

Farmer Perspectives on Cover Crop Incentive Programs in the Northeast

Barbara Chami and Matthew Ryan – College of Agriculture and Life Sciences – Cornell University

Objective

This research seeks to compare cover crop incentive programs in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Vermont and to understand the relationship between farmer adoption and incentive program structure. First, we collected and assessed program data. Then we conducted an online survey targeting farmers and agricultural service providers.

Incentive Programs

Maryland:

Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MASC)

- \$30-\$90 per acre; up to 87.5% total cost
- Average obligated funds (2011-2018): \$20.3 million
- Average annual cropland covered (2011-2018): 444,988 acres

New York:

Agricultural Non-Point Source Abatement & Control Grants (AgNPS)

- ~\$70 per acre; up to 70% total cost
- Average obligated funds (2011-2018): \$482,821
- Average annual cropland covered (2011-2018): 6,918 acres

Climate Resilient Farming (CRF)

- ~\$60 per acre; up to 70% total cost
- Average obligated funds (2011-2018): \$361,737
- Average annual cropland covered (2011-2018): 6,097 acres

Pennsylvania:

- No statewide programs.
- Various county programs exist but have not been assessed.

Vermont:

Farm Agronomic Practices (FAP)

- \$30-\$45 per acre; up to \$8,000
- Average obligated funds (2011-2018): \$325,092
- Average annual cropland covered (2011-2018): 4,925 acres

NRCS National Program:

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

- \$47-\$77 per acre; 3-year max
- Average obligated funds (MD, NY, VT): \$583,778
- Average annual cropland covered (2011-2018): 11,406 acres

Take our survey!



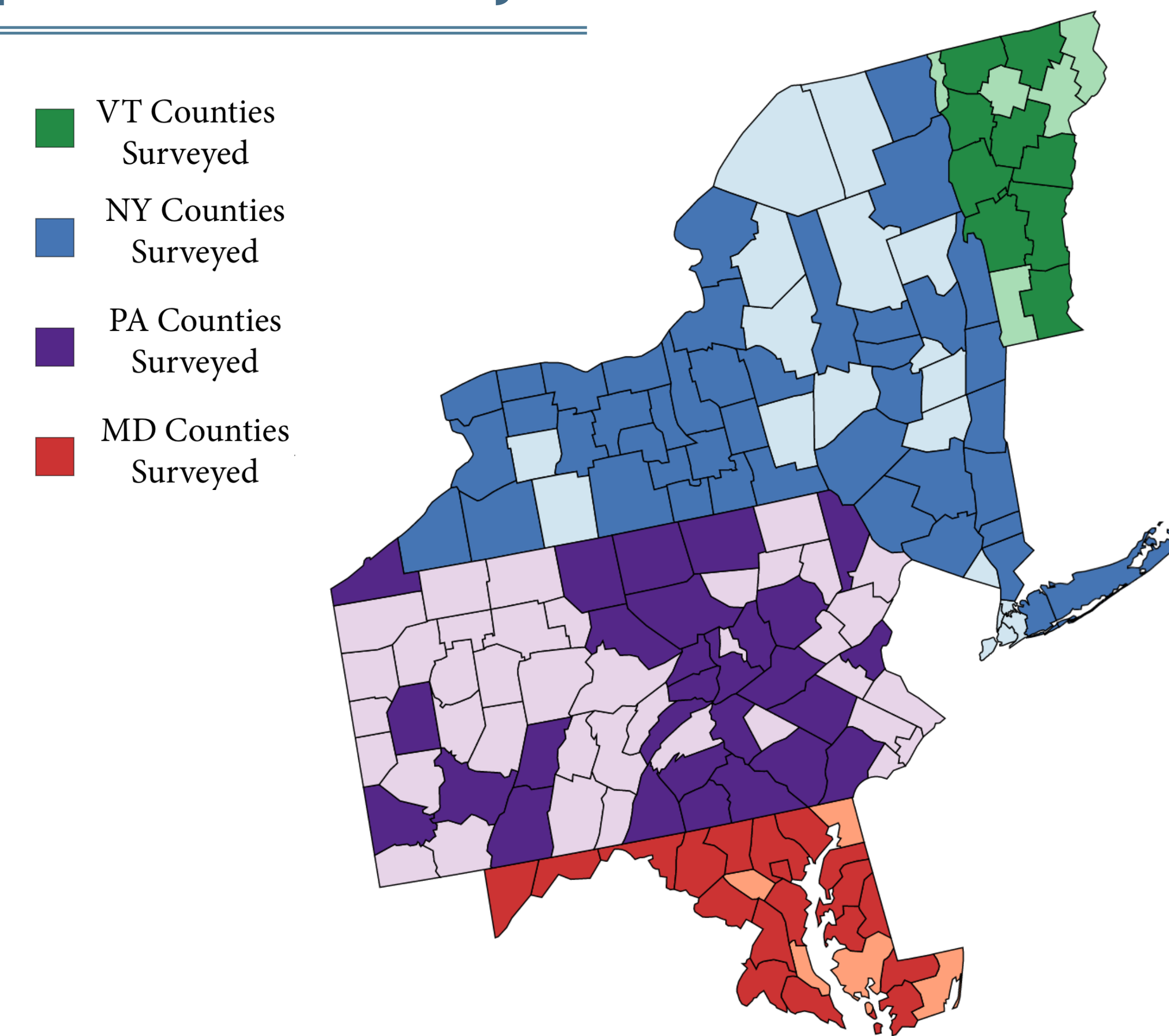
We are seeking feedback from all farmers and agricultural service providers that have knowledge of incentive programs in MD, NY, PA, and VT.

(← Just take a picture of this code)



Funded by SARE: GNE18-16

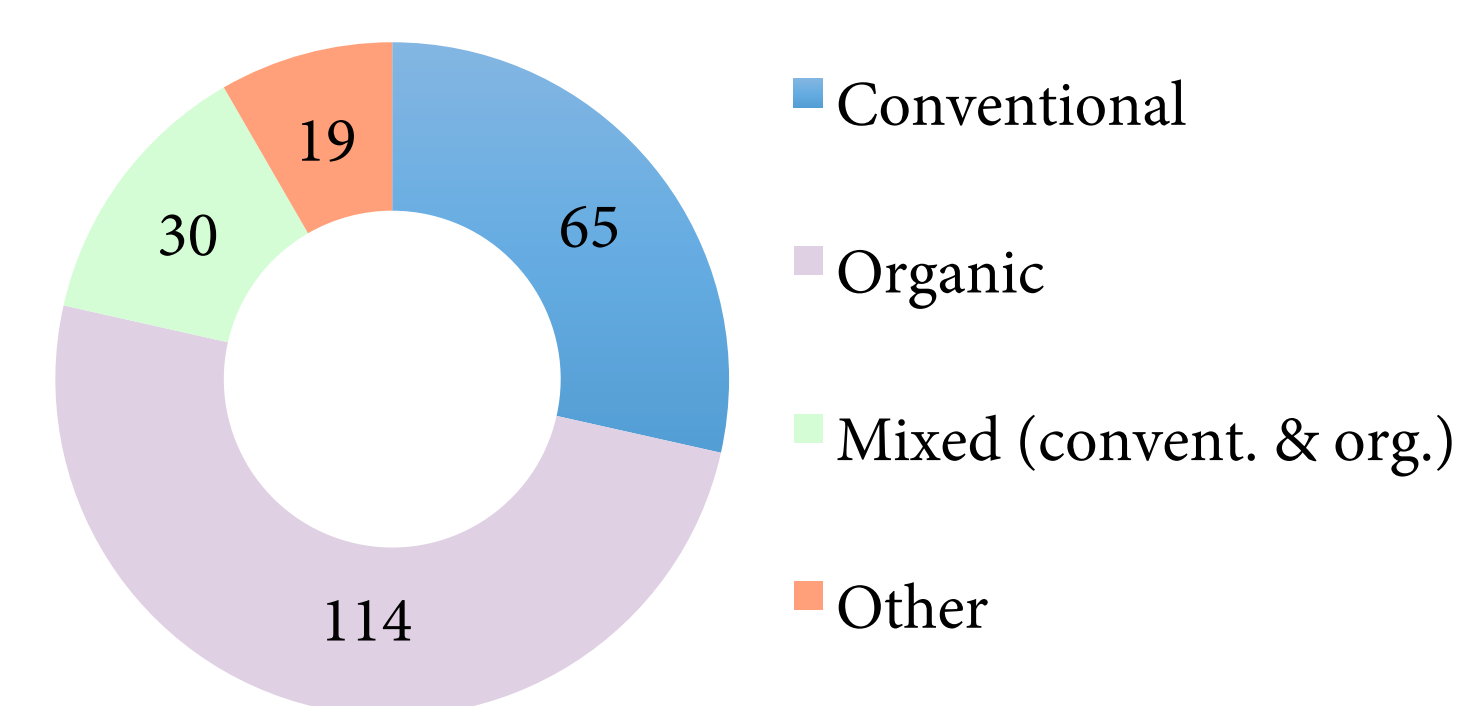
Map of Farmers Surveyed



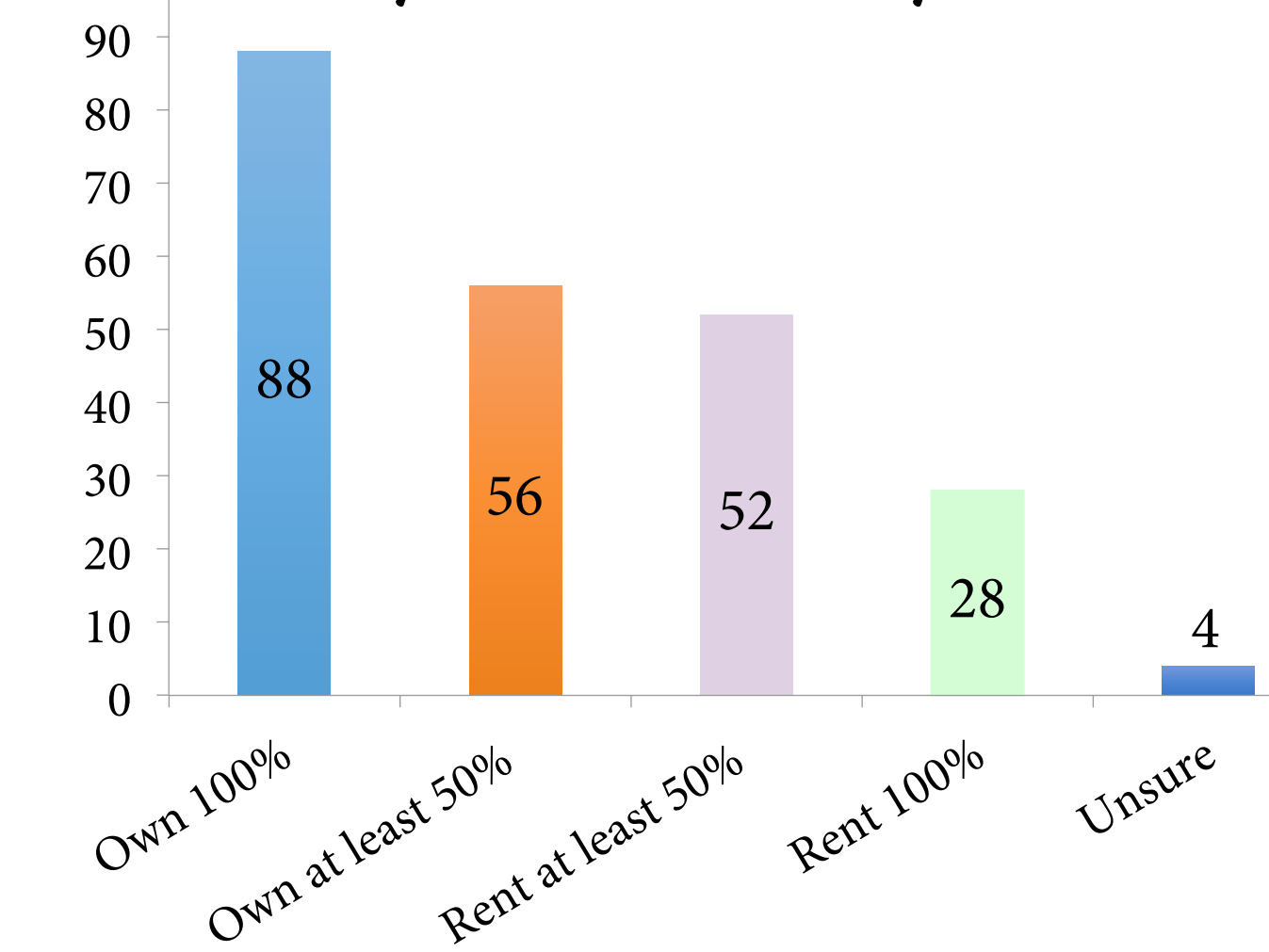
Survey Summary

Non-farmers	58	Farm Size:	Average	418 acres	Average Cover Crop Use:
Farmers	248		Average	418 acres	(before, during, & after incentive program)
Maryland	62		Min	0 acres	Before (N=81) 119 acres
New York	107		Max	8,800 acres	During (N=81) 225 acres
Pennsylvania	48		Median	85 acres	
Vermont	28				

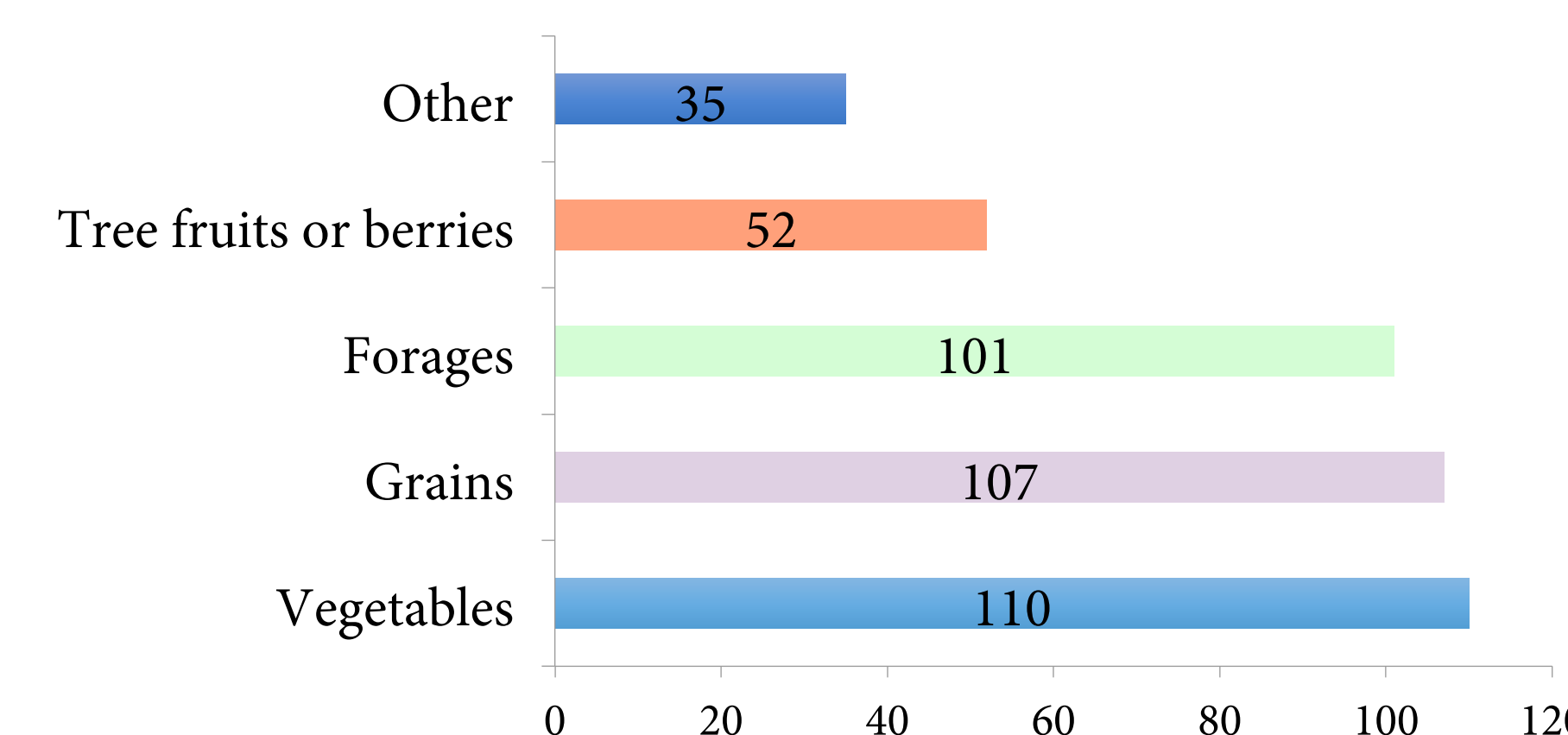
What best describes your farm operation?



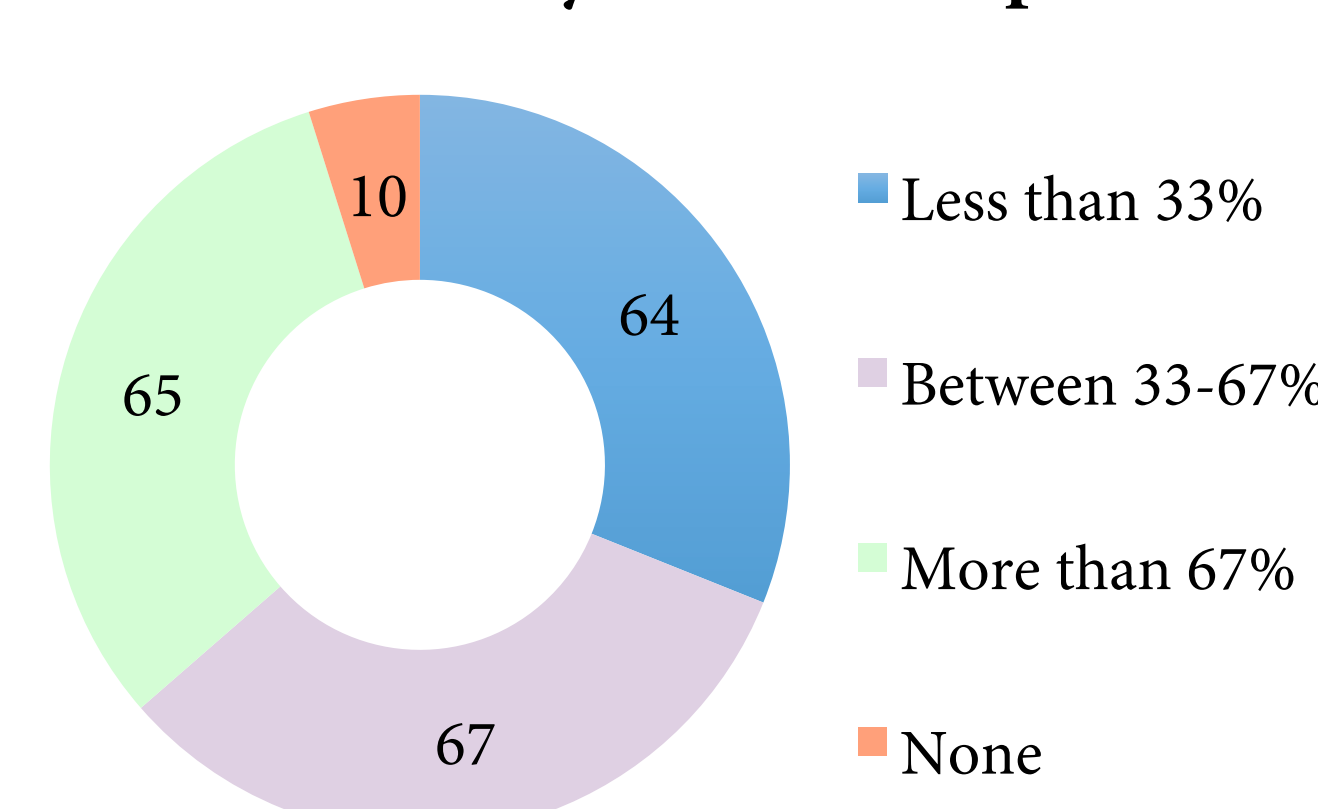
Do you own or rent your land?



What crops do you grow?



What percent of your cropland do you cover crop?



How Farmers Would Improve Incentive Programs

"EQIP should allow for non-commercial/certified seed to be used, as long as results are up to par. Some cover crop seed produced by neighbors is much more affordable and [has] better availability for us, with results just as good as commercial seed."

-NY Farmer

"Make sure these programs don't penalize the farmers who are going to cover crop anyways. I've been ineligible in the past b/c we were already using covers, which sends the wrong message (i.e. leave ground bare this year so you can get paid to do it next year)."

-VT Farmer

"Pennsylvania should pay farmers to plant cover crops like Maryland does."

-PA Farmer

"More flexibility on species and possibility of a summer cover crop incentive program in place of double crop soybeans."

-MD Farmer

Preliminary Results

Overall, incentive programs nearly double the acres planted with cover crops!

The table below highlights cover crop use in each state before, during, and after cover crop incentive programs.

State	Acres planted to cover crops			
	Surveyed	Before	During	After
MD	N=5	17	105	55
NY	N=10	176	261	231
PA	N=6	160	246	279
VT	N=3	15	30	18

- MD and VT's programs offer indefinite funding and the highest decrease after stopping the programs.
- MD offers the highest reimbursement rate and has the greatest increase in cover cropping while enrolled in the program.
- NY and PA's programs only offer funding for 3 years, which helps farmers to establish the practice and encourages them to maintain it.

Farmers across all four states have suggestions to improve the programs:

Maryland:

- More flexibility with application dates, planting dates, and seeding rate.

New York:

- Simpler application process and more flexible planting dates.
- More education about programs.

Pennsylvania:

- More technical education and collaboration with the NRCS.

Vermont:

- Increase seed access and compensation for the high cost of seed.
- Create tiered payments; higher rates for early planting.