

Hoosiers outline issues driving their votes

By JOY McCLAIN

THE final ballot count in November's election has the potential to greatly affect Indiana farmers. Here, a few Hoosier farmers talk about the issues that concern them most. Among the topics mentioned, taxes seem to be the common denominator.

Farming's future Chris and Tammy Linville

Property taxes are a grave concern for the future of farming to Chris and Tammy Linville, Ripley County. They're concerned for their children's future. If their son, Zachary, or their daughter, Heather, choose to be in the family business, will there be affordable health care? With so much ground being turned into development, what is the future of farming?

Tax assessment and the rise in property taxes is causing apprehension with this election, Chris insists. He desires voices that sit in the seats of decision be more up front with people. "I don't want the wool pulled over my eyes," he says. "Just be honest with me. I'd rather know what's really going on, rather than be told one thing, only to find it's another way."

The Linvilles greatly value a solid education and preparation for the future. When their own school system did away with all general ag classes, it greatly concerned Chris.

"With the push for state standards, agricultural education is falling by the

SQUEEZED OUT?

Dale Fields does the best he can to run his farm in the shadow of Indianapolis, but development makes his mission difficult.



Key Points

- Property tax concerns are still key for farm families.
- Many Hoosiers worry how next generation will afford to farm.
- Disappearing land base worries many farmers.

wayside," he says. "Farming is a million-dollar operation, and who is going to train the next generation of farmers how to run that million-dollar enterprise?"

Believing in building a legacy now, the Linvilles desire to give their children every opportunity. They just hope government officials are on their side and will work on all levels, from foreign policy to agricultural policy, to help insure that opportunity. Boiled down, they hope the choice to farm still exists for their kids.

Disappearing land Dale Fields

Farming in the state's most populated county is a challenge for Dale Fields of southern Marion County. Known for his home-grown melons, Fields believes his area has been a wonderful place to farm for 40 years, but notes it's becoming increasingly more difficult.

He's lost the majority of his rented ground to development and gravel pits; it's next to impossible to move farm equip-

ment along the roads; and the issue of water having no place to run is a constant problem. Even with all these serious issues, Fields biggest concern, and one he hopes is addressed again, is property taxes.

His property taxes have doubled in the past two years, and he fears he hasn't seen the end to that rise. He'd also like to see protection against growth. That would mean government leaders paying more attention to preserving farmland.

National topics David Hardin

When it comes to free trade and foreign trade agreements, pork producers need political leaders on their side. David Hardin, a Hendricks County pork producer, fears that if a new administration chooses to place negative boundaries up with other nations, without any flexibility, pork producers would have reason to grow nervous.

Immigration is another issue Hardin thinks should be examined more closely.

"We need the workers," he says. "However, producers could find themselves in a catch-22, being that they're required to probe into the immigrant's background for accountability's sake, yet if they dig too deeply, it could be considered discriminatory. There needs to be more compromise in this area."

Believing and practicing good stewardship, Hardin hopes that with environmental issues, elected officials will be prone to use scientific study and proof, rather than emotion, which is easily aroused, given the media-push on the environment. "With the high cost of fertilizer, why would anyone purposely overuse?" he asks.

With livestock management, Hardin believes it's best to have decisions made on a



TAX BITE HURTS: Chris and Tammy Linville, Osgood, returned home from a summer trip to find a much-higher-than-expected property tax bill waiting. That could impact their thinking near election time.

state level, since there should be greater resources and training there.

In many areas, he believes the government has done its job. Still, he's hoping for more unbiased, science-based reporting. "We in agriculture don't want to arbitrarily have tools taken out of our toolbox that have worked well for us just because there's a change in the political winds, at any level," he says.

Taxes Bill and Kaye Whitehead

A fourth-generation farm in Delaware County, southeast of Muncie, is operated by a couple who have been active in ag programs on all levels. Kaye Whitehead and her husband, Bill, are proud they've "grown a farm that is managed and productive, without being managed by the farm." Yet Kaye hopes that with the next administration, many areas will be addressed.

The fact that you're taxed twice for your land — first when you purchase it and then again when you die, after working so hard — unnerves Kaye. "Taxes on all levels have to be addressed," she says. And she wonders about the ability for any business to remain in the U.S.

"All the control and bureaucratic red tape is making it increasingly difficult for any business, not just farming," she adds.

Kaye looks for leaders willing to represent agriculture on a worldwide arena — ones willing to negotiate wisely, without being a "yes" man. She doesn't want to see farm policy used as a political tool.

"We need an efficient government — one that doesn't overspend, practices common sense, one that doesn't entice people to live off the government, and a government willing to listen, even to those not in the popular majority, such as farmers," Kaye believes.

She realizes young farmers take a risk, but are willing to do so, if given the opportunity. She's hopeful the next generation will have that opportunity.

"Taxes, especially estate taxes, are going to make it very difficult to pass the family farm to the next generation," she explains, hoping someone is willing to listen to these issues, even if they disagree.

"We can agree to disagree respectfully," Kaye says. Many others in agriculture like her are hoping that once ballots are counted, ears of the elected will indeed be willing to listen.

McClain writes from Greenwood.

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