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Focus Group Report

Monday, September 21, 2026

Iowa Farmers on Key Issues



Methodology

On September 10, 2026, GBAO conducted two in-person focus groups in Des Moines with Iowa crop and livestock farmers. Both groups were mixed partisanship but leaned heavily Republican.

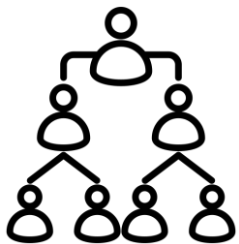


- ❖ Group 1: Iowa crop farmers (predominantly soy and corn) with farms of at least 50 acres. Republican leaning.
- ❖ Group 2: Iowa livestock farmers (predominantly cattle) with at least 50 heads of livestock. Republican leaning.

Key Takeaways

- Farmers report being mostly optimistic and feeling “blessed” and “honored” to have the challenging farming lifestyle.
- Yet interest rates, market fluctuations, high fuel prices, access to capital, are all regular challenges.
- While some in this Republican-leaning audience are reluctant to criticize Trump, others see his policies as reckless or harmful. He receives a median grade of “C.”
- Despite their leadership roles running large organizations, many farmers report a lack of agency, subject to the whims of agribusiness, global politics, and consumer choices. “We’re price takers, not price makers.”
- Farming is hard for outsiders to “get,” and these farmers see few trying. Instead, they see politicians romanticizing them, and most Americans as forgetting where their food comes from. They also chafe at being blamed for environmental problems.

Farming Isn't Just A Job—It's A Multi-generational "Heritage," "A Lifestyle," "In Your Blood," And A "Legacy"



"If you don't absolutely love what you're doing, you're not going to do it. **It's not a job, it's a lifestyle.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"I got my grandkids, and I can guarantee I know which ones'll farm and which ones [want] no part. **It's in their genes.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"I got a boy that is with me, so I'll do it till I can't move because he's there. That's what I like. I mean **I get to work with him every day.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"For most of us I think **it's not just a location, it's our legacy.**" – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat

"It's in your blood. I mean for my kids, my oldest is 30 and he'll come out and help....My middle son, no, he's a computer engineer....My oldest, he'll come out and help, but he also understands there's a lot of money involved to get started up too." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"[I feel] **honored** [to be a farmer]....Not everybody can just jump into farming. **You have to be born into it or very lucky to find your way into it.** So you've got to take it and be proud of it, because it takes a lot of work to do it..." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I think it's important to know that **most of us are multi-generational businesses**....We're doing a business that we're going to pass on to the next generation." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

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Some Farmers Worry Their Communities Are Struggling Or "Dying"

Moderator: Fill in the blank for me. I feel [BLANK] about the way things are going in my community these days.

"The school is dwindling, getting smaller because there's no rural people. Takes less people to farm. We farm more acres, so the community's shrinking....No, **it's dying, and all those towns are dying down there.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"I know our school numbers are going down. The main street's going down. **It's hanging on, but it's everything.**" – Crop farmer, weak Republican

"For my community mostly it's the aging of the community. **We're not getting any younger** and there's nothing new to pull young people in." – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"We're okay, our population hasn't declined really quickly, but it's just not growing by any means....**There's a slow decline because of the lower population...**" – Crop farmer, independent

"**It's killing our area** and I come from...there's a hundred people where I live....And we have no employment. Everybody drives about 30 miles to a factory town." – Livestock farmer, independent

"**I would use the word stretched...**demographics from the standpoint that we have a lot of people on assistance in our community, not working, not contributing, stretching all the rest of us." – Livestock farmer, weak Republican



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But Others Are Optimistic About Their Farms Or Recent Changes They've Seen In Their Areas

Moderator:. I feel [BLANK] about the way things are going in my community/as a farmer these days.

"Our community has manufacturing, we have Premier, we have Pella Corp, we have tourism....And then we have agriculture. So **if one of those goes down, I guess I'm excited that the others pull in.**" – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"I think **my farm operation is growing and expanding and doing well** and I'm excited about what I'm doing for the future and some of the things we can do and with technology..." – Crop farmer, independent

"On a farming perspective...my dad and I farm together and we're in the transition period and we're starting to make some new decisions....And **you're starting to see a lot of opportunity present itself.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"I breed cattle and I've enjoyed the best....**The last three years have been the best three years in my life** and in my dad's life....And my son has joined the farm." – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat

"I have cow-calf and **the last three or four years have been very good for me.** It's kind of like a God thing that I was able to buy a piece of property that I bought and now the cows are helping me get it paid for." – Livestock farmer, weak Republican

"While this year might be tough, **we've had 30 good years really in a row.** This one's been tougher, but it's been a long time since it's been in dire straits....I guess that's why I'd say blessed." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

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Farmers Describe Long And Constantly Changing Days Dictated By The Season

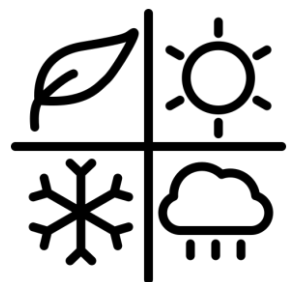
Moderator: Tell me about your typical day as a farmer.

"Every day is different, so it just depends what's broke with today, what's wrong, what problem. Typically, I deal with problems and planning are probably the two things I deal with." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"If it's spring, you're busy or fall, you're really busy....It changes almost every day, but it's extremely seasonal. Winter day is a lot different than a springtime day." – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"I'm usually planting the beans and then doing the spraying and then doing a couple hundred acres of hay, and so I'm just running nonstop....It's usually 6:00 in the morning till 10:00 at night every day, seven days a week." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I would say it's never dull....Right now, we're planning on harvest, but in the back of your mind you're thinking, 'Okay, I got to get fertilizer and chemicals for next year before they go up in price'..." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat



"I like a good day's work and the feeling you have after you have had a good day of hard work where you can look and see that you really did something." – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat

"The amount of work and long hours...we get told we're getting nothing but welfare, and I'm like, 'If you think I'm getting nothing but welfare, come shout at me after a 40-hour week. We'll be done with that by Tuesday afternoon.'" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

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Limited Access To Capital, High Equipment Costs, And Rising Interest Rates Are Hurting Farmers

"It's a lot tougher for a young guy or a young gal. If you're 28 and your parents don't have land, your chance of getting in this industry are tough...because the margins are tight and the capital requirements huge." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"I've been fortunate to buy a couple pieces of ground, but interest rates and payments and rent and repair, **everything is just so expensive....**So it's just a lot of dollars changing hands that I'm not keeping..." – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican



"Our combine...it's a nice used seven-year-old machine we got for a bargain at a quarter million. That's most people's house and that was one good used combine. Don't even look at the new million dollar one." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I hope my children and grandchildren have the same opportunities that I do. They don't currently...**The capital required today, that's expensive.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"Well, I'm trying to get my son involved in farming, but **it's become a numbers game.** It's so much capital, so much money involved. And the cost of everything, cost of equipment has just skyrocketed." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"20 years ago, I bought a brand new tractor for \$62,000, and a year ago I bought a brand new one, \$283,000, exact same tractor. There's a few more electronics on it, but that's a lot of growth that you got to try to pay for." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

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Tariffs Are Largely Viewed Negatively, Though Some Are Conflicted

Moderator: How, if at all, have tariffs been impacting you?

"Tariffs definitely impact us at a big scale....For me it's both [positive and negative]. I have an organic operation and it's actually raised my prices because of tariffs....On the other side, it has actually probably raised our fertilizer higher." – Crop farmer, independent

"Negative. We're fighting with Canada right now. They're the number one supplier of potash....I'm not totally anti-Trump, but man, let's not make everybody mad." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"So, I thought our president did a good job...of saying 'Hey, wait a minute. These are reciprocal tariffs.'....It's all an attempt to arrive at that free market that we all want." – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"The second time around it just feels like every day, [Trump's] just **throwing a dart. It's like there's no plan.**" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"As a whole, they're not good for us. I mean our inputs always cost more because of all these tariffs, and there's a good chance we sell less, export less of our products because of them." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I feel like two different ways. I mean we've had tariffs on our stuff forever, and I didn't like that. So, it's kind of one for the other now." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I think he's got the right plan. I think it's going to work, but it really hurts to get there. So I'll tell you in 5 to 10 years if it was good or not." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican



Fuel Prices Are A Major Concern, With Some Blaming Big Oil Companies

Moderator: How, if at all, have gas and diesel prices been impacting you?

"Look at BP's profits. Look at where crude is versus the price of gas and diesel. It's at an all time record high....With these crude prices, gas should be three bucks, maybe 2.75." – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"Crude oil and diesel price do not coincide....It tells me, **somebody is stealing a lot of money from us.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"We're just kind of still doing the same thing we're doing, but **the fuel prices are just killing us...**because it's double what we are accustomed to paying." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"It's going to cost me \$1,000 a day to run the combine this fall. The amount of money we have to roll through is just incredible." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"We've had \$80, \$90, \$100 crude before, but we didn't have **\$6 diesel fuel.** Something between here and there changed....Where is the gap here? What's going on?" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"Our energy crisis is just man-made [by the war in Iran], and it's absolutely killing people." – Livestock farmer, independent

"I think there were maybe some nuclear security issues, but **war in Iran was a war of choice,** and we're going to leave that place worse than we found it." – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat



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There Is Agreement That Corporate Consolidation And Price Gouging Are Major Problems

"I still go back to COVID when companies were raising widgets 10, 15, 20% of the time and people didn't quit buying....They figured, 'Oh my God, look what we can get away with.' Look at the profits of some of these larger corporations....**We almost have become immune to huge price increases...**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"**Deere, they don't regret raising the price,** and they know the farmers can absorb it." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"One of the big thing that holds larger corporations and conglomerates together is **regulatory bureaucracy that they have to go through, which hinders the new upstarter from starting.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I hate to use the word **gouge**, but I can't really think of a better word to take advantage of the situation....If BP can get away with it, then I would argue we **need more competition.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"A lot of the fertilizer suppliers have found that we can accept certain prices and they're not going to come down. **They control that supply as well.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"They can't even try to absorb some semblance of what's going on down on our end because they have to have that growth....**It makes it feel like we're carrying them around on our shoulders.**" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"I think [the government] should help break up **monopolies...control of the fertilizer companies.**" – Crop farmer, independent

"After World War II...the balance of power was in labor, and then along about 1980, **that balance shifted from labor to the boardroom.**" – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat



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Many Feel A Lack Of Agency, With Farms Subject To The Whims Of Politics, The Economy, And Consumer Preferences

"Farmers are price takers, not price makers. Where in the big oil companies there's just so many and they're an oligopoly or whatever, but farmers, we take whatever price we can get." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"You look back to when Trump went over to China, if they have a positive meeting, green can go limit up. If it's a bad meeting, it's going to limit down. **It really has nothing to do with supply and demand.**" – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"From a farming perspective, we can't quit buying....You see decisions being made that you don't necessarily control....But at the same time, I'm **going to control what I can control.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"We can't help it, so we have to become more efficient to match the world we live in. So **we don't love it, but we deal with it.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"We don't have anybody to pass it onto....Everybody else has this pass through. They pass it on to their customers. We don't tell our price. **We get our price told to us.**" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"That's one thing I don't understand is, **why the consumer doesn't change to alternative meat.** They just keep paying higher and higher and higher for beef and they just keep using it." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"Whatever happens in Washington D.C., **I can't do a doggone thing about it.** I can't do anything about fuel prices, so I just got to pay the bill and just figure out how you're going to do it." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

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Nearly All Are Pessimistic About Politicians And Political Parties, And See Few As "Getting It"



Moderator: How can you tell a candidate "gets" farmers like you?

"They tell us they care, but we've never actually seen a policy shift when they get there. I mean, at the end of the day, **they never deliver.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"You can tell [a politician is] lying when their mouth's moving." – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"Most new politicians actually do care for a year or two until they get...bought out. **They all need to have a NASCAR jacket to tell us who they're sponsored by.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"We're choosing the **lesser of two evils.** That's where we're at." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"**We don't really matter.** I don't think they really care. I think they just say it to say it." – Crop farmer, independent

"I think that **they're trying to buy votes** and they're always wanting to get reelected...both parties. I mean both parties." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"I think what could really help the system is make competitive congressional districts....If we had competitive congressional districts, **you would find more moderate candidates.**" – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat



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Farmers Are Knowledgeable About Policy Issues That Impact Their Business

"We are part of the solution, not part of the problem. **The government is not allowing [E15] to happen....If it can't happen now, when?** I mean, they're doing E30 down in Brazil, thank God. They're finally burning some corn up so it's helpful for us....Think if we could lower the price of gas for the whole country, if we could get E15 passed." – Crop farmer independent lean Democrat

"The creation of ethanol has been a savior for corn farmers. Hopefully, when this 45Z comes out, the soybeans, or the diesel oil will be a savior for soybeans, as well." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"The USDA comes out with reports throughout the year, sometimes monthly....But they'll tell how much crops are left, how much they think we're going to produce, and then they give us a balance sheet and that generally affects the market. **If they don't get those numbers correct, how do you market your grain?**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"Before [Argentine beef imports], **a market-ready steer was going to be about \$3,500 a head. And so you can take 20% off that.** That market went from \$235 to \$218 like that." – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat

"I'm booking potash this week because I'm afraid to death that Canada's going to say potash price **got to go up.** The potash isn't too bad right now. It's been pretty good for a while... We're poking Canada in the eye. They want to poke back." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"I agree that we do actually need to get the price [of beef] down a little bit to support the demand. If you destroy the demand, then the price comes crashing down and stays down. **I would rather see the price stay between \$200 and \$218 rather than see it go all the way down into \$160.**" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican



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Farmers Urge “Free Markets” While Lamenting The Need For Subsidies And Protracted Farm Bill Negotiations

Moderator: How important are things like subsidies to you?

"I think we'd feel better about it on a national stage if they just quit calling it a farm bill and **start calling it a welfare bill** because it's what it is." – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"We're working on the farm bill that's over five years old, and they were supposed to pass it, and **it got derailed because of SNAP**, which none of us in this room have any control over at all." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"We don't want subsidies, but there's times where sometimes that if you didn't have them it'd be a bad day. I mean, **if we want a free market, make a free market so we get a fair price...**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"**I want less government payments**, more [ability] to be able to survive on our own....I want our corn price to be high enough to survive [without] a handout." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"It's not a farm bill. **It is a cheap food bill.**" – Crop farmer, weak Republican

"**We subsidize crop insurance....**That's why the big farmers keep farming huge and driving the prices of everything up...if they just stop supporting crop insurance...I think a lot of things would start to straighten out." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican



"This is where I get a little libertarian, and **I say let the market work.** That's where I'm at." – Livestock farmer, weak Democrat

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Trump Receives A Median C Grade, With Some Willing To Give Him The Benefit Of The Doubt And Others Disappointed

Moderator: What grade would you give Trump for his second term?



Group	A grade	B grade	C grade	D grade	F grade	N/A
1	2	3	3	1	0	2
2	0	2	4	1	1	0
Total	2	5	7	2	1	2



"[I gave him a] C...probably because I didn't have the guts to give him an F...I don't know. I **can't stand to listen to him open his mouth.**" – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"Most presidents seem to talk and nothing happens. And, good or bad, **Trump gets shit done.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I think it's a lot of **promises not kept.**...For example, in the second term, there's checks coming out and things like that. It gives a lot of false hope....He spends a little too much time on his social media account.." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"**Trump plays multi-level chess.**...He's not doing it just because he wants to do it. He's doing it because he's got a goal in mind." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"I think he gets how the economy should work, but his **ego drives him to do things that work against what he should know better.**" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

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Farmers Are Fully Informed On Trump. All Are Familiar With Three Recent Trump Messages

Participants were presented a video of Trump supporting Argentine beef imports, a Truth Social post about data centers, and Trump's promise to provide \$5,000 checks if Republicans win the midterms.

"I think he's a developer first, so that's what he's thinking [with data centers]. His ego is talking a little bit there. I mean he's overstating it." – Crop farmer, weak Republican

"I'm not going to knock Trump, but the \$5,000...oh, my god...I **just don't understand**. Why would he have to say that?" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"I understand what he's doing intellectually [about data centers], but then when he goes off on the rant of, 'You don't know what you're talking about...' **That's the toddler, the complete lack of emotional intelligence coming out.**" – Livestock farmer, independent lean Republican

"It goes back to being another empty promise...which is very frustrating." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"I think [allowing Argentine beef] lessens his America First....Other countries having success is not a bad thing, but when your whole thing is making America great again...and then you're sacrificing US farmers for them..." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"Hell, I voted for this moron once. He's just gone off the rails....Who would say that [about data centers]? You think he loves the Midwest or loves farmers when you read that?" – Livestock farmer, independent

"Trump's the only one that just flat out told everybody [he'd give out money], which I can't believe he did, but...he's just going to give it to you flat out instead of hiding it behind the wall." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

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Many Feel Unfairly Targeted And Villainized In Discussions About High Iowa Cancer Rates

Moderator: I heard that Iowa has the 2nd highest cancer rates in the country. Does this sound familiar?

"Well, **we get blamed for it. I mean, farmer greed. Farmers' fault...**even though for the most part I think we're all trying to do the best practices to keep our land in as best shape as possible." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"I truly believe there's not a person in this room that if **someone came out and said, 'If you would do this, cancer rates will drop in Iowa 50%.'** Every one of us would do it in a heartbeat." – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"Well, I guess **my biggest fear is that we get blamed for it.** So are their resources and efforts going to go into the wrong category? Are they going to come after us as farmers and start putting limits but then that doesn't do anything for the cancer rate but it hurts us?" – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"There are a lot of different cancers out there, and so to assign blame to farmers in particular, I take offense at that because I don't believe it's accurate....**Cancer is a generic thing that they throw at farmers.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"Well, they want to blame it on nitrates, but is that necessarily the cause? Who knows?....**They don't have an ounce of proof, but they have some deep pockets.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

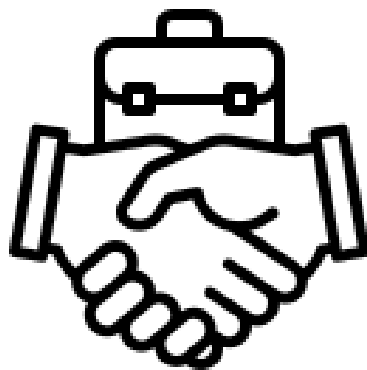
"**It's a fear disease that we have no handle on,** so it can be the boogeyman to attack any industry that we want to because, 'You're causing cancer.'" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

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Americans Misunderstand The Business-First Nature Of Farmers' Lives, Or Even Where Their Food Comes From

Moderator: If I were to do groups like this around the country and ask non-farmers what they thought about farmers, what would they get wrong?

"As farmers, we run our own businesses. **We're business people first now.** We're not just...I mean they talk about lifestyle, that is true, but the margins are so thin and the costs are so high. We're all business owners at this point that have to be business owners first." – Crop farmer, independent



"What's frustrating is **it goes from one extreme to the other.** We're either the million-dollar big farmer, corporate farmer trying to rule the world or we're the Norman Rockwell." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

"They all want us to look like Norman Rockwell....But **these are multimillion-dollar businesses.** It's not easy." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"They need to understand **where their food comes from** and what it takes to produce it and how lucky they are to have it." – Livestock farmer, weak Republican

"Watch any movie, **the depiction of a farmer is far from the truth....**We're not a poor guy barely scraping by. We're a legitimate business, legitimate CEOs that manage...multi-million dollar farm businesses." – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"**We're not Farmer Bob anymore.**" – Livestock farmer, strong Republican

"**Food does not come from a grocery store.**" – Crop farmer, strong Republican

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Farmers Want People To Know They Are Stewards Of The Land And Take Pride In Feeding America

Moderator: What would you want to tell people in the rest of the country about being farmer?



"Food safety and environmental safety, there's nobody who's a better environmentalist than the American farmer." – Crop farmer, independent lean Democrat

"I say before you blame, learn and understand....It's a complex system and pointing a finger without understanding why you're pointing the finger is going to create the issues that we see." – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"We have an extremely high standard of living. We have the safest, most clinical food supply in the world....We still whine and bitch about everything." – Livestock farmer, weak Republican

"Everyone in this room is going to supply them with the highest quality, safest product that's the most reasonably priced on the planet." – Crop farmer, strong Republican

"I think what people don't get probably the most...is farmers, and all of us in this room, **would never ever do something that would harm land intentionally, or water.**" – Livestock farmer, independent

"We're a multi-generational business and I feel like, as farmers, we're very involved in our community and our country and very much care about other people." – Crop farmer, independent lean Republican

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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO.

About the Study

On September 10, 2026, GBAO conducted two in-person focus groups in Des Moines with Iowa crop and livestock farmers. Both groups were mixed partisanship but leaned heavily Republican.

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