

Appendix A

Characterizations of Southern Illinois by Agricultural Stakeholders

The following quotes are from interviews with farmers in Southern Illinois in 2007:

“Southern Illinois is a great place to live if there’s some way to make a living. It’s working lands. People here like space. You can live a good life here, I think, if you enjoy space, and enjoy fresh air, sunshine. The most important asset Pope County has is its space. There’s not much I told you so is families in Southern Illinois compared to Central Illinois. I guess we’re more laid back. There’s a lot of the attitude of know what you can change and what you can’t in Southern Illinois. The soil types and the weather variability really make farming a challenge. Pope County is almost every geography imaginable. Southern Illinois is a fascinating part of the world if you just don’t get hung up on all the issues.”

“The people are much friendlier to talk to. They’re willing to work with you. I think they are more outgoing and not scared to take a chance. They are hard workers and if you get along fine with them, you won’t have any trouble with them and you’ll do fine. People are just a more, I think, closer group of people. Yet, they can be real hard nosed and very difficult at times and they don’t make snap decisions. They’re a hard person to sell, but once you have their trust you’ll be fine.”

“From an agricultural standpoint, you’ve got a difference in the mental mindset of the farmers. Southern Illinois farmers are not as progressive as Northern Illinois farmers. They just grab on to new things as quick as possible and in Southern Illinois they take to it, but it’s a slow process. They don’t have to look for new information. When you have land given to you and our taxes are so low down here that you can squeak out enough on a few hundred acres to pay for it and keep it. You just live in your little house there in the woods and that’s fine. You don’t have to be all stressed and worried about stuff.”

“Southern Illinois has a lot of recreation and several lakes. It draws tourism. The Shawnee National Forest. There’s an ag area, has one main university and several community colleges. Has a lot of parks. Farm ground is pretty prime. There are several acres of CRP in this area.”

“Southern Illinois is not nearly as populated. You can have your own front and backyard with your own privacy. There is a lack of industry which is not a good thing except for we don’t have the environmental pollution. There’s not the opportunity for a person to stay in the area unless they can find something else on their own line of thinking. It’s a very beautiful area. We have one of the prettier areas in the U.S. It’s totally different, very pretty. There’s quite an extreme visualization you can see throughout.”

“It’s definitely a rural setting. We’ve got a unique situation where we’re too far north to raise southern crops and we’re too far south to raise northern crops. We have to really work to adapt anything we grow here. We have a tendency to grain farm too much.”

“It’s sort of a depressed area, I’d say. We don’t have a lot of jobs.”

“We’re a little bit too redneckish, whatever that means. Southern Illinois has a lot of tremendous resources, but we also have a lot of resources that need lots of management given our low soil fertility, thin topsoil profile, the ebb and flow of the humidity and the chill factor that goes along with that as you manage livestock and the endophytic fungus in the fescue. These are natural resources that make it a challenge to manage things. So, we’ve got a tough environment. Now that’s the natural resources. The human resources seems to fall in a little bit with that. I think it is difficult to work collectively, collaboratively, cooperatively for whatever reason. Maybe that’s just the way you define redneck. We kind of hate for anybody to tell us what we’re gonna have to do. We’ll bow our back and bristle up the hair on the back of our neck just to come in opposition to the mandate even if the mandate was what we need just because you ain’t gonna tell me what the sam hell I gotta do down here. We’re leery of what others think and that they are gonna take over. We want to remain in charge of our own destinies.Down there in Pope County, I witnessed a lot of the local people not adapting to the technology that was being demonstrated in their own back yards.”

“The fault line, our elevations are unique. We’ve got a lot higher elevations from the rest of the state. We’ve got the hills and hollers and creeks and springs and all that because of the fault line and that also puts us in a different hardiness zone as Northern Kentucky. So, we’ve got different weather patterns and since the area wasn’t glaciated, we’ve got high acid clay soil rather than that good black dirt that the rest of the state got.”

“Southern Illinois is hilly, hilly and no black dirt. It’s a coal mining region. And, trees.”

“The forested area and the Cache make this area unique. It’s probably heavier into cattle and livestock than other areas of the state. There’s a lot of poor people. We’re in a really poor area here.”

“We have rolling hills and the rocky bluffs and we don’t have as much flat farmland as they do up north. Although, we do have river bottoms and that’s basically where most of the grain farming is done. People here have to adapt their farming operations and that’s one reason at one time we had so many cattle because hay and pasture can conserve the soil.”

“Least amount of people than any county in the state which is fine with me, but economically we’re more than likely one of the poorer because 1/3 of the land is owned by the Federal Government. Topographically we have a little bit of everything. We have

hill, creek bottoms, river bottoms. We have river bottom land and also hill land. Some is steep. Some is rolling and we have feeder creeks that go into the river and we have creek bottoms ground at those creeks. Most of the region is gently rolling or hills.”

“Soils are poorer quality from Mt. Vernon south. We also have more smaller farming operations from Mt. Vernon south.”

“There’s a lot more recreational grounds, a lot more hills, a lot more sites to visit. Southern Illinois has a lot more recreational tourism, hiking trails, biking trails, that type of thing than central counties of the state.”

“Southern Illinois has a longer growing season. Here we have thinner soil. The top layer of soil is not as thick. We got more clay soil. We have rolling land and some areas we can irrigate and some we can’t. We have soils here that vary from 5% organic matter to 2% and fertility here varies from not needing any phosphorus and potash to having to put everything on once you take off. Land costs are still a little bit less here.”

“Topography is the first thing that comes to mind. We’ve got rolling hills, depends on where you’re at, pretty steep hills in places. There is a pride, I think, in Southern Illinois and maybe that comes from at least partially being at an economic disadvantage to the northern end of the state. I think people from Southern Illinois are really proud that they are from Southern Illinois. As far as economics, Southern Illinois could be a more prosperous area. Except for the highway corridors, we don’t have the highway system that would be conducive to transporting things further distances.”

“Here it’s more of a hometown, small town type of situation where everybody knows everybody a lot better. It’s wide open country and the land the climate is exciting to me because the temperature change from the top to the bottom part of the state is dramatic, more than people realize. Below 64 is almost like another climate change. It just seems like not just the horticultural side of it, but all growing aspects change at the line. There’s different heat units early and late and there’s more of em. It seems like the humidity is a lot greater for sure than what is up north. The growing season is probably extended by a minimum of three weeks for sure.”

“The climate and the hilliness and the un-prairieness of the landscape here makes Southern Illinois unique. Northern soils are better than here and they are much flatter. This is trees down here. We’ve got this outfit down here which is not a prairie at all which is very wooded and rocky. There’s Giant City State Park and Cave-in-Rock. There’s a great deal of historical importance and I think this was much more an Indian important area.”

“The geography is different. The culture’s a little unique. They economy is unique. It has its own feel. The environment’s different, the ecosystems, the flora and fauna are diverse, small farms as opposed to Central Illinois’ farms.”

“The land is not productive land. It’s coon huntin’ land, bird hunting and so forth. So, the land is questionable as far as its productivity which makes the economy questionable to the farmers and they cannot live on the 150 acres they inherited. So, they’ve got a job some other place and they have put their land in the government support program and it’s no longer agricultural land. It’s the welfare land. Down here, Pope County, I think 2/3 of it is owned by the Federal Government and 2/3 of the balance is signed up for a support program. So, there’s no agriculture here in Pope County except for the half dozen farmers who farm the whole thing.”

“Geologically we’re different. The ice age really didn’t come down all the way. We have these various domes here and so geologically it’s different. There’s a lot of spirit down here.”

“Southern Illinois is located in the unglaciated region between two major rivers. The area is beautiful, contains agricultural land, forest service land, state parks, national wildlife refuges and a variety of small communities and a few medium sized ones. The area is sparsely populated, has pockets of extreme poverty, and has several major transportation arteries such as interstates, railroads, and rivers. But, intra-area transportation is poorer. Mass transit is lacking.”

“It’s scenic with productive land now that they’re no-tilling. Hardin County was the spar capital of the world.”

“Economically Southern Illinois is rather poor. I would say there are a lot of poor. Of course there’s poor people in the ghettos and cities all over, but I think there isn’t any industry down here. Unless you want to teach, and there’s just so many teaching jobs down here, there’s not a whole lot else to do. Farm. The coal mines are no longer in operation down here. There’s also not a lot of cooperation among municipalities to consolidate anything such as airports or schools.”

“We’re known as Little Egypt down here because we have a vast amount of resources. We have coal, oil, fluorspar and we can grow a wide variety of crops.”

“It’s a slit loam ground and basically German/English influx, hard working people, a lot of bottom ground especially along the rivers and because of good management practices and good rainfall, Southern Illinois can grow a quality corn providin’ you get the rainfall. We don’t have the quality dirt and normally we don’t get the rainfall that Central Illinois gets, but farmers are very competitive as far as soybean, milo, wheat, corn yields.”

“The friendliness and the compassion of the people makes Southern Illinois unique.”