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What's The Matter With Kansas? Media Apathy

TV Coverage of Rural America Slid in Election Year, Farming Nearly Ignored

WASHINGTON, DC —Network television news coverage of rural America in 2004 fell 23 percent from 2002 levels, according to a new study released by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)** for the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**. The study also found only three percent of all the rural coverage dealt with farming and agricultural issues.

CMPA President Robert Lichter said “It hasn’t been surprising to see the media navel-gazing over rural America since Election Day. As our study results indicate, to most TV reporters in the coastal network bureaus, middle America is a big red question mark.”

CMPA’s study "Media Coverage of Rural America: 2004 vs. 2002," examines the news media’s coverage of rural America for the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**. **CMPA** monitored media coverage in January-June 2002 and June-November 2004 in ten news outlets: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*; and ABC, CBS and NBC morning and evening news shows and prime time newsmagazines. Those outlets produced 529 rural stories during the 2004 study period compared to 337 stories in 2002. The full study is available online at <http://www.cmpa.com> .

Major Findings:

- There were 62 stories discussing rural America on the network evening and morning news programs in 2002 compared to 48 percent in 2004—a **decline of 23 percent**.
- In contrast with the networks, the newspapers and magazines studied gave rural America 75 percent more coverage in 2004 than in 2002, an increase from 275 to 481 stories.
- The number one rural topic in both years was zoning and land use (e.g.,urban sprawl) amounting to a quarter of all stories produced in each year.
- Coverage of rural crime fell from one in five stories (20%) to one in eight (13%).
- Only three percent of all rural stories dealt with farming, and only one percent of all sources quoted had any connection to agriculture.
- Three out of every four descriptive terms regarding rural America were positive in nature. (Positive examples: *picturesque*, *strong work ethic*, *safe*, *have good values*, *peaceful*; negative examples: *backward*, *bumpkins*, *hardscrabble*, *lonely*, *redneck*, *uneducated*)