Rural Poll asked Delta residents about changes in their communities. The results suggest substantial stability in residential patterns, but some change in community well-being.

Many Deltans are life-long residents of Mississippi – over one-quarter of poll respondents have lived in Mississippi their whole lives, and one-fifth have lived in the state for more than fifty years (representing forty-four percent of the population over fifty years of age). Moreover, the number of recent arrivals to the Delta is relatively small. Fewer than fifteen percent of respondents have lived in Mississippi less than twenty years.

Not only have many Deltans spent their lives in-state, but many have lived in the same community for a long time. Sixteen percent have lived in their current community over fifty years, and forty percent have lived in their current community more than twenty-five years. However, some Deltans do move between communities – sixteen percent have lived in their current community less than five years, and over one-quarter have lived in their current community less than ten years. Furthermore, fifteen percent of respondents intend to move from their community in the next year, and twenty-seven percent say they definitely or probably will not be living in their present community in five years.

While Deltans tend to stay in their communities, many expressed doubts about the direction their community was going. Thirty-seven percent of respondents said their community had changed for the worse during the past year, while only nineteen percent believed their community had changed for the better. As for a sense of empowerment to change things, forty-nine percent agreed with the statement "Life has changed so much in our modern world that most people are powerless to control their own lives." Thirty-nine percent disagreed with the same statement.

Individual Well-Being

The 2003 Delta Rural Poll surveyed residents about their personal well-being. The results suggest that most Deltans believe their lives are improving and they are optimistic about the future. Sixty percent of the respondents believe they are better off than they were five years ago, while only nineteen percent

believe they are worse off. Moreover, four-fifths of respondents believe they are better off than their parents were at the same age, while only eight percent say they are worse off than their parents. As for the future, sixty-four percent believe they will be better off in ten years time, while less than seven percent believe they will be worse off.

Technology Use

This year's Delta Rural Poll asked respondents about their use of modern technologies. The results suggest Deltans are reasonably well-connected. Half of the respondents own a home computer, and thirty-six percent currently use the internet at least once a week. Of those using the internet, the most common uses are web browsing and e-mail. Twenty-two percent use the internet for on-line shopping, and nine percent use the internet to work at home.

Health Care

Regarding health care, a majority of Deltans reported a positive health status. Over two-thirds of respondents indicated that they were in good to excellent health. Deltans also have reasonably good access to primary health care. Eighty percent of survey respondents have seen a doctor in the past year, and seventy-two percent said that they live within fifteen miles of their primary health care provider. Only ten percent must travel over thirty miles for primary care.

Access to specialized tests and treatments is more difficult for many Deltans. Only thirty-five percent reported living within fifteen miles of specialized care facilities, while over thirty-five percent must travel more than thirty miles for specialized care.

Paying for health care is also a challenge for many Deltans. One-fifth of survey participants reported having no health insurance and paying for medical expenses out-of-pocket. Approximately one-fifth of respondents indicated that at least once during the past twelve months, they needed a doctor's care but could not afford to go, and nearly sixteen percent reported a similar barrier to accessing health care for someone else in their household. Nearly one-third said they utilize government programs such as Medicaid, Medicare or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to cover health costs.

Future Reports

Researchers at the Center for Community and Economic Development will continue to analyze data from the Delta Rural Poll and issue policy reports throughout the year. Upcoming reports on specialized aspects of the Delta Rural Poll will be released according to the following schedule:

A detailed report on access to and use of health care will be issued during the week of January 15, 2004.

A detailed report on internet and technology use will be issued during the week of March 15, 2004.

A detailed report on public perceptions of Delta schools will be issued during the week of May 15, 2004.

A detailed report on employment and work in the Delta will be issued during the week of June 15, 2004.

If you have any questions or would like further information about the Delta Rural Poll, please contact Dr. Alan Barton, Division of Social Sciences, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS 38733, (662) 846-4097.