

# APPENDIX A

## **Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan**

### **Farmer Focus Group Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis**

To initiate the process of updating Erie County's Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, a first set of farmer focus groups were held throughout Erie County. At these meetings, attendees shared their thoughts and insights about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing agriculture in the County. A total of five meetings were held, including in the Town of Clarence, the Town of North Collins, the Village of Holland, the City of Buffalo, and virtually. Meetings were well attended with 78 members of the community attending. The North Collins meeting was the most well attended with a total of 38 attendees.

Information gathered from these focus groups was utilized to develop a list of agricultural issues, needs, and opportunities for the Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) to review. Once the AFBP reviews this information, they will identify which items require further investigation. The strategies and actions that will be identified later in the planning process will directly address the issues, needs, and opportunities that were generated through public input identified here and through other community engagement exercises. The complete SWOT chart can be found below along with a summary of the SWOT analyses.

#### **SWOT Summary for Clarence, North Collins, Holland, and Virtual Farmer Focus Group Meetings**

##### *Strengths*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, farmers believe that the County's agricultural sector thrives due to a combination of factors. Its strategic location, offering access to large customer bases and nearby markets, provides a strong foundation for economic growth. The region's climate, including diverse microclimates, supports a wide range of crops, with an abundance of food processing facilities that help to add value to local produce. Support from dedicated agencies, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County and the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District, bolster the County's farming legacy, while high-quality soils and water, established transportation routes, and a diversity in farm sizes creates a fertile environment for both established and emerging farmers. This supportive ecosystem is complemented by the emergence of a new generation of young farmers and innovative partnerships, which enhance market opportunities and sustainability.

##### *Weaknesses*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, farmers believe that the agricultural environment faces several challenges that hinder its growth and sustainability. Poorly maintained road ditches and unsupportive local zoning creates logistical and operational issues for farmers, while the high cost of land makes it difficult for new farmers to enter the industry. The County also suffers from a lack of public agricultural education, leading to limited understanding of local farming's importance and value. Furthermore, road safety for farm vehicles, damage from pests and invasive species like deer and the emerald ash borer, as well as restrictive state regulations add additional hurdles. These weaknesses are compounded by high taxes, a shortage of produce auctions and meat processing facilities, and a lack of local government support for smaller farms and Right to Farm Laws.

##### *Opportunities*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, farmers believe that Erie County's agricultural environment has numerous opportunities to strengthen its industry and community. Replicating successful land preservation programs like the Clarence Greenprint at both county and local levels can help protect farmland and promote sustainable

agriculture. Expanding farmer networking and investing in cooperative distribution systems would foster collaboration and strengthen local food systems. By supporting students interested in agriculture with scholarships and encouraging agricultural curriculum in schools, the County can build a skilled workforce and inspire the next generation of farmers. Additionally, the growth of direct marketing, homesteading, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) presents new market opportunities, while partnerships with local colleges to establish agricultural programs and the development of incubator farms offer pathways for innovation and inclusion.

### *Threats*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, farmers believe that Erie County's agricultural environment faces several significant threats that could impact its long-term viability. Farm consolidation and the loss of land to renewable energy developments reduce the available farmland, while sprawling development patterns, and the increase in non-farming neighbors create additional pressures on agricultural practices. The aging farmer population and inheritance issues also pose a risk, potentially leading to a decline in farming traditions and the loss of family farms. Furthermore, a lack of farmland protection funding, unpredictable weather patterns due to climate change, and land purchases by foreign countries can further destabilize the agricultural landscape. These threats are compounded by local law enforcement harassment, unsupportive politicians, increasing commodity prices, and competition from other states, all of which could limit the success of Erie County's agricultural sector.

## **SWOT Summary for Buffalo Urban Farmer Focus Group Meeting**

### *Strengths*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, urban growers in Erie County find strengths in the region's vibrant agricultural environment. Celebratory events like Urban Farm Day foster community and bring attention to urban agriculture, while access to quality water and County-supplied compost kits and rain barrels support sustainable practices. Active organizations and agencies, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County and the Greater Buffalo Urban Growers, provide valuable resources and guidance to urban growers. The area's agricultural legacy, with dedicated and multi-generational growers, enriches the local culture and ensures a steady flow of knowledge. Additionally, the diversity of products grown, the presence of the greenhouse industry, and the abundance of available vacant land create ample opportunities for urban farming and innovation. Finally, institutional research resources and the prevalence of honor stands, also known as roadside stands, for direct-to-consumer sales further strengthen the urban agricultural ecosystem.

### *Weaknesses*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, urban growers in Erie County face significant weaknesses that hinder the growth of urban agriculture. A major issue is the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a "farm," leading to inconsistencies in regulations and support. Urban farms are excluded from the NYS Agricultural District program, limiting their access to benefits and protections available to traditional farms. The City of Buffalo's lack of laws protecting urban agriculture and restrictions on hooved animals constrain urban growers' operations. Additionally, barriers to land and water access, with land being expensive or held vacant for potential future development, create hurdles for urban farmers. There's also a lack of support from policymakers and City officials, coupled with limited exposure of children to farming, which hampers community awareness and engagement. Moreover, food apartheid and the absence of corner stores selling fresh produce contribute to limited access to healthy, locally-grown food in urban areas.

## *Opportunities*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, urban growers in Erie County recognize several key opportunities to strengthen the region's agricultural environment. Changing institutional procurement policies to reward local growers and those focusing on regenerative farming could boost local agriculture and encourage sustainable practices. Workforce training and connecting farms with schools would help cultivate a new generation of urban farmers, fostering education and community involvement. Creating an urban NYS Agricultural District and establishing an Office of Urban Agriculture in the City of Buffalo could formalize support for urban growers and streamline local regulations. Additionally, facilitating water access, promoting backyard gardening, and developing equipment-sharing programs among farms would lower barriers to entry and support the growth of urban agriculture. Lastly, linking local growers with larger processors in the County can enhance distribution networks and market opportunities for urban farmers.

## *Threats*

Based on SWOT analysis responses, urban growers in Erie County face a range of threats that challenge the sustainability of the region's agricultural environment. Climate change, with increased winds and volatile spring seasons, exacerbates the risk of invasive species, potentially damaging farm equipment and reducing yields. Farm consolidation and the loss of open green space due to increased impervious surfaces threaten the economic viability of small-scale urban farming. Additionally, the lack of public education on how food is grown and what urban farms contribute to the community hampers support for urban agriculture. Funding limitations, workforce availability, and government subsidization of low-cost processed foods also undermine the success of urban farming. The cost inflation of fresh produce and the risk of groundwater contamination from industrial history further complicate the landscape. Finally, solar developments that convert agricultural land into renewable energy sites contribute to the loss of valuable farmland, posing a significant threat to the long-term viability of urban agriculture in Erie County.

## Farmer Focus Group SWOT Analysis Chart – Clarence, North Collins, and Holland

<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What assets/resources do we have?</li> <li>What do we do well?</li> </ul>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What challenges do farmers face?</li> <li>What resources/talent/knowledge do we lack?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large customer base and access to nearby markets</li> <li>Ideal climate for a diversity of crops</li> <li>Microclimates for specialized crops</li> <li>Abundance of food processing facilities</li> <li>Dedicated agencies and staff (i.e. CCE, NRCS &amp; SWCD)</li> <li>County legacy and history of farming</li> <li>Ag districts and tax incentives</li> <li>High quality soils and water</li> <li>Reliable and established transportation routes</li> <li>Availability of open land</li> <li>Variety of farm sizes</li> <li>Proximity to supplies and services.</li> <li>Emergence of a new generation of farmers</li> <li>Institutional purchase aggregation (i.e. produce peddlers and FreshFix)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly maintained road ditches</li> <li>Unsupportive local zoning</li> <li>The high cost of land</li> <li>Lack of public agricultural education – understanding how food is grown, where it comes from, and the importance of supporting local agriculture.</li> <li>Damage from pests &amp; invasive species – deer &amp; emerald ash borer</li> <li>Road safety for farm vehicles</li> <li>State regulations – environmental and labor</li> <li>High taxes</li> <li>Lack of produce auctions, meat processors, and small-scale processing facilities</li> <li>Lack of local government understanding on Right to Farm Laws</li> <li>Lack of grant assistance and technical training for small farms</li> <li>Lack of local laws supporting/encouraging smaller farms</li> </ul>
<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are weaknesses hampering agriculture?</li> <li>What competition is agriculture facing?</li> <li>What causes our weaknesses?</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can we leverage our strengths?</li> <li>How can we address our weaknesses?</li> <li>What new trends can we capitalize on?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farm consolidation</li> <li>Loss of land to renewable energy developments</li> <li>Loss of land to suburban sprawl and increase in non-farming neighbors.</li> <li>Aging farmer population and inheritance issues</li> <li>Lack of farmland protection funding</li> <li>Changing and unpredictable weather patterns</li> <li>Land purchased by foreign countries.</li> <li>Local law enforcement harassment (i.e. mud on the roads)</li> <li>Unsupportive politicians</li> <li>Loss of the traditional farm family</li> <li>Increase in commodity prices.</li> <li>Reduction in consumer beef consumption</li> <li>Large Co-Ops that limit individual farm's ability to market</li> <li>Market competition with other states</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replicate the Clarence Greenprint at the County and local level.</li> <li>Expand farmer networking</li> <li>Investments in Co-Op distribution systems</li> <li>Support students interested in agriculture with scholarships</li> <li>Growth of direct marketing</li> <li>Growth in the homesteading movement</li> <li>Agricultural workforce development</li> <li>Partner with local colleges to develop agricultural specific programs and certificates</li> <li>Develop creative zoning tools (i.e. collaborative agriculture)</li> <li>Encourage agricultural curriculum in schools.</li> <li>Incentivize institutional procurement of local products</li> <li>Emulate the national AgrAbility program</li> <li>Popularity of CSAs</li> <li>Develop incubator farms and support for immigrant/refugee farming</li> </ul>

## Farmer Focus Group SWOT Analysis Chart – Buffalo

<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What assets/resources do we have?</li> <li>What do we do well?</li> </ul>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What challenges do farmers face?</li> <li>What resources/talent/knowledge do we lack?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Events that celebrate agriculture – Urban Farm Day</li> <li>Access to quality water</li> <li>Active organizations and agencies (i.e. CCE &amp; GBUG)</li> <li>County supplied compost kits and rain barrels</li> <li>Agricultural legacy – dedicated and multi-generational growers</li> <li>Institutional research resources</li> <li>Greenhouse industry</li> <li>Diversity of products grown</li> <li>Access to supplies stores and support services</li> <li>A lot of available vacant land</li> <li>Abundance of “Honor Stands”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of definitive definition of what a “farm” means</li> <li>Lack of local laws protecting urban agriculture</li> <li>Urban farms aren’t eligible to be included in Ag districts</li> <li>Not exposing kids to farming when they are young</li> <li>Lack of support and desire from the city to support urban agriculture</li> <li>Land and water access barriers – land is expensive or held vacant in hopes of future development</li> <li>Lack of support and knowledge from policymakers</li> <li>Soil testing is not allowed in the City until after you purchase the property</li> <li>Food apartheid</li> <li>Hooved animals are not permitted in the City</li> <li>Lack of corner stores selling fresh produce</li> </ul>
<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are weaknesses hampering agriculture?</li> <li>What competition is agriculture facing?</li> <li>What causes our weaknesses?</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can we leverage our strengths?</li> <li>How can we address our weaknesses?</li> <li>What new trends can we capitalize on?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invasive species</li> <li>Economic viability of farming</li> <li>Farm consolidation</li> <li>Climate change – increased winds, volatile spring season, spread of invasive species</li> <li>Lack of public education – how food is grown and what urban farms actually do</li> <li>Increase in impervious surfaces and the loss of open green space</li> <li>Lack of funding for urban ag operations</li> <li>Workforce availability and burnout</li> <li>Government subsidization of cheap and processed foods</li> <li>Inflation of fresh produce</li> <li>Groundwater contamination from industrial history</li> <li>Solar developments – loss of ag land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing institutional procurement policies – reward local growers and growers who focus on regenerative farming and climate change initiatives</li> <li>Workforce training</li> <li>Connecting farms with schools</li> <li>Create an urban Ag district</li> <li>Establish an Office of Urban Agriculture in City Hall</li> <li>Develop guidelines for smart citing solar energy arrays to mitigate loss of ag land</li> <li>Subsidize locally grown food</li> <li>Promote backyard gardening</li> <li>Make water access and connection processes easier</li> <li>Develop programs for equipment sharing between farms</li> <li>Link local growers with larger processors in the county</li> </ul>

## Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan Update

### PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS

**Do you consider Erie County an agricultural community?**

	#	%
No	10	15%
Yes	57	85%
Total	67	100%

**Which best describes how often you visit farm stands, farmers markets, or other agritourism events from May-October?**

	#	%
A few times a year	3	4%
At least once a week	34	51%
Once or twice a month	28	42%
Seldom, if ever	2	3%
Total	67	100%

**Are you concerned about farmland loss in Erie County?**

	#	%
No	2	3%
Yes	65	97%
Total	67	100%

**Which farmland loss contributors concern you the most?**

	#	%
Lack of transition planning	20	31%
Location of renewable (solar) energy on farmland	7	11%
Location of residential development (single-family homes, subdivisions) on farmland	38	58%
No Response	2	3%
Total	65	100%

**Which farmland protection measures do you must support?**

	#	%
Education on the importance of farming	9	13%
Land use regulations that prioritize farmland and restrict non-farm development in certain areas	35	52%
Programs that protect farmland forever	19	28%
Taxation policies that discourage the location of large-scale solar on farmland	4	6%
Total	67	100%

**Aware of Erie Grown**

	#	%
Yes	29	43%
No	38	57%
Total	67	100%

## Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan Update

### PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS

What best describes how often you visit farm stands, farmers markets, or other agritourism events from May-October?

	#	%
A few times a year	5	7%
At least once a week	34	51%
Once or twice a month	26	39%
Seldom, if ever	2	3%
Total	67	100%



Erie County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan

**FARMER AND FARMLAND OWNER SURVEY REPORT**

## Contents

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## Overview

### Introduction

To maximize farmer and farmland owner participation in the Erie County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, Erie County staff and its planning consultant, assisted by the Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board, designed and distributed a survey to farmers and farmland owners throughout Erie County. The survey results helped to identify the most pressing issues and priorities for Erie County farmers and agricultural landowners and aided with identifying implementation actions recommended in the Plan. This survey campaign yielded a total of **166** survey responses. This report is an attempt to synthesize the diverse range of perspectives of those involved with agriculture in Erie County and identify the most pressing issues in the region that the County can help address.

### Survey Methodology

During a two-month period from April 1<sup>st</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, surveys were distributed and collected from farmers and agricultural landowners throughout Erie County. To maximize survey participation, various methods of distribution were utilized, including: (1) providing paper surveys at each of the four in-person farmer focus group meetings held throughout the county, (2) distributing handouts to take the survey online, (3) linking the online survey on the County's website, and (4) distributing the survey online through steering committee channels such as newsletters and email lists. The input gathered provides an overview of conditions and trends as well as insight into farmer support for potential initiatives to be included in the plan. Responses from full-time and part-time farmers are compared as well as those from non-farming farmland owners.

### Key Findings

**There is a lack of connection between farmers looking for farmland and landowners who are looking to rent/lease their land.** Finding cost effective and suitable land to farm was identified as a major challenge for both full-time and part-time farmers (61% & 40%). However, at the same time, when asking landowners how they select farmers to rent/lease their land, the two most common answers was the proximity of the farmer (71%) and if they were already acquaintances (50%). Finding pathways to connect farmers seeking land and landowners seeking to rent/lease their land would greatly benefit both parties.

**Rented farmland is more important to full-time farmers than it is for part-time farmers.** 54% of full-time farmers said that losing the land they rent/lease would have a serious to moderate impact on their operations while 30% of part-time farmers said so. Solutions should be geared towards finding pathways for farmers to own their land or develop protections for conserving leased farmland.

**The loss of farmland and farm consolidation are perceived as the biggest challenges for farmers in 10 years.** 67% of full-time farmers and 50% of part-time farmers indicated large scale development are one of the biggest challenges they see in the future. Similarly, 58% of full-time farmers and 33% of part-time farmers see farm consolidation as one of the biggest issues. These responses demonstrate respondents desire solutions to the loss of productive farmland and to ensure farming is done by people who are from Erie County and who still view it as an economically viable way of life.

**Farmers see opportunities in diversifying their business.** 40% of all farmer respondents see agritourism as a key opportunity in the next 10 years, 67% see direct-to-consumer sales as a key opportunity, and 45% see product diversification as a key opportunity. Similarly, the most effective ways farmers see for retaining agriculture in Erie County is providing marketing support for agritourism, allowing farmers to operate non-agricultural businesses on their farm, and encouraging

# Farmer and Farmland Owner Survey Report

more farm stands and farmers markets. Collectively all these opportunities will allow farmers to expand the products and services they offer, thus improving the economic viability of their business.

## Farmer Survey Results

### Respondent Characteristics

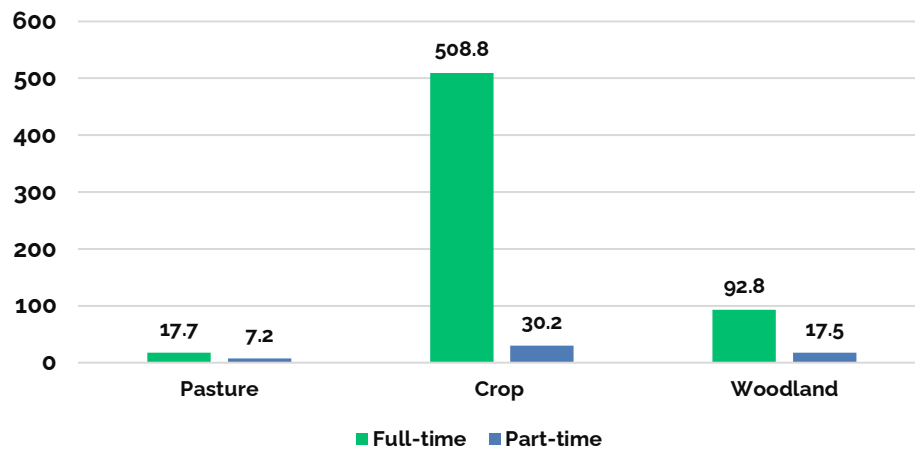
**1. Which of the following best describes you?**

Of the 166 survey respondents, 81 indicated they are either a full-time or part-time farmer. 55% (45) stated they far full-time while 45% (36) indicated they only work part-time at their farm.

**2. Please describe the land you use for farming**

Among survey respondents, full-time farms use on average more land than part-time farmers. Full-time farmers who responded to this survey use on average 508.8 acres of cropland, 17.7 acres of pastureland, and 92.8 acres of woodland. Conversely, part-time farmers use on average, 30.2 acres of cropland, 7.2 acres of pastureland, and 17.5 acres of woodland

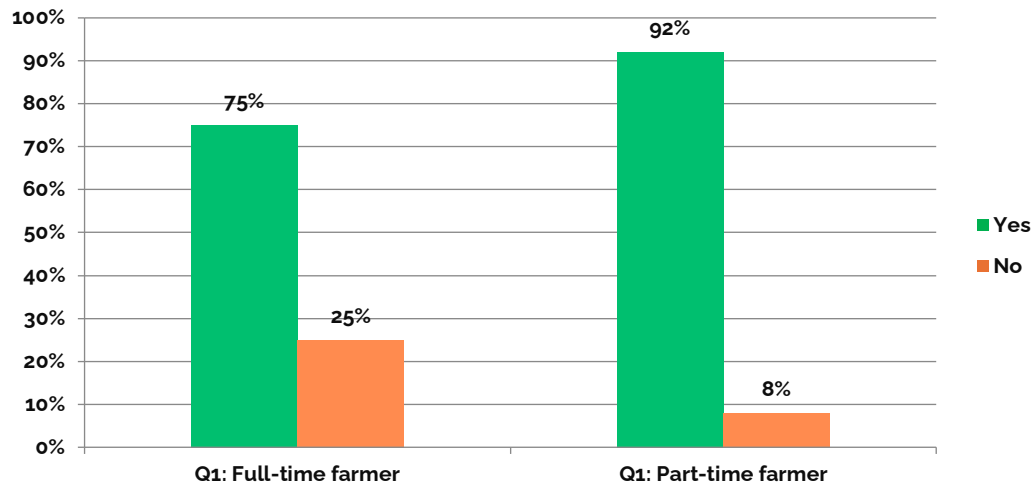
**Please Describe the Land You Use For Farming  
(Average)**



**3. Is all the farmland you work in Erie County?**

Among survey respondents, 75% of all the land full-time farmers work is within Erie County. Conversely, 92% of all the land that part-time farmers work on is in Erie County. Significantly more full-time farmers work on agricultural land that is outside of the county. Responses as to where else these farmers work, common responses included Niagara, Genesee, Wyoming, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua County.

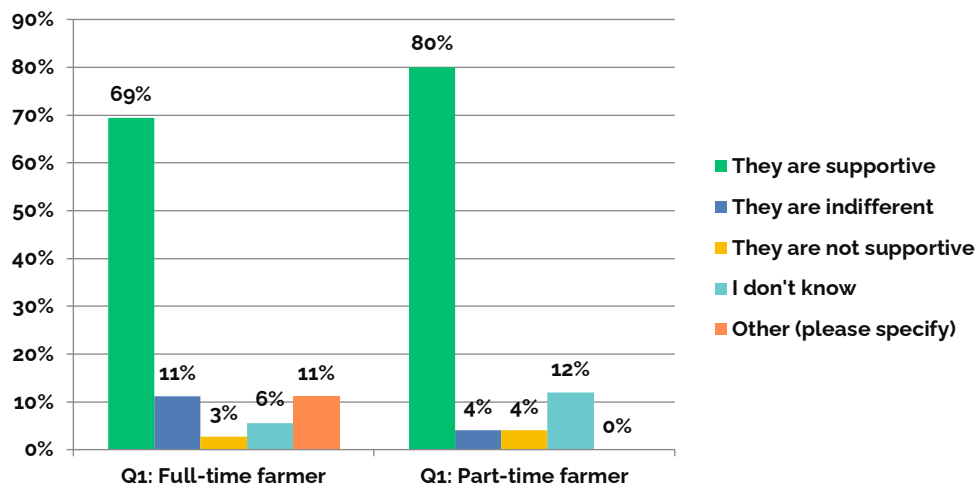
### Is all the farmland you work in Erie County?



#### 4. How do your neighbors perceive your farming operations?

Neighbors of farm survey respondents seem to be generally in support of their operations. 69% of full-time farmers said their neighbors are supportive while 80% of part-time farmers indicated likewise. Less than 5% of full-time and part-time farmers indicated that neighbors are not supportive.

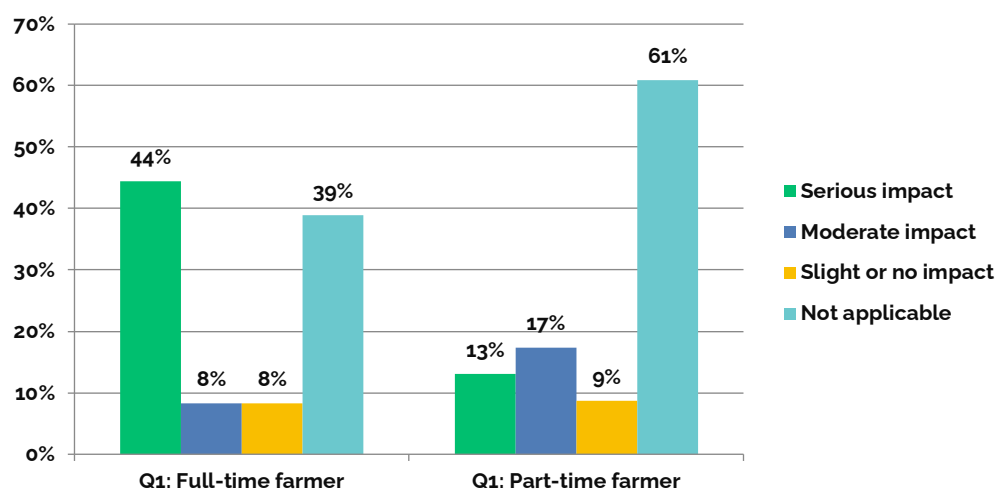
### How do you believe your neighbors perceive your farming operations?



### 5. How many acres do you lease and how would the loss of this land affect you?

Among survey respondents, 36 full-time farmers and 23 part-time farms indicated they lease land for their agricultural operations while . Full-time farmers rented on average 513 acres of land while part-time farmers rent 55 acres. When asked how impactful the loss of their rented land would be on their operations, 54% of full-time farmers who lease land said it would have a serious to moderate impact while 30% of part-time farmers who lease land said it would have a serious to moderate impact.

#### If your rented land were no longer available, how would that affect your operation?

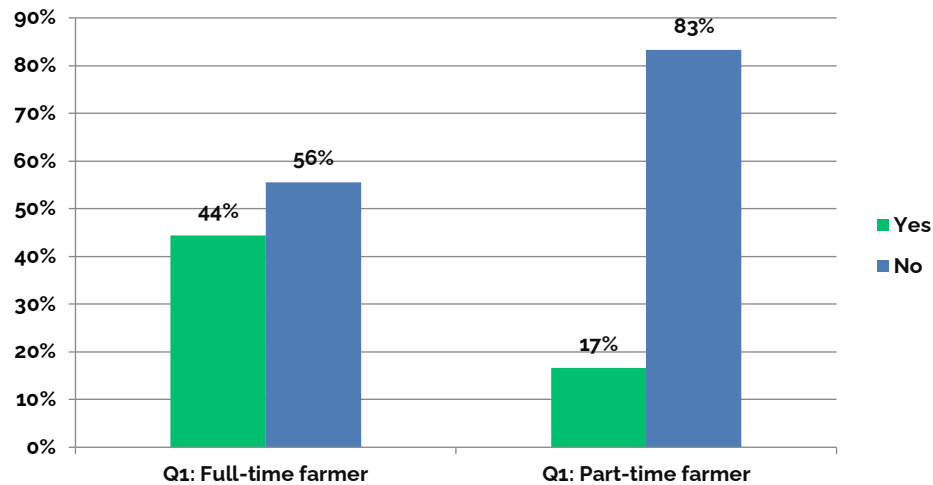


## Farming Operations

### 6. Does your farm have a written business plan?

Few farmers who responded to this survey indicated they have a written business plan for their operations. Common responses as to why they don't include no need to, not sure how to, it's verbal, "nonsense paperwork", and in the process of developing one. A total of 12 farmers (9 full-time and 3 part-time) did indicate they would be interested in receiving technical assistance to prepare a business plan.

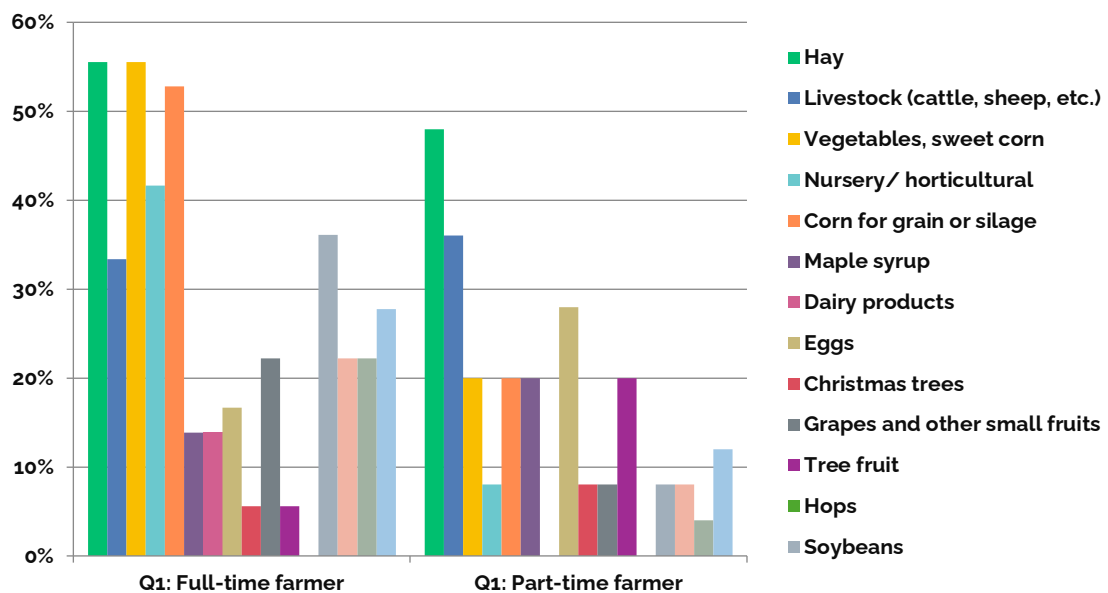
## Does your farm have a written Business Plan?



### 7. Please list the products produced on your farm

Among survey respondents, the most commonly produced products include hay (56% full-time & 48% part-time), livestock (33% full-time & 36% part-time) vegetables (56% full-time), and corn for grain/silage (53% full-time)/

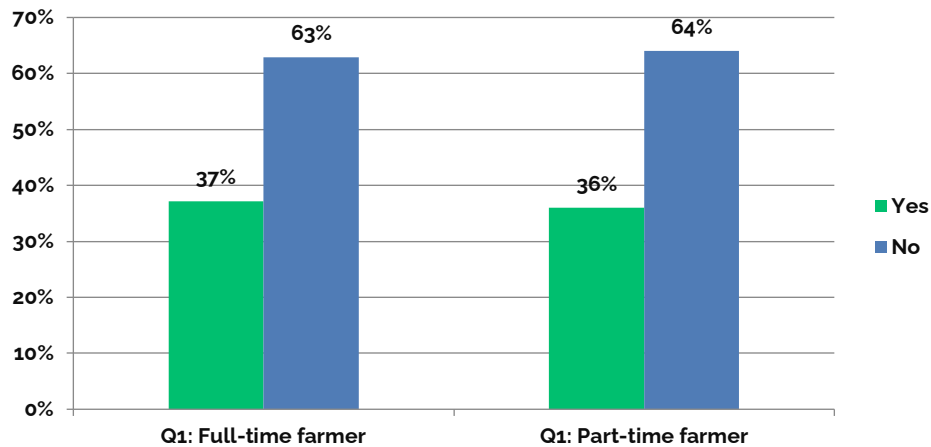
## Please list the products produced on your farm



### 8. Are some or all of your products organic?

The number of farmers who produce organic products is similar among full-time and part-time farmers with 36-37% of each indicating yes. Certified organic through the US Department of Agriculture or a farmed pledge that their products are organic were the two most common responses to what type of organic regulations they follow.

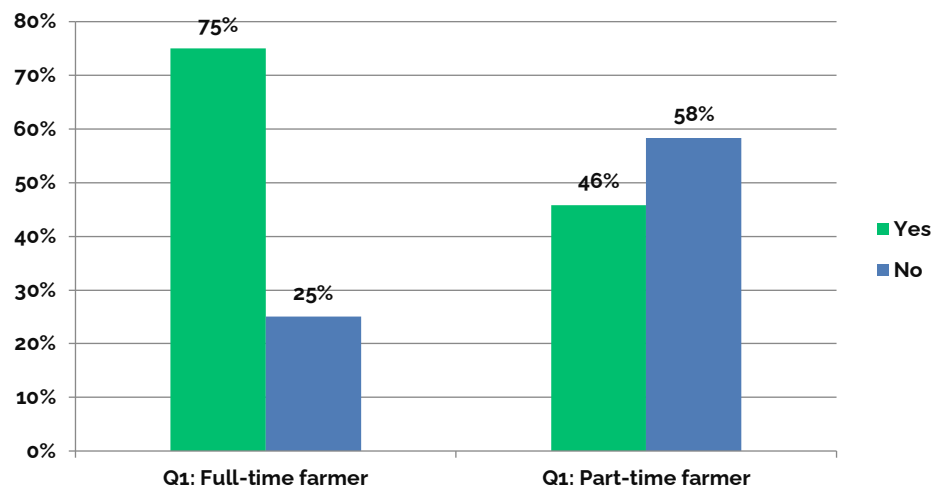
## Are some or all of your products organically grown?



### 9. Have you installed best management practices (BMPs) on your farm to protect water quality and the environment?

A majority of farmers responding to the survey have installed best management practices (BMPs). Among full-time farmers, 75% have installed while 46% of part-time farmers have. Common BMPs utilized include conservation tillage, cover cropping, crop rotation, nutrient management, buffer zones, soil testing, and tiling.

## Have you installed BMPS on your farm?

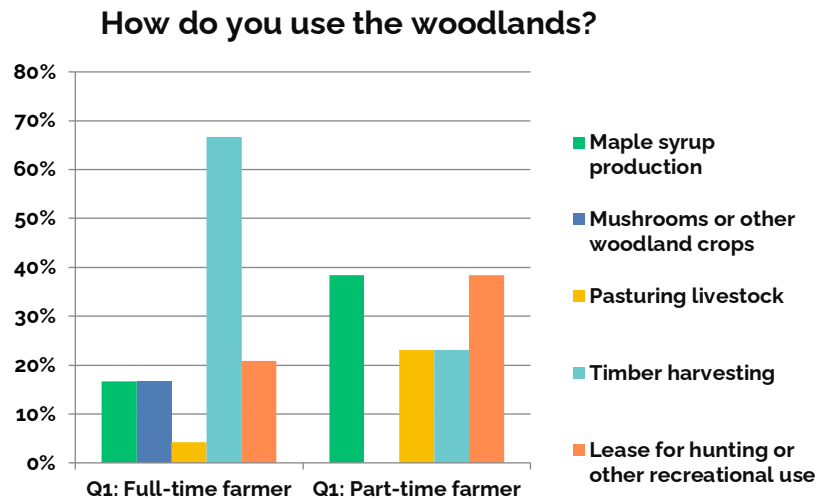
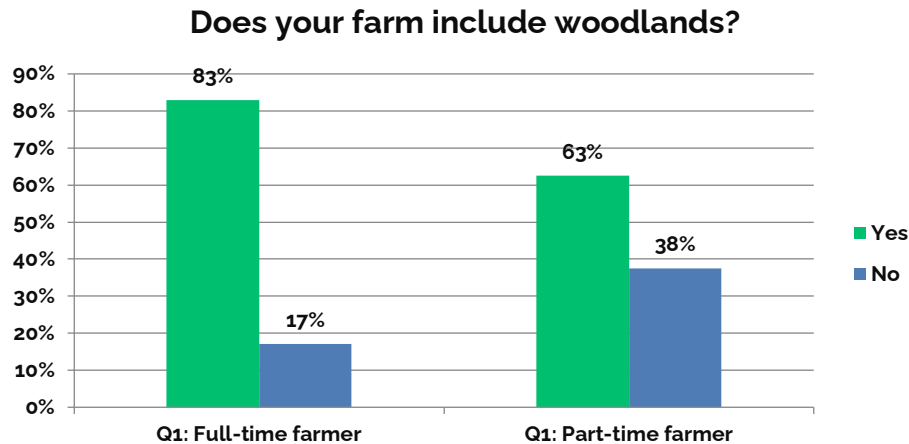


### 10. Do your farm have woodlands and how do you use your woodlands?



## Farmer and Farmland Owner Survey Report

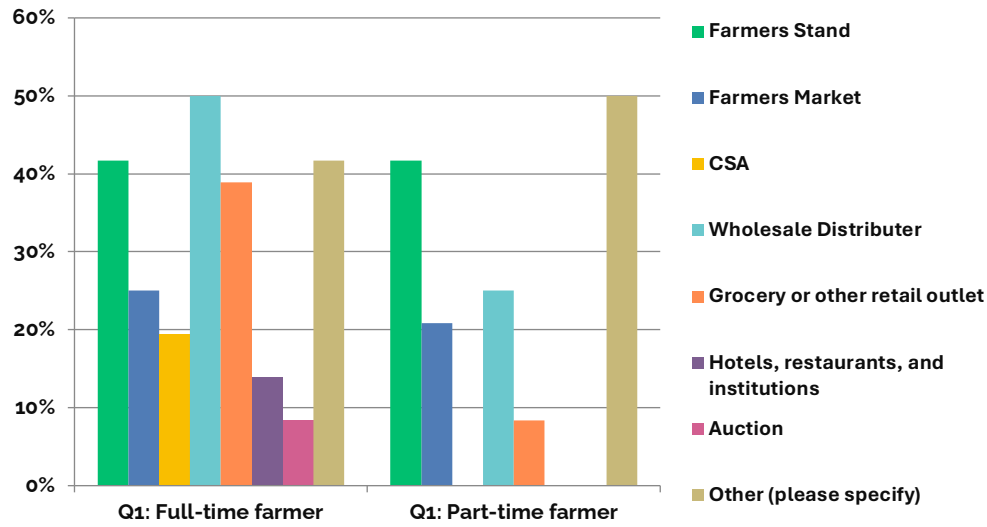
Among survey respondents, most full-time and part-time farmers have woodlands as part of their farms. Overall, 83% of full-time farmers and 63% of part-time farmers reported woodlands on their farms. Woodlands on farms are most used for timber harvesting (67% & 23%), hunting/recreation (21% & 38%), and maple syrup production (17% & 38%).



### 11. Where are the products you produce sold?

Market outlets where farmers sell their products is quite diversified among survey respondents. Full-time farmers who responded to the survey sell their products at a farm stand (42%), farmers market (25%), wholesale distributor (50%), grocery store (39%), and CSA (20%). Part-time farmers largely only sell their products through a farm stand (42%) or wholesale distributor (25%).

## Where are the products you produce sold?

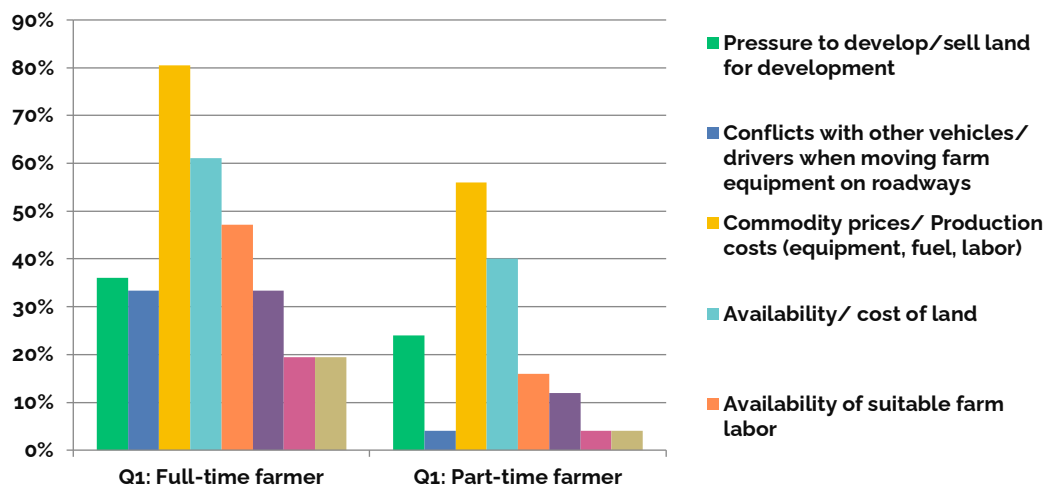


## Challenges and Opportunities

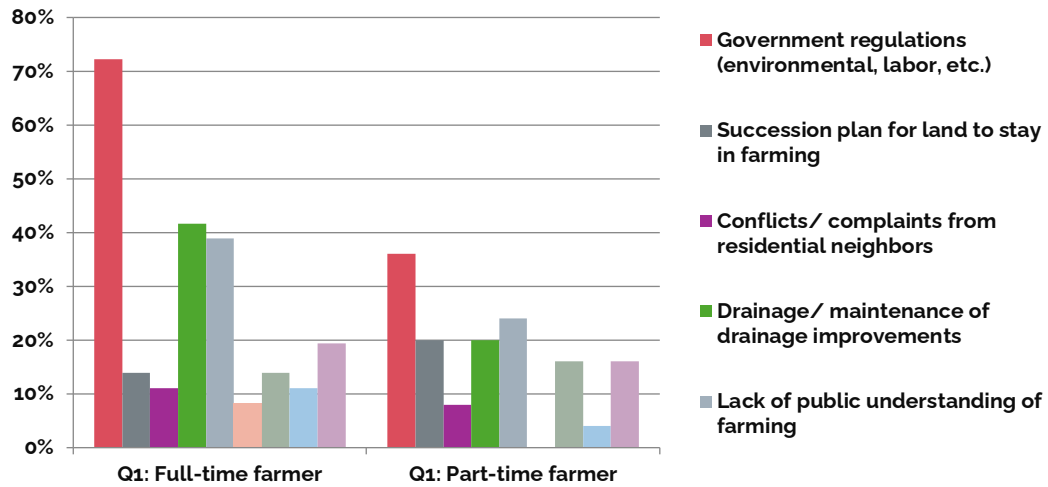
### 12. Which of the following are challenges to your farm operation?

Survey respondents reported a multitude of challenges to their farm operations. The most shared challenges for full-time and part-time farmers include commodity prices (81% & 56%), availability/cost of land (61% & 40%). Government regulation (72% & 36%) and pressure to sell/develop their land (36% & 24%).

## Which of the following are challenges to your farm operation?



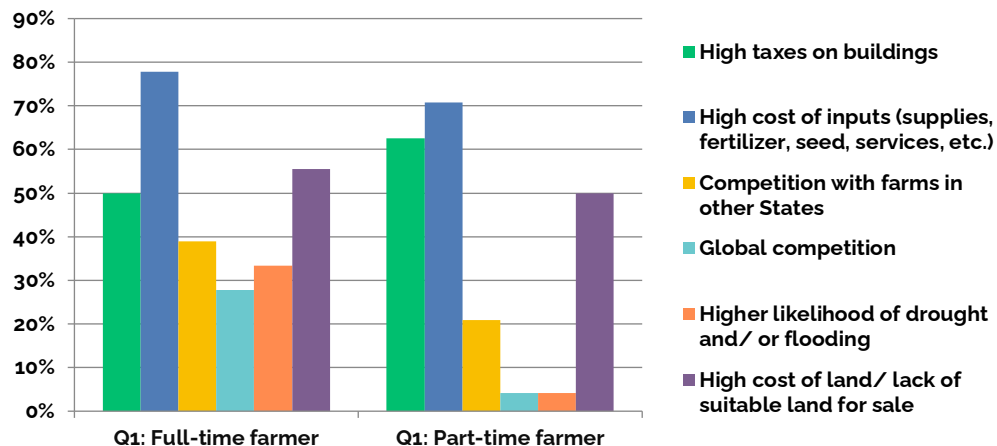
### Which of the following are challenges to your farm operation?



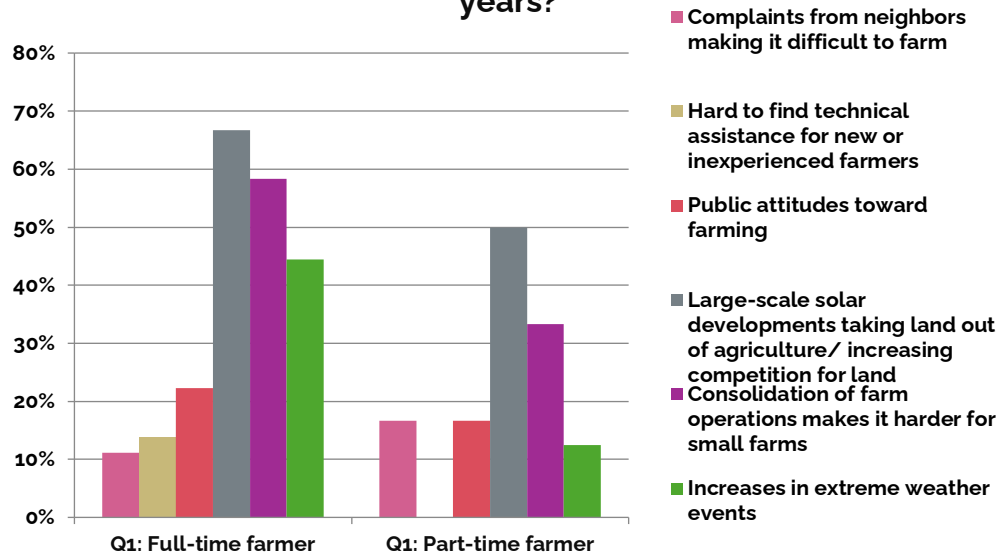
### 13. What are the biggest challenges to your farm over the next 10 years?

The challenges most commonly indicated for full-time and part-time farmers over the next 10 years include high taxes on building (50% & 62%), the cost inputs (78% & 71%), the cost of land (56% & 50%), large-scale solar developments (67% & 50%), and the consolidation of farms (59% & 33%).

### What do you see as the biggest challenges to your farm and other farms in the County over the next 10 years?



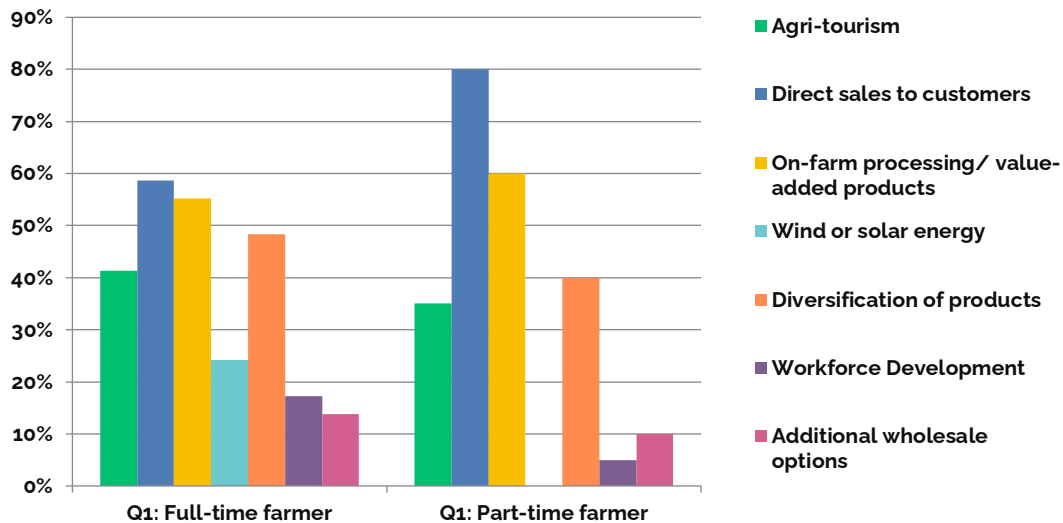
### What do you see as the biggest challenges to your farm and other farms in the County over the next 10 years?



#### 14. What are some opportunities you see for your farm in 10 years?

Farmer respondents identified several opportunities for their farms in the next 10 years. Responses with a large consensus among respondents include agritourism (42% & 35%), direct to consumer sales (59% & 80%), on-farm processing (55% & 60%), and diversification of agricultural products (48% & 40%).

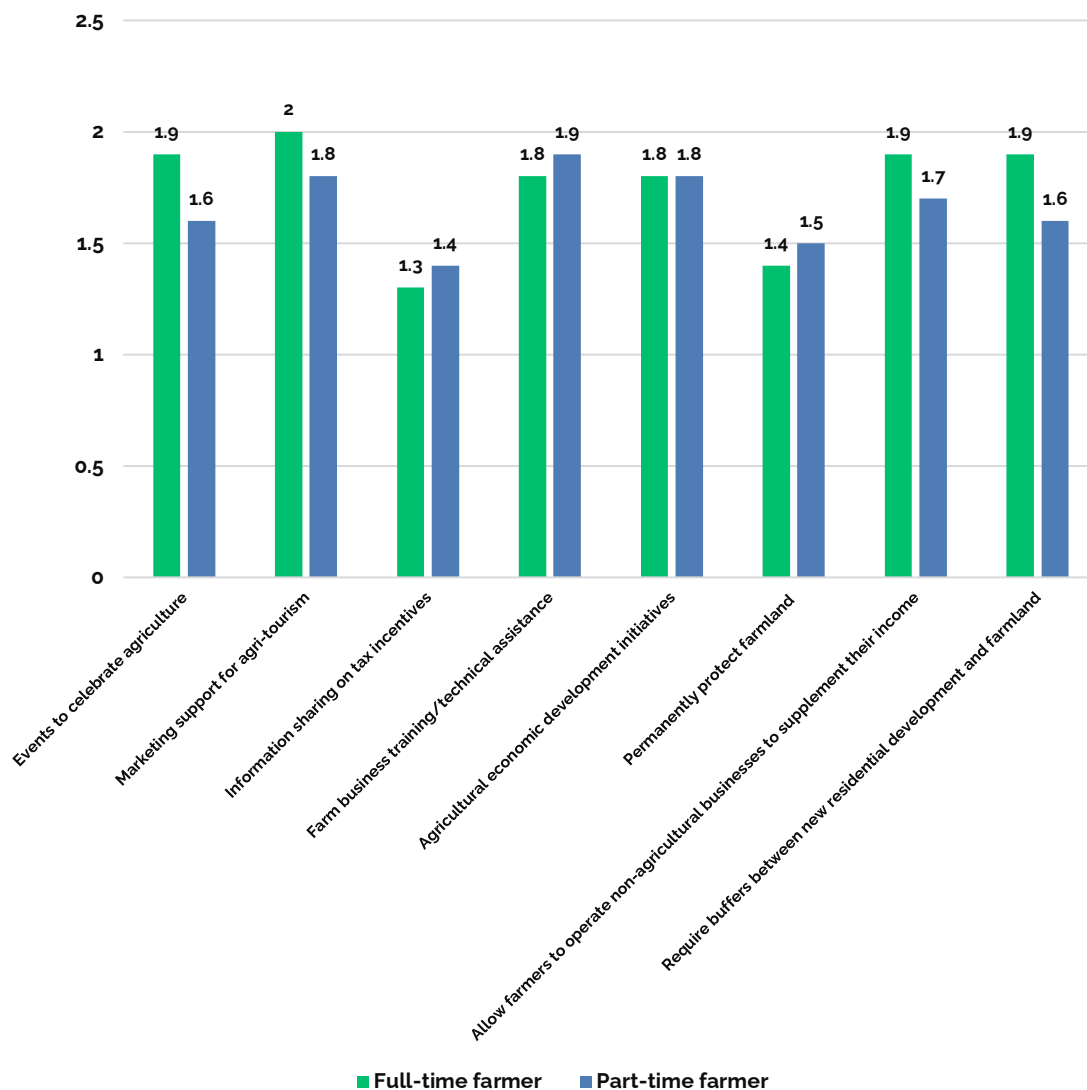
### What are some opportunities you see for your farm over the next 10 years?



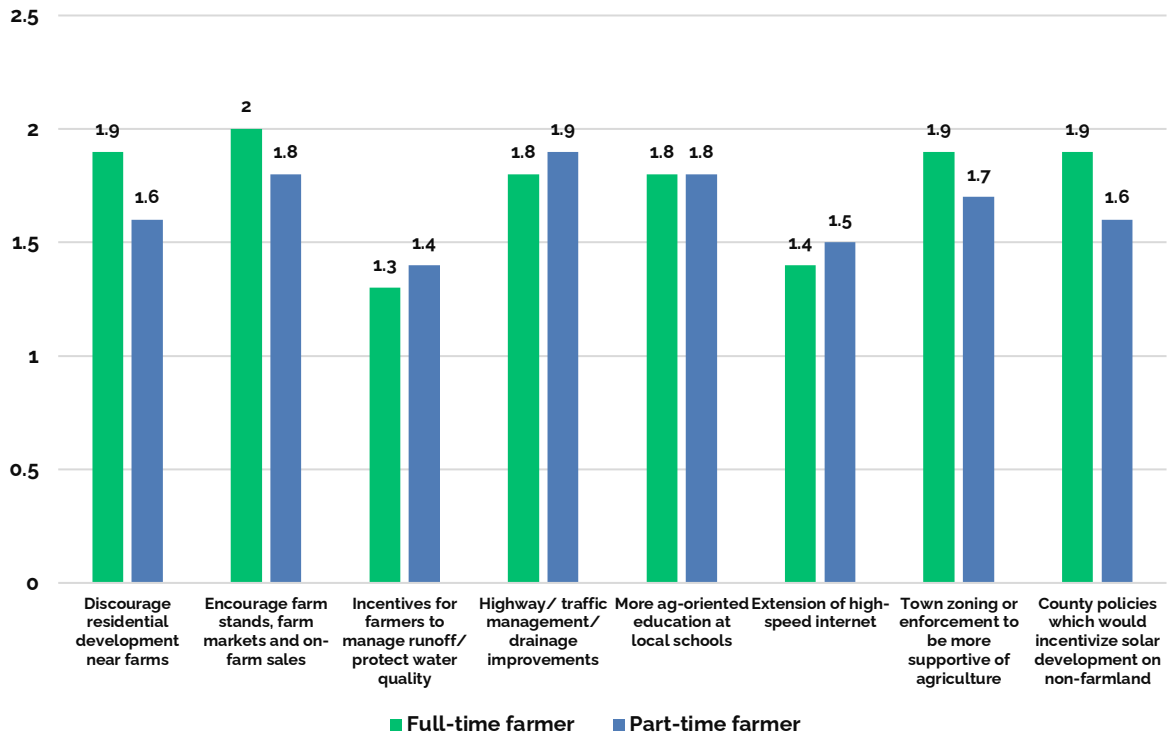
## 15. What strategy would be the best for retaining high quality farmland and supporting agriculture in Erie County?

Respondents ranked various strategies on a scale of very important (2), somewhat important (1), or not important (0). Responses were weighted to determine which strategies are the most supported. The most well-supported strategies among full-time and part-time farmer respondents include marketing support for agritourism (2 & 1.8), farm business training (1.8 & 1.9), agricultural economic development initiatives (1.8 & 1.8), allow farms to operate non-agricultural businesses (1.9 & 1.7), encourage more farm stands and market (2 & 1.8), highway and drainage improvements (1.8 & 1.9) and more agricultural education in schools (1.8 & 1.8).

### Which of the following would be most effective in supporting agriculture in Erie County?



**Which of the following would be most effective in supporting agriculture in Erie County?**



**16. What has the county done in the past that has been beneficial?**

Question 16 was an open-ended question where farmer respondents could indicate what they appreciate the County has done in the past to support agriculture. Common responses included:

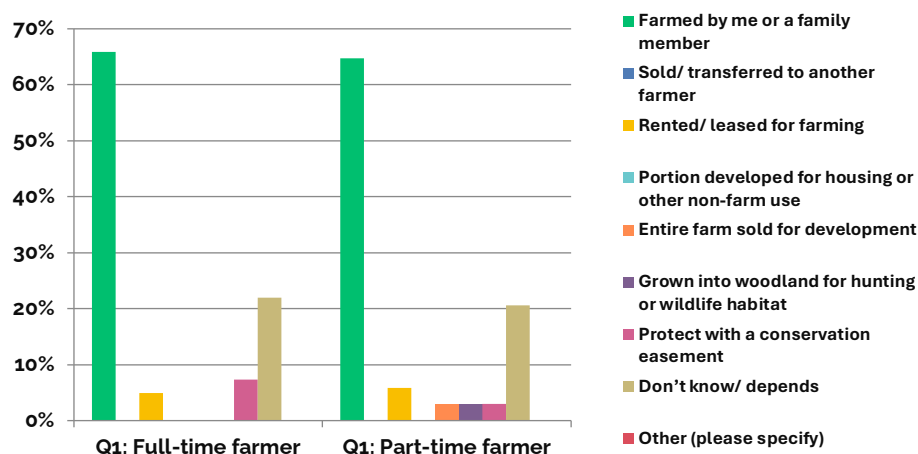
1. Erie Grown
2. Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board
3. Farmland Conservation Programs and support agencies (i.e. Soil and Water Conservation District)
4. Ag districts and agricultural tax exemption
5. November storm disaster relief

## The Future of Farming in Erie County

### 17. What do you think your farmland will be used for in 10 years?

When asked how their farmland may be used in 10 years, farmers in Erie County foresee their land to be continued to be used as productive agricultural land. No respondents indicated they would like to see their farmland used for new solar or residential development.

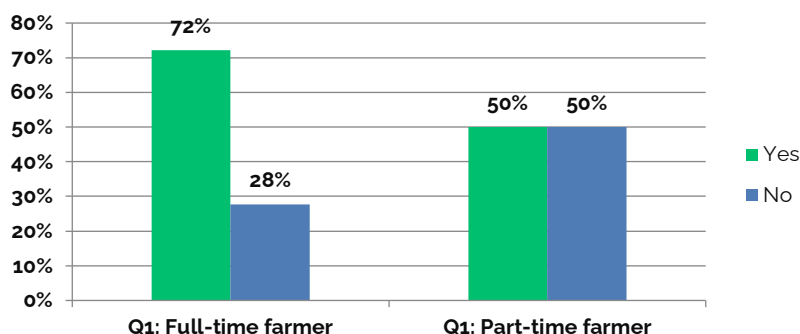
#### What do you think the farmland you own in Erie County will be used for in 10 years?



### 18. Do you have a plan for the future?

Following up on question 17, when asked if they have a plan ensure their land is continued to be used for farming, 72% of full-time farmers and 50% of part-time farmers said yes.

#### Do you have a plan to ensure that your land will continue to be farmed by future generations?



### 19. What can Erie County incentivize new farmer to take up the practice of farming?

Question 19 was an open-ended question asking respondents to indicate how the County can help incentivize new farmers take up the practice. Common responses included:

1. Tax incentives
2. Funding focused on people of color
3. Training and technical assistance
4. Make land available/cheaper
5. Develop a collective farming organization/incubator farms

## Farmland Owners Survey Results

In addition to asking questions for farmers in Erie County, this survey also sought to develop a better understanding from resident who own farmland that is rented/leased to farmers. Overall, 51 respondents indicated they rent/lease land to another farmer. Of these, 7 landowners also indicated they are part-time farmers themselves.

**1. How many acres of land do you own that you rent/lease to farmers?**

Respondent landowner who rent/lease land to farmers rent on average 38.7 acres of land. The amount of land rented to farmers ranged from 8 to 200+ acres.

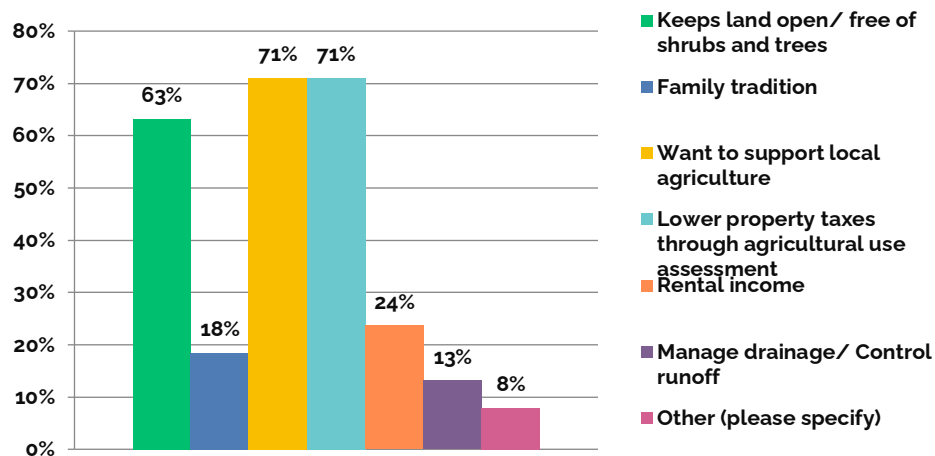
**2. How many farmers do you rent/lease from?**

All but two farmland owner respondents rent/lease their land to just one farmer. Other respondents rent/lease to two farmers.

**3. Why do you rent/lease our land for farming?**

The two primary reasons landowner respondents rent/lease their land for farming is because they like to support local agriculture and want to have their property taxes lowered through agricultural use exemptions.

**Why do you rent/ lease your farmland for farming?**

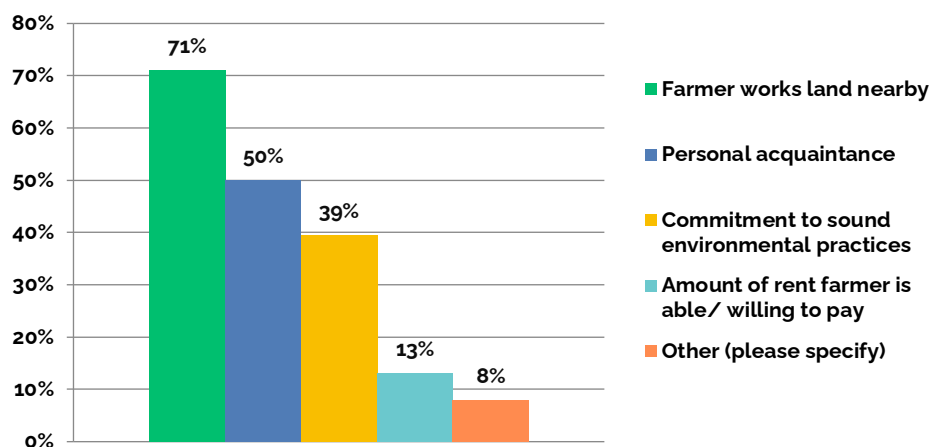


**4. What factors are important in selecting a farmer to rent to?**

The two most important factors in selecting a farmer to rent/lease land to is if the farmer already works land nearby (71% of respondents) and if they are a personal acquaintance (50% of respondents).



### Which of the following factors are important in selecting a farmer to rent to?



**5. Do you have a written lease agreement?**

Most landowners who responded to the survey do have a lease agreement with the farmer they rent/lease to (81%).

**6. Do you place any restrictions on farming practices on your land?**

Landowners who rent land to farmers largely do not place restrictions on farming practices on their land. Only 24% of landowner respondents indicated they did. Restrictions that were specified included organic only, having setbacks with forest boundaries, limited pesticide application, field crops only, and hay only.

**7. Are you considering removing your land from production in the next 5 years?**

Only 7% of landowners who currently rent/lease their land for agriculture are considering removing the land from production in the next 5 years. When probed as to what the future use would be, respondents most indicated it would be for personal use or it would be kept vacant. Few to no respondents indicated it would be used for residential development or renewable energy.

## Comments on Display Boards from Participants at Farmer Focus Group Meetings

Buffalo, 9/12/2024

Clarence 9/18/2024

Holland 9/25/2024

North Collins, 10/3/24

*NOTE: All comments were made by participants in the focus group meetings, transcribed from participant comments, notes left on boards and flip chart notes.*

**Which existing agriculture-related initiatives or programs in the WNY region inspire you? Think of successful campaigns, leaders, or organizations.**

### **City of Buffalo**

- Providence Farm Collective
- Massachusetts Avenue Project
- Groundwork Market Gardens
- Buffalo Go Green
- Grassroots Gardens
- PUSH Buffalo

### **Clarence**

- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Sheriff helps control traffic on Route 62, at request of growers
- Farm markets - offering places for farmers to sell their crops
- Emphasis on agri-businesses has been very important and successful

### **Holland**

- Providence Farm Collective
- Good Farmers Guild
- Farmland Access Support Network

### **North Collins**

- Providence Farm Collective

## What Has Worked and What Hasn't?

Share **three** challenges about farming in Erie County that you'd like to see changed.

### City of Buffalo

- Need for more attention to urban ag issues, i.e., water and garbage for urban sites
- Easier access to vacant land in the city

### Clarence

- 1. Zoning; 2. Agrobusiness red tape; 3. Tax incentives
- Large solar farms and the state over-riding local government zoning on large projects. Also using prime farmlands

### Holland

- Municipal laws can be weaponized by local leaders to make farming difficult
- Small farms/ farmers feel doomed/ frustrated/ hopeless

### North Collins

- 1. Sprawl  
2. Hostility of town boards (even in more agricultural communities) to farming

## What Has Worked and What Hasn't?

**Imagine you're reading a newspaper article about agriculture in Erie County 10 years from now. What do you want the headline to say?**

### **Clarence**

- That we still have farms and they are still strong and viable
- Farm & Ag Program now being offered through Harkness/ BOCES

### **North Collins**

- Erie County provides national model for getting beginning small farmers onto farmland

## Areas of Focus

Please review each area of focus and indicate how important you think it is in supporting agriculture in Erie County over the next 10-20 years. Indicate specific assets, challenges, or examples related to each focus area.



### Farmland & Environmental Protection

Preserve high quality farmland available for agricultural production consistent with protection of soil & water resources.

Not Important

Very Important



Specific assets, challenges, or examples include...

#### City of Buffalo:

- Entities that can afford to pay more than farmers can get growing crops - e.g., solar farms

#### North Collins

- Supporting scale-appropriate land access for beginning small farmers



City of Buffalo



Clarence



Holland



North Collins

## Areas of Focus

Please review each area of focus and indicate how important you think it is in supporting agriculture in Erie County over the next 10-20 years. Indicate specific assets, challenges, or examples related to each focus area.

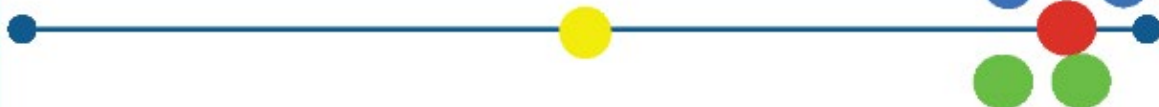


### Public Appreciation of Agriculture

Having more events that celebrate/promote agriculture, improving agricultural education in schools, and educating people on opportunities to purchase local.

Not Important

Very Important



Specific assets, challenges, or examples include...

#### City of Buffalo:

- Farm to School programs are doing a great job - should be supported as much as possible



City of Buffalo



Clarence



Holland



North Collins



## Areas of Focus

Please review each area of focus and indicate how important you think it is in supporting agriculture in Erie County over the next 10-20 years. Indicate specific assets, challenges, or examples related to each focus area.



### Integrated Agricultural Economy

Improve access to markets, storage/distribution, and support services.

Not Important

Very Important



Specific assets, challenges, or examples include...

#### North Collins

- Research Rust Belt Fiber Shed

City of Buffalo

Clarence

Holland

North Collins

## Areas of Focus

Please review each area of focus and indicate how important you think it is in supporting agriculture in Erie County over the next 10-20 years. Indicate specific assets, challenges, or examples related to each focus area.



### Farm Business Support


Technical assistance, funding, and other resources to assist farm operations.





Specific assets, challenges, or examples include...

#### City of Buffalo:

- Need grant writing assistance

 City of Buffalo

 Clarence

 Holland

 North Collins



## Other Comments

### Virtual Workshop

#### Land & Environment Approaches

- Focus on land accessibility in areas with low food access
- Commitment to uplift traditionally marginalized groups into ag space

#### Economic Viability Approaches

- Succession planning
- H-2A have minimums which then need to be applied to local workers, which is higher than minimum wage, which pushes operation costs
- Land prices are rising, and conservation easements do not necessarily fit
- Town of Clarence model
- Support for developing new farmers markets in areas with low fresh food access

#### Public Appreciation Approaches

- No appreciation for effort it takes to grow food and bring it to market
- Indifference towards consuming less nutritional and lower cost foods
- Deepen connections between agriculture and climate impacts to the public

#### Urban Agriculture Approaches

- Stronger agritourism around urban farming
- Require soil testing and soil education
- Provide career opportunities in areas other than rural areas
- Improve access to water/municipal user fee access to services
- Increase access to rural farms for urban residents
- Composting as a way to engage the public
- Universal consideration of urban agriculture as an integral part of the food system, such as by municipalities and government

## Other Comments

Buffalo 9/12/2024

- What is the issue with solar and farmland?
- What types of crops are popular in Erie County?
- Do any farms do seed saving?
- Rain Barrels for urban ag
- Information for home gardeners
- Education and community aspects should be discussed
- Classes/Education on how to build raised beds
- Workshops for families
- What is focus level on indoor farming?
- What about ground cover crops?
- Aeroponics as form of farming

## Other Comments

### Clarence 9/18/2024

- Highlight flooding issues for agriculture
- Emergency, large scale livestock crematoriums/incinerators – farmers need to travel long distances for these services
- Agricultural education for CEOs and public decision makers
- Bring zoning into compliance with Agricultural Districts law
- Continue to explain ag districts
- Town legislative tours
- Funding for SWCD
- Small scale meat processing (e.g., hot dogs from local beef)
- Public education on animal welfare
- General farming practices – slow moving tractors
- Good working relationship between Sheriff officers and farmers – use of roads by farm vehicles
- Ag related businesses are not covered by Agricultural District protections
- No exceptions to land protection laws – also a limit to new and beginning farmers
- Incubator farms not eligible for Agricultural District protections
- Lack of soil testing in urban areas
- Grow cooperative (Ellicottville Greens)
- Creek backup and flooding – leads to introduction of
- Urban sprawl
- Impervious surface increasing
- Encourage permeable pavement, limit impervious surfaces
- Farms need many skilled workers – not only field crews - such as mechanics, CDL, industrial HVAC, other maintenance
- Ag is becoming more technologically advanced
- Rural internet access – Erie Co. is currently putting in infrastructure with fed funding
- Lack of 3 phase power in southern Erie Co
- Utility companies – high cost to upgrade power
- Train Local officials on animal welfare practices to avoid neighbor conflicts

## Other Comments

Holland 9/25/2024

- Support side businesses on farms. See Marilla's Comprehensive Plan and zoning that supports this.
- Municipal comprehensive plans need to include policies in support of agriculture
- Farm labor is big concern. Farms need to provide year-round housing for employees to attract workers
- East Aurora High School has a Sustainable Farming course. Students have constructed high tunnels, raise broilers, and recently acquired a heifer to raise.
- Dairy farm consolidation is affecting smaller farms.
- Large processors make it difficult for small businesses to succeed
- Composting facility in Orchard Park – could it be made available to local farmers/ slaughter facilities so they don't have to transport so far?
- See Allegany County's Farm Bureau request for NYS legislation
- Market local products in New York City

## Other Comments

North Collins, 10/3/24

- Farm consolidation – large entities make it difficult for smaller farms to acquire land, compete economically
- Fiber processing facility needed in region – closest are in Ohio and Vermont.
  - Research Rust Belt Fiber Shed – may be opportunity for processing facility in region, as no similar facilities between Ohio and Vermont
- Lack of meat processing facility – hard to schedule, farmers need to travel long distances to take animals for processing
- Large dairy consolidation and business practices of processing facilities causing dairy farms to go out of business
- NYS has obligation to help farmers – [see Article 1, Section 3: Declaration of policy and purposes in NYS Agriculture & Markets Law]
- Opportunities for farmers to sell directly to consumers, for those consumers who are willing to pay higher prices
- Transferring farmland to young or beginning farmers – farmland owner needs to be properly compensated

## Potential Approaches

This plan will recommend a variety of approaches to support agriculture in Erie County. Using the sticky dots, indicate which approaches you think would be the most effective in Erie County.



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