

The 2020 Ohio Farm Poll: Taking the pulse of Ohio farmers

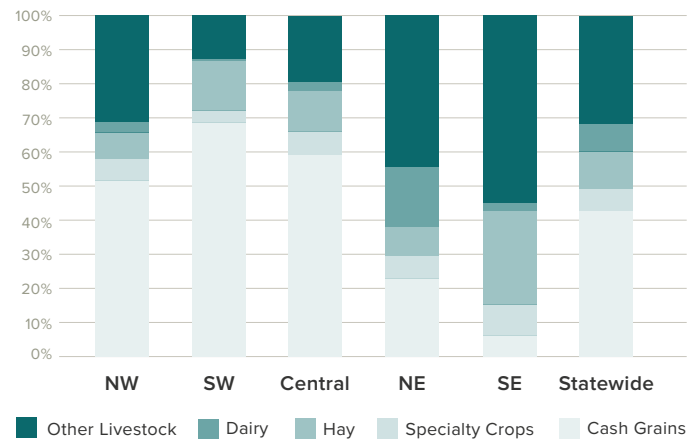
Summary

In 2019, Ohio farmers experienced shocks that tested the limits of Ohio agriculture. Heavy rains affected planting and harvesting times, economic turbulence contributed to lower commodity prices, and nonfarm economic growth pushed farmland costs up.

To learn how farmers were impacted, researchers in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University created the Ohio Farm Poll.

The statewide survey, mailed in February 2020, asked farmers to rate their sources of stress, share the effects on their families and businesses, and report how they responded to these challenges.

Farmer responses by enterprise type and Ohio region



Over 800 farmers answered—a 41% response rate—reflecting Ohio’s diverse mix of farm types and sizes.

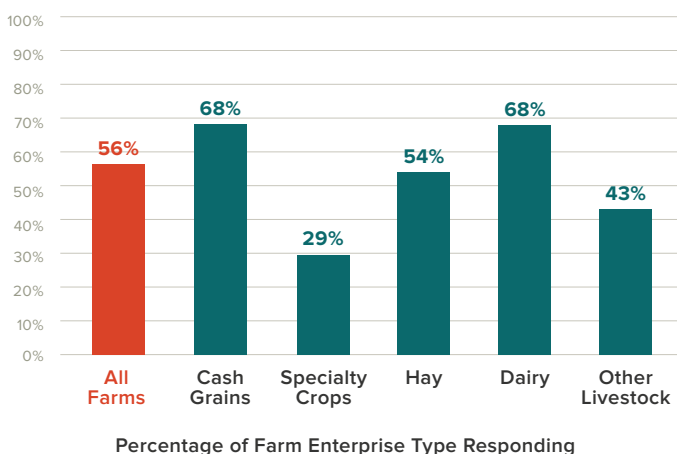
Key Findings

Researchers identified three important takeaways from survey results:

1. The challenges of 2019 served as a stress test that revealed current strengths and weaknesses within the farming sector.

Heavy rains affected farms across the state, with many also seeing an increase in pest and disease pressures.

Over half of Ohio’s farms said business conditions were “worse than usual” in 2019



56%

Delayed planting crops > 2 weeks

43%

Experienced a 20% or greater drop in crop yield

Trade wars caused market disruptions, reducing prices farmers received for products.

38%

Experienced a significant drop in prices received

Low rates of entry into farming have skewed farmer age higher. A majority of Ohio farmers are over 55, and stressful conditions have contributed to concerns about the future of farming.

- 60% are concerned about the future of farming in their area.
- Almost one-third of farmers plan to retire or quit in the next five years.

2. Ohio is home to a variety of farm types. Farmers experienced price and weather disturbances in very different ways depending on their farm type, size, and marketing strategy.

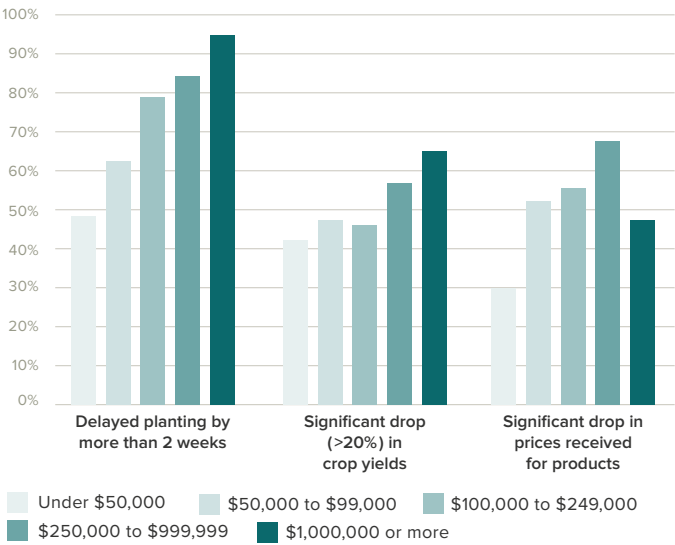
Weather had an outsize affect on large grain operations, which were most likely to report delayed planting times of at least two weeks and reduced yields.

65% of Ohio’s largest farms had significant drops in yield, compared to 42% of small farms.

Respondents who market directly to consumers were significantly less likely to experience a drop in prices.

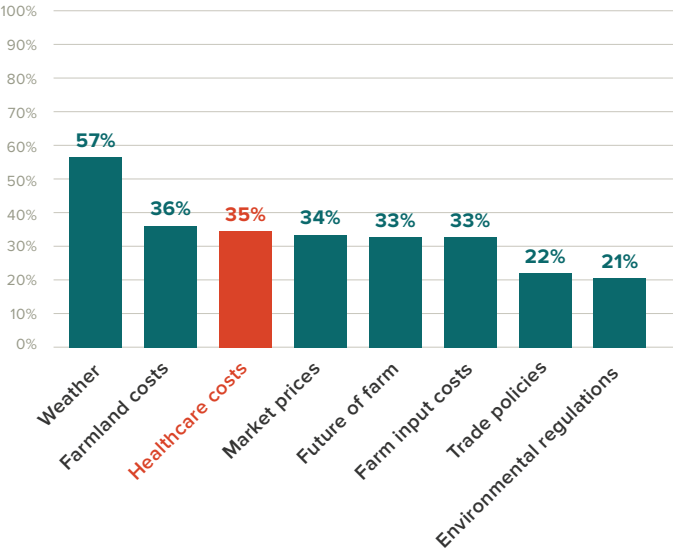
- Just 1 in 3 farmers would encourage their children to take over the farm.
- Half of survey respondents said their children cannot afford to take over the farm.

Large farms (by sales) felt greater price and yield impacts



3. Farm survival is linked to both household and farm business well-being.

Healthcare costs a major source of stress equal to farm business concerns



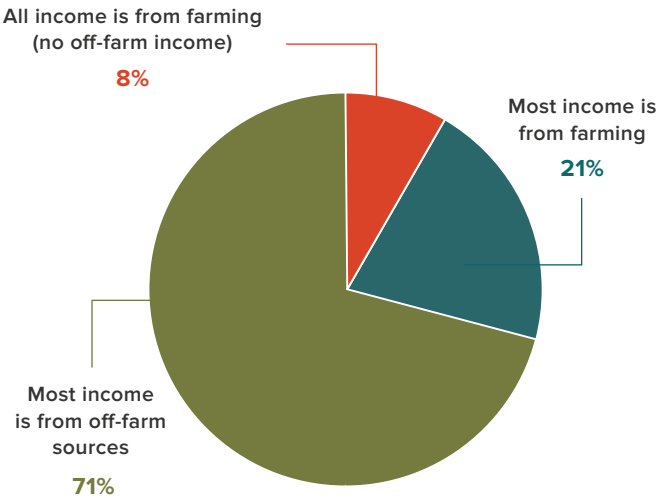
Almost 60% of Ohio farmers have a family member with a preexisting or chronic health condition.

Nearly 1 in 3 farmers have a health condition that makes it difficult to work.

40% of farmers relied on households savings to meet farm business expenses.

More than one-third delayed purchases for the farm business and 29% cut back on household spending.

Majority of farms rely on off-farm income to survive



Recommendations

One size does not fit all in rural community development. Different kinds of farms experience different kinds of stress. Farm programs should be tailored to specific types and sizes of Ohio farms.

A diversified farming sector helps minimize risk and build resilience. Support and promote diversifying crop rotations, integrating crops and livestock, and expanding marketing options.

Rural development is farm policy. Improving rural quality of life and the nonfarm economy helps make farming an attractive career. Efforts to aid farmers need to improve household and community quality of life.

Investments in broadband access and rural schools can help encourage the next generation of farmers.


Address health and well-being of farmers at different stages of their career:

- Early career farmers need more access to land and capital, quality off-farm jobs, and childcare options.
- Late career farmers want help transitioning to the next generation: ease land transfers, better social support to deal with complex emotions and family dynamics.

Future Plans

Researchers in CFAES plan to administer future Ohio Farm Polls every two years. This cycle will help them track changes over time and identify new issues before they become difficult to address. Learn more at kx.osu.edu. Search Ohio Farm Poll. For more information on Ohio farm trends, visit senr.osu.edu/ohiofarmtrends.

A special thank you to all of the Ohio farmers who took the time to complete the survey.

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EXCHANGE**



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