



Understanding integrated crop and livestock farming systems: farmer survey results

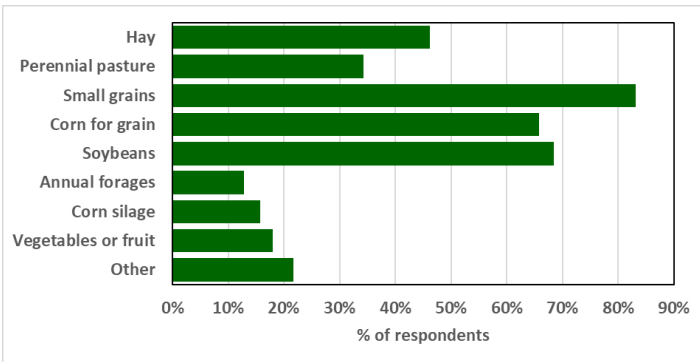
Crops-only respondents

Match Made in Heaven: Livestock + Crops, October 2024

In 2023 through April of 2024, the Match Made in Heaven project (MMIH) surveyed 553 farmers primarily in the 6 Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Of these respondents, 40 currently raise only crops. The goal of the survey was to understand the benefits associated with integration of livestock into annual cropping systems as well as the barriers to doing so. This fact sheet provides a snapshot of what we learned.

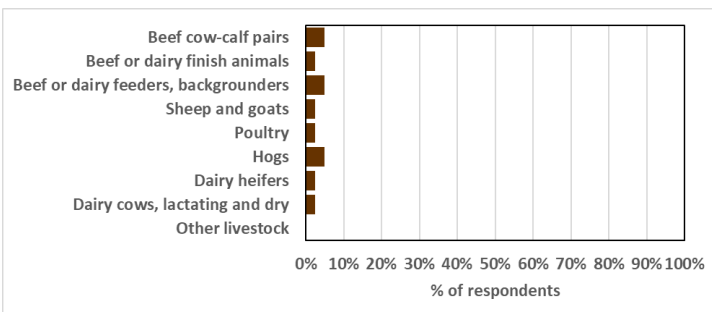
What do crops-only farms look like?

Crop production. Because these respondents are not raising livestock, their cropping mix skews toward grain crops. In spite of not raising livestock these farmers report raising hay and perennial pasture, perhaps using rental agreements with livestock farmers or selling hay and forage crops.



Livestock types

A small percentage of crops-only respondents reported having raised livestock in the last three years.

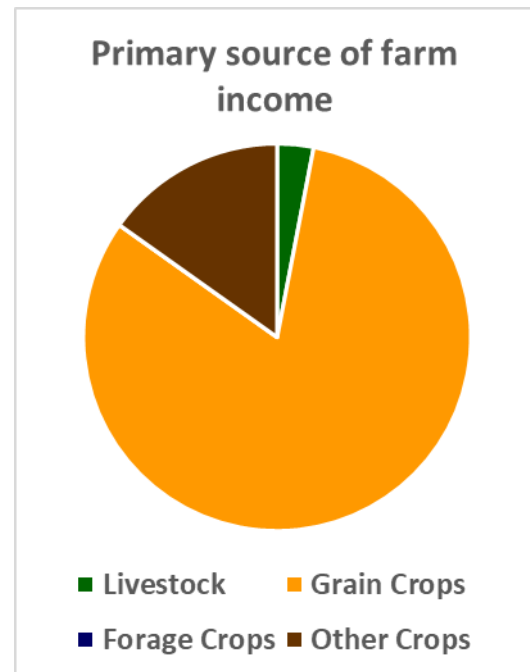


Demographics

- ❖ 40 survey responses
- ❖ 25 states represented
- ❖ Average age: 51
- ❖ Average years farming: 24
- ❖ Average acres owned: 230 (range: 0 to 2000)
- ❖ Average acres rented: 311 (range: 0 to 4000)
- ❖ Raised livestock in the last 3 years: 4 respondents

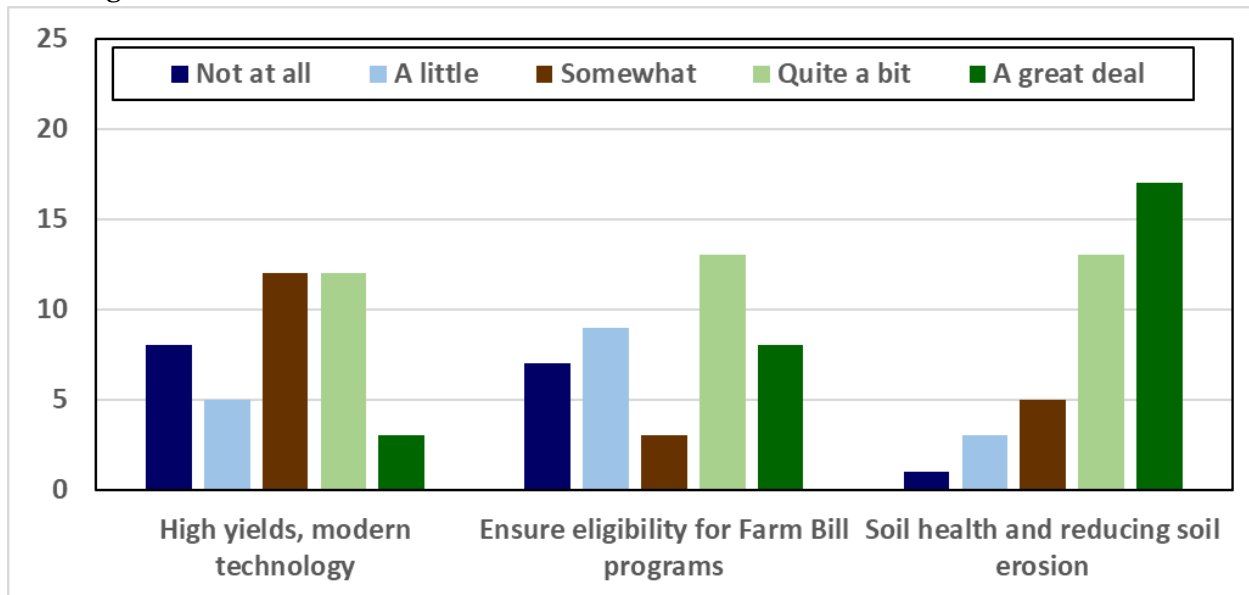
Economics of crops-only farms

Not surprisingly, a majority of crops-only respondents reported that **grain crops** was their primary source of income from farming, with the second largest category being other crops.



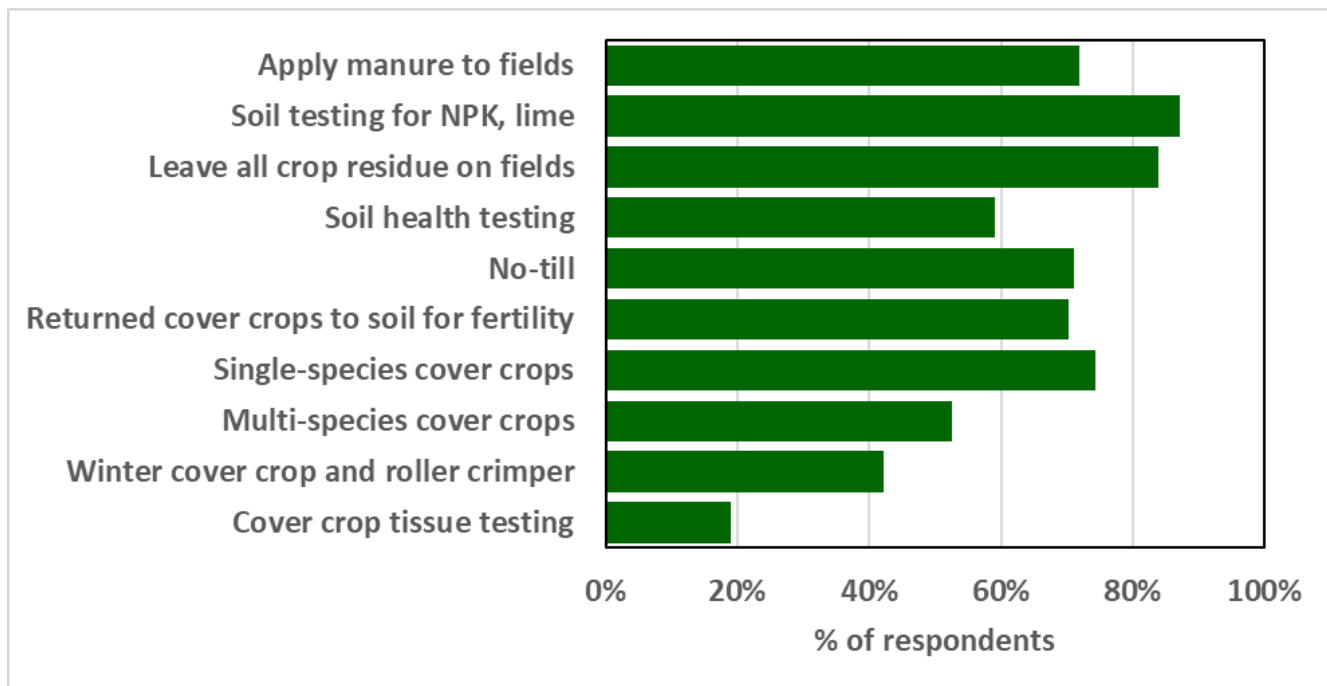
Motivation for choosing a crops-only systems

Respondents were asked how closely several approaches matched their own motivations for making farming decisions. Crops-only farmers were more evenly motivated across the three categories of motivation than integrated farmers or livestock-only farmers. The majority were strongly motivated by **soil health** and reducing soil erosion.



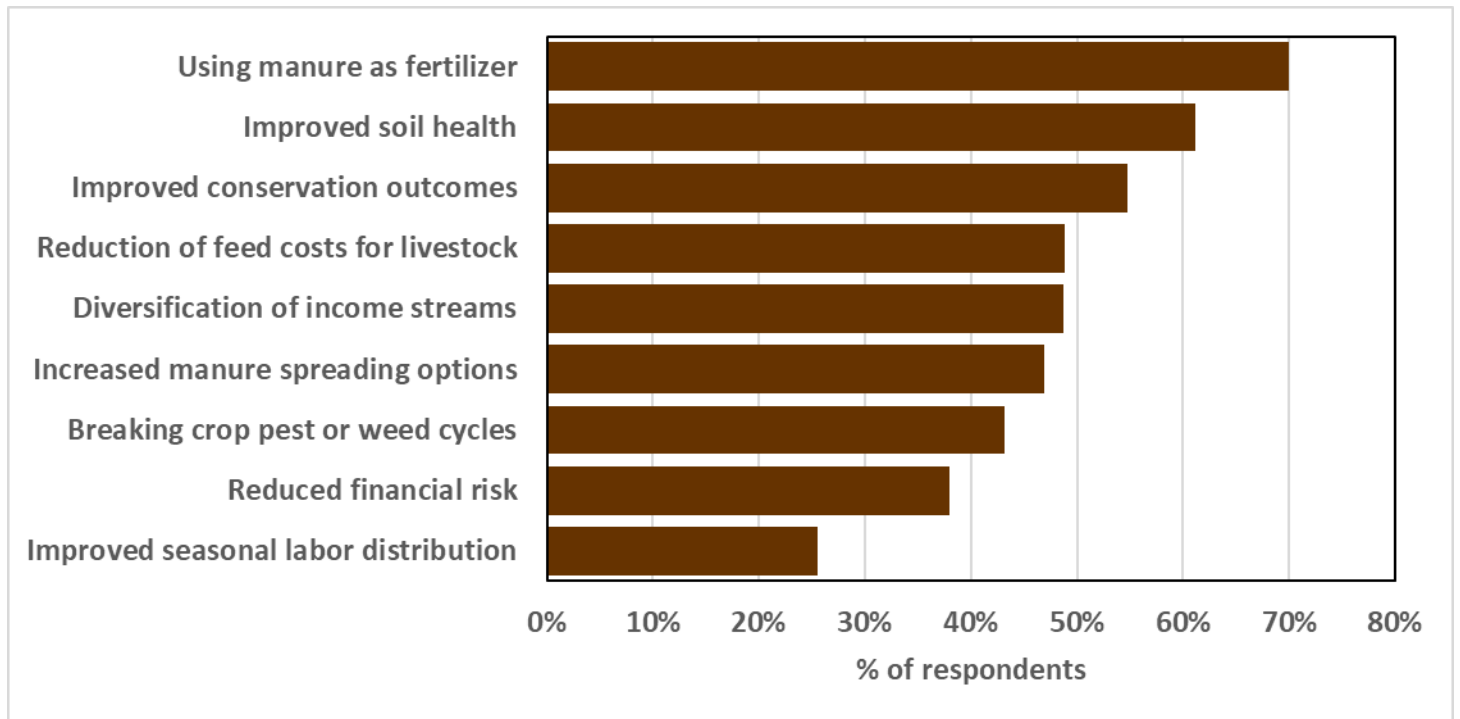
Soil health practices

Crops-only respondents were asked a variety of questions regarding their soil management practices. This chart shows some of the most common soil health practices that are being used. Top practices included standard conservation practices, such as soil testing, no-till, leaving residue in the field and planting cover crops. In spite of not raising livestock on their farms, more than 70% of respondents reported acquiring livestock manure to apply to their crop land.



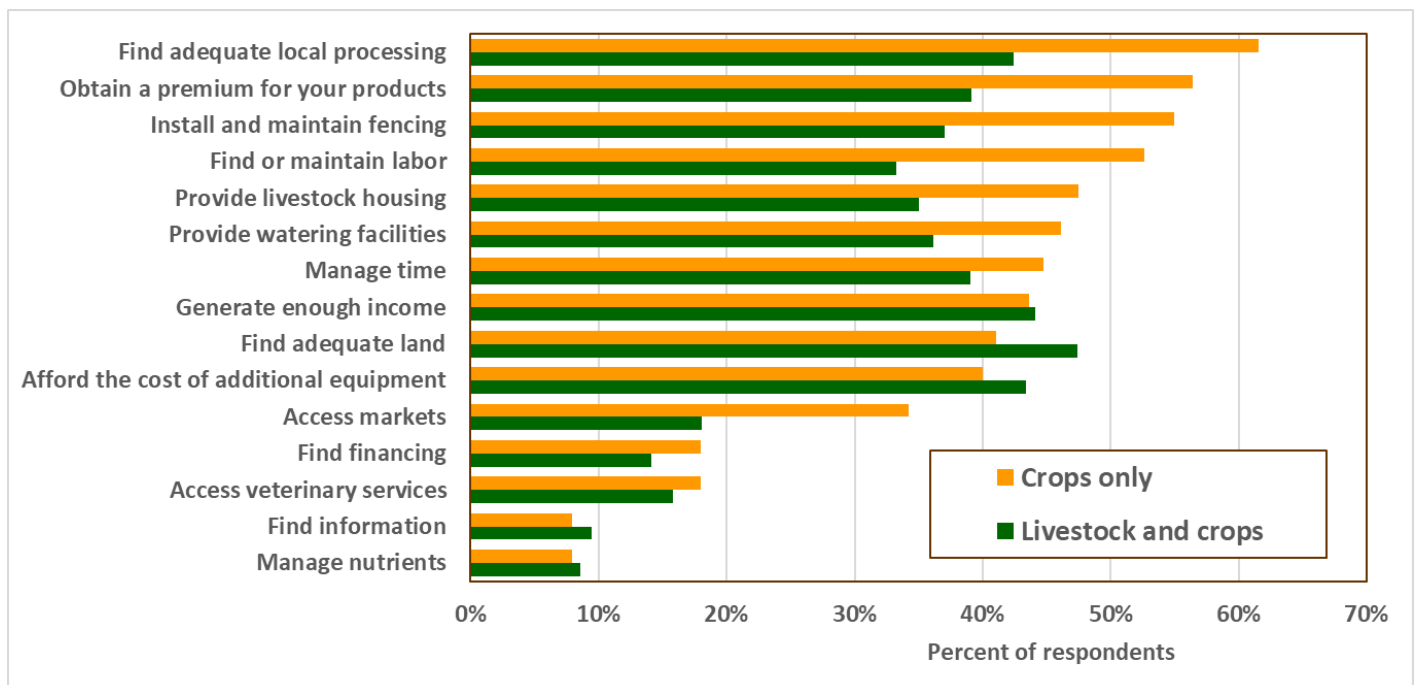
Integration benefits

All respondents to the survey (crops-only, livestock-only, and crops+livestock farmers) were asked about what they perceived as the most beneficial aspects of integrated crop and livestock systems. The graph below shows the percent of respondents valuing potential livestock integration benefits 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'.



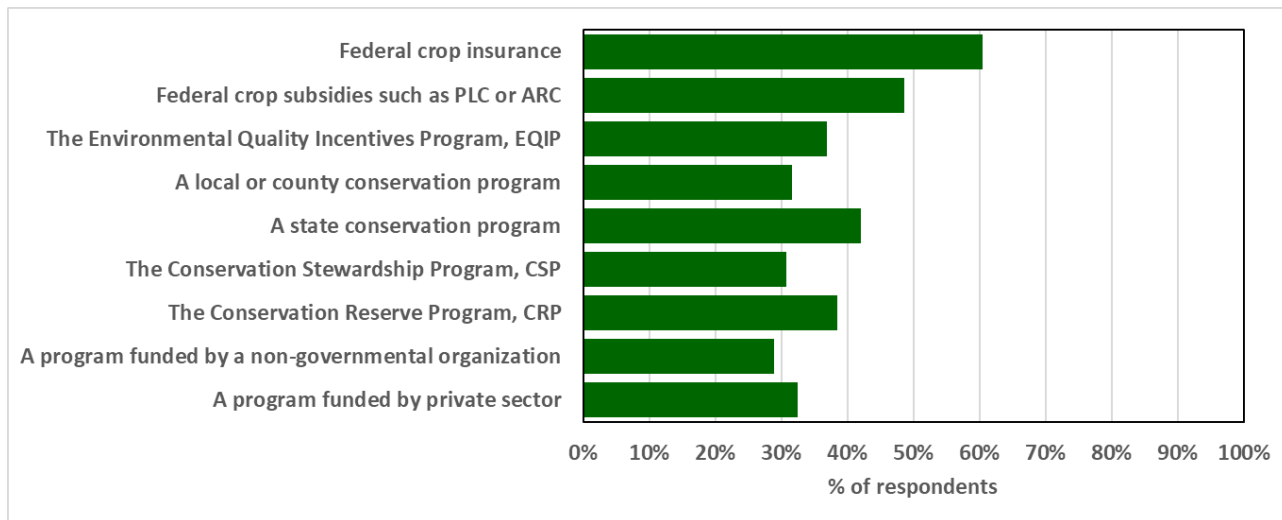
Integration challenges

Farmers with integrated crop and livestock systems were asked how challenging various aspects of integration were for them. We also asked crops-only farmers what they perceived as challenges associated with adding livestock to their operations. The chart compares percentages of respondents who view each item as “very” or “extremely” challenging. Several topics were considered significantly more challenging by crops-only farmers than they actually are for farmers with integrated systems. There were also a few topics that integrated farms found were more challenging than crops-only farmers thought they might be.



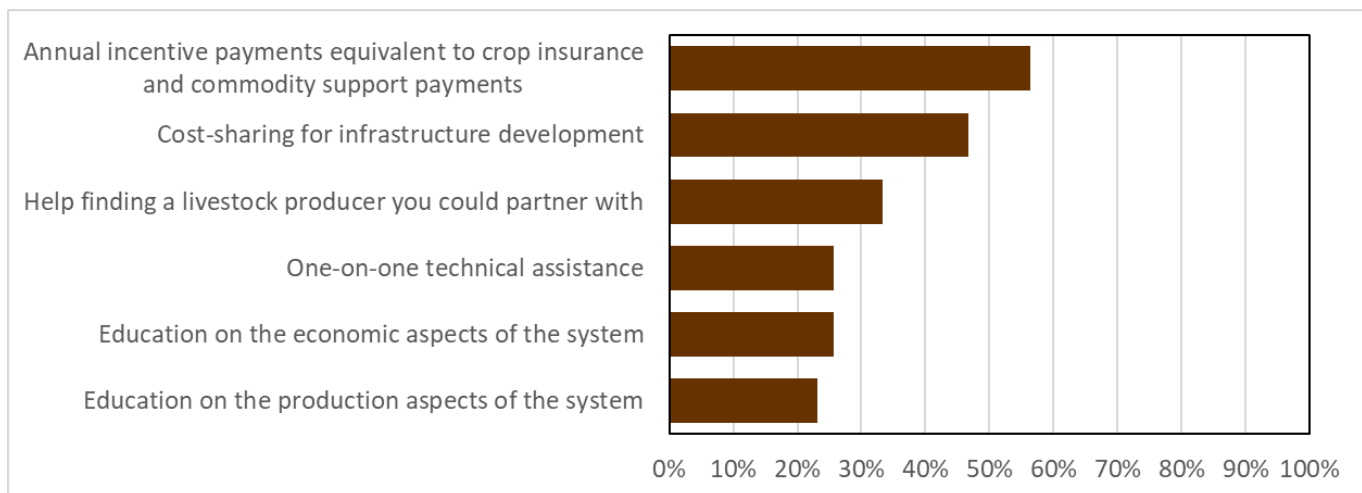
Incentive programs used by crops-only farmers

A large proportion of respondents reported NOT participating in programs that encourage adoption of soil health and conservation practices. The graph below shows that the most commonly used program for crops-only farmers is federal crop insurance, followed by other federal subsidy programs.



Opportunities to help crops-only farmers add livestock to their operations

Crops-only farmers were asked what kinds of assistance would help them overcome the barriers to adding a livestock enterprise to their farming operations and were offered a series of potential support options. The graph below shows that a majority of respondents expressed interest in incentive payments equivalent to supports provided for commodity crop production. Cost sharing for fencing and watering systems was also desired by nearly half of respondents.



Background information

Authors: Laura Paine, Jane Jewett, Amy Fenn, Gigi DiGiacomo, and Erin Meier.

“Match Made In Heaven: Livestock + Crops” is a 3-year, 6-state grant project led by Green Lands Blue Waters that creates opportunities for farmers to share their interests, challenges, and needs, and for the crop and livestock organizations that they engage with to hear from their members and meet their needs with their programming and resources. The project is a collaboration between 50+ groups including crop and livestock associations, universities, public agencies, and soil/water groups. In addition to the survey, project elements include case studies of 8 farmers with integrated systems, highlighting their unique systems and innovations, a series of field days being conducted in 2024 and a resource library of materials on crop and livestock integration. Learn more at <https://greenlandsbluewaters.org/match-made-in-heaven-livestock-crops/>

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