

## A Survey of Commercial Farms in North Carolina

FEBRUARY 2010

### Introduction

A survey was conducted at the Carolina Farm Steward Association's (CFSA) 22nd Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference (SAC) in Durham NC in November of 2007. This effort was undertaken to get a "snapshot" of the status of some of the commercial farmers in attendance. Similar surveys have been conducted, formally and casually. In many of these surveys, however, it was unclear if the respondents were commercial farmers who generated a substantial portion of their family income from farming. This survey was designed specifically for commercial farmers. Although there were hundreds of people in attendance at this conference, we found only 17 individuals of the many who offered to take the survey met that criteria.



Display at conference where survey was offered.

A PUBLICATION OF THE FARM PROSPERITY PROJECT— IMPROVING FARMLAND PROTECTION BY INCREASING FARM PROSPERITY WITH ADOPTION OF HIGH VALUE NEW CROPS AND AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES

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### Survey Results

#### Farm Size

Farmers were asked the question, "How large is your farm?"

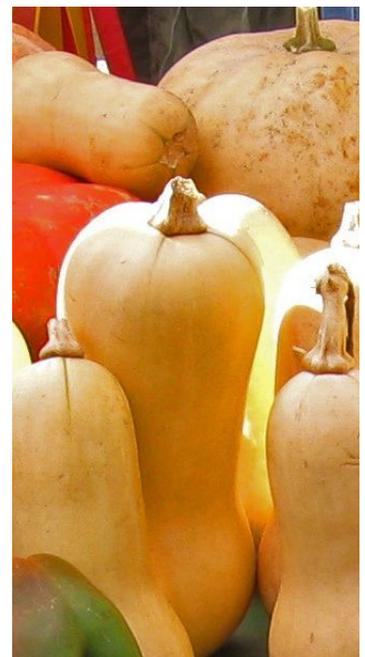
- A total of **673 acres** of farms were represented by the farmers that we polled.
- Average farm size was **39.6 acres**.
- The highest farm size was **275 acres**, while the lowest was **0.25 acres**

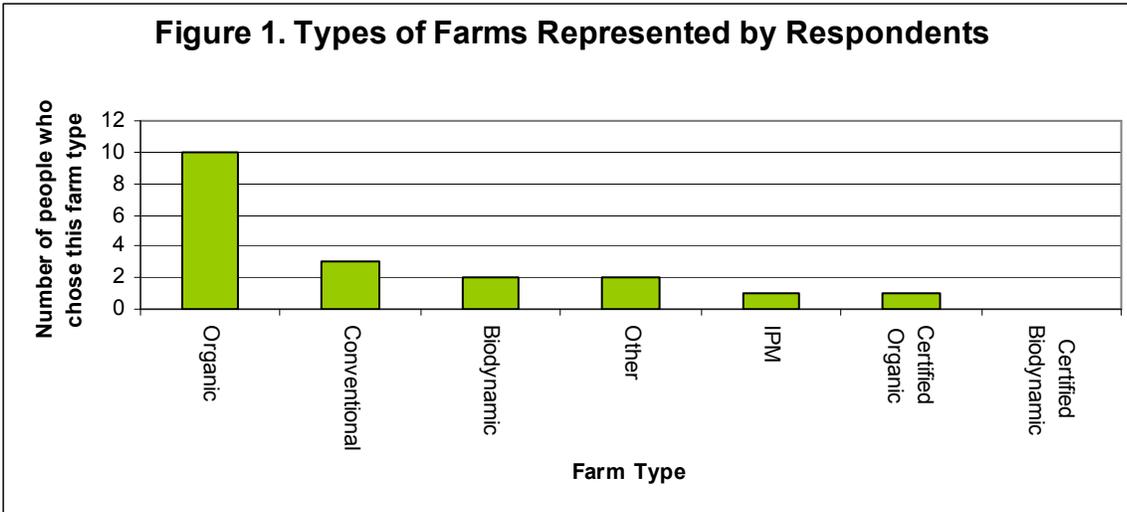
#### Farming System

Farmers were asked which type of farming system they used on their farm.

(Answers are summarized in figure 1)

- **Organic** farming systems were most common, 10 of the farmers classified themselves as such.
- Three people indicated their farms were **conventional**.
- Two people indicated their farms were **biodynamic** or "other".
- Only one person each indicated that his/her farm was **Integrated Pest Management or Certified Organic**.
- No one who took this survey farms a certified biodynamic farm
- When given the option to explain their definitions of "other", respondents included "biointensive" and "Sustainable-Triple Bottom Line".





**Time in Farming**

Farmers were asked the question, “How long have you been farming?”

- The farmers that we polled have spent a cumulative **160 years** in the farming business.
- Average length in the business was **9.97 years**.
- The longest time spent farming was **40 years**, while the shortest length was **0 years**.
- One person did not indicate the time spent farming.

**Full Time on Farm**

Farmers were asked the question, “Are you full time on the farm?”

- **58.82%** of our polled farmers do not work full time on the farm.
- **41.17%** do work full time on the farm.
- 17 farmers were polled, 7 indicated yes for full time, 10 indicated no for full time.
- All farmers answered this question.

**Location/State**

Farmers were asked the question, “In what state of the Southeast is your farm located?”

- **94.12%** of the polled farmers were from North Carolina.
- **5.88%** of the polled farmers were from South Carolina.
- 17 farmers were polled, 16 indicated NC, 1 indicated SC.
- All farmers answered this question.

**Location/Region**

Farmers were asked the question, “In what region of the Southeast is your farm located?”

- **64.71%** of the polled farms were from the Piedmont region.
- **29.4%** of the polled farms were from the Mountain region.
- 17 farmers were polled, 11 indicated piedmont, 5 indicated mountains
- 1 farmer opted not to answer this question.



### Price Satisfaction

Farmers were asked the question, "Are you satisfied with the price you receive for your product?"

- **52.94%** of polled farmers felt satisfied with the price they are receiving for their product.
- **23.53%** of polled farmers were not satisfied with the price they are receiving for their product.
- 17 farmers were polled, 9 indicated they were satisfied, 4 indicated they were not satisfied.
- 4 farmers opted not to answer this question.
- Comments from farmers relative to low price received:
  1. *10%-15% more should be received per unit*
  2. *\$.50—\$1.00 more should be received per unit*

### Pressure from Development

Farmers were asked the question, "Do you feel pressure from development going on around your farm?"

- **64.71%** of polled farmers said that they did feel development pressures around their farms.
- **29.41%** of polled farmers said that they did not feel development pressures around their farms.
- 17 farmers were polled, 11 indicated they felt development pressure, 5 indicated they did not feel development pressure.
- 1 farmer opted not to answer the question.

### Land Trusts

Farmers were asked the question, "Have you looked into conservation easements or land trusts?"

- **64.71%** of polled farmers said that they had looked into conservation easements or land trusts.
- **29.41%** of polled farmers had not looked into conservation easements or land trusts.
- 17 farmers were polled, 11 indicated they had considered easements or trusts, 5 indicated they had not considered easements or trusts.
- 1 farmer opted not to answer the question.

### Community Support

Farmers were asked the question, "Do people in your community support your farm operation?"

- **64.71%** of polled farmers said that they received community support for their farm.
- **17.65%** of polled farmers did not receive community support for their farm.
- 17 farmers were polled, 11 indicated they had community support, 3 indicated they did NOT receive community support.
- 3 farmers opted not to answer the question.
- Comments from farmers relative to community support:
  1. *There is a lot of verbal support and thanks. But these same people do not often purchase my products*
  2. *Not in my small town, but yes in nearby large town*
  3. *We sell out every year*
  4. *CSA and neighbors are compliant*
  5. *Buying Vegetables*
  6. *They buy from us*
  7. *Neighbors do, but development is rampant!*
  8. *Lots of vocal support and "voting with their feet"*



### Produce and Products

Farmers were given numerous crop choices from which they could select the ones they grow on their farm. Additionally, they could indicate which crop choices they were considering for the future. Crop choices fell into several main categories, including, *Specialty Crops*, *Animal Products*, *Value Added Products*, and *Agritourism Products*. The results of these selections are shown in Figures 2 through 5. Note that one purpose of this survey is to help determine which information is most needed from the university through extension and other outreach channels. Thus, these answers were weighted to help us determine where the greatest needs are. If a farmer indicated that he/she would be growing a crop in the future, it was weighted heavier, given 2 points, than for a crop currently being grown, given 1 point.

Figure 2 (next page) shows the number of farmers who indicated that they were currently growing or thinking about growing any number of *Specialty Crops*.

- The most popular crops were lettuce and culinary herbs (13 points).
- In the mid-range, 4-8 points, were blueberries, organic vegetables, non-organic vegetables, hot peppers, heirloom vegetables, shiitake mushrooms, general mushrooms, specialty melons, organic garlic, figs, specialty sweet potatoes, strawberries, specialty potatoes, muscadine grapes, asparagus, organic apples, and non-organic apples.
- In the low range, 1-3 points, were grapes, gourds, cut flowers, other small fruits, paw paws, organic orchard fruits, general nursery/greenhouse items, medicinal herbs, garlic, nursery greenhouse perennials, loofa gourds, tea herbs, hay, organic grapes, edible flowers, exotic grains, and cereals.
- No one in this survey grew, or was interested in growing wasabi, ethnic vegetables, organic tobacco, sweet sorghum, off-season strawberries, raspberries, ramps, oilseed crops, truffles, indoor mushrooms, or galax. Additionally, several nursery/greenhouse crops were not of interest including, small shrubs, propagation, plasticulture, ornamental stock, or ornamental containers. These were omitted from the chart below to conserve space.

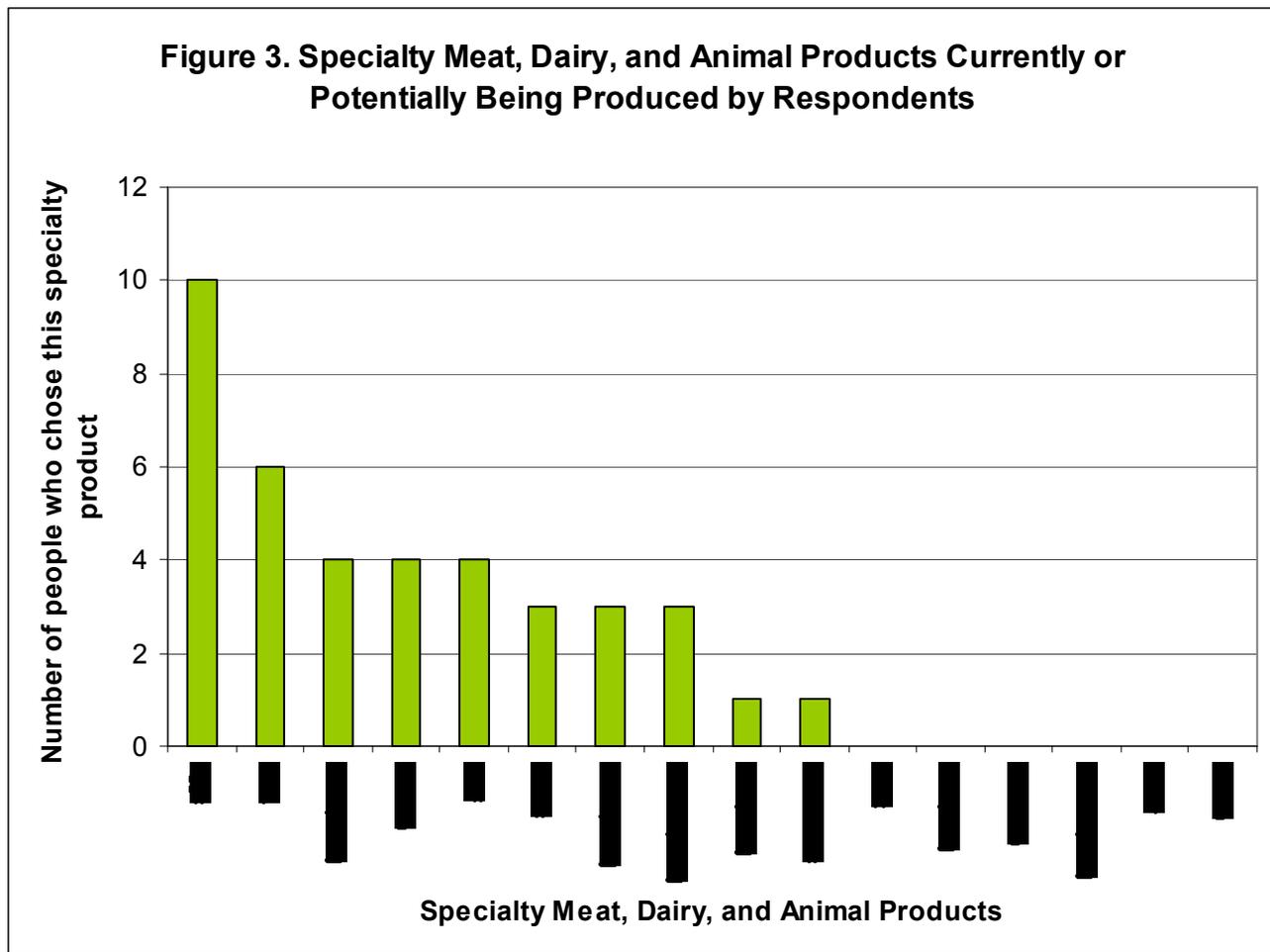




**Specialty Animal Products**

Figure 3 shows the number of farmers who indicated that they were currently producing or thinking about producing any number of *Specialty meats, dairy, or animal products*. Weighted values were used as described for produce and products.

- Eggs were the most popular product with 10 points.
- In the mid-range (4-8 points) were pork, goat meat, chicken, and beef.
- In the low range (1-3 points) were lambs, lamb meat, goat cheese, goat milk, and honey bees.
- No one in this survey produced trout, cow milk, ice cream, cow cheese, butter, or alpaca.

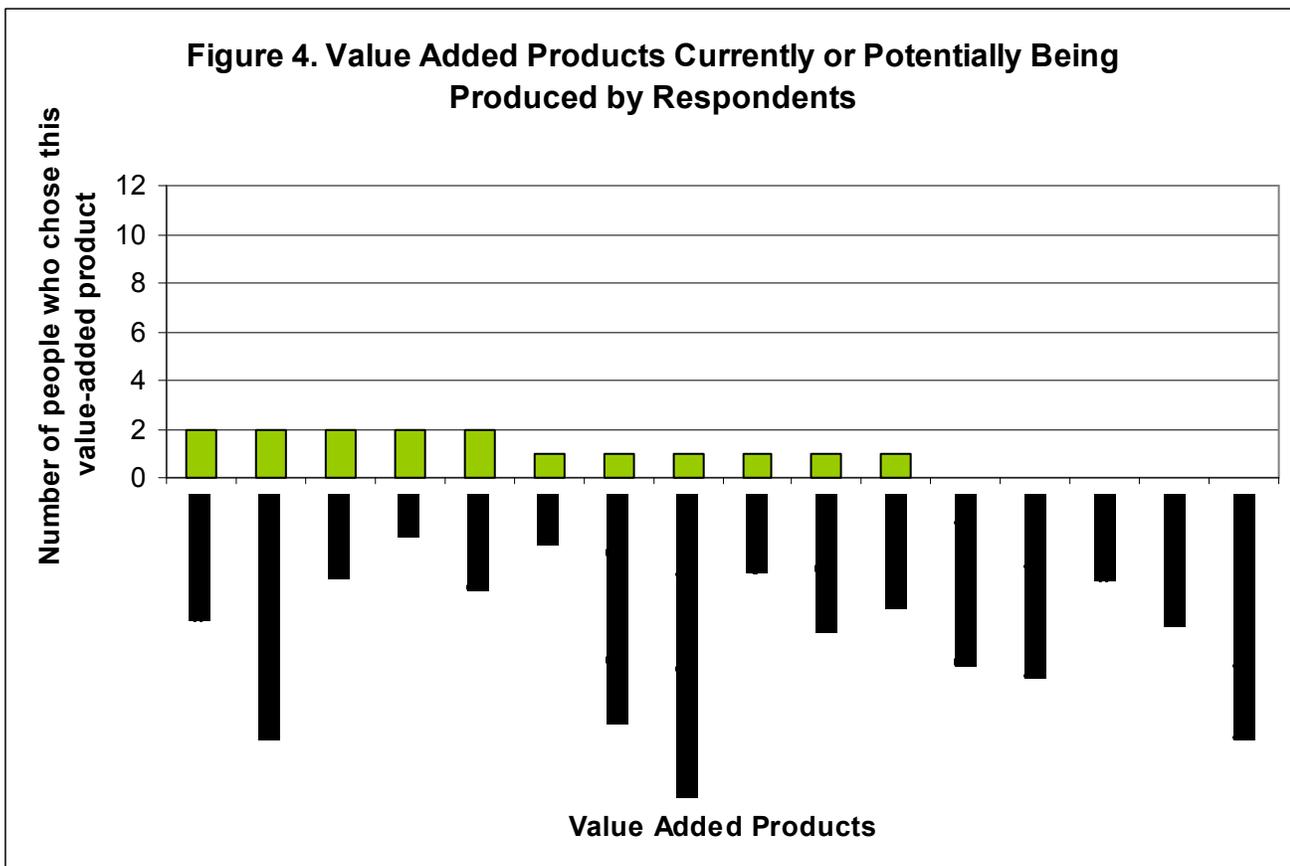




**Value Added Products**

Figure 4 shows the number of farmers who indicated that they were currently producing or thinking about producing any number of *Value Added Products*. Weighted responses are displayed as described for produce and products.

- There was no overwhelmingly popular value added product.
- The maximum number of responses for any product did not exceed 2.
- Products scoring in the 1-2 point range included smoked meats, herb vinegars/oils/sauces, dried fruit, cider, beef jerky, pesto, packaged fruits/vegetables, herb soaps, gift store, dried vegetables, and baked goods.
- No one in this survey indicated that they were producing popcorn, value added pecans, gift packs, fruit smoothies, or flavored corn-meal/flour.

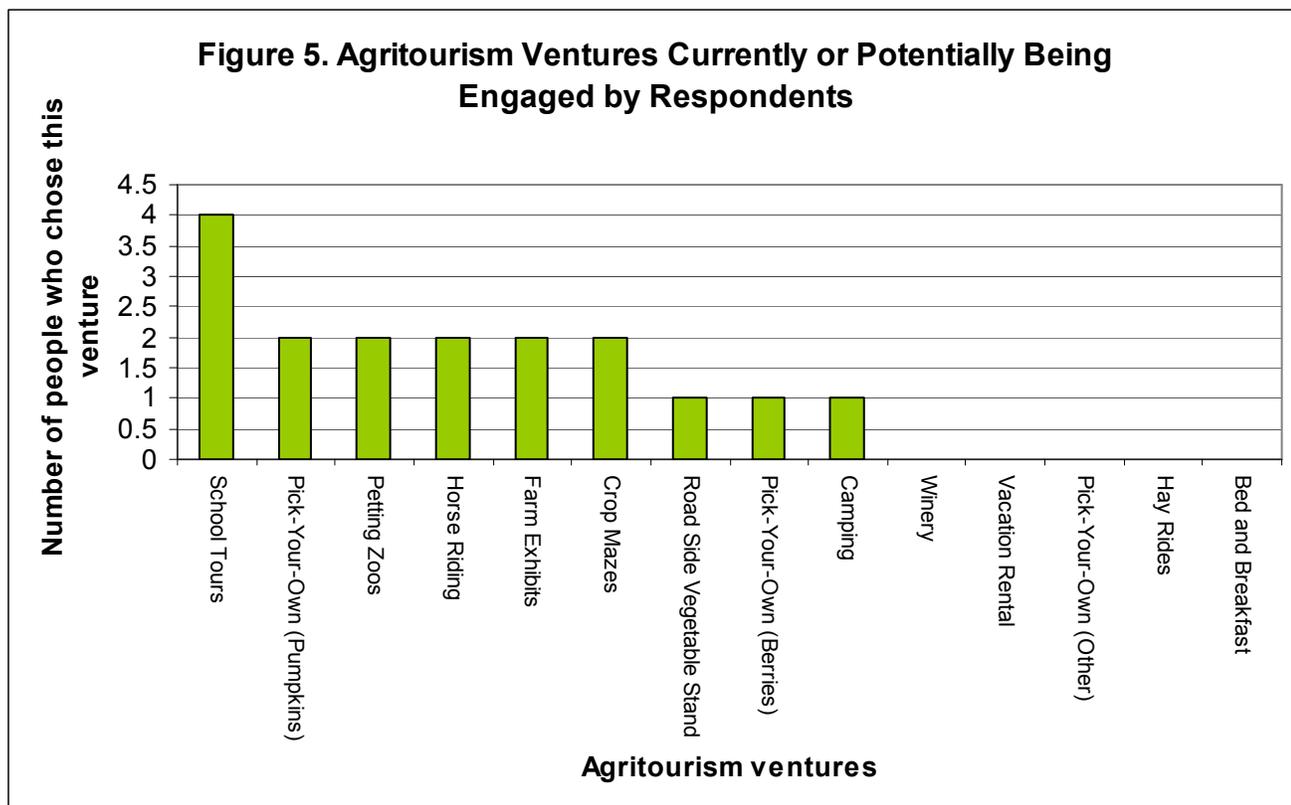




**Specialty Farm Enterprises**

Figure 5 shows the number of farmers who indicated that they were hosting or considering hosting any number of *Agritourism* events on their farms. Weighted responses are indicated as described for produce and products.

- Similar to value added products, there was no overwhelmingly popular agritourism venture.
- School tours ranked highest with 4 points.
- Agritourism ventures in the low range (1-2) included pick-your-own pumpkins, petting zoos, horse riding, farm exhibits, crop mazes, road side stand, pick-your-own berries, and camping.
- No one in this survey indicated that they were hosting or interested in hosting a winery, vacation rental, hay rides, or bed and breakfast.





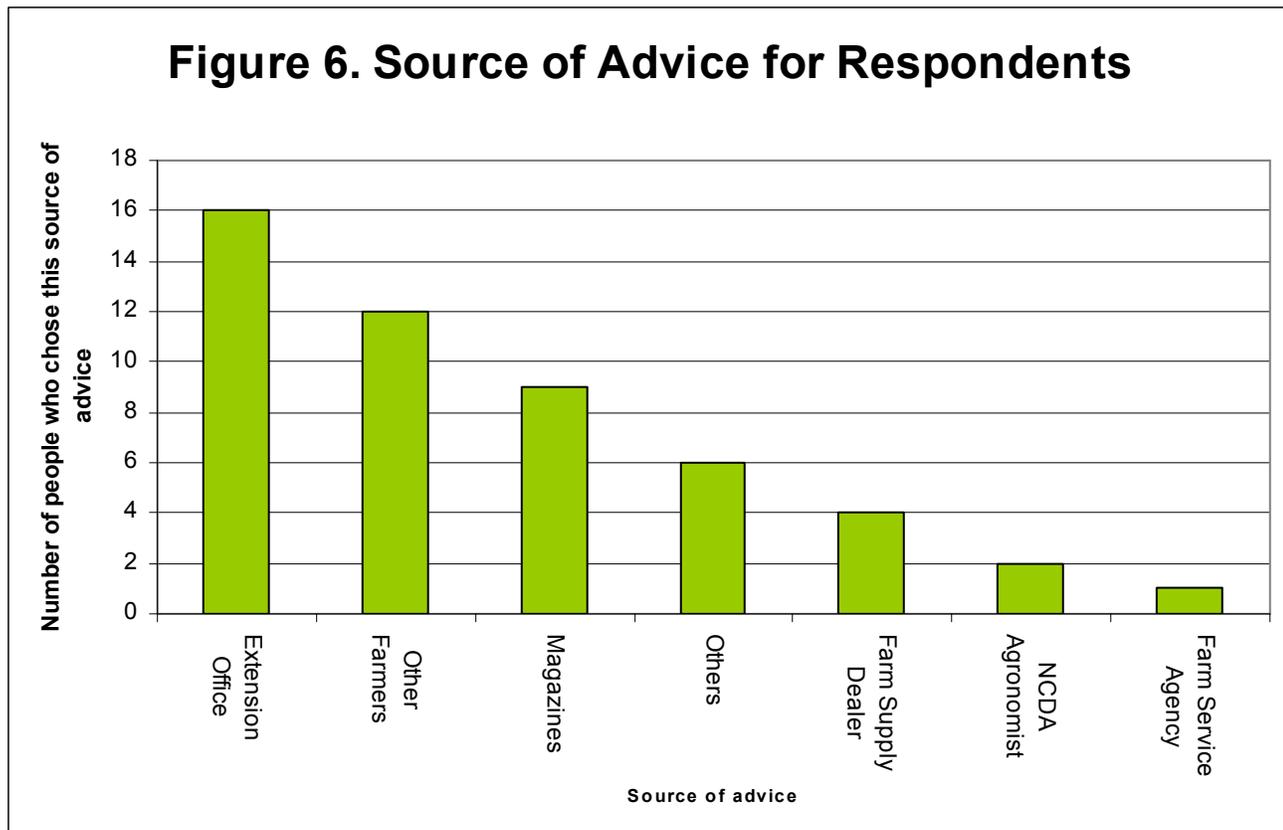
**Sources of Advice**

Farmers were asked two related questions about how they seek advice. The first question was “*When you take on a new crop or have problems with older crops, where do you go for advice?*” Multiple choice answers included extension office, farm service agency, other farmers, farm supply dealer, NC Department of Agriculture agronomist, magazines, and other. See Figure 6.

- Overwhelmingly, farmers chose extension agents as a source of information. 16 of 17 farmers surveyed chose extension agents.
- In the high range (9-12) farmers picked other farmers and magazines.
- In the mid-range (4-8), farmers picked other sources and farm supply dealers.
- In the low range (1-3) farmer chose NC Department of Agricul agronomists and farm service agency.
- Farmers were given the option to supply examples for “other”. In these cases, farmers wrote in the internet and on-farm research as other sources for advice with a problem.

The next question related to advice was “*When you need help selling a crop, where do you go?*” In this case, farmers were not given multiple choice. They were allowed to answer the question directly.

- 12 farmers did not answer this question.
- Of the remaining 5, two people answered Carolina Farm Stewardship Association.
- Otherwise, tailgate markets, existing channels, other growers, farmer’s associations, local papers, and radio were mentioned only once each.

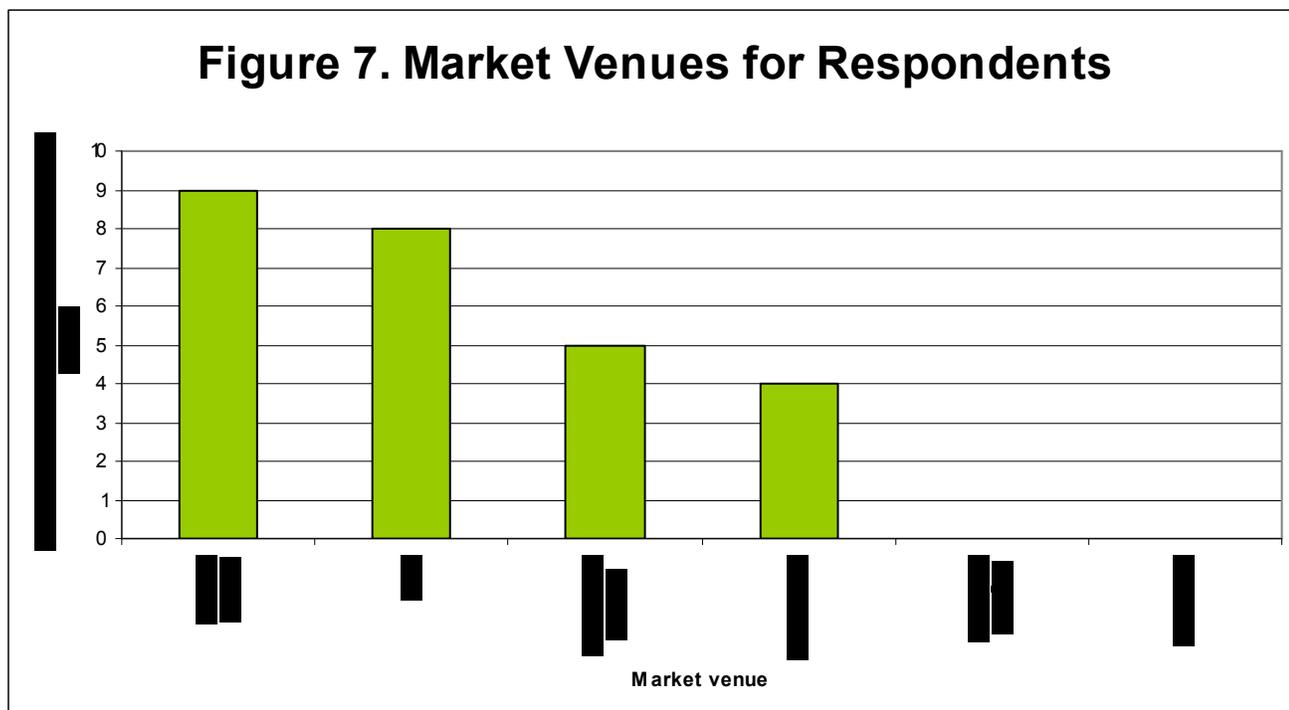




### Market venues

Farmers were asked the question “Where do you sell your products?” Farmers were given several options and allowed to answer as many times as appropriate. Multiple choice options included direct to restaurants, food stores, tailgate markets, regional distributor, wholesaler, or other. Results for this question are presented in Figure 7.

- Farmers in this survey chose tailgate markets and “other” as the most popular sales markets for their goods with 9 and 8 points, respectively.
- In the mid-range (4-8 points), farmers chose direct to restaurants and food stores.
- Regional distribution and wholesalers were not chosen as sales markets by any of the farmers surveyed.
- When given the option to provide “other” sales markets, farmers wrote in CSA (x2), direct from farm, email lists, friends, pick-your-own, farmer’s market, and direct to florist.



### Are the products local

Farmers were asked “Does the product stay in the area, or is it shipped elsewhere? If shipped, how is it delivered?” Farmers were not given multiple choices for this question, and were allowed to answer individually.

- Out of the 17 surveyed farmers, 7 did not answer the question.
- The remaining 10 respondents indicated that they sold locally.
- Two of the 10 farmers selling locally also shipped via UPS and USPS.

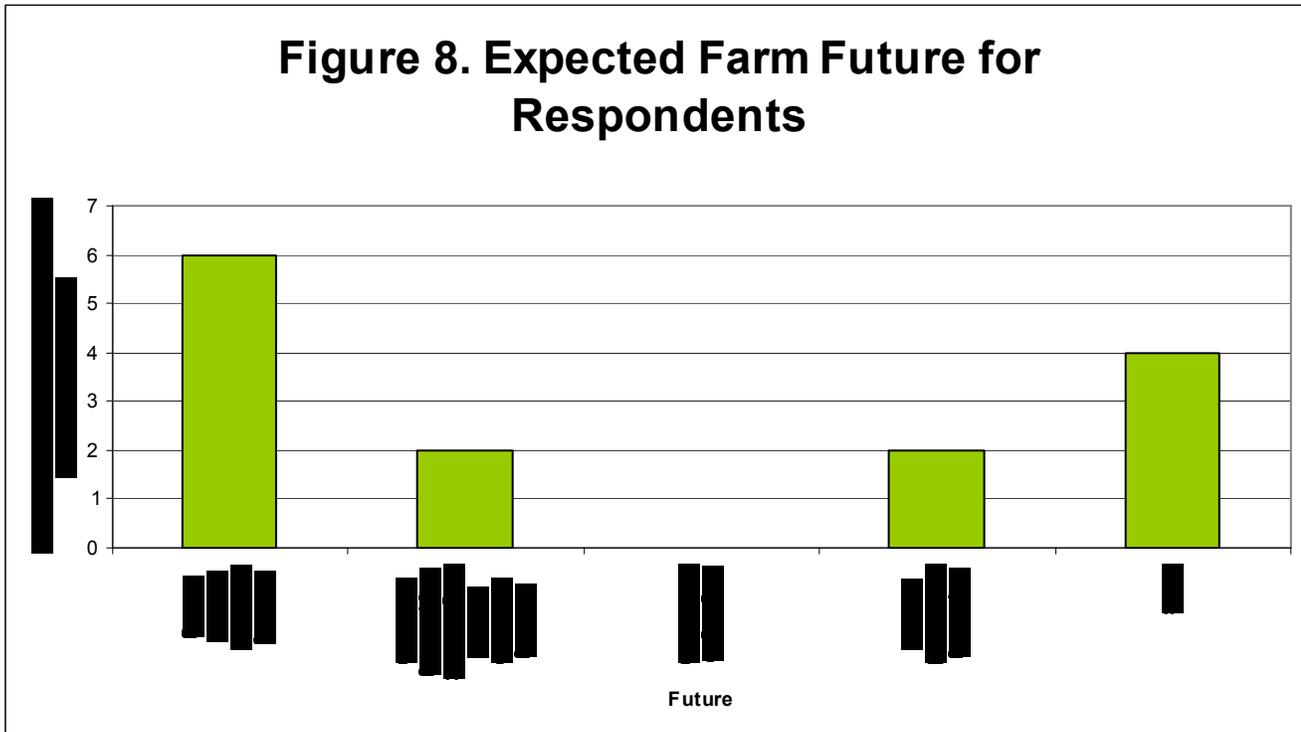


**Future of Farmland**

Farmers were asked “What are your thoughts on the future of your farm?” They were given several multiple choice answers, and allowed to answer as many as they saw fit. Multiple choice answers included, “I want my children to continue farming here”, “I want my children to continue living here, but they probably won’t farm”, “I am going to sell the farm”, “I expect my heirs will sell the farm”, and “other”. Summary results from this question are in Figure 8.

- The most popular choice (with 6 points) was for the children or heirs to continue farming the land.
- Four farmers chose the “other” option.
- Equal numbers of farmers (2) wanted their children to continue living on the land without farming or felt that their heirs would sell the farm.
- No one thought that they would directly sell their farmland.
- When given the option to provide “others”, three farmers provided ideas: 1) wanted a community sponsored/managed farm, 2) wanted to protect the land from development, and 3) wanted to purchase property, but was (at present) renting land on which to farm.

**Figure 8. Expected Farm Future for Respondents**




**Appendix - Survey Questionnaire used at the CFSA 22nd Sustainable Agriculture Conference 2007**

How large is your farm? \_\_\_\_\_ acres

How long have you been farming? \_\_\_\_\_ years

Are you full time on the farm?

- Yes  
 No

What are your crops/products? (check all that apply) *Indicate the most important crops with a \**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apples (Organic)                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (Propagation)         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apples                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (Small Shrubs)        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asparagus                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Oilseed crops                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Figs                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Orchard Fruits (Organic)                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flowers (cut)                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Paw Paws                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flowers (edible)                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Peppers (Hot)                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Galax                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Potatoes (Specialty)                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gourds                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Ramps                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic (Organic)                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Fruits (Raspberries)               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grapes (Organic)                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Fruits (Blueberries)               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grapes (Muscadines)                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Fruits (Strawberries)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herbs (Culinary)                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Fruits (Strawberries - off season) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herbs (Medicinal)                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Fruits (Other)                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herbs (Tea)                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Sorghum (Sweet)                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lettuce                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweet Potatoes (Specialty)               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Melons (Specialty)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Tobacco (Organic)                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mushrooms                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Tobacco                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mushrooms (Shiitake)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetables (Ethnic)                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mushrooms (Truffles)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetables (Heirloom)                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mushrooms (Indoor)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetables (Organic)                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (General)               | <input type="checkbox"/> Wasabi                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (Ornamental Stock)      | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (Ornamental containers) | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (Perennials)            | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery/Greenhouse (Plasticulture)         | <input type="checkbox"/>  |

Do you produce any of the following specialty meats, dairy, and other animal products? (check all that apply) *Indicate the most important products with a \**

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pork        | <input type="checkbox"/> Butter        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beef        | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese (Cow)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trout       | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese (Goat) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goat (Meat) | <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lamb (Meat) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lambs         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Milk (Cow)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Alpaca        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Milk (Goat) | <input type="checkbox"/>               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ice Cream   | <input type="checkbox"/>               |



Do you produce any of the following Value-Added Products? (check all that apply) *Indicate the most important crops with a \**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baked Goods                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Dried Fruit          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cornmeal and Flour (flavored)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Smoothies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gift Packs                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Gift Store           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herb Vinegars, Oils, or Sauces    | <input type="checkbox"/> Popcorn Processing   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herb Soaps and Body Care Products | <input type="checkbox"/> Pecans (Value-Added) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Packaged Fresh Vegetables         | <input type="checkbox"/>                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cider                             |   |

Do you participate in any of the following Specialty Farm Enterprises? (check all that apply) *Indicate the most important with a \**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crop Mazes                | <input type="checkbox"/> Vacation Rental   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farm Exhibits             | <input type="checkbox"/> Winery            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hay Rides                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Bed and Breakfast |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Petting Zoos              | <input type="checkbox"/> School Tours      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pick-Your-Own (Pumpkins)  | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pick-Your-Own (Other)     | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pick-Your-Own (Berries)   | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horse Riding              | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camping                   | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Road Side Vegetable Stand |  |

Are there other crops or enterprises that you are considering? If yes, which ones?

- Yes     No

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In what region of the southeast is your farm located?

State \_\_\_\_\_ Region (ex: Piedmont) \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate which of the following descriptions best suits your farm (check all that apply)

- Conventional  
 Integrated Pest Management  
 Organic  
 Certified Organic  
 Biodynamic  
 Certified Biodynamic  
 Other

When you take on a new crop or have problems with older crops, where do you go for advice? (check all that apply)

- Extension office  
 Farm Service Agency  
 Other Farmers  
 Farm/agricultural supply dealer  
 NCDA agronomist  
 Magazines  
 Others



Where do you sell your products (check all that apply)

- Direct to restaurants
- Food stores
- Tailgate markets
- Regional distributor
- Wholesaler
- Other

Does the product stay in the area, or is it shipped elsewhere? If shipped, how is it delivered?

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Are you satisfied with the price you receive?

- Yes
- No

If no, how much more do you think you should receive, per unit?

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When you need help selling a crop, where do you go?

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Do you feel pressure from development going on around your farm?

- Yes
- No

What are your thoughts on the future of your farm?

- I want my children to continue farming here
- I want my children to continue living here, but they probably won't farm
- I am going to sell the farm
- I expect my heirs will sell the farm
- Other

Have you looked into conservation easements or land trust?

- Yes
- No

Do people in your community support your farm operation?

- Yes
- No

How or how not?

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Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out this survey. We appreciate your time and input.

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