

“SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE FARM GROWTH AND PERSISTENCE AT THE RURAL-URBAN INTERFACE: BALANCING FAMILY, GOALS, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS”

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND APPLIED ECONOMICS
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PROFILE OF BURLINGTON, VT

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STUDY BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The project “Small and Medium Scale Farm Growth and Persistence at the Rural-Urban Interface: Balancing Family, Goals, Opportunities and Risks” is a joint project undertaken by researchers at The Ohio State University and The University of Vermont. The goal of this national study is to understand how the goals and values of farm families influence the future of agriculture in areas experiencing population and non-farm development pressures.

Despite the fact that farmland at the Rural-Urban Interface (RUI) is vulnerable to non-farm development, a substantial proportion of U.S. agricultural production occurs at the RUI.

- Counties considered to be agriculturally important¹ and located at the RUI represent less than 20% of all U.S. counties, but accounted for 41% of U.S. agricultural sales.

¹ For a detailed explanation of agriculturally important-RUI counties see Jackson-Smith and Sharp 2008.

- Just under half of total agricultural crop sales, 95% of U.S. fruit and nut sales, 84% of U.S. vegetable sales and 95% of nursery green house sales originated in metropolitan counties in 2007.

The long-term viability of agriculture at the RUI relies on successful establishment of new farm enterprises, growth of existing farms, and the persistence of farm enterprises across generations. Researchers examining agricultural change at the RUI have identified a range of issues beyond land costs and farmland conversion that affect the future of agriculture in urbanizing environments.

The core objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify and assess the relationship of household dynamics (demographics, employment strategies and, goals and values) to the growth and persistence of small and medium scale farm enterprises at the RUI.
- To identify policy needs or program developments critical to improve farm and ranch vitality

In this series, we describe the three-phase study and provide background information on one of five research sites, Burlington, VT.

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Site Selection

The five case study sites were selected based on several criteria:

- An active agricultural base, within the top quartile of US agricultural sales
- Positive population growth indicating their location at the RUI
- Regional and production variation
- A higher than regional average percentage of small and medium size farms
- A higher than regional average presence of farmer diversity measured by women, minority, and beginning farmers

The selected sites are shown on the map in Figure 1 and listed below with a brief background. Individual site reports profile each case study site.

Lewiston, ME has seen a growth in the number of farms while overall sales and farm acres have declined. The vast majority of farms (nearly 89%) are small. The majority of farm sales are from livestock and some fruit production. Lewiston has a large portion of beginning and women farmers.

Miami, FL is made up of three primary export agricultural systems: row crops (vegetables), tropical fruit and nursery operations that are located on extremely flat, rock ground soil terrain. The highest percentage of sales comes from small-scale farms. The region has a high population of minority and women farmers.

Columbus, OH is an agriculturally dense area with the highest percentage of sales coming from large commodity producers of corn, soybeans, livestock, etc. Columbus has a high population of women farmers.

Honolulu, HI is a major population center on the island of Oahu with an agricultural focus on fruit and vegetable production. Though small-scale farms are the most numerous, the highest percentage of sales comes from large farms. Honolulu has high populations of minority and women farmers.

Burlington, VT is a northern CBSA with the vast majority of its agricultural sales from livestock and

dairy products. Burlington is notable for having a high percentage of female principal operators.

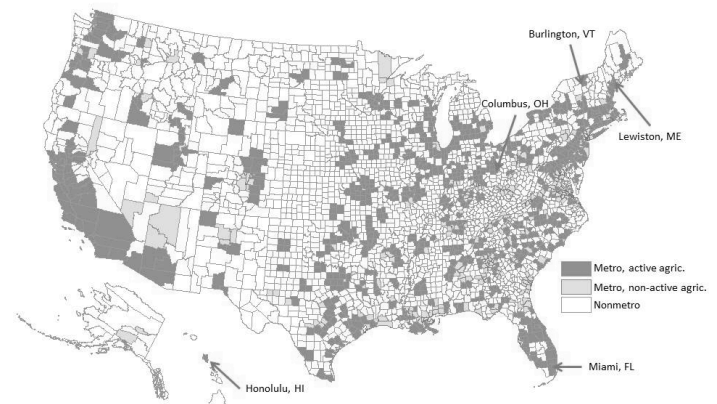


FIGURE 1: MAP OF CASE STUDY SITES

Phase 2: Interviews with Local Leaders and Farm Households

Interviews were conducted in each study site to understand the different perspectives and issues affecting farm families in particular locations. The interviews are also being used to develop questions for a farm household survey.

Phase 3: Farm Household Survey

The 2013 *Small and Medium Scale Farm Growth and Persistence* survey will be sent to 1600 farmers in the case study sites. Data collection will take place from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014.

BURLINGTON-SOUTH BURLINGTON, VT INFORMATION

The Burlington CBSA consists of three contiguous counties in northwestern Vermont: Grand Isle, Franklin and Chittenden. The counties are bordered by Canada in the north and Lake Champlain in the west. Burlington, Vermont's largest city, resides in Chittenden County. A large portion of the CBSA's acreage is devoted to agriculture, the vast majority of it in Franklin County. 280,526 of the CBSA's 805,587 acres are farmland.

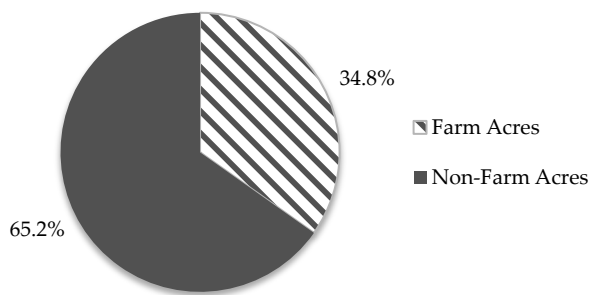


FIGURE 2: PERCENT FARM ACRES IN BURLINGTON-SOUTH BURLINGTON, VT

FARM SIZE AND TYPE

The majority of agricultural sales in the Burlington metro region come through the sales of livestock and dairy products. Of the \$207.6 million in sales for 2007, over \$182.5 million (or 87.9%) were related to livestock. Milk and dairy products accounted for \$157.4 million. The remaining \$25 million (12.1%) was classified as “other crops and hay”.

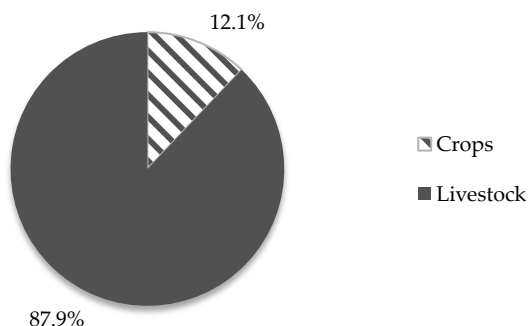


FIGURE 3: BREAKDOWN OF AGRICULTURAL SALES

Between 2002 and 2007, the Burlington metro area saw a slight increase in farm numbers, and a dramatic increase in farm sales. Of the 1,538 farms, the majority (55.8%) of farms are considered small and 23.6%, are hobby farms (Figure 4). While there are a smaller number of medium farms (7.3%) and large size farms (13.3%) the vast majority of sales come from these farms. Large farms account for 84.4% of all sales in the region while small and hobby farms combined account for less than 7.1%.

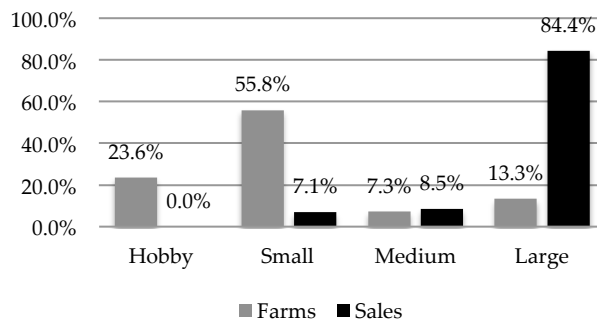


FIGURE 4: FARM TYPES AND SALES IN BURLINGTON, VT

MARKETING ORIENTATION

Farms located at the RUI often have unique opportunities to market goods to nearby urban communities. The Burlington metro region has a large number of organizations that promote alternative and direct marketing systems. According to the 2007 census just under 20% of farms in the Burlington metro region reported direct sales, 8.4% engaged in value adding activities while only 3.6% of farms reported selling through a CSA (Figure 4). A very small minority of farms (1.2%) reported any tourism activity.

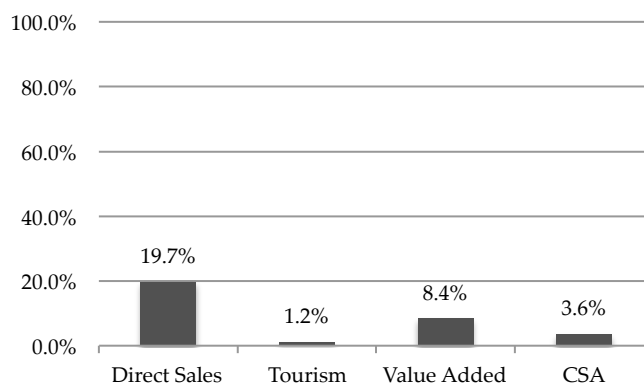


FIGURE 5: BURLINGTON, VT ALTERNATIVE MARKET FARMS

SUB-POPULATIONS

With regards to the type of farmers in the Burlington metro region, there is a relatively high number of female operators and very few minority farmers. In the region, 35% of farmers are women compared to the national average of 30%. 19.2% of farms had a female principal operator – a higher portion than any other case site. At 1.3%, minorities make up a very small portion of the population, the majority of which are of Hispanic descent. Burlington has a fairly substantial amount of beginning farmers with 15.3% farming for 10 years or less, well above the national average of 13%.

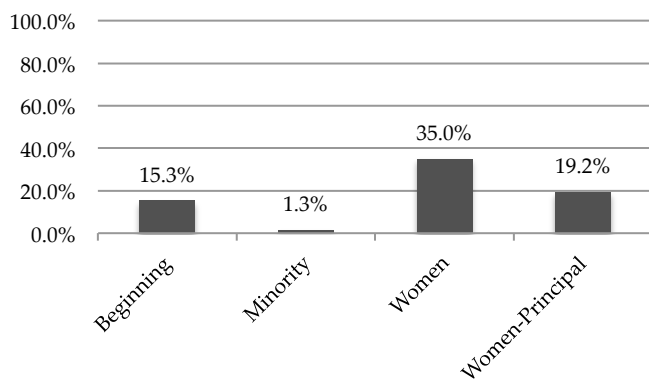


FIGURE 6: SUB-POPULATIONS OF FARMERS IN BURLINGTON-SOUTH BURLINGTON, VT

NEXT STEPS

The research team is currently analyzing the qualitative data with HyperRESEARCH software. The results will be used to develop the survey of farm households. The next step will be to identify and survey 400 farm households in each study site, then analyze the data and report to the communities, local, state, and national policy-makers including USDA, nonprofit agricultural organizations, and disseminate findings through journals, press releases, and policy briefs.

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Project Website: <http://senr.osu.edu/research/ag-and-food-systems>.