



Overview of a Survey on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Virginia Farms and Agribusinesses, Fall 2020

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In September and October 2020, faculty members in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted a survey of farms and agribusinesses throughout the state to estimate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was distributed through Virginia Cooperative Extension listservs, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), and other partners in the farm and agribusiness sectors. The survey gathered information on basic farm characteristics; disruptions from the pandemic and steps taken by farms to adapt and mitigate challenges; value of sales and production costs in 2019 and 2020; impacts on labor supply, labor usage, and worker health; participation in various government financial relief programs; financial strategies; family financial security and literacy; and demographics.

The research team is currently analyzing the data collected in the first round of the survey and plans to follow up by distributing updated versions of the survey in early 2021. The survey will help to demonstrate how the pandemic has affected different types of farm businesses. For example, it will be possible to measure differing impacts of the pandemic by type of product sold (field crops; beef and cattle; fruits, tree nuts, and vegetables; etc.), by size of farm, and by gender and race of respondent. After collecting subsequent rounds of data in 2021, it will also be possible to gauge the evolving impact of the pandemic on Virginia farm businesses.

The initial round of the survey yielded responses from farmers in 43 counties and cities, mostly in the Piedmont, Shenandoah Valley, and Northern Virginia. The initial round overrepresented large, economically significant farms: of those who reported 2019 revenues, nearly 20 percent reported revenues greater than \$500,000. Nearly half of respondents produced beef and cattle, and about a quarter grew field crops. Other major products sold included specialty crops (fruits, tree nuts, and vegetables), hay, and poultry. Each of these was produced by at least 10 percent of respondents. About 30 percent of respondents were women, while fewer than 10 percent indicated that they were ethnic or racial minorities, and none indicated that they were of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. According to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture, about 36 percent of farm producers in Virginia are women, 96 percent are white only, and about 1 percent are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. However, Virginia's population is significantly more diverse than the population of farm producers: based on the 2019 American Community Survey, 61% of residents are white alone and nearly 10 percent are of Hispanic or Latino origin. In subsequent rounds of the survey, the research team will make efforts to recruit respondents from a broader and more diverse population.

It is expected that results from this research project can be used to inform local, state and federal policy development around farm financial resiliency. Development of Virginia Cooperative Extension

programs will also benefit from the information gathered through the surveys and data analysis.

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References

- U.S. Census of Agriculture. 2017. Table 63 for Virginia: Selected Producer Characteristics by Race.
https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Virginia/st51_1_0063_0063.pdf
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table S0601. Selected Characteristics of the Total and Native Populations in the United States. Virginia.
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=virginia%20population%20by%20race&tid=ACST1Y2019.S0601&hidePreview=false>.

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