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# Public Attitudes to the Countryside in Northern Ireland

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# Overview

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- Why look at public attitudes to the countryside?
- Farmers and farming: a drain or a gain for the countryside?
- Who owns the countryside – private or public property?
- The rural idyll?
- Some conclusions

# Why look at public attitudes to the countryside?

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- Considerable change in the policy environment
- Dismantling of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- Increasing emphasis given to rural development
- Legitimacy of agricultural subsidies and 'public goods'

# Farmers and farming: a drain or a gain for the countryside?

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- Sometimes a negative image of farmers portrayed in the media
- Seen as gaining at the expense of the general public
- This is what underpins the emphasis on providing goods valued by the public

# Farmers and farming: a drain or a gain for the countryside?

- *‘A simpler solution would be for central government to ...abolish farm subsidies. Despite tying up a stonking 75% of the UK landmass, agriculture generates a measly 1% of GDP. Take away the £3bn or so in grants paid out under the CAP and many farms would be abandoned. Financial Times 18.10.06*

# Farmers and farming: a drain or a gain for the countryside?

How much do you agree or disagree that..	% agreeing	% disagreeing
Farms and farming families keep the countryside alive	<b>89</b>	<b>3</b>
Farms add to the beauty of the countryside	<b>83</b>	<b>5</b>
NI farmers produce better quality safe food than produced elsewhere	<b>67</b>	<b>9</b>
Farmers are subsidised far too much these days	<b>22</b>	<b>45</b>
Farmers are just concerned with making money and don't care about the countryside	<b>12</b>	<b>71</b>
Farming as a way of life should be allowed to die out in our society	<b>4</b>	<b>91</b>

# Farmers and farming: a drain or a gain for the countryside?

Many farmers in Northern Ireland could not survive economically without subsidies. Which of these three statements comes closest to your own view about the levels to which farmers in Northern Ireland should be subsidised?

	%
<b>If farms in Northern Ireland cannot survive without subsidies then they should be forced to close or sell up just like any other business</b>	7
<b>Farming in Northern Ireland should be preserved at all costs</b>	23
<b>Farming in Northern Ireland should be subsidised to some degree to help farms survive - but not at any cost</b>	68
<b>(Don't know)</b>	3



# Farmers and farming: a drain or a gain for the countryside?

Modern methods of farming have caused damage to the countryside	
	%
Agree strongly	8
Agree	39
Neither agree nor disagree	25
Disagree	19
Disagree strongly	1
Can't choose	8

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

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- Many user groups/ interest groups who stake a claim on the countryside
- Farmers, recreational users, developers, environmentalists
- Private property or public property?

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

Suppose it is discovered that some waste from a farm has begun leaking into a nearby river. Should the farmer ...

	%
<b>...just be asked to do something about it,</b>	31
<b>Or, should he/she be heavily fined for every week it continues</b>	48
<b>Or, should the farm be shut down until he/she does something about it</b>	21
<b>(Don't know)</b>	1

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

Looking after the countryside costs a great deal of money. From the groups on this card, please say which should have the most responsibility for footing the bill, and which the next most. First, the most responsibility.

	%
<b>The general public through income tax and VAT</b>	40
<b>Everyone who lives in the countryside through their rates</b>	18
<b>Visitors and holidaymakers through fees and charges</b>	9
<b>The farming community through their profits</b>	12
<b>Other businesses and industries in the countryside, through their profits</b>	16
<b>(None of these)</b>	1
<b>(Don't know)</b>	4

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

The EU has recently introduced new rules on water quality which farmers will have to comply with. When farmers are working the land they will now have to make sure that they do not affect the water supply in any way. Which of these three statements comes closest to your own view about who should pay the extra costs for making sure that our water supply is not affected by farming practices?

	%
<b>The farmers on their own</b>	12
<b>The farmers with financial support from the government</b>	59
<b>The government on its own</b>	27
<b>(don't know)</b>	3

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

Suppose a rarely-used public footpath runs through farming land. Should the farmer be able to get it closed without a lot of fuss and bother?

	%
<b>Definitely should have the right</b>	10
<b>Probably should have the right</b>	31
<b>Probably should not have the right</b>	32
<b>Definitely should not have the right</b>	19
<b>(It depends)</b>	6
<b>(Don't know)</b>	1

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

Now suppose the footpath is used quite a lot as a short cut for local people to get to the shops. But sometimes gates are left open and the farmer has had problems with livestock getting into the road. Should the farmer be able to get the footpath closed?

	%
<b>Definitely should have the right</b>	24
<b>Probably should have the right</b>	39
<b>Probably should not have the right</b>	19
<b>Definitely should not have the right</b>	10
<b>(It depends)</b>	7
<b>(Don't know)</b>	1

# Who owns the countryside – private or public property?

Please tick one box to show whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.  
Compared with other users of the countryside, farmers have too much say.

	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	2
<b>Agree</b>	17
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	36
<b>Disagree</b>	32
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	4
<b>Can't choose</b>	6
<b>Missing</b>	4



# The Rural Idyll?

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- Romantic view of rural life dates back to industrialisation
- Chocolate box images
- ‘Getting away from it all’

# The Rural Idyll?

- *‘When despair for the world grows in me and  
I wake in the night at the least sound...  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great  
heron feeds....  
For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and I am free  
Wendell Berry, The peace of wild things*

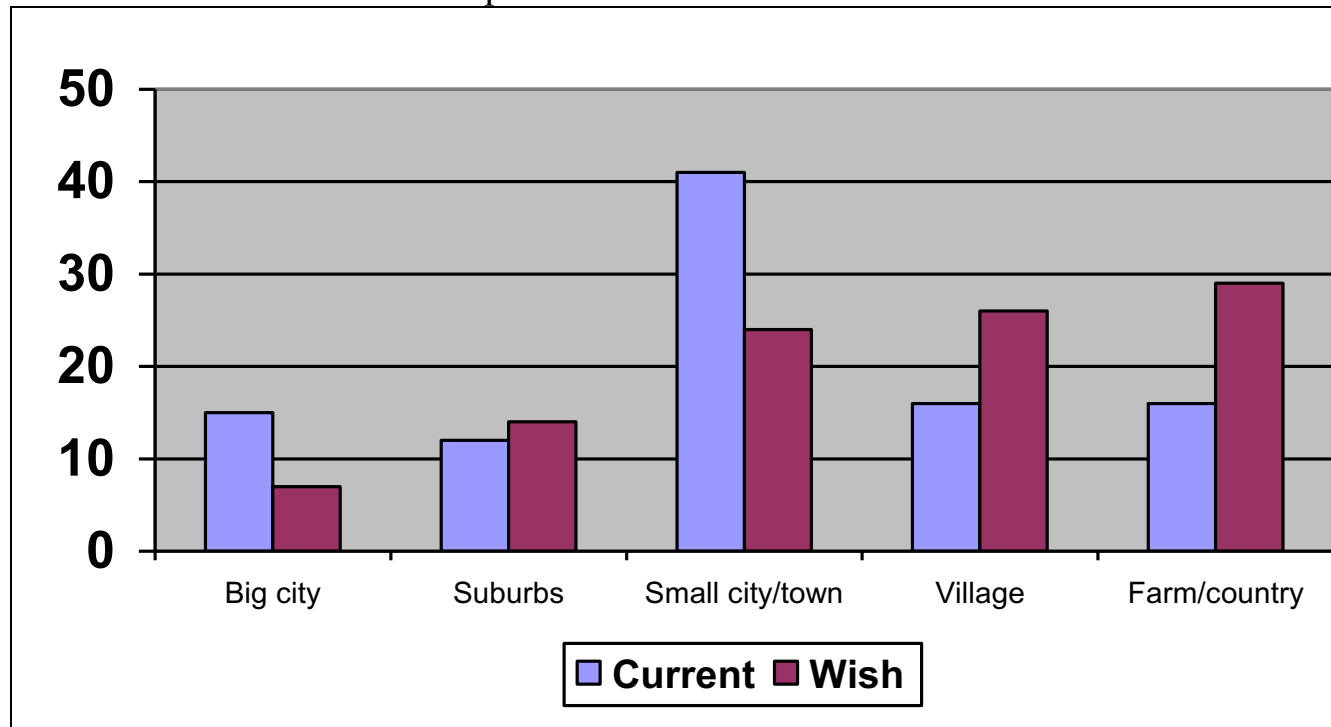
# The Rural Idyll?

- *Back once again in wild, wet Monaghan  
Exiled from thought and feeling  
A mean brutality reigns  
It is really a horrible position to be in  
And I equate myself with Dante  
And all who have lived outside civilization*

*Patrick Kavanagh, Having to Live in the Country*

# The Rural Idyll?

Area of residence and area of preference



# The Rural Idyll?

There is less crime in the countryside	
	%
Agree strongly	10
Agree	55
Neither agree nor disagree	14
Disagree	17
Disagree strongly	1
Can't choose	3

# The Rural Idyll?

It is harder to get a good job if you live in the countryside

	%
Agree strongly	6
Agree	38
Neither agree nor disagree	18
Disagree	32
Disagree strongly	3
Can't choose	3

# The Rural Idyll?

The countryside is a better place to bring up children	
	%
Agree strongly	19
Agree	56
Neither agree nor disagree	18
Disagree	6
Disagree strongly	<1
Can't choose	13

# The Rural Idyll?

Living in the countryside is very boring	
	%
Agree strongly	2
Agree	12
Neither agree nor disagree	20
Disagree	49
Disagree strongly	15
Can't choose	2



# The Rural Idyll?

The countryside provides a healthier environment to live in	
	%
Agree strongly	25
Agree	64
Neither agree nor disagree	9
Disagree	2
Disagree strongly	<1
Can't choose	1

# The Rural Idyll?

There is more community spirit in the countryside

	%
Agree strongly	20
Agree	50
Neither agree nor disagree	19
Disagree	7
Disagree strongly	1
Can't choose	4

# Some Conclusions

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- In general the public are supportive of farmers and farming and consider that they provide goods of public benefit
- There is a much more complex view of ownership of the countryside and responsibility for the countryside than frequently presented in the media.
- There is a sense that we are all responsible for the countryside
- The rural idyll is alive and well