

1998 Survey of Kent County Agricultural Landowners on Farmland Preservation Issues

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The results of the opinion survey of 1037 out of 3076 Kent County agricultural landowners are compiled below. Agricultural landowners with 10 acres or more as determined by the Farm Service Agency were surveyed. Comments and questions about this survey should be directed to [Kendra Wills](#) at (616) 336-3265.

Summary:

- ? Over 75% of respondents were concerned about the loss of farmland and urban sprawl.
- ? 45% agree they need to sell their land for retirement.
- ? 67% reported they are not able to make a profit from farming.
- ? 55% say regulations make it too difficult to farm.
- ? 74% agree their land is more valuable for development than farming.

- ? The two most important issues facing agricultural landowners are taxes (93%) and profitability (89%).
- ? Landowners have owned their land in the family for an average of 58 years.
- ? Landowners are aging. 66% of respondents were over 50 years old.
- ? 43% plan to own their land for more than 20 years.
- ? 22% of those surveyed receive over 50% of their family income from the farm.

- ? Over 53% are not familiar with farmland preservation programs (Purchase of Development Rights, Ag Security Zones, Transfer of Development Rights).
- ? 58% are opposed to government restrictions of development on their land to preserve farmland.
- ? 59% are in favor of voluntary restrictions of the development of farmland.
- ? 603 landowners selected "tax land on agricultural use rather than on development potential" as the most important thing government could do to promote agriculture.

Survey Results:

1. In Kent County, how concerned are you about the following:

| | Very Concerned | Concerned | Not Very Concerned | Not Concerned At All | No Opinion |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|------------|
| ? Loss of Farmland | 51% | 28% | 11% | 8% | 1% |
| ? Loss of Open Space | 42% | 33% | 14% | 8% | 3% |
| ? Loss of Wetlands | 29% | 29% | 23% | 16% | 3% |
| ? Loss of Scenic | 30% | 39% | 18% | 10% | 4% |

| Resources | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|----|
| ? Restrictions on Development | 41% | 35% | 13% | 9% | 3% |
| ? Urban Sprawl | 46% | 31% | 12% | 8% | 2% |

2. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | No Opinion |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| Preserving Kent County farmland is important. | 52% | 29% | 11% | 5% | 3% |
| Development restrictions are necessary to preserve farmland. | 43% | 29% | 16% | 9% | 4% |
| Land use planning in my township has been effective in preserving farmland. | 6% | 24% | 37% | 18% | 15% |
| I need to sell my land for my retirement. | 20% | 25% | 24% | 12% | 20% |
| My land is more valuable for development than for farming. | 44% | 30% | 11% | 10% | 5% |
| I am not able to make a profit from farming. | 31% | 36% | 16% | 4% | 13% |
| Laws related to farming make it too difficult to farm. | 21% | 34% | 23% | 3% | 20% |
| Taxes on my land are too high for farming. | 45% | 35% | 10% | 1% | 9% |
| Nearby development is making it too difficult for me to continue farming. | 19% | 33% | 27% | 5% | 17% |
| The younger generation does not want to farm. | 23% | 44% | 16% | 6% | 11% |
| The Capital Gains Tax should not be charged when farmland is sold to family members for farming. | 62% | 30% | 2% | 1% | 5% |
| State or Federal land use restrictions have limited my development opportunities. | 12% | 23% | 27% | 5% | 35% |
| Township or County land use restrictions have limited my development opportunities. | 16% | 27% | 26% | 5% | 27% |
| It would help keep land in agriculture if commodity prices were stabilized at equitable levels. | 26% | 38% | 13% | 4% | 19% |

3. How familiar are you with the following programs and concepts:

| | Strongly Familiar | Somewhat Familiar | Not Familiar |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| ? P.A. 116 - Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act | 27% | 39% | 34% |
| ? Right to Farm Act | 18% | 41% | 40% |
| ? Exclusive Agricultural Zoning | 10% | 37% | 52% |
| ? Purchase of Development Rights Program | 11% | 36% | 53% |
| ? Agricultural Security Zones | 5% | 21% | 74% |
| ? Transfer of Development Rights | 8% | 24% | 68% |
| ? Revised Land Division Act | 6% | 21% | 74% |

4. In your opinion, how effective are the following programs and concepts in preserving farmland?

| | Effective | Not Effective | No Opinion | Percentage of respondents that have participated or may participate in program. |
|--|-----------|---------------|------------|---|
| ? P.A. 116 - Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act | 28% | 25% | 47% | 17% |
| ? Right to Farm Act | 26% | 16% | 60% | 3% |
| ? Exclusive Agricultural Zoning | 17% | 14% | 69% | 3% |
| ? Purchase of Development Rights Program | 18% | 14% | 68% | 3% |
| ? Agricultural Security Zones | 10% | 10% | 81% | 2% |
| ? Transfer of Development Rights | 12% | 10% | 78% | 2% |
| ? Revised Land Division Act | 7% | 13% | 80% | 3% |

5. The following is a prioritized list of things that the township/county could do to promote agriculture:

1. Tax land on agricultural use rather than on development potential. (603 respondents)
2. Lower my property taxes or assessment. (450 respondents)
3. Protect farmers from complaints. (126 respondents)
4. Pass local ordinances which do not restrict farm size, hours of operation, and livestock numbers. (125 respondents)
5. Control the number of non-farm splits. (121 respondents)
6. Keep housing developments 500 feet from working farms. (106 respondents)
7. By my development rights so I can continue farming. (105 respondents)
8. Create an Agricultural Advisory Committee to the Township Planning Commission. (88 respondents)
9. Enact Agricultural Zoning. (75 respondents)
10. Promote local farm markets. (69 respondents)
11. Eliminate private roads in agriculture zones. (59 respondents)
12. Exempt perishable agricultural products from road restrictions. (23 respondents)

6. How important are the following issues you face as an agricultural landowner?

| | Very Important | Important | Not Very Important | Not Important At All | No Opinion |
|---|----------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Drainage from developments/roads | 22% | 32% | 26% | 11% | 9% |
| Environmental regulations | 31% | 43% | 11% | 5% | 9% |
| Labor regulations | 18% | 62% | 28% | 10% | 16% |
| Neighbor complaints | 18% | 35% | 26% | 11% | 10% |
| Vandalism | 29% | 35% | 21% | 6% | 7% |
| Trespassing | 40% | 35% | 16% | 4% | 5% |
| Traffic problems moving machinery | 24% | 34% | 23% | 7% | 9% |
| Road restrictions during thaws | 14% | 28% | 37% | 11% | 10% |
| Taxes | 65% | 28% | 3% | 1% | 4% |
| Profitability | 63% | 26% | 3% | 1% | 7% |
| Local government unaware of agriculture's impact on economy | 42% | 36% | 7% | 3% | 11% |
| County drains | 26% | 38% | 18% | 6% | 12% |

7. If you are in favor of preserving farmland, please answer the following question: "Why do you favor preserving farmland?" (The following is a prioritized list.)

1. Preserve future food supply. (55%)
2. Need for the environment - water, wildlife, trees. (38%)

- 3. Need the economic base of agriculture. (26%)
- 4. Farming is a way of life. (26%)
- 5. Need open space. (13%)
- 6. Other (6%)

8. Would you favor government restriction of development on your land in order to preserve farmland?

- 58% Opposed
- 22% Favor
- 15% No opinion
- 5% Gave written comments

9. Would you favor voluntary restriction of development on your land in order to preserve farmland?

- 59% Favor
- 21% Opposed
- 17% No opinion
- 4% Gave written comments

10. In which Kent County Township is the majority of your land located?

| Percentage of Land | Township |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1.8% | Ada |
| 4.4% | Algoma |
| 9.6% | Alpine |
| 6.0% | Bowne |
| 6.8% | Byron |
| 3.1% | Caledonia |
| 4.3% | Cannon |
| 2.4% | Cascade |
| 6.0% | Courtland |
| 6.7% | Gaines |
| 0.4% | Grand Rapids |
| 5.3% | Grattan |
| 4.7% | Lowell |

| | |
|------|---------------|
| 4.4% | Nelson |
| 3.4% | Oakfield |
| 1.3% | Plainfield |
| 4.8% | Solon |
| 6.4% | Sparta |
| 4.7% | Spencer |
| 5.1% | Tyrone |
| 4.3% | Vergennes |
| 1.2% | Walker |
| 0.2% | Ottawa County |
| 0.5% | Wyoming |
| 0.3% | Kentwood |
| 0.1% | Lawton |
| 1.3% | Kent City |
| 0.1% | Chester |
| 0.2% | Wright |

11. Number of acres:

- ? Average number of acres owned: 121 acres
- ? Average number of acres owned in agricultural production: 109 acres
- ? Average number of acres rented from others: 241 acres
- ? Average number of acres you rent to others: 66 acres

12. How long have you, or your family owned agricultural land in Kent County?

- ? Average: 58 years

13. Your age:

- ? 5% Under 35
- ? 30% 35-50
- ? 34% 51-65
- ? 32% Over 65

14. How long do you, or your family, expect to own agricultural land and/or operate a farm in Kent County?

- ? 37% More than 25 years
- ? 16% 6-10 years
- ? 11% 1-5 years
- ? 10% 16-20 years
- ? 9% 11-15 years
- ? 6% 21-25 years
- ? 3% Less than 1 year

15. Do you plan to make major capital investments (buildings, machinery, or land) over the next five years?

- ? 50% No
- ? 26% Yes
- ? 24% Not sure

16. What are your potential future plans for the agricultural land you own?

- ? 56% Continue to own or rent as farmland
- ? 37% Transfer the farm on to the next generation
- ? 25% Sell the land for development
- ? 12% Other
- ? 11% Sell the land to another farmer

17. What percentage of your family income comes from the farm?

- ? 69% Less than 25%
- ? 18% More than 75%
- ? 9% 25-50%
- ? 4% 50-75%

18. What commodity is the main source of your agricultural income?

- ? 24% Crops
- ? 24% Land rental charges
- ? 19% Livestock
- ? 13% Fruit
- ? 13% Other
- ? 5% Dairy
- ? 3% Vegetables
- ? 1% Greenhouse

19. Population Data:

- ? 85% Male
- ? 15% Female

- ? 98% Caucasian
- ? 1% Native American
- ? 1% Multiracial
- ? 0.1% Hispanic