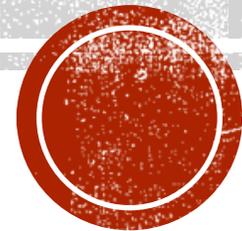


AGRICULTURAL CONTEMPORARY ISSUES: INTEGRATING POLARIZED PERSPECTIVES TO CHALLENGE GRADUATE STUDENT OPINIONS

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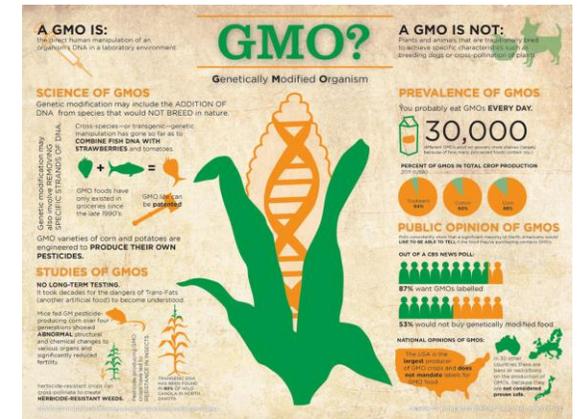


INTRODUCTION

- Increased political and public attention to agricultural policy and industry practices has created a need for graduates in the agricultural sciences to formulate and defend professional opinions regarding contemporary agricultural issues. In the graduate course, Contemporary Issues in Animal Agriculture at Sam Houston State University an innovated teaching approach was implemented to develop professional opinions and awareness of contemporary agriculture issues with graduate students.



MATERIALS AND METHODS.....



- Students viewed various anti-conventional agricultural films
- Students completed pre/post-free response surveys polling their beliefs
- Survey responses were analyzed using NVivo™
- After each section of the video, different open-ended questions were asked to facilitate classroom discussion and debate
- When appropriate, instructor or certain students played the opposing role to general class consensus
- Students were forced to think outside their traditional viewpoints and belief systems by making them take an opposing role



TOPICS AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

✓ “Factory Farming”

Do Animals have the right to a certain quality of life?

✓ Pervasiveness of corn in the foods we eat

Do people have the right to know what is in their food?

✓ Food Safety

Who’s responsible for keeping our food safe?

✓ Fast Food

Should access to healthy food be a right for everyone?

✓ Ag Labor Force

When deciding what to eat, how much should we consider the workers who pick, process and transport it?

✓ Economics of our food system

Does it matter to you which food companies produce your food?

✓ Producer Rights

Should companies be able to own the DNA contained in plants seeds?

✓ Consumer Information

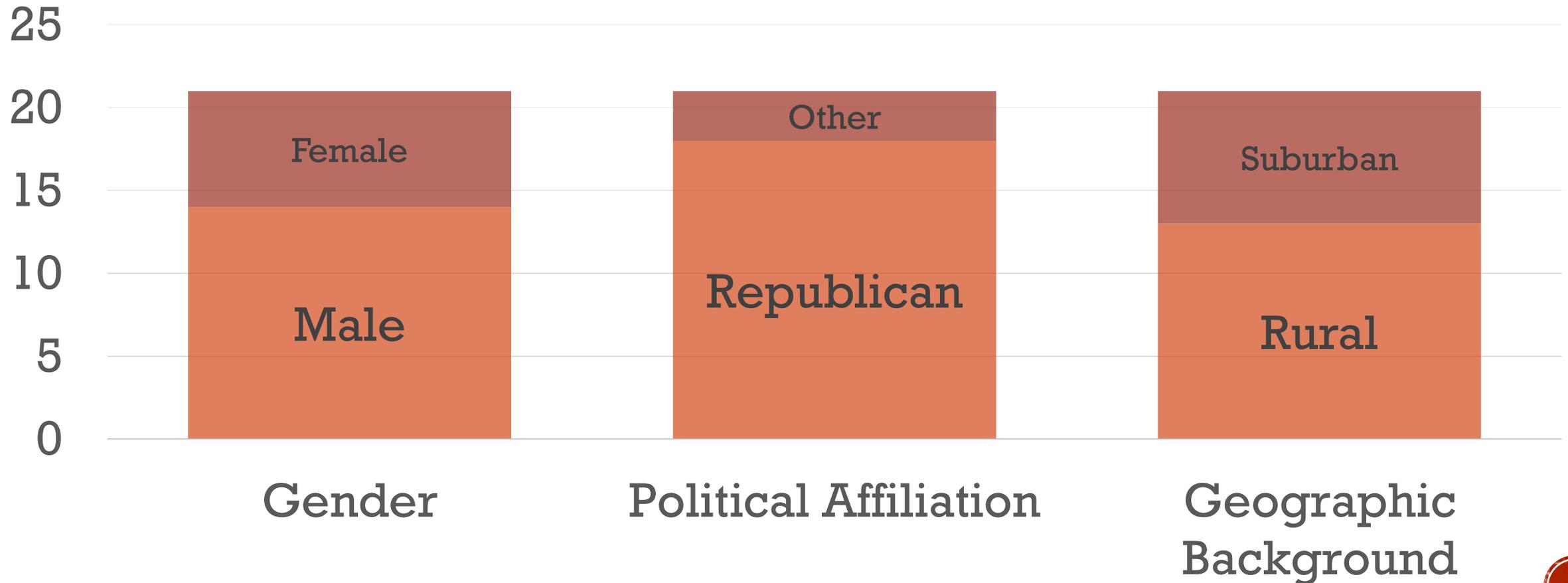
Should a company have the power to decide what information to give consumers about the food it produces?

✓ Change

What individual or collective actions are you willing to take to improve our food system, and what would be their impact?



STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



RESULTS



- ✓ 65% of students reported a shift in personal beliefs with respect to.....
 - ✓ Food labeling
 - ✓ Consumer awareness
 - ✓ Student Response Example:
 - ✓ *Pre: ...people should know what is in their food and they must make a justification if they want to consume it or not*
 - ✓ *Post: ...people do not (need to know what may be in their food) due to the consumer's lack of knowledge and vast misunderstanding of labels and products*
- ✓ No change in beliefs after media introduction and course discussion centered on.....
 - ✓ Role of agriculture producers
 - ✓ Disparities of on-farm labor
 - ✓ Student Response on immigrant farm labor:
 - ✓ *I think most large companies get away with ignoring policies to get cheap labor, and they should be held accountable.*
 - ✓ *I believe it is good as it is 1 in 6 jobs are directly or indirectly related to agriculture. Hands on picking is becoming slightly less common due to machines but it still takes a mass amount of people to accomplish.*



CONCLUSIONS.....



- ✓ Polarized media exposure and classroom discussion on contemporary issues caused students to evaluate and defend professional opinions
- ✓ Course finished with team debates over selective issues
 - ✓ Students expressed that post questions would have shown greater changes if delivered after the team debates
 - ✓ After team debates an even more in-depth knowledge of the subjects were achieved causing initial opinions of the subjects to change
- ✓ Survey fatigued was noticed half-way through the activity
- ✓ Faculty will continue to review delivery methods that will not only challenge intellectual thought but allow students to express their beliefs while also assessing their value system with contemporary agricultural issues

