SELZER&COMPANY

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS
NW Ohio Water Poll

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Selzer & Company conducted a poll of 500 registered voters in four northwestern counties in Ohio: Erie, Lucas, Ottawa, and Sandusky. The poll had several purposes:

- To find out how much voters know about water issues related to CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) in this part of the state;

- To gauge support for and opposition to a proposal for a moratorium on new construction of CAFOs;

- To measure support for and opposition to a proposal to change state rules on CAFOs so more of them would be subject to regulation;

- To assess messages both for and against a freeze on construction; and

- To understand how these issues might play in upcoming elections.

OVERVIEW

The findings show that clean water is of universal importance to voters in NW Ohio. While they have some familiarity with algae blooms, they are not knowledgeable about what is happening inland to produce them. Most do not know whether CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) are or are not subject to regulation. Initially, voters are more inclined than not to favor a freeze on new CAFO construction by a margin of 44% to 33%, with 23% not sure. With more information, presented in the form of reasons to favor and reasons to oppose a freeze, that 11-point margin grows to a 30-point margin by the end of the interview, with a majority of 59% favoring a freeze and 29% opposing. By a similar margin (59% to 26%), NW Ohio voters favor including more CAFOs under state regulation.

This is currently viewed as a major issue to consider in assessing candidates for upcoming elections to a minority of NW Ohio voters (40%), with another 36% saying it would be a minor issue for them. In comparing candidates, a majority of 59% say they would favor a pro-freeze candidate over a candidate who favors the status quo of paying for voluntary programs to reduce manure runoff.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Clean water is important—*very* important.** A full 88% of NW Ohio voters rated safe clean water very important to them personally and deserving of government action. Another 4% say it is fairly important (Q.1).

   Second in importance is health care, with 83% saying it is very (74%) or fairly (9%) important. All other issues tested were rated very or fairly important by majorities of voters; lowest in importance was international trade at 60% very or fairly important.

What this means. The voting population of NW Ohio is sensitive to the issue of clean water, and they are aware of algae blooms in Lake Erie—a threat to clean water. Beyond that, most are not knowledgeable about the details of agricultural operations that create that threat.

2. **A majority of voters are familiar with algae blooms.** A full 69% say they are very (53%) or fairly (16%) familiar with algae blooms in Lake Erie (Q.4). Less than half indicate familiarity with other related topics tested, including use of fertilizer on crop fields (46%), manure runoff (42%), the sport fishing industry (40%), voluntary programs to reduce agricultural runoff (34%), and state rules and regulations regarding manure spreading on crop fields (26%).

3. **Protecting Lake Erie is near-universally embraced, along with programs for at-risk children.** Let's start with kids (Q.3). A full 91% of respondents say they strongly (61%) or mostly (30%) favor creating after-school support programs for at-risk public school students. The second-most popular proposal tested was spending more than a billion dollars to protect Lake Erie and other state waterways from pollution, with 59% saying they strongly favor and 30% saying they mostly favor this proposal, for a total of 89%.

    Other proposals tested with majority support include:

    - Instituting new restrictions on gun sales and ownership (69% favor);
    - Authorizing medical marijuana (68%);
    - Raising the legal smoking age to 21 from 18 (67%); and
    - Eliminating state income taxes on low-income households and instituting a flat 4% income tax cut for all other households (61%).

      What this means. Clean water is about as American as apple pie, dogs, and children. While we did not test apple pie or dogs, we did get a clear read that voters in NW Ohio support government spending—in the billions—to protect Lake Erie.

4. **More favor than oppose a moratorium on new CAFO construction.** In a cold test of this key issue, 44% strongly (23%) or mostly (21%) favor a freeze while 33% mostly (20%) or strongly (13%) oppose this proposal. This leaves about one in five (23%) who are not sure of their view.

5. **Most do not know about CAFO rules and regulation.** Fully two in three (68%) say they do not know if CAFOs are or are not regulated by the state in terms of the number or size of operations that can be built in Ohio (Q.5). The remainder divide about evenly among those who say they know they are regulated (13%), those who know they are not regulated (9%), and those who say they are not sure one way or another (11%).

6. **With a bit of information, voters move to favor a freeze on CAFO construction.** Midway through the survey (Q.6), with a little bit of information about CAFOs and with the knowledge that the number that can be built is not limited by the state of Ohio or the EPA,

a majority of 57% say they favor freezing new CAFO construction, with 31% opposing. That includes a plurality of 32% who say they strongly favor this proposal, up from 23% in the first test.

Near the end of the survey (Q.9), after hearing messages for and against a freeze, 59% favor a freeze (including 36% who favor it strongly) and 29% oppose.

What this means. Those respondents who did not favor the proposal early in the survey (they opposed or were unsure how to answer the question but favored toward the end of the interview) resemble a cross-section of the entire sample. That is, there is very little demographic difference that characterizes the population of movers we identified. These "movers" account for about one in four voters.

7. **Voters favor regulation.** A majority of 59% favor bringing CAFOs with fewer animals under regulation, with 42% favoring that strongly—the plurality response (Q.10). This is favored by three in four movers (75%).

8. **Protecting the lake-driven economy is the message that tests best.** Half of NW Ohio voters say this is an excellent reason to put a freeze on new CAFO construction (Q.7). It is the only reason of six tested to hit that mark. Here is the full wording:

> The problem hurts our economy. Lake Erie provides one-third of tourism and travel revenues for the state including walleye and sport fishing. The lake creates over 100,000 jobs and brings in billions of dollars in revenue, so the state needs to protect Lake Erie from toxic algae blooms.

This reason is rated excellent by six in 10 movers (60%).

Accountability ranks second, with 46% saying this message is an excellent reason to favor a freeze. A majority of those who moved to favor a freeze by the end of the survey (54%) rated this an excellent reason.

> CAFO owners should be accountable for their manure pollution. They should be financially responsible to take actions to reduce their pollution instead of forcing the public to endure algae outbreaks in Lake Erie.

Only one message was scored as ineffective by as many as one in four (26%), addressing rising water rates for some communities to cover costs for cleaning the polluted water—in other words, that it costs too much not to take action.

9. **None of the reasons to oppose a freeze is rated excellent by as many as one in five.** Closest, at 19%, is a message about investing in research and technology to fix problems (Q.8). Another 38% said it was a good reason, with 34% saying it was not a good reason.

Ranking second best was a message about other causes besides CAFOs, so they should not

be singled out (17% excellent and 35% good).

Three messages were rated "not good" by at least half:

- That there has only been one major drinking water shutdown, so a freeze is overkill (55% not a good reason);

- That the government should not restrict people's use of their own land to make money (52%); and

- That the hog and poultry industries are job creators, and a freeze could slow growth (51%).

10. **Voters associate CAFO ownership with large ag corporations and NW Ohio families.** More than six in 10 voters say the image they have in their minds about who owns CAFOs is large agricultural corporations (65%) or NW Ohio families (61%, Q.13). Many of the same voters give both answers, seeing these as not incompatible. Not quite half see CAFO owners as organic farmers (47%). Fewer envision Wall Street investment firms (33%) or foreign investors (29%) as owning CAFOs in NW Ohio.

   What this means. This issue may not boil down to good guys and bad guys, as defined by stereotypes—at least not in these voters' minds after hearing this survey's contents. Farm families can be held accountable just like large agricultural corporations. It's the same with organic farmers.

11. **A pro-freeze candidate is attractive.** Without a mention of political party, voters were asked if they were more likely to support a hypothetical candidate who favors a freeze on CAFO construction or one who favors current practice and voluntary programs (Q.11). A majority of 59% favor the pro-freeze candidate. This includes 76% of Democrats, 65% of independents, and 54% of Republicans—all self-identified. Movers are more likely to favor the pro-freeze candidate, as would be expected (78%).

   While interest in this hypothetical pro-freeze candidate appears strong, just 40% say this will be a major issue as they consider what candidate to support (Q.12). It's 53% among self-identified Democrats, the highest of any demographic group.

Summary. Clean water is important to NW Ohio voters. Lake Erie is worth protecting, they say, showing near-universal support for spending more than $1 billion to protect it and other waterways from pollution. There is seemingly little technical knowledge of the ways in which the lake and other waterways are threatened by some current agricultural practices. Once exposed to arguments on both sides of a proposed freeze on new CAFO construction, a majority support that position, and a majority say they would support a pro-freeze candidate.