

## Summary of Farmers Survey (95 entries, only 60 filled it out completely)

### About Our Farm Participants

- All Towns of County represented except Hardenburg, Town of Kingston, Town of Rosendale, Town of Woodstock, and Villages. Towns with most frequent responses came from Marlborough, Rochester, Gardiner, and New Paltz.
- Most were in a NYS Ag District (77%) but 13 (21%) were not sure. Some did not know the Ag District number they were in. For those that did, District 1 was most common.
- 72% receive a NYS Agricultural Assessment. 7% were not sure. 40% rent land and those landowners receive a NYS Agricultural Assessment.
- 52% have farmed in Ulster County for > 20 years. 21% farmed here 10-20 years, and 26% (16 farmers) have operated here less than 9 years. When asked what brought newer farmers to Ulster County, answers given were they grew up here or were familiar with the county; had a job here with another farm or retired here.

### About The Farm and Farm Activities Represented in the Survey

- Collectively, those participating farmers represent 5531 acres of land in Ulster County. The average size of the farm was 102 acres, and the median size was 52 acres.
- Farmers indicated that they rent 2,458 acres of land to support their farm operation, with a median size of 12 acres and an average size of 48 acres.
- A wide variety of crops are grown. All the crops included in the survey have at least one farmer growing them. The top three crops were fruits and berries (46%), vegetables for fresh market (38%), Hay (34%). About 22% to 25% of farmers indicated they grew beef, flowers for cutting, herbs, poultry for eggs, and nursery floriculture, and greenhouse products. Many farmers grow more than one crop or raise more than one kind of animal.
- Of the 27 different farm activities queried, only 15 crops were indicated as being primary crops. When asked which crop or product was the primary farm product, farmers indicated that fruits and berries, and vegetables for fresh market were the most common type of farm. In addition to these, hay, beef, flowers for cutting, horses/ponies/donkeys, poultry for eggs and meat, dairy, grains, corn for grain or seed, herbs, mushrooms, nursery/floriculture/greenhouse, and vegetables for processing were the crops identified as primary.
- Most farmers (82%) have not made any major changes in the past 10 years.
- Farmers participated in a diversity of farm-related activities. 36% have agritourism, 30% have grass-fed animal production and value-added processing, 28% have u-pick operations, 26% have organic production with USDA certification, 18% have farm-based brewery, 18% organic without USDA certification, and 16% have solar production for farm. Four farms have solar production for grid/off-site use and 2 have a restaurant or café.
- Ag-tourism or value-added activities included cidery, farm markets, u-pick, on-farm stays, tasting rooms, farm tours, flower arranging or flower arranging workshops, value added products like baked goods, jams and jellies, or herbal products. One participant indicated they have a 20-C certified wash-pack space to bag baby greens mixes for market and their CSA.



- 51 or 84% of farm participants sell their agricultural product direct to consumers, and 30 (49%) sell wholesale. Some farms do both. Two farms do farm to institutional sales. For those farms that sell direct to consumers, most (76%) are from a on the farm/farm stand, or u-pick operation. However, selling at Ulster County farmers markets (12 farms) and at NYC farmers markets (10 farms) were also common. Seven farms sell through online marketplaces, and 8 have CSAs.
- For those farms with wholesale operations, the most common market was retail (supermarket, food shops, food cooperatives, etc.) (62%). Fourteen farms sell at restaurants, 6 us intermediaries such as food hubs, and 4 sell to food and beverage processors.

### **Marketing and Profitability of Participating Farms**

- When asked if they were interested in expanding into new markets, 41% were not sure, 33% said yes they were, and 26% said they were not interested in expanding.
- By far, the most common method of advertisement was on social media (73%). Many also had websites (59%), roadside signs (46%), use email (42%), and use print publications (22%). Promotion via regional efforts and marking on special events at farm property were other advertising methods used by about 10 farms. Six farms indicated they do not market or advertise their products.
- About 21% have farm incomes in the range of \$100,000 to \$249,000. Eleven farms (19%) gross over \$500,000 and 7 farms (12%) gross between \$250,000 and \$499,999. 23 of 57 reporting farms gross under \$50,000.
- 38% report their farm income as their primary source of household income and about 39% indicate it is their secondary source. Fourteen farms, or 23% indicate they do not rely on the farm as a source of income. Only 2 farms said they considered their farm operation very profitable. Most 926 farms or 43%) said they were somewhat profitable. 20% felt their operation broke even, and 13 or 22% said they were not profitable. 18 farms consider their farm operation less profitable than 10 years ago, with 33% indicating they had no change in profitability, and 20 (35%) said they were more profitable than 10 years ago.

### **Information on Future of Participating Farms**

- Positive features about farming in Ulster County included location, sense of community, beautiful, access to markets, support (among residents and other farmers), and climate. The most common responses were its location with good proximity to markets, and the support and sense of community they feel.
- When asked about their plans for the next five years, 20 or 33% of farmers said they were planning on increasing their acreage or production. 18, or 30% plan on staying the same, and 25% plan on developing agritourism or diversifying crops or animals raised. 10 farmers, or 17% plan on retiring, 9 plan on selling land for non-farm uses, 4 donating or selling development rights, and 4 plan on stopping farming to pursue other employment.
- Almost half of the participating farms do not have a succession plan. 43% do have such a plan and 5 were not sure.
- When asked what they need to increase their revenues, reduce costs, or reach additional markets, farmers listed (in order from most important to least) housing for farmworkers



(44%), affordable land to purchase, processing facility for livestock, affordable land to rent, aggregation and distribution facility, assistance seeking financing, cold storage, business planning assistance marketing assistance, succession planning help, employee training, or processing facility for fruits and vegetables.

- The majority (76%) said that farmland should be better protected from conversion or development of non-agricultural uses.

### Important Issues Identified

- The ranking of identified issues from most important to least important were:

#### **RANKING - FROM MOST IMPORTANT TO LEAST IMPORTANT**

Production costs relative to price received for agricultural products	2.59
Changing weather patterns and weather extremes	2.52
Farm equipment and machinery repair costs	2.37
Difficulty finding labor (skilled or unskilled)	2.36
Farm equipment and machinery acquisition costs	2.34
Cost of labor (skilled or unskilled)	2.32
Property taxes	2.30
Land prices	2.25
Fewer people interested in farming as a career	2.23
Availability of agriculture-related services and supplies for farms	2.23
Increased pest or disease pressure	2.23
Availability or cost of insurance	2.19
Liability and risk management	2.17
Development pressure	2.13
Lack of support for farming by municipal and county leaders	2.10
Loss of farmland to non-farm uses, like housing	2.08
Lack of support for farming by the public	2.03
Land availability	1.88
Global consolidation of the food supply or system	1.85
Traffic that makes it difficult to move farm equipment	1.85
Food safety compliance	1.83
Nuisance complaints from non-farmers	1.81
Feed costs	1.79
Transferring the farm to the next generation	1.77
Increased consumer preference for prepared and convenience food	1.76
Restrictive municipal land use regulations	1.73
Solar facilities on farms	1.69
Cost of marketing products in New York City	1.68
Limited agricultural economic development programs	1.68
Difficulty finding markets for farm products	1.66
Limited marketing and promotion of local farm products	1.65
Restrictions on or availability of pesticides and herbicides	1.62
Lack of distribution facilities to get products to market	1.60
Lack of support for scaling up farms to reach wholesale markets	1.58
Competition from new farms for local markets	1.39
Consolidation of small and mid-sized farms into larger farms	1.34

An additional question was asked about what farmers felt was the biggest issue facing agriculture. This was an open-ended question and the comments offered largely revolved around the very high costs of doing business (land, equipment, labor, taxes) and lack of affordable housing for employees.

### **Summary of Farmland Owner Survey (5 entries)**

- The survey represents 328 rented farmland acres, ranging from 2 acres to 280 acres.
- Rented farmland was in the towns of Esopus, Gardiner, New Paltz, and Rochester.
- Two farms rented to other farmers are entirely in a NYS Agricultural District, while 2 were not sure if they were in an Ag District or not. None of the respondents knew which agricultural district their farmland was included in.
- Two farms receive an Ag Value Assessment, one does not, and one was not sure.
- Positive features about farming in Ulster County included ability to get tax exemptions, beauty of the area, good support from SWCD and others when help is needed, access to fresh produce, great soils, location to markets, that their farmland keeps things green and prevents over building, the climate, and farming contributes to local economies.
- Rented farmland is used in a variety of ways. 75% of landowners who rent farmland indicate their land is used for fruits, vegetables, specialty crops, and allow use of their buildings for animals or storage. 50% have field crops or forest products, and 25% allow for pasturing animals, and selling products on-farm. No rented farmland was used for agritourism activities.
- Most of the farmland owners (75%) said they planned to continue renting the same number of acres for farming and one owner was going to sell their land for agricultural uses.
- Landowners who rent their land for farming recognize the economic difficulties of making a living in agriculture, were concerned about taxes, development, land availability at prices affordable to farmers, and development.
- Other comments added included:
  - Description of Arrowhead Farms model for leasing
  - Desire to see funding farmers to produce local organic food
  - Need to educate the community about what it takes to farm and the importance of farming to the environment
  - Issues related to certain conservation easements felt to be confusing, impossible to adhere to, and the need for oversight.
  - Desire to ensure that Ulster County continue to be a home for small farms and produce local fresh food.
- There were many written comments, to be summarized from Survey Monkey results.



## Survey Results: Members of the Public Not Involved in Farming

### Ulster County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

(N=166)

- 93% of Ulster County residents participating in the survey believe that local farms and agriculture are “very important.” The top reasons:
  - Agriculture provides healthy, local food (97%)
  - Agriculture provides job opportunities and supports the local economy (90%)
  - Agriculture retains our community character (82%)
- Respondents report that when making decisions about the food that they buy, the attributes they consider most important are its freshness and quality (94%), the fact that it is locally grown or produced (87%), and its nutritional value (74%). Only 50% identified organic as most influential in purchasing food products.
- 82% of respondents report that they *regularly* buy agricultural products grown or raised in Ulster County. These purchases are made most often at farmers’ markets (72%) or at farmstands or on-farm markets (66%). Less than 40% buy local farm products at chain grocery stores.
- 62% of the survey participants think that there has been a significant loss of farmland in Ulster County over the last 25 years, while 35% are not sure. Additionally, 89% believe that farmland in Ulster County should be better protected from being developed or converted to non-agricultural uses, with a nearly equal proportion (85%) indicating that they would support the use of public funding in Ulster County for land conservation to protect agriculture.
- Asked whether they think agriculture is a topic of importance to other residents in their communities, 69% of the respondents said yes. They are less confident about whether agriculture is important to their municipal leaders, however, with 49% indicating that they are not sure.
- We received 114 replies to an open-ended question about the major issues facing agriculture in Ulster County. The comments covered a variety of topics, including:
  - Development pressure / residential and commercial development / solar energy development
  - High cost of land
  - Difficulty finding workers
  - Access to land, especially for new and young farmers
  - Rising costs, e.g., fuel, fertilizer, property taxes
  - Unpredictable weather events