

## **Texas Organization Board Members' Communication Methods and the 2002 Farm Bill**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Extension education programs continue to intersect stakeholders' interests with the U.S. Farm Bill. The purpose of this study was to identify organizational communication methods and their relationship to Texas agricultural and natural resource organization board members' perceptions of the 2002 Farm Bill. Respondents believed their organizations met their primary farm bill objectives. A significant positive relationship existed between perceived organizational communication methods and factors influencing the 2002 Farm Bill. Because of their local contact base, extension educators should study other organizations and the public's interest in future farm bills to determine what provisions, issues, or programs are most needed to benefit society.**

**KEYWORDS:** Agriculture Commodity Organizations, Communications, 2002 Farm Bill

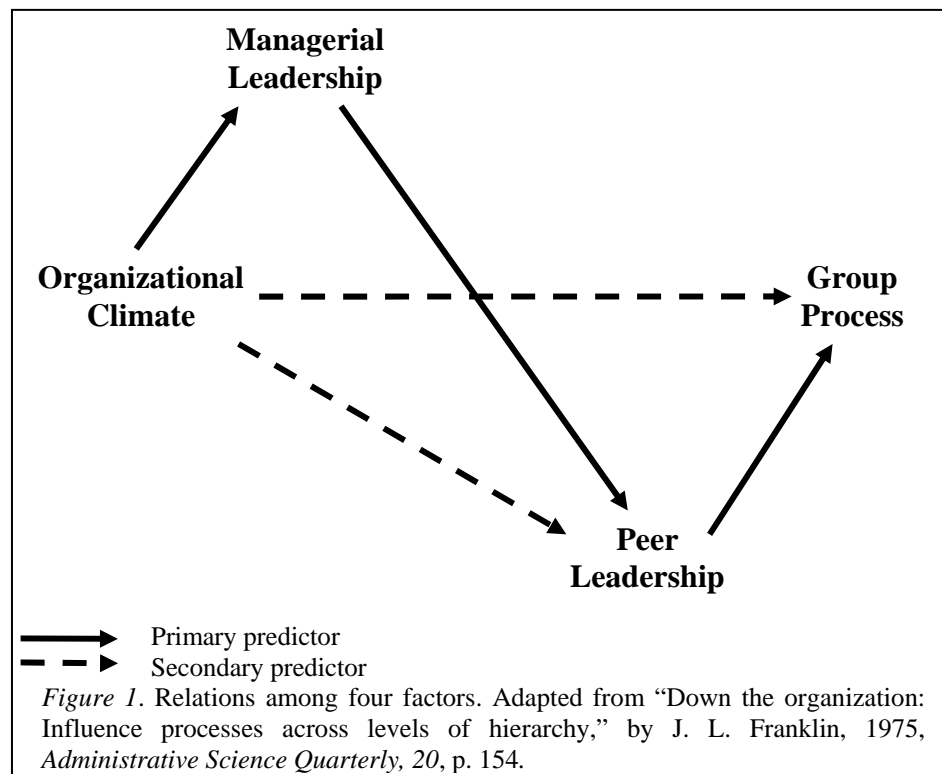
### **INTRODUCTION**

During farm bill development, messages are communicated about the provisions, issues, or programs that become the new farm bill. National agricultural organization board members and congressional leaders disseminate these messages to other organization leaders, lobbyists, and state-level organizational board members who communicate the provisions, issues, or programs to their respective organizational members. After the farm bill becomes a new law, state-level organizational board members adhere to the advice from national and congressional leaders and lobbyists. State-level board members may allow such advice to shape their perceptions of national farm policy (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2004).

Organizations have been studied to determine the effectiveness of leaders' and members' organizational communication methods, especially their message formation and communication techniques, much like the provisions in the farm bill (Conrad, 2000). Organizations can enhance their communication methods by creating environments that require people to communicate because of a shared purpose (Conrad, 2000).

Organizational communication improves the process for establishing policies and norms. Leaders or board members' behavior and decision-making can influence the behaviors of other members in the organization (Franklin, 1975). Franklin developed a

model (Figure 1) that suggests four major social-psychological factors exist—organizational climate, managerial leadership, peer leadership, and group process—to describe critical group and organizational conditions and practices influencing communication methods (Bowers, 1975; Likert, 1967; Likert & Bowers, 1973). The model demonstrated that “the major causal pattern for these factors is from organizational climate to managerial leadership to peer leadership, finally resulting in group process” (Franklin, 1975, p. 154). Such a model, working dynamically as combined methods, may be useful in determining selected Texas agricultural organization board members’ communication methods for the 2002 Farm Bill.



Sulak (2000) recommended additional research to understand organization leaders and members’ needs in farm bill policy. Perceptions belong to individuals, but communication processes define how individuals share perceptions to enlighten others (members). Organizational communication methods may influence members’ perceptions. Organizational communication effectiveness depends on the individual’s understanding, perceptions, and behaviors in an organization (Wilson, 1964).

The purpose of this study was to identify organizational communication methods and their possible relationship to Texas commodity-specific, general agricultural, and natural resource organization board members’ perceptions of the 2002 Farm Bill. Three objectives guided this study:

1. Determine perceptions of organizational communication methods used by commodity-specific, general agricultural, and natural resource organizations;

2. Determine board members' perceptions of factors influencing the 2002 Farm Bill outcome; and
3. Determine if organizational communication methods were related to board members' perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose, objectives, and selected methods used to report the results of this study were part of a larger research project (Catchings, 2004). Similarities in research design and demographics reported herein are evident elsewhere (Catchings, Wingenbach, & Rutherford, 2005), but are reported in full in this study.

An *ex-post facto* correlational design was used because the 2002 Farm Bill had been enacted and implemented prior to the study; potential respondents would have established their perceptions of the farm bill prior to data collection. The target population (N=300) included all (according to the Texas Department of Agriculture) Texas commodity-specific, general agricultural, and natural resource organization board members who had a vested interest in the 2002 Farm Bill. Personal communications with organizational leaders/directors determined the target population for these organizations.

The sample was purposefully selected from memberships in the Texas Farm Bureau, selected agricultural commodity organizations (cotton, wheat, corn, or grain sorghum), and the Texas Wildlife Association. The sample (n=160) produced 70 respondents for a response rate of 44%. Electronic mail (e-mail) reminders were sent to all Texas organization's executive officers every two weeks. Despite repeated and unsuccessful follow-up procedures to non-respondents, a response rate of 44% merits caution in generalizing the results of this study beyond the respondent group.

The conceptual schema was based on Sulak's (2000) research, which focused on National Commodity board members perceptions of the 1996 Farm Bill, and Catchings and Wingenbach (2004) which focused on selected Texas commodity board members' perceptions of the 2002 Farm Bill. Data were collected (February to March 2004) from the sample using a modification of Sulak's, Catchings and Wingenbach's, and Franklin's (1975) surveys. Minor editing and word changes were made to the final version of the research instrument used in this study. Researchers used a cross-sectional and uniform questionnaire, which illustrated similarities and differences of perceptions and communication processes between selected Texas agricultural organizations.

Data were derived from three parts of the instrument. Part one contained 17 organizational communication statements, from Franklin's (1975) model, where participants recorded their perceptions of organizational communication methods. Statements ranged from organizational climate, managerial leadership, and peer leadership, to decision-making practices, human resource primacy, motivational conditions, and communication. Responses were recorded using a Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, 0=No Opinion). Questions such as "My organization wants to meet its primary objective" and "Information is widely shared in my organization" represented peer leadership items. Cronbach's alpha for the scale measuring perceptions of organizational communication methods was .93.

Part two contained Likert-type (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion) statements measuring respondents' agreement levels with 10 factors, derived from earlier studies (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2004; Sulak, 2000), that may

have influenced the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill. Examples included “Farm organizations influence on the 2002 Farm Bill,” and “Non-farm organizations influenced the 2002 Farm Bill more than farm organizations.” Cronbach’s coefficient alpha for the scale measuring perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill was .68. Due to the relatively low coefficient alpha level, caution is warranted against generalizing the results of this scale beyond the respondent group. The final section collected demographics such as age, education, residence, family ownership of farm or ranch, and organization affiliation. Content validity was established by Catchings and Wingenbach (2004), Sulak (2000), and Franklin (1975). A pilot test with Texas Farm Bureau Association participants, who were not part of sample, was administered in early February 2004. Based on pilot test feedback, the final survey length was reduced.

Mixed-mode techniques were used to collect data by e-mail first, followed by postal surveys (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). Dillman (2000) stated that as e-mail and Internet surveys gain favor with surveyors, a formidable barrier to their use is the fact that many people do not have access to the Internet. The mixed-mode (used in this study) compensated for the weaknesses of each method (Dillman, 2000). Organization leaders or directors were sent an e-mail with instructions to distribute the Internet address of the online survey to their organizational members. Online data were kept in a password-secured database. Correct follow-up procedures such as telephone calls and e-mail messages, were sent (every two weeks) to non-respondents. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analyses were conducted to determine if significant relationships existed between board members’ organizational communication methods and perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill.

## RESULTS

Respondents were mostly board members from commodity-specific (57%), general agriculture (30%), or conservation and natural resources (10%) organizations. The majority was 36 or older (83%). Most of them had attended college or had completed an undergraduate degree (77%), were raised on a farm or ranch (67%), and the majority currently lived on farm or ranch (60%).

Selected Texas agricultural organization respondents (n=70) rated their levels of agreement to organizational communication methods. A Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion) was used to measure agreement levels that ranged from 3.02 to 3.61 for each item (Table 1).

Respondents strongly agreed (M=3.61, SD=.49) that their organizations wanted to meet their primary objectives for the 2002 Farm Bill. They strongly agreed (M=3.51, SD=.59) that information about important events or situations was shared in their organizations (Table 1). Overall, respondents agreed with 16 organizational communication methods (Appendix). There was no disagreement with any of the organizational communication methods.

**Table 1.** Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Selected Texans' perceptions of organizational communication methods used in their organizations.

| Organizational Communication Methods   | CS<br>(n=40)   |     | GA<br>(n=21)   |     | C/NR<br>(n=7)  |     | Total<br>(N=70) |     |
|--|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|  | M <sup>a</sup> | SD  | M <sup>a</sup> | SD  | M <sup>a</sup> | SD  | M <sup>a</sup>  | SD  |
| My organization wants to meet its primary objectives.                              | 3.63           | .49 | 3.60           | .50 | 3.50           | .55 | 3.61            | .49 |
| Information about important events or situations is shared within my organization. | 3.49           | .60 | 3.65           | .59 | 3.17           | .41 | 3.51            | .59 |

*Note.* Key: CS=Commodity-specific; GA=General Agriculture; C/NR=Conservation/Natural Resources. See appendix for all organizational communication methods.

<sup>a</sup>Likert-type scale: (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion).

Members of all selected Texas agricultural organizations rated their level of agreement with 10 statements measuring factors that may have influenced the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill. A Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion) was used to measure agreement levels that ranged from 2.51 to 3.74 for each statement (Table 2).

Respondents strongly agreed with four statements: Farm organization coalitions were essential for enacting the 2002 Farm Bill (M=3.74, SD=.54); Farm organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill (M=3.71, SD=.52); Farm organizations influenced the 2002 Farm Bill more than non-farm organizations (M=3.55, SD=.64); and My respective organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill (M=3.51, SD=.56) (Table 2). There was no disagreement with any of the factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill (Appendix).

**Table 2.** Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for selected Texans' perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill.

| Statements  | CS<br>(n=40)   |     | GA<br>(n=21)   |     | C/NR<br>(n=7)  |     | Total<br>(N=70) |     |
|---|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|   | M <sup>a</sup> | SD  | M <sup>a</sup> | SD  | M <sup>a</sup> | SD  | M <sup>a</sup>  | SD  |
| Farm organization coalitions were essential for enacting the 2002 Farm Bill       | 3.93           | .27 | 3.45           | .76 | 3.40           | .55 | 3.74            | .54 |
| Farm organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill                         | 3.88           | .34 | 3.57           | .60 | 3.00           | .71 | 3.71            | .52 |
| Farm organizations influenced the 2002 Farm Bill more than non-farm organizations | 3.63           | .59 | 3.48           | .75 | 3.20           | .45 | 3.55            | .64 |
| My organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill                           | 3.62           | .54 | 3.45           | .51 | 2.75           | .50 | 3.51            | .56 |

*Note.* Key: CS=Commodity-specific; GA=General Agriculture; C/NR=Conservation/Natural Resources. See appendix for all statements of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill.

<sup>a</sup>Likert-type scale: (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion).

Respondents' perceptions of organizational communication methods and the influencing factors affecting the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill were summed and correlated, using Pearson's Product-moment correlations (Borg & Gall, 1989), to determine if significant relationships existed (Table 3). A significant positive (moderate)

relationship ( $r=.33$ ) existed between perceived organizational communication methods and perceived levels of factors influencing the 2002 Farm Bill outcome.

**Table 3.** Significant correlations among selected variables (N=70).

| Variables  | <u>1</u> <sup>a</sup> | <u>2</u> <sup>b</sup> |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill                                  | —                     | .33**                 |
| 2. Perceptions of organizational communication methods used by selected Texas agricultural organizations |                       | —                     |

*Note.* Four-point (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion) scales were summed to determine respondents' overall perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill and perceived organizational communication methods.

<sup>a</sup>Perceptions of factors influencing the farm bill ranged from 5-37 (M=29.85, SD =5.48).

<sup>b</sup>Perceptions of communication methods ranged from 38-146 (M=58.82, SD=13.00).

\*\*Significant at .01 level.

## DISCUSSION

Respondents wanted their respective organizations to meet their primary objectives and information needs in their organizations. Organizational communication methods found in this study coincided with Franklin's (1975) peer leadership factor. An implication exists in that organizations should set objectives through a shared communication process (Conrad, 2000). Shared purposes contribute to the completion of organizational objectives. More research involving Texas farm, non-farm, and other organizations is needed to gather members' perceptions and use of organizational communication methods. Because of their local contact base, extension agents should study other organizations' interests in future farm bills to determine what provisions, issues, or programs are most needed to benefit society.

Respondents' strong agreement levels were congruent with the overall organizational factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill. Overall, the results showed farm organization leaders believed their organizations influenced the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill, which was congruent with another study (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2004). Catchings and Wingenbach found a shift between national (Sulak, 2000) and state-level commodity board members' perceptions (Catchings & Wingenbach) of organizational influencers. The shift could be related to the House Committee on Agriculture hearings that allowed commodity groups to present specific recommendations for the new farm bill (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2004; Mark, Daniel, & Parcell, 2002). This study illustrated such inferences could be the result of a heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous (Catchings & Wingenbach) respondent group's collective perception of their organizations' input to the 2002 Farm Bill.

More research is needed to show if non-farm organizations have the same influence as farm organizations on agricultural policy at the national level (Catchings, Wingenbach, & Rutherford, 2005). The findings showed farm organization leaders believed they affected the 2002 Farm Bill outcome, but non-farm organization leaders also viewed farm organizations as having affected the 2002 Farm Bill. An implication, concurrent with previous studies (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2004; Catchings, Wingenbach, & Rutherford, 2005; Mark, Daniel & Parcell, 2002), is that more research is needed to gather non-farm organizational board members input. Such input will be beneficial to policy makers as new farm bills are developed, written, and enacted.

There was a significant positive (moderate) relationship ( $r=.33$ ) between perceived organizational communication methods and perceived levels of factors influencing the 2002 Farm Bill outcome. As perceptions of communication methods increased, so too did perceptions of the factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill. Alternatively, the opposite holds true for these two variables. Additional research should explore, beyond a descriptive sense, if this relationship has a causal element to it. Does one factor cause the other to change? Which factor precedes the other? Answers should be sought from the same groups in this study, with a larger response rate, and/or a more diverse group of farm bill stakeholders.

Mark, Daniel, and Parcell's (2002) study found farm bill stakeholders' perceptions changed over time. This study did not measure perceptions over time, but showed that different agricultural organization board members' perceptions could change when considering their respective affiliations. Extension agents may use these findings to note that as perceptions change, so too can they be manipulated to produce perceptions that are positive toward any organizational issue. Positive perceptions can be increased when specific organizational communication methods are used. Based on Franklin's (1975) work, peer leadership items were perceived highly in this study. These perceptions are useful for understanding the phenomena under study and for incorporating into public media campaigns for agricultural legislation matters.

Even the small respondent group in this study helps us understand that information about farm policy is useful to policy makers (Mark, Daniel, & Parcell, 2002). More research is needed to identify which organizational communication methods increase perceptions of organizational influencers and vice versa. Researchers should study other organizations, not just as outsiders, but also as members of respective organizations, such as the Cooperative Extension Service. Such research could assess the variables correlating to organizational influence on farm policy and organizational communication methods to determine if they concur or differ with this study.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1.** Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Selected Texans' perceptions of organizational communication methods used in their organizations.

| <u>Organizational Communication Methods</u>  | CS<br>(n=40)         |           | GA<br>(n=21)         |           | C/NR<br>(n=7)        |           | Total<br>(N=70)      |           |
|--|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
|  | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> |
| My organization wants to meet its primary objectives.  | 3.63                 | .49       | 3.60                 | .50       | 3.50                 | .55       | 3.61                 | .49       |
| Information about important events or situations is shared within my organization.   | 3.49                 | .60       | 3.65                 | .59       | 3.17                 | .41       | 3.51                 | .59       |
| I encourage members to exchange opinions and ideas.  | 3.47                 | .56       | 3.55                 | .61       | 3.20                 | .45       | 3.48                 | .56       |
| Information is shared in my organization.  | 3.53                 | .51       | 3.37                 | .83       | 3.00                 | .89       | 3.43                 | .67       |
| Organizational objectives are announced with no opportunity to raise questions or give comments.   | 3.43                 | .73       | 3.35                 | .75       | 3.40                 | .55       | 3.40                 | .71       |
| Decision makers have access to all available information in my organization.   | 3.47                 | .51       | 3.30                 | .66       | 3.17                 | .41       | 3.39                 | .55       |
| My informational needs, as a director, are adequately met within my organization.  | 3.54                 | .51       | 3.20                 | .52       | 3.00                 | .71       | 3.39                 | .55       |
| My organization makes decisions and solves problems well.  | 3.43                 | .50       | 3.26                 | .45       | 3.50                 | .55       | 3.39                 | .49       |
| Organizational members have knowledge that is communicated to decision makers.   | 3.42                 | .50       | 3.30                 | .57       | 3.20                 | .45       | 3.37                 | .52       |
| My organization plans and coordinates its efforts collaboratively.   | 3.49                 | .51       | 3.15                 | .49       | 3.33                 | .52       | 3.37                 | .52       |
| Organizational objectives are announced and explained with opportunities to ask questions.   | 3.34                 | .75       | 3.25                 | .79       | 3.00                 | .71       | 3.29                 | .75       |
| Organizational members are receptive to my ideas and suggestions.  | 3.35                 | .54       | 3.16                 | .50       | 3.25                 | .50       | 3.28                 | .52       |
| Members in my organization listen to me.   | 3.26                 | .55       | 3.32                 | .48       | 3.25                 | .50       | 3.28                 | .52       |
| Decisions are made at levels with the most adequate and accurate information available.  | 3.26                 | .55       | 3.25                 | .55       | 3.20                 | .45       | 3.25                 | .54       |
| Organizational objectives are created and are discussed, and sometimes modified by members before being issued throughout the entire organization. | 3.24                 | .60       | 3.30                 | .66       | 2.83                 | .41       | 3.22                 | .61       |
| Specific alternative objectives are  | 3.32                 | .53       | 2.70                 | .92       | 2.83                 | .41       | 3.08                 | .73       |

|   | CS<br>(n=40)         |           | GA<br>(n=21)         |           | C/NR<br>(n=7)        |           | Total<br>(N=70)      |           |
|---|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
|   | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> |
| <u>Organizational Communication Methods</u>   |                      |           |                      |           |                      |           |                      |           |
| crafted by leaders, then members are asked to discuss them, indicating the objective they think is best for the organization. |                      |           |                      |           |                      |           |                      |           |
| After decisions are made, people affected by those decisions are asked for their ideas.                                       | 3.11                 | .79       | 2.90                 | .91       | 2.75                 | .96       | 3.02                 | .83       |

Note. Key: CS=Commodity-specific; GA=General Agriculture; C/NR=Conservation/Natural Resources.  
<sup>a</sup>Likert-type scale: (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion).

**Table 2.** Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for selected Texans' perceptions of factors influencing the outcome of the 2002 Farm Bill.

| <u>Statements</u>   | CS<br>(n=40)         |           | GA<br>(n=21)         |           | C/NR<br>(n=7)        |           | Total<br>(N=70)      |           |
|---|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
|   | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M<sup>a</sup></u> | <u>SD</u> |
| Farm organization coalitions were essential for enacting the 2002 Farm Bill         | 3.93                 | .27       | 3.45                 | .76       | 3.40                 | .55       | 3.74                 | .54       |
| Farm organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill                           | 3.88                 | .34       | 3.57                 | .60       | 3.00                 | .71       | 3.71                 | .52       |
| Farm organizations influenced the 2002 Farm Bill more than non-farm organizations   | 3.63                 | .59       | 3.48                 | .75       | 3.20                 | .45       | 3.55                 | .64       |
| My organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill                             | 3.62                 | .54       | 3.45                 | .51       | 2.75                 | .50       | 3.51                 | .56       |
| The 2002 Farm Bill impacts conservation programs more than previous farm bills      | 3.03                 | .66       | 3.05                 | .62       | 3.20                 | .45       | 3.05                 | .63       |
| Non-farm organizations influenced the 2002 Farm Bill more than farm organizations   | 2.95                 | .70       | 3.19                 | .75       | 3.00                 | .00       | 3.03                 | .70       |
| The 2002 Farm Bill impacts natural resources issues more than previous farm bills   | 2.97                 | .63       | 2.86                 | .73       | 3.25                 | .50       | 2.95                 | .65       |
| Interests of the environmentalists were opposites of farmers for the 2002 Farm Bill | 2.82                 | .69       | 2.95                 | .78       | 2.40                 | .89       | 2.82                 | .74       |
| Non-farm organizations strongly influenced the 2002 Farm Bill                       | 2.66                 | .75       | 2.45                 | .89       | 2.75                 | .50       | 2.60                 | .78       |
| The 2002 Farm Bill impacts farm production more than previous farm bills            | 2.36                 | .72       | 2.62                 | .74       | 3.25                 | .50       | 2.51                 | .74       |

Note. Key: CS=Commodity-specific; GA=General Agriculture; C/NR=Conservation/Natural Resources.  
<sup>a</sup>Likert-type scale: (1=Strongly Disagree—4=Strongly Agree, or 0=No Opinion).