



# Small Farmers in the West: Profiling a Growing Segment

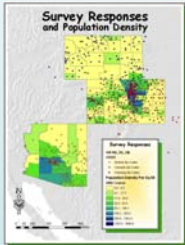
## THE ISSUE

Although we know a great deal about agriculture's contribution to the economy and its challenges, we know much less about the changing make-up of 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 the identification of new Extension clientele and their learning preferences.

There are 48,085 farmers and ranchers in the states of Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming. 2002 Census data indicate a decreasing number of "traditional" producers and significant increases in small farms. 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.

## THE SURVEY

- Targeted farms with less than \$50,000 in annual sales in Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming
- 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%

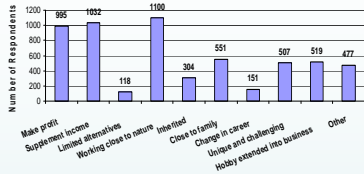


- Surveyed topics included:
- Reasons for Involvement
  - Informational Preferences
  - Resource Management
  - Crops
  - Animals
  - Income Issues
  - Demographics

## 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.

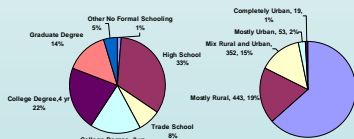
## Why Small Farmers Engage in Rural Family Enterprises



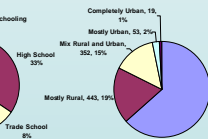
## OWNER PROFILE

- 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 7.9 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

## Education



## Location of Property



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

