



2024 Larimer County Agricultural Producer Survey Findings

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LARIMER COUNTY
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



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i Background

Snapshot of Ag in Larimer County

- There are approximately **3,000 producers** on roughly **467,000 acres** of farmland in Larimer County
 - ~100,000 acres of Cropland
 - ~322,000 acres of Pastureland
- In 2022 **\$270.6 million dollars** were generated from Agricultural sales in Larimer County.
- **Larimer County population is increasing while farmland is decreasing**
 - Larimer County population increased by 28% from 2007 – 2022**
 - Land in farm use in Larimer County has decreased by 22,000 acres from 2007-2022*

*According to 2022 USDA Ag Census **According to US Census Bureau

Survey Purpose

As Larimer County changes so are the challenges producers are facing. The aim of this survey was to understand these challenges to reduce barriers and create more opportunities for producers in Larimer County.



Background

Timeline

December 2023

Larimer County Extension created a small focus group of producers (farmers/ranchers) with different agriculture backgrounds to discuss their current agricultural challenges

February 2024

Larimer County Extension utilized responses from focus group to create a survey draft

March 2024

Agriculture Advisory Board and county departments were able to edit and add comments to survey draft

March-April 2024

Final survey was distributed throughout the county via the county's and agriculture organizations' social media, list servs, and newsletters. The survey was closed on April 26, after receiving 101 responses

August 2024

Results from survey were created into a report and presented at a work session of the Larimer County Commissioners

November 2024

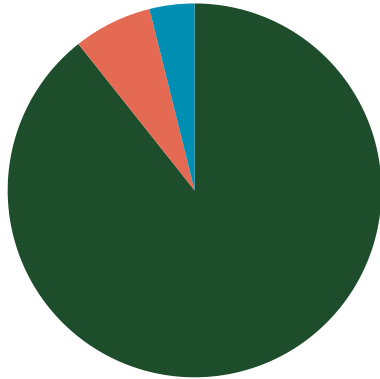
Final Report was created and shared with the public





Results – Demographics

- There were 101 responses to the survey.
- About 75% of the respondents completed the survey to the end

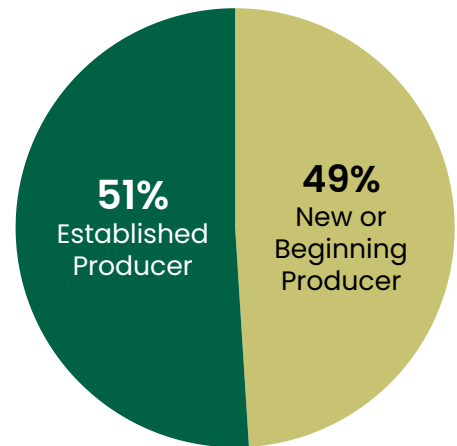


Respondents were:

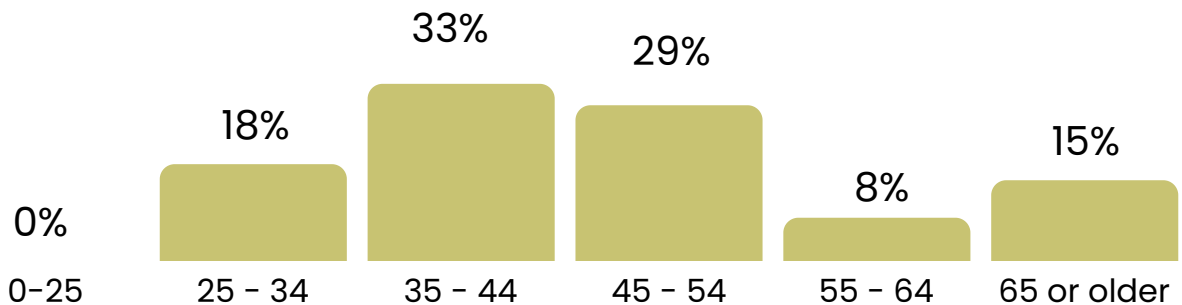
- Mostly White, Not Hispanic or Latino
- Mostly between 35-64 years old
- Nearly evenly distributed between male and female

- White (92%)
- Multi-racial (7%)
- Unknown (4%)

Almost an even number of new and beginning producers (0-10 years of experience) and established producers took the survey.



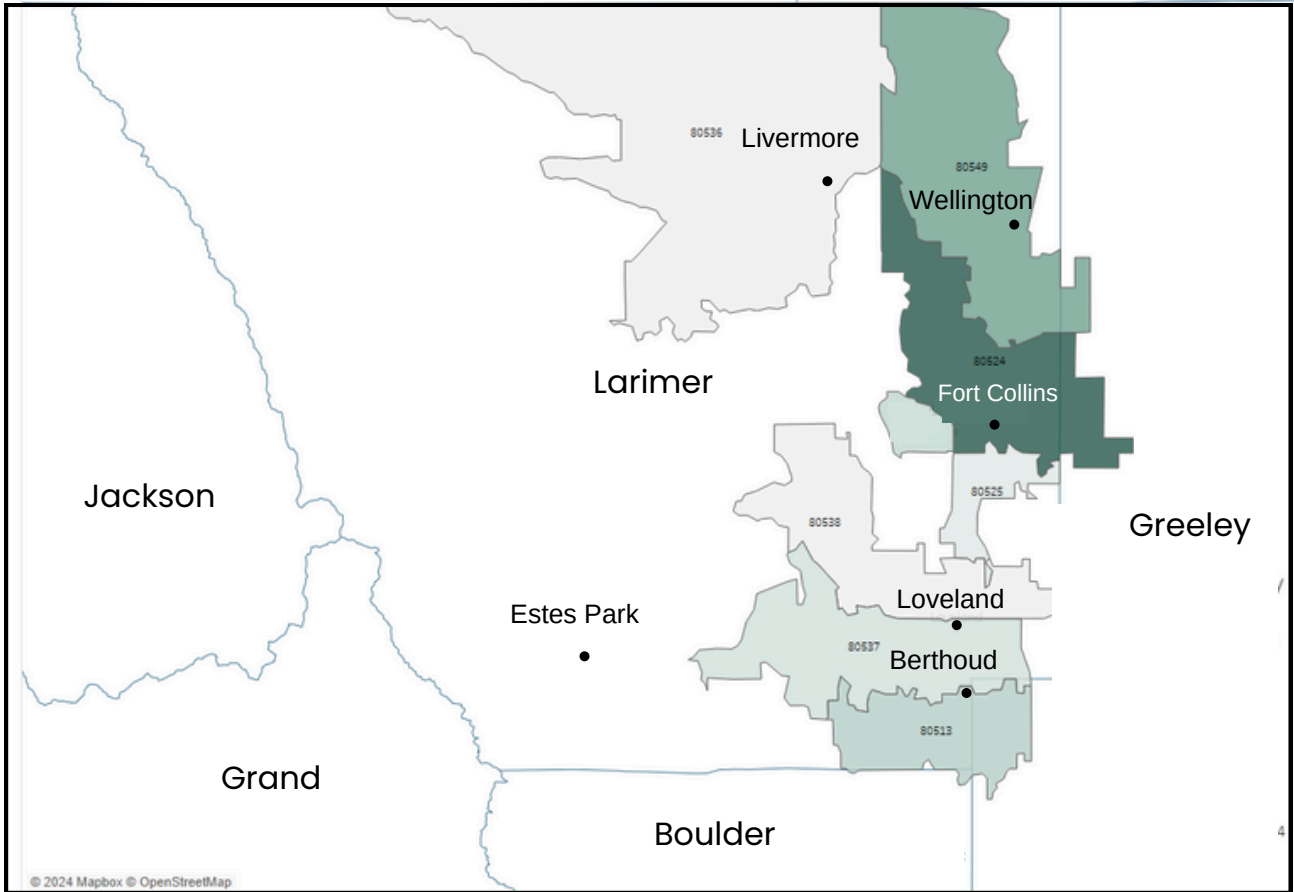
Age of Respondents





Results – Demographics

Location of Respondents' Farms or Ranches*



*Zip codes with less than 5 responses were not counted in the map



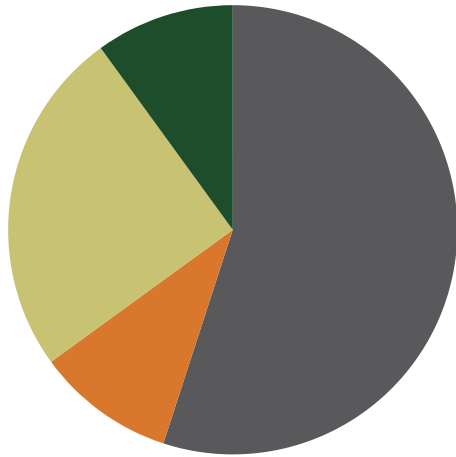
Most of the respondents' farms and ranches are located near **Fort Collins, Wellington, Loveland or Berthoud.**





Results – Farm/Ranch Characteristics

Ownership Status of Respondents

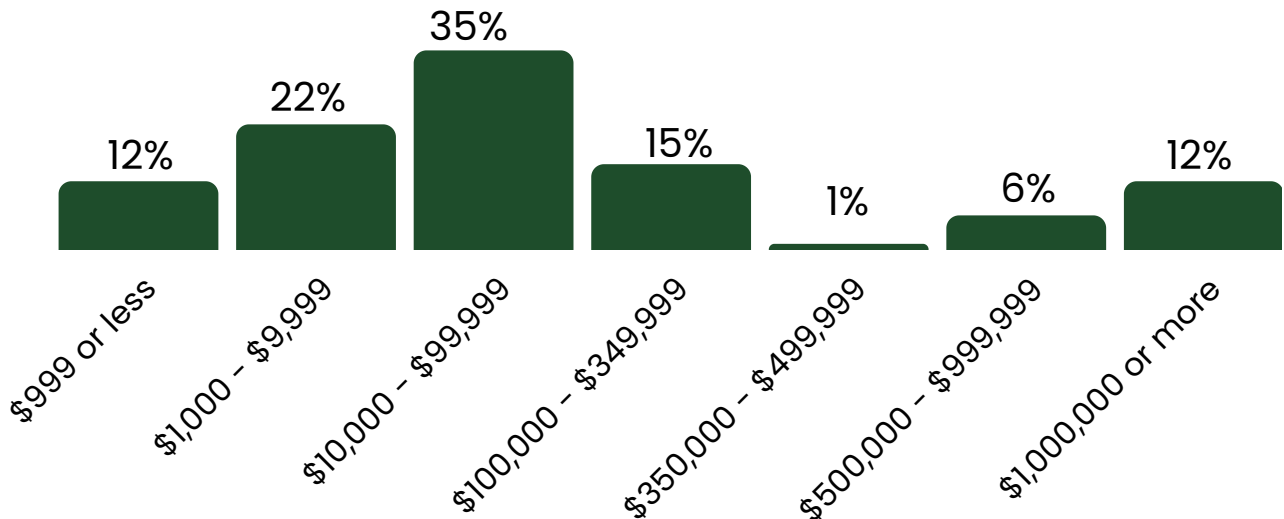


- Owns Land (55%)
- Leases Land from Others (25%)
- Leases Land to Others (10%)
- Owns & Leases Land (10%)

The majority of the respondents own the land they operate on but **35%** of those respondents lease additional land as well

Average Annual Gross Sales (\$)

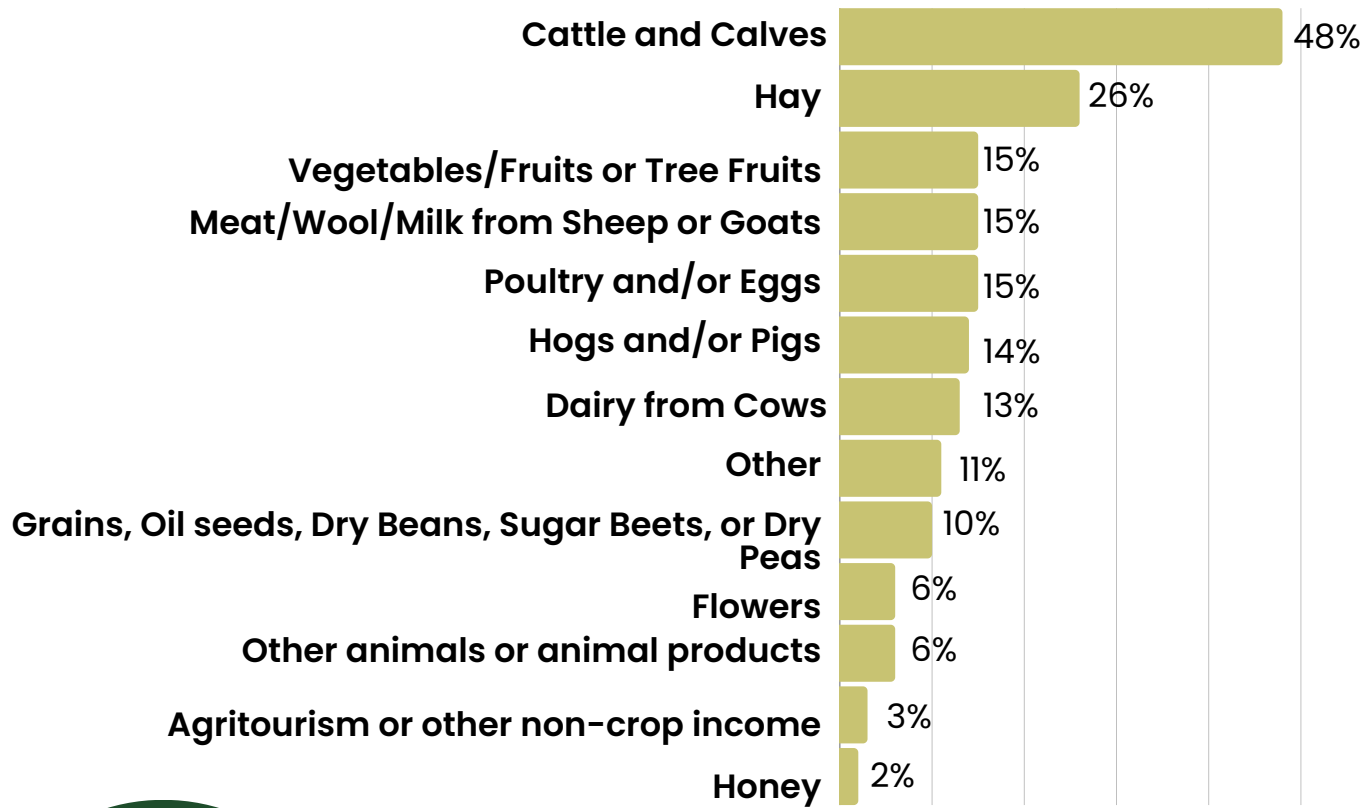
69% of respondents make less than \$99,999 in average annual gross sales





Results – Farm/Ranch Characteristics

Sources of Agricultural Sales (\$)*



**The percentages are greater than 100% because each respondent could choose up to three commodities*



Almost half of the survey respondents receive their sales from cattle/calf operations

Agricultural Sales Breakdown

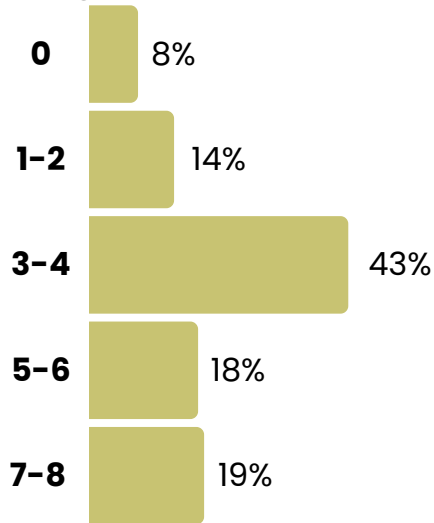
- Survey respondents sources of ag sales are similar to most recent census
- According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agricultural data for Larimer County
 - Crops account for 35% of Ag sales
 - Livestock, poultry, and related products account for 65% of ag sales





Results – Soil Health and Irrigation

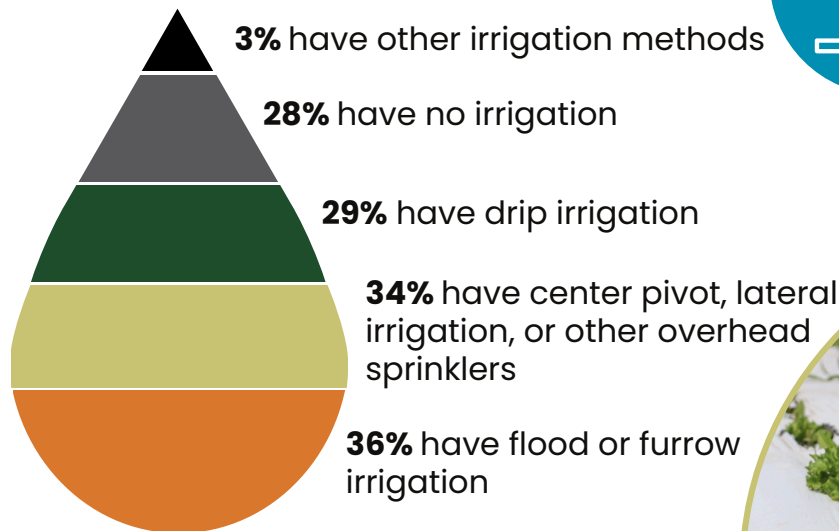
Number of Soil Health Practices Being Implemented by Producers



Average Number of Soil Health Practices by Type of Producer

Producers	# of Practices
Vegetable/Fruit	5
Cattle/Calf and Dairy	3
Grains	5
Alternative Livestock/Poultry/Hogs	3

Producers' Irrigation Methods



63% of producers use water efficient irrigation methods (sprinkler and drip irrigation)

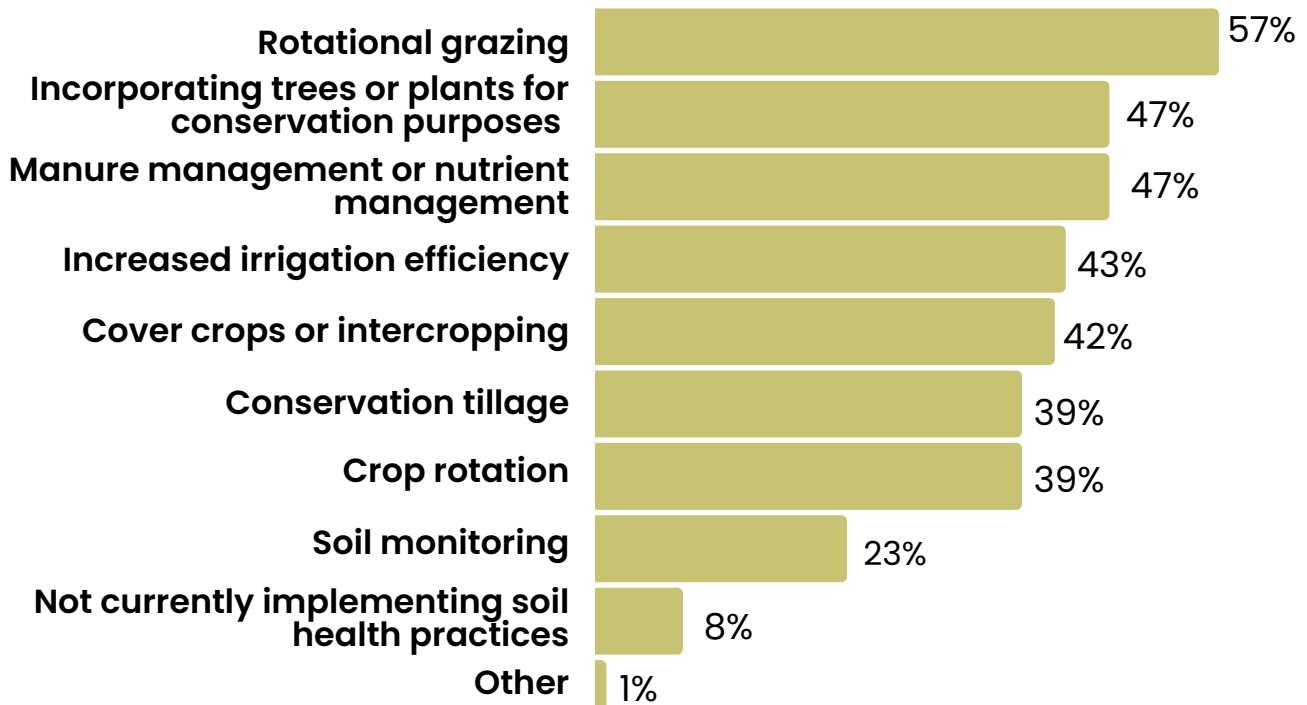
** Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose as many responses that applied to them*





Results – Soil Health

Soil Health Practices Implemented by Producers



* Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose as many responses that applied to them

Top Three Soil Health Practices Being Implemented By

Veg/Fruit/Flower/Grain Producers:

- Crop Rotation
- Cover Crops or Intercropping
- Incorporating Trees or Plants for Conservation Purposes

Cattle/Dairy/Alternative Livestock/Poultry Producers:

- Rotational Grazing
- Manure or Nutrient Management
- Conservation Tillage

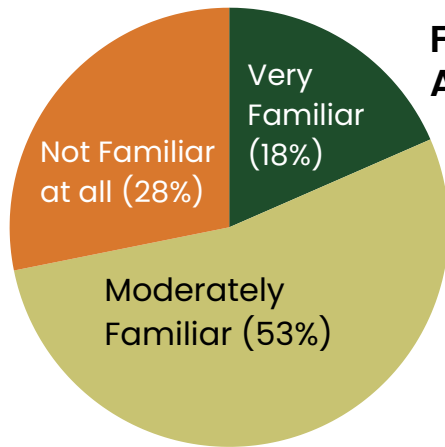




Results – Land Preservation

Definition of Conservation Easements

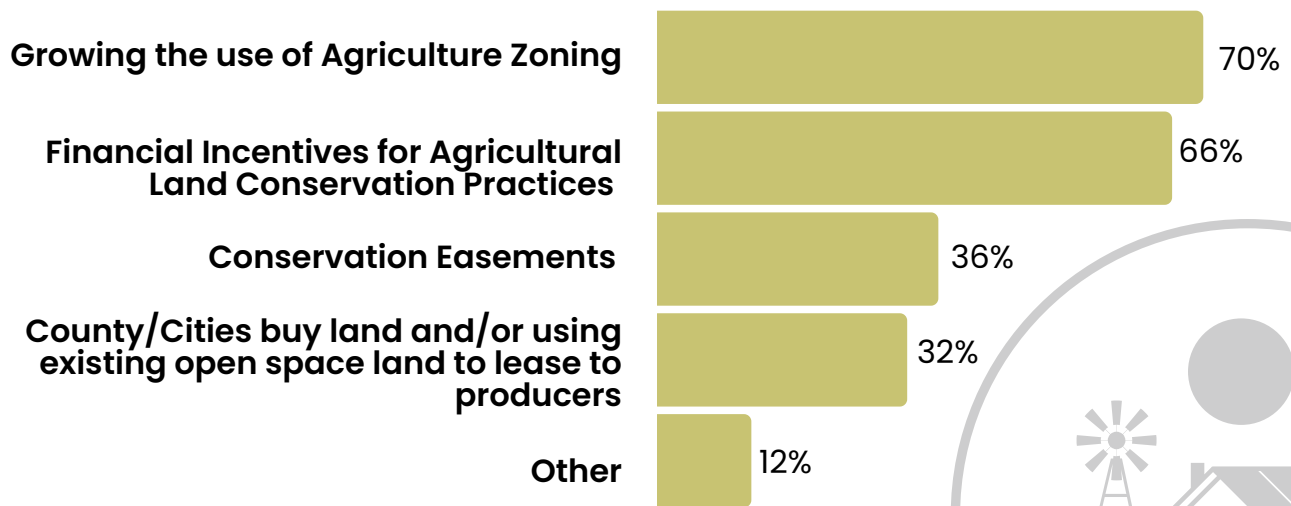
“A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government entity which contains permanent restrictions on the use or development of land in order to protect certain values of that particular property.” (Colorado Open Lands)



Familiarity with Conservation Easements Among Producers Without Existing Easements

- 22% of respondents have a conservation easement on their property
- Of the 78% of respondents who do not have a conservation easement, about half are moderately familiar with conservation easements

Responses to “What is the best Farmland Preservation Tool”*



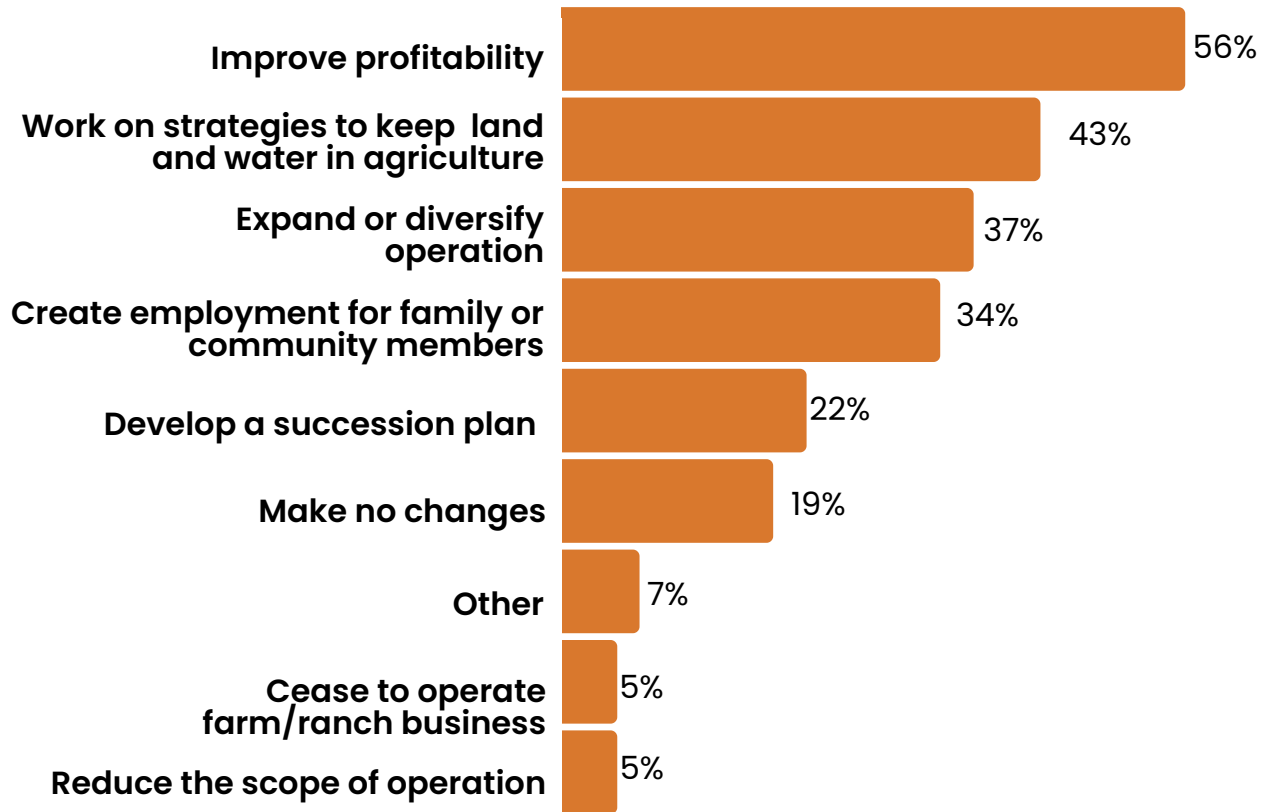
* Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose as many responses that applied to them





Results – 5 year Goals

Respondents' 5 - Year Goals for their Farms/Ranches



* Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose up to 3 responses

Top Three 5-Year Goals for Producers by Ag Commodities

Veg/Fruit/Flower Producers:

- Improve Profitability
- Expand or Diversify Operation
- Create Employment for Family or Community members

Cattle/Dairy/Alternative Livestock/Poultry Producers:

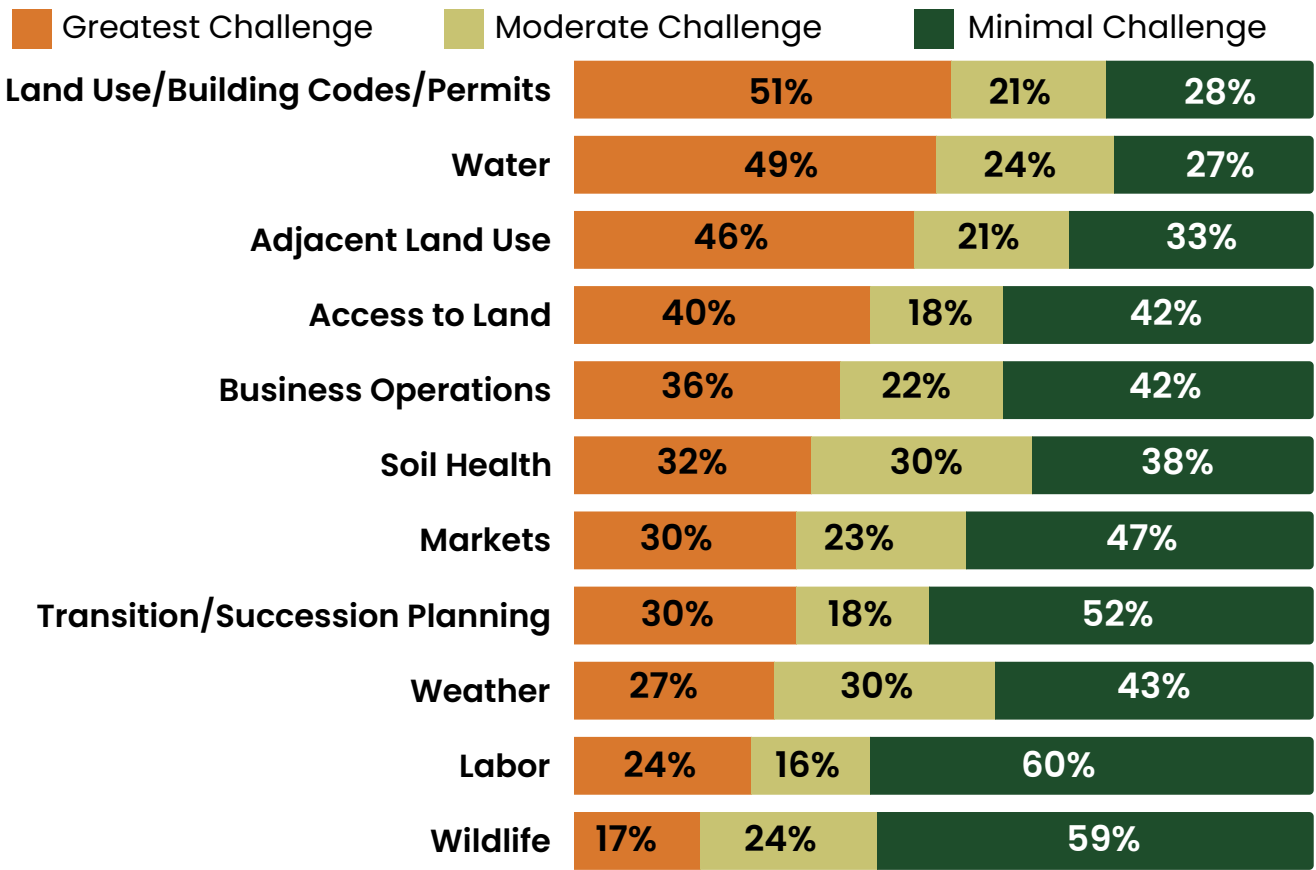
- Improve Profitability
- Work on Strategies to Keep Land and Water in Agriculture
- Expand or Diversify Operation





Results – Producer Challenges

Respondents' Ratings per Ag Issue*



*Ratings 4-5 were characterized as greatest challenge, 3 moderate challenge, 1-2 minimal challenge

Top 3 greatest challenges for producers:



Land Use/Building Code/Permits (51%): ex: regulations and laws that dictate construction and operation of ag structures (farm stands, barns, housing for labor, etc.)



Water (49%): cost, leasing from municipalities, access during drought, working with ditch companies, irrigation management, etc.



Adjacent Land Use (46%): ex: non-ag neighbor conflicts, traffic, development pressure, support for local ag, etc.





Producer Challenges

Based On Categories

Category	1st Greatest Challenge	2nd Greatest Challenge	3rd Greatest Challenge
Cattle/Calf Producers	Water	Adjacent Land Use	Access to Land
Dairy Producers	Access to Land	Water	Markets
Vegetable/ Fruit/Flowers Producers	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Weather	Adjacent Land Use
Sheep/Goat/ Alternative Livestock Producers	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Water	Adjacent Land Use
Poultry/Egg Producers	Business Operations	Adjacent Land Use	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits
New and Beginning Producer	Water	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Business Operations
Established Producer	Adjacent Land Use	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Access to Land
Producers with Average Sales > \$1 million	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Labor	Adjacent Land Use
Producers with Average Sales between \$350K - \$999k	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Access to Land	Weather
Producers with Average Sales between \$1K - \$350K	Water	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Business Operations

1st Challenge Overall
 2nd Challenge Overall
 3rd Challenge Overall

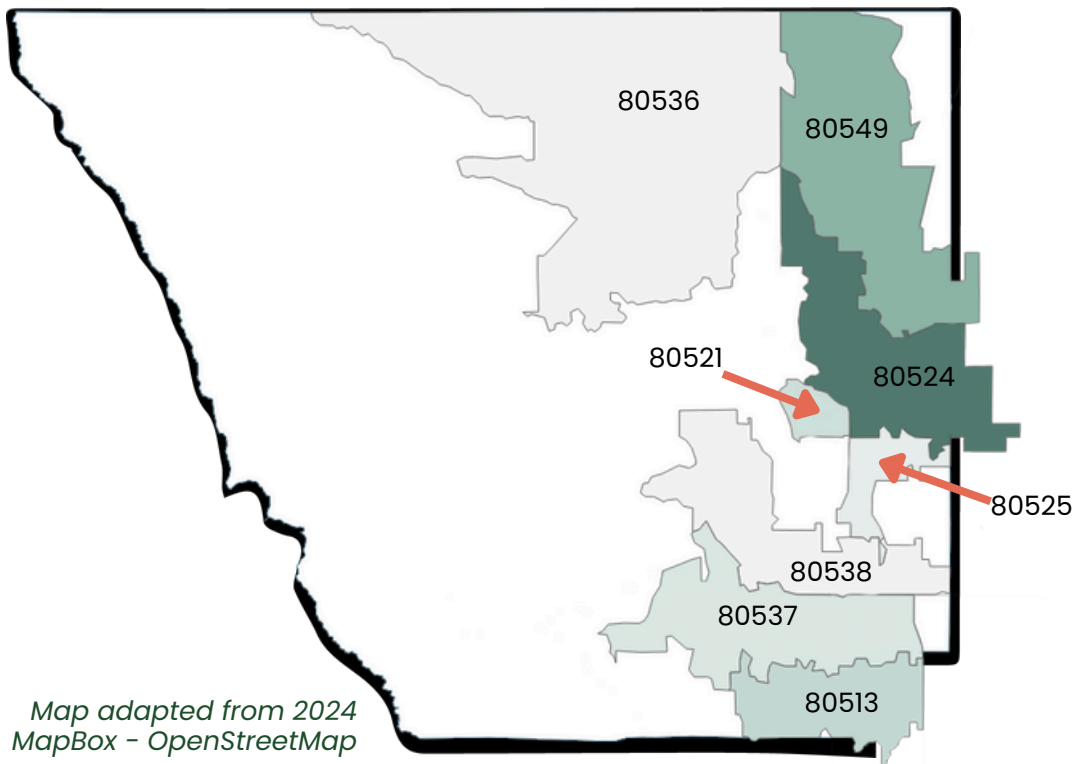




Producer Challenges

Based On Categories

Category	1st Greatest Challenge	2nd Greatest Challenge	3rd Greatest Challenge
Fort Collins Area (Zip Code: 80524,80525, and 80521)	Land Use/Building Codes/Permits	Water	Adjacent Land Use & Access to Land
North Larimer County Area (Zip Code: 80536,80549)	Water	Adjacent Land Use	Business Operations
Loveland Area (Zip Code: 80537, 80538)	Water	Business Operations	Adjacent Land Use
Berthoud Area (Zip Code: 80513)	Access to Land	Adjacent Land Use	Farmer/Rancher Transition

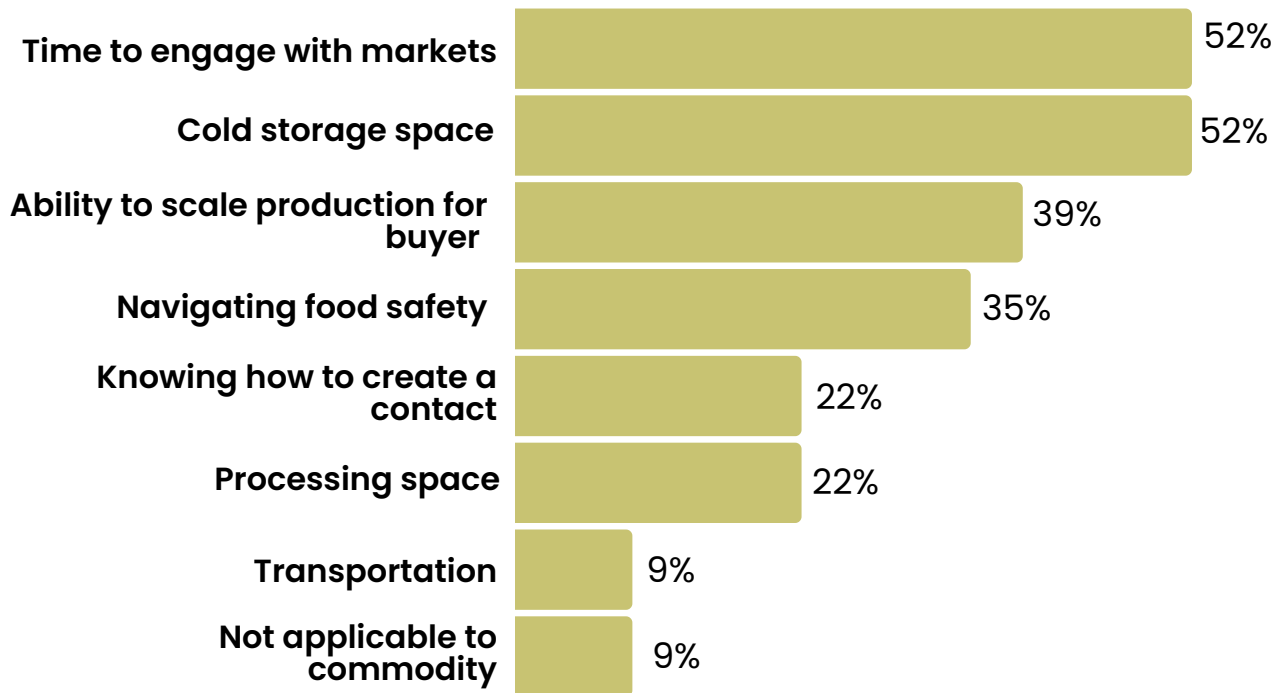


Results – Market Challenges



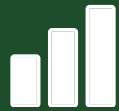
Local commercial Markets include but are not limited to restaurants, coffee shops, food trucks, catering, breweries, etc.

Producers' Challenges when Selling Food Products to Local Commercial Markets, Sample Size = 23*



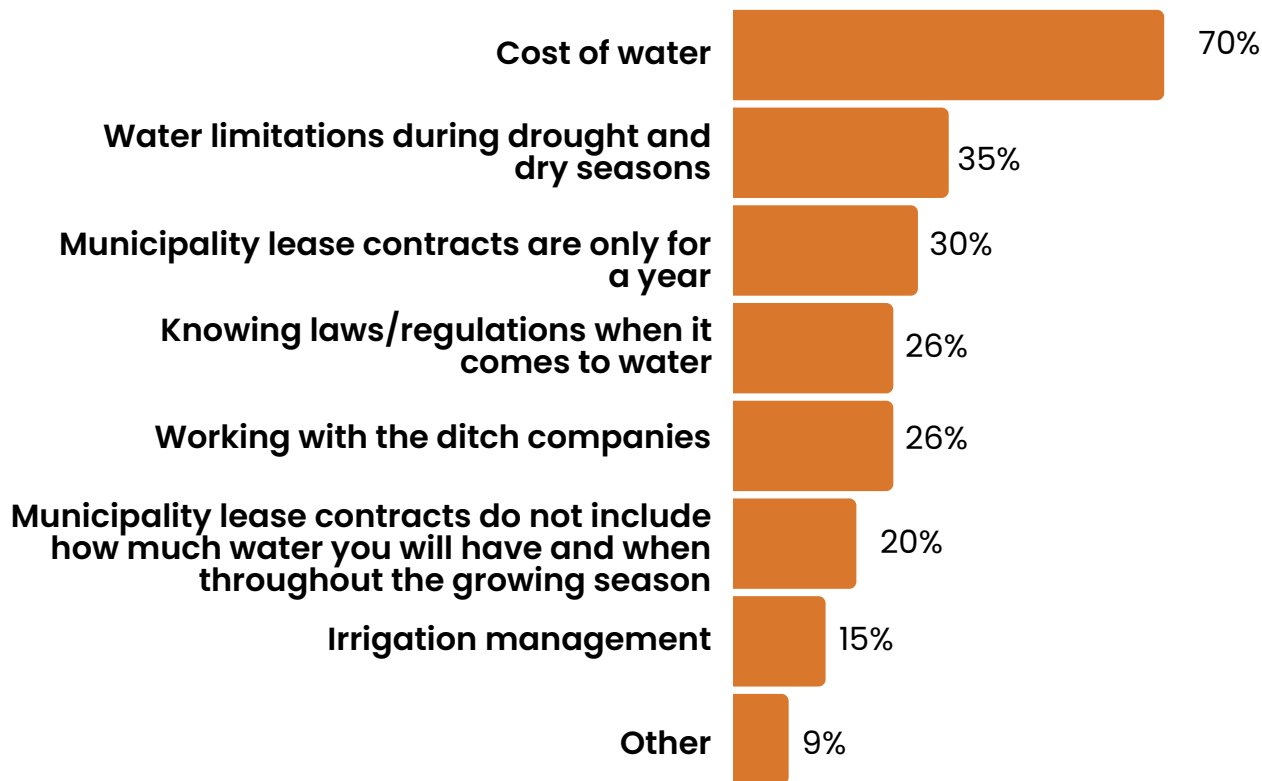
*Question appeared on survey when respondents marked that “markets” were one of their greatest challenges. Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose up to 3 responses



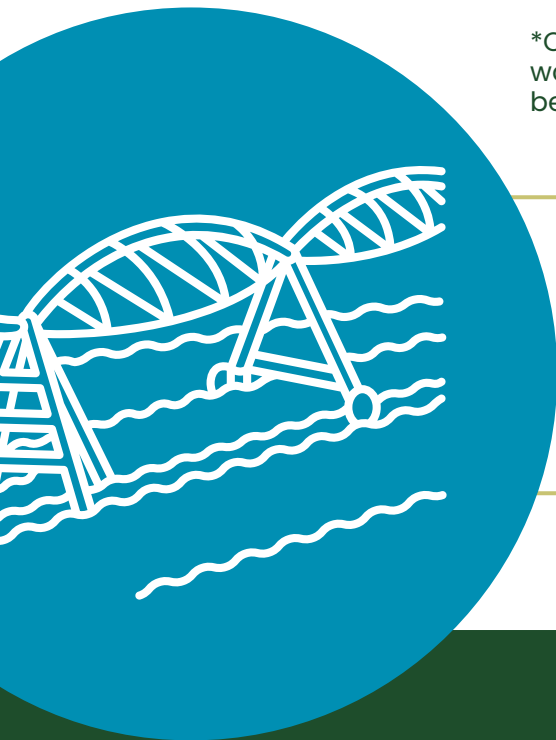


Results – Water Challenges

Producers' Challenges around Water , Sample Size = 46*



*Question appeared on survey when respondents marked that "water" was one of their greatest challenges. Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose up to 3 responses



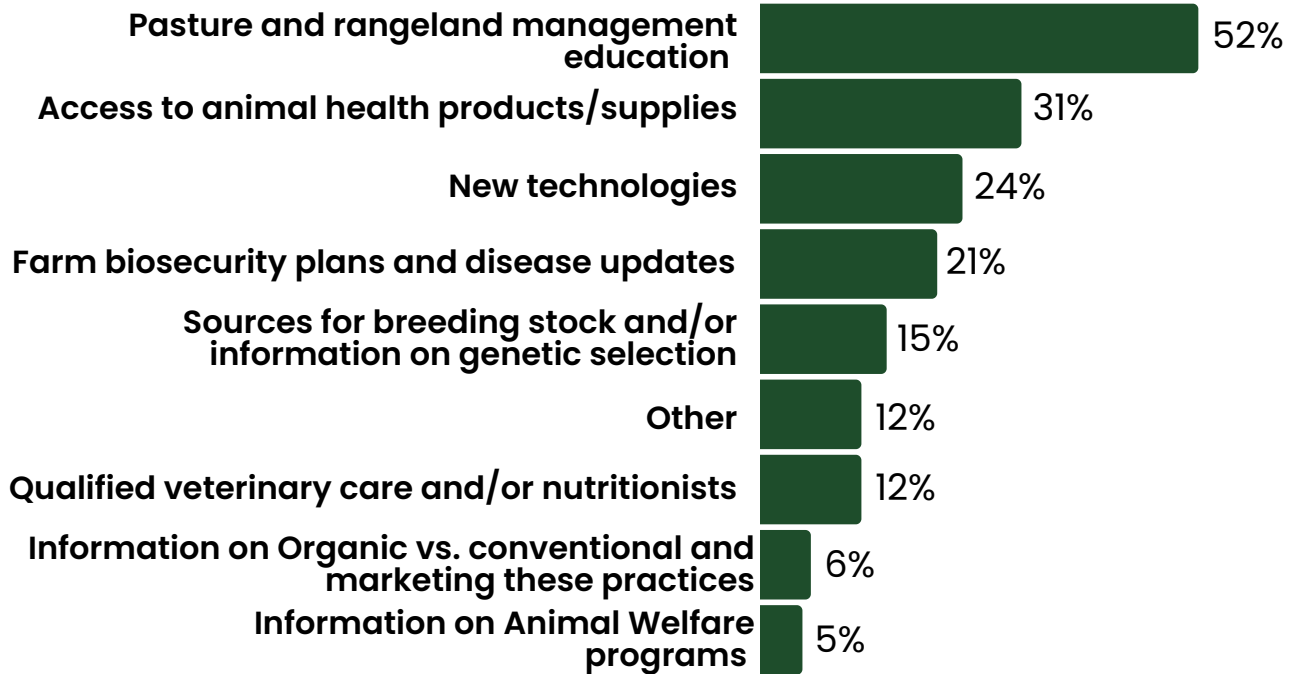
- The cost of water is connected to water limitations during dry seasons/droughts; as dry seasons or droughts occur the cost of water will increase
- Limited water for agriculture can limit soil health practices, such as cover crops that utilize water during the growing season





Results – Livestock Assistance

Resources or Assistance that Would Most Benefit Livestock Owners*



*Percentages are not equal to 100 because respondents could choose up to 3 responses

Top 3 Resources or Assistance that Would Most Benefit Livestock Owners based on Average Annual Sales

Producers with more than \$350K in average annual sales

- Pasture and Rangeland Management
- Farm biosecurity
- Access to animal health

Producers with \$1K-\$350K in average annual sales

- Pasture and Rangeland Management
- New technologies
- Farm biosecurity



Results – General Comments from Survey

“make it easier for farmers to diversify including accessibility for farm stands, restaurants, kitchens, etc.”

“What would help is easier land use codes relating to ag practices and markets. Less restrictive, allow for more flexibility and creativity. Easier for a ag business to grow if they don't have to wait a year to accomplish a goal because paperwork and navigating permits took forever and cost a lot...”

“Larimer county is developing at an astounding rate; I would like to see the county do more to purchase parcels of land and lease them to farmers...”

“Ag in Larimer county needs to have more emphasis [on Ag]... Currently there are minimal opportunities for new comers as USDA loans would hardly cover the down payment for a piece of farm ground in the county...”

“My hay fields keep turning into developments and I am...getting increasing neighborhood pressures and complaints about noise and my livestock guardian dogs.”

“Housing for help is very difficult to accomplish within code. Need for code to allow safe mobile housing for farm help, according to reasonable needs of farm.”





Key Takeaways

Snapshot of Ag in Larimer County



Agriculture is paramount to preserving the natural resources, cultural history, and economy in Larimer County. As the population of Larimer County continues to grow, farmland is steadily decreasing



With the increase in population, farmers note that access to land, non-ag neighbor conflict, traffic, and development pressures are becoming more challenging.



When asked about their plans for the next 5 years producers indicated they want to grow, improve their profitability, and work on strategies to keep land and water in agriculture within the next 5 years.



Agricultural producers within the county engage in conservation practices - 80% of the producers surveyed are implementing more than three soil health practices on their operation and 63% of producers surveyed are using water efficient irrigation methods.





Key Takeaways

Challenges and Context

Top Challenge for Producers Overall



1. Land Use/Building Code/Permits

Being able to respond to economic changes is important for farm businesses. When farmers want to diversify or expand their operations (for example through processing products on-site, adding a retail store or farmstand, and housing their workers), they can encounter land use planning, building code, and permitting obstacles.



2. Water

Water limitations and cost can severely impact farm business profitability. In the survey, seventy percent of producers noted that the cost of water is the primary challenge which is most pronounced during droughts and dry seasons. Another key challenge is that many producers rely on annual contracts or agreements for water from municipalities, making it difficult for farmers to create 5-year plans on what crops they are able to grow, how many acres they can irrigate, and if they can incorporate more soil health practices like cover cropping in the future.



3. Adjacent Land Use

The increase of new neighborhood developments next to existing farms and ranches can create conflict between residents and producers as residents may be unaware of what living next to a farm entails (noise, large equipment, dust, smell, etc.).

Adjacent Land Use was the greatest challenge for established producers with over ten years of farming/ranching experience. As the population grows in traditionally rural areas of Larimer County, these producers will continue to face challenges with non-agricultural neighbors and development pressures, especially if they would like to expand their operations.





Key Takeaways

Challenges and Context, Continued

Other Challenges for Producers

Access to Land

Access to land was one of the three greatest challenges for producers with agricultural sales from cattle and/or dairy. These operations typically require more land than other types of agriculture because of the need for more extensive grazing land and forage production. As available and affordable agricultural land decreases in Larimer County, this challenge is likely to persist.

Labor and Business Operations

Labor was one of the top three greatest challenges for producers with average annual sales exceeding \$1 million. As agricultural business grow, so does the demand for labor. The high cost of housing and access to qualified agricultural farm workers are factors that can make finding and retaining agricultural workers difficult for larger producers in Larimer County.

For new and beginning producers and producers with less than \$350K in average annual sales, understanding and managing their business operations was one of their most significant challenges. Marketing, taxes, managing labor, budgeting, grants, insurance, risk management, etc. can pose a tremendous learning curve for producers that are starting out in the agricultural industry.

Markets

According to the survey overall, a significant challenge for producers selling ag products to local commercial markets (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) is finding the time to engage with potential buyers and obtaining cold storage space.

Pasture and Rangeland Management

Survey results indicated that livestock producers need assistance and education on pasture and rangeland management, including topics like rotational grazing, weed management, irrigation, manure management, and reseeding.

The need for information on rangeland management is common for small acreage owners in Larimer County. Yet, even producers with average annual sales over \$350K noted that assistance and education on pasture and rangeland management would be most helpful for their livestock operation.





Next Steps

Next Steps for Larimer County Extension



Present and facilitate meetings with key departments, stakeholders, agricultural producers, and boards across the county to discuss steps that can be taken to address producer challenges from the report.



Continue and expand existing events, programs and resources that address challenges from agriculture producer survey in line with extensions educational mission.



Depending on need, producers may be surveyed again in the future to see how successfully challenges have been addressed within the county and if new needs have emerged.

