

Caroline Ag Survey as of 5/11/2023

30 surveys returned; 2 with under one acre;

28 farmland owners & farmers own/rent a total of approx.. 2500 acres.

There are several distinct Landowners:

Long term owners – Many, though not all, seem to be thinking about phasing out/retiring; some already rent most of their land to other farmers

Recent owners 30-60 years – generally diverse operations with some part time farm income from hay, beef, equine or eggs

Only 2 dairy operations remain but these are small herds taking advantage of adding value for local sales

Newer owners under 30 years – this group seems to have interest in expansion or diversification but they are not exactly sure how to grow their business; time, money, energy and help being most limiting factors, some mentioned needing more land.

Most common land uses are for hay crops, pasture/grazing, field (grain) crops, smaller patches of veggies, berries, herbs, etc. Only two people mentioned thinking about diversification into hemp/marijuana.

Also mentioned, less regulation pertaining to small scale cottage industry/added value product development.

Agritourism was mentioned as an enterprise opportunity – this should be explored further as there are many kinds of agritourism – a common understanding through educational workshops and joint efforts among farmers to develop and promote an agritourism sector is needed.

Beef, pigs, poultry and eggs are common livestock products.

Equine is a popular farming activity that includes horse riding and boarding. Demand for quality hay is strong among folks who raise horses because it is hard to raise and cut all your own.

Smaller and larger farms seem to rely primarily on word of mouth for product sales – perhaps a more pro-active marketing strategy is needed. Sales are most commonly made to someone you know or who knows you – you call up a farmer and order the products you need, go to the farm and pick it up.

Several folks mentioned the need for better marketing options...a common challenge is that a part-time farmer ends up having little time left after focusing on production to devote to marketing.

Very few of these farms employ help beyond...the farmer, the family, sometimes seasonal workers. The largest farm employer in the town is a vegetable operation with 8-12 seasonal employees.

Respondents own land for the following reasons that were most commonly stated:

Grow their own food, preserve the land they own, preserve a farming tradition or pass the land on to family; Hunting and Recreation were also common land uses; and about 10 respondents indicated interest in continuing in part time farming or full time farming.

About half of the respondents did not have any sales from farm products, about 6 had sales under \$10,000; and about 10 had sales above \$10,000. At least 5 would be considered full-time farmers based on sales or how they identify themselves.

Land use concerns: zoning, solar, taxes, development pressure (suburbanites), food freedom/sovereignty were all mentioned multiple times.

Opportunities to explore: (Based on survey comments...)

- Hay is a strong common denominator – is there a way to collectively pool hay and sell it? Or at least make it be known to horse and livestock owners who regularly have hay to sell.
- Local products for local sales – more consumers who buy local.
- Encourage cottage industry development (small scale value added products).
- For landowners who are anticipating they will not be farming in the next 5 to 20 years, is there an opportunity to think about ways to transition the land they own to new farmers?
- Would it be helpful to have a list of parcels available to rent (or perhaps buy)?
- Would there be interest in an agritourism workshop...what is it, how to make money from AT, assessing your property for agritourism potential, etc.
- Someone mentioned at an earlier meeting – is there a way to have a livestock marketing group, and perhaps also figure out slaughter needs/bottlenecks?
- How can the Town incentivize farming? Lower taxes? Fund for infrastructure improvements? Other ideas...no ideas are too wacky!
- What about timber and maple, etc. I assume timber sales are happening...is there an opportunity here or need for education?
- Someone mentioned Agrivoltaics (solar and ag uses) – does this work?
- How can we create a reliable seasonal labor pool?
- Any interest in conservation easements?
- Other thoughts??