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*To help people
help themselves
through the practical
application of knowledge
and resources to improve
their quality of life and
that of future generations*

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PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL AMERICA: VIEWS FROM THE U.S. CONGRESS

BATTLE CREEK, Michigan, May 3, 2002 — The W.K. Kellogg Foundation today released the results of a new study on the perceptions of rural America and public policy, *Perceptions of Rural America: Congressional Perspectives*. Interviews with members of Congress found that legislators view rural America as an incubator of traditional values but believe the absence of a strong national voice is an impediment to drafting rural policy. The study was released as part of the *Stand Up for Rural America Day* activities on May 6-7, 2002. For a full copy of the report, visit the Foundation's Web site at www.wkkf.org on the Food Systems and Rural Development page.

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc., a Democratic research firm, and Greener and Hook, a Republican consulting firm, conducted the interviews. The bi-partisan research included 26 members of Congress, including 16 Democratic House members and senators and 10 Republican House members and senators.

"Elected officials share the view that there is something unique and particular about rural America that deserves attention, protection, and support," said Anna Greenberg, vice president of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. "But legislators express some pessimism about rural America. They are disturbed about the death of the family farm and the effect that consolidation has on ordinary farmers as well as the persistent poverty in rural communities and the difficulty of bringing economic opportunities to rural communities."

Policy makers interviewed identified that job loss and the overall lack of economic opportunities are the two greatest challenges facing rural America. A list of rural issues includes increasing resources to family farmers rectifying the inequities in the farm bill, expanding access to broadband, improving the rural healthcare system, generating incentives for industry to locate in rural communities, and preserving the rural environment.

"We found that one barrier to effective policy making, as many legislators on both sides of the aisle point out, is the well-organized interests that exert a profound effect over rural policy making – particularly on the farm bill – that are not always beneficial to the small farmer and the rural economy as a whole," said Bill Greener of Greener and Hook. "The study also found that legislators feel hostage to a system that is captive to multiple interests and programs like Food Stamps that are impossible to vote against."

"The Kellogg Foundation has had a long-standing concern about the economic and social health of rural America," said Rick Foster, Vice President for Programs, W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "These interviews with members of Congress give us an important snapshot about how federal policy makers view rural America. This is the second report we have released in a series of surveys about how rural America is perceived. In the next year we hope to

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also complete a national public opinion survey, regional focus groups, and a content analysis of media coverage of rural America.”

The first report, released last December, was based on in-depth interviews with 242 residents of rural, suburban, and urban America. It found that perceptions of rural America are centered on a series of contradictions:

- Rural life is more relaxed and slower than city life, but harder and more grueling;
- Rural life is friendly, but intolerant of outsiders and difference;
- Rural life is richer in community life, but epitomized by individuals struggling independently to make ends meet.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 “to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.” Its programming activities center around the common vision of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being; and has the capacity to be productive, and to help create nurturing families, responsive institutions, and healthy communities.

To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation targets its grants toward specific areas. These include health; food systems and rural development; youth and education; and philanthropy and volunteerism. Within these areas, attention is given to the cross-cutting themes of leadership; information systems/technology; capitalizing on diversity; and social and economic community development programming. Grants are concentrated in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the southern African countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

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For further information, please visit the Foundation’s Web site at www.wkkf.org