



# Understanding integrated crop and livestock farming systems: farmer survey results

## Livestock-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. The majority of respondents (457) currently have an integrated system with both annual crops and livestock. **Fifty-six respondents reported raising livestock only.** 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.

### Demographics

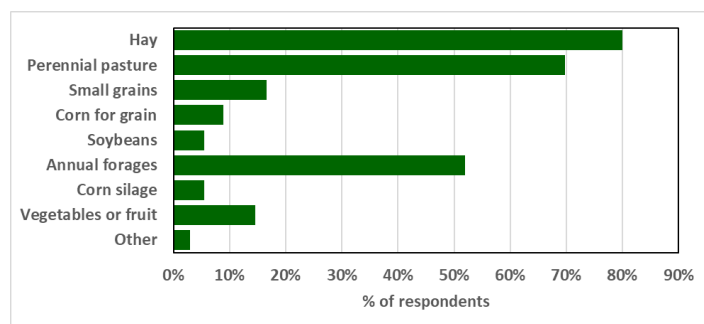
- ❖ 56 survey responses
- ❖ 25 states represented
- ❖ Average age: 48
- ❖ Average years farming: 18
- ❖ Average acres owned: 84 (range: 0 to 360)
- ❖ Average acres rented: 68 (range: 0 to 616)

### What do livestock-only farms look like?

**Crop production.** Because these respondents are raising livestock, their cropping mix skews heavily toward forage crops and pasture. These farmers also raise a variety of common crops and many use cover crops and annual forages for livestock feed.

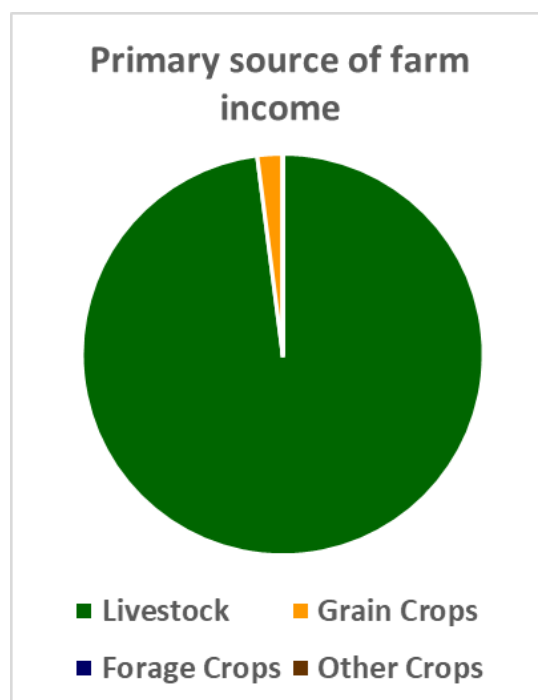
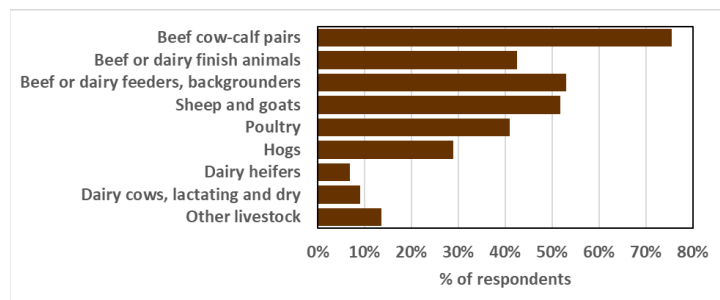
### Economics of livestock-only farms

Not surprisingly, a majority of respondents reported that **livestock** was their primary source of income from farming, with a small proportion indicating that grain crops were a primary source.

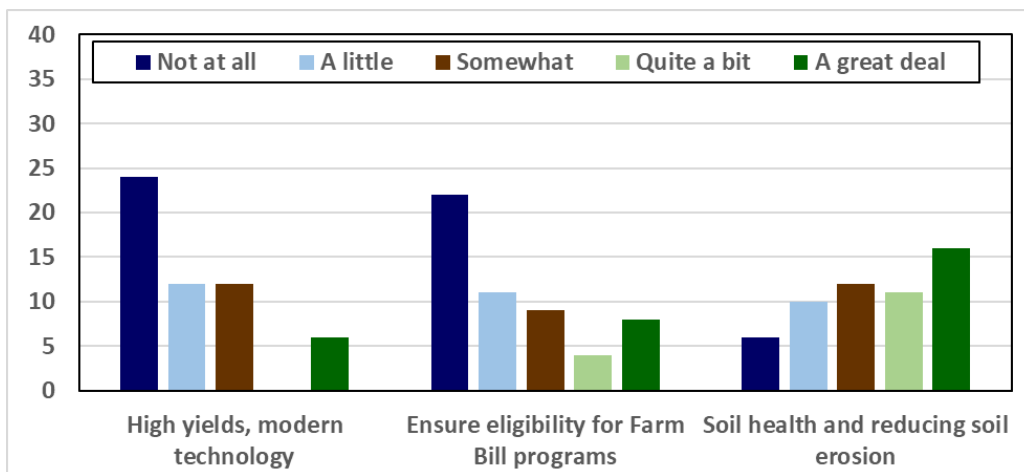


### Livestock types

Livestock-only respondents raise a wide range of livestock types, but a majority raise beef animals.



## Motivation for choosing a livestock-only system

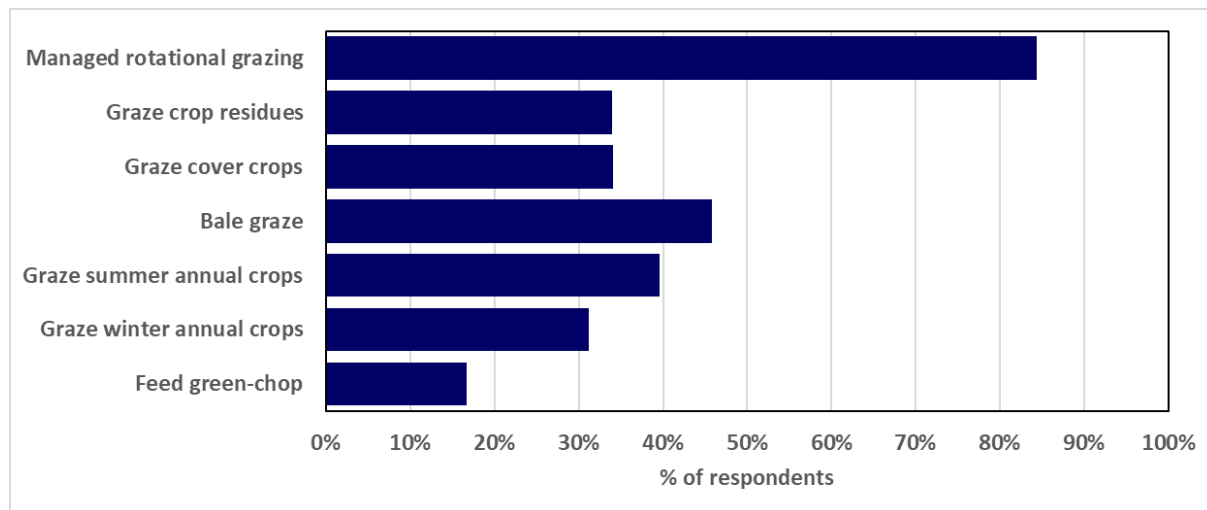


Respondents were asked how closely several approaches matched their own motivations for making farming decisions. The 56 livestock-only respondents were more motivated by **soil health** and reducing soil erosion than increasing yields or eligibility for Farm Bill programs. A large proportion of respondents were not motivated by high yields or eligibility for farm programs.

## Livestock production and soil health practices used

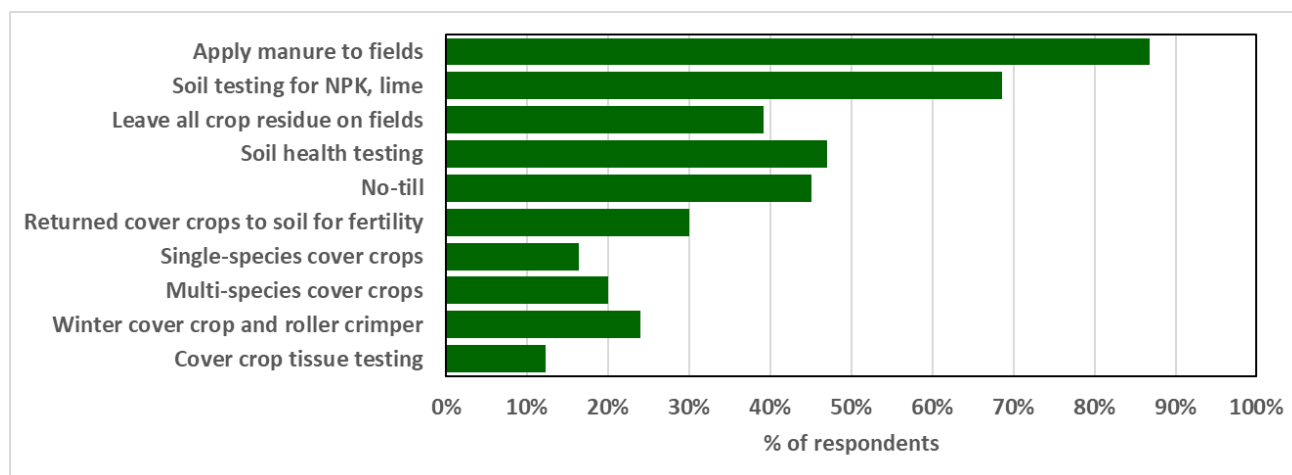
Livestock-only respondents use a variety of livestock grazing practices, but a majority do managed rotational grazing. Other common practices include bale grazing and grazing of annual crops and cover crops.

### Livestock grazing practices



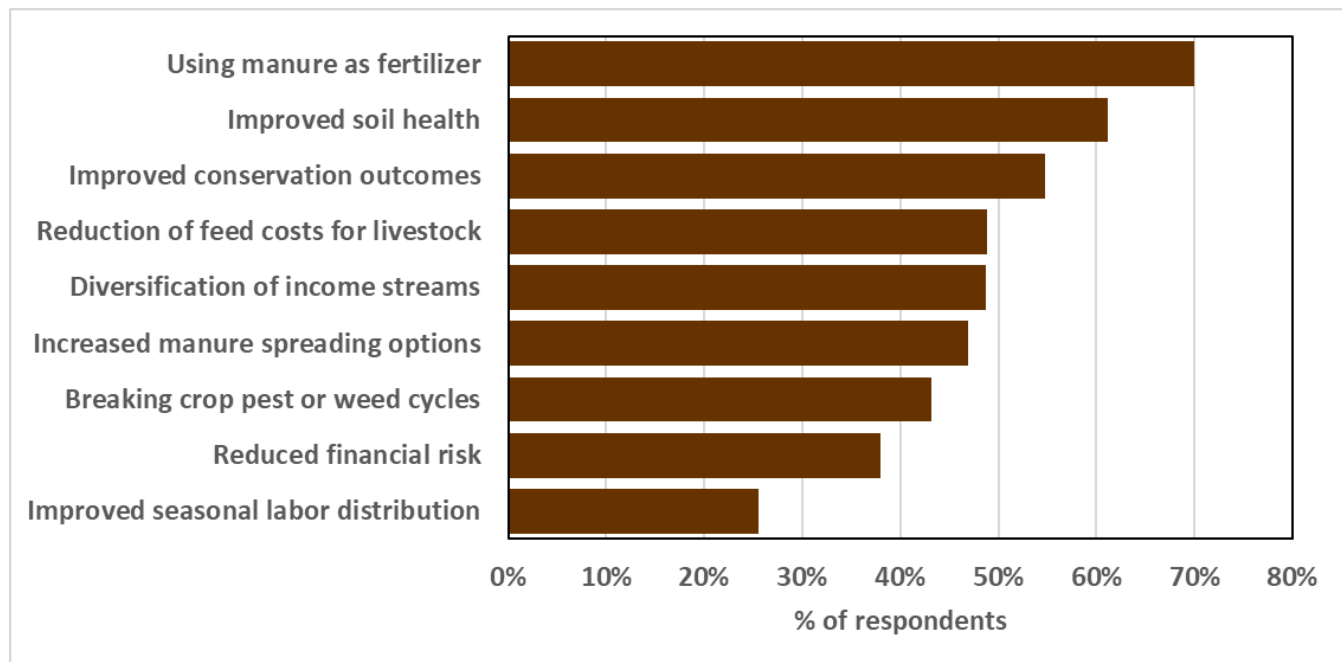
## Soil health practices

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 on Midwestern livestock farms.



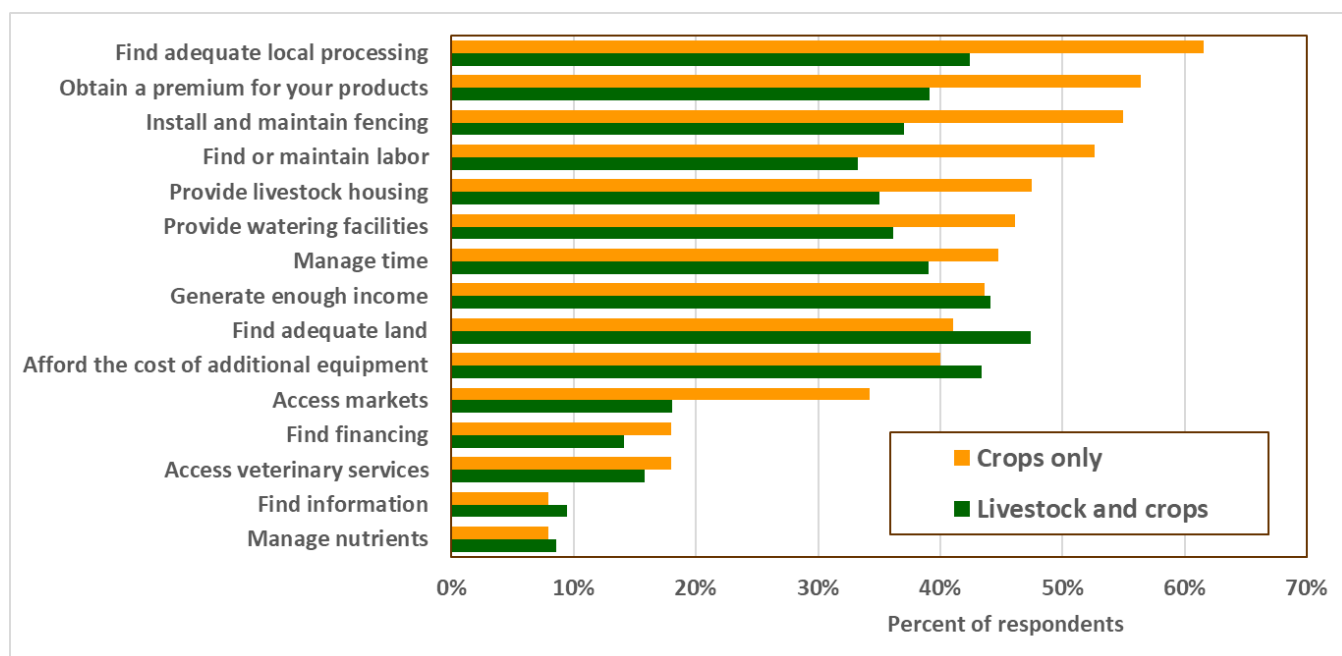
## Integration benefits

Livestock-only respondents were not asked specifically about benefits and challenges of integrated systems. This chart summarizes integrated crop and livestock respondents' perceptions of the most beneficial aspects of integrated crop and livestock systems. The graph below shows the percent of respondents valuing livestock integration benefits 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal'.



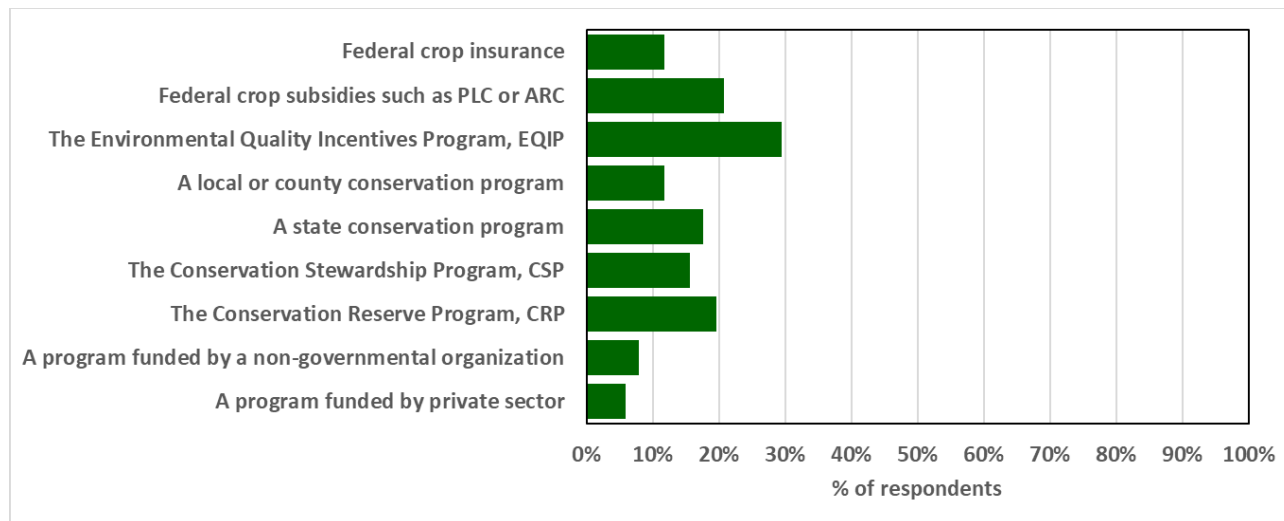
## Integration challenges

Livestock-only farmers were also not asked about perceived challenges of integration. 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.



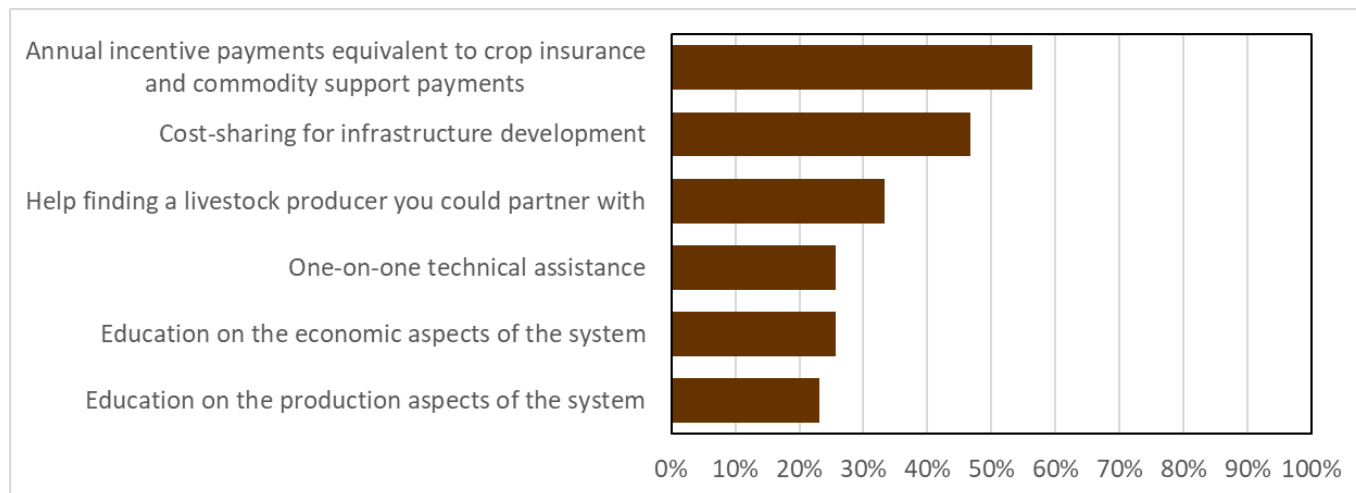
### Incentive programs used by livestock-only farmers

A large proportion of respondents reported NOT participating in programs that encourage adoption of soil health and conservation practices. Of all the groups of respondents, livestock-only farmers were the least likely to participate in programs. The graph below shows that, for this group, the most commonly used program among these livestock farmers is EQIP at just under 30%.



### 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/>

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under agreement number 2021-38640-34714 Am 3 through the North Central Region SARE program under project number LNC21-453. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture