

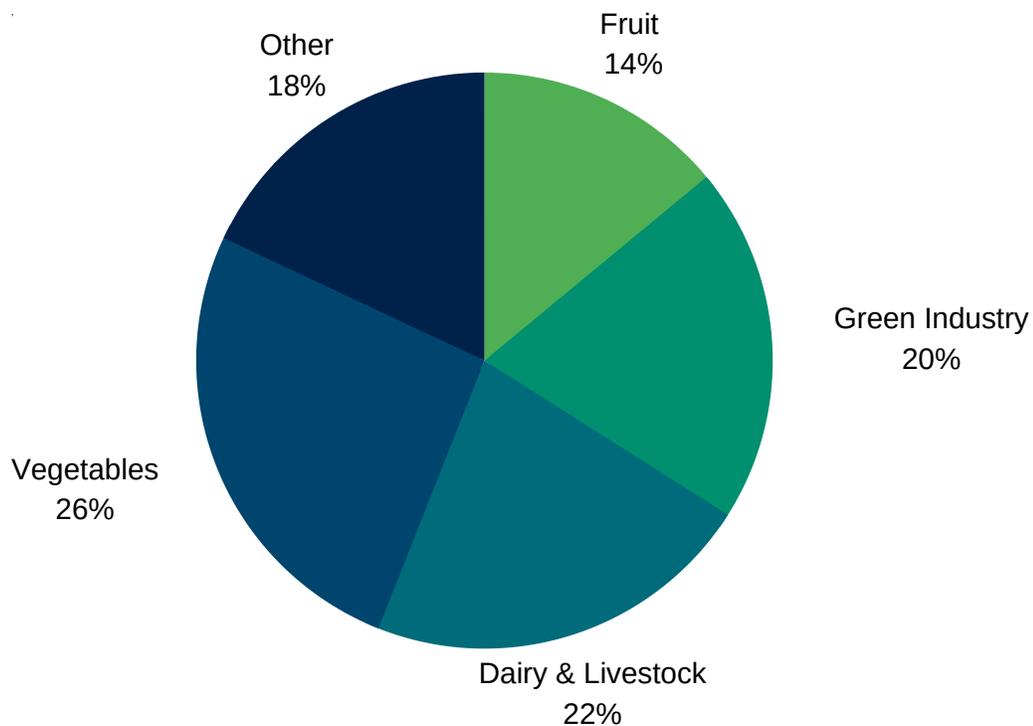
Update: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Connecticut Agriculture

JULY 2020 REPORT BY UCONN EXTENSION

INTRODUCTION

UConn Extension conducted a survey to assess the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Connecticut Agriculture. This anonymous survey was sent to farmers and growers in Connecticut. It was distributed in March and again in June. We had 103 respondents on the follow up survey, with 192 commodities. 47% of the respondents had two or more commodities grown on their operation.

REPORTED COMMODITIES



ECONOMIC VIABILITY CONCERNS

Economic viability is a concern for all businesses during the pandemic, including agricultural operations. Of the respondents, 47% indicated that farm income was up, 28% indicated that income was down as a result of this pandemic. There was a wide range in the percent increase and decrease of farm income reported. The average income increase was 54% and the average decrease was 61%.

We asked respondents about the changes made on their agricultural operation in response to COVID-19. These included:

- Closing the farm to the public
- Limiting the number of volunteers
- Establishing contactless pickup and online preordering
- Purchasing additional freezers to keep up with demand
- Requiring social distancing, use of hand sanitizers, and use of masks
- Adding a new entrance
- Investing in packaging and equipment for online sales

FARM LABOR CONCERNS

Employee numbers closely aligned with responses to income. 18% of the respondents added between one and four employees, while 17% decreased the number of employees by one to five full or part-time employees. Labor challenges cited by respondents were:

- Difficult to find extra help
- Health concerns
- Willingness to practice sanitary practices

MARKETABLE PRODUCT

Only 17% of respondents lost marketable product. We asked if customers were finding it difficult to pay invoices, and 72% of respondents said that none of their customers had difficulties making payments.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is an area of greater challenge for agricultural operations. 56% of respondents said they experienced difficulties securing supplies. 75% of respondents have been negatively impacted by challenges transporting products off of their agricultural operation.

MARKETING

Marketing products is key to economic viability and 65% of respondents have considered alternative marketing strategies. These include:

- Use of open food network
- Online ordering
- Delivery options
- Sell more wholesale,
- Addition of food trucks
- Preordering
- Use of social media
- Use of USDA Food Box

PANDEMIC IMPACTS ON THE FARM

The data indicates that in the follow-up survey, there was a significant increase in the opportunity to sell product, demand for product, and market prices. Food safety and restaurant closure concerns saw no significant change.

	% increase	% decrease	% no change
• Opportunity to sell product	44	38	18
• Market prices	26	13	61
• Demand for product	66	17	17
• CSA sales	38	5	57
• Online sales	48	6	46
• Farm store sales	51	15	34
• Food safety concerns	59	2	39
• Restaurant closures	17	33	50

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The majority (84%) of agricultural operators that responded to our survey are receiving information in a timely manner. Improvements sought in communication include more informational webinars, farmers' market updates, and reducing the number of duplicate emails received.

GREATEST CONCERNS

Respondents concerns regarding COVID-19 include:

- Social distancing and use of masks
- Financial loss
- Health risks
- Understanding of how customers will react to changes
- Weather
- Regulations and recommendations
- How to reopen and be safe
- How to package goods
- Liability from customers contracting COVID-19
- Redesigning the stand
- Planning for next year, will increased demand this year be sustained
- Understanding what customers will want
- Establishing safety protocols and signage

NEXT STEPS

UConn Extension is working with our partners to address concerns cited in our surveys. Our team is refining our educational outreach resources and developing new materials to meet the challenges that agricultural operators are facing. Updates will be announced throughout the summer and fall.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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