

## U.S. Public At Odds With Government Policy on Farm Subsidies

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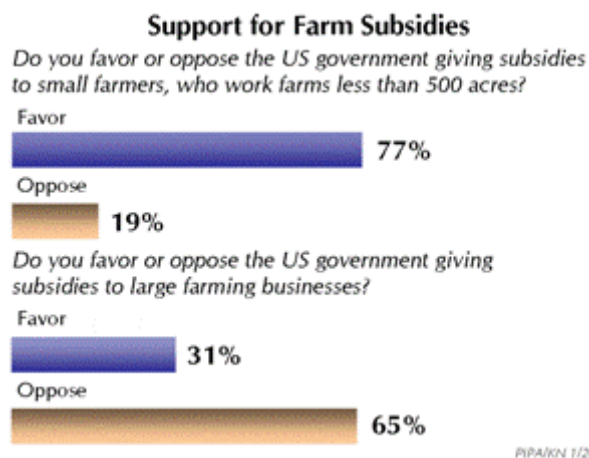
### Supports Subsidies to Small Farmers, But Not Large Farming Businesses

#### [Questionnaire](#)

A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll finds that American public attitudes on farm subsidies are sharply at odds with actual U.S. policy. While 77 percent supported providing subsidies to small farms (under 500 acres), only 31 percent supported providing them to large farming businesses (over 500 acres). In fact, 80 percent of U.S. subsidies go to large farming businesses and while most of them get subsidies, this is true of only a minority of small farmers (Source: USDA).

Most Americans do not support the current policy of providing subsidies on a regular annual basis, rather than only in bad years. Only 34 percent (of the whole sample) favored giving small farmers regular annual subsidies, and just 9 percent favored giving them to large farming businesses.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, comments, "Clearly, U.S. policy on farm subsidies is far out of step with the preferences of the American public. The vast majority of U.S. subsidies go to large farming businesses on a regular annual basis, while only 1 in 10 Americans approves of this."



U.S. farm subsidies have been a major stumbling block in trade negotiations, with developing countries refusing to open their markets any further as long as the U.S. and other developing countries continue to give their farmers the advantage of subsidies. Steven Kull comments, "While the public would oppose eliminating all farm subsidies, the scope of subsidies the public supports is so much narrower than is currently provided that, if the public's preferences were followed, this would largely remove the current obstacle in trade negotiations."

A striking finding is that the public in farm states was not significantly different in their attitudes about farm subsidies. The poll included an oversample of the 17 states that receive the largest amounts of farm subsidies, excluding the metropolitan areas of California, Illinois and Texas. In these states support for subsidies to small farmers was 81 percent, while just 31 percent favored subsidies to large farming businesses. Support for regular annual subsidies to small farmers was 35 percent, while support for regular annual subsidies to large farming businesses was just 9 percent.

Support for farm subsidies in principle is fairly strong. When presented arguments for and against farm subsidies, arguments in favor were consistently more popular. But this appears to be derived from support for subsidies to small farmers, as it does not translate into support for subsidies to agribusiness.

Subsidies for tobacco farming are quite unpopular. Only 23 percent supported them (27 percent in farm states) and 73 percent were opposed (65% in farm states).

While Americans are aware that more subsidies go to large farming businesses than small ones, the discrepancy is actually greater than they assume and far greater than they think it should be. The mean estimate was that 42 percent of subsidies go to small farmers, when in fact only 20 percent does. The mean respondent said that 64 percent should go to small farmers. Here again there was no significant difference in farm states.

Even with this underestimation of the proportion of subsidies going to large farming businesses an overwhelming majority (79%) said that the U.S. government favors large farming businesses, with 12 percent saying that it treats them equally and 6 percent saying it favors small farmers.

Many Americans are also unaware that farm subsidies are provided on a regular annual basis. Forty-six percent expressed the incorrect belief that farmers receive subsidies “only for bad years,” while 50 percent had the correct view that farmers receive subsidies “on a regular annual basis, whether or not it’s a bad year.” Respondents in farm states were no more accurate.

When told that, “the U.S. government also provides subsidies to agricultural businesses that do not farm, but provide farmers with equipment and services,” only 36% approved of this practice and only 31 percent of those in farm states approved.

Most Americans appear to be unaware of the objections to farm subsidies based on their impact on developing countries. Only 27 percent concurred with the view, generally held by experts, that U.S. farm subsidies “contribute to poverty in poor countries.” However, as noted, if U.S. farm subsidies were limited to small farmers in bad years, as the majority prefers, U.S. subsidies overall would be so small that they would have an insignificant effect on farmers in developing countries.

The PIPA/KN poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,896 respondents from December 19 to January 5. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percent.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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