

AMERICAN VIEWPOINT

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Wayne County Ohio Survey Analysis

American Farmland Trust
&
The Trust For Public Land

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Key Points Summary

Vote Intentions and Core Analysis

- W** Currently 52% of the registered voters in Wayne County say that they would support this measure and this is clearly a positive sign.
- W** At the same time, voters are very fluid, with a majority of voters neither definitely supporting nor definitely opposing this measure. Voters are, therefore, highly persuadable at this time.
- W** Turn-out is very difficult to predict from this data, but it is clear that an effective get-out-the-vote effort will be even more critical in this campaign than in most.
- W** Once voters are informed of some of the aspects of the proposed measure and what it is meant to accomplish, support rises to 60%, while opposition remains about the same.
- W** Voters fall into roughly three categories: Core Supporters (49% of the voters), Core Opponents (23% of the voters) and the Battleground (28%) which will largely determine if this measure passes or fails.
- W** The key hesitations that Battleground voters have in supporting this measure are:
- | | |
|---|-----|
| Don't want to increase my taxes / Can't afford it. | 23% |
| Need more information / Need to find out more about it. | 22% |
| Money won't be used properly / Money will be wasted | 18% |
- W** From this it appears that many can be convinced to support this measure.

Overall Political Environment

- W** Preserving open space and farm land tops the issue agenda in Wayne County and voters should be receptive to any initiative designed to address this problem.
- W** 42% of the voters in Wayne County feel that the county is growing and developing too fast, and this attitude correlates highly with support for this measure. Then too, even a majority of those who feel the county is growing at the right pace appear willing to support this measure.

Wayne County Survey Analysis
American Viewpoint, Inc.
July, 2001

- w 85% feel that it is either Very or Somewhat important for Wayne County to have a program to protect agricultural land from development.
- w Even when some of the details of the program are fleshed out and voters are informed that it would entail the use of public tax dollars, 65% approve of having a program of this nature.

Positive Messages & Themes

- w The survey tested five positive messages and themes, all of which resonated with the voters and can play an important role in passing this measure. In addition it is clear that:
- w Voters make the connection between preserving the rural lifestyle and agricultural economy and preserving farm and rural lands. They understand that it is not only important to farmers, but it is also important to them *personally*.
- w Voters not only understand that this is an important undertaking, but that they must act *now*.
- w “Slowing the rate of growth and development” is a positive issue, but is not nearly as important as other issues in this section.
- w The question concerning the cost of the program expressed in terms of dollars per month is very positive. Not only do three out of four voters agree that it is a small price to pay, but almost a majority (47%) *strongly* agree.

Negative Messages & Themes

- w The survey also tested three negative themes and messages. One appears to be weak, but the other two will need to be dealt with effectively.
- w A majority of voters disagree that there are more important problems for the county to address.
- w However, 55% of Battleground voters agree that “Taxes in Wayne County are already too high, if the county wants a program like this they should find some other way to pay for it.” In fact, 34% of Battleground voters strongly agree with this statement.

Wayne County Survey Analysis
American Viewpoint, Inc.
July, 2001

- W** Finally, when informed of the annual cost of the program, a majority said that it would not make a difference, but it appears that — as one might expect — the cost is a very important factor for a significant number of voters, including about one-third of the Battleground voters.

- W** The main point is that the campaign will need to emphasize the importance of the benefits of the program and the problem that it addresses and to stress the cost in the most favorable terms, i.e. the cost per month.

Vote Intentions and Core Analysis

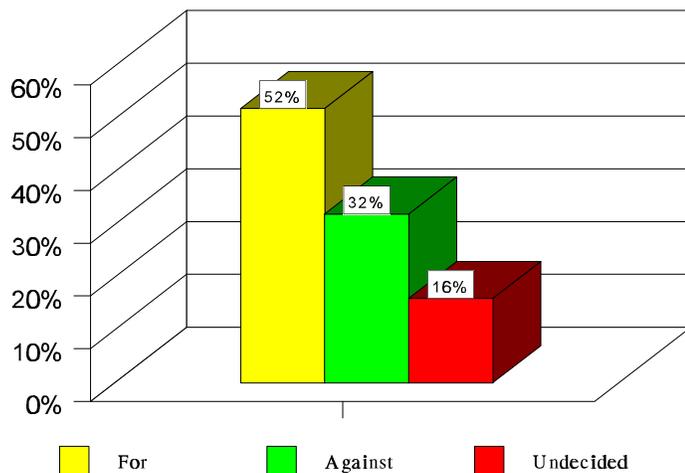
Current Vote Intentions

Currently 52% of the registered voters in Wayne County say that they would support a sales and use tax of one-quarter of one percent for the purpose of acquiring agricultural easements to protect agricultural lands, including farmland, woodlands and pasture.

Overall, this is a positive sign. Any uninformed vote intention over 50% is considered to be a positive sign — that is not to say that the measure would pass without an effective educational effort and campaign — but 52% is a good starting point.

Note too, that voter attitudes are very fluid on this measure. That is, 27% would *definitely* vote for the measure and 20% would *definitely* vote against it, but a majority of voters fall somewhere in between indicating that they would be persuadable one way or the other. Stated another way, in the absence of an effective campaign, those who support this measure can only count on about 25% of the voters to vote for it.

Current Vote Intentions



Conversely, opponents of this measure can also count on about 20% of the voters to vote against it. Keep in mind, too, that anti-tax voters are often more motivated to vote than those who favor a measure, so they tend to turn out in disproportionate numbers.

The extent to which this will be true in Wayne County is unclear. To begin with, support appears to be fairly consistent regardless of past voting behavior. That is, 52% of those who vote in all elections, 52% of those who vote in most elections and 51% of those who vote in half or less than half of the elections currently support this measure. On the other hand, seniors tend to vote with higher frequency than younger voters, and seniors are only supporting this measure by a 43% to 33% margin.

Wayne County Survey Analysis
 American Viewpoint, Inc.
 July, 2001

What appears to be happening here is this: Retired men are reporting below average past voting behavior (43% vote in all elections) while retired women report higher than average past voting behavior (55% vote in all elections) giving *all* retired voters about average past voting frequency. This, of course, is atypical and one has to wonder if this is, indeed, the case or not. At the same time, working women, who are among this measure's best supporters (60% For) report the lowest past voting frequency of all voters (just 41% vote in all elections). Once again, if this is indeed the case, this group would be a prime target for a get-out-the-vote effort. Working men report average past voting frequency, are weak supporters and should be a target of an informational campaign. Finally, Homemakers make up just 8% of the voters, but their reported past voting frequency is the highest in the study (61% vote in all elections) and they support this measure by a wide 71% to 23% margin. In short, turn-out is very difficult to predict in this case and an effective get-out-the-vote effort will be critical to this measure's success or failure.

Turn-out Scenarios

	% Of Voters	Vote In All Elections	Voting For
Working Men	36%	48%	49%
Working Women	26%	41%	60%
Retired Men	11%	43%	34%
Retired Women	16%	55%	49%
Homemakers	8%	61%	71%

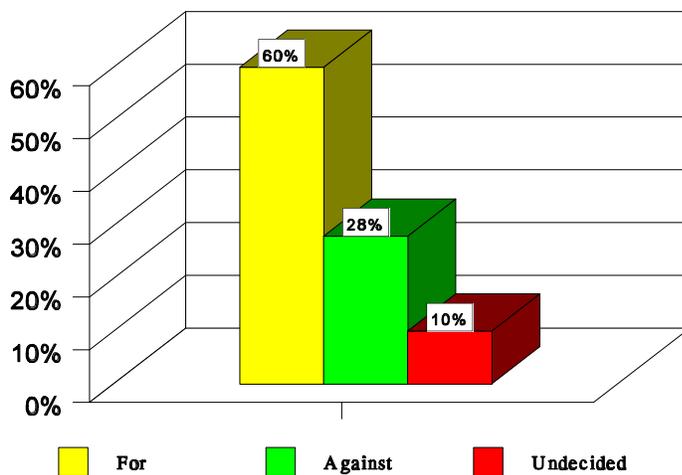
It is also worth noting that Republicans constitute 41% of the voters and only 49% support this measure. Among Democrats and Independents, who constitute 54% of the voters, support is fairly strong (Democrats 56% For / Independents 58% For).

Then too, support among those who are reliant on agriculture for their income (55% For) is only about the same as the support among those who are *not* reliant on agriculture (53% For). Because this measure is meant to help farmers, this raises a red flag of sorts. Why isn't support higher? Do those who rely on agriculture have problems with the program, with the tax increase or both? Is it possible that an agricultural group such as the Farm Bureau would come out in opposition to the measure? This could, of course, be disastrous. On the other hand, 24% of the voters report having some reliance on agriculture, so if this group could be energized in support of the measure, the effect could be very positive. In any event, this is an area that the campaign will want to explore in depth.

On a slightly different topic, when it comes to measures such as this, the burden of proof tends to be on those who would raise taxes. If anti-tax voters can raise a “reasonable doubt” about the effort to raise taxes they will often prevail. Stated another way, when in doubt, voters tend to vote “No”. So the question becomes: how much opposition will this measure encounter? Will the anti-tax voters be organized and vocal? Will the local newspaper or significant groups within the community come out in opposition to the measure? The answers to these questions are, of course, unknown at this point and will only be answered as the campaign plays out. However, the message here is clear. The uninformed ballots tend to overstate eventual voter support, and this measure can only win with a well organized, effective educational campaign in support of the measure.

Informed Ballot Test

Informed Vote Intentions



Once voters are informed of some of the aspects of the proposed measure and what it is meant to accomplish, support rises to 60%, while opposition remains about the same. Overall, 11% of the voters switched their vote intentions from Undecided or Opposed to For and 3% of the voters switched from For to Undecided or Opposed - resulting in the net gain of about 8%. Then too, *definite* support rises modestly from 27% to 33% and *definite* opposition declines slightly from 20% to 18%.

The Informed Vote Intentions are somewhat artificial in that they are predicated on *all* voters having *all* of the knowledge imparted in the questionnaire, including the positive messages and themes. However, the foregoing suggests that this measure could pass given an effective campaign and assuming that there is no organized opposition to plant seeds of doubt in the voters' minds.

Voters fall into three basic categories. First, there are those who were voting for the measure on both ballots. They have heard the cost of the program and the negative messages and are still supporting the measure, so it is safe to call them Core Supports. Second, there are those who were voting against the measure on both ballots. They have heard all of the reasons to support this measure, but still oppose it, so it is safe to call them the Core Opposition. Finally, there is a fairly large group in the middle who are not consistently for or against the measure.

This Battleground group tends to be a mixed bag. Some may find the program appealing, but have problems with the cost. Some may simply need more information than that given to them by a complete stranger over the phone. Others may simply be the type of voter who is slow to commit to anything on short notice. And finally, others may not be convinced that the program is needed or will be effective and properly managed. The open end question asking Battleground voters for their main hesitation in voting for this measure gives some insight into their feelings.

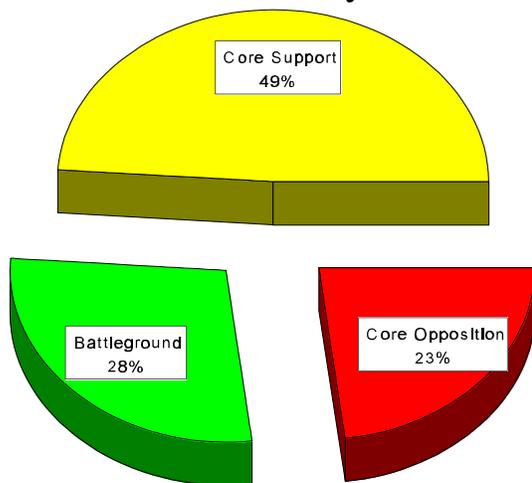
Battleground voters' top three hesitations were as follows:

Now, I would like to read you a statement and have you complete it in your own words, "If I have one hesitation in voting for this proposal, it is. . ."

Don't want to increase my taxes / Can't afford it.	23%
Need more information / Need to find out more about it.	22%
Money won't be used properly / Money will be wasted	18%

Those who gave monetary concerns will be very difficult voters to persuade. Fortunately, they constitute just 23% of the Battleground voters. On the other hand, those who simply need more information may be very persuadable. Finally, those who are concerned about the administration of the program will probably be tough voters to persuade, but there is certainly potential there.

Core Analysis



Overall, the Core Analysis looks like this:

From this perspective the outlook is quite positive, especially when one considers that much of the Battleground appears to be fairly persuadable. Keep in mind, however, that only 27% are definitely voting for this measure and different turn-out scenarios and organized opposition to this measure could change the picture significantly.

Overall, however, this analysis reinforces the earlier statement that this measure could pass with an effective campaign.

Political Environment

Overall, the political environment appears to be quite positive for the passage of this measure.

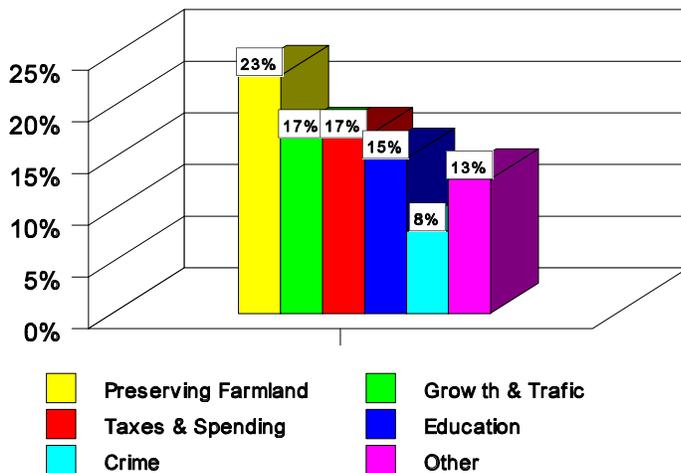
Most Important Problem

To begin with, when asked for the most important problem facing Wayne County at the present time, 40% gave growth related problems such as Traffic and Transportation Problems (6%), Controlling Growth And Development (11%) and most importantly, Preserving Open-space And Farmlands (23%).

By contrast, only 17% gave Holding Down Taxes (12%) or Cutting Government Spending (5%). While Education is typically the top issue in local communities, it actually ranks below Preserving Open-space And Farmlands.

It is also interesting that nearly one in every ten voters gave Fighting Crime & Drugs as the most important problem, which are often problems associated with growth and development.

Most Important Problem



In short, preserving open space and farm land tops the issue agenda in Wayne County and voters should be receptive to any initiative designed to address this problem.

Rate of Growth

Given the above, it is not surprising to find that 42% of the voters in Wayne County feel that the county is growing and developing too fast (53%). Interestingly, voters in the southern tier of townships where there has been comparatively less growth and development, are the most likely to feel that the county is growing too fast. In the northern tier or townships, only 39% feel the county is growing and developing too fast, while a plurality (48%) feel it is growing at about the right pace.

Be that as it may, it is clear that a significant number of voters are concerned about the rate of growth in the county and this can be a strong motivating factor to vote for this proposal. In fact, among those who feel the county is growing too fast, 66% support this measure. But among those who feel that it is growing

at the right pace, only 43% support it. That is not to say that those who feel the county is growing at the right pace cannot be persuaded to vote for this measure — in fact 55% are supporting it on the Informed Ballot Test. It is clear, however, that these will be tougher votes to get and any campaign in support of this measure will need to make the case to these people.

The Need For A Program

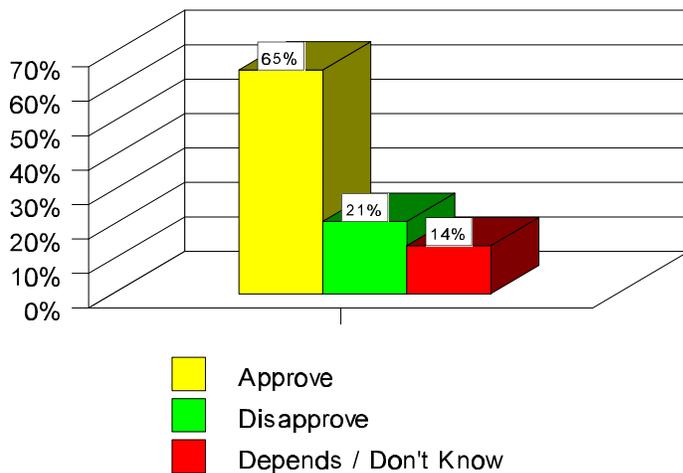
Just as it is apparent that many voters feel the county is growing too fast, it is also apparent that most voters would support a program to protect agricultural land from development. Overall, 85% feel that this is either Very Important (53%) or Somewhat Important (32%). This feeling is strong among most sub-groups, even including Republicans (52% Very Important). Note, however, that only 46% of those in Wooster and 44% of the working men feel that this is Very Important, so it will be somewhat harder to make the case for an agricultural easement program among these two sub-groups.

Overall, voter support for a program to address this problem is encouraging.

It is also encouraging that — when the details of the program are fleshed out, including the fact that it would be supported by *public tax dollars* — support remains high. When the following question was asked:

As you may know, an agricultural easement program uses public tax dollars to pay landowners who voluntarily agree to keep their farm land in permanent agricultural use rather than selling it for development. Generally speaking, would you approve or disapprove of an agricultural easement program in your community?

Ag. Easement Program



65% of the voters approved of having such a program and 39% **Strongly** Approved.

This, once again, shows potential for a campaign in support of this measure, but it is only potential until voters are informed of the need for the program and how it would work. Keep in mind, that only 9% of all voters are Very Familiar with agricultural easements, while a majority are Not Too Familiar (32%) or Not At All Familiar (21%) with them.

Messages & Themes

Positive Messages & Themes

This survey tested five positive messages and themes, all of which resonated very well with voters. These arguments, in order of importance, were as follows:

Q. 10 - Preserving farm land also protects important wildlife habitat, scenic views and historic landscapes.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
85%	61%	86%	61%

Q. 11b - The preservation of Wayne County's rural lifestyle and agricultural economy is dependent on preserving farm and rural lands.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
80%	55%	85%	53%

Q. 9 - Because Wayne County has lost 34% of its farms in the past 30 years, it is clear that we must act now to preserve the county's remaining agricultural lands.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
77%	54%	85%	49%

Q. 13 - \$4 dollars a month is a very small price to pay to preserve farmlands in Wayne County.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
75%	47%	70%	39%

Wayne County Survey Analysis
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Q. 11a - The preservation of Wayne County's rural lifestyle and agricultural economy is dependent on slowing the rate of growth and development.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
72%	37%	64%	24%

Several things are clear from the above findings. First, the connection between preserving farm land and protecting wildlife habitat, scenic views and historic landscapes is an *extremely* important message for voters and cannot be overstated nor overdone in a campaign.

Second, voters also make the connection between preserving the rural lifestyle and agricultural economy and preserving farm and rural lands. They understand that it is not only important to farmers, but it is also important to them *personally*.

Third, Question 9 makes it clear that voters not only understand that this is an important undertaking, but that they must act *now*.

Fourth, Question 11a indicates that "slowing the rate of growth and development" is a positive issue, but is not nearly as important as other issues in this section.

Finally, the response to Question 13 (concerning the cost of the program expressed in terms of dollars per month) is very positive. Not only do three out of four voters agree that it is a small price to pay, but almost a majority (47%) *strongly* agree.

Having said that, it is also important to note the responses of Battleground voters. Among this group only 39% strongly agree, which is good, but it is far smaller than the strongly agree response of Core Supporters (66% strongly agree). The point being, that Core Supporters are far less troubled by the cost of this program than are Battleground voters.

All in all, these are very strong messages for the campaign to take to the voters and they should play in instrumental role in the passage of this measure.

Negative Messages & Themes

The survey also tested three messages that were essentially negative in nature. The first does not appear to have much resonance with most voters. In fact, a majority of voters *disagree* that there are more important problems for the county to address and almost one-third *strongly* disagreed. Then too, only 13% of the Battleground voters strongly agreed with this statement. In many ways, this reflects the responses of voters to the question asking for the most important problem facing the county to which schools and law enforcement were given less often than growth and development concerns. In any event, this does not appear to be an overly damaging or convincing argument for the opposition.

Q. 12 - We would be better off spending our money on more important issues such as more schools, better law enforcement, and better county services and worry about preserving farmlands later.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
35%	15%	32%	13%

The second argument is much stronger.

Q. 14 - Taxes in Wayne County are already too high, if the county wants a program like this they should find some other way to pay for it.

Total Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agree Among Battleground	Strongly Agree Among Battleground
49%	29%	55%	34%

The strength of this argument is underscored by several findings. First, even among the Core Supporters 35% agree with this statement. Second, over one-third of the Battleground voters *strongly* agree with it. And, third, even among those who give preserving farm lands as the most important issue facing the county, 43% agree with this statement.

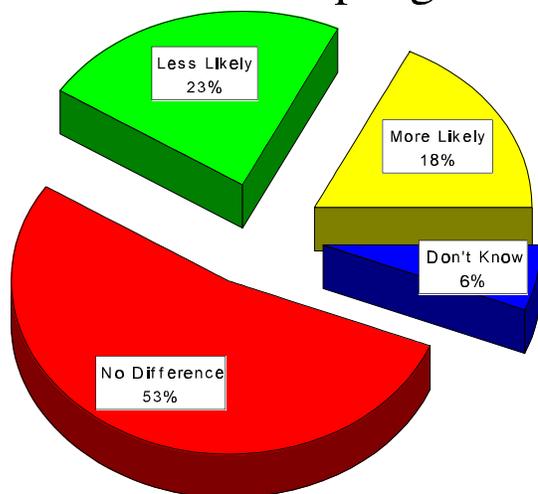
In a way, the response to this argument is predictable in so far as everyone wants a “free lunch”. And the fact that only 29% strongly agree with it is an indication that this argument in and of itself is unlikely to defeat this issue. It is clear, however, that when voters ask if there isn’t some way to pay for this program that would not increase taxes, the supporters of this measure had better have a very good answer.

Finally, voters were asked the following question:

Q. 4 - If you learned that passing this measure would cost the average household \$44 per year in additional taxes, would you be more or less likely to vote for this measure, or wouldn't it make a difference?

The results are displayed below.

Annual cost of program



It is certainly encouraging that a majority of the voters said that the cost would not make a difference to them.

At the same time, it is clear that the cost will make a great deal of difference to some voters. This is particularly true of Core Opposition Voters, but it is also true, to a lesser extent, among Battleground voters. Among this group 35% said the cost would make them less likely to vote for the measure and, more importantly, 23% said that it would make them *much* less likely to support it.

In short, it comes as no surprise that the cost of the program is the greatest impediment to getting this measure passed. The vital point is

that the campaign will need to emphasize the importance of the benefits of the program and the problem that it addresses and to stress the cost in the most favorable terms, i.e. the cost per month.