

Agriculture Success Team
“Growing Solutions for the Future”

*Greater Wayne County Foundation, Inc., Wayne County Commissioner
and Wayne Economic Development Council cooperating*

**Wayne County
Agriculture Success Team
Producer Survey
Executive Summary**

2004

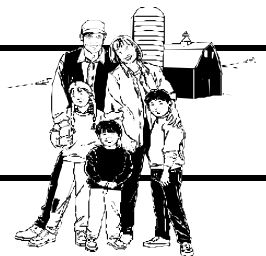


Agriculture Success Team



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“Growing Solutions for the Future”



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Donations are tax deductible.

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Thank you!

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AGRICULTURE SUCCESS TEAM PRODUCER SURVEY Executive Summary

Background

In the first phase of the program, the Committee developed and distributed the Agricultural Producer survey with the following objectives in mind: (1) To establish the current status of farming practices in Wayne County; (2) To determine the farmer respondents' view of the agriculture infrastructure supporting farming; and (3) To consider the respondents' view of the future of agri-business in Wayne County.

Student volunteers from the College of Wooster delivered 154 surveys to randomly selected farms throughout the county in April and May of 2004. The selected farmers returned 112 completed surveys for a response rate of 72.7%. The survey results are summarized briefly here, and a complete copy of the survey is available from the following sources:

Printed (hard copy) reports can be requested at the Ohio State University Extension Office in the County Administration Building, 428 West Liberty Street, Wooster, Ohio. Websites publishing the documents include <http://wayneohio.org> and <http://wayne.osu.edu>.

Background Demographic Information

As background for the survey, the committee considered past census data showing general demographics for Wayne County. The following highlights are particularly significant in regard to agriculture in Wayne County.

1. During the year 2000, the population of Wayne County was 111,564, representing a 10% increase over 1990. For the same time period, the State of Ohio grew 4.7%. Wayne County is the 24th largest county in the State of Ohio.
2. Median household income for Wayne County residents in 1999 was \$41,538 compared with the statewide median income of \$40,956.
3. In the year 2000, 26% of Wayne County's labor force held management, professional or related occupations. While, only a small part of Wayne's labor force was engaged in farming, that segment made Wayne County the best producer in Ohio in cattle and milk production. In 2002, Wayne County ranked first in hay production, number of cattle, number of milk cows and amount of milk sold.



4. The county's total farm cash receipts increased approximately 10% during the period from 1996 to 2001; but then declined significantly during 2002. Of products showing improvement, dairy, vegetables and nursery products experienced the fastest growth.

Highlights from the Survey

Although this survey certainly does not provide a complete picture of agriculture in Wayne County, it does offer some insights into what local producers think about the current state and future of agriculture in the county. The following points summarize the highlights of the survey:

1. 78% of the respondents are owners/operators.
 - a. 69% of the respondents have been farming for more than 20 years;
 - b. 42% are employed full-time off the farm; and
 - c. 58% of the respondents' spouses were employed full-time off the farm.

As might be expected, respondents cited the most important reason for working "off the farm" as "financial necessity."

2. Over half of the respondents had gross annual sales in the year 2003 of more than \$50,000.
3. 59% of the respondents rent some or all of the land they farm.
 - a. 22% farm less than 50 acres;
 - b. 46% farm 51-250 acres;
 - c. 32% farm more 250 acres.
4. 77% of the respondents rated Wayne County as "good" or "excellent" as a place for agricultural business. Consistent with this finding, the majority of farmers felt that the support system for agricultural and farm business was "good" or "excellent."



5. The top three attributes, considered most important to agri-business, were:
- a. cost of land;
 - b. quantity and quality of water; and
 - c. availability of land for production.

Other factors cited, but of less importance, were:

- a. availability of labor;
 - b. increase in large scale operations; and
 - c. contract farming.
6. Even though a majority believe that Wayne County is an “excellent” or “good” place for agri-business, 36% of the respondents remain pessimistic about the future viability of agriculture in Wayne County. Respondents cited the greatest future challenges to farming as:
- a. operating costs and profitability;
 - b. price of farm products;
 - c. land cost;
 - d. government regulations;
 - e. management/owner succession;
 - f. encroaching development; and
 - g. availability of land.
7. The farmers in the survey rely primarily on wholesale marketing (74%), but 18% plan to make changes in future marketing plans. A large majority indicated that most of their sales are conducted within Wayne County.
8. With regard to gross annual sales, roughly half of the farmers who were surveyed had annual gross sales of less than \$50,000, about 30% had income between



- \$50,000 - \$250,000 and the balance of roughly 19% showed annual gross sales in excess of \$250,000. While a majority of the farmers were either optimistic or neutral about farming's future in Wayne County, the respondents' attitudes did not seem to correlate directly to the amount of money earned.
9. Most of the respondents plan to continue farming and most did not plan to make any changes in their farming operations.
 10. While not always evident in the statistical results, a common theme among the written comments suggested concerns about farmland disappearing from production and resulting encroachment from housing and other developments.
 11. For information, farmers rely heavily upon the Ohio Department of Agriculture, OSU Extension services, and advice from other farmers. The least important source of information listed was the internet.

