

Small Farmers in the West: Profiling a Growing Segment



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Funding Agent



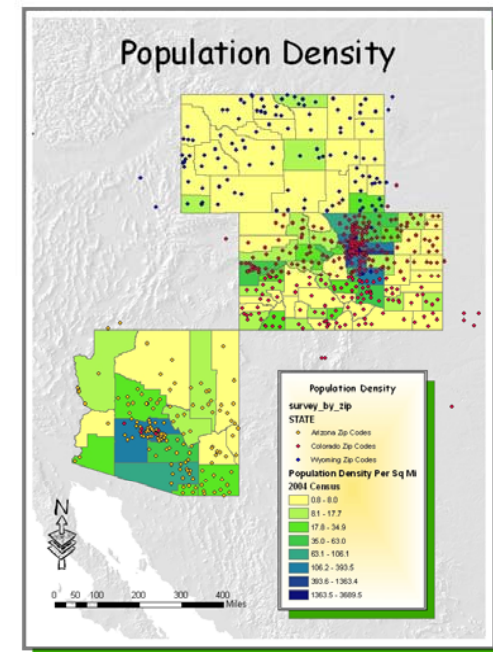
Summary of "Meet the Researcher" poster at AFBF Conference 2007, Salt Lake City, UT

The Issue

Farms with less than 180 acres account for almost 55 percent of all farms. Likewise, farms with sales of less than \$50,000 account for 78 percent of all farms. Both numbers are rising. But we know little about small farm operators and their characteristics. This project surveyed small farmers about their demographics, preferences for learning methodologies, greatest threats, and information demands. The project will aid in profiling this component of agriculture.

Data Source

- Target population was small farmers (< \$50,000 in annual sales) in Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming
- Survey was developed by the authors and conducted by NASS via letter and phone followup
- Mailed in Spring 2006
- Number of responses was 2,645
- Return rate was 53.6%



Motivation Profile

Reasons for Engagement Small farmers are engaged in their family business

- to support their lifestyle and their family,
- to utilize their skill and knowledge, and
- to make money.

With that, they believe that financial risk is their greatest challenge followed by risks associated with the production of their commodity/product.

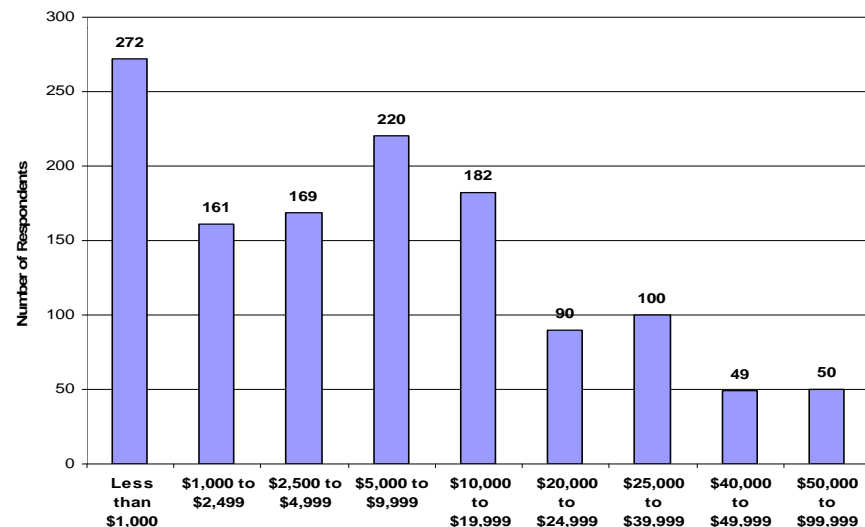
Level of Confidence Overall, they are confident of their ability to manage their family business and achieve their goals; though somewhat less confident to deal with changes in the business environment. They appear optimistic about their ability and the future of the business. However, they appear less comfortable in balancing work and family demands.

Personal Enjoyment They enjoy what they do and strive for quality in the family business. For the most part, they do not envision themselves doing anything else.

Owner Profile

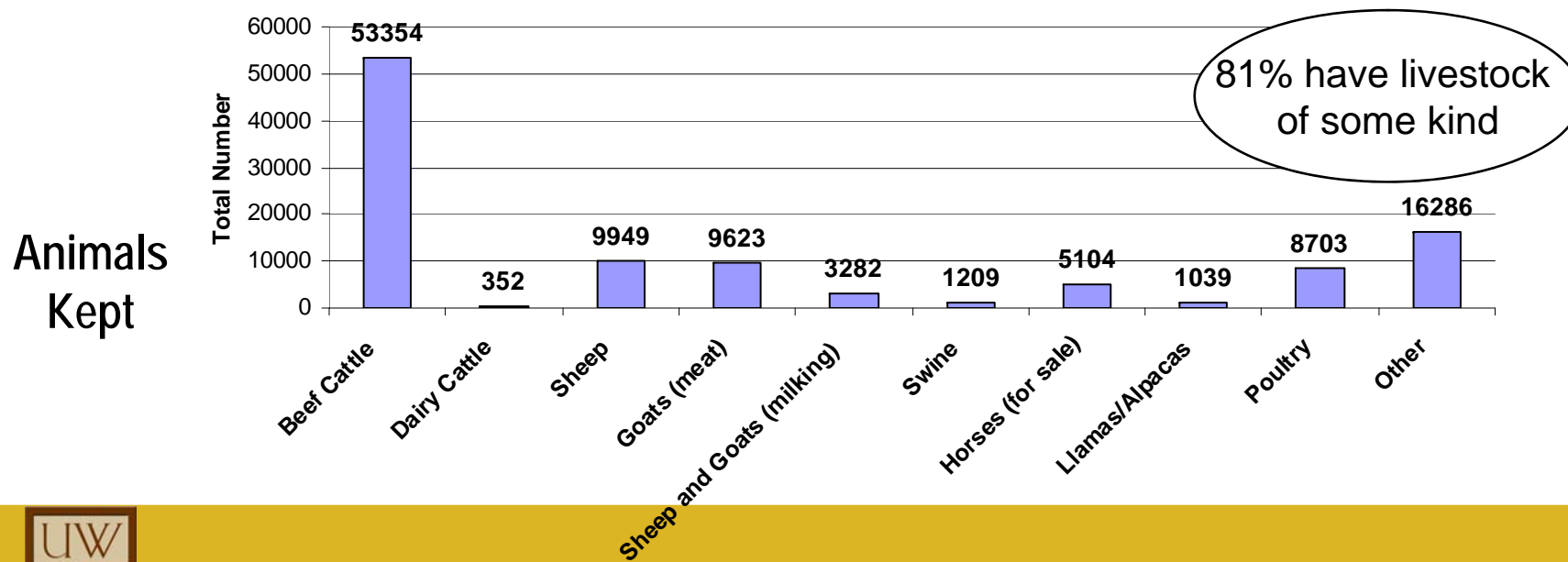
- 60% of the operators belong in the age group 45-64
- Most are white males (77% of primary operators) and well educated
- On average they have lived 19 years on property
- On average they have lived 31 years in the community
- For 16% of the operations, the primary residence is not located on the property. The average distance between the two is 79 miles
- On average, the property headquarters is 25 miles away from the nearest metro area
- 81 percent indicated that less than 20% of their household income comes from agricultural sales
- Two thirds of the respondents (822) reported having gross farm and ranch sales of less than \$10,000 in 2005

Farm/ranch based Gross Income in 2005
(according to Schedule F)



Small farmers are very likely to have livestock – and it is likely to be cattle.

- 81% of respondents keep animals. About half of animal keepers hold cattle – this is 43% of all respondents.
- The average cattle herd is 39 head.
- The segment that kept horses generally for pleasure or work (i.e. not for sale) was about 20% of the livestock holders or 16% of the surveyed population.
- A common horse herd is 4 head.



Crop Production Profile

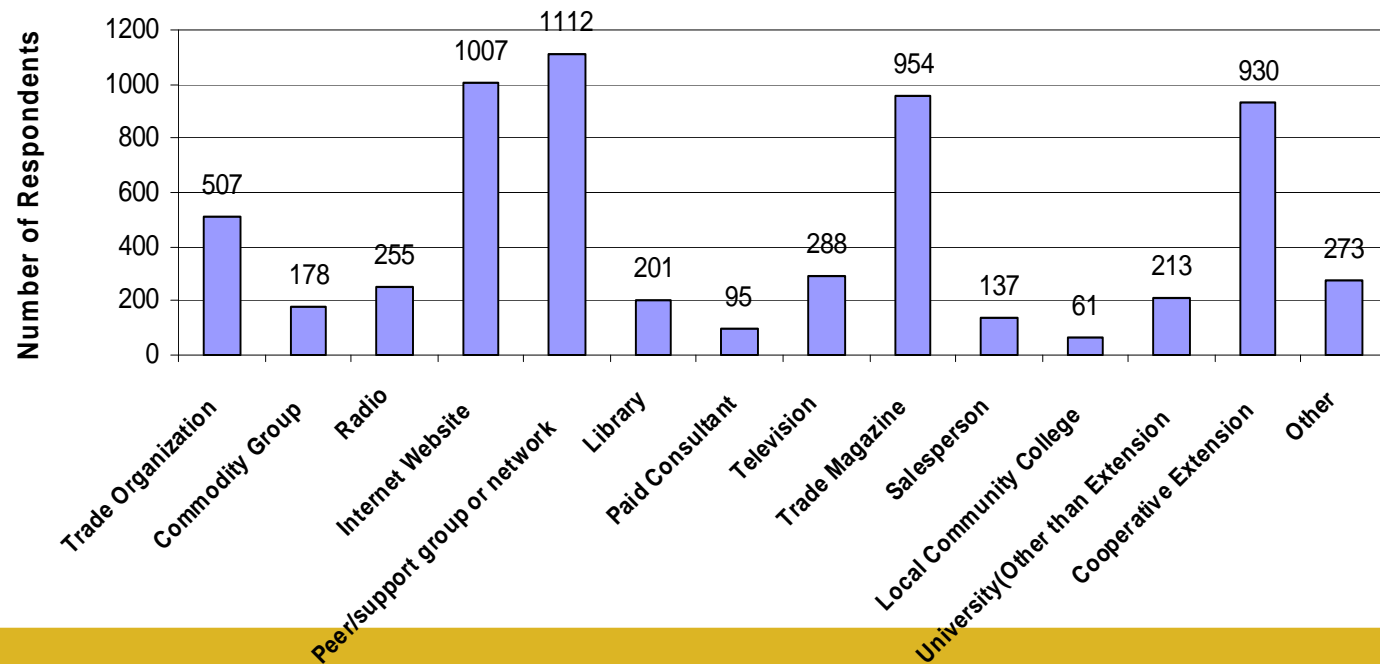
- Small farmers are somewhat likely to have crops: 53% produce crops. The crop is likely to be about 50 acres of hay or 60 acres of alfalfa.
- 74% of crop producers irrigate.

Average Crop Acreages		
	Alfalfa & alfalfa hay mixtures	60
	Mixed/other hay	51
	Corn	156
	Sorghum (grain)	53
	Small grains	118
	Dry beans	59
	Fruits	7.1
	Vegetables	2.5

Information Source Profile

- Small farmers prefer information from peers and collection points, such as trade magazines. They prefer print delivery.
- Of the information they use, they desire improved and more understandable content.

Preferred Information Sources
(3 choices could be marked)



Summary

As the rural West experiences demographic and economic transformations, both commercial and small agriculture has changed. This survey profiled the small acreage producer. Future work will deepen the analysis of the survey and extend it to resource advisors who can use it to better tailor their content and delivery.

More information will be released at
www.ruralfamilyventures.org