ORGANIC AND REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD

FARM OWNER SURVEY REPORT

2025

Executive Summary

About this report

The survey was conducted to describe organic and regenerative farming in NJ and what the farmers most need to be successful. Who are they? Where are they farming, and on what scale? What do they grow? Are they satisfied with the profitability of their farms? What do they need to be better businesspeople? What do they need to be better land managers? The answers are here.

The first half of the results describe our farmers and their farms. The second half reports upon their challenges, priorities, and the services they have found most useful.

This is a report of the needs assessment survey conducted by the Organic and Regenerative Farming Board of New Jersey (ORFBNJ) in January and February 2025. We are grateful for the essential partnership of Meredith Melendez of Rutgers University Cooperative Extension to refine the survey and deliver it through the University's research protocols.

The survey included responses from over 200 individuals. This report is of a selection of data from Farm Business Owners only. Data shown is marked with the number of respondents (n). We also collected data from farm employees and from agricultural service providers, and that is not shown here. To our knowledge, this is the most complete survey of organic and regenerative farmers and their needs that has been conducted in any state in the Northeast.

In the following pages, you will find that the data and graphics paint a picture. You will see that New Jersey's organic and regenerative farmers are overall young, diverse, and new to farming. They grow most things you can think of, but concentrate heavily on fast growing specialty crops. They have needs that are not being met by existing support services within the state, but the information that they have shared with us will allow NJ legislators, the Department of Agriculture, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and the wealth of nonprofit service providers in our state better serve these farmers.

Key Findings

- The cost of farmland is the largest barrier for farmers.
- Many of these farmers concentrate on enterprises that have a low cost of entry.
- Direct sales to individual customers is overwhelmingly how these farmers sell their products.
- Extreme weather is a major concern.
- A higher chance of profitability is linked to being a business sized to employ and manage 11-20 people, indicating the need for business and management skills.
- Lower profitability farms report less engagement with support services, suggesting that improved outreach and support could have a significant impact.

Why support farmers?

The Garden State is the most densely populated state in the nation. Thriving farms are better able to withstand development pressure and to promote the food security of the communities around them. Farmland buffers our towns against floodwater effects, contributes to carbon sequestration, beautifies our landscape, offers wholesome recreational opportunities and provides meaningful jobs.

The manifold benefits of farms to our communities are undeniable. Yet we see from the survey that the majority of these farmers struggle to financially sustain farm businesses. The results of this survey should be used to put resources in the directions that they will do the most good for farmers, with spin off benefits that are good for all Jerseyans.

Who Are New Jersey's Regenerative Farmers?

"Regenerative farming" means farming and grazing practices that:

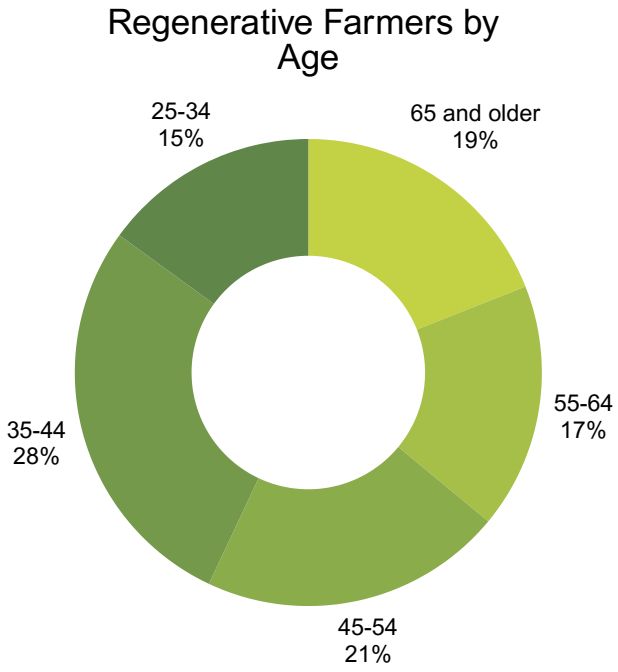
- prioritize soil health and ecosystem health,
- reduce reliance on synthetic inputs,
- reverse climate change by rebuilding soil organic matter, sequestering carbon, and restoring degraded soil biodiversity, and
- (engage in conservation practices to ensure the long-term health of the farm's ecosystem, among many benefits.

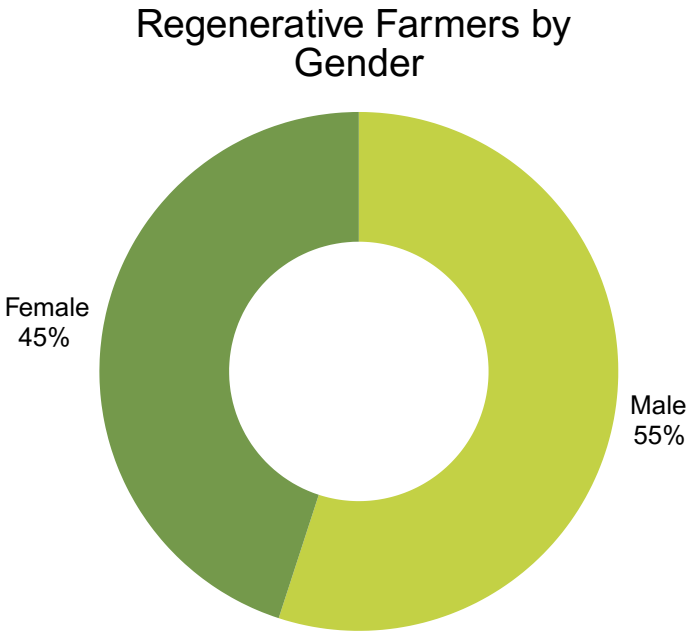
The age of regenerative and organic farm owners in New Jersey reveals a notably younger profile than that of the overall agricultural sector as reported by the 2022 Census of Agriculture data for New Jersey. While the average age of all farm producers in New Jersey stands at 58.7 years, the average among regenerative farmers surveyed is closer to 50, almost a decade younger.

This skew toward younger producers is evident in the detailed breakdown: 28% of regenerative farmers are aged 35–44, and 21% are between 45 and 54. Another 15% are aged 25–34, more than double the statewide average, 6.1%, for that group. By contrast, only 36% of regenerative farmers fall into the older brackets of 55–64 and 65+, compared to 66.4% of all NJ producers.

Nearly 45% of regenerative farm owners in the sample identify as female, significantly higher than the 38% reported among all producers statewide and the 36.3% share at the national level.

Age and Gender



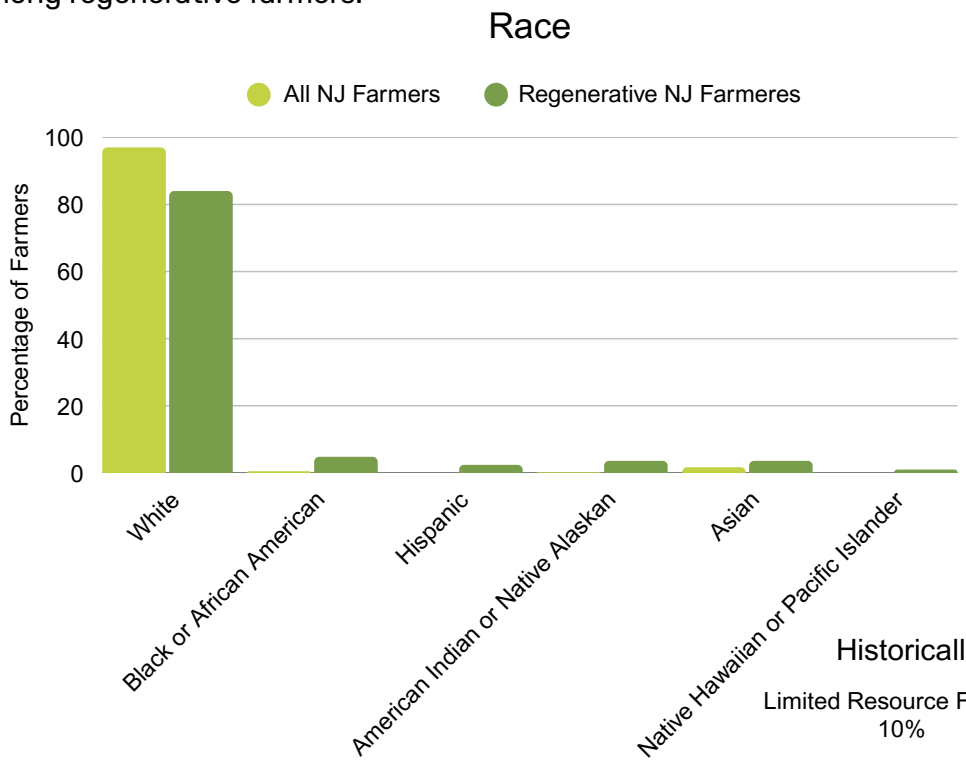


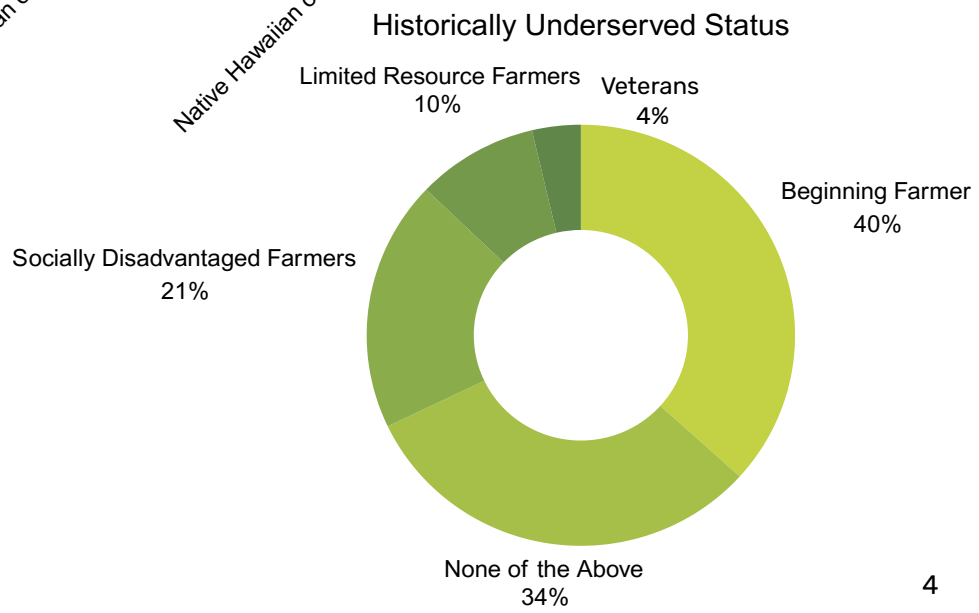
Race & Historically Underserved Status

White farmers make up 97% of New Jersey's total farmers according to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, while they account for 84% of surveyed regenerative farmers. This indicates that regenerative farmers are a notably more diverse population than the state's farming community as a whole.

Regenerative farmers include relatively higher proportions of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups: Black farmers represent 4.8% of the sample (compared to 0.5% statewide), while both American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Asian farmers each comprise 3.6% (versus 0.2% and 1.7%, respectively). Hispanic farmers, though not broken out in USDA state-level reporting, make up 2.4% of regenerative owners. This data points to a growing and more inclusive generation of farmers in the regenerative sector. These farmers often face compounded barriers, particularly when it comes to land access, startup capital, and navigating support systems.

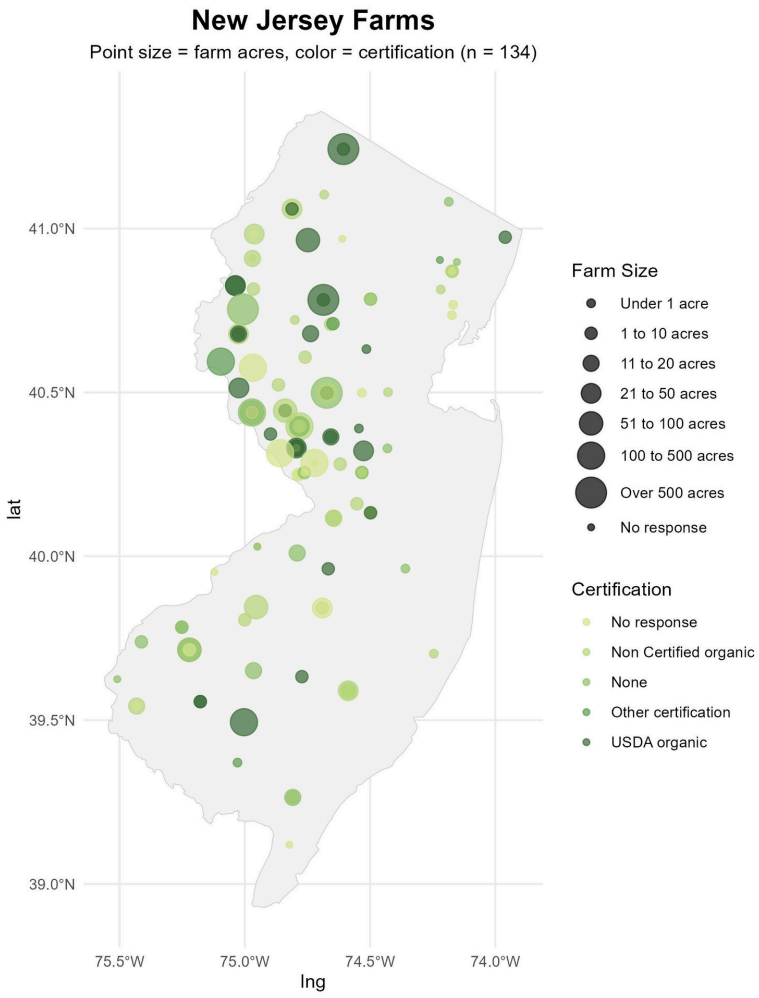
This increased diversity is mirrored in experience levels as well. While 29.96% of all New Jersey producers are classified as beginner farmers (those with fewer than 10 years of experience), that number rises to 40.4% among regenerative farmers.





Where are New Jersey's Regenerative Farms?

Organic Regenerative Farm Map Displaying Farm Size and Certification Status



Interactive NJ Map displaying

- profitability
- annual revenue brackets
- farm demographics

SCAN HERE

Interactive NJ Map displaying

- %of beginning farmer
- %of owned land
- farms by gender and revenue

SCAN HERE

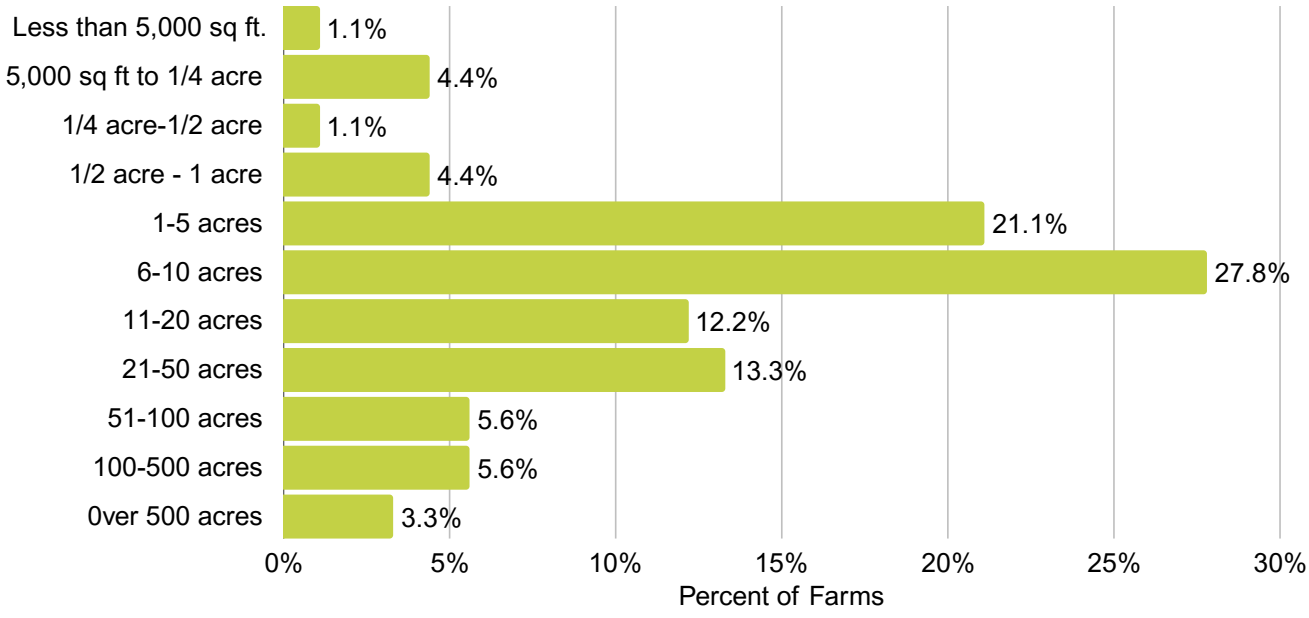
What do New Jersey's Regenerative Farms look like?

Organic Regenerative Farm Size Distribution by Acreage

When compared to the 2022 Census of Agriculture data for New Jersey, organic and regenerative farms appear notably smaller in scale. Census data shows 17% of all New Jersey farms are 100 acres or more, while in the regenerative sample only 8.9% exceed 100 acres. Conversely, the share of farms under 10 acres is substantially higher in our sample than in the statewide farm distribution (59.9% versus 28.5%).

Given that more than ¼ of all NJ farms report that they are 10 acres or less, state agencies and support providers should demonstrate a strong focus on the realities of farming for smaller scale operations. Markets, equipment, input purchasing, labor, diversification, and other needs for smaller farms vary significantly from larger counterparts.

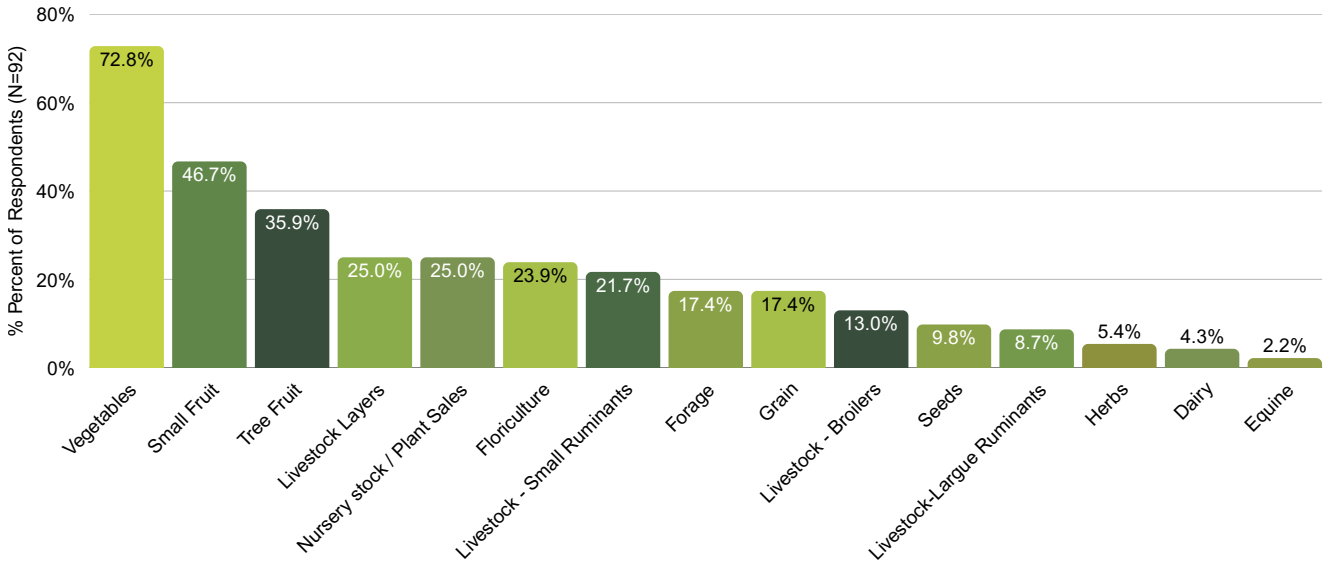
Regenerative Farm Size Distribution by Acreage



Products Sold by Regenerative Farmers

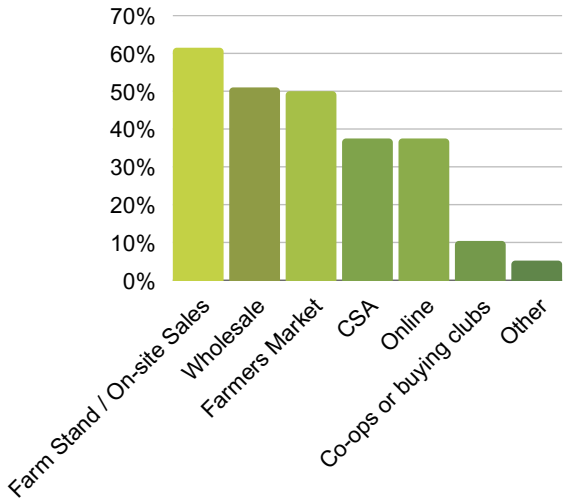
When reviewing the income by product type, vegetables stand out as the dominant primary income source, with more than 60 respondents reporting some vegetable revenue and a substantial portion, nearly half, earning over 50% of their farm income from vegetables.

We infer a positive correlation between the most common products sold and a lower cost of entry for start up of those enterprises. From our Board's internal experience, vegetable growing and small fruits are among the expensive types of specialty crop agriculture a farmer could start a business in. Livestock farming represents a higher cost of entry. It is likely that a lack of financial resources combined with the beginner status of many of our farmers is responsible for this product distribution. We see opportunity for enterprise diversification if capital investment and training became available.

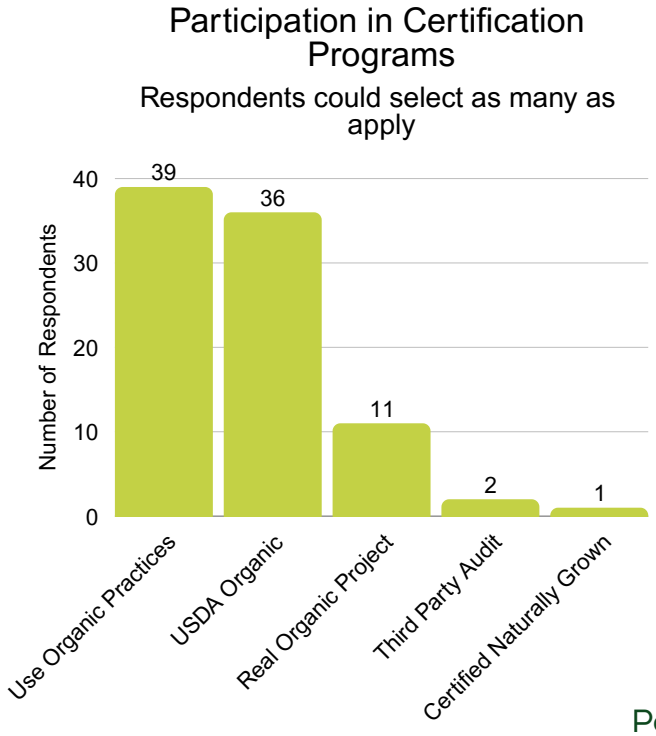


Sales Channels

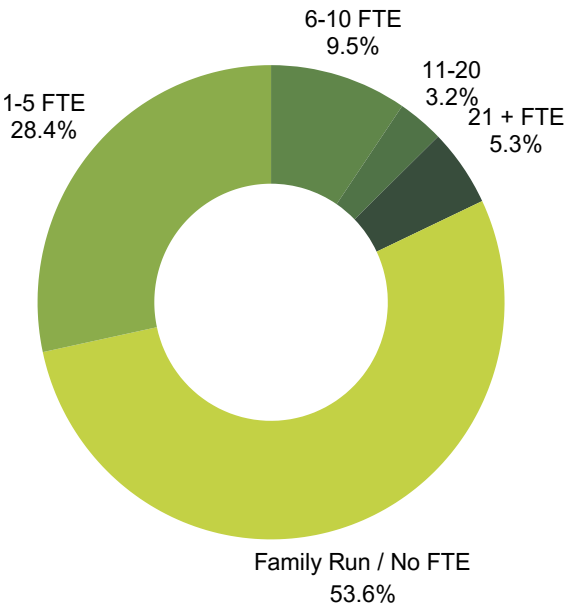
Our farmers overwhelmingly market by selling directly to the end user. This information should be used to inform marketing programing and training for this demographic.



Certification Programs



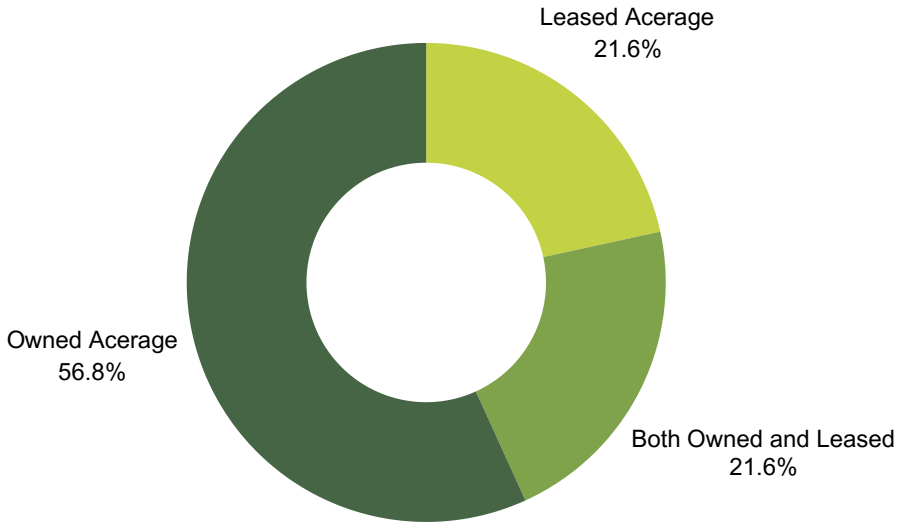
Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Employees



Over half (53.7%) of respondents reported no full-time employees, indicating that their farms are entirely family-run. Another 28.4% operate with a small workforce of 1 to 5 FTEs, while only 18% of farms reported having more than five employees. The 2022 Ag Census reports that approximately 35% of New Jersey farms operate with no hired labor, and this regenerative sample shows a much higher rate of family-run operations.

Land Tenure

Surveyed farmers are more likely to operate on leased or mixed tenure farms than the total pool of producers in NJ. Just under 57% of respondents reported owning the land they farm, while 43% either lease acreage or operate on mixed-tenure land. This differs from the broader Census profile, where 68% of farmland acres in New Jersey are owned. This report will reveal that the expense of farmland is a key barrier to success for organic and regenerative farmers

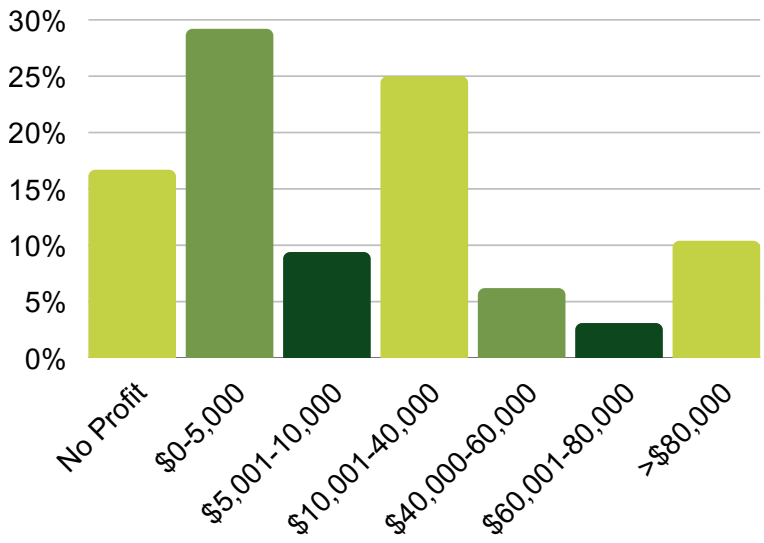


Profitability

Average profit over the previous three years

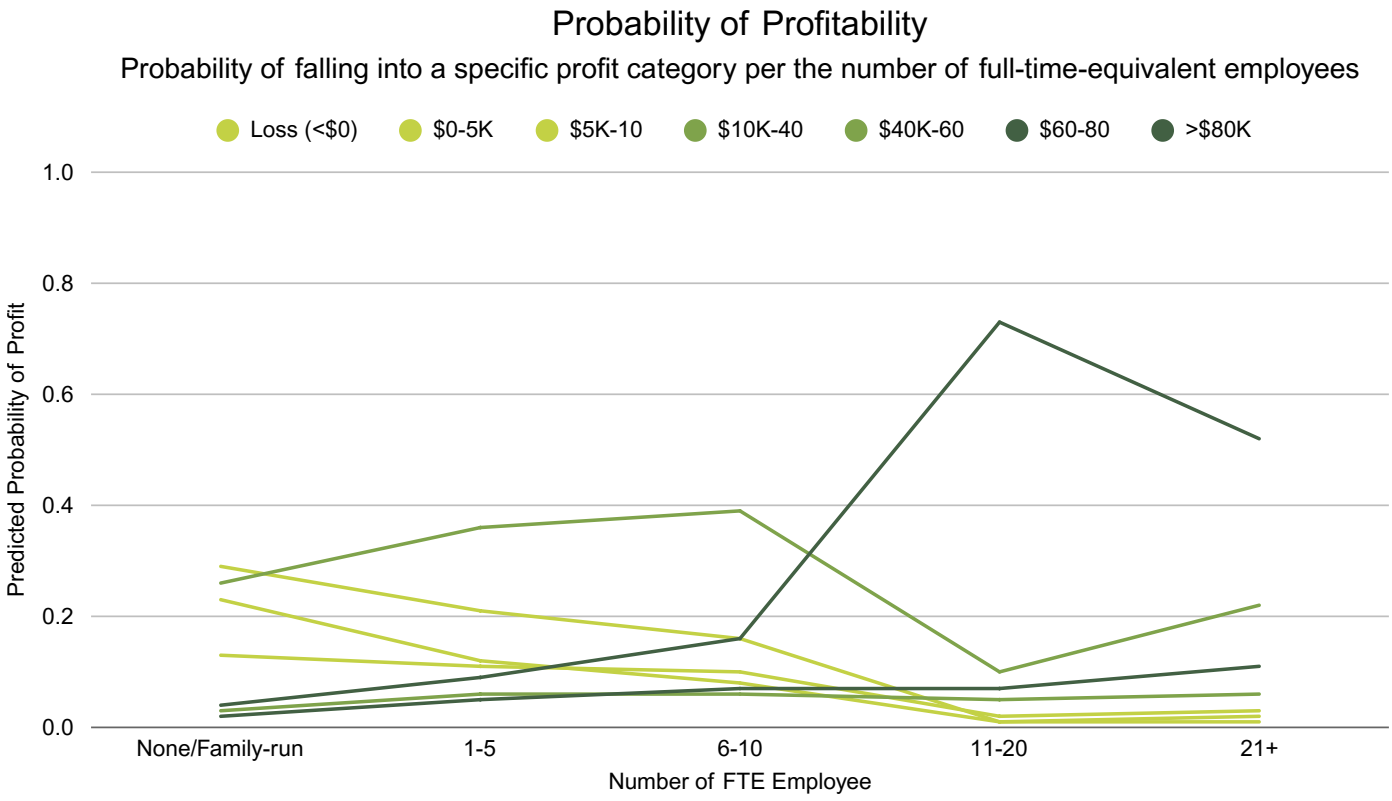
When asked to estimate their average profit over the past three years, respondents revealed a wide range of outcomes. Nearly one in five (17%) reported no profit, while close to 30% reported small annual profits of $0–$5,000. Another 34% of farms reported moderate earnings between $5,001 and $40,000, and only 19% indicated profits above $40,000, with 10.6% reporting earnings greater than $80,000 annually.

The farms in this survey fared no worse regarding profitability compared to all New Jersey farms. Comparisons are difficult to draw due to differing methods of data collection, but 13% of our surveyed farms reported $60K+ annual average profit over the past 3 years, while approximately 9% of statewide farms reported net cash farm income over $50K in 2022. However, that 13% represents only 12 total farms, so it is difficult to draw significant conclusions regarding increased profitability.



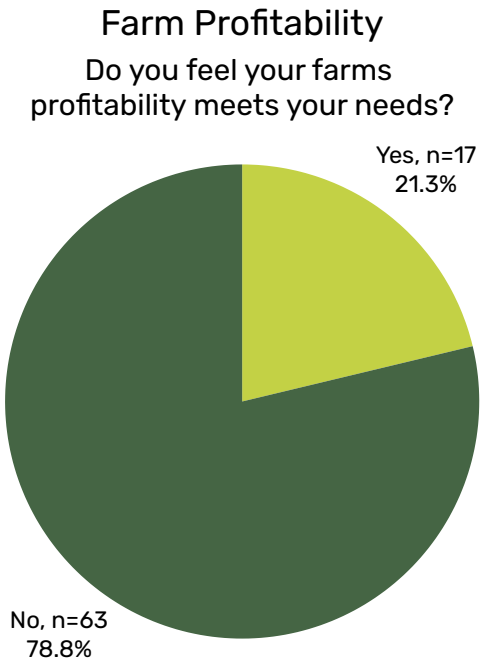
Probability of making a higher profit is highest when surveyed farms have 11-20 full time employees

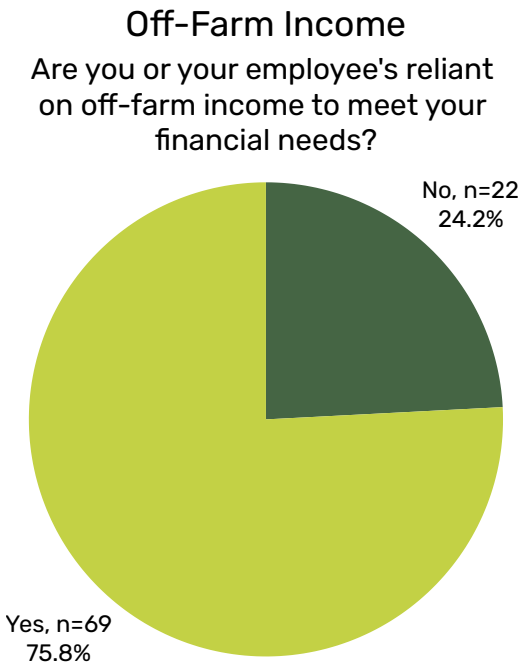
As Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing increases from 0 to 10 employees, there is a modest shift in predicted probabilities toward the mid-range reported profit categories ($10–40K), but the most pronounced jump in profitability occurs at the 11–20 FTE threshold. These results suggest that employment scale plays a pivotal role in farm profitability, potentially due to increased production capacity, specialization, or market reach that comes with additional labor. However, farms with 21 or more employees show slightly lower predicted probabilities of high profit compared to the 11–20 FTE group, indicating diminishing or more variable returns at even larger scales. The skills required for farm owners to successfully recruit, manage, and maintain employees are thus critical, but we see a gap in programming available to develop these skills. We show later in this report that labor availability and quality are key concerns our farmers.



Whether farm profitability is meeting basic needs; farmers' reliance on off-farm income to meet basic needs

As shown below, only 17 respondents (<20%) report that their farm's profitability is sufficient to meet basic financial needs. At the same time, a large majority (~75%) report relying on off-farm income to meet financial needs.

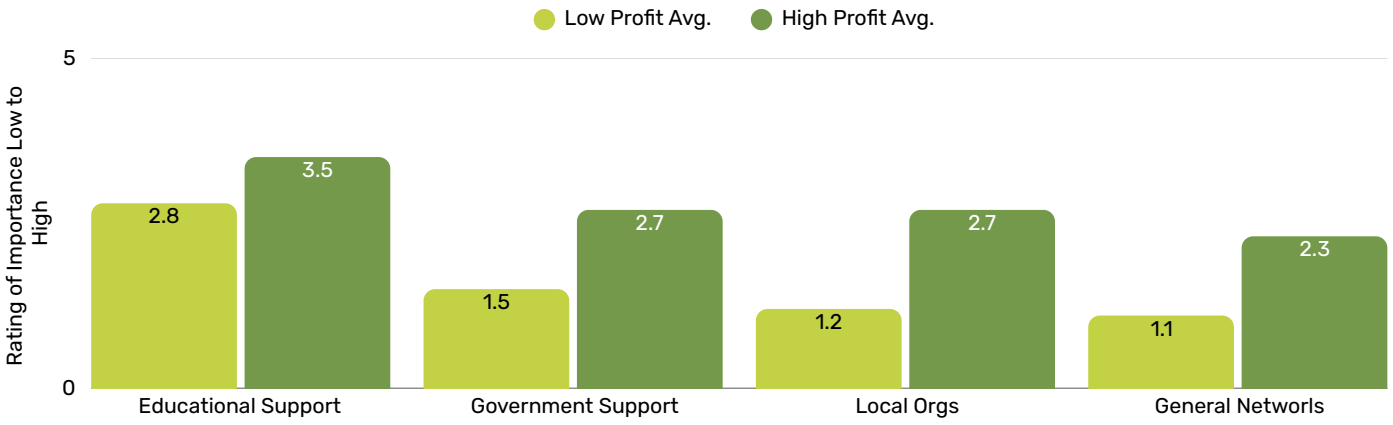




Support, Services, & Assistance

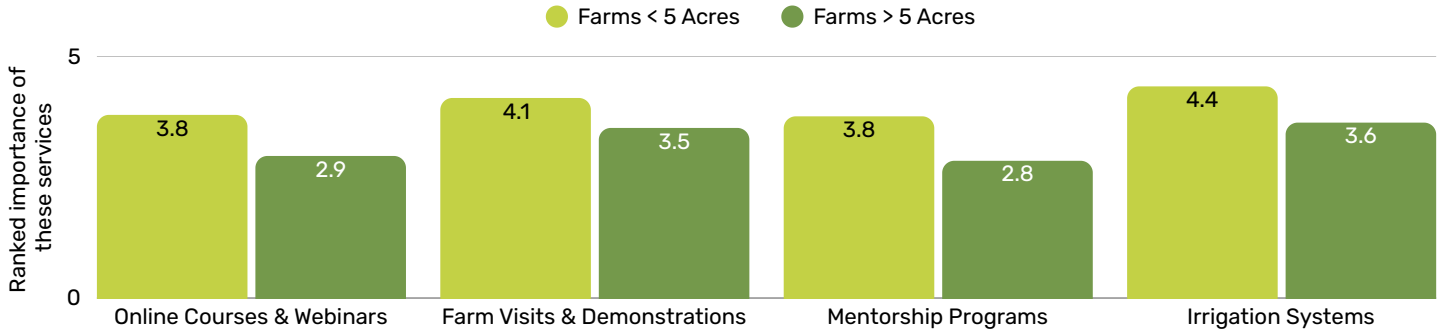
Perceived Importance of Support Types by Profitability

High-profit farms consistently rated sources of support including educational programs, government resources, local organizations, and general networks, as significantly more important than their lower-profit counterparts. These differences were sizable in magnitude (often more than a full point on the scale) and statistically significant.



Perceived Importance of Support Types by Farm Size

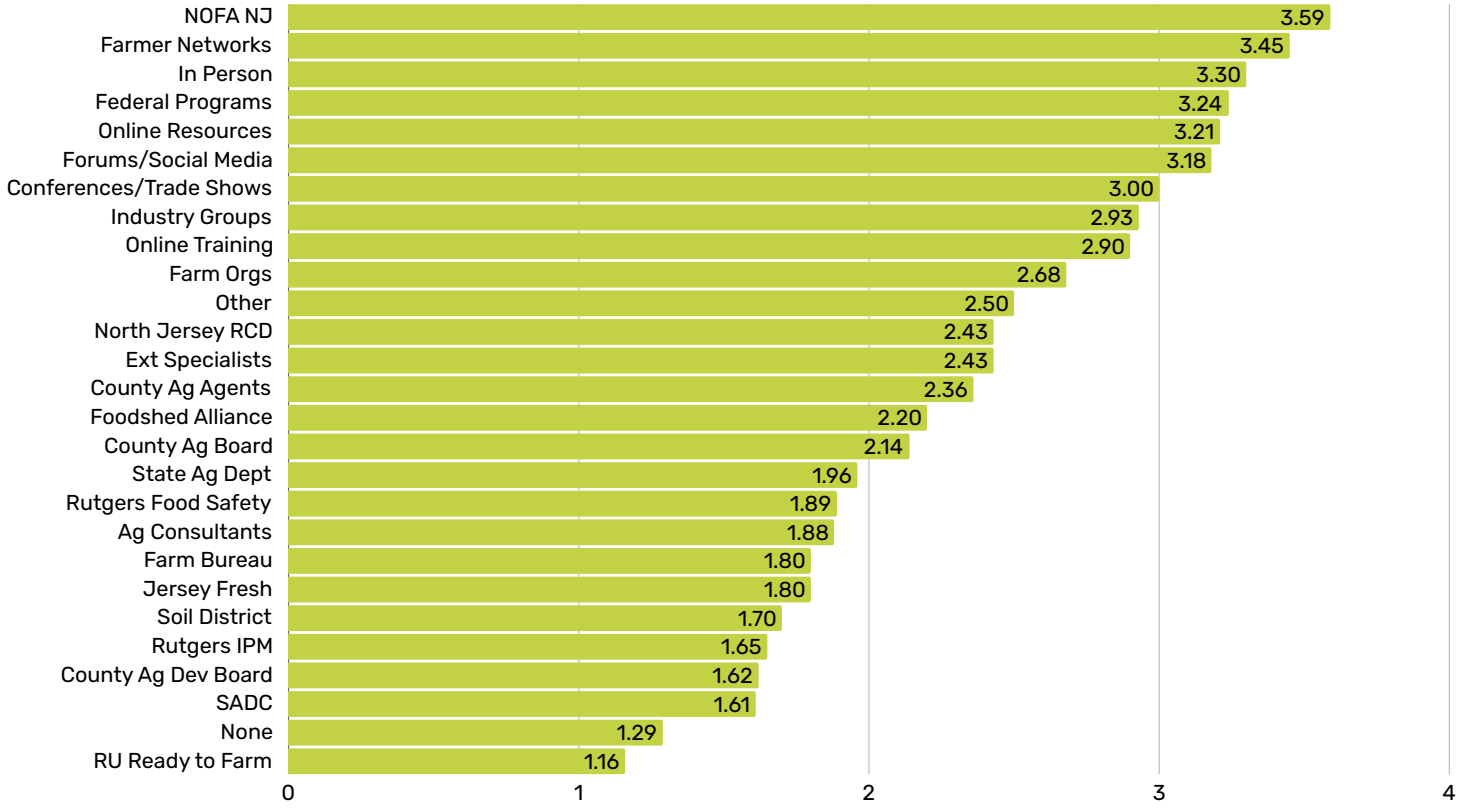
Within these four categories, smaller farms consistently gave higher scores to the importance of the below assistance programs. There is strong demand from respondents in the <5 acre group for programs that address their specific needs.



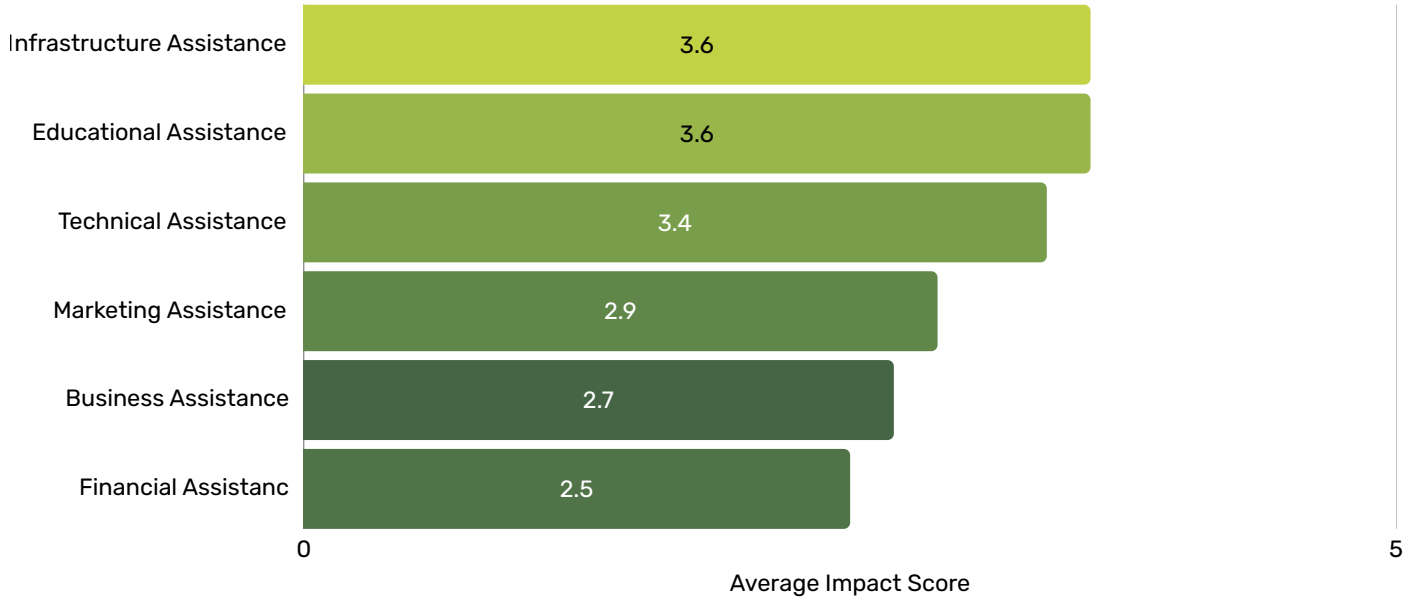
Services Having a Positive Impact on Business

Survey takers were asked to rank the level of positive impact the following services have had on their farms' success. This rating of services invites providers that have lower average scores to evaluate their services and programs either in outreach or in content. Services were rated 0-5 with 5 being the most valued.

We recognize that for this report, all respondents were farm owners, and some services do not target that sector. It is also possible that some service providers have not habitually outreached to the organic/regenerative farming subset.



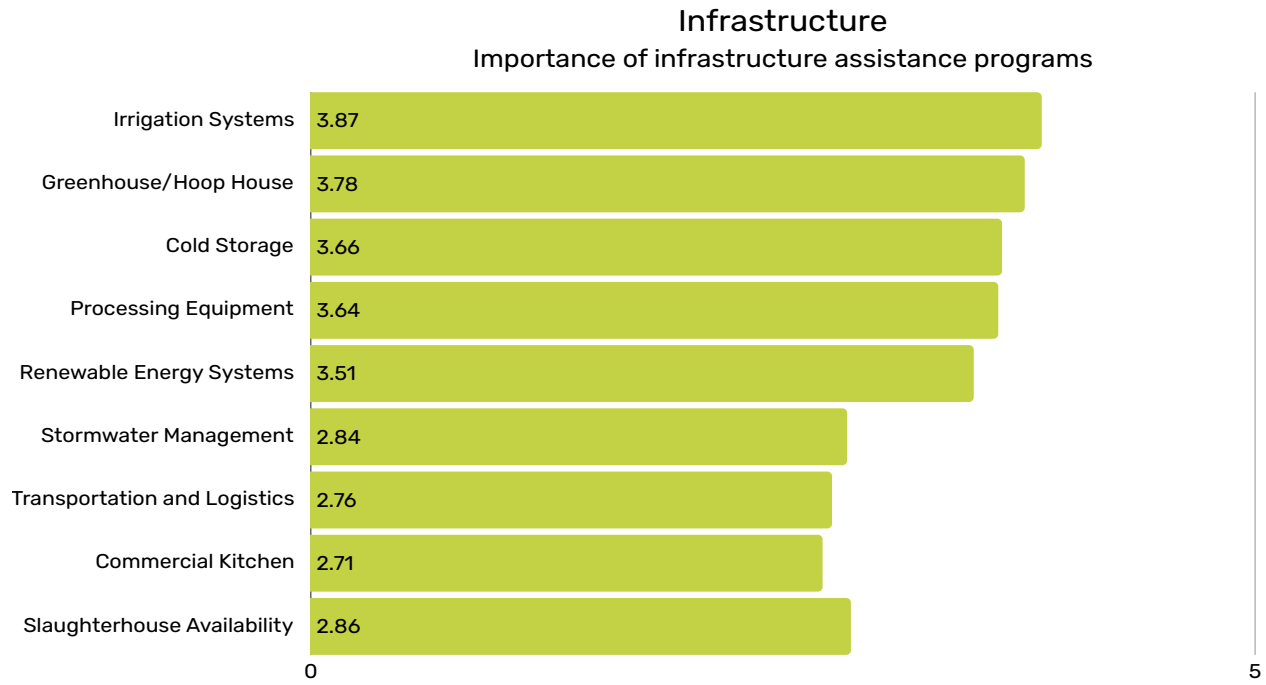
Importance of assistance programs by average sector score

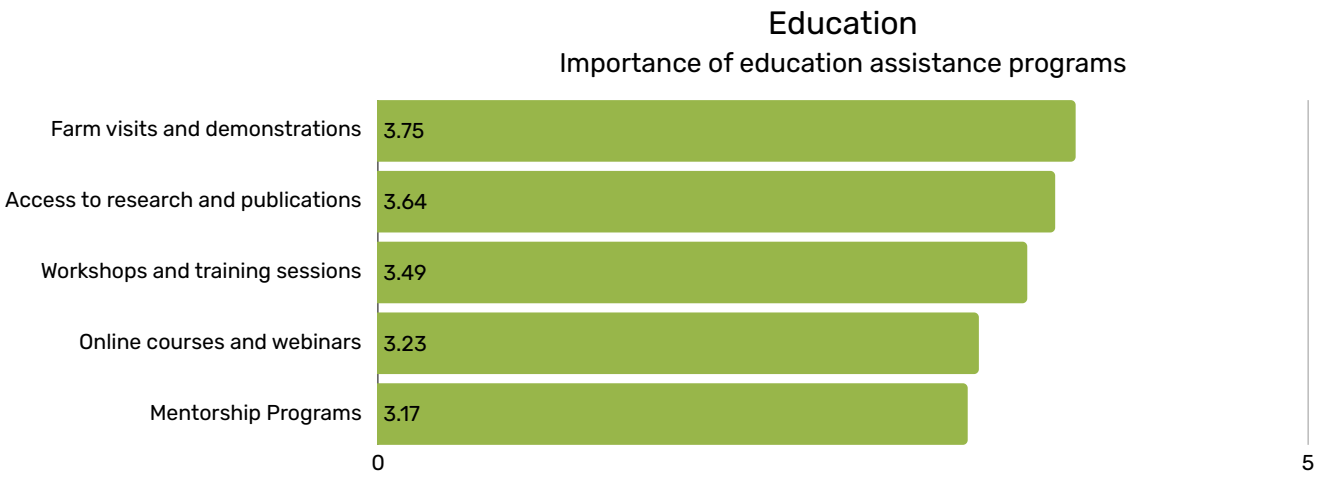


Infrastructure and education emerged as the most urgently needed categories of support, with farmers rating those the highest in mean importance. Across all six of these assistance program domains—financial, business, marketing, technical, educational, and infrastructure assistance—high-profit farms consistently rate these supports as more important to their profitability and sustainability than low-profit farms. While the importance of several individual possible selections within the categories reached statistical significance (e.g., grants, crop insurance, financial planning, stormwater management), the more salient pattern is a systemic difference: high-profit farms appear to benefit from broader and more intensive engagement with the full spectrum of public and private support programs.

This suggests a structural dynamic where high-profit farms are either better positioned to access resources, to know of their existence, or are more adept at converting them into economic gain. These findings raise critical equity concerns, particularly if low-profit farms are underutilizing or are underserved by programs that demonstrably correlate with higher success. Targeted outreach, capacity building, or redesign of support mechanisms may be needed to bridge this utilization gap.

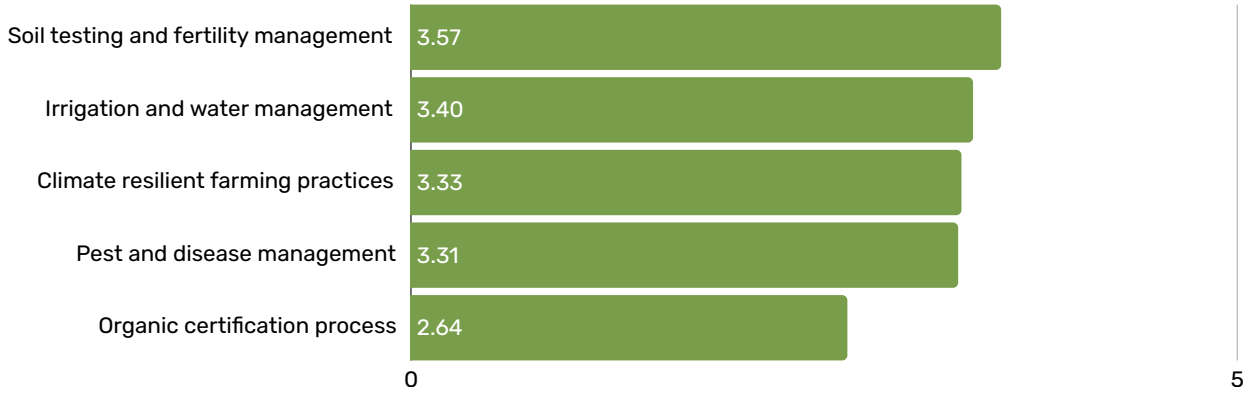
Importance of Assistance Programs rated individually





Technial

Importance of technical assistance programs



Marketing

Importance of marketing assistance programs

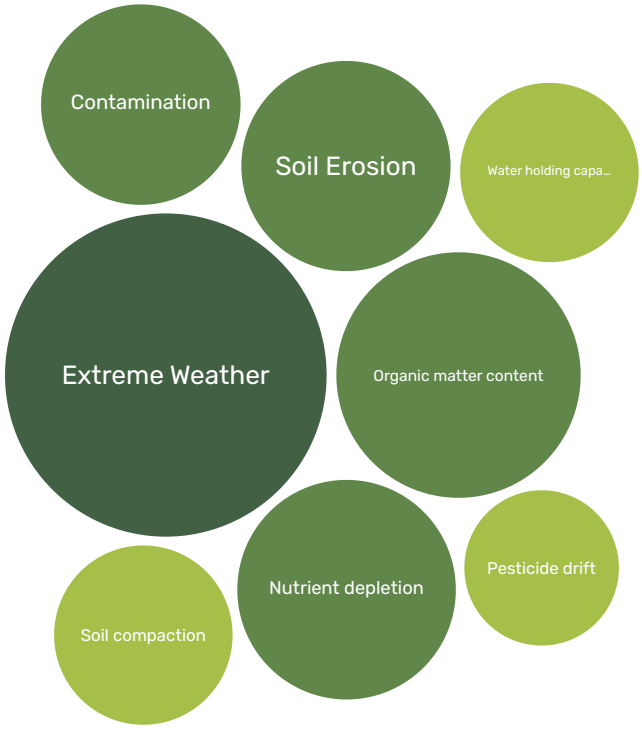
The top three out of five ranked are types of direct marketing.

Business

Importance of business assistance programs

Climate & Soil

Soil health concerns and ratings

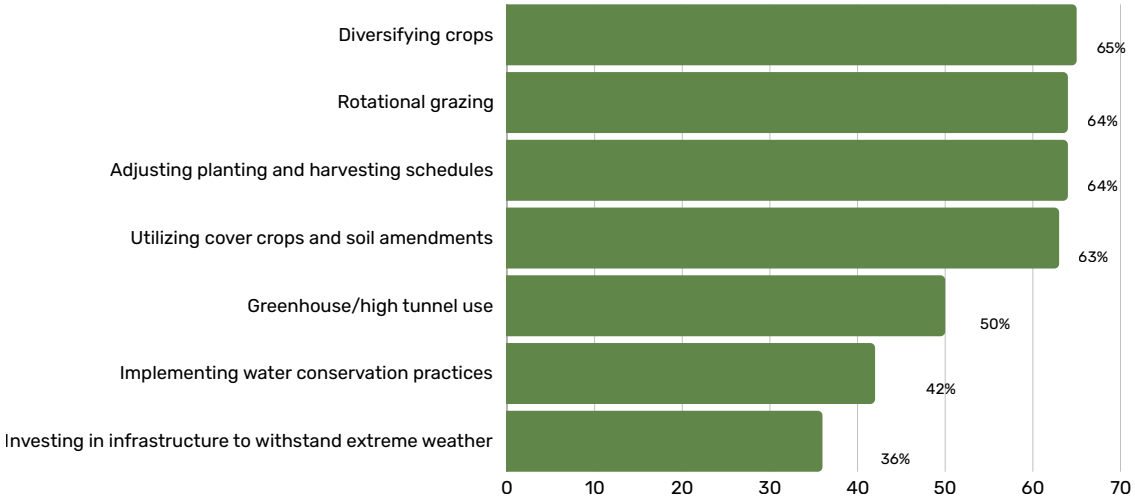


When asked to rank the top primary soil health concerns, these received the highest ratings.

1. Extreme Weather
2. Organic Matter
3. Nutrient Depletion
4. Soil Erosion
5. Contamination
6. Soil Compaction
7. Water Holding Capacity
8. Pesticide Drift

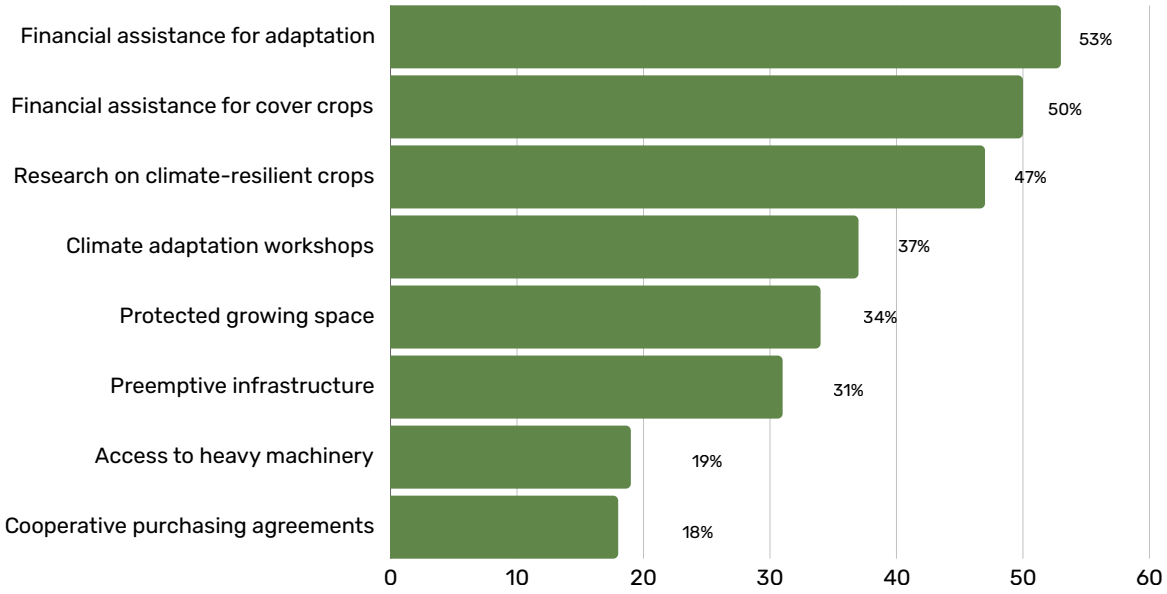
What strategies are currently used to adapt to climate change

In response to these soil health concerns, farmers are taking a proactive approach to adaptation. The most widely utilized strategies are crop diversification, adjusting planting and harvesting schedules to meet new climate realities, and the use of cover crops and soil amendments, each of which was selected by over 60% of respondents.



What additional resources would help manage climate-related risks?

In recognition that extreme weather is correlated with reduced yields and profits, we wish to place emphasis on the strategies that our farmers place value in to adapt to the reality of a changing climate. Assistance for the financial burden of adaptation and cover crops rank highest, but these farmers are also asking for research on resilient crops and adaptation education.



Analysis of respondent comments

At several points in the survey respondents were invited to give open-ended responses in case the multiple choice selections did not reflect what they felt was most important to their operations. This brought to light several new areas of need. The following are key issues that emerged:

- The need for greater clarity and support in navigating regulations. Respondents expressed frustration with overlapping and unclear requirements across agencies, including those related to water use, pesticide handling, labor laws, fire safety, and food processing regulations.

- Also related to regulatory burden, there are complaints the here is no single, clear pathway for farmers to understand compliance, and that this often becomes a barrier to entering or scaling farm operations. Suggestions included regulatory guides, legal support, and software tools to walk applicants through complex certification or licensing processes.

- The need for mental health care tailored to agriculture. Farmers acknowledged the stress and isolation associated with farming and expressed the importance of having mental health services that understand the unique pressures of agricultural life.

- Expansion of policy support—such as advocating for including meats, dairy, and value-added goods in Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and SNAP incentive programs.

- Several farmers emphasized the importance of and need for cooperative systems and shared infrastructure, such as equipment rental programs, shared processing facilities, and coordinated transportation networks.

- There was significant concern about input access and supply chain development. Farmers described challenges in sourcing compost, seeds, livestock feed, and other critical materials locally. We would like to point out that the NexGen farming program of the NJ SADC has been developing a guide addressing this, and applaud the approach.

In Conclusion

The Organic and Regenerative Farming Board of New Jersey's overwhelming takeaway from the survey results is that this population of farmers is passionate and hardworking. Many are building organic and regenerative businesses under enormous constraints, and some have begun to "crack the code" on regenerative farming that has sustainable profitability. At a time when farmers statewide are aging out of the industry, this younger generation of growers represents a critical opportunity to help sustain our state's agricultural legacy.

But the data is clear: that opportunity is at risk. Without meaningful support, services and assistance, the financial strain experienced by many of these farms threatens their survival. The need is urgent—and so is the responsibility.

To re-state our key findings:

- The cost of farmland is the largest barrier for our farmers
- Many of these farmers concentrate on enterprises that have a low cost of entry, and support for diversification may unlock additional market demand
- Direct sales to individual customers are overwhelmingly how these farmers sell their products
- Extreme weather is a major concern
- A higher chance of profitability is linked to being a business sized to employ and manage 11-20 people, indicating the need for business and management skills.
- Lower profitability farms report less engagement with support services, suggesting that improved outreach and support could have a significant impact.

Programs addressing these points are the most critical. It is notable that there are points of overlap between these findings and those of the State Agriculture Development Committee's Next Gen Farmer Program. The ORFB and its cooperators at Rutgers University are extremely open to collaboration with other entities to share subsets of the data to further service to the farmers in our state. Please consider yourself encouraged to ask us questions and ask for tailored data sets.

We look forward to advocating for mutually beneficial solutions with all partners.

About the Organic and Regenerative Farming Board:
The Organic and Regenerative Farming Board of New Jersey was created by an act of the NJ State Legislature in 2022. The duties of the Board are listed in NJSA: 4:10-80:
Develop, administer, and oversee programs in consultation with the Department of Agriculture on topics related to organic farming, including the certification program established pursuant to 14 P.L.2003, c.176 (4:10-79), the federal organic farming certification program implemented by the United States Department of Agriculture, best practices for organic and regenerative farming; incentives to encourage more organic and regenerative farming in the State, new techniques to carry out organic and regenerative farming, and programs to provide outreach, education, and marketing support to organic and regenerative farms in New Jersey.

The Organic and Regenerative Farming Board of New Jersey hosts quarterly meetings, whose schedule and minutes can be found here:
https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/state-board/organicboard.shtml

Study Contributors
Jess Niederer, ORFBNJ
Jasmine Moreano, ORFBNJ
Jared Krawitz, ORFBNJ
Dave Watts, ORFBNJ
Laura Tessieri, ORFBNJ
Meredith Taylor, ORFBNJ
Meredith Melendez, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, contributed to this publication by helping to design the ORFBNJ's survey instrument, provided narrative content, and assisted with data analysis. Garin Bulger, Rutgers University, provided narratives and collaborated with Kelline Muo, Rutgers University, on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Report Contributors
Jess Niederer, ORFBNJ
Jasmine Moreano, ORFBNJ
Dave Watts, ORFBNJ
Laura Tessieri, ORFBNJ
Meredith Taylor, ORFBNJ
Meredith Melendez, Rutgers University
Garin Bulger, Rutgers University
Kelline Muo, Rutgers University

Authors
Jess Niederer, ORFBNJ
Jasmine Moreano, ORFBNJ
Laura Tessieri, ORFBNJ
Meredith Melendez, Rutgers University
Garin Bulger, Rutgers University
Kelline Muo, Rutgers University

Contact

To reach the full ORFB of NJ: AG-OFB@sonj.onmicrosoft.com