

# Preliminary Survey of Northern Illinois Small-Scale Farmers

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## Gathering Initial Data

The first steps taken to gather the data were done by Dr. McKee as she identified specific categories of information to be gathered during the survey.

The distinguished categories were:

Source, Farm Name, Location, Size, Type of Farming, Main Crop, Value-Added Income Sources, Farmer Name, Age, Years Farming, Generation, Farming Knowledge, Farm Income, Other Occupation, Loans/Grants, and Contact Information.

These categories were organized and placed in an Excel Spread Sheet.

The research assistant collected data from various sources throughout the internet, including listings on Upick.org and farmers' business websites. As the data accumulated, it was organized into a spread sheet within the identified categories.

## Interview Process

The researchers developed plans to gather further information on the survey categories through telephone interviews and email surveys. Scripts were developed, and the research proposal was submitted for IRB approval.

The research assistant called farmers using the data that had been collected, and questions were related to the categories that had been identified during the gathering of initial data

The research assistant entered the data into a master Excel spread sheet of all the farmers' data. The research assistant used pseudonyms for each interview within the Excel Document to keep the farmers' identities confidential.

## Quantitative Analysis

Type of Farming	Total #	Age (Mean Years)	Age N	Acreage (Mean Acres)	Acreage N	Generation (Mean)	Generation N
organic	27	55	4	44	14	2	6
conventional	9	59	9	1426	9	4	8
not given	49	54	2	292	10	1	9
CSA	16	55	1	4	2	3	2
IPM	9	56	7	53	8	3	7
Sustainable	9	63	5	154	6	2	8
Alternative-Other	44	49	8	117	17	2	18
<b>Type of Retail</b>							
Farmstand	20	60	6	125	11	4	8
CSA	39	46	3	74	11	2	14
Upick	46	56	15	239	14	2	18
Wholesale	10	58	10	1348	10	4	10
Multiple	39	52	11	40	22	2	17
<b>Value-Added</b>							
Good	24	58	8	13	10	2	9
Activity	44	57	10	374	22	2	20
Good-activity	14	57	3	68	4	2	5
None	16	60	8	178	21	2	19

Table 1: The table above is a list of means for the Types of Farming, Retail and Value-Added Income. Each of the means calculated from the data given were for the age of the farmer, acreage and the farmer's generation.

## Typology of Variables

Type of Retail	Type of Farming	Value Added - Income
Farm Stand	Organic	Good
CSA	Conventional	Activity
Upick	CSA	Activity/Good
Wholesale	IPM	None
Multiple	Sustainable	
	Alternative/Other	

Table 2: Interviews elicited farmers' self-descriptions of their type of farming, type of retail activity and any value-added goods or activities they sold. Researcher then developed a typology to condense their responses. Alternative/Other combined Biodynamic, Natural, Certified Naturally Grown and Hydroponic. Multiple means 1 or more means of Retail

## Qualitative Analysis and Future Research

To analyze interview data qualitatively, the research assistant gathered responses pertaining to four categories - Expansion, Financial Outlook, Government and Education – and examined trends. Many interviewees reported a trend of expansion and growth in CSA and farm stand type of farms. Future research could explore this reported expansion, to learn whether local food sales are rising across the region, and if so, explore how the change is affecting the growth of small-scale farms. Farmers reported mixed feelings about government funding. Some farmers do not trust the government, whereas others wished they had received loans from the government. The research assistant hypothesizes that there is a misunderstanding and a lack of education on how to apply for government loans and grants, which may be fueling some of these emotions. Pertaining to the topic of education, two farmers made specific comments, one farmer used scientific research to improve their crops, while the other found hands-on experience more beneficial than a college degree. The research assistant hypothesizes that studying education further could yield interesting results. A common thread between all of the farmers' thoughts on financial stability is that it is unpredictable and consistently fluctuating. In some interviews, farmers described farming as supplemental and a hobby, instead of being a career choice or financially stable. Further research could investigate how financial stability effects beginning and more experienced farmers differently, as well as the techniques experienced farmers use to gain financial success from their farms.

This survey's data and preliminary analysis will be used to supplement Dr. McKee's preliminary ethnographic investigation in her design of a long-term ethnographic study of farming in northern Illinois. Dr. McKee has been exploring two potential directions of research, one focusing on the experiences of new farmers engaged in "alternative" methods and a second concentrating on "local food" networks. While analysis is still ongoing, these survey results suggest that an ethnographic investigation of the obstacles and opportunities facing new farmers would be both academically fruitful and practically useful to farmers.