

1998 Farmland Study

Introduction

The following report is the summation of results and conclusions made from the 1998/99 Fauquier County Farmland Study. The Farmland Study consists of information gained from the 1998 Fauquier County Farmland Survey, and its follow-up, the 1999 Landowner Focus Groups. The study was conducted as a joint effort of the Fauquier Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Fauquier County Agricultural Development Office.

The purpose of the 1998/99 Fauquier County Farmland Study was three-fold. The primary purpose was to assess the characteristics and personality of Fauquier County's agriculture industry and agricultural landowners. The secondary purpose was to assess the educational and service needs of agricultural and forest landowners. The final purpose was to develop a database of locally produced agricultural products.

The preparers of this report would like to thank all persons whom responded to the 1998 Farmland Survey and the 34 volunteers whom participated in the 1999 Landowner Focus Groups.

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Conclusions:

- 1) The next fifteen years are critical for the future of farm and forest land in Fauquier County, since over half will likely change hands during that time.
- 2) There is an overwhelming desire to preserve farm and forest land among Fauquier County landowners.
- 3) No single land preservation tool meets the needs of all landowners. Therefore, a variety of tools should be made available to enable the protection of land for future agricultural use.
- 4) Estate planning is a necessity to facilitate land preservation. There is a need for education in this area.
- 5) Special Land Use Assessment is vital to maintaining our farm economy.
- 6) Education of the non-farm public about Special Land Use Assessment is necessary.
- 7) The agricultural infrastructure provides markets and supplies to farmers and significant economic activity to Fauquier County as a whole.
- 8) Fauquier County farmers are open-minded to innovative changes to their operations, in order to increase their farm profitability.
- 9) Positive steps must be made to recruit and support new / young farmers.

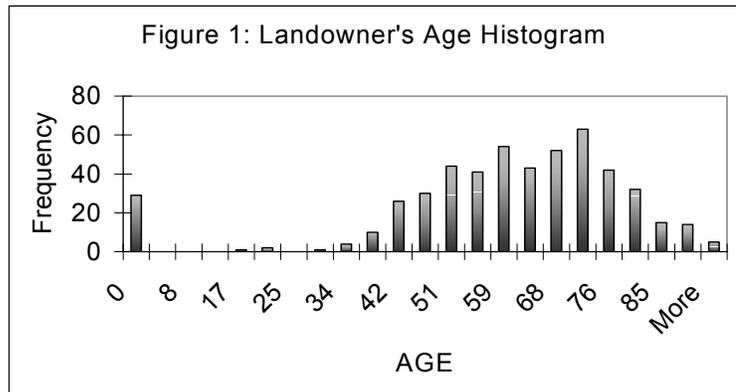
1998 Fauquier County Farmland Study

Summary of Findings: 1998 Farmland Survey

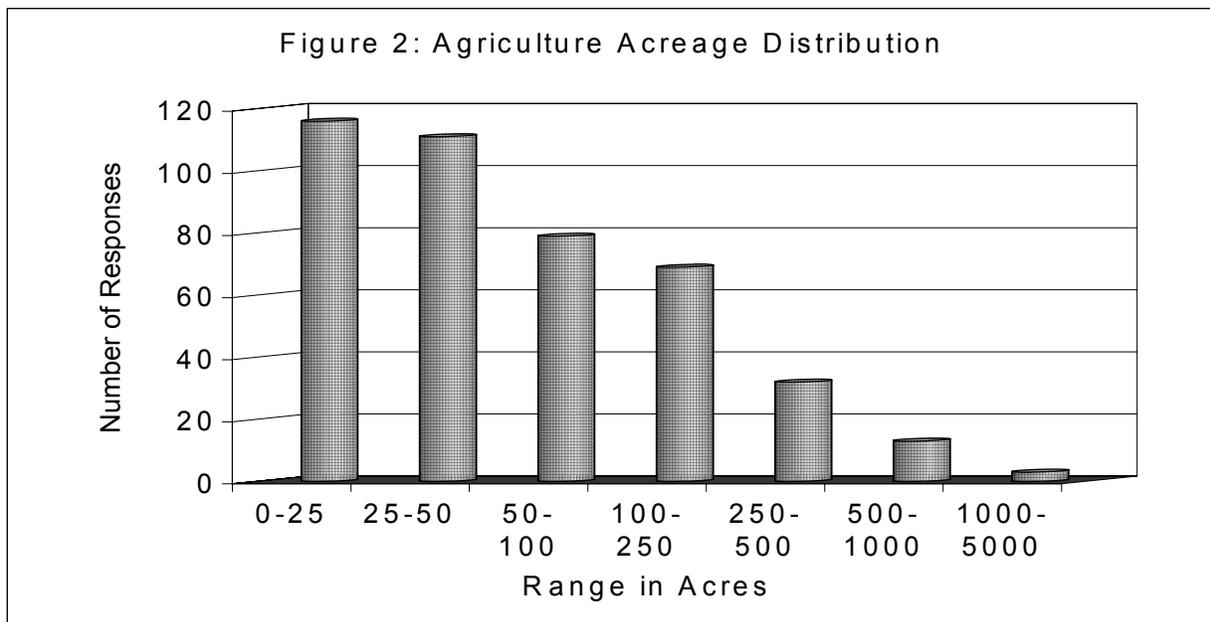
The following is a summary of the major findings of the 1998 Fauquier County Farmland Survey which can be found in appendix B. The survey method is found in Appendix A, and complete results of the survey with a statistical analysis of the results can be found in Appendix C.

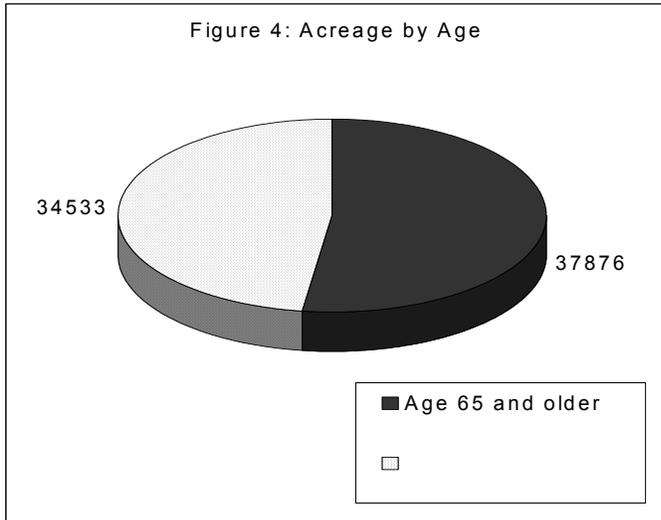
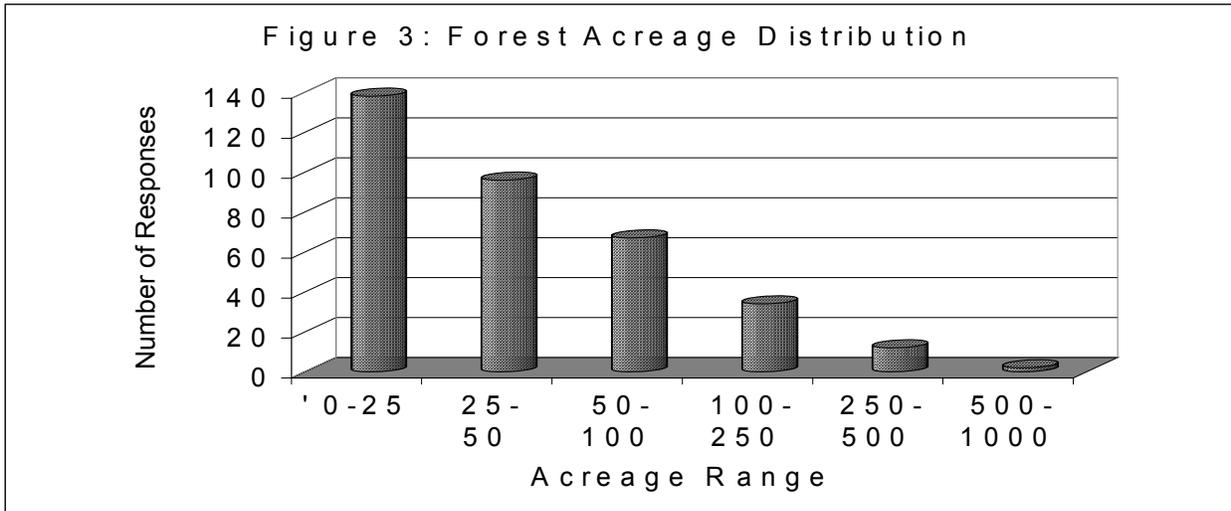
Landowner Characteristics

The average age of Landowners responding to the survey was 61 years. Figure 1 is a Histogram of the Landowner age responses. This figure illustrates a fairly normal distribution of ages surrounding the average. The spike at the zero category is due to a number of "age" categories left blank, which translated into a zero response.



On average, landowners responding to the survey owned 120 acres of farmland, 61 acres of forest land, and had 142 acres of combined farm and forest land. In addition, those who leased their land leased an average of 85 acres. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the survey by size of agricultural tract. Note that smaller parcels are far more common than large ones. Figure 3 is a similar representation for forested acres.





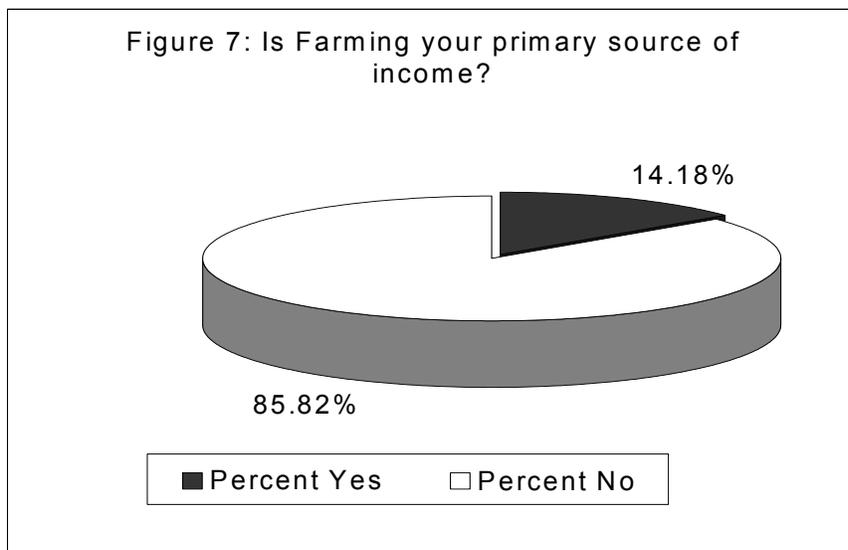
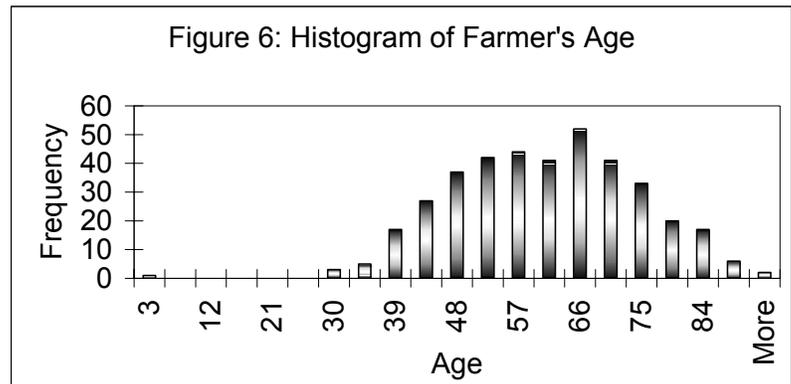
Fifty-two percent of the farm and forest land represented in the survey is currently owned by individuals age 65 and older (figure 4). Given an average life expectancy of around 80 years, this could mean that over half of our farm and forest land will change hands within the next 15 years.

Nearly 90 percent (89.83%) of landowners responding to the survey answered “yes” to the question “Do you wish to preserve your land for future agricultural purposes?” (figure 5)



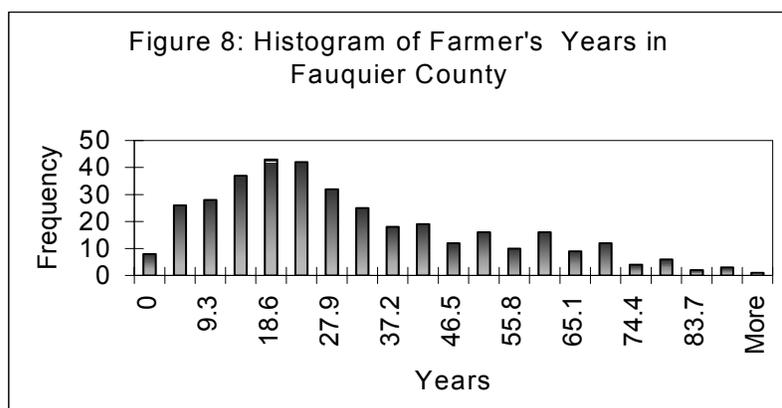
Farmer Characteristics

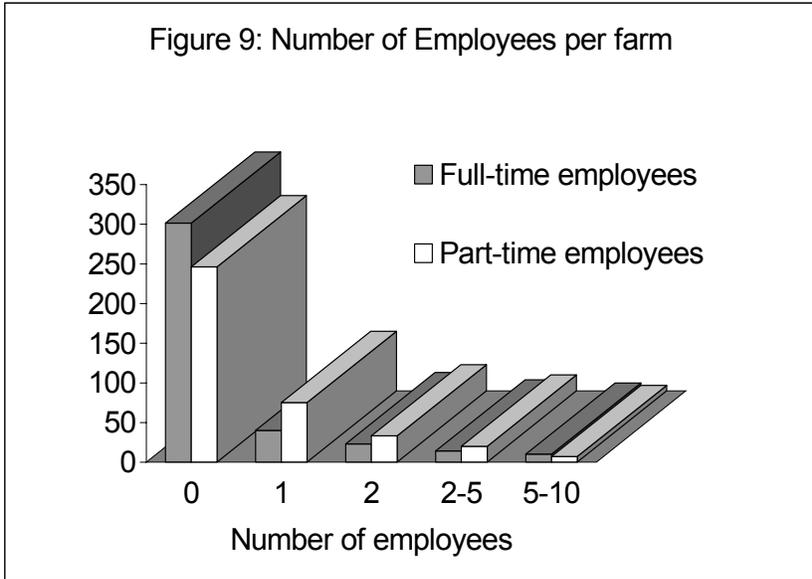
The average age of farmers or farm operators responding to this survey was 56 years. Figure 6 is a histogram of the farmer's age responses. Again, as with the landowner ages, we see a fairly normal distribution of ages around the average.



When asked "Is farming your primary source of income?" over 85 percent of the farm operators responding to the survey said "No". This shows the importance of off-farm employment to farmers. (Figure 7)

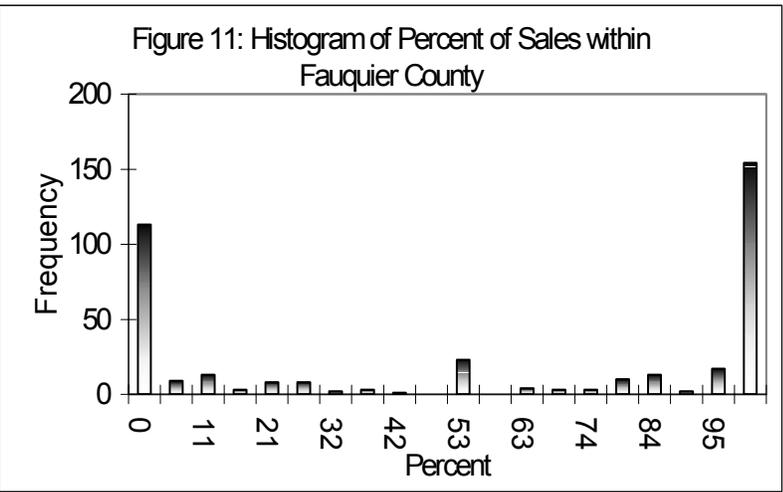
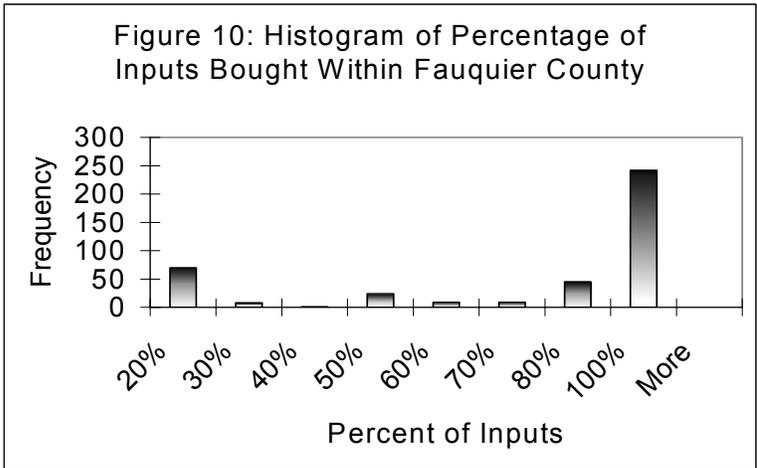
On average, farm operators responding to the survey have been residents of Fauquier County for 24 years, and have been involved in agriculture for 25 years. It should be noted that the number of years in the county had quite a range of responses, as can be seen in the Histogram in figure 8.





Farm operators were asked how many full-time and part-time employees they employed. The most common number of employees reported was zero, with 43 percent of farm operators reporting at least one part-time employee. (Figure 9)

Farm operators reported purchasing an average 72.7% of agricultural inputs within Fauquier County. It should be noted that the average does not clearly show the real picture for this question. Figure 10 illustrates that while the vast majority of responses were in the 100% range, the next most common response was in the 20% range.



Farm operators were also asked what percentages of their product sales were within Fauquier County. The average response was 55%, but just as with figure 10 there was a unique pattern to the responses. The two most common responses were 100 percent and zero. This is represented in figure 11.

Marketing Practices

The next six figures summarize the answers to the six questions about farmer marketing practices. The question appears in the title of the chart, and the responses are clearly indicated.

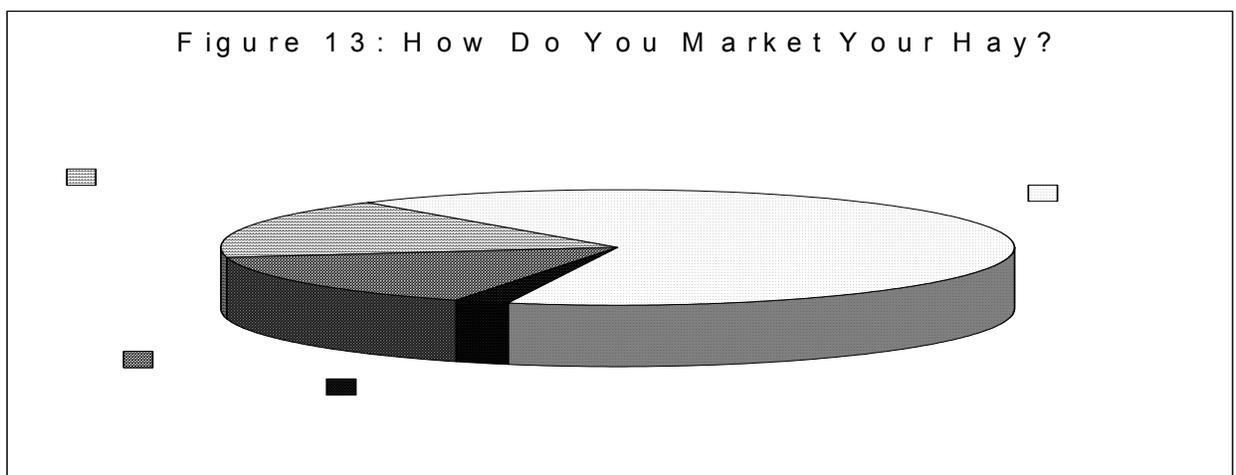
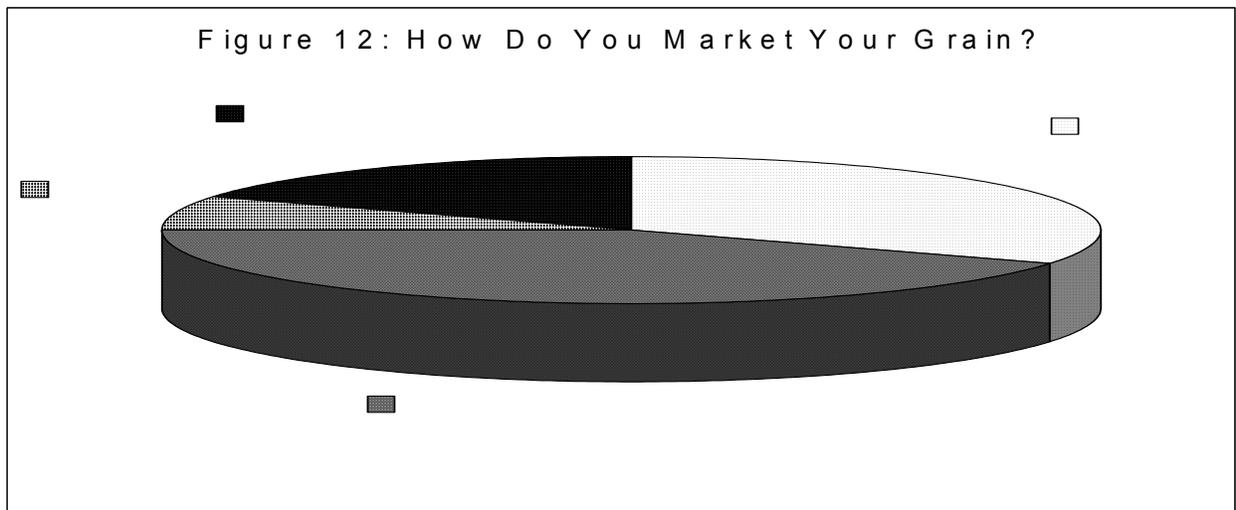
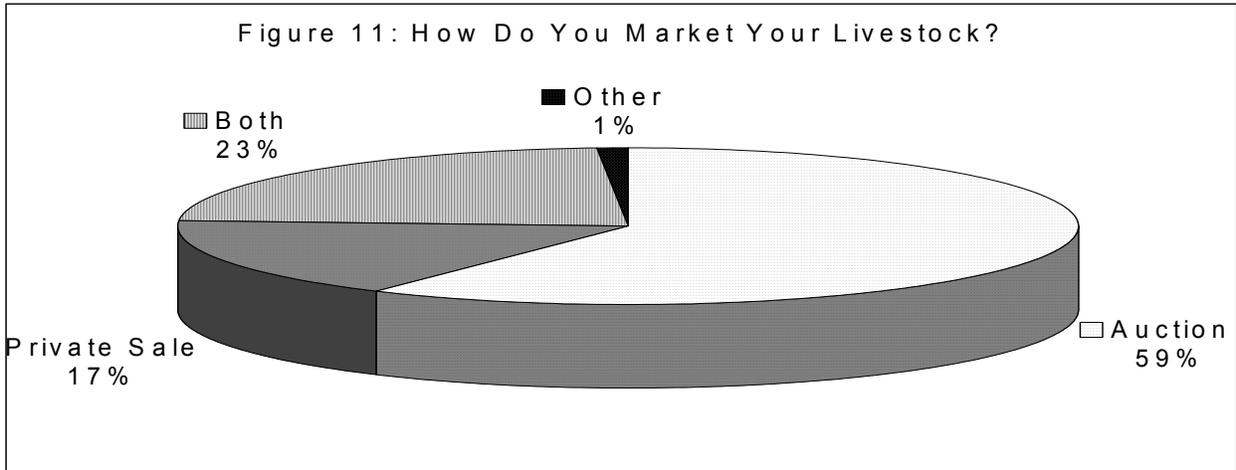


Figure 14: How Do You Market Your Specialty Livestock?

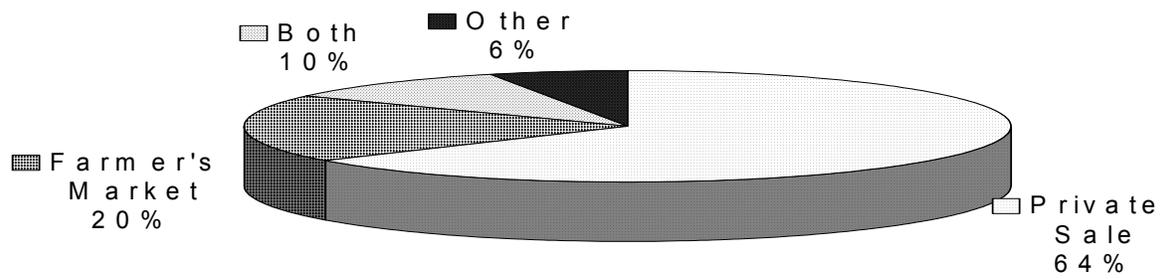


Figure 15: How Do You Market Your Specialty Crops?

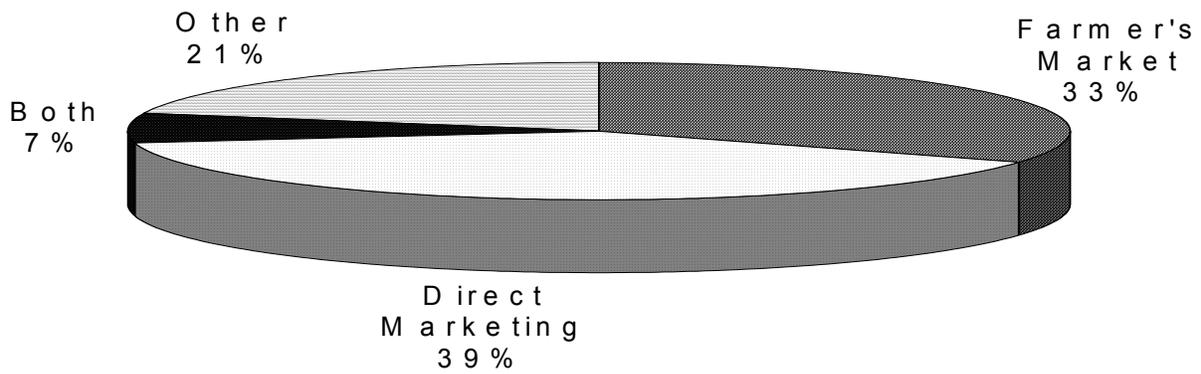
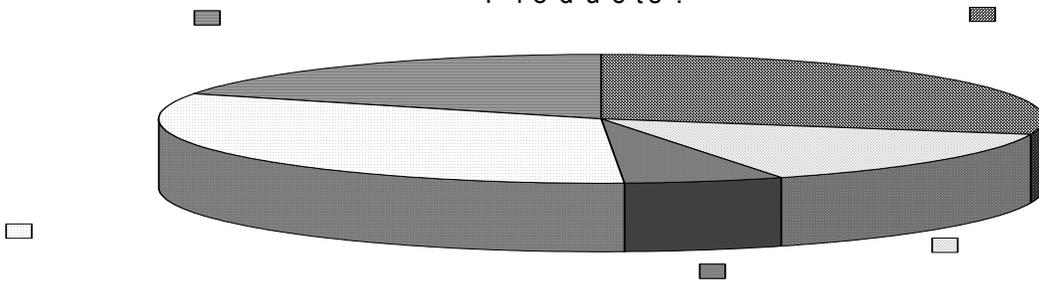


Figure 16: How Do You Advertise Your Products?



1998 Fauquier County Farmland Study

Summary of Findings: 1999 Landowner Focus Groups

Common themes and selected supportive statements

Theme #1: Education of the non-farm public about land-use taxation is a necessity.

- “In this county we have land use taxes, if that were to go, the county would be developed within ten years. I would have to quit farming immediately. It’s the only thing that keeps me farming.” (Center District)
- “Going back to land use, if they stop to realize what very little services we get from the county compared to a subdivision, very little road, police protection, recreation, ...Look what the subdivision costs the county. They cost taxpayers money. I don’t know why the county would want to get rid of land use.” (Lee District)
- Land-use taxation is constantly under fire... change the name... “Clean and Green”... make it friendlier. (Marshall District)

Theme #2: Agricultural land is the family farmer’s primary financial asset.

- “It would be nice to be able to sell a small lot for housing to help decrease debt load on the farm. Land is our only real asset.” (Scott District)
- “We’ve gotten to the point in America where people’s land is in many cases the main asset that they have...” (Marshall District)
- “...The only thing he can retire on is what the land would bring...” (Scott District)

Theme #3: Agriculture, forest and open space land is an asset to the community. These uses conserve natural resources, lower the burden to taxpayers, and contribute to the quality of life for the entire community.

- “... The reason most of us live in this county is for the rural aspect. For the farmland, for the open space, clean air, and that’s negotiable at this point... It can go away pretty quickly.” (Cedar Run District)
- “Hopefully, the people who enjoy the open space will contribute more... I think they’ll have to... Either through the government or through whatever, to having that open space. It’s a privilege for them to have that.” (Marshall District)
- General public that moves in and likes that field and open space, they need to make concessions – taxes, land rights... (Lee District)
- “The nation needs to realize that farmland is one of the most important resources. They think of saving streams, etc., but not farmland. We’ve never been short on farm products. We can’t reverse it when we come up short of farmland.” (Center)
- Philosophy toward land – “I don’t own the land, I am only the steward right now.” I am trying to improve the land while keeping it in agriculture production. (Lee)
- Encourage conservancy... It’s in the government’s best interest. (Marshall)

Theme #4: Landowners are uncertain of their farm’s future because they are uncertain of the future of Fauquier County.

- “My son... I’d like to see him keep it... The times are going to run him out of it... The taxes on the land are getting higher each year... and developers are all around us... So what are you going to do? They put you in a box... So you’ve got to sell or you’ve got to buy more land... and the machinery and stuff is so high... Right now he farms and works off the farm to make ends meet... I just feel sorry for the younger people... What are they going to do? Where are they going to build a house? Where are they going to get the money to buy a piece of land? The developers are just running the farmers out.” (Marshall)
- “... but will my family own it? We’ll do our darndest to make sure... That’s kind of out of our hands... When I think about my daughter being able to make a living off of it. It kind of depends on what happens to Fauquier County... If we’re tucked in a sea of suburbs, we’re not going to be able to make a living off the farm.” (Marshall)
- “I’m not too far from where Waterfield will be... I just see less agricultural use and more development... I’ll probably just get swallowed up” (Scott)
- “There are desires and then plans. Our desires are to stay there ‘til we die. Our plans react to what is going on around us from year to year. Realistically, will the environment be conducive to stay around?” (Center)
- We moved out to get away from civilization. I don’t like the subdivision, but you should be able to give your property to the children. The future of the two hundred acres for sale next door will affect their business and life. (Lee)
- More young people would stay if they could afford to. (Cedar Run)

Theme #5: Increasing the profit margin off the land is a priority.

- How can farmers in this area tap into metropolitan market, find specialty crops, cattle, etc.? Extension and county needs to guide and provide financial assistance to farmers towards this direction. (Scott)
- Find alternate and valuable uses for the farm. Use land for wildlife habitat. (Lee)
- Need information on alternative enterprises (Cedar Run)
- “What can be done to encourage healthy and viable farm economy?” (Marshall)

Theme #6: Landowners feel a need to organize to identify and address common issues and needs.

- Hold regular, annual forums of farmers...numbers count... Farmer’s association. (Lee)
- Share information with each other. (Cedar Run)
- We need a spokesperson for the group. (Lee)
- Support from community necessary, “strength in numbers” (Scott)

Estate Planning

Theme #7: Landowners realize estate planning is necessary to minimize estate taxes. More education is needed.

- “Thank goodness my mother had the foresight to plan her estate” (Scott)

- “Without the estate plan, if the farmer hadn’t planned and died, they’d have to sell the whole farm. Or there wouldn’t be enough left to farm. There are a lot of programs, but they all tie you up. It’s awful important and some older farmers have no estate or financial plans.” (Center)
- Estate taxes hurt land preservation, land is sold to pay. (Scott)
- Need more information about estate and financial planning (Cedar Run)
- How to leave to kids, how to.... Estate planning ... easements are a part of it. Need to know all of the options. (Marshall District)
- “You can’t keep up with it yourself.” (Lee)
- “Laws change and make it difficult to do an estate plan.” (Cedar Run)

Theme #8: Landowners are planning for the future of their property in a variety of ways.

- The only way to go and stay ahead was to sell the property to son. And he has a son and it’s a family tradition, if you have a son, he farms to. It’s hard to designate what will happen to your property 25, 50 years from now, with someone else. (Lee)
- We talked to our children and they have no real interest. None of them want to be a farmer. We didn’t want to break up our land and put it under easement with the Virginia Outdoor Foundation. Our land should stay open for the next 50 years. The children were agreeable even though it may make their inheritance less valuable. (Center)

Growth and Development

Theme #9: Zoning is necessary to help control and channel growth, but frustrate landowners by the limitations it places on them.

- “I believe zoning has helped some. But it is really hard to keep people from doing what they want to do. It’s a free country.” (Center)
- “Makes it difficult for elderly people that are trying to give their land to their children.” Just give it away. There are some pluses, surrounding property has remained agricultural. (Lee)
- Zoning changes... signs are too small on road, letters are only mailed to bordering landowners. More people need to know of proposed changes. (Cedar Run)
- “The old saying goes - A man ought to be able to do on their land what they want. But if we do that, what will my grandchildren have?” (Lee)
- Zoning hurts ability to house farm employees. (Scott)
- It’s getting tougher to farm, rules and regulations. (Lee)
- They need to get tough on regulations (development). (Center)
- “The county has responsibility for this land. If they turn it loose, it will turn into Prince William County. I don’t like that that’s the way it’s got to be, but I want a place for my future generations to live.” (Lee)
- “Policies are snowball policies. They encourage the progression of the disaster we are talking about, more people.” (Center)

In general, there was misperception and confusion on the zoning regulations.... Education in this area is needed.

Theme #10: Landowners are supportive of the service district concept with a priority toward industrial and commercial development.

- “I’m for the service districts.” They are good. (Lee)
- Service Districts are good. They should be developed. Keep the development there. (Cedar Run)
- Taxes. Develop in service districts to increase tax base, while taking pressure off the farmer. (Scott)
- Development concentrated in service districts with a high tax base. Growth will occur, no matter what, R+D, manufacturing development needed. (all participants agree-Scott)
- Fears residential without business. Growth is inevitable. Fewer people with resources or interest in farming. Must have business base to support housing. Citizens should provide input into how land is developed. (Scott)

Theme #11: Landowners are concerned about the environmental impact of growth.

- Many changes to the environment have happened due to development. Water doesn’t soak in as well because there is less forest. (Center)
- “... The impact of the development coming west, I can see that intersection being most anything you want to make of it... Hopefully, when it’s done, it’s done properly, so that the floodplain for that part of the valley will not be ruined, because it’s the headwaters for a great deal of the Goose Creek watershed.” (Marshall)
- There is more raw sewage coming from some localities, fertilizers on lawns, etc... (Lee)

Theme #12: The growing community has presented conflicts for landowners.

- “Educate people about what farmers are going through. What their actions are doing to the farm? What is their house in the country doing to those trying to make a living?” (Lee)
- “I have only had problems with people on the roads. If you get out there on a tractor or something, people aren’t pleasant if you hold them up on the way to work. People need to be told that that tractor can’t go any more than 16 miles per hour and it’s gonna weave, because it was not designed to be on the road. I’m doing the best I can.” (Center)
- “People like farming in the abstract, but don’t understand it or like the reality of it. Cow pies, flies, the smell. Farming is not always neat and tidy.” (Center)

Other Identified Education/Program Needs

- Directory of landowner/farm resources and associations
- “Beginning farmer kit”
- Erosion, Conservation programs
- School-age education in farming

REACTION TO SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

PROS & CONS

FARM LINK: A program that would assist in transitioning farmland from retiring to entering farmers.

PROS

- It would be good if everyone was cooperative. (Lee District)
- Would help (Scott District)
- That's something I would use. (Cedar Run District)
- A good idea- reduce paperwork, education important (Marshall District)

CONS

- May help in the mid west where farming is more serious...Few young people busting to go into farming in Fauquier... (Center District)
- "There are even problems with families trying to divide stuff, I don't think that two people with no relationship whatsoever will be able to work this out." (Lee District)
- I've tried to do a farm link in our area. Basically, you farm my land, keep the profit, and I'll get land use. Sometimes that doesn't even work out. (Lee District)
- Sounds like a great idea out west, but may not be realistic here. (Scott District)

Marshall district did not have time to thoroughly discuss this program. One participant did a "farm link" of his own by selling his farm to a neighbor that would continue to farm the property.

TAX DEFERMENT: A program that would allow producers of agricultural products that take more than one year to mature for harvest (i.e. winegrapes, forest products) to defer property taxes until year of harvest.

PROS

- It's good (Lee District)
- For forestland, I had to talk my brother into keeping land in woods and not selling it. It helps people keep land agricultural and productive. (Lee District)
- Helps people afford it. (Lee District)
- Tie to not developing and it will have credibility. "I try to keep the developers on the other side of the fence. With the value of the land, it is hard to keep it. Taxes will run us out." (Center District)
- If seen as a resource, give more incentives for farming and for not developing. "Thirty years tax-free!" (Center District)

CONS

- Not realistic (that local government will adopt.) (Marshall District)
- Unrealistic (Cedar Run District)
- With land use taxation already under attack, afraid deferment would further jeopardize it. (Center District)
- More programs equal less freedom to do what you want to do. (Center District)

PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS: A program in which a property owner voluntarily sells the right to develop their land to a government agency or private conservation organization.

PROS

- Not sure how this works, but it is one of the more interesting options. On PDRs, I would like a say in the long run. If they (government, conservation organization) develop the land, who gets the profit? Interested in the implication for the future. (Center District)
- I don't understand how they did it in MD. My brother told me he could get \$2500/acre for 150 acres. No tax on that money. (Lee District)
- "Concept is good, but how would the county swing the cost? The county in MD is doing it themselves. They put it on the ballot. The citizens were in favor of it 2 to 1. (Lee District)
- Transfer of Development Rights can help develop certain areas more densely. (Scott District)
- "I like PDRs. I would rather see development rights purchased rather than government taking. Which is what happens with down zoning." (Center District)
- Now in Montgomery County, MD, they can buy development rights and use them to develop another area. Which makes more sense. At least you have the value of the development right and you still have open space." (Center District)

CONS

- Can create "pockets" of farms in developed areas. (Scott District)
- "That's exactly what my father did, but he didn't get paid for it. We did it for free." (Lee District)
- Skeptical of government purchasing development rights...would be more trustful of a private organization. (Cedar Run District)
- Downside...can't sell property for high dollar amount. (Cedar Run District)
- "I think this one has a few potholes along the way. It might be good in the short term for the person selling the development right. It might not be very good at protecting the land. What if the government or private agency that purchases it does not maintain it?" (Center District)
- Who wants to be first? Interested in it, hard to estimate the value of development "wait and see" attitude. (Scott District)
- Where does the buck come from? Will our taxes go up? What help is this? (Center District)
- "Provided you trust the government to honor that side of the contract." (Center District)
- Problem- the program is not committed spatially. (Scott District)

ESTATE PLANNING

Discussed in Focus Group Summary Themes 8 through 10