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UCSB Releases Findings of 2010 'Central Coast Survey' Based on Poll of Santa Barbara County Residents

Researchers at UC Santa Barbara today released the findings of the 2010 Central Coast Survey, a large-scale public-opinion poll of residents in Santa Barbara County on a variety of issues affecting quality of life in the region.

Conducted by the Social Science Survey Center at UC Santa Barbara, and funded by the UCSB Division of Social Sciences, the periodic Central Coast Survey features telephone interviews with members of more than 800 households, both English- and Spanish-speaking.

The results of the survey tap the public's attitudes on a wide range of important issues, from quality of life and the economy, to land use, growth, and development. This year's survey also gave special emphasis to issues of agriculture, environmentalism, and local food and food security.

Among its key findings were:

- Respondents identify affordable housing, immigration, and the quality of education as the main issues affecting their communities. South County residents regard the lack of affordable housing as the most significant challenge, while for those in the North County it is immigration.

- Most respondents believe their economic conditions have declined since 2008. Thirty-seven percent said their families are worse off in 2010, while only 24 percent made the same assessment in 2008.
- Health insurance continues to be a problem for many Santa Barbara County residents. Nineteen percent of respondents reported that they do not have any kind of health insurance, while 30 percent indicated that they or someone in their household has delayed medical or dental treatment because of the cost.
- Santa Barbara County residents are generally satisfied with their community's rate of growth. When given a choice regarding future development plans, a majority of respondents preferred either building out into open space or not building at all, as opposed to building higher density housing. When asked about building out into land currently used for agriculture, however, support for building out fell sharply and support for not building increased.
- Residents throughout Santa Barbara County strongly support agriculture, and an overwhelming majority favors the Williamson Act, which reduces farmers' property taxes if they maintain their land for agricultural use.
- For a majority of respondents, buying local produce is important, and nearly half said they purchase local produce at least once a week.
- Santa Barbara County is known as a place where environmentalism thrives, although some people have suggested that support for the environment is concentrated in the South County. According to the survey, environmentalism is widely spread throughout the entire county.

"The goal of the Central Coast Survey is to bring the resources of UCSB's social science research community to bear on topics of interest to academia, local government, and the public at large," said John Mohr, professor of sociology and the survey center's director. "Especially in this period of economic uncertainty, we are focused on gathering information that will allow local decision-makers to have the best data available concerning the opinions of the community on issues that are of vital concern to all of us."

Said Melvin Oliver, dean of social sciences at UCSB: "The 2010 Central Coast Survey is a significant tool that allows us to tap into the changing attitudes on a number of important issues to our community. This is a key example of how the university can

provide clear data to educators, non-profits, businesses, and politicians, thus serving as a valuable resource for the general public."

The survey was directed and the report was written by John Mohr, professor of sociology and the survey center's director; Paolo Gardinali, the center's associate director; David Cleveland, professor of environmental studies; Garret Glasgow, associate professor of political science; Michael McGinnis, associate researcher at the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management and the Marine Science Institute, and acting director of UCSB's Ocean and Coastal Policy Center; and Eric Smith, professor of political science. Also assisting in the survey were Megan Carney, a graduate student in the anthropology department; and Lauren Copeland, a graduate student in the political science department.

Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish and averaged 17 minutes in length.

All survey respondents were at least 18 years of age.

In total, 2,508 households were contacted, and 804 interviews were completed.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.