

REHOBOTH FARMS NEEDS SURVEY

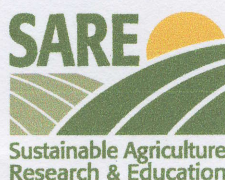


Summary of Findings - Spring 2009

Rehoboth Agricultural Commission

June B. House, AICP, Project Leader

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The survey data, without farm identification information, is stored in an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) database. Organizations seeking additional insights regarding this data are invited to contact Project Leader June House to discuss ideas for analyses which might be useful to the organizations in shedding new light upon issues or to otherwise assist them in their mission in serving agriculture in the Commonwealth.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rehoboth Agricultural Commission (AgCom) conducted a mail survey of local farms to assess the most pressing needs and issues relating to agriculture in the town. A total of 67 useable responses were received, representing a wide variety of farms. The AgCom did not set strict limitations on what would be considered a farm in terms of income, acreage, products, or activities. Of total respondents, 18% rely upon their farm as their primary source of income; 39% augment their family income from agriculture; and 38% do not seek any income from their farm. Some key findings are presented here:

Rehoboth is a Farm Friendly Community. Respondents were asked to list the 3 best things about having Rehoboth as a location for their farm. One quarter of responses contained language including:

"right to farm community,"

"farm friendly town,"

"the town people support farming."

There is a compelling need to educate town residents -- both farm and non-farm -- regarding the Right to Farm Bylaw. Despite the overall supportive environment for agriculture in Rehoboth, roughly one fifth of survey respondents mentioned issues with neighbors in response to the open-ended question "What are the 3 greatest challenges your farm has faced in Rehoboth?"

"neighbor's dog killing my livestock"

"neighbors who don't mind their business"

"worrying about what neighbors think or say about aroma"

A major part of the survey asked for farms' input regarding their need for more education or training in 40 different issues/topics pertaining to agriculture. In order of importance, the two top issues selected were "Right to Farm Laws" and "Protections under the Right to Farm Bylaw" and the eighth-ranked was "Avoiding Trespassers and Theft."

Farm Succession & Farmland Preservation are a High Priority for education and training.

Almost half (32) of farms indicated that they do not yet have a family member or other individual lined up to take over the farm when they retire. Roughly 1 in 3 (21 respondents) indicated that they may need to sell part or all of their land upon retirement. "Farmland Preservation Techniques & Funding Sources" was a highly ranked training topic requested by respondents in the Training Needs section of the survey.

Respondents who rely upon their farm for part or all of their family income place a high priority on the need for information and training in financial management, ranking it third.

Other High Priority Training Topics:

- Reducing Energy Costs/Alternative Energy Sources
- Keeping up with Legislation
- Wetland, Groundwater Protection, & Health Regulations
- Conservation Practices

INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

In February 2009 the Rehoboth Agricultural Commission conducted a needs assessment survey of local farms to assess the most pressing needs and issues facing Rehoboth agriculture. The survey was a self-administered 7-page questionnaire mailed to 267 known farm enterprises, including small family stables. In planning and executing this project, the AgCom did not set strict limitations on what would be considered a 'farm' in terms of income, acreage, products, or activities. Rehoboth has a long history as an agricultural community, yet it also provides a location for a wide range of equine activities.

Because a comprehensive list of Rehoboth Farms did not exist, a mailing list of 267 farm enterprises was compiled from Town departments and other sources:

- Stable Permits
- Piggery Permits
- Chapter 61 Lands
- Chapter 61A Lands
- Farms known to members of the Agricultural Commission and the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP)

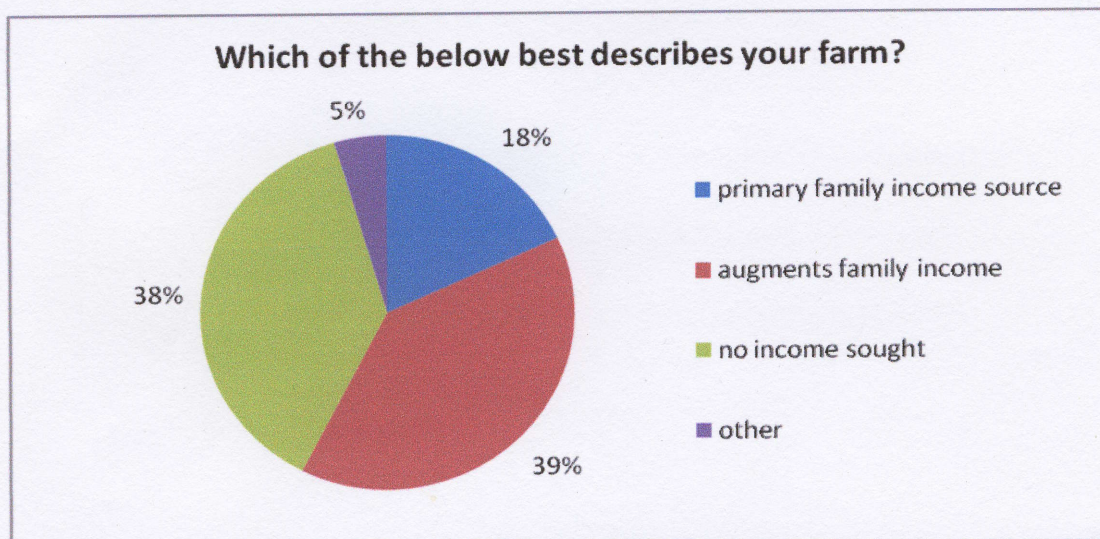
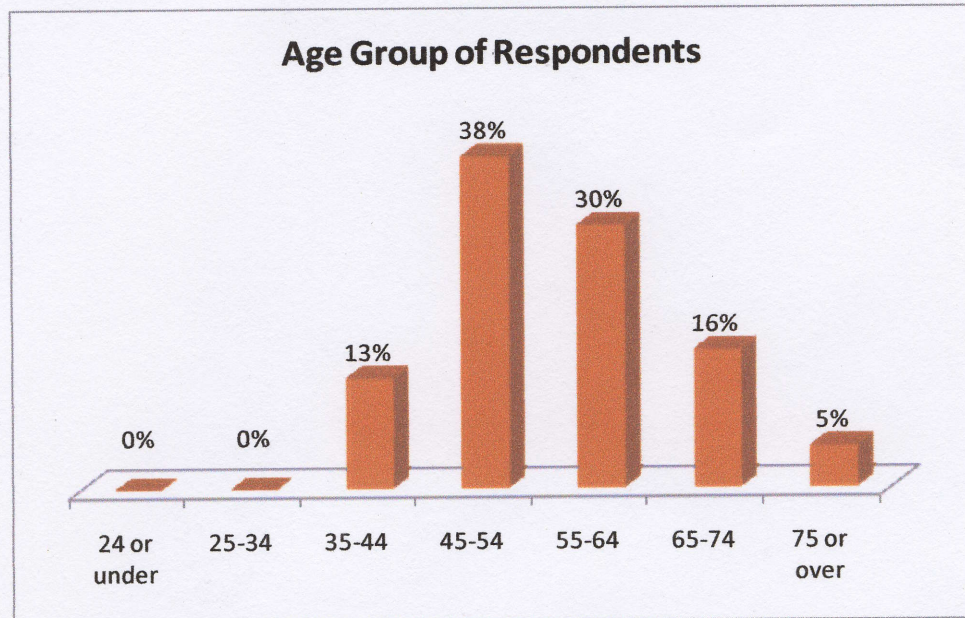
The mailing list used for the survey is what is known as a 'convenience sample' because it was compiled from readily available information and is not assumed to be a comprehensive listing of all Rehoboth farms. Additionally, only about a third of those surveyed completed the questionnaire. Because of these factors, it is important to understand that the survey findings should not be used to make inferences about *all* Rehoboth farms. However, convenience samples are widely used by organizations to gather useful information at reasonable cost.

Of 267 surveys sent out, 17 were returned as undeliverable. Of the remaining 260 surveys, 78 were returned – a 31.2% response rate. Eleven of these had checked the box asking to be removed from the mailing list and did not complete the questionnaire. A total of 67 useable surveys (26.8%) were coded and entered into a database/statistics program (SPSS) for analysis. A copy of the questionnaire and cover letter is provided in the Appendix. No farm identification information is included in the database or report. All findings are reported in aggregate.

Regrettably, respondents were somewhat selective regarding which portions of the survey they elected to fill out. As a result, certain topics and questions did not receive adequate responses to be included in the analysis.

PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

As shown in the following charts and tables, the group of 67 survey respondents represents a broad mix in terms of age, farm products/activities; and the share of the family income that is derived from agriculture. *Note: Several respondents indicated that they did not consider their small family stable to be a farm. However, for the purposes of this report, all respondents are considered to be engaged in agriculture, and will be considered 'farms.'*



Primary Farm Products/Activities (could check more than one)

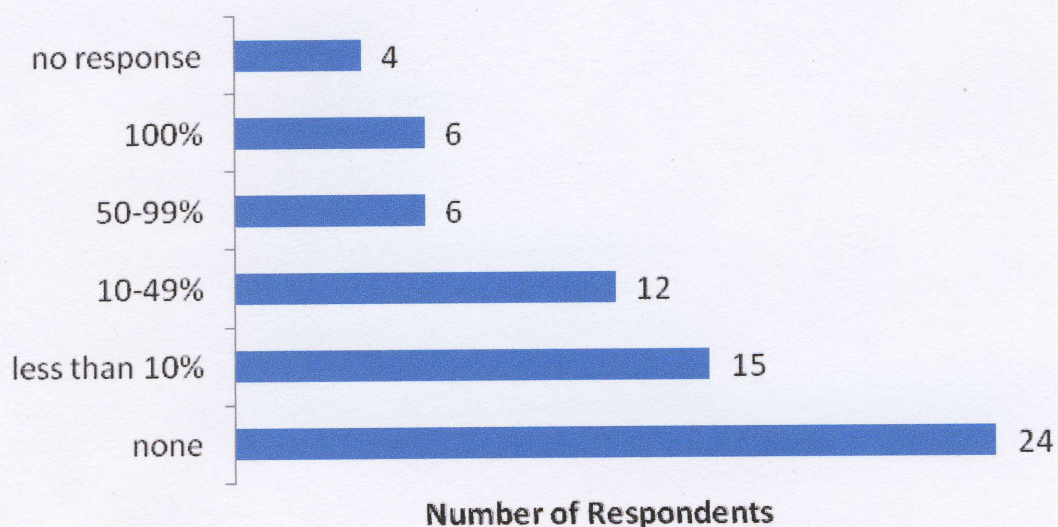
- 19 vegetables
- 15 other
- 14 stable rental
- 13 livestock (meat/fiber)
- 12 hay
- 9 farm stand
- 8 berries
- 7 equine - family only
- 7 equine - breeding/sales
- 6 riding instruction
- 6 visitor activities (hay rides, etc.)
- 4 flowers/nursery
- 4 forest products
- 4 Christmas trees
- 3 U-pick
- 3 beekeeping
- 2 orchard fruit
- 1 milk/dairy

In general, respondents to the survey tend to be in the middle and older age groups. No one under the age of 35 is represented in the analysis.

As shown in the above pie chart and table on the next page, respondents relying upon agriculture as their primary family income source are in the minority, with just 6 indicating that their farm brings in 100% of their family income.

Farms were asked to specify their main farm product(s) and/or activities. As shown in the table at left, a wide range of agricultural activities take place on Rehoboth family farms. (Answers provided for "other" are listed in the Appendix to this report.)

What percentage of your family income is derived from your farm operation?



The next table presents a crosstabulation showing how many respondent farms in each product/activity category rely on agriculture as a primary or partial source of family income. With a few exceptions almost every agricultural activity taking place in town may or may not be conducted to provide family income.

TYPE OF FARM BY PRODUCT/ACTIVITY	FARM CONTRIBUTION TO INCOME:		
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
Vegetables	6	6	6
Berries	3	2	3
Hay	4	5	3
Flowers/Nursery	3		
Stable Rental	2	6	5
Riding Instruction	2	3	
Milk/Dairy	1		
Forest Products	1	3	
Livestock (meat/fiber)	3	7	3
U-pick	2	1	
Farm Stand	5	3	1
Visitor Activities	2	2	1
Christmas Trees	1	3	
Equine - family only		1	6
Beekeeping		1	2
Equine - breeding/sales	1	3	3
Other	2	7	6

FAMILIARITY WITH AGRICULTURAL AGENCIES AND NONPROFITS

Respondents were asked to provide information regarding their knowledge of some of the more well-known governmental and nonprofit organizations that are dedicated to assisting farmers in our area. Specifically, farms were asked whether they had attended programs or had received information from the organizations. They could also indicate that they were not familiar with the organization. This section of the survey was included specifically to provide insight and information to these organizations, which included: Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR); Bristol County Farm Bureau; Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP); Bristol County Conservation District; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Pilgrim RC&D Area Council, Inc., Bristol County Farm Service Agency, and the Rhode Island Center for Agricultural Promotion & Education (RICAPE).

Although not all responded to this section of the survey, the responses are useful in determining whether the organizations are reaching their target constituencies. With this in mind, additional tables providing greater detail may be found in the Appendix to this report.

Survey Question: "Are you familiar with these local organizations that work to sustain agriculture by providing grants, education, and services to farms? Have you received information from them or attended any of their events?"

	Have Attended		Receive Info		Not Familiar With		No Response		Total Respondents	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Mass Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)	9	13%	18	27%	28	42%	12	18%	67	100%
Bristol County Farm Bureau	13	19%	21	31%	22	33%	11	16%	67	100%
Southeastern Mass Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP)	14	21%	14	21%	28	42%	11	16%	67	100%
Bristol County Conservation District	6	9%	15	22%	33	49%	13	19%	67	100%
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	8	12%	14	21%	33	49%	12	18%	67	100%
Pilgrim RC&D Area Council Inc	7	10%	3	4%	43	64%	14	21%	67	100%
Bristol County Farm Service Agency	13	19%	13	19%	28	42%	13	19%	67	100%
RI Center for Agricultural Promotion & Education (RICAPE)	3	4%	4	6%	46	69%	14	21%	67	100%

For this question, respondents could select only one answer choice, so it may be assumed that persons who have attended a function sponsored by an organization have also received information from them. Farms appear to be the least familiar with Pilgrim RC & D and RICAPE. The mailing list utilized for this survey will be made available to organizations wishing to expand their outreach in Rehoboth.

Are farms that are dependent on agriculture for all or part of their family income more likely to be involved with these organizations than those which might be considered "hobby farms" because they do not derive income from agriculture? This question is explored with the following crosstabulation (presented on the next page):

Degree of Involvement with (selected) Ag Organization X **Farm Contribution to Income**

As shown below, farms depending on agriculture for all or part of their income are more likely to have received information or to have attended activities sponsored by these organizations.

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FARM CONTRIBUTION TO INCOME:			
MDAR	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	3	3	3
receive information	6	9	1
not familiar with	1	11	14
TOTAL	10	23	18
BRISTOL COUNTY FARM BUREAU			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	4	5	3
receive information	5	12	3
not familiar with	0	7	13
TOTAL	9	24	19
SEMAP			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	6	3	4
receive information	3	11	0
not familiar with	1	10	15
TOTAL	10	24	19
BRISTOL COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	3	0	2
receive information	5	8	2
not familiar with	1	16	14
TOTAL	9	24	18
NAT. RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	3	1	3
receive information	5	9	0
not familiar with	1	15	15
TOTAL	9	25	18
PILGRIM RC&D			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	2	1	3
receive information	1	2	0
not familiar with	6	20	15
TOTAL	9	23	18
BRISTOL COUNTY FARM SERVICE			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	5	4	3
receive information	3	9	1
not familiar with	1	11	14
TOTAL	9	24	18
RICAPE			
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought
have attended	1	1	1
receive information	0	3	0
not familiar with	7	20	17
TOTAL	9	24	18

FARM SUCCESSION – THE FUTURE OF OUR FARMS

Respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to their tenure in agriculture and their future plans with regard to their land.

How many years have you been farming in Rehoboth? A total of 63 answered this question, with answers ranging from 1 to 60 years, with a median of 20 years, a mean of 23.6 years, and a mode of 20 years. (Note regarding statistics terminology: 'median' is the middle value in a range of values; mean is the same as 'average;' and 'mode' is the answer given the most times.)

Are you the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth generation to be farming at this location?

As shown in the table at right, quite a few families have been farming in Rehoboth for many generations, while fully 60% of respondents are the first generation to be engaged in agriculture in Rehoboth. (Respondents indicating over 5 generations were assigned the number '6' in the survey database.)

Generation #	Number	Percent
1	40	60%
2	8	12%
3	5	7%
4	2	3%
5	3	4%
6	3	4%
N/R	6	9%
TOTAL:	67	100%

Interestingly, fully half of the first generation farmers are relying upon their farm to provide at least a portion of their family income, as shown in the table below.

Are you 1st, 2nd,... generation farming?	1. Which of the below best describes your farm? (check one)				
	primary family income source	augments family income	no income sought	other	TOTAL
First	4	15	19	1	39
Second	2	3	1	2	8
Third	3	2	0	0	5
Fourth	1	1	0	0	2
Fifth	2	1	0	0	3
Over Five	0	3	0	0	3
TOTAL	12	25	20	3	60

How many more years do you expect to be the principal operator of your farm? A total of 43 answered this question with answers ranging from 1 to 50 years, with a median of 10 years, a mean of 18 years, and a mode of 10 years.

Do you have an individual (family member or other lined up to take over the farm when you retire? Of the 52 answering this question, 20 (38%) replied in the affirmative and 32 (62%) said 'no.' This should set off alarm bells!!!

Is it likely that you may need to sell part or all of your land when you retire? Of the 58 providing answers, 21 (36%) said "yes" and 38 (64%) said "no."

The table below provides a crosstabulation between the likelihood of selling land and the level of dependence on agriculture for income. **Respondents relying on their farm as a primary income source are more likely to have plans to sell land upon retirement.** It is probable that there has not been adequate opportunity to set aside a nest egg for this purpose.

FARM CONTRIBUTION TO INCOME	Is It likely that you may need to sell part or all of your land when you retire?		
	NO	YES	TOTAL
primary family income source	4	6	10
augments family income	20	5	25
no income sought	10	10	20
other	3	0	3
Total	37	21	58

COMPUTER USE AND OWNERSHIP

The majority of those responding to the survey, 55 (82%) have access to a computer as well as to the internet. If it has not done so already, email is rapidly overtaking "snail mail" as the primary means by which organizations disseminate important information to the farm community. For budgetary reasons, this is the only viable means for the AgCom to communicate regularly with local farms. Of the 55 responding farms with web access, 46 have provided their email address to facilitate communications with the AgCom. The importance of this new communication mode cannot be overemphasized.

FARMS' USE OF THE INTERNET

47	85%	Email communication
41	75%	Conducting research
37	67%	Purchasing goods & services
18	33%	Marketing the farm's goods/services
12	22%	The farm has its own website
55		Total with web access

INTEREST LEVEL IN FUTURE AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION INITIATIVES

The Agricultural Commission made use of the survey to inform farms of its future plans and to solicit farms' participation...

- 27 farms are willing to provide access to their farm for photography and information for the upcoming educational/marketing brochure to be produced with the SARE grant.
- 24 farms would like their farm listed in the direct marketing component of the brochure
- 25 farms are willing to have their farm listed on the (future) Rehoboth AgCom website
- 7 farms are interested in learning more about an opportunity to have a more extensive web page linked to the AgCom website (for a small fee)
- 37 farms would be interested in participating in future agricultural events in Rehoboth

- 42 farms provided telephone contact information for future use by the AgCom
- 46 farms provided an email address for receiving news and information from the AgCom
- 8 women would be interested in forming a group with other women farm operators

INFORMATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

An important part of the survey consisted of a matrix in which respondents were asked to rank 40 different skills/knowledge areas with regard to need for additional information and training. The skills were organized in the following groups: farming practices; preserving the farm; understanding & compliance with regulations; reducing costs/increasing profits; business skills; computers; and community relations.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether each topic was a high, medium, or low priority for training, or "not applicable." The information collected in the matrix will be used by the Agricultural Commission and, it is assumed, other agricultural organizations in developing future educational programming for Rehoboth farms.

Items graded "high" priority received 3 points; "medium" priority received 2 points; and "low" priority received 1 point. N/a responses were given a score of zero. All the scores were then tallied and a mean (average) score was derived for each item in the matrix. The table on the next page lists all informational training needs, ranked in order of their importance to respondents. *Note: respondents did not always fill out the matrix completely. Items left blank were assigned a "N/A" rating.*

As shown in the training needs table, **Right to Farm tops the list in importance to farms, with the 2 highest mean scores.** "Avoiding Trespassers & Theft" ranks 8th. This is supported anecdotally in the open-ended questions, when farms were asked "What are the 3 greatest challenges your farm has faced in Rehoboth?" A number of responses dealt with the issue of neighbor relations...

"neighbor's dog killing my livestock"

"neighbors who don't mind their business"

"worrying about what neighbors think or say about aroma"

"city slicker neighbors"

Farms need to know their rights under this law, and the general public needs to know, as well.

Alternative Energy and the Reduction of Energy Costs is the second most important information/training need expressed by farms. Several educational and grant programs already exist, but the information may not be reaching all who need it.

Although "Farm Transfer and Succession" ranks 14th in importance with respondents, "Farmland Preservation Techniques and Funding Sources" ranks 4th. Previous findings in this report --that 21 respondents expect to sell all or part of their land upon retirement, and just under half (32 respondents) do not have anyone lined up to take over the farm when they retire -- indicate that this is an important topic for education or at the very least a public awareness campaign.

The table below presents the mean scores and importance ranking as indicated by ALL survey respondents:

ALL RESPONDENTS:		
RANK	INFORMATION/TRAINING NEED	Mean
1	Right to Farm Laws	1.88
2	Protections under the Right to Farm Bylaw	1.88
3	Reducing Energy Costs / Alternative Energy Sources	1.86
4	Farmland Preservation Techniques & Funding Sources	1.76
5	Keeping up with Legislation	1.73
6	Wetland Regulations	1.71
7	Conservation Practices	1.66
8	Avoiding Trespassers & Theft	1.63
9	Working with Town Zoning Regulations	1.62
10	Ground water Protection Regulations	1.60
11	Working with Health Regulations	1.60
12	Farm Energy Discount Program	1.57
13	Grants & Financial Assistance Opportunities	1.52
14	Farm Transfer / Succession	1.51
15	Increasing Productivity/Fertility (livestock and/or crops)	1.51
16	Managing Finances (analysis & budgeting)	1.50
17	Agricultural Protection Restrictions (APR's)	1.50
18	Animal Waste Management	1.46
19	Applying for Grants - Basic Grantwriting Skills	1.43
20	Utilizing Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B Property Tax Relief	1.43
21	Planning for Retirement	1.40
22	How to maximize income from value added sales	1.40
23	Marketing Farm Products	1.38
24	GAP: Good Agricultural Practice Certification	1.36
25	Conventional, Sustainable, and Organic Management	1.34
26	Irrigation & Water Management	1.30
27	Water Management Act	1.29
28	Farm Recordkeeping	1.29
29	Using Computers - Basic Computing Skills	1.29
30	Farm Tax Management	1.28
31	MA Endangered Species Act	1.28
32	Pesticide Management Regulations	1.23
33	Business Plan Development	1.16
34	How to Develop a Website for Your Farm	1.14
35	Special Issues for Woman Operators	1.13
36	Alternative Enterprises / Agritourism	1.09
37	Starting a Food Business or Processing Farm Products	1.00
38	Using the Internet	0.98
39	Labor Management	0.98
40	Biosecurity Management	0.88

A second set of calculations were performed on a subset of respondents: *ONLY* those who rely upon their farms for all or part of their family income. The higher mean scores in this table emphasize the increased importance of training in these subjects for farms who need information in order to succeed financially and remain viable into the future. In many subjects the 2 groups are fairly consistent in their priorities.

One significant difference should be noted. Respondents **those who derive income from their farms have indicated that "Managing finances" is a high priority, ranking 3rd** as compared with 16th in the previous table.

Interestingly, "planning for retirement" is not a high priority in either group.

Should additional information be helpful, organizations which provide assistance to farms are invited to contact project leader June House to conduct additional analysis using different subsets of the survey respondents.

FARM PROVIDES ALL OR PART OF FAMILY INCOME		
RANK	INFORMATION/TRAINING NEED:	Mean
1	Protections under the Right to Farm Bylaw	2.37
2	Reducing Energy Costs / Alternative Energy Sources	2.23
3	Managing Finances (analysis & budgeting)	2.19
4	Keeping up with Legislation	2.07
5	Farmland Preservation Techniques & Funding Sources	2.07
6	Right to Farm Laws	2.06
7	Grants & Financial Assistance Opportunities	2.04
8	Farm Energy Discount Program	2.04
9	Conservation Practices	2.03
10	Increasing Productivity/Fertility (livestock and/or crops)	2.00
11	Avoiding Trespassers & Theft	1.97
12	How to maximize income from value added sales	1.96
13	Working with Health Regulations	1.93
14	Farm Transfer / Succession	1.92
15	Marketing Farm Products	1.89
16	Wetland Regulations	1.86
17	GAP: Good Agricultural Practice Certification	1.82
18	Farm Recordkeeping	1.81
19	Applying for Grants - Basic Grantwriting Skills	1.78
20	Planning for Retirement	1.75
21	Groundwater Protection Regulations	1.75
22	Farm Tax Management	1.75
23	Working with Town Zoning Regulations	1.74
24	Utilizing Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B Property Tax Relief	1.74
25	Conventional, Sustainable, and Organic Management	1.72
26	Pesticide Management Regulations	1.69
27	Irrigation & Water Management	1.67
28	Agricultural Protection Restrictions (APR's)	1.66
29	Using Computers - Basic Computing Skills	1.64
30	Business Plan Development	1.57
31	Special Issues for Woman Operators	1.56
32	Water Management Act	1.54
33	Alternative Enterprises / Agritourism	1.50
34	MA Endangered Species Act	1.48
35	Starting a Food Business or Processing Farm Products	1.48
36	Animal Waste Management	1.47
37	Labor Management	1.36
38	How to Develop a Website for Your Farm	1.32
39	Using the Internet	1.25
40	Biosecurity Management	1.14

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The survey began with two open ended questions:

"What are the 3 greatest challenges your farm has faced in Rehoboth?"

"What are the 3 best things about having Rehoboth as a location for your farm?"

The verbatim responses to these questions are provided in the Appendix. To assist interpretation, they have been loosely grouped into categories that seemed appropriate. Because these questions were at the beginning of the survey, respondents had not seen the long list of issues in the "Needs" section of the document. Therefore, these responses are more likely to be "from the gut." The summary of these is presented here.

What are the 3 greatest challenges your farm has faced in Rehoboth?

23%	23	COST AND INCOME RELATED
20%	20	OTHER
17%	17	WEATHER/TOPOGRAPHY/NATURE/INSECTS
14%	14	ISSUES WITH NEIGHBORS
12%	12	FARMING PROCEDURES: IRRIGATION, PASTURE MANAGEMENT, MANURE DISPOSAL, ETC
7%	7	AVAILABILITY OF NEEDED SERVICES & SUPPLIES
6%	6	ISSUES RELATED TO INCREASED DEVELOPMENT IN TOWN
3%	3	REGULATIONS
100%	102	TOTAL ANSWERS PROVIDED

What are the 3 best things about having Rehoboth as a location for your farm?

23%	24	VERY CONVENIENT LOCATION
31%	32	OTHER (INHERITED THE LAND, GOOD SOILS, ETC.)
25%	26	FARM-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY
17%	18	RURAL, QUIET
4%	4	RIDING TRAILS
100%	104	TOTAL ANSWERS PROVIDED

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Rehoboth Farms Needs Survey has provided the Agricultural Commission and others with valuable and actionable information about our farm community. Whereas many surveys strive to collect inventory information pertinent to crop production, the goal of this project was to find out what our farms NEED. It will help the Ag Com in developing its future work plan and scheduling speakers and trainings. It has provided a roster of local farms eager to participate in agricultural events and to assist in future educational and marketing projects spearheaded by the AgCom. This report will be widely distributed among local agricultural agencies and nonprofits. Copies of the survey questionnaire will be made available to all who are interested in replicating this project in whole or in part.

Perhaps most important, this project has opened new lines of communication between the Ag Com and local farms and signals the beginning of a closer working relationship. It will continue to be an important resource well into the future.