Farmland Preservation Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Survey results. The survey was distributed to 1,636 landowners and received 408 responses.

Survey results identified the need to support farmland preservation efforts.

- 82% of respondents think farmland loss is now or could be a problem.
- 82% of respondents think it’s important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County.

The following preservation methods were identified as most important to implement:

- **Continue the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program.**
  This should include advocating for additional federal and state support and focusing preservation efforts in the most critical areas.
  - 63% of respondents strongly agree/agree that agricultural conservation easements are an important farmland preservation tool.
  - 98 respondents are interested in learning more about the PDR program.
  - 24% of respondents are considering permanently preserving their farmland so that it remains agricultural.

- **Increase the effectiveness of succession planning efforts.**
  This may include piloting an incentivized program for succession planning and mobilizing beginning farmer resources.
  - 78% of respondents strongly agree/agree that this is an important farmland preservation method.
  - 78% of respondents are age 55 and older.
  - 76% of respondents are not first generation farmers.
  - 75% of respondents are planning to pass their farmland to heirs.

- **Coordinate an improved growth strategy using planning and zoning.**
  This may include an ag mapping initiative, piloting a transfer of development rights program, and increasing engagement with local units.
  - 88% of respondents strongly agree/agree that this is an important farmland preservation method.
  - Of the respondents who felt farmland loss is now or could be a problem, 97% indicated that it could be due to urban/suburban sprawl.

- **Actively address barriers to the economic viability of farming.**
  This may include addressing taxation issues, adopting agricultural technologies, and enhancing income diversification opportunities.
  - 88% of respondents strongly agree/agree that this is an important farmland preservation method.
  - 67% of respondents receive income from farming, however 46% of these respondents require additional sources of off-farm income.

Next Step: Develop a Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Implementation Plan that defines the actions and tasks necessary to preserve farmland and farming through the methods identified as most important to Ottawa County landowners.
Response rate

In January 2019, the Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department (PPID) mailed a survey seeking input on the topic of farmland preservation. The survey was mailed to 1,636 property owners in Ottawa County who own 5 or more acres of land that is classified as agricultural for tax purposes. As of March 1, 2019, 408 completed surveys were returned to the PPID. This is a 25% response rate.

Do you own and/or rent farmland in Ottawa County?*

- Yes, 99%
- No, 1%

Of those who own and/or rent farmland in Ottawa County,**

- 52% own and rent farmland to others.
- 29% own farmland.
- 17% own and rent from others.
- 1% own, rent from others, rent to others.
- 1% rent from others.

* 384 respondents answered this question
** Based on 381 respondents who own and/or rent farmland in Ottawa County
How many survey respondents own and/or rent farmland in each Ottawa County local unit?*

What is your age category?**

- 65 or older: 51%
- 55-64: 27%
- 45-54: 11%
- 35-44: 7%
- 25-34: 3%
- 18-24: 1%

* 379 respondents answered this question
** 383 respondents answered this question
Farmland Preservation Survey Results

Demographics

Are you a first generation farmer?*

Not a first generation farmer 76%
First generation farmer 22%
Unsure if they are a first generation farmer 2%

The majority indicate 2 or 3 generations of their family have farmed/owned their land.**

6 generations 2%
5 generations 7%
4 generations 19%
3 generations 33%
2 generations 39%

How would you characterize your farm income?***

Supplemental source of household income 46%
Hobby farm 33%
Primary source of household income 21%

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* 389 respondents answered this question
** 189 respondents answered this question
***380 respondents answered this question
Farmland Preservation Survey Results

Farmland Loss in Ottawa County

Do you think farmland loss is or could be a problem in Ottawa County?*

- Yes, 82%
- No, 9%
- Unsure, 9%

Of those who said farmland loss is or could be a problem in Ottawa County,** they indicated it could be due to…

- Urban/suburban sprawl: 58% Strongly Agree, 39% Agree, 3% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 1% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Increasing population: 47% Strongly Agree, 48% Agree, 3% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 2% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Lack of heirs or new farmers to assume farming operations: 33% Strongly Agree, 43% Agree, 16% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 8% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Volatility of the farm economy: 31% Strongly Agree, 43% Agree, 20% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 6% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Commercial development: 23% Strongly Agree, 47% Agree, 23% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 7% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Excessive regulations: 29% Strongly Agree, 33% Agree, 30% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 8% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Zoning constraints and requirements: 23% Strongly Agree, 37% Agree, 31% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 9% Disagree or Strongly Disagree

* 400 respondents answered this question
** Between 321 and 325 respondents answered each of these questions
Farmland Preservation Survey Results

Farmland Preservation in Ottawa County

Do you think it is important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County?*

- Yes, 82%
- No, 4%
- Unsure, 14%

* 400 respondents answered this question

Of those who said it is important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County,** they feel it is important to do so by...

- Enhancing economic viability of farming: 42% Strongly Agree, 46% Agree, 12% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 0% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Protecting farms through planning and zoning: 42% Strongly Agree, 46% Agree, 10% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 2% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Planning for succession: 28% Strongly Agree, 50% Agree, 21% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 1% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Creating agricultural conservation easements: 23% Strongly Agree, 40% Agree, 31% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 6% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Encouraging venture capital investors to buy, hold, and/or lease prime farmland: 12% Strongly Agree, 18% Agree, 40% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 30% Disagree or Strongly Disagree

** Between 313 and 322 respondents answered each of these questions

Prepared by: Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department (4/23/19)
Farmland Preservation Survey Results

Ottawa County’s Farmland Preservation Program

Prior to taking this survey, were you aware that Ottawa County has a Farmland Preservation Program?*

- Yes, 74%
- No, 26%

Would you like to learn more about the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Program?**

- Yes, 26%
- No, 43%
- Unsure, 31%

* 402 respondents answered this question
** 380 respondents answered this question

Prepared by: Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department (4/23/19)
Participating in the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Program* could be valuable because...

1. Farmland provides numerous public benefits
   - Strongly Agree: 40%
   - Agree: 45%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 11%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 4%

2. The ability of a community to produce its food locally is important
   - Strongly Agree: 27%
   - Agree: 51%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 17%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 5%

3. Proceeds from the sale can be reinvested into my farm
   - Strongly Agree: 13%
   - Agree: 49%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 31%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 7%

4. Land will be restricted for agricultural use in perpetuity
   - Strongly Agree: 17%
   - Agree: 39%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 34%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 10%

5. Removing the development rights makes the land more affordable for new farmers
   - Strongly Agree: 13%
   - Agree: 41%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 36%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 10%

6. Tax advantages can be realized
   - Strongly Agree: 8%
   - Agree: 37%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 44%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 11%

7. Proceeds from the sale can be used to balance the value of the estate among heirs
   - Strongly Agree: 7%
   - Agree: 38%
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 45%
   - Disagree or Strongly Disagree: 10%

* Between 383 and 388 respondents answered each of these questions
I would not participate in the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Program* because…

- Selling development rights limits financial options for my heirs: 21% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 26% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 9% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Program does not offer enough money to be of interest: 12% Strongly Agree, 34% Agree, 48% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 6% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- I don’t understand how the program works: 11% Strongly Agree, 29% Agree, 39% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 21% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Agricultural conservation easements endure in perpetuity: 9% Strongly Agree, 30% Agree, 49% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 12% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- My land may not qualify for the program: 4% Strongly Agree, 29% Agree, 61% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 6% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Application process is too long and/or too complex: 5% Strongly Agree, 27% Agree, 62% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 6% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Selling development rights does not reduce farmland loss: 4% Strongly Agree, 24% Agree, 44% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 28% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
- Public money should not be used for private farmland preservation: 6% Strongly Agree, 18% Agree, 44% Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 32% Disagree or Strongly Disagree

* Between 358 and 373 respondents answered each of these questions.
As property owners* plan for the future, 75% are considering passing their farmland to heirs.

- Pass farmland to heirs: 75%
- Continue farming to retirement: 35%
- Sell acreage and/or assets to another farmer: 22%
- Increase acreage and/or production: 20%
- Sell a portion of farmland for development: 11%
- Sell all farmland for development: 8%
- Decrease acreage and/or production: 2%
- Stop farming and pursue other employment: 2%

* 392 respondents answered this question. Respondents were able to select multiple answers for this question.
Are you considering permanently preserving your farmland so that it remains agricultural?*

- Yes, 24%
- No, 29%
- Unsure, 47%

* 393 respondents answered this question

Of those who are considering permanently preserving their farmland, the number** who own farmland in each local unit include…

** 91 respondents answered this question
**Farmland Preservation Survey Results**

**Permanent Preservation of Farmland**

Of those who are considering permanently preserving their farmland…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+ years</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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They*** would characterize their farm income as… compared to all survey respondents

- **Supplemental source of household income**: 41%
- **Hobby farm**: 41%
- **Primary source of household income**: 18%

Their*** age category is… compared to all survey respondents

- **65 or older**: 53%
- **55-64**: 28%
- **45-54**: 7%
- **35-44**: 7%
- **18-34**: 5%

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100% are second generation+ farmers**

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* 88 respondents answered this question
** 75 respondents answered this question
*** Between 92 and 93 respondents answered these questions
Prepared by: Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department (4/23/19)