

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT AGRICULTURE IN COLORADO

JUNE 2006

Executive Summary

In the spring of 2006, a study was conducted by the Colorado Department of Agriculture and the Human Dimensions in Natural Resources Unit of the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University. Replicating similar studies done in 1996 and 2001, the purpose of the 2006 study was to understand how Coloradans currently perceive agriculture and whether those perceptions have change over the past 10 years. This document summarizes the 1996, 2001, and 2006 results and is drawn from the full 2006 final report of research.

SALIENT FINDINGS FOR 2006

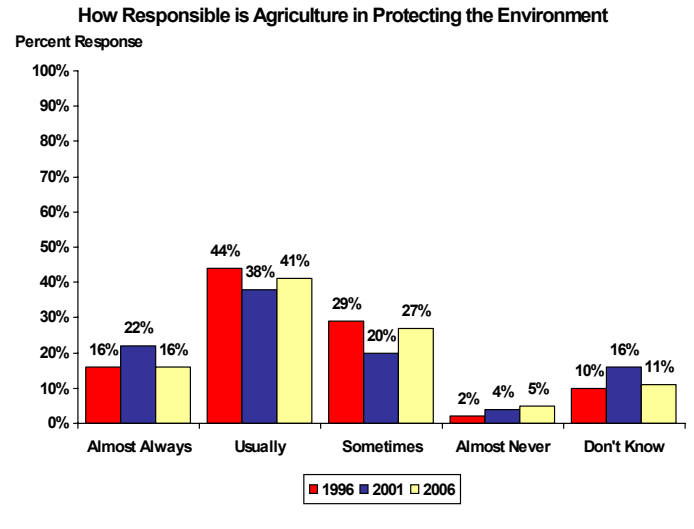
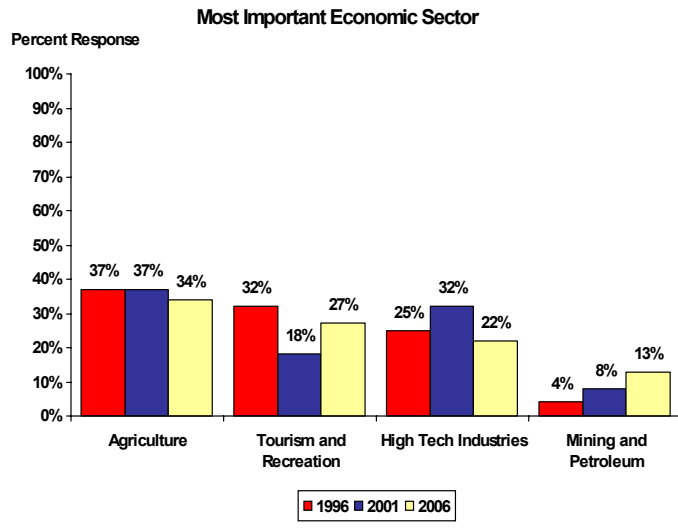
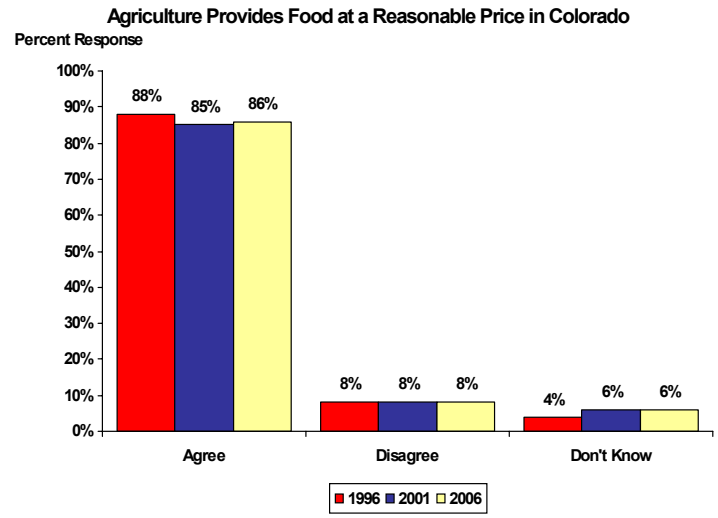
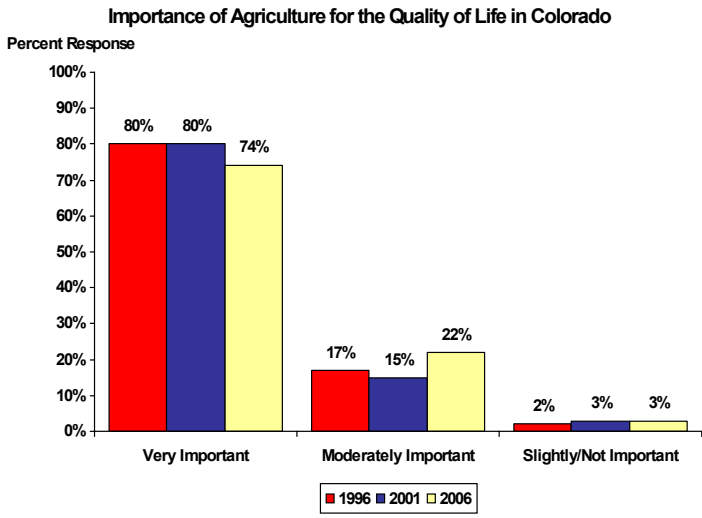
- One-fourth of respondents (26%) were at least moderately familiar with the activities and programs of the Colorado Department of Agriculture. More than one-third (36%) were not at all familiar with the agency.
 - Three-fourths (74%) of those surveyed felt that agriculture was very important to the quality of life in Colorado.
 - More than eight of ten respondents (86%) felt that agriculture provides food at a reasonable price.
 - Two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that, if available, they would definitely buy more Colorado grown and produced products while one-fourth (25%) indicated they would probably do so.
 - One of three respondents (34%) ranked agriculture as the most important economic sector in Colorado, followed by tourism and recreation (27%), high tech industries (22%), and mining/petroleum (13%).
 - A majority of respondents (83%) felt it was very important to maintain land and water in agricultural production.
 - Three-fourths of respondents (73%) agreed that purchasing developing rights to prevent the loss of agricultural lands was acceptable. Coloradans favor using either financial incentives (47%) or regulations (34%) to encourage landowners to maintain agricultural land and water in production. Most respondents (84%) agreed that open space programs should be partially used to minimize farm and ranch losses.
 - More than half of the respondents (57%) agreed that agriculture in Colorado is protective of the environment.
 - Six of ten respondents (62%) agreed that it is at least sometimes necessary to use chemicals to produce enough food for people; lower than in 2001 (72%) and 1996 (80%).
 - More than one-half of the respondents (56%) felt that food produced in Colorado is almost always safe while three of ten (31%) believed it is usually safe. Less than four of ten (38%) believed genetically engineered food is safe. Only 3 percent of respondents had no opinion on this issue.
 - Seven of ten respondents (72%) believed that farm and ranch animals are treated humanely.
 - About three-fourths of respondents (78%) agreed that ranchers with permits to graze on public lands treat the land appropriately.
 - Two of three respondents (65%) agreed that agricultural practices to conserve water and soil are effective.
 - Nearly nine of ten respondents (87%) agreed that public funds should be used to help farmers and ranchers improve wildlife habitat and conserve soil and water resources.
 - About three-fourths of respondents (73%) felt that agriculture should be a top priority for water use in a dry year. In stream flow levels was the top priority for less than one of five respondents (18%).
 - Nearly nine of ten respondents (88%) agreed that the United States should increase its production of corn-based ethanol and crop-based bio-diesel as alternatives to petroleum-based fuels.
 - Farmers and ranchers (33%) and farm/ranch organizations (28%) were rated most trustworthy as sources of information about agriculture. Government agencies (35%) and news reports (36%) were least trustworthy.
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METHODS USED

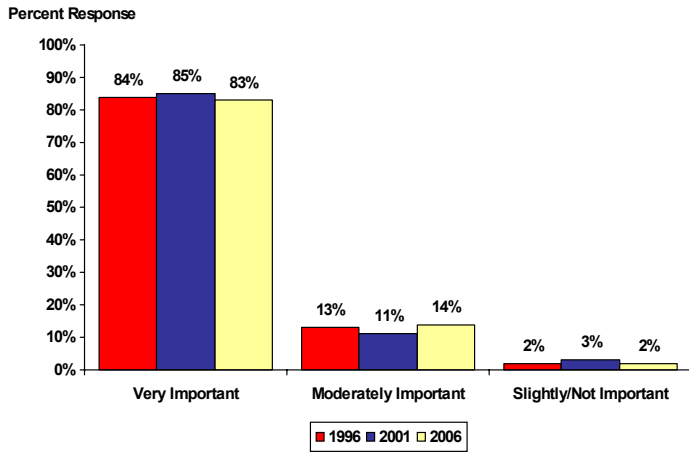
To collect data for the 2006 survey of Coloradan's perceptions of agriculture, a telephone survey of randomly selected households in Colorado was conducted by PhoneBase Research Inc. in Fort Collins, Colorado. A total of 500 completed surveys were obtained. The 2006 results have a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of +/- 5%.

COMPARISON OF RESULTS ACROSS 1996, 2001, AND 2006

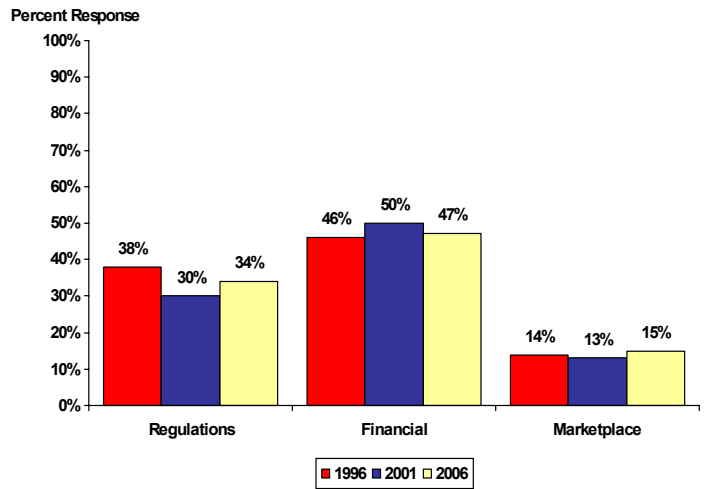
The following graphs present the primary results of the study for the years 1996, 2001, and 2006. This allows for an examination of how perceptions of various issues relevant to Colorado agriculture have changed or stayed the same over time.



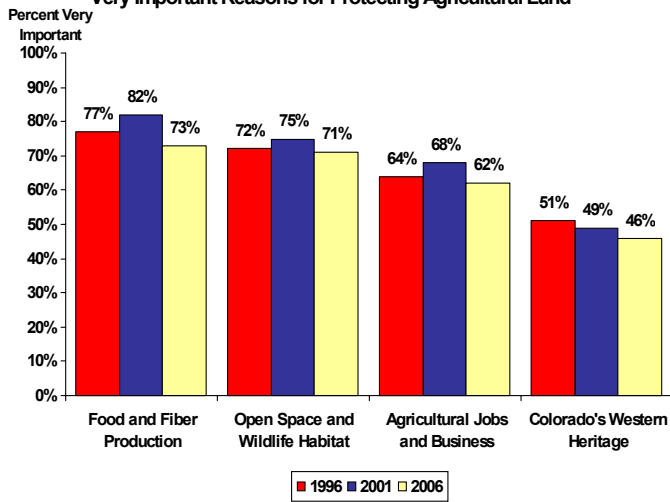
Importance of Maintaining Land and Water in Agricultural Production



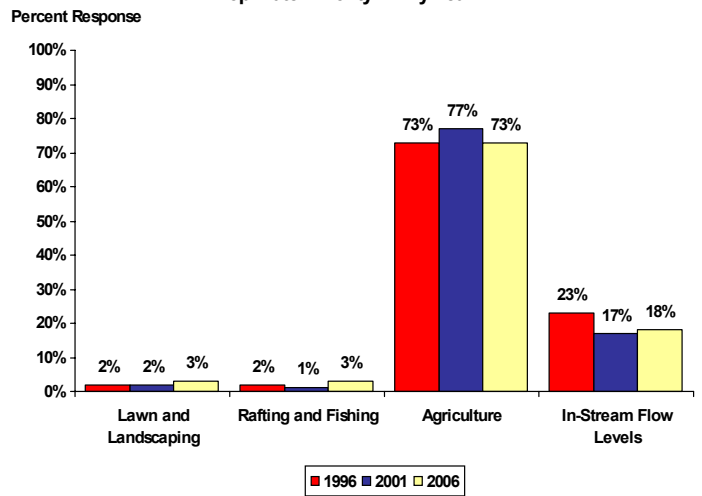
Preferred Approach for Protecting Agricultural Land and Water



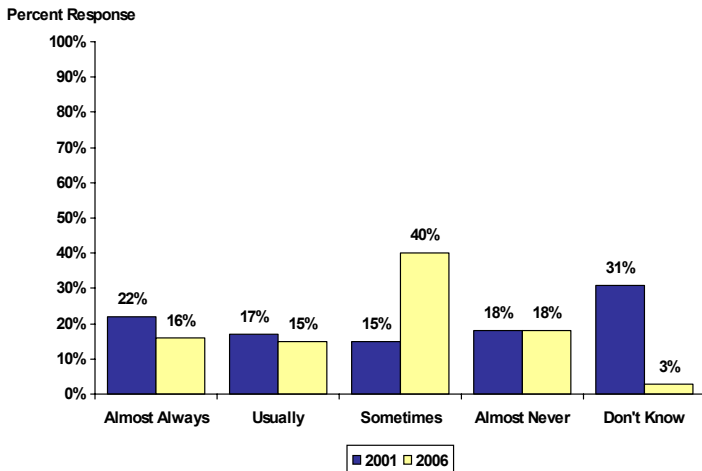
Very Important Reasons for Protecting Agricultural Land



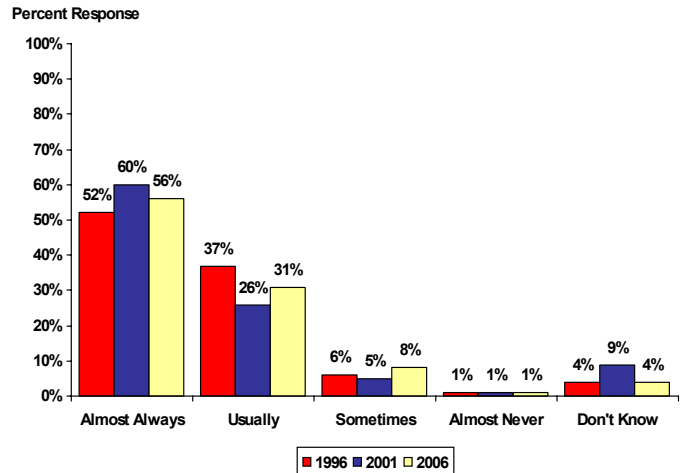
Top Water Priority in Dry Year



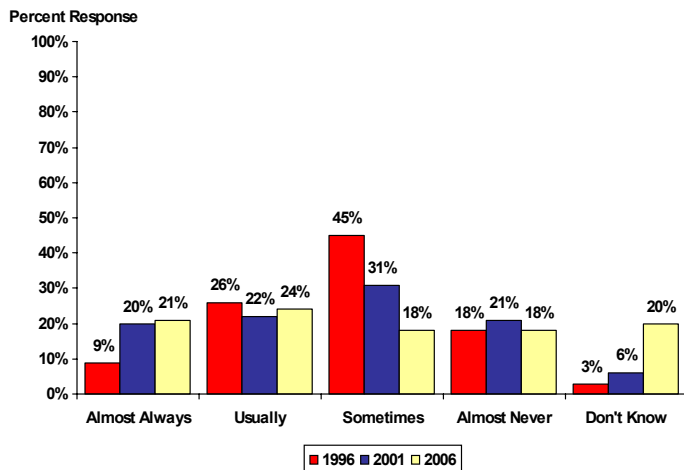
How Safe is Genetically Engineered Food to Eat



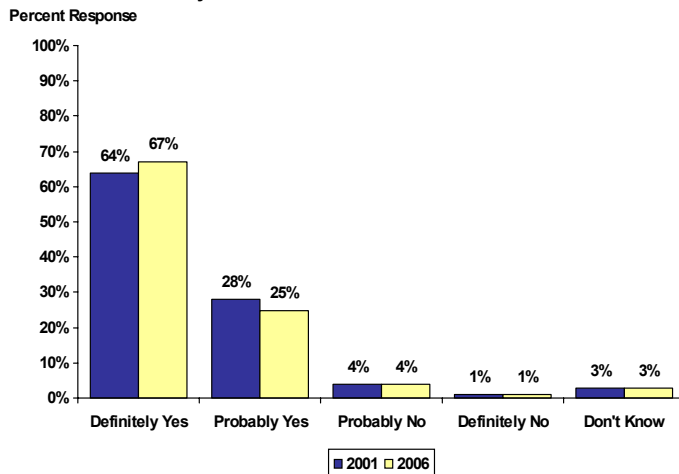
How Safe is the Food Produced in Colorado



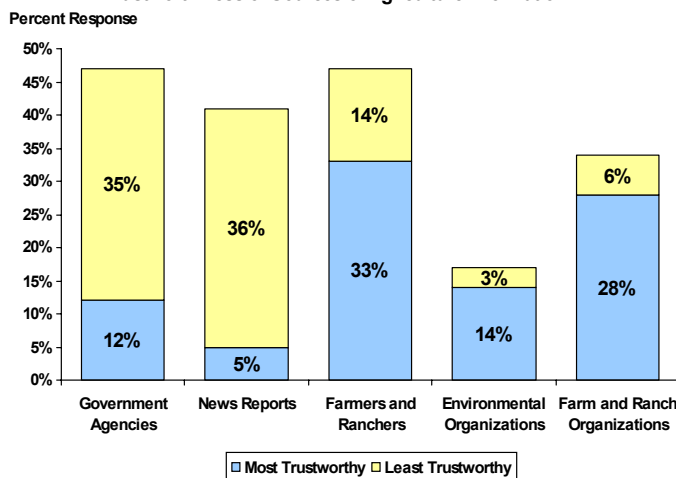
How Necessary is it to Use Chemicals to Produce Enough Food



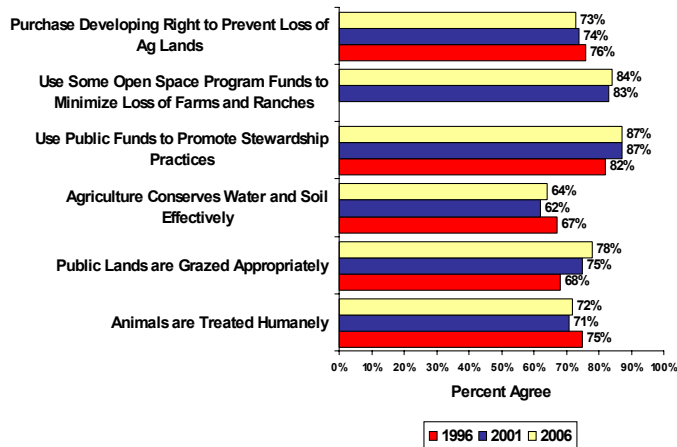
Would You Buy More Colorado Grown and Produced Products



Trustworthiness of Sources of Agriculture Information



Agree with Practices



SUMMARY

There continues to be significant support for agriculture in Colorado. This is supported by perceptions that agriculture is important to the quality of life in Colorado; Colorado food is provided at a reasonable price; and that if available, Coloradans would buy more Colorado produced products. These positive perceptions have been fairly constant over the past 10 years. Coloradans view agriculture as a particularly important economic sector and support initiatives such as maintaining land and water in agricultural production, purchasing development rights to prevent the loss of agricultural land, and using a portion of funds from open space programs to minimize farm and ranch losses. Most Coloradans also believe that agricultural techniques are conducted effectively. Most believe that Colorado agriculture is done in a pro-environmental way; that Colorado food is safe; that farm and ranch animals and land are treated appropriately; and that agricultural practices effectively conserve water and soil. The use of chemicals, while still seen as sometimes necessary by most Coloradans, has seen declining support in the past 10 years. A new question in 2006 found that producing corn-based ethanol and crop-based bio-diesel as an alternative to petroleum based fuels was strongly supported by Coloradans.

If you have questions about this study, please contact:

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If you want copies of the executive summary (free of charge), or the full report (\$10.00) please contact:

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<http://www.colostate.edu/Dept/CoopExt/>