

Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program Survey: Highlighted Findings

American Farmland Trust and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, with support from Very Alive, teamed up in April 2006 to survey owners of farms that were preserved through the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. A 79 question survey was mailed from the CT Department of Agriculture and included a cover letter from the Commissioner. Completed surveys were mailed to American Farmland Trust and were kept anonymous. Of 217 surveys mailed, 78 were returned, for a response rate of 36%.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

- 65% of survey respondents were the original sellers of the development rights; 29% had purchased their farmland after it had been protected through the program.
- 38% of respondents work more than 20 hours per week at a non-farm job.
- 45% reported that someone else in their household is employed by non-farm work for more than 20 hours per week.
- 51% indicated that less than 10% of their total family income is derived from farming

Characteristics of Surveyed Farm Operations

- Among respondents, the average acreage of their entire farm—not limited to protected acreage—is 103, with a range of 10 acres to 800 acres.
- On average, 57% of protected acreage is actively farmed.
- 26% reported that they rent all of their protected land for agricultural purposes; 22% rent a portion of their protected land and farm the remaining land themselves.
- 23% characterized the area in which their farm is located as a strong farming community; 57% described the area as some farming in an increasingly suburban community; 17% characterized the area as very little farming in a suburban community; 3% described the area as an urban community.

| Primary Use of Protected Farmland | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 25% Hay-other feed for on-farm use | 5% Other fruit production |
| 21% Dairy | 4% Beef |
| 12% Hay-other feed for sale | 4% Tobacco |
| 5% Horses | 4% Vegetable production |
| 5% Orchards | 4% Idle land |

Program Perceptions of those who Sold the Development Rights

- 46% reported that they were very satisfied with the program; 43% were somewhat satisfied or mixed in their impressions; 10% were somewhat dissatisfied.

| Challenges with the Program¹ | |
|--|---|
| 37% | Frustrations over easement restrictions |
| 24% | Length of time to complete process |
| 11% | Frustrations working with multiple parties |
| 11% | High capital gains taxes |
| 8% | Issues with program uncertainty, such as funding and price per acre |
| 11% | Other |

- If given the opportunity to do it all over again, 66% stated they would be very likely to participate in the program again; 15% would be somewhat likely; 11% are mixed: about equally likely and unlikely; 10% would be unlikely².

| Most Important Factor in Decision to Participate in Program³ | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 60% | Preserve farmland from development |
| 15% | Preserve farmland for family |
| 13% | Pay debts |
| 4% | Expand farm operation |
| 0% | Provide for retirement |

- Had there been no opportunity to sell their development rights, 27% of respondents said they would have sold the entire farm; 25% would have sold some of the land.

| Primary Use of Program Proceeds | |
|--|---|
| 36% | Paid down debt |
| 26% | General savings or investment |
| 11% | Constructed or improved farm buildings or other agricultural structures |
| 9% | Retirement fund |

¹ Summary of write-in responses; responses add to more than 100% due to rounding.

² Responses add to more than 100% due to rounding.

³ Summary of write-in responses.

Attitudes

- 78% of those who purchased land already enrolled in the program said that having the land already protected made the land affordable; 11% reported that the protected status created appraisal problems.⁴
- When asked if owning a protected farm had an impact on their family's ability to stay in farming for the long term:
 - 49% said it had a very positive impact;
 - 31% cited a somewhat positive impact;
 - 12% reported no impact;
 - 2% stated a negative impact.
- When asked if owning a protected farm would have an impact on whether they passed the farm on to their children or other family member:
 - 56% indicated it would make it more likely;
 - 20% reported it would make it somewhat more likely;
 - 15% said it would have no impact;
 - 5% stated it would make it less likely.
- When asked if owning a protected farm had an impact on their attitude toward farmland conservation:
 - 63% of respondents stated a very positive impact;
 - 17% reported a somewhat positive impact;
 - 10% cited no impact;
 - 6% said a negative impact.
- When asked if owning a protected farm had an impact on their attitude toward programs administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture:
 - 38% of respondents cited a very positive impact;
 - 39% reported a somewhat positive impact;
 - 9% stated no impact;
 - 8% said a negative impact.

⁴ Summary of write-in responses.

Recent Changes

- When asked what the most important change to the farm operation respondents had made as a result of having protected their farmland:
 - 39% reported no changes;
 - 17% constructed or improved farm buildings;
 - 16% bought new farm equipment;
 - 10% increased tillable acreage.
- In the last 5 years, 25% of respondents branched out into new crops or different livestock or created new products from current crops.
- In the last 5 years, 25% obtained new financing for their farm operation.
- Of those who tried to obtain financing:
 - 49% thought that having a protected farm had no impact on their ability to obtain a loan;
 - 14% reported a very positive impact;
 - 6% a somewhat positive impact;
 - 20% a somewhat negative impact;
 - 11% a very negative impact.

Future Plans

| Most Important Issue Facing Owners' Long-Term Viability in Agriculture | |
|---|--|
| 35% | Economic viability |
| 25% | Low prices for commodities/farm products |
| 19% | No successor for their farm operation |
| 6% | Nonagricultural development |
| 3% | Local zoning/ordinances |
| 3% | Lack of government support or resources |

- When asked if they are likely to buy more farmland in the next 5 to 10 years, 19% reported they are likely to do so; 75% are unlikely.
- Of those interested in purchasing more farmland, 48% expressed an interest in purchasing more protected land; 35% are not sure whether or not they would want to purchase protected land; 17% said they would not purchase already protected land.
- When asked about their plans over the next 5 to 10 years:
 - 77% said they are very likely to continue their current agricultural use;
 - 16% are somewhat likely;
 - 1% are somewhat unlikely;
 - 4% are very unlikely.
- Of those who plan to transfer their farm in the next 5 to 10 years:
 - 73% plan to convey it to a family member;
 - 11% plan to list it on the open market;
 - 4% intend to convey it to someone presently leasing the land.