

# WHO ARE TODAY'S FARMERS AND WHAT ARE THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

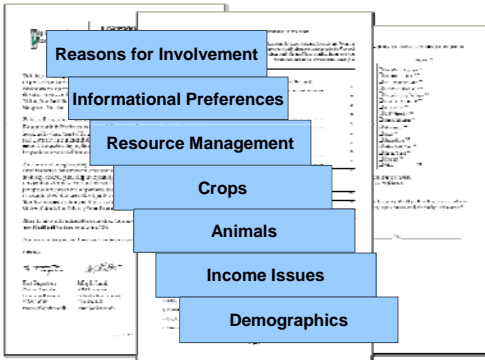
## The Issue

The rural, western United States has experienced dramatic demographic and economic transformations over the past decade. Although much is known about agriculture's contribution to the economy and its challenges, much less is known about the changing make-up of small farm operators and their characteristics.

- ❖ There were 48,085 farmers and ranchers in the states of Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming in 2002.
- ❖ Census data indicate a decreasing number of "traditional" producers and significant increases in small farms.
- ❖ Farms with sales of less than \$50,000 account for 78% of all farms in 2002.

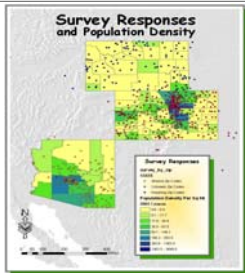
## Discovery – The Survey

Educators and researchers from three western land-grant universities developed and distributed a seven-part survey to farm operators – with annual sales less than \$50,000 – in Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming. The survey was designed to collect information about today's agricultural operators in an attempt to discover new clientele for Cooperative Extension services across the West.



The statistically valid survey was conducted in the Spring 2006 by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Surveys were allocated based on small farm populations in each state and geographic representation.

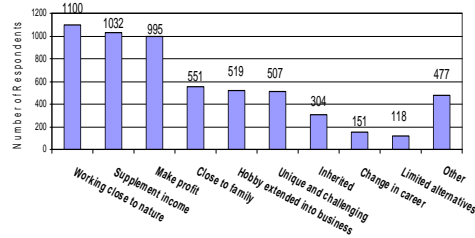
Surveys were mailed in the Spring of 2006. A postcard reminder followed the survey mailings by one week. NASS conducted telephone interviews with non-respondents about one month after the initial mailing.



Surveys Mailed.....4,939  
 Surveys Returned.....2,447  
 Surveys & Interviews.....2,645  
 Return Rate..... 53.6%

## Why Farm or Ranch

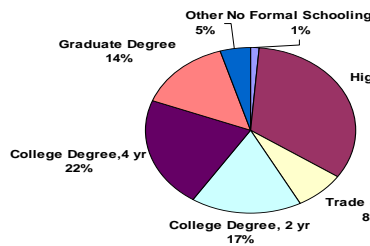
Western farmers and ranchers, according to their survey respondents, indicate they are engaged in their particular family business to (1) work close to nature and (2) earn money and supplement family income.



## Operator Profile

Primary operators on western U.S. small farms/ranches typically:

- Have lived on their properties for an average of 19 years and in the community for 31 years.
- Are well educated Caucasian males.
- 56 years of age or older (46%).
- Have their spouses help manage the family business.



## 71% of operator households have off-property jobs

- ✓ Average commuting distance is 29 miles (46.67 km)
- ✓ Most travel only 10 miles (16.09 km)
- ✓ Some do not travel any distance at all

## Reasons for Engagement

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

## Level of Confidence

- Small farmers are confident in their ability to manage their family business and achieve their goals.
- Small farmers are optimistic about their ability and the future of the business.
- Small farmers 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.

## Receiving Information

- Small farmers prefer information from peers and collection points, such as trade publications.
- They prefer print delivery.

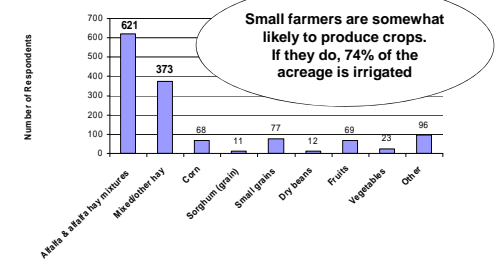
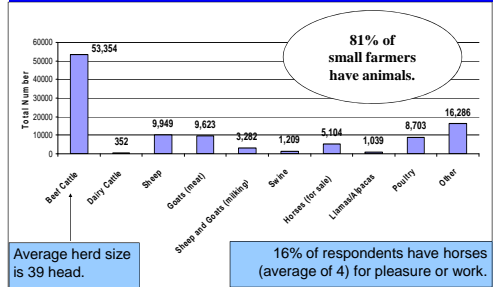


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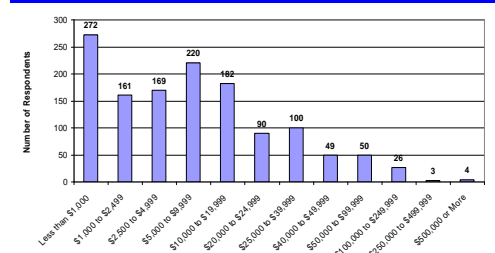
## Resource Management

- Respondents typically:
- ✓ Own and manage 40-acre (16.12 hectares).
  - ✓ Do not produce commodities sold in organic or other niche markets.
  - ✓ Use chemicals to control weeds but do not hold a chemical applicators license.
  - ✓ Do not irrigate their pastures.
  - ✓ Graze only their own property. Very few lease public lands.
  - ✓ Use little pasture management strategies such as rotational grazing or leaving some grass for re-growth.

## Livestock & Crop Production



## Farm/Ranch Income



## For More Information

This information will help guide content and delivery to reach the small farmer audience. Future work will deepen the analysis of the survey and extend it to resource advisors.

[www.RuralFamilyVentures.org](http://www.RuralFamilyVentures.org)

