

Orange County Agriculture - Farmer Survey

Final results - February 4, 2014

105 responses

Highlights of the Results:

When asked about specific issues facing their farm operation, most were concerned with the increasing cost of items the farmer has little control over. Fuel, property taxes, and overall production costs were the top issues. Combined with high response rates to the general economic climate, the overall low profitability of the agriculture business, and other comments in the survey, the farmers frustration shows through.

When asked to list the top three (3) most critical issues facing their business, real property taxes rose to the top of the list, followed by availability of labor. Loss of farmland and the availability and cost of farmland also ranked high as an issue.

The following table shows the answers to question 2 receiving a 10% or higher response rate:

Question 2 Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Real property taxes	39%	41
Availability of affordable or skilled labor	24%	25
Production costs	20%	21
Federal policies	12%	13
Loss of farmland	12%	13
Availability and cost of farmland	11%	12
Low profitability	11%	12
Environmental regulations	10%	11
Fuel costs	10%	11
Land use regulations	10%	10
Residential encroachment	10%	10

- The farmers recognize there are some policies in place designed to help them overcome these obstacles, but many feel they are not effective enough, or not being used to their full potential. Most feel the Agriculture District program is a help, as are PDR programs. But there are still some conflicts with local government regulations, the government officials that enforce them, and the limited scope of the PDR program.
- Some municipalities are viewed as very proactive towards farming, while others are not. The support for farming at the local level is not uniform throughout the County. More needs to be done by both the county and the towns to preserve and promote agriculture.

- Inventive solutions to the high property tax burden, education of local officials about existing agriculture policies and programs, and a stronger PDR program were all mentioned as ways to help the farming community overcome some of these obstacles.
- When asked how the County could help preserve and promote agriculture, relief from development pressure and taxes were to two most cited. Wallkill flood protection, grants and funding of existing programs, emphasizing buying local, tying agriculture with tourism, new processing facilities, and relief from burdensome regulations were also mentioned multiple times.
- At the local level, tax relief and protection from over development were also listed as top priorities. Better education of, and coordination between, local officials and agencies was also mentioned.
- Purchase of development rights remains a popular option many farmers are interested in. 70% probably or definitely would consider entering a PDR program.

The following table shows the answers to question 10 “Do you feel that any of the following Farmland Protection Strategies would be beneficial in Orange County?”:

Question 10 Answer Options	Answered - Somewhat or Very Beneficial
Provide incentives for farmland to be preserved, including tax incentives	91%
Farm friendly zoning that allows a variety of ag-related uses on one property	89%
Right to farm laws	85%
Encourage development that is consistent with the protection of farmland	84%
Education programs about farming for the Non-farm community	83%
Organize additional programs to promote locally-grown farm products	83%
Facilitate first time farmer financing programs	80%
Limit Non-farm development in productive farm areas	78%
Assist with obtaining grants for promoting agriculture and recruiting new farming operations	77%
Facilitate the purchase of development rights from willing sellers	77%
County funding for purchase of development rights programs	75%
Create a local brand for products	73%
Assist in the development of processing facilities such as a milk processing plant	73%
Assist with farm business planning	71%
Ag-enterprise zones	65%
Conservation subdivisions that allow residential development at the same time as preserving some of the land that can be farmed	59%
Transfer of development rights (where development is transferred from one property to be preserved to another to be developed)	57%
Come Farm With Us programs	42%

- Flooding is a well know issue for farmers in the Black Dirt region. There is a strong desire that something be done to alleviate the problem, and a strong majority (69%) are willing to consider a special district tax for flood control

Dairy -

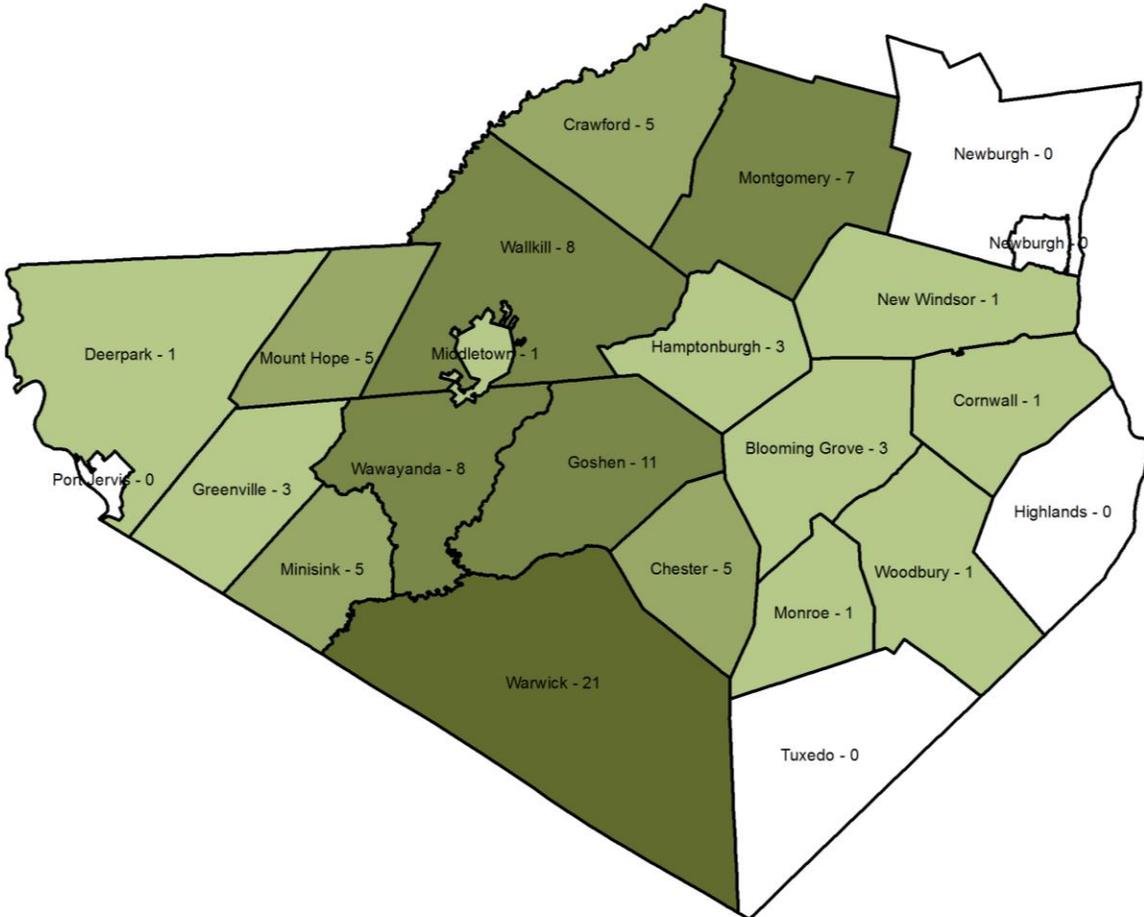
- 27 (26%) of the respondents said they are a dairy farmer.
- Only 7 (27%) of the dairy farmers have any value-added processes, and all but one are not interested in adding any kind of new value added processing. Current value added products include ice cream, cheese, yogurt, kefir, and raw milk. Five farmers said the value added product is a major part of their business, and it requires a higher quality milk to produce.
- The majority of dairy farmers would not increase production if higher milk prices available, but would if more affordable farmland were available.
- 91% are interested in a local label processing plant, but not willing to invest in it personally
- When asked what would help Orange County dairy the most, 12 out of 24 said higher milk prices and/or profits. Three (3) said lower taxes, two (2) – land protection, two (2) – local processor, and two (2) – better dairy services.

Some notable differences between the Dairy farmer responses and overall farmer responses:

- Fuel costs are a much larger issue for dairy farmers, as is lack of processing facilities, and the cost and accessibility of farmland.
- Dairy farmers are slightly more prone to conflicts with non-farm neighbors and local government.
- Dairy farmers rent a much larger proportion of the land they farm than others. (Dairy – 250 acres average, vs. 97 acres average for all farming sectors).
- 96% of the dairy farmers said they are full-time farmers vs. 68% for all farmers.
- A much larger percentage of their income comes from the farm, and their spouse is less likely to have off-farm employment.

Demographics –

Responses were received from all but three (3) towns and two (2) cities in Orange County. The exceptions



being: the towns of Newburgh, Highlands, and Tuxedo; and the cities of Newburgh and Port Jervis.

- 88% of the respondents have their land enrolled in a state certified Agricultural District.
- 83% take advantage of Agricultural Assessment.
- Dairy/cows (22%) and vegetables/herbs (18%) were the major farm enterprises
- Value added and farmers' markets were not popular over all. However, 44% said they sell direct to the consumer from the farm or a nearby retail outlet. And 40% are interested in expanding this market, or moving into it.

- The most often cited business needs are – Improved regulatory environment and access to enough farmland. These were followed closely by livestock processing, and employee training.