

# EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OFF FARM EMPLOYMENT, MULTIFUNCTIONALITY, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Results from a survey conducted in New England region showed majority farmers were middle age or older, male, well-educated, and have Medium to High incomes from off farm employment. This same group also farm small acreage, have low agricultural sales, and over a third sustained losses from farming activities. However these farmers contributed significantly to economic mobility and intellectual mobility by supporting their own families through off farm jobs, as well as offering employment opportunities to other families in communities. The key to sustain rural economy seems to rely on a combination of economic mobility and intellectual mobility to support farm households to achieve the highest satisfaction which would lead to community prosperity.

## Challenges for Farm Households

- ❑ Poverty, declining land value, environmental degradation, climate change, and volatile economic structure
- ❑ Lack of economic incentives, resources, and opportunities
- ❑ Negative correlation between farm size, off farm income, and losses from farming

## Research Questions

- ❑ What do farmers do to continue farming activities even at a loss?
- ❑ What is the relationship between off farm jobs, multifunctionality, and economic mobility for farm families and others in a community?

## Multifunctionality in Agriculture

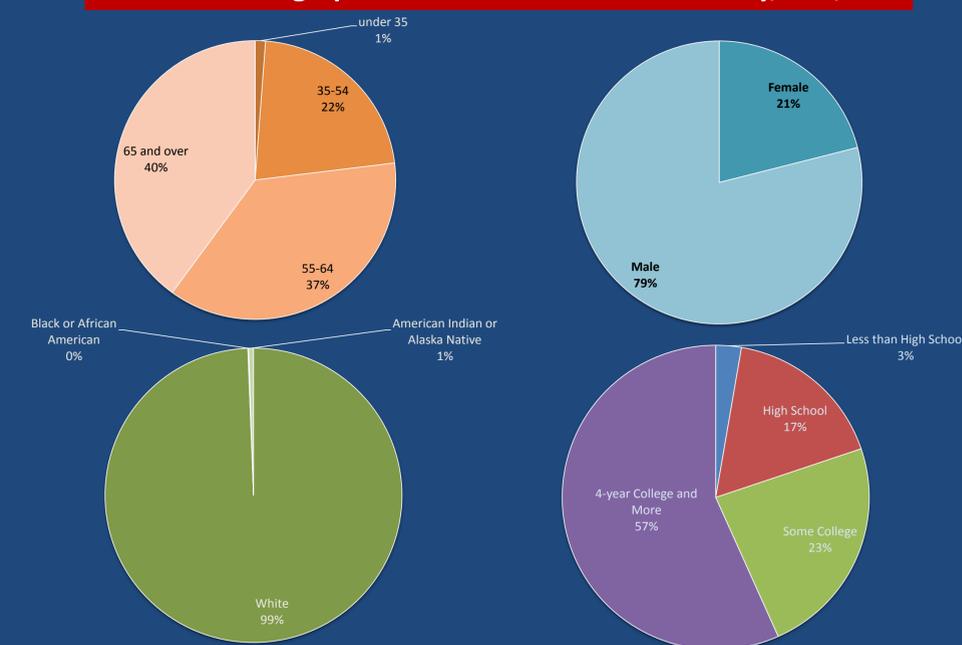
*Deepening, Broadening, Re-Grounding*

- ❑ **Agritourism** – petting zoo, farm tour and demonstration, event/festival, Bed & Breakfast, outdoor recreation
- ❑ **Value Added** – jam & jelly, cheese, spice, bread, butter, cream, ice cream, yogurt, wool, pickled fruit/vegetable, syrup, wine, candy, Christmas tree
- ❑ **Direct Sales** – pick-your-own, farm stand, Community Supported Agriculture, coop, farmer's market, restaurant, grocery stores, institutions

## Differences between Multifunctionality and Diversification

- ❑ Production v.s. Operation and Management
- ❑ Non-traditional benefits and values offered by agricultural enterprises
- ❑ Resource allocation and re-direction

## Selected Demographics of the Detailed Farm Survey, n=1,029



## Survey Methods and Responses

Step 1. Postcard mailed to 30,000+ farmers in New England through National Agricultural Statistics Service ⇒ 4,636 responses

Step 2. Detailed farm survey mailed to 7,026 farmers (including postcard respondents and additional random samples) in New England through National Agricultural Statistics Service ⇒ 1,029 responses used in this study

## Off Farm Income Categories Based on Job Title in 2011

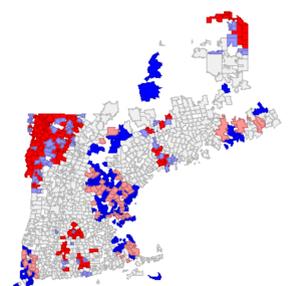
High - \$80,000+ (n=67)  
Physician, lawyer, professor, president/CEO, etc.

Medium - \$30,000 to \$80,000 (n=318)  
Teacher, nurse, truck driver, plumber, etc.

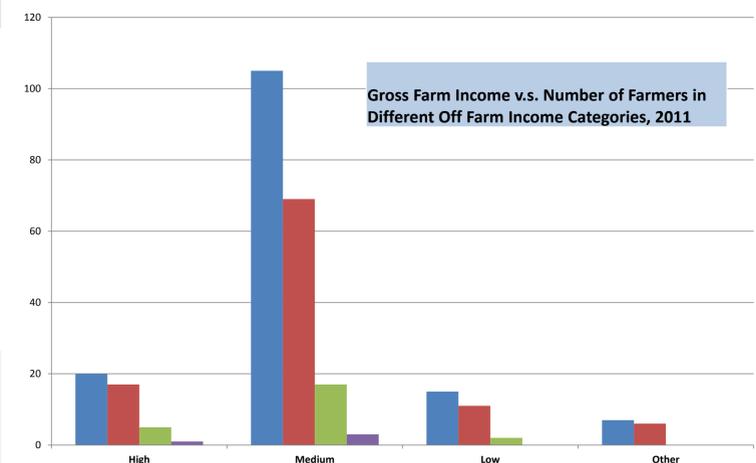
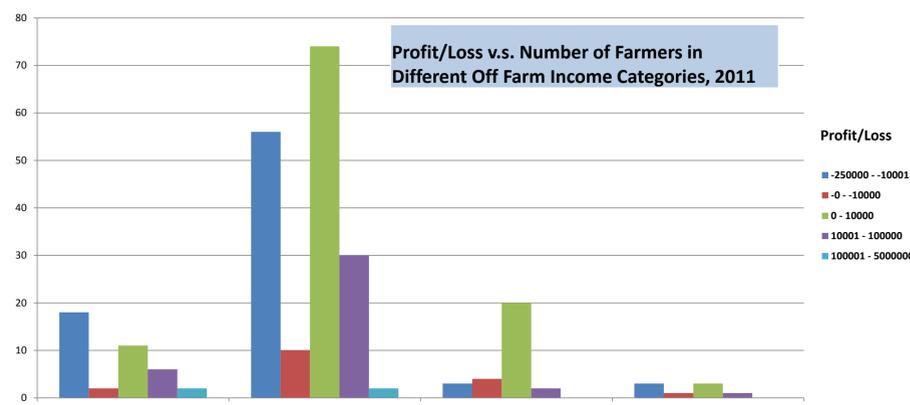
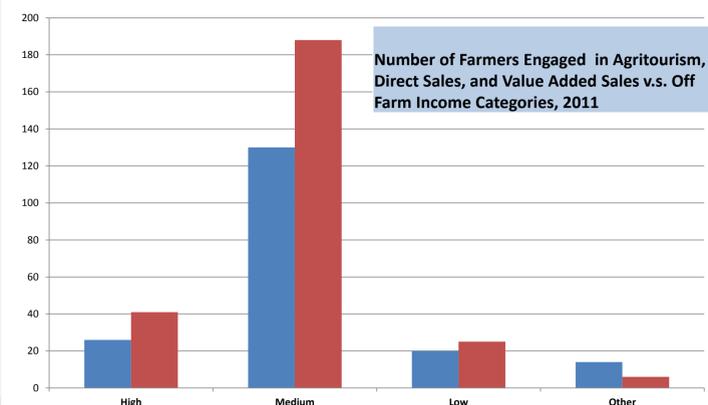
Low – less than \$30,000 (n=45)  
Labor, teacher's aid, part time work, etc.

Others – retired, volunteer, no response (n=20)

## New England Multifunctional Agriculture Distribution Based on Postcard Surveys



Red = high-high, Pink = high-low, Purple = low-high, Blue = low-low, White = no data, Grey = not significant



- Vermont had the highest percentage of respondents in the Middle Off Farm Income category
- Rhode Island had the highest percentage of respondents in the High Off Farm Income category, followed by Massachusetts

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## Discussion

- ❑ Majority small family farm operators relied on off farm income
- ❑ Over ½ of respondents who received off farm income engaged in multifunctional operations in 2011
- ❑ Direct sales seemed to be the most popular practice
- ❑ Many farmers earned High to Medium levels of off farm income while sustaining losses or very low income from farming
- ❑ Higher education levels related to higher positions in off farm jobs
- ❑ Geographic location influenced farming style and decisions in off farm jobs
- ❑ Farmers enhanced economic mobility for their own families by participating in off farm jobs and multifunctional operations
- ❑ Farmers contributed to intellectual mobility for local economy by engaging in higher paid off farm jobs

## Policy Implications

- ❑ Design and develop outreach programs for small family farmers focusing on balancing life style and financial security
- ❑ Offer guidance and training to motivate young, well educated people to create new opportunities in both farming and contributing to local economy through off farm employment

## Future Studies

To quantify and estimate impacts of off farm jobs on economic mobility and intellectual mobility at community level through employment and multifunctional operations