

Agricultural Enterprise Survey: Summary of Responses

February 5, 2018

Survey conducted by Vermont Farm to Plate, NOFA-VT, Rural Vermont and VT Farm Bureau

A 15-question survey was distributed, via email and an online link, through various farmer networks including Rural Vermont, NOFA-VT, Vermont Farm Bureau, the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association, and the Farm to Plate Agritourism listserv between January 30 and February 4, 2018.

290 responses to the Survey were received.

Respondents were from **13 out of 14 counties**, with the highest response rate coming from Chittenden, Washington, Addison and Windsor counties. The only county not represented in the survey was Essex.

47% of respondents said they are currently operating some type of accessory on-farm business. **80%** of respondents said they are interested in starting an accessory on-farm business of some kind.

90% of all respondents said that a goal of their accessory on-farm business is to **“Earn additional income to increase viability of my farming operation.”**

From a list of 8 possible options, the highest percentage of respondents cited **“Uncertainty about regulations”** as the greatest barrier to success in both starting and operating an accessory on-farm business.

Many respondents, in additional comments they provided at the end of the survey, emphasized the need to reduce impediments and clarify the process for farmers seeking to start accessory on-farm businesses so those accessory businesses can contribute to the economic viability of their farms. Below is a selection of those comments:

“Farms may generate a lot of revenue on the aggregate but on the individual farm level, there is not a lot of return to the operator. Being able to host on-farm events which generate additional income but are not the primary business of the farm would be very helpful to the bottom line.”

“...farming requires so many different skills and revenue streams to maintain economic viability that any farm exploring these avenues to grow their business should be encouraged and helped along the way. Ultimately, it will strengthen our communities and local economy.”

“We have owned farm land for over 45 years. We want to keep the land open, viable and in organically sustainable use. We are having trouble earning enough to stay afloat so being

able to start a small 'accessory on-farm business' will open new ways to financially survive, afford taxes and keep our land open."

"It is important to us that the less impediments to initiating an on-farm accessory business the better. It is an option we should have to stay viable."

"Farms create stronger communities through the fresh local products we provide and the stewardship of our jobs, events and harvests. Help farms stay viable by maintaining a streamlined easy process for value added producing and eventing!"

"With the profits from small scale vegetable farming in Vermont being fairly small, the ability to increase annual revenue by adding other farm-related enterprises to our business could make our farm much more financially viable. I believe that Vermonters are proud of and emotionally attached to the idea of Vermont's agricultural heritage. Finding ways to make our farms profitable is important to the state's identity, as well as its economy and food security."

"Farming is tough - farmers buy at retail prices and sell product at wholesale prices. If the state wants to support agriculture (as a livelihood and tourist attraction) it needs to help farmers survive. The above proposals provide more diverse opportunities for farmers to survive (and maybe thrive)."

"I have worked on and owned farms in NY & VT. This has always been an arduous battle. We went through heck at Kingsbury Market Garden just to put out picnic tables so that folks could get lunch at the farm store and eat amongst our fields. This NEEDS to be universally codified so that producers and processors aren't wasting so much time, energy & money fighting these battles alone."

"Accessory businesses are vital to farm survival in the state. All of our additional enterprises directly relate to our farm operation and are integral to keeping the farm going."

For questions regarding the survey, please contact:

- Jake Claro – Director of the Farm to Plate Network
- Maddie Kempner – Policy Advisor for NOFA-VT
- Andrea Stander – Policy Consultant for Rural Vermont and the Ag Enterprise Bill drafting group