



THE OHIO FARM POLL

A Profile of Ohio's Organic Farms:

Key findings from the OFP – Organic Edition

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Douglas Jackson-Smith, Shoshanah Inwood, Andrea Rissing, Tiffany Woods.

What is the Ohio Farm Poll?

Every year, farmers operate under conditions that are out of their control. But 2019 was a perfect storm of flooded fields, a trade war, and higher farmland costs. To understand how Ohio farmers were impacted by these challenges, researchers at the Ohio State University in the School of Environment and Natural resources created the first Ohio Farm Poll.

- **This statewide survey provides authoritative information about the well-being and outlook of typical Ohio farmers and farm households.**
- 2019 served as a stress test for Ohio agriculture. Understanding how different kinds of farmers were affected by multiple stressors—and how they responded—can guide strategies to strengthen Ohio's farm sector for the future.
- In addition to a random sample of 2500 Ohio farms, the poll also included a targeted sample of 500 organic farms. **This report presents key results from the organic sample and comparisons between the organic and random samples.**

Who are Ohio's Organic Farmers?

Organic farmers work all over the state, but 52% of organic farms are located in the northeast region.

- **Ohio's organic sector is young.** 19% of organic farm respondents are between 18 and 34 years old, compared to only 3% of conventional farmers (Fig 1).
- **Ohio's organic farms are also much more likely to be run by Amish or Plain farmers.** Although Plain farmers represent just over 20% of Ohio's overall farm population, they comprise approximately 65% of its organic farmers (Fig 2).

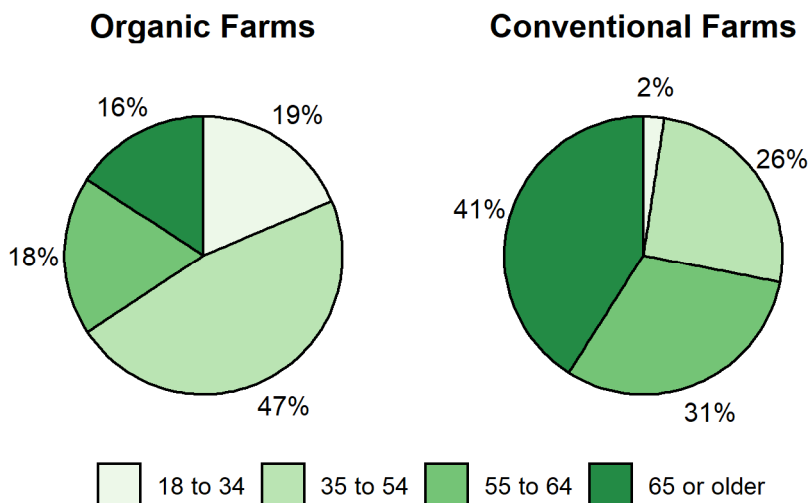


Fig 1: Distribution by age of principal operator

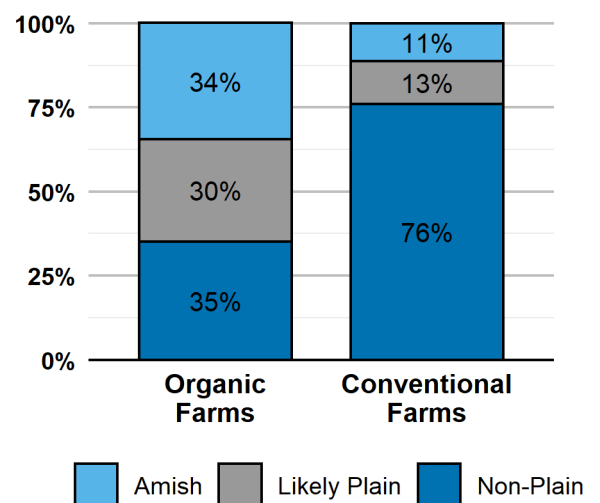


Fig 2: Percent members of Plain communities

What do Ohio's Organic Farms Look Like?

Ohio's organic sector has more enterprise diversity than Ohio's conventional sector (Fig 3), including significantly more specialty crop and dairy production. **32% of Ohio's organic farms are dairies.** Contrary to common perceptions, most organic farms are significant commercial enterprises (with 66% selling more than \$50,000, compared to 33% of Ohio's conventional farms (Fig 4).

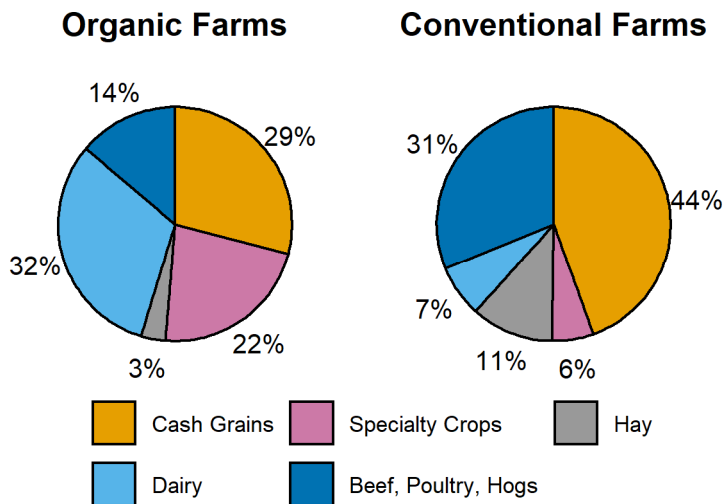


Fig 3: Distribution by enterprise type

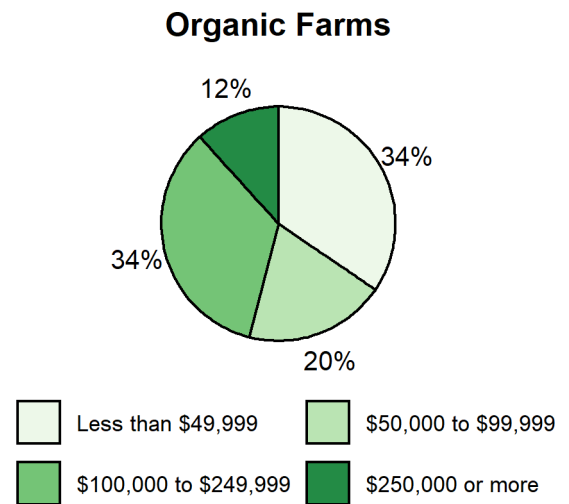


Fig 4: Distribution by gross farm sales

What Happened to Ohio's Organic Farms in 2019?

2019 was a hard year across Ohio, and organic farmers were not exempt from the year's shocks.

- **64% of organic farms had to delay planting because of heavy rains.**
- 55% of organic farms experienced a significant drop in crop yields.
- 34% of organic farms experienced a significant drop in prices received for products.
- Not all shocks were related to external conditions. **15% of organic farms had family members with health conditions that made it difficult to farm.**

Different Experiences of 2019

Organic farms experienced different kinds of shocks depending on their commodities (Fig 5). **These results point to the importance of a diversified farm sector for increasing resilience in the face of different stresses.**

- Organic cash grain farms were most vulnerable to weather (delayed planting and yield drops).
- Organic dairy farms were most likely to experience price declines.
- Organic specialty crop producers were most likely to report pest and disease pressures.

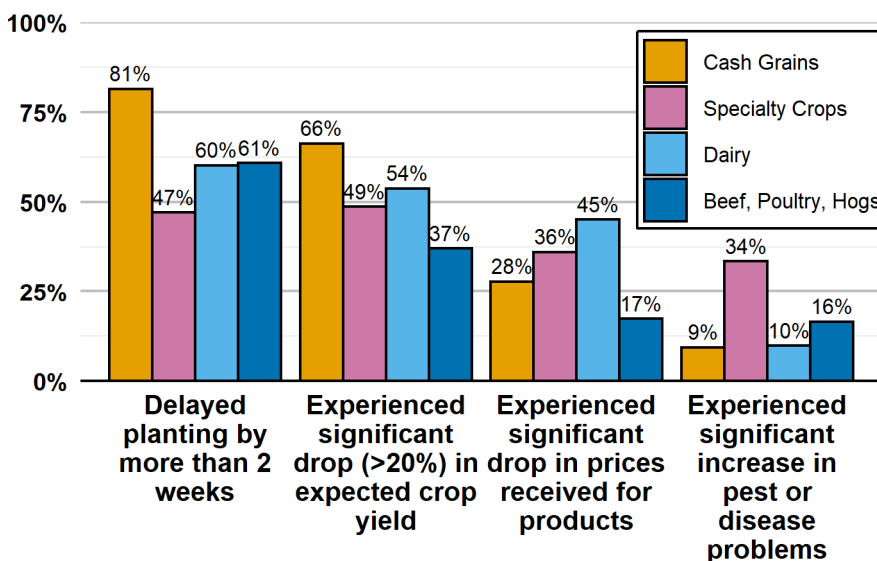


Fig: 5 Organic farm types most impacted by 2019's shocks

Satisfaction, Quality of Life, and Views toward the Future

Different production practices and markets expose organic farms to different conditions, but these are not the only ways that organic and conventional producers differ. The poll found that organic farmers reported higher levels of satisfaction with elements of their farming operation (Fig 6) and quality of life (Fig 7).

- **Overall, both organic farmers (84%) and conventional farmers (76%) reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of life that farming affords.**

Organic and conventional farmers also differed in their perspectives on the future. While organic farmers were slightly more likely than conventional farmers to be concerned about the future of farming in their area, **organic farmers were twice as likely to encourage their children to be farmers (Fig 8).**

- Reflecting their younger average age (48 years old vs. 60 years old), organic farmers were also less likely to plan on stopping farming in the next five years (Fig 9).

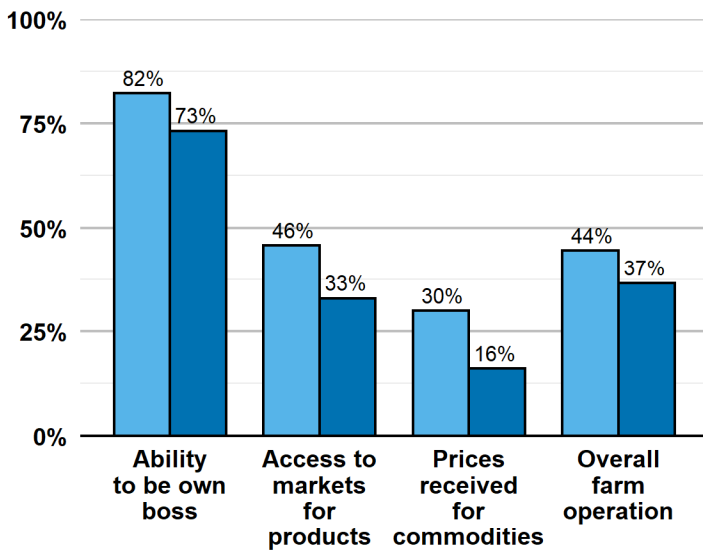


Fig 6: Percent reporting very satisfied or satisfied

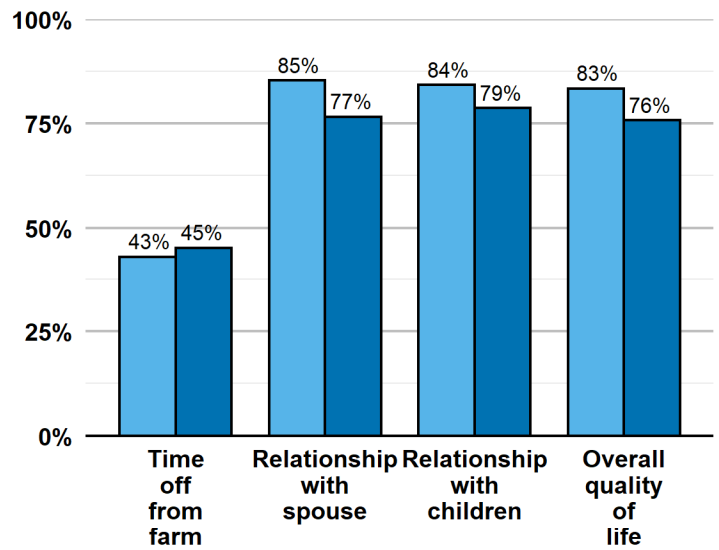


Fig 7: Percent reporting very satisfied or satisfied

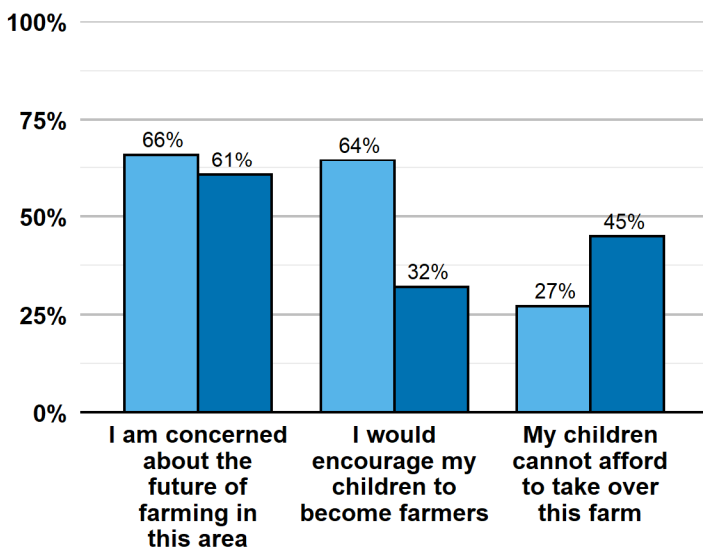


Fig 8: Percent agree or strongly agree

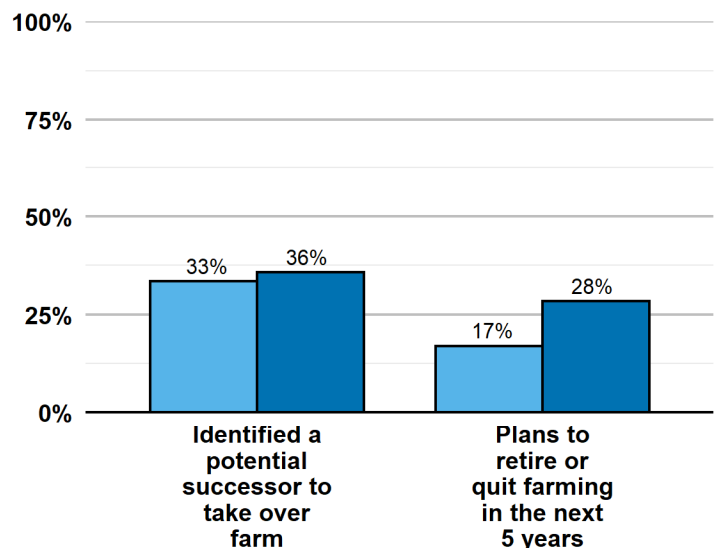


Fig 9: Percent answering yes

■ Organic Farms ■ Conventional Farms

Use of Conservation Practices

Organic farmers are much more likely to use a range of conservation practices (Fig 10), including **cover crops, extended crop rotations, vegetative buffers, and creating or maintaining pollinator habitat.**

The greatest difference between organic and conventional farmers' adoption of conservation practices was seen in the use of cover crops (59% vs. 16%).

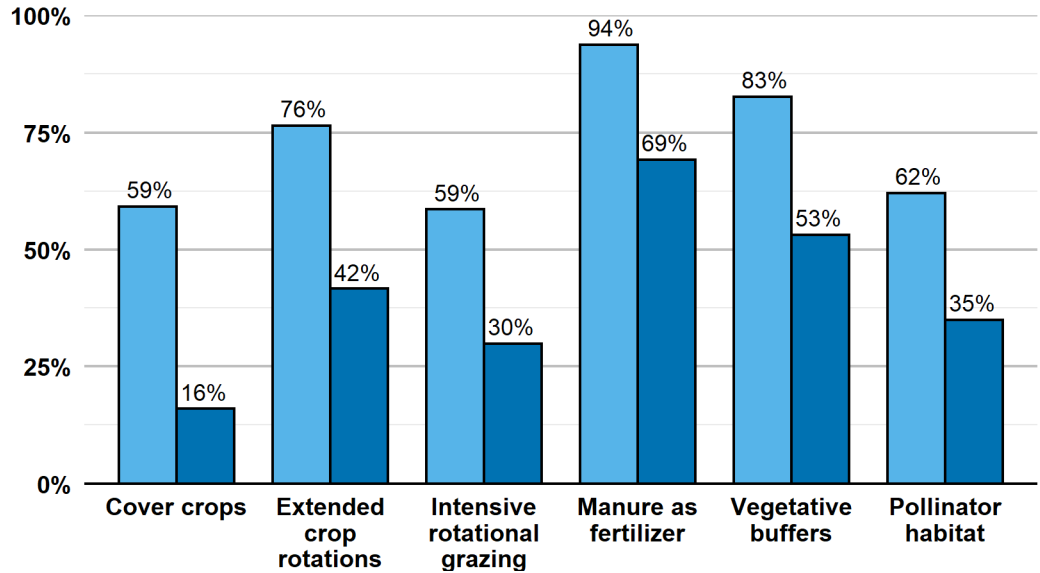


Fig 10: Percent using conservation practices in 2019

Perspectives on Current Topics

The Ohio Farm Poll also asked farmers to share their perspectives on a range of current topics, including environmental issues, the role of government in agriculture, and genetic modification of crops.

- Relatively few organic farmers believe that genetic engineering will benefit them, compared to nearly 40% of conventional farms.
- Very few farmers believe that agribusiness consolidations have helped their farm. Over half of organic farmers believe that the government should limit agribusiness consolidation (Fig 11).

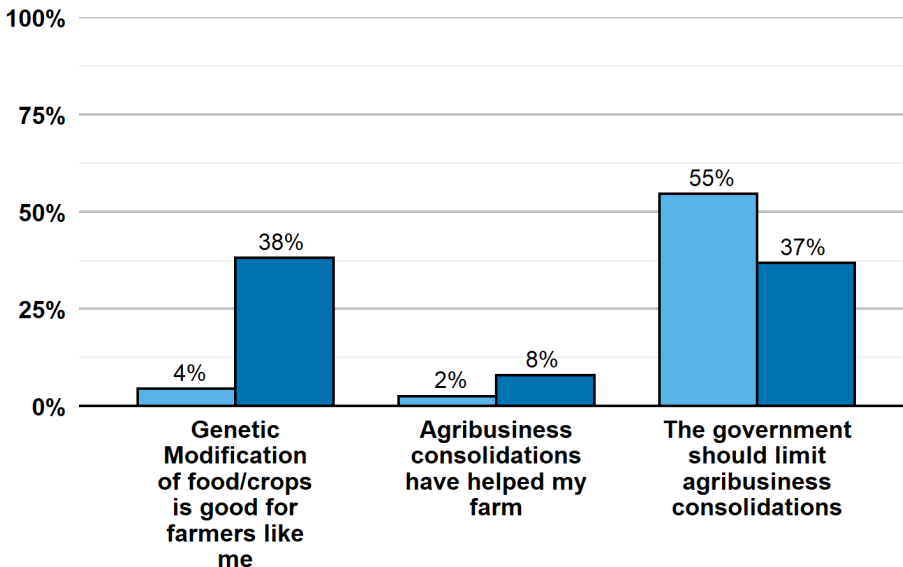


Fig 11: Percent agree or strongly agree

Ohio Farmers Speak

"I am 57. When I was 12, there were 8 farmers on my road, and they all worked together. Now there are me and 2 or 3 others that farm 5000 acres. It is all cutthroat, no community anymore"

– Ohio organic grain farmer

■ Organic Farms ■ Conventional Farms