

IV: APCC Agricultural Survey

A. Creation and Distribution of the APCC Agricultural Survey

APCC distributed a survey to Cape Cod farmers in 2009 based on a template created by the Agricultural Commission in the Town of Rehoboth, Massachusetts. The survey (Appendix 2) contained questions regarding farmers' agricultural backgrounds, practices, income, concerns, and future plans. Four hundred and thirty four mailing addresses were obtained through public records and these surveys were then distributed with prepaid return envelopes.

B. Results

Of the 434 surveys sent to Cape Cod farmers, 56 responses were received from farmers in the 15 Cape towns. Forty-five of the responses were from people recognized in the APCC Farmland Inventory accounting for 105 parcels recognized as active farmland. Results from the survey broken down by demographics, farm information, and benefits and concerns are presented in the following texts and figures.

Demographics

Of those responding to the survey the vast majority of farmers were between 45 and 74 years of age (Figure 34). Among the respondents, only one was less than 24 years old, none were between the ages of 25 and 34, and four were between the ages of 35 and 44.

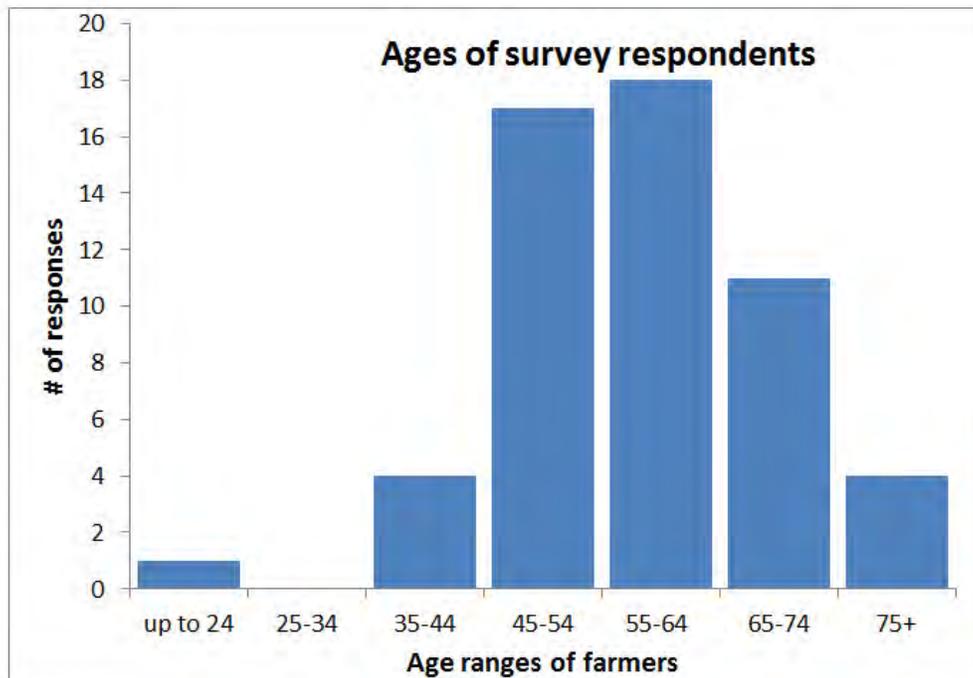


Figure 34. Ages of farmers on Cape Cod.

Most of the survey respondents have been farming for 25 years or more (Figure 35). Eight have been farming for less than five years.

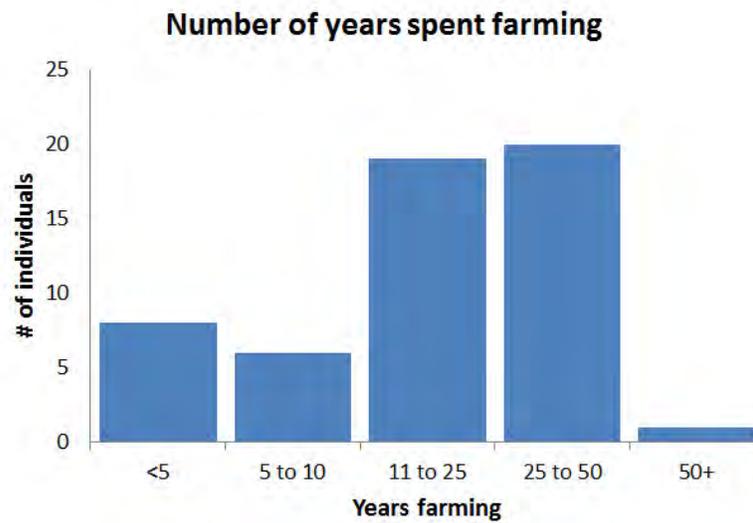


Figure 35. Number of years farming on Cape Cod.

There was a wide range of responses to the question of when a farmer intended to retire. Several farmers responded they had no intention of retiring or did not respond to the question (Figure 36).

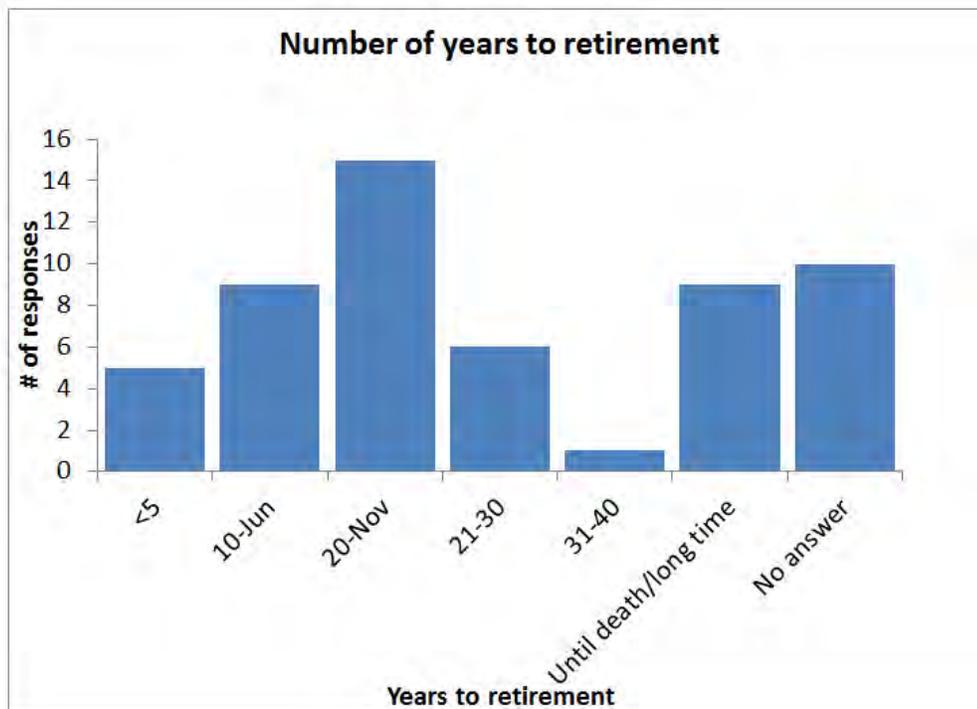


Figure 36. Number of years to retirement.

Property Ownership and Income:

Most of the survey respondents own the land they farm; only four respondents lease land they farm; and seven own some land and lease additional land (Figure 37).

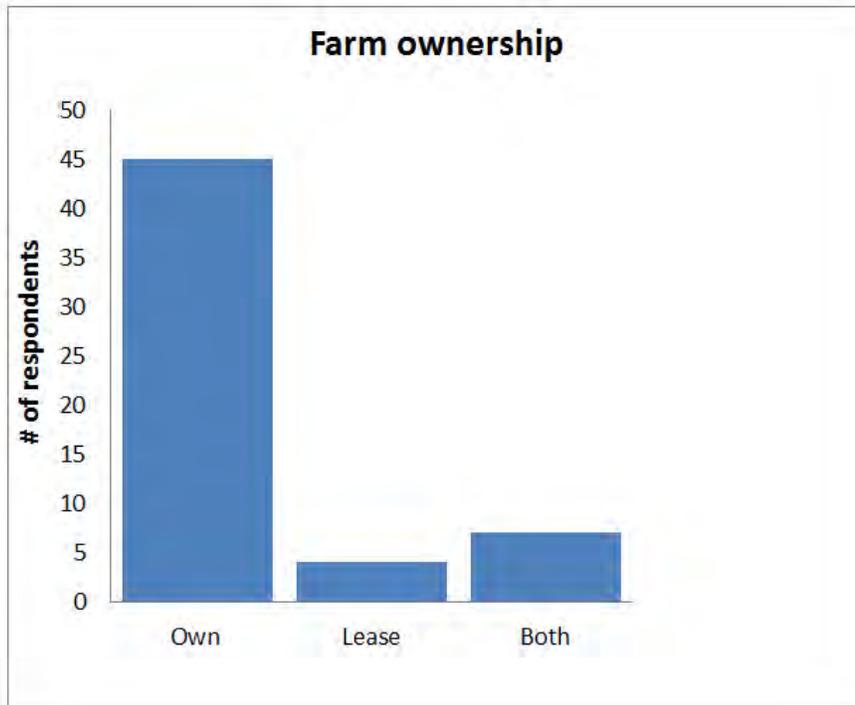


Figure 37. Percent of Cape Cod farmers renting or owning the land farmed.

Of those responding to the survey, 22 reported that farming contributes five percent or less to their income. Ten reported that farming contributed 100% to their income (Figure 38).

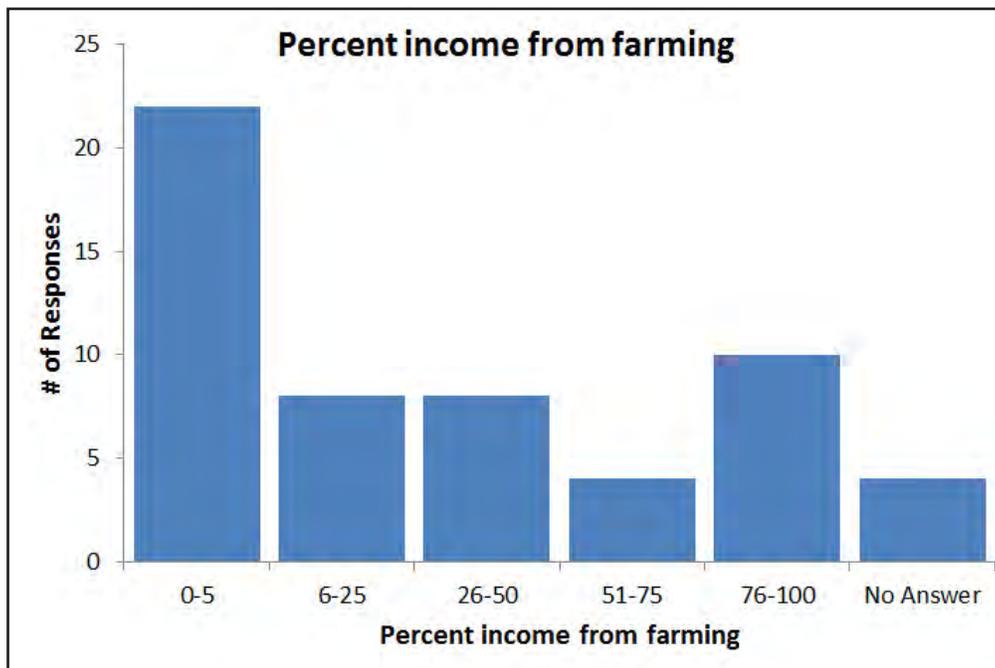


Figure 38. Percent income from farming activities farmed.

When asked about future plans, 34 (60%) respondents did not have someone to take over their farm business upon retirement (Table 15). When asked what the likelihood was that the farmer would be sold, 16 or 29% indicated they would sell the land.

Table 15. Future plans for the farm parcel.

| | Has a successor been identified? | Will the land be sold? |
|-----------|---|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 16 | 16 |
| No | 34 | 33 |
| No Answer | 6 | 7 |

Benefits and Challenges of Farming on Cape Cod:

When asked to specify the three top benefits of farming on Cape Cod, the most frequent response was the customers (Table 16). The specific environmental benefits listed ranged from improved water quality to wildlife habitat.

Table 16. Recognized benefits to farming Cape Cod by farmers responding to APCC survey.

| Benefit | Responses |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Good customers | 14 |
| Environmental Benefits | 13 |
| Location | 13 |
| Providing Healthy Food | 13 |
| Strong Community | 11 |
| Pleasure | 8 |
| Climate | 7 |
| Tourism | 7 |
| Family business | 5 |
| Good growing season | 5 |
| Income | 3 |
| Working with animals | 2 |
| Providing Education | 2 |
| Lack of competition | 1 |
| Agricultural Preservation | 1 |
| Growing Interest | 1 |
| Resources | 1 |

Along with several benefits came several challenges the respondents faced (Table 17). The cost of running their agricultural business ranked the highest with 20 responses. Costs included land, feed, electricity, and equipment. Also ranking high with 14 responses was the challenge of adhering to government regulations. The regulations most mentioned were land use regulations and public health regulations, with regards to farmers' markets and manure management.

Table 17. Recognized challenges of farming Cape Cod by farmers responding to APCC survey.

| Challenge | Responses |
|---|------------------|
| Cost/economic Challenges | 20 |
| Government Regulation | 14 |
| Market/Production | 10 |
| Soil Conditions/ Environmental Concerns | 8 |
| Climate/Weather | 8 |
| Lack of Resources/ Communication | 8 |
| Predation/Pests | 7 |
| Property Taxes | 7 |
| Labor | 3 |
| Development | 3 |
| Neighbor Issues | 2 |
| Weed Control | 2 |
| Lack of Land/ Space | 2 |
| Lack of competition | 1 |
| Agricultural Preservation | 1 |
| Growing Interest | 1 |
| Resources | 1 |

Summary of the Survey Responses

The survey provided important information about Cape Cod's farmers. They are an aging group that most likely will farm into their later years. More than half of the respondents do not have successors to take over their farm business, which raises the question as to what will happen to the agricultural land once the current operator stops farming. Adding to that concern is the fact that 16 respondents said they would most likely need to sell their land.

Farmers also face numerous challenges running their businesses. The cost of farming and government regulations were the highest-ranking challenges and concerns from the respondents.