

Orange County Agriculture - Public Survey Summary

369 responses

Highlights of Results:

- Participants have a very positive view of agriculture and farmland. 78% said that farming has influenced their decision to come or stay in their residential location. Agriculture is valued for being part of the local economy, the area’s character, and for fresh food. 87% are very concerned about loss of farms and farmland.
- Decisions to buy food are more influenced by freshness/quality and whether it is locally grown than price. Price, organically grown, and nutritional values are important, but less so.
- A large majority are willing to pay more for local products, but to some extent. People are willing to pay more but only if the price was not significantly higher.
- Vegetables and fruits are most popular locally grown products that are bought, followed by fruit, seasonal products like pumpkins, eggs/poultry, honey, and nursery plants. All of the products were bought by more than 10% of participants. About 40% of respondents said they buy locally grown meats and dairy products.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Meats	40.7%	149
Eggs/poultry	69.4%	254
Fruits	86.6%	317
Vegetables	96.4%	353
Herbs and spices	45.6%	167
Seasonal items such as pumpkins and gourds	82.0%	300
Christmas Trees	43.7%	160
Honey	66.7%	244
Milk or dairy products	44.5%	163
Nursery plants and flowers	62.8%	230
Maple Products	32.8%	120
Animals for a backyard or small farm operation	11.5%	42
Feed for a backyard or small farm operation	14.2%	52
Unsure where items I buy come from	1.1%	4
None of the items I buy come from local sources	0.5%	2
Other products produced locally? (please specify)		25

- About 80% purchase food at chain grocery stores. After chain grocery stores, Farmers’ markets and direct from farm are most popular purchasing locations. About 71% said they purchase food at farmers markets. 32 different farmers markets are mentioned but Goshen was the most popular.
- 13% participate in CSAs.
- 70% indicated that there were other foods they would buy locally if available. There are many

different foods listed – some that are already widely available in farmers markets. However, the top answer to this question was “anything grown locally” shows a great deal of support for any local product. The second most common answer was ‘organic’. There were many seeking more organically grown foods. By commodity, the top response was the desire for more meat and poultry. Other common responses include:

- Eggs
 - Cheeses
 - Honey
 - Herbs
 - Fruits
 - Baked goods/bread.
 - One interesting response that came from multiple people was that they were looking for more canned/frozen or already prepared meals using local products.
- 69% said that agriculture is a topic of importance in their community. 56% said that they felt their local government also considered agriculture as an important topic.
 - Hundreds of comments were collected on what participants feel are issues facing agriculture in their community. The issues can be categorized into major themes which include:
 - lack of education and awareness about agriculture and ag practices,
 - the high cost of doing business and low profitability for the farmer,
 - taxes,
 - development pressure and sprawl,
 - aging farmers and the lack of a new generation,
 - government regulations,
 - loss of land,
 - high land prices which make it difficult for the farmer to compete with other land users,
 - labor shortages, and
 - competition with and lack of access to supermarkets and other stores where a large number of people could be reached with local food.
 - There were many thoughtful answers given as to what the county should do to address those issues. 84% think more needs to be done to support agriculture. Several recurrent themes are seen throughout the 170 comments offered:
 - more education about farming to the general public to build awareness and community support;
 - more marketing and promotion of farms and farm products;
 - more farmers markets and opportunities for people to buy local foods;
 - enhance local food processors and institutional uses of farm products;
 - funding for purchase of development rights and easements;
 - offer incentives and tax breaks to make farming more affordable; and
 - enhanced land use planning and zoning to protect farmlands from development.
 - Most people (95%) did NOT have any conflicts with farmers.
 - A large majority (66%) favored offering farmers reductions in property taxes in exchange for commitment to keep farm land in production. 21% partly favored that. 4% were opposed.

- Use of conservation easements to protect farmland, farm friendly zoning, conservation subdivisions, ag-enterprise zones, come farm with us programs, and right to farm law were all felt to be very beneficial to protect farmland by a majority of participants. More people were unfamiliar with transfer of development rights, lease of development rights programs. Farm friendly zoning had the most support.
- 74% support FFA programs.
- Participants came from over 34 different locations, including several that live outside Orange County but that come to Orange County for local markets. The most common places were (In order: Mount Hope (29), Wallkill (26), Goshen (25), Warwick (25), Middletown (22), and Crawford (21). The other locations represented in the survey are Blooming Grove, Bullville, Campbell Hall, Chester, Circleville, Cornwall, Cuddebackville, Deerpark, Florida, Greenville, Mamakating, Minisink, Monroe, New Windsor, Newburgh, Otisville, Pine Bush, Scotchtown, Tuxedo, Walden, Waywayanda, Washingtonville, West Town.
- 25 participants have land used by someone else for farming. The number of acres represented ranged from 4 acres to 100 acres. The average size was 37 acres. The largest was 100 acres in Pine Island. These were located throughout the County: Campbell, Crawford (3), Chester, Florida, Goshen (3), Minisink (2), Montgomery, Mount Hope (3), Pine Bush, Pine Island, Slate Hill, Wallkill, and Warwick (2). Three people also have land they rent outside Orange County to farmers.
- Of those 25 people who rent land, 13 also received agricultural assessments on their property and 7 did not - one had land outside of Orange County that did not receive an ag assessment.

Other Observations:

The survey most likely represents people who are already involved and supportive of agriculture because the online survey probably attracted those people already interested in agriculture and because the survey was promoted at farmers markets. Thus the percentage of people who use farmers markets and CSA's is likely higher than the general population.

With that said, there is a high degree of support and interest among the participants and shows there is a strong, dedicated group of people supportive of agriculture. This group of people are highly influenced by the quality of food, and tie quality to the fact that it is locally grown, and with some, to organically grown products. Organic and nutritional value of food are also very important. Price is of concern, but less so than quality of the food. At the same time, about half of the participants indicated that if the price became significantly higher, then it would influence their buying decisions.

Participants buy a wide diversity of products and while the primary product is fruit and vegetables, they also support a wide variety of products available at farmers markets and CSA's. There is more desire for meat and poultry products, cheeses and baked goods. Overall, participants want to see more of 'anything grown locally.'

Participants feel that there is a higher degree of support for agriculture in the general population. At the same time, the support of agriculture among local governments is lower. This disconnect between local government and the general population is a topic that could be explored further.

The group recognizes the importance of community awareness, the need to promote and market local farms and farm products, to use planning and PDR to protect farmland, and to implement methods to keep the costs of farming down. Overall, they feel that more should be done to support agriculture. The group was highly supportive of tax incentives as one solution.

The survey represents all corners and towns in the County except for Highlands. It is not concentrated in any one area and many participants are from the areas identified as high priority growth areas in the County.