

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

Survey Responses

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

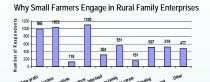
 Resource Management •Crops Animals Income Issue: Demographics

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





•60% of the operators belong in the age group 45-64 •Most are white males (77% of primary operators) and well educated

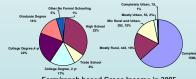
•On average they have lived 19 years on property •On average they have lived 31 years in the community •For 16% of the operations, the primary residence is not located on the property. The average distance between the

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

Location of Property Education



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





cattle. They might also irrigate crops.

Cattle production

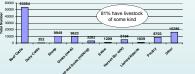
•81% of respondents keep animals. About half of animal keepers hold cattle - this is 43% of all respondents.

•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.

•The average horse herd is 4 head.

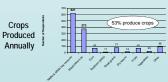
Animals Kept



Irrigated crop production 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.

Crop





Vegetables 2.5

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFILE

·Respondents typically own and manage 40 acre tracts of land and lease little, if any, additional acreage.

 They are not producers of commodities sold in organic or other niche markets.

 Properties are not typically enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

 Chemicals are often used to control weed problems on these rural properties. However, few property owners hold a chemical applicators license

Water Use

•Water sources on small properties typically include wells and surface water. Respondents reported that surface water is not usually present on lands bordering their properties.

•The majority of respondents do not irrigate their pastures (58%). Of those that do, 10 acres were typically irrigated.

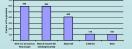
Graze Property Hard

Small farmers graze their own property - very few have leases on public property.

They'll typically graze pasture 7.5 months a year and leave no or almost no grass left

Their pastures have a 50/50 chance of being managed with a pasture management system - if a plan is in place it will likely have 3 pastures

Annual Pasture Eaten by Livestock



Purchase Feed

Small farmers purchase most of their animal feed, and typically from a neighbor.

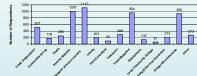
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INFORMATION PROFILE

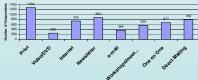
Small farmers prefer information from peers and collection points, such as trade magazines. They prefer print delivery

Of the information they use, they desire improved and more understandable content.

> Preferred Information Sources (3 choices could be marked)



Preferred Ways to Receive Information



FUTURE WORK

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.

The rural West has experienced dramatic demographic and economic transformations in the past decade. As both commercial and small agriculture changes, so must the methods and content of educators.



