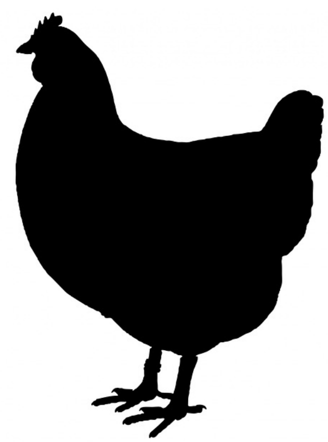
Community Food Assessment

for the Heath Agricultural Commission

with the Towns of Charlemont and Colrain

Interim Survey Findings and Recommendations



December 22, 2016

frcog Franklin Regional Council of Governments

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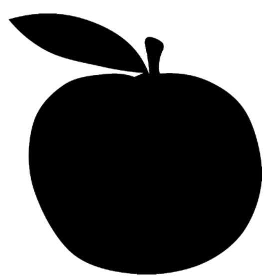
Imagine what it would be like if you could buy much of the food you eat right in Heath, Charlemont and Colrain! This is the scenario under which the Heath Agricultural Commission, in collaboration with members of the Charlemont and Colrain Agricultural Commissions, surveyed consumers, growers and business owners in those three towns. The findings of this survey will help to determine what foods consumers would most like to purchase in town, and what food producers and growers need to be able to produce more food. Growing and buying more food locally - what a great idea!



Survey Findings

Introduction

In 2016, the Heath Agricultural Commission, along with members of the Charlemont and Colrain Agricultural Commissions, requested assistance from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments to conduct a Community Food Assessment in their three towns. The members of the Agricultural Commissions (Ag Comms) have a vision of increasing food production in their towns and increasing the amount of food purchased by residents and businesses in the three towns.

The Ag Comms envision growing their thriving local food economy. Numerous farms and small-scale food businesses are located in Heath, Charlemont and Colrain, already producing eggs, beef, cider, maple, poultry, hops and much more. To nurture an even more robust food economy, Ag Comm members imagine farmers and food producers might be more able to scale up their production by working cooperatively with one another as needed, and sharing some equipment and/or infrastructure (think cider press, canning equipment, truck and trailer and others). Ag Comm members also envision adding opportunities for farmers and food producers to sell their goods, building on existing modes of food vending, such as at the Heath Farmers Market, as well as farm stands, online sales and bartering.

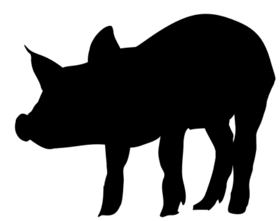
In terms of consumers, the members of the Ag Comms envision a local food economy where residents do not have to make so many trips out of town to purchase food and where the items residents most want to buy are easier for them to obtain. Members of the Ag Comms also acknowledge that an important part of scaling up local food production involves enabling more individuals and families to gain knowledge and hands-on experience in growing, raising, processing, preserving and/or preparing food they have grown in their own gardens. They also understand the challenges many individuals and families encounter in terms of being able to afford good, fresh, local food.

And, while there are only a modest number of businesses in the three towns, the Ag Comms also believe there are opportunities to increase purchasing of local food by those businesses.

To better understand the level of interest in the three communities in increasing production, purchasing and consumption of food grown within the communities, the Community Food Assessment focuses mainly on information gathering, obtained primarily through the Tri-Town Community Food Assessment Survey.

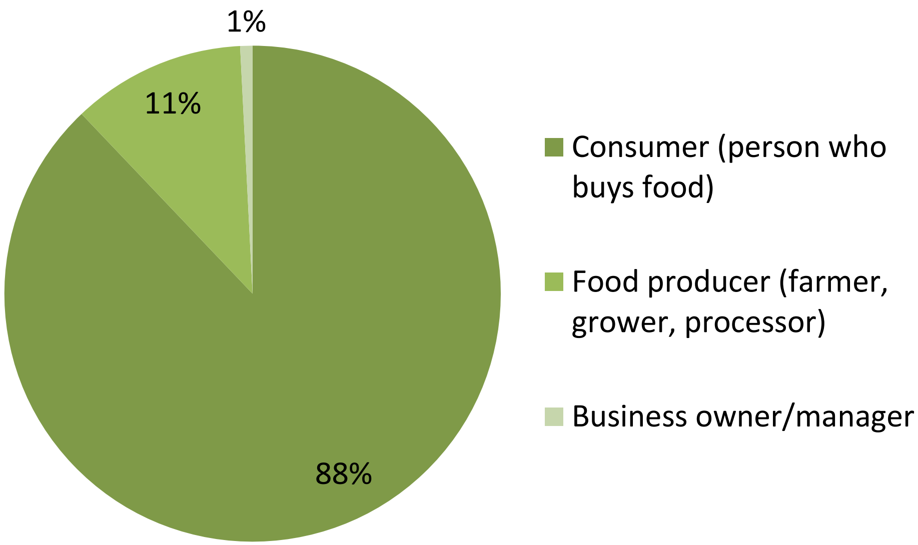
The purpose of the survey is to 1) find out what items consumers would like to purchase locally, 2) determine what farmers and food businesses need to be able to produce and/or sell more products and 3) to find out if nearby restaurants and other businesses are interested in purchasing more products locally. It is hoped the answers to this survey will help shape the priorities of the Agricultural Commissions, as well as strengthen the economic viability of agricultural and food production in Heath, Charlemont and Colrain, and improve access to and demand for more local food in the tri-town area.

What follows are the findings of the survey, conducted from October 2016 through December 2017, and focused on three primary groups: consumers, food producers, and businesses. This report will be updated by the Ag Comms when the survey closes at the end of January 2017



Who responded to the survey?

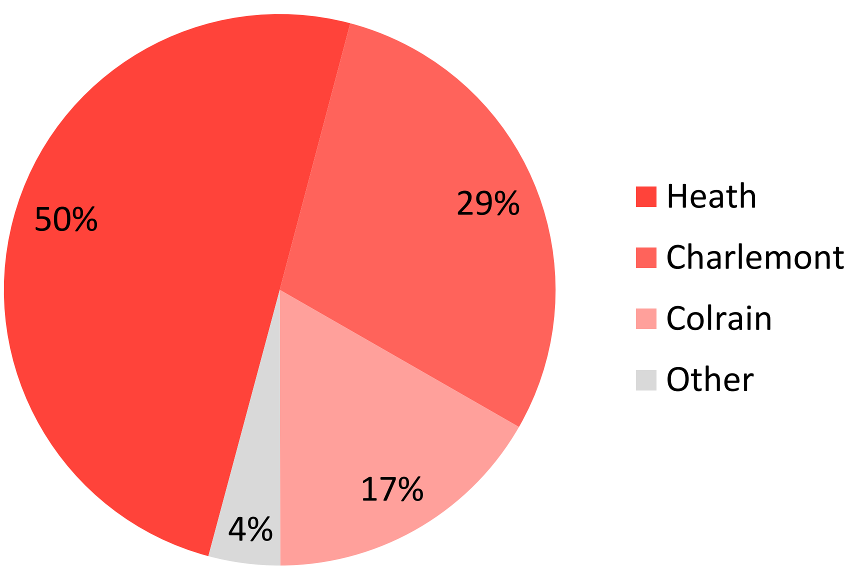
(124 respondents)



Respondents to the survey overwhelmingly selected “**consumers”** as the category that best described them. Of the 124 respondents, 88% identified as consumers, 11% as food producers, and 1% as business owner/manager. Of the 111 consumers, 11 also filled out the food producer section of the survey and two filled out the business section of the survey.

Where are respondents from?

(96 respondents)



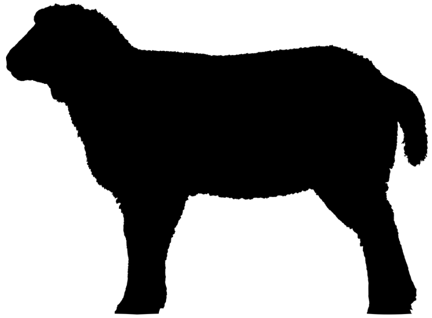
Half of respondents are from Heath, about 30% are from Charlemont and 17% are from Colrain.

The population of the three towns, based upon 2014 US Census estimates, is 3,602. Heath has approximately 700 residents, while Charlemont and Colrain have 1,246 and 1,656 respectively. The number of survey respondents represents only about 3.4% of the total population for the three towns.

Survey Findings

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of the Tri-Town Community Food Assessment Survey, a number of recommendations and next steps have emerged. The Ag Comms can use these recommendations and next steps to help plan their priorities for the coming years. It is recommended that the Ag Comms seek additional technical support and funding to help study and implement some of the recommendations and next steps.



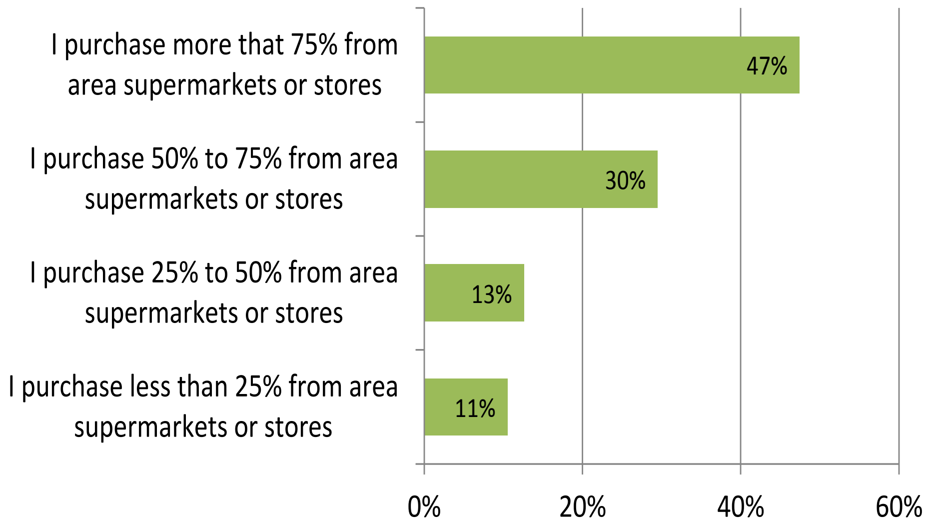
Recommendations / Next Steps	**Proposed individuals / organizations**	**Time frame- short (4-6 months), medium (up to a year), long (over a year)**
Determine how the three Ag Comms will continue to work together moving forward, especially if the Charlemont and Colrain Ag Comms gain new members and become more active.	Heath Ag Comm; Charlemont Ag Comm; Colrain Ag Comm	Short
Follow up with requests made by producers as soon as possible. Work with the FRCOG to identify any organizations that could help with technical assistance (such as land trusts, Land for Good, CISA, and others)	Ag Comms; FRCOG	Short
Request additional technical assistance from the FRCOG to help further study and/or implement these and other food system-related recommendations.	Ag Comms; Heath, Charlemont and Colrain Select Boards	Short
Explore whether there would be any benefit for the producers of the most-purchased products (such as apples, maple and cider) to collaborate and/or aggregate their products to increase their ability to sell to local consumers as well as stores, restaurants and institutions	Ag Comms; interested producers	Medium - long
Gauge level of interest in some producers selling farm shares.	Ag Comms; interested producers	Short - medium
Seek funding to subsidize farm shares for interested low and moderate income consumers.	Ag Comms; FRCOG	Short - medium
Identify potential leaders and take next steps toward implementing such	Ag Comms; Town volunteers;	Short - medium

Recommendations / Next Steps	Proposed individuals / organizations	Time frame- short (4-6 months), medium (up to a year), long (over a year)
Determine whether there is interest in expanding the existing Heath Farmers Market hours.	Heath Ag Comm; Heath Farmers Market vendors	Short
Consider developing a farm and food brochure that could address the need for better information on where to buy products	Ag Comms; FRCOG	Short - medium
Develop a system to match those willing to rent and/or allow access to farmland with those looking for more farmland. Contact those identified in the survey.	Ag Comms	Short (for initial matching) and long (for ongoing matching)
Consider holding a workshop and/or info session to focus on the regulations that are acting as barriers to producers growing and selling more products.	Ag Comms; Regional Health Agent; interested producers	Medium
Consider organizing a tour of the Western Mass Food Processing Center (WMFPC) with interested producers. Possibly coordinate with a class relevant to producers being offered by the Franklin County CDC (FCCDC).	Ag Comms; WMFPC; FCCDC; interested producers	Medium
Hold a meeting to determine the level of interest in shared processing facilities and equipment.	Ag Comms; interested producers	Short - medium
Work on identifying a funding source for any shared processing facilities and equipment determined to be needed.	Ag Comms; FRCOG	Short - long
Hold a meeting to determine the level of interest and next steps for pursuing a small-scale poultry processing facility.	Ag Comms; interested producers	Short - medium
Work on identifying a funding source for a small-scale poultry processing facility, if there is enough interest in moving forward with this idea.	Ag Comms; FRCOG	Short - long

Survey Findings

Consumers

Percentage of food dollars spent at area supermarkets *(95 respondents)*



About 47% buy more than 75% of their food at supermarkets

Nearly half of all consumer respondents say they purchase more than three quarters of their food from area supermarkets or store. The most prevalent purchases at supermarkets are grains, cheese, fruit (other than apples and berries), yogurt and chicken.

The top five items purchased directly from growers are apples, maple syrup, cider, berries and vegetables, while the top items bought at farmers markets are vegetables, berries locally processed foods (jams, salsas, etc.), nursery stock/bedding plants, and other types of fruit.

Bartering is a less common way of obtaining food, but some respondents do barter for items such as eggs, vegetables, maple products and other items.

Consumers also rely upon their own gardens for some of their food. Nearly 50% of respondents grow some of their own vegetables and herbs. Nearly 30% grow their own berries and about 20% process some of their own foods and grow their own apples.

Current food and other product consumption *(95 respondents)*

Top five items bought at supermarket	#
Grains	89
Cheese	84
Fruit, other	77
Yogurt	73
Chicken	70

Top five items bought from growers /farm stands	#
Apples	76
Maple syrup/prod	68
Cider	58
Berries	54
Vegetables	53

Top five items bought at farmers markets	#
Vegetables	38
Berries	24
Processed local foods	23
Nursery stock / bedding plants	22
Fruit, other	22

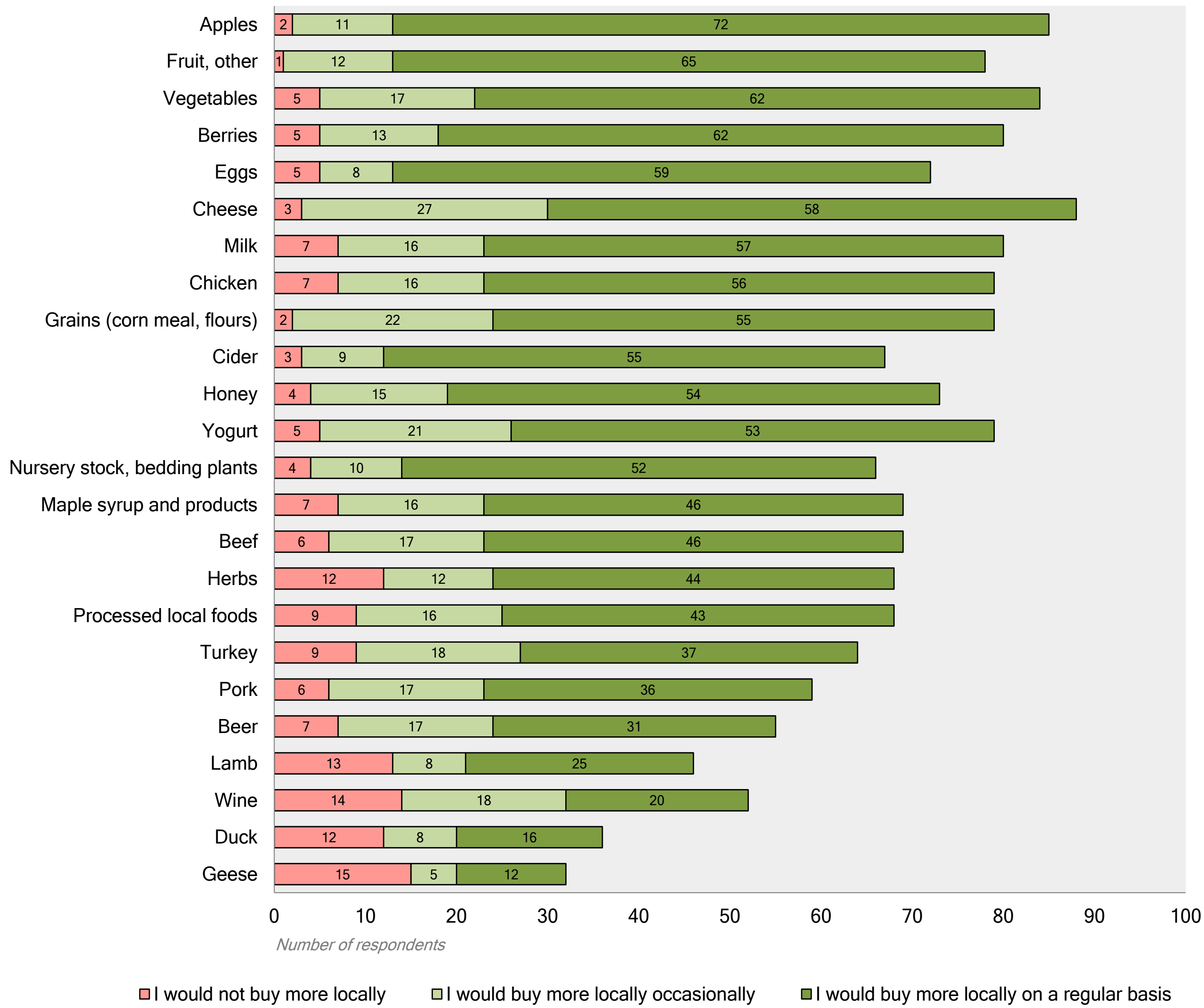
Top five items bartered	#
Egg	14
Vegetables	13
Maple syrup/products	11
Nursery stock / bedding plants	10
Berries	6

Top five items consumers grow themselves	#
Vegetables	59
Herbs	54
Berries	36
Processed local foods	27
Apples	24

Apples, maple syrup and cider top the list of items bought from growers and farm stands

If more food was available in Heath, Colrain and/or Charlemont, consumers say they would buy as follows:

(92 respondents)

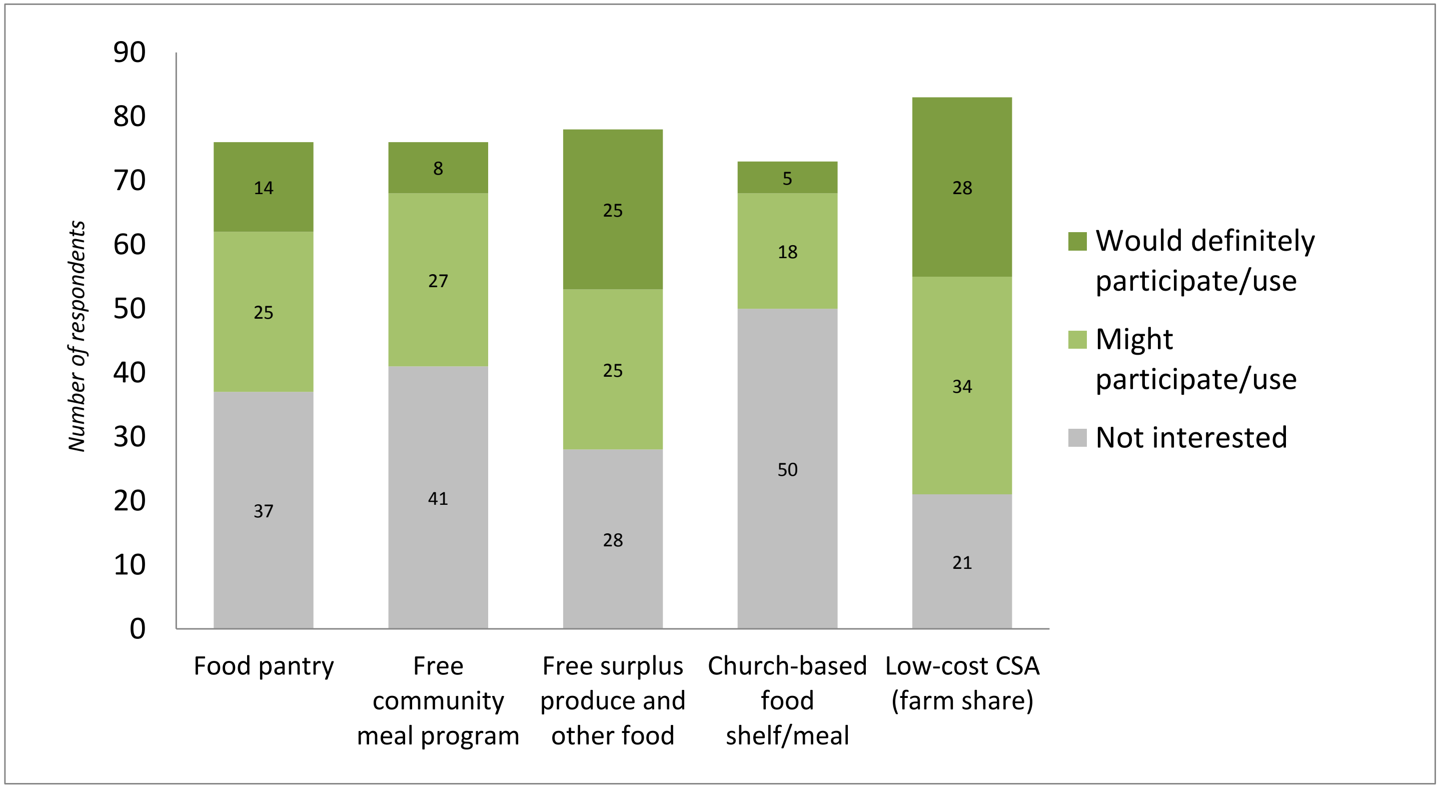


Apples, berries, and other fruits, as well as eggs and cheese, are some of the top items consumers say they would buy more of on a regular basis

There are dozens of items consumers say they would buy more of on a regular basis if the food and other products were more readily available in their town. With the exception of chicken, meat items such as duck, geese, lamb, pork and turkey are items that consumers seem less likely to purchase locally.

If lower cost or free food was available, consumers say they would be interested as follows:

(85 respondents)



Consumers also suggested:

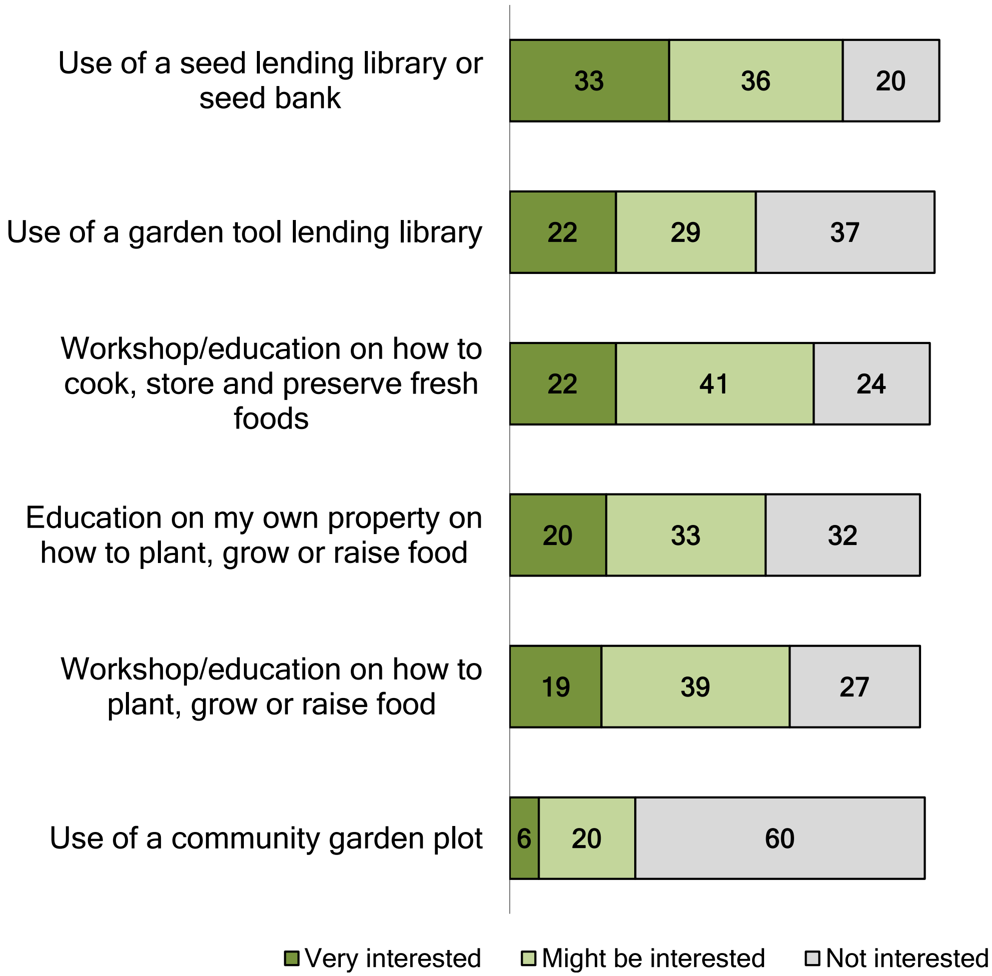
- Farm share deliveries and co-op deliveries
- Free firewood from fallen town-owned trees
- Additional farmers markets

Low-cost farm shares and free surplus food are of the most interest to respondents

Access to good, fresh and local food can often be a challenge for people of moderate or low incomes. Services such as free meals and low cost farm shares are some of the items consumers were asked to indicate their interest in using. Church-based food shelf/meals are the least popular option. On the other hand, low-cost farm shares and free surplus food are options consumers appear to have the most interest in.

If food-related services and/or education was available, consumers say they would be interested as follows:

(89 respondents)



Respondents are interested in services and/or education that help them increase their ability to grow, cook, store and preserve their own foods.

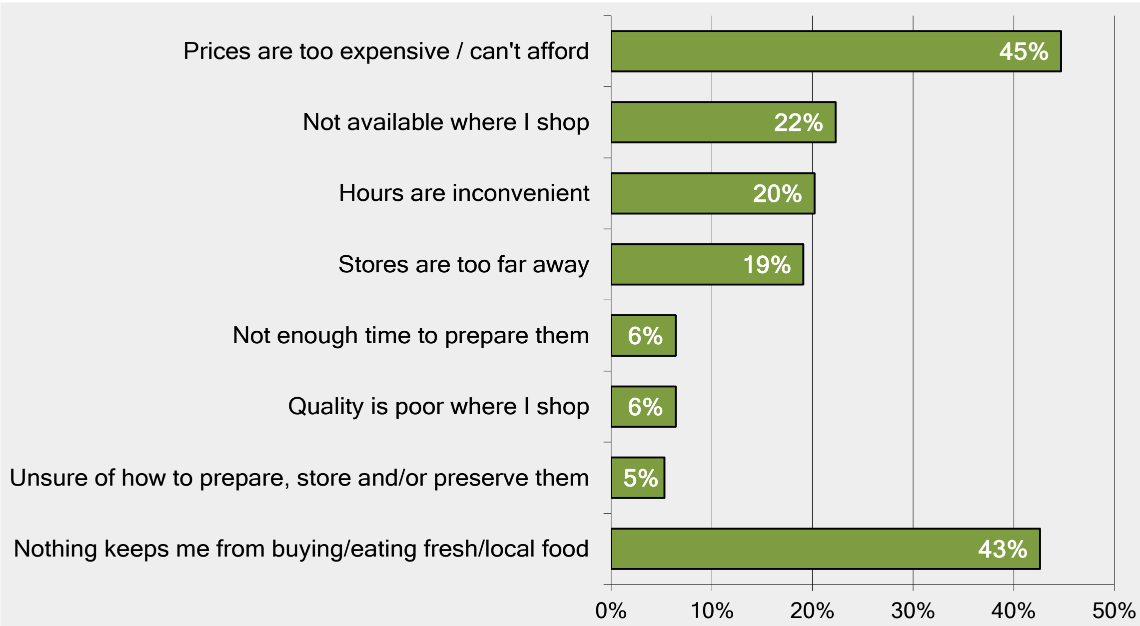
Over three quarters of those who responded to this question have some level of interest in a seed lending library or seed bank (33 are very interested and 36 might be interested). There is also significant interest in various types of workshops and other education on aspects of food preparation and food gardening. Interest in community gardens is fairly low.

This emphasis on education is in line with findings at the state-wide level. Findings in the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan*, published in December 2015 demonstrate a need for more informational and educational resources to improve food access for residents.

*The Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan can be viewed at http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/

What factors keep respondents from buying and/or eating as much fresh and/or local food as you would like?

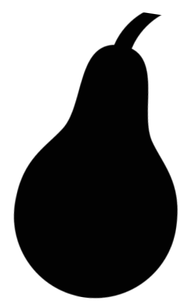
(94 respondents)



45% of respondents cite price as a barrier to buying and eating as much fresh and/or local food as they would like - while nearly as many say they don't have any barriers

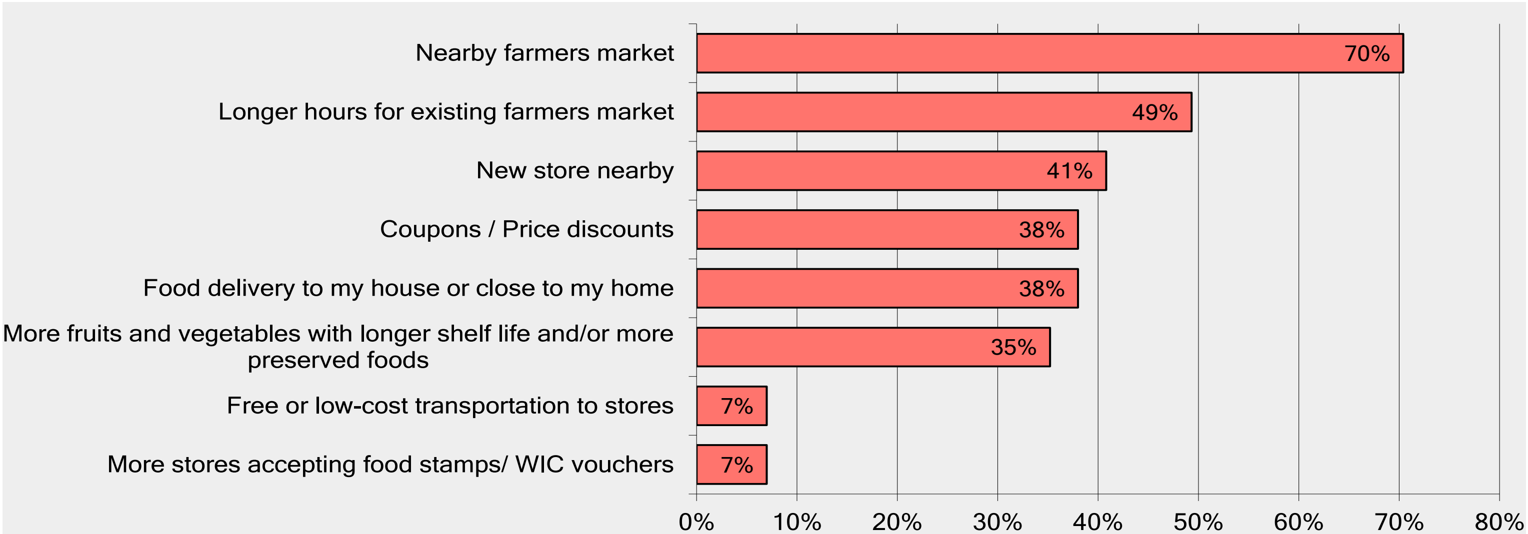
Respondents were asked to list any other barriers to buying and/or eating as much fresh and/or local food as they would like. Several cited not having all the local food available in one location and/or having to make several stops as being a barrier. Seasonality - or lack of products available year-round - was also cited as a barrier.

These findings are similar to finding at the state-wide level. The Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan cites affordability, transportation and lack of availability of fresh, local food as barriers to access.



Which of these would help respondents eat more local foods?

(71 respondents)



70% of respondents say nearby farmers markets are key to them eating more local food - 49% say longer farmers market hours are key

As with the previous question, respondents were asked to list additional ideas. Some mentioned a need for more information about what is available and where one can obtain the products. The need for more local products to be available in general was also listed.

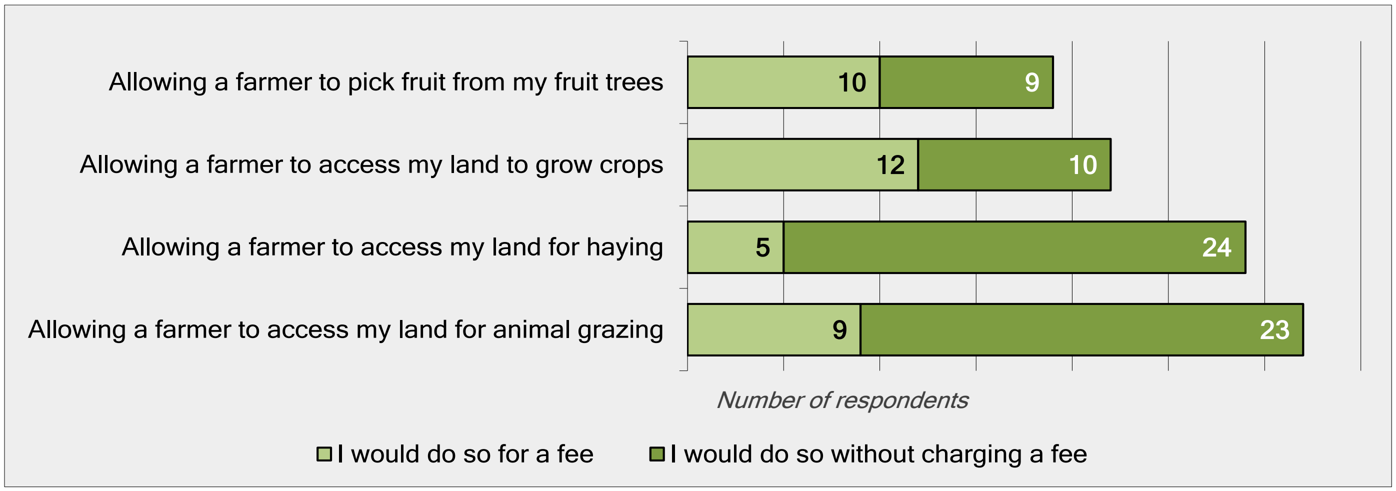
Over the past 12 months, which of these were true: *(10 respondents)*

	#
I or my family members were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food	5
I or my family members relied upon hunting or foraging to meet some of our food needs	6
I or my family members were hungry because we could not get to a store	4

Few responded to this optional question, asking about hunger and meeting food needs. Of the ten who responded, half say they or their family were hungry because they did not have enough money to buy food. Hunger is a problem that is prevalent in Western Massachusetts, where 13.2% of residents are food insecure, or without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.*

Respondents who own land were asked how interested they are in the following:

(38 respondents)



About 60% of those who responded to this question are willing to allow farmers to hay or graze on their property without a charge

Access to affordable farmland is a barrier to increasing production that has been identified in regional and statewide food-related projects and reports. Based on the data above, it appears there are a number of possibilities for farmers to have access to land owned by residents in the three towns. A next step for the Ag Comms would be to match up those who say they have land available with farmers looking to expand their operations. Of number of interested respondents to this question provided information on how to contact them and how much/what type of land they have.

*More hunger statistics as well as how to get help with hunger at: https://www.foodbankwma.org/learn/local-hunger-facts/

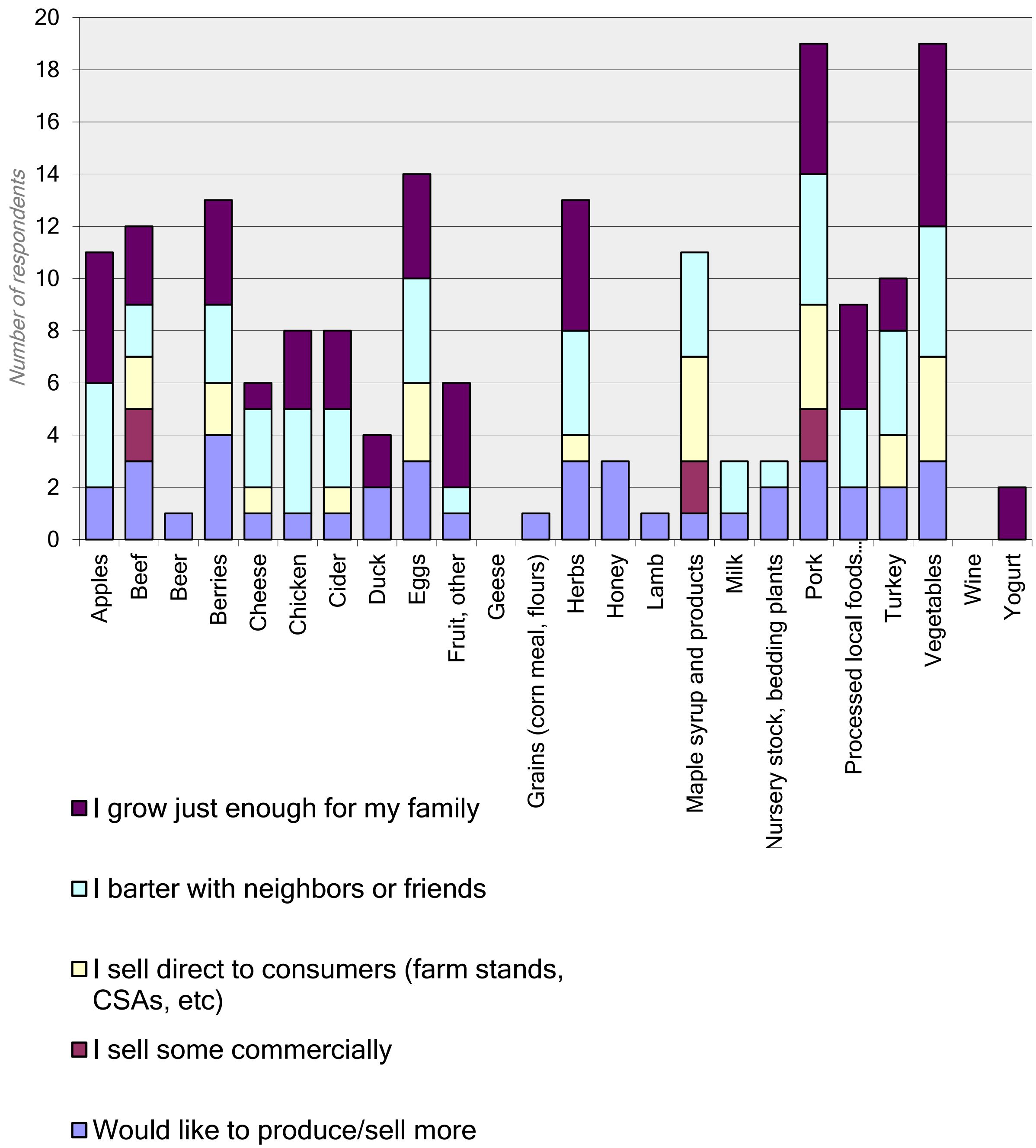
Survey Findings

Food Producers

Farmers • Growers • Processors

The following describes producers' current production:

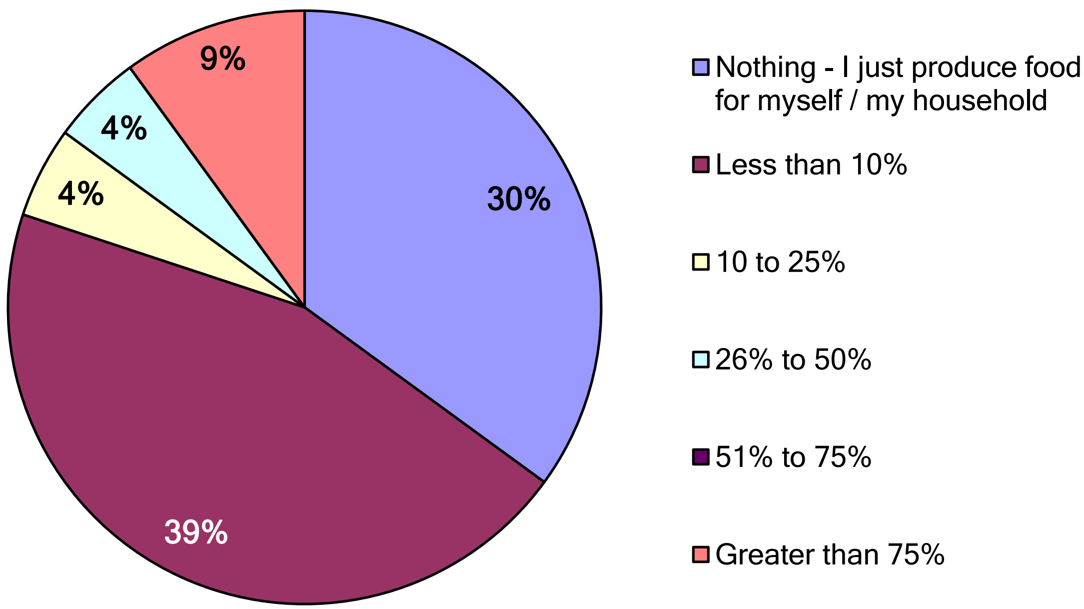
(20 respondents)



There is some interest in expanding production of nearly all products, although that interest is on the part of just three producers

Percent of producers' total household income earned from their food production:

(23 respondents)

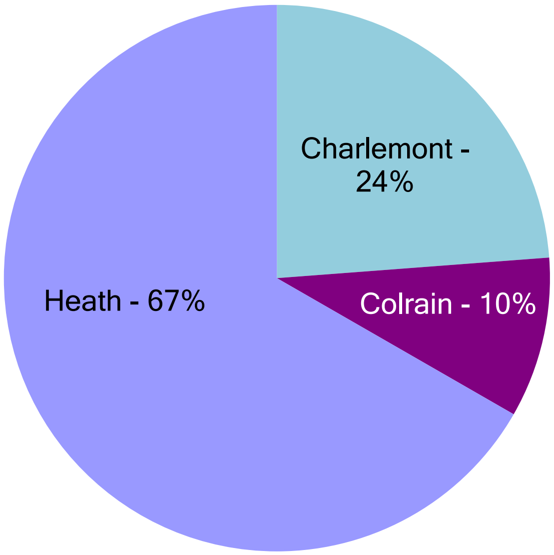


Only 9% of producer respondents say they make more than 75% of their income from their producing food.

Thirty percent of producer respondents grow just enough for their own household's use. And nearly 40% make less than 10% of their income from their food production. This data paints a picture of primarily small food production operations in the three towns. In subsequent questions, we will learn what is keeping producers - if anything - from producing more and making more of their income from doing so.

Where producers grow, farm and/or produce food:

(21 respondents)



Just over 2/3 of producers' operations are located in Heath, while 1/3 are in Charlemont or Colrain

The following describes producers land situation:

(19 respondents)

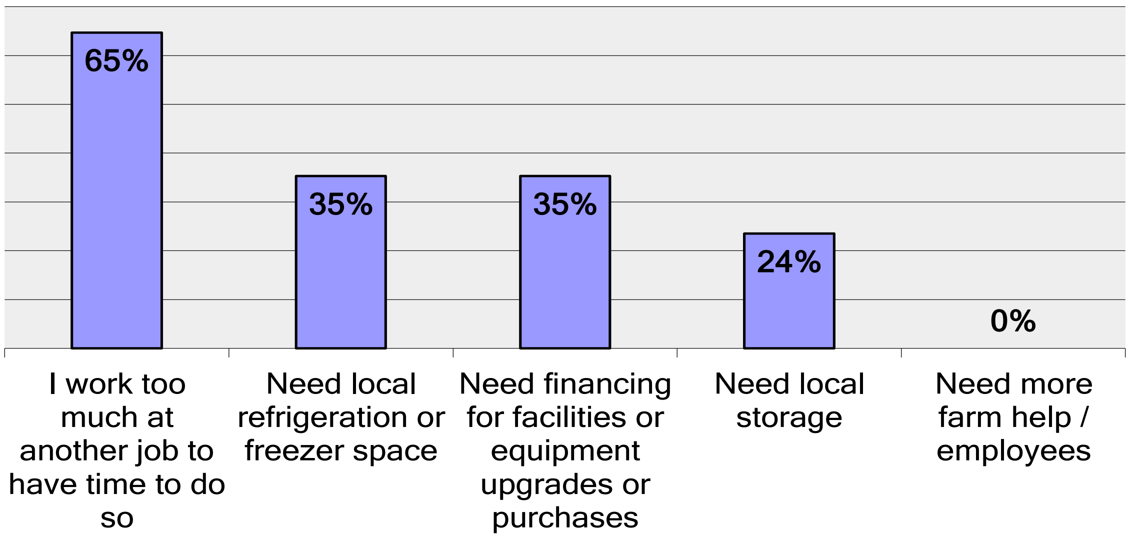
Types of Land	I need more land to lease or purchase for farming	I rent land to another farmer	I have land that is available to rent to another farmer	I have just enough to meet my needs
Cropland	3	0	2	9
Pasture	3	0	3	6
Hay	3	1	4	1
Orchard	0	0	1	7
Sugarbush	2	0	2	5
Woodlot	0	0	4	7

Respondents to this question were asked to provide their contact information, if willing, so that the Ag Comm can follow up and help match of farmers who need more land with farmers who have land to rent.

More land is needed for farming, including for crops, pasture, hay and maple sugaring. And there are a number of respondents who say they have land they could rent

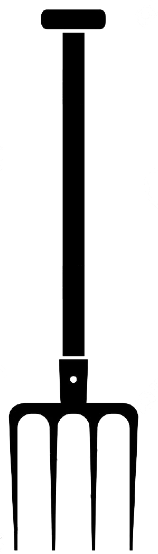
These findings are similar to Franklin County-wide findings from the Franklin County Farm and Food System Project. Farmers from all but three towns in Franklin County identified 64 needs for farmland.

If producers would like to grow or raise more food, other than land cost and availability, what is preventing them from doing so? *(17 respondents)*

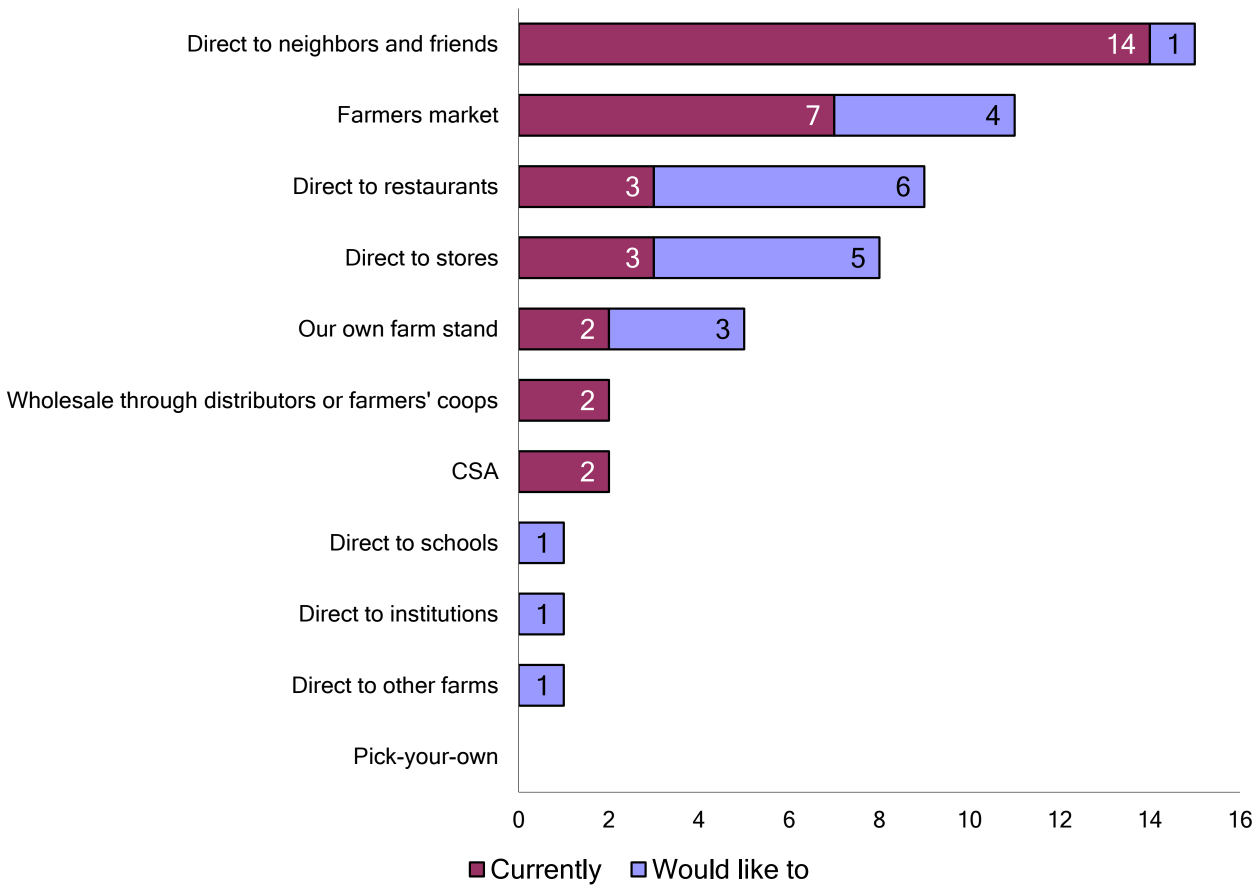


The #1 challenge to producers growing more food is time. They work too much at another job to have time to devote to producing more food.

This finding is consistent with other data in the state and region which shows that farmers often have to have second jobs to make ends meet and/or to have health insurance and other benefits.



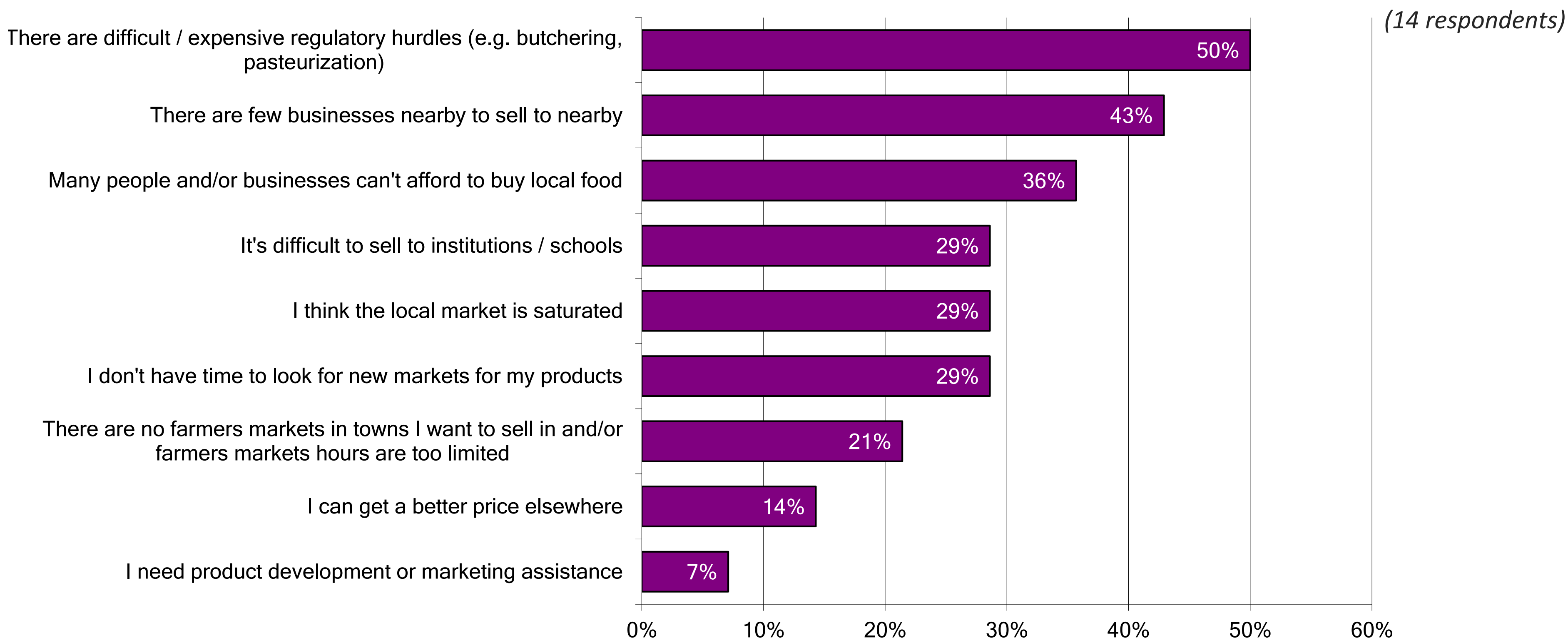
These are the places or ways in which producers sell their food: *(17 respondents)*



82% of producers who responded say they sell direct to neighbors and friends. Just over 40% sell via farmers markets.

Producers want to sell more product, according to their responses. Of those who responded, 29% of producers would like to sell direct to stores and 35% would like to sell direct to restaurants. Still others are interested in selling at farmers markets or on a farm stand of their own.

Barriers to producers selling more products in or nearby their town:



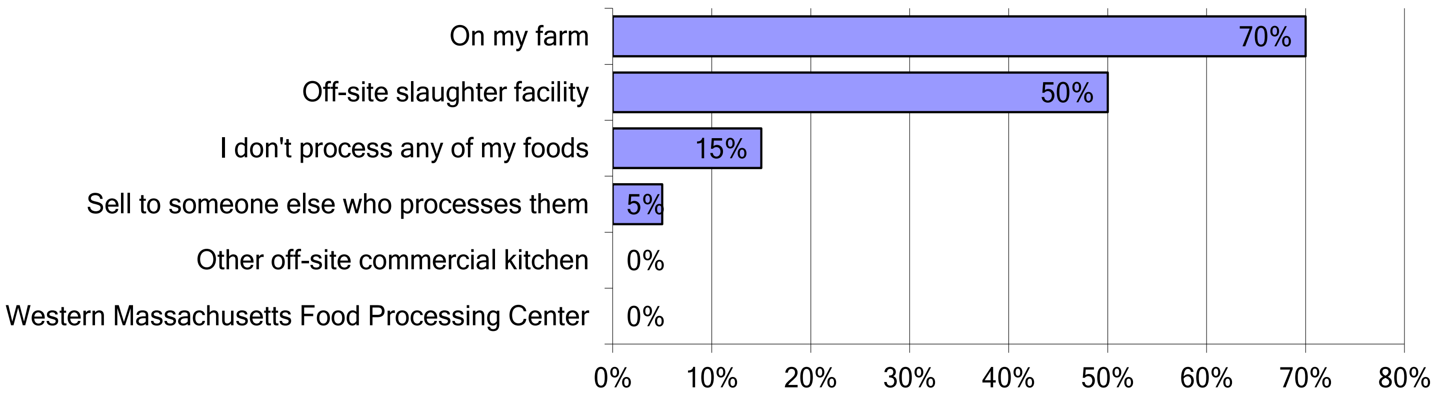
50% of producers who responded say regulations are getting in the way of them selling more products.

These findings correspondent with findings from the MA Local Food Action Plan, which identified a regulatory system that is difficult to navigate as one of the primary challenges to increasing food production in the state. In addition to regulations, producers in Heath, Charlemont and Colrain also say there are few businesses nearby to sell to and that it is difficult to sell to institutions and schools.

Producers also identify many consumers' inability to be able to afford local food as a barrier to being able to sell more products.

Where do producers say they process their products?

(20 respondents)



70% of producers who responded say they process some of their products on their farm.

In addition to the on-farm processing producers say they are doing, 50% of them use an off-site slaughter facility. None are currently using an off-site commercial kitchen or the Western Mass Food Processing Center.

If they want to process more, what is keeping them from doing so?

(10 respondents)

Reason for not processing more	% respondents
There are too many regulations to navigate to process on my farm	60%
Need to upgrade or purchase new equipment / facilities to process on my farm	50%
Need more farm laborers to help process food on my farm	10%
Need heated washing and packing space for winter	20%
Need a local shared processing facility	40%
My farm is too small to use a processing facility	10%
It is too expensive to use a processing facility	10%

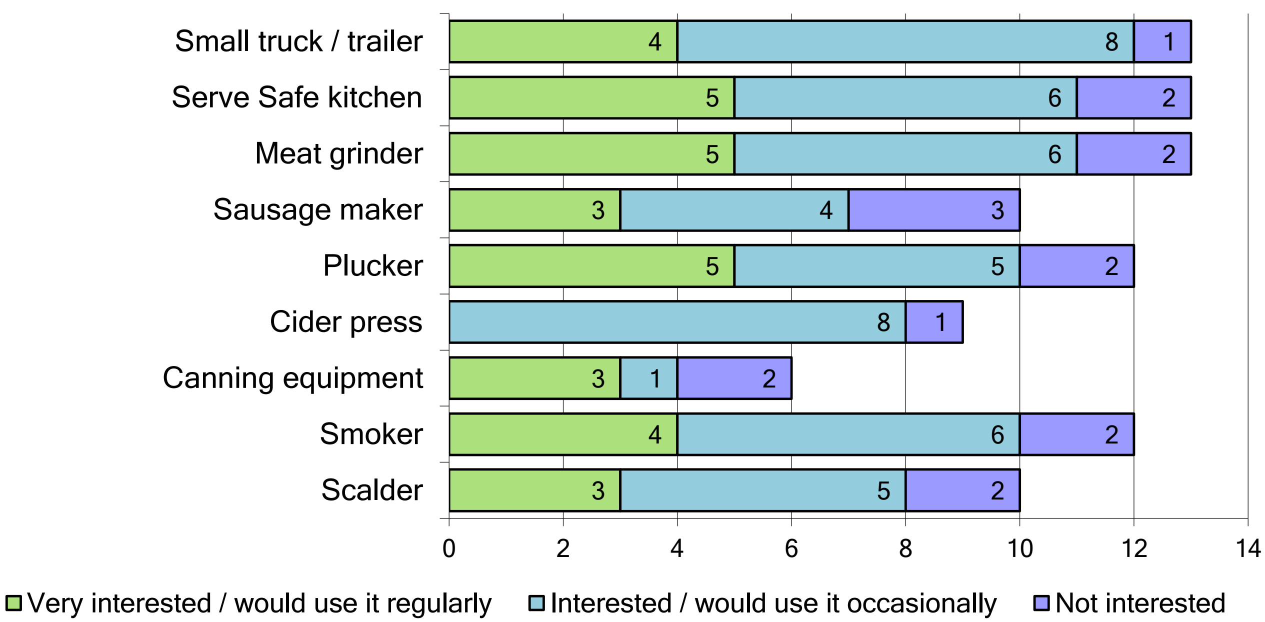
Regulations and the need for upgraded equipment or facilities are the primary barriers to producers processing more of their products.

What type of food packing and /or processing services or facilities do producers say they need? *(8 respondents)*

Service or facility	#
Butchering	8
Smoking	7
Curing	6
Packing	5
Freezing	4
Canning or bottling	3
Pickling	2
Fermenting or aging	2
Cleaning, trimming, coring, slicing or other similar preparation	0

Producers identify needing meat-related processing services or facilities such as butchering, smoking and curing.

If any of the following equipment was available to the community, how interested would producers be in using it? *(19 respondents)*



Producers say they are interested in shared equipment, especially a truck/trailer, Serve Safe kitchen, and a meat grinder, as well as other items. The Ag Comms could hold a gathering of interested producers to begin to better understand producer needs. They could also begin to research potential sources and costs for such equipment, and could look into models that other communities have successfully used to obtain and manage shared equipment.

If there was a dairy processing facility in Franklin County, what would producers level of interest be in the following? *(10 respondents)*

Options	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Bottling and selling my own brand of milk, cream or butter	0	0	7
Processing and selling my own brand of cheese	2	1	7
Processing and selling my own brand of ice cream	0	0	7
Working cooperatively with other local farmers to process and sell local dairy products	0	0	7
Selling my milk to another business using the processing plant	0	0	7

With the exception of processing and selling their own brand of cheese, there was no interest in a dairy processing facility.

What are producers' level of satisfaction with their slaughter facilities?

(10 respondents)

Facility type	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Meat slaughter facility	6	0	3
Poultry slaughter facility	0	2	5

Producers are mixed in their satisfaction with their current slaughter facility, with some highly satisfied and others not satisfied at all.

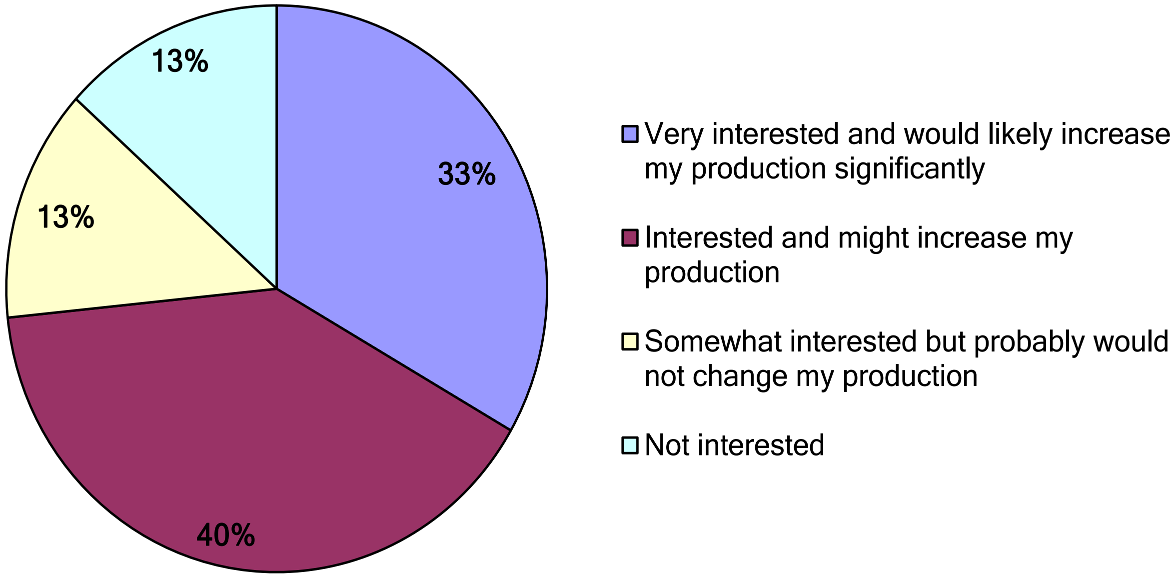
Reasons cited for their dissatisfaction include the distance producers have to travel to the slaughter facility, the cost and poor quality.

At the county-wide level, satisfaction with slaughter facilities varies, with 33% of respondent highly satisfied, 43% satisfied and 21% not satisfied. Similar issues such as distance traveled and quality were cited at the county level.*

*Franklin County Farm and Food System Farmer Survey: http://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Franklin-County-Farmer-Survey-Responses-Final.pdf

Are producers interested in a small-batch poultry processing facility nearby?

(15 respondents)



About 1/3 of producers who responded say they are very interested and would likely increase their production significantly.

Are producers interested in shared cold storage? *(13 respondents)*

Options	Response Count
Yes, a cold storage facility in West County	5
Yes, a refrigerated truck	5
I'm not interested in a cold storage rental facility or vehicle	6

There are a modest number of producers interested in cold storage.

Of these other services, what are producers interested in?

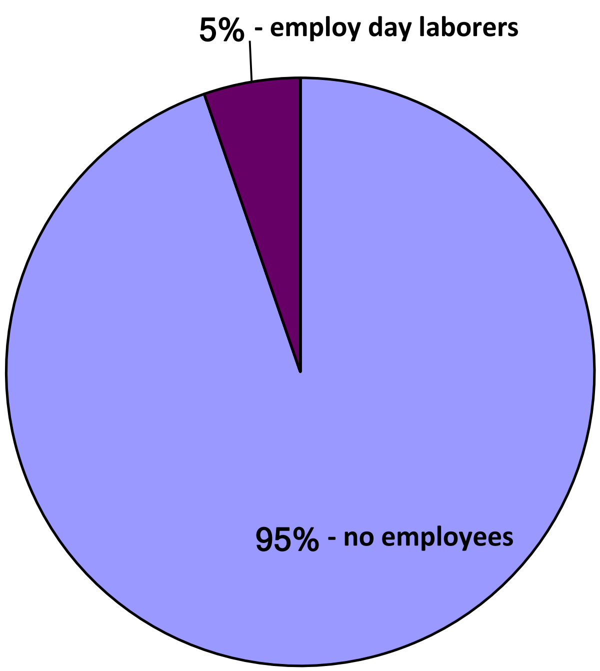
(17 respondents)

Options	Response Percent
I'm interested in receiving compost for use my farm	59%
I'm interested in sending some of my farm waste for compost	0%
I'm interested in participating in an agricultural plastic recycling program	29%
I'm not interested	24%

Over half of producers who responded say they are interested in receiving compost for their farm.

How do producers describe their farm worker employment situation?

(19 respondents)



Only 5% of producers who responded to this question say they have employees.

Of those who do have employees, they indicate having a hard time finding field workers and day laborers.

Of these other potential shared initiatives, what are producers interested in? *(16 respondents)*

Shared initiative	Would like to participate	Would like to start or manage
Cooperative purchasing	11	3
Tool lending library	10	1
Seed saving library	10	3
Farmer's cooperative store or other farm-and/ or food-focused business	10	2
Donating surplus food	9	0
Shared greenhouse	8	0
Labor shares or work parties	8	0

There are nearly a dozen producers interested in several of the shared initiatives - such as cooperative purchasing.

As a next step, the Ag Comms could conduct additional outreach to see if there are other community members who would like to participate in some of these initiatives, such as a seed saving library or a shared greenhouse.

What support do producers need?

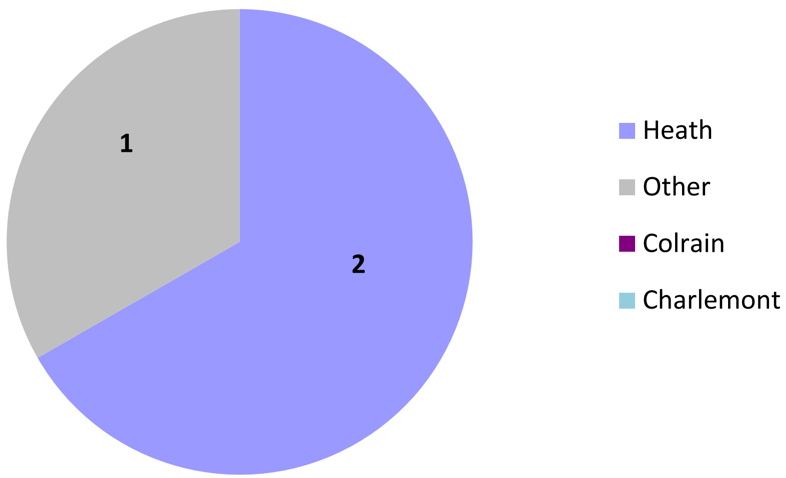
As a thank you for taking the survey, producers were offered a list of potential technical support topics, such as new product development and farmland protection, to name a few. The Heath Ag Comm Chair will work to identify the individuals or organizations who can contact those who requested assistance, with the help of the FRCOG.

Survey Findings

Businesses

Owners • Managers

In what town are the businesses that responded located? *(3 respondents)*



If businesses do want to purchase more from local food growers, farmers or producers, what is keeping them from doing so? *(2 respondents)*

Answer Options	Response Percent
It's too complicated to deal with multiple local growers, farmers and producers	33.3%
It's too hard to find what I need from local growers, farmers and producers	0.0%
I don't have time to look for local growers, farmers and producers	0.0%
Local growers, farmers or producers might not meet my standards for quality or food safety	0.0%
It's too expensive to buy from local growers / farmers	0.0%
Other (please specify)	66.7%

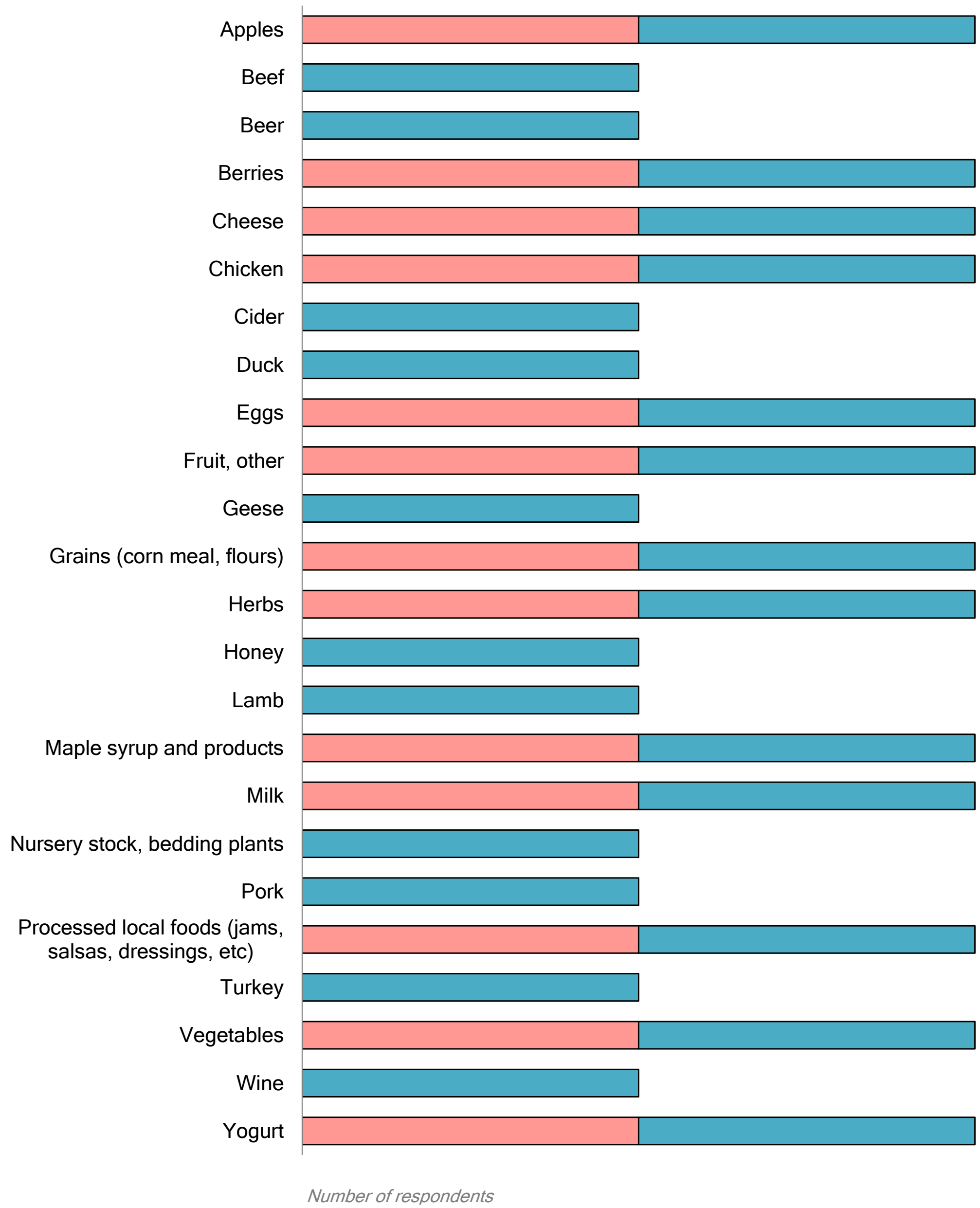
Not enough respondents to draw any conclusions.

What food-related initiatives do businesses say they might be interested in?

Answer Options	Response Percent
CISA's Local Hero program	0.0%
A 10% local food procurement challenge in which I try to source 10% of my food locally	0.0%
A CSA (Consumer Supported Agriculture) share	0.0%
Purchasing from a local food distributor	0.0%
Purchasing from a farmers cooperative	0.0%

No respondents

What do businesses that responded currently purchase from local food growers, farmers or producers? *(2 respondents)*



Not enough respondents to draw any conclusions.