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Title of Poster

Small Farmers in North Carolina – Successful Practices

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Small Farmers in North Carolina – Successful Practices

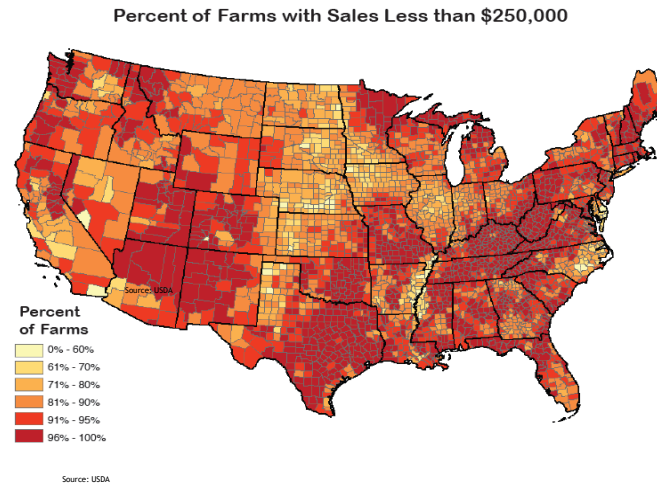
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Abstract: Small farms account for 91 percent of all farms. Given the importance of small farmers this research focused on identifying successful practices of small farmers in North Carolina. The research indicated that successful farmers combined marketing strategies, a diverse mix of enterprises, specialty crops and the ability to manage risk.

Problem statement and importance of the work: Small farms contribute more than farm production to our society and account for 91 percent of all farms. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines small farms as farms with \$250,000 or less in sales of agricultural commodities. Given the importance of small farm viability, this research focused on identifying ways to further enhance successful small farmers in North Carolina. The overall objective of this research is to identify practices that will contribute to the success of small farmers.

Data and Methods: The research methods for this project included both case studies and surveys. The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Program identified “successful” farmers from its sampling frame to participate in the case studies. The survey questionnaire was distributed to a sampling frame that also included small farmers not identified as being successful. The survey instrument solicited production and financial data, attitudes and beliefs about farming, as well as demographic questions.



The North Carolina Department of Agriculture reports that 45,200 farms have sales less than \$100,000

Small farms account for 56 percent of the total U.S. value of agricultural land and buildings.

Source: USDA

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I regularly attend farming workshops and training programs			7.1%	46.4%	46.4%
I utilize crop or other farm insurance to lessen my risk	3.6%	10.7%	28.6%	46.4%	10.7%
I participate in local farmers' market or sell locally	17.9%	17.9%		50.0%	14.3%

n=28

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The main reason why I farm is because I love it.		3.6%	14.3%	17.9%	64.3%
My farm has been in my family for more than one generation.		3.6%		39.3%	57.1%
I plan to keep my farm in the family.			3.6%	28.6%	67.9%
I do not expect my farm to turn a large profit.	3.6%	10.7%	32.1%	17.9%	28.6%
Computers help me with record keeping and finances.		7.1%	10.7%	60.7%	21.4%
I have very little debt.	21.4%	17.9%	28.6%	14.3%	7.1%

Major Results and Implications: Overall results showed that most farmers farm because they love it, the farm has been in their family for more than one generation and they plan to keep the farm in the family. Recurring indicators among the successful small farmers are the “love of farming,” “manageable debt” and “workshop participation.” Other strong indicators of successful farmers include a combination of marketing strategies, a diverse mix of enterprises and specialty crops as well as other indicators. Each farm represents an individual business enterprise that has to deal with its own unique set of factors. The success of a small farm is likely to be based on having characteristics that enable the farm to overcome changes in market demand and operating costs as well as to manage risk. A majority of the farmers surveyed (n=40) indicated their awareness of the importance of biofuels (78%). Small farmers strongly agreed (47%) that they, “Would adopt another enterprise if it were similar to enterprises currently in operation,” “If start up cost were minimal” (52%); and “if proper training were available” (68%). Unlike the case study findings, most of the farmers surveyed do use computers to assist them with their record keeping and finances.

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