



*The voice of  
Manitoba farmers*

**NEWS RELEASE**

**April 16, 2020**

## **KAP releases results of rural cell and internet survey**

Almost two thirds of Manitobans who responded to a survey conducted by Keystone Agricultural Producers, the voice of Manitoba farmers, expressed dissatisfaction with their mobile phone and internet coverage according to a survey report released today. This comes at a time when a vast majority of Manitobans are increasingly reliant on both networks due to social distancing protocols.

“Farm operations require strong internet and cell coverage to conduct business and ensure that food continues to make its way to market,” said Jill Verwey, KAP vice president and chair of the rural policy committee. “We have heard deep-seated frustration from both farm families and non-farmers about the state of connectivity in rural Manitoba, and providers cannot continue to ask us to pay for a service that is subpar at best.”

Many of the comments on the survey reflected an inability to be in touch in emergency situations and with farm employees, a hindered ability to fully participate in business operations, or incurring additional costs to add a booster that works sporadically. There are also broad impacts for education, with respondents noting that they are unable to conduct schoolwork, access course materials, or participate in distance learning like webinars.

“With thousands of Manitobans stuck in their homes and relying on internet connections to accomplish important tasks like educating their children, we are all aware that present service levels are unacceptable with daily disruptions,” added Verwey. “The best time to fix these gaps was 5 years ago, the second-best time is now.”

1,557 Manitobans representing 113 municipalities took the survey and respondents came from all parts of the province. A full report will be shared with both the federal and provincial governments, as well as major service providers, later this year.

BACKGROUND ATTACHED

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***For more information:***

*Joey Dearborn, communications coordinator*

*Keystone Agricultural Producers*

*431-588-3869*

[\*Joey.dearborn@kap.ca\*](mailto:Joey.dearborn@kap.ca)



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## BACKGROUNDER

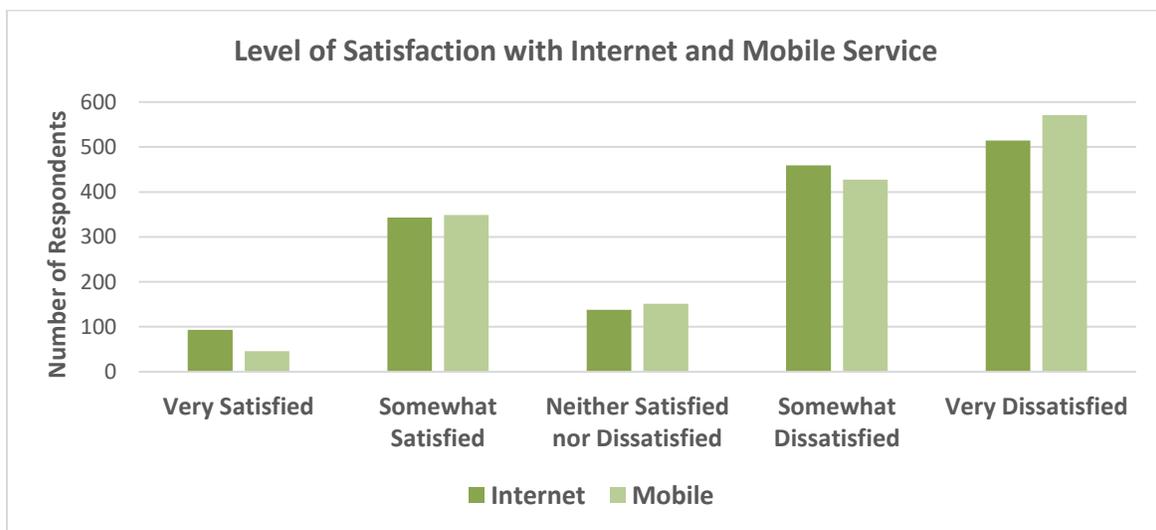
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### Rural Cell and Internet Service in Manitoba

To gain a better understanding of rural residents' experiences, Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) conducted a survey to collect data on cell and internet service in rural Manitoba. The survey launched on February 19, 2020 and closed on March 31, 2020. The survey collected data on respondents' level of satisfaction with internet/cell service in rural areas, frequency of service disruptions, impacts of service disruptions, service providers used in rural areas, and demographics (age, location, farmer/non-farmer).

In all, KAP received 1,557 submissions from across the province. Responses were split nearly in half between farmers (48.9%) and non-farmers (51.1%), indicating the importance of this issue for all rural residents. In terms of the age distribution of respondents, 29.4% of respondents were under the age of 35, 36.5% were between the ages of 35 and 54, and the remaining 34.1% were 55 and older. Of the 137 municipalities in Manitoba, 113 were represented in the dataset.

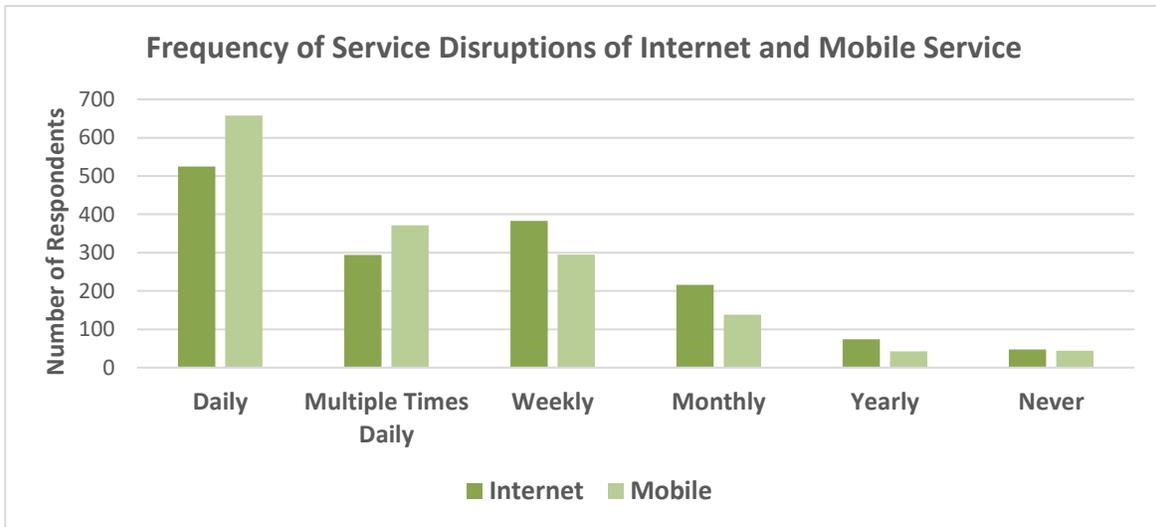
Respondents were first asked to rate their satisfaction with the level of service they receive for both internet and mobile phone services. As can be seen from the graph below, the pattern of responses was quite similar for both internet and mobile service and illustrates a high level of overall dissatisfaction. Accordingly, 62.9% of respondents reported being either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their internet service, and 64.6% reported being either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their mobile phone service.



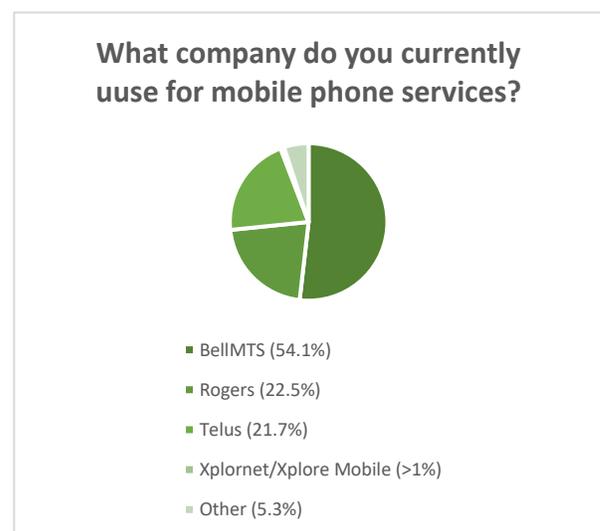
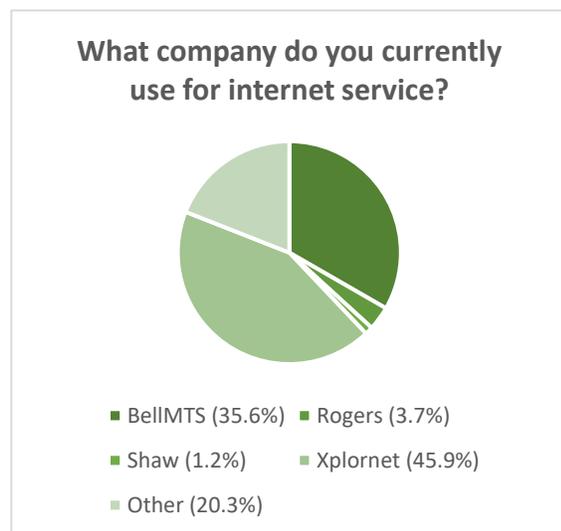


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Next, respondents were asked to share how often they experience disruptions with their service. Just over 50% of respondents reported experiencing internet service disruptions at least daily, if not multiple times daily, whereas 66.5% of respondents indicated they experience mobile phone service disruptions at least once a day, if not multiple times daily. Based on these results, it appears that mobile phone service disruptions are slightly more common than internet service disruptions.



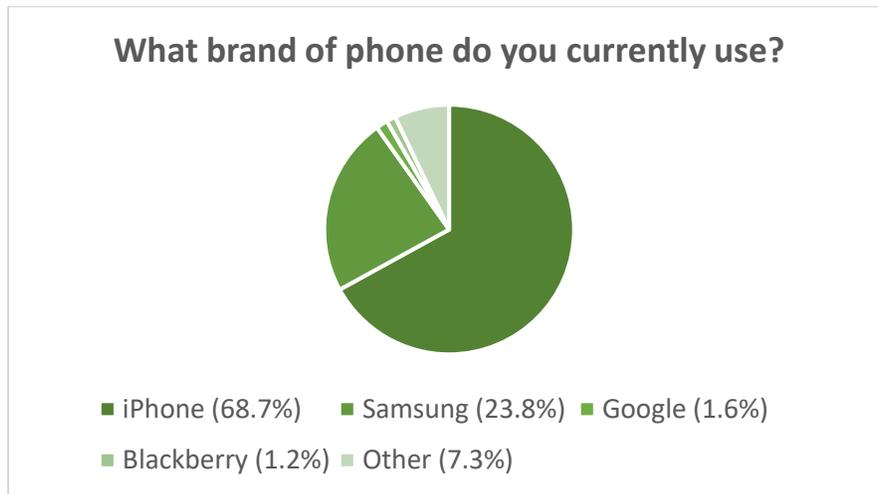
Respondents were asked to identify their service providers for both mobile phone and internet service. Xplornet was the most popular choice for internet service providers, followed by BellMTS. However, many respondents noted that Xplornet was the only internet provider available in their area. Other internet service providers that were frequently mentioned include Westman Communications, RFNOW, and some respondents noted their internet is provided through a fibre optic network installed by their local RM.





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As for mobile phone services, more than half of respondents indicated that their service is provided through BellMTS. The remainder of respondents were mostly split between Rogers (22.5%) and Telus (21.7%). As for the brand of phone used, iPhones were by far the most popular choice (68.7%), followed by Samsung (23.8%).



Respondents were asked to share the details of how internet and mobile phone service disruptions impact their lives. For internet service, the majority of responses fell into four broad categories: business, personal, education, and safety.

For business impacts, respondents noted that internet service disruptions affected the ability to conduct regular business interactions such as bookwork, emails, payment processing, online banking, troubleshooting issues, as well as leading to missed opportunities and lost sales. For farming in particular, respondents mentioned the impact of disruptions on processes such as participating in online auctions, retrieving field data, accessing grain markets and trades, as well as monitoring calving with cameras. Some respondents noted that they are unable to invest in new technologies that would aid their business due to the lack of a fast and reliable internet connection.

As far as personal impacts, many respondents noted disruptions in streaming videos, Netflix, and video games. There was also an isolation factor reported by some respondents who are unable to call family and friends and miss out on social media interactions due to their inability to connect online.

For education, some respondents noted that they are unable to participate in online webinars, access online course materials and study resources, as well as conduct research for schoolwork.

In terms of safety, respondents described being unable to look up highway conditions or weather reports. Other safety concerns had to do with the reliability of alarm systems and security cameras that depend on internet service.



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As for the impacts of mobile phone service disruptions, the majority of responses related to business and safety concerns. A common response was that respondents were not confident that they would be able to place a call to emergency services if ever they experienced a medical emergency in a rural area. For this reason, many respondents indicated that they either felt obligated to keep a home landline or re-install a landline for the sole purpose of emergencies.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide any additional thoughts or comments on the topic at the end of the survey. While the comments varied, the main message that came across is that rural residents are frustrated paying either the same rates or more than urban residents for sub-par service. As one respondent noted “this is the biggest issue holding rural Manitobans back.”