2017
Western and Northern Maryland Agriculture Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

University of Maryland Extension Needs Assessment Team
Bryan Butler, Extension Educator, Carroll County
Shannon Dill, Extension Educator, Talbot County
Sherry Frick, Agent Associate, Allegany County
Andrew Kness, Extension Educator, Harford County
Willie Lantz, Extension Educator, Garrett County
Teresa McCoy, Assistant Director, Evaluation and Assessment
Matthew Morris, Extension Educator, Frederick County
Jeff Semler, Extension Educator, Washington County
Executive Summary

The University of Maryland Extension (UME) conducted an agricultural needs assessment for the seven counties in northern and western Maryland in 2017. This survey will help UME understand issues concerning regional agriculture, identify agricultural and educational needs and to focus UME agricultural training and resources.

The survey was conducted in 2017 and included four sections: 1) industry priorities, concerns and viability, 2) research and education needs, 3) education and training preferences and 4) demographic and farm information. Results were received from 172 farmers through paper or online surveys (29% response rate).

One-third of the respondents reported tilling 101-500 acres. This was followed by 25% reporting 51-100 acres and 20% reporting 0-10 acres. Fifty-three percent farm full time with 66% farming more than 20 years and 14% farming 11-20 years. The majority of respondents reported raising livestock (29%) and field crops (28%), followed by fruit and/or vegetables (13%). Many reported farming in more than one of the commodity categories. The majority of those responding to the survey were male (75%), non-Hispanic (100%) and white (96%). Over 58% of farmers were over the age of 55 with the majority being in the range of 55-64 (34%) and 65-75 (24%). The results for gender, ethnicity, race and age are in alignment with demographic data from the 2012 Agriculture Census.

Results from industry priorities and viability were predominately related to regulatory, legislative and production related topics. Those with the highest importance according to mean include:

- Legislators understanding of agriculture production and its importance to the economy;
- Public understanding of agricultural production and its importance to the economy;
- Maintenance and protection of adequate agricultural land; and
- Farmer involvement in the legislative process and regulation development.

Major farm concerns include loss of farmland due to urban encroachment and farm transfer to the next generation. Industry concerns include agriculture maintaining its viability and profitability in years to come and the public image of agriculture.

Survey respondents were asked about desired knowledge, education and training they would like to receive. Soil science and increasing soil health and current regulations and environmental laws were the top two critical education topics, followed by animal nutrition and feeding, use of records to improve financial decisions and integrated pest management.

Education delivery preferences included half-day seminars or workshops, one-on-one education or consulting and Extension newsletters. Priority services for UME to provide include sources of educational material, interpretation and assistance with agricultural regulations, research data from field and variety trials and agricultural promotion and education to consumers and non-farmers.

Moving forward, UME will continue to analyze the data and prepare a plan to meet the needs of farmers and landowners in the northern and western counties.