



2025 Alabama Farm Poll







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Executive Summary

The Alabama Farm Poll was conducted in 2025 by the Auburn University Rural Partnership Institute (AURPI) to examine Alabama agricultural producers' views and perspectives[1]. Our aim was to better understand the challenges facing Alabama farmers and how they are navigating these challenges. This report is divided into four major sections outlining the survey respondents' views on well-being and quality of life, stress and economic pressure, adaptation factors to change and stress, and the future of farming in Alabama.

For this initial version of the Alabama Farm Poll, 321 farmers responded. While many producers farm across commodity categories, 68% listed livestock (cattle, poultry, etc.) as their main commodity, and 32% listed crops (row crops, specialty crops, etc.) as their primary commodity. The mean farm size was 621 acres, which is larger than the Alabama mean farm size—265 acres—from the 2022 Census of Agriculture. This is most likely because we purposefully surveyed farms with more than 100 acres, except for poultry producers. Our sample is also slightly older and more educated than the Census of Agriculture data. Just over half of the respondents own all of their farmland; the remaining half rent, or both rent and own their farmland.

Regarding well-being, we found that farmers are largely satisfied with their work. Nearly three-fourths of all respondents reported being "satisfied" or "highly satisfied" with their work and quality of life as agricultural producers. Farmers stated that the cost of farm inputs and net farm income were the least satisfactory aspects of farming. In response to economic pressure, over one-third of producers made farm management decisions to reduce farm expenditures and postpone major farm purchases. Looking ahead to the future, we found that most Alabama farmers expect their quality of life to remain the same but anticipate economic conditions to worsen.

The goal of the data presented in this publication is to provide agricultural producers, organizations, community decision makers, researchers, businesses, and elected officials with information about the perspectives and views of Alabama farmers.

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[1] This work is supported by the Auburn University Rural Partnership Institute, project award no. 707500-38914, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.



I. Well-being and quality of life

Overall, farming remains a meaningful occupation for our respondents. While fewer farmers report being consistently satisfied, the majority report positive levels of job satisfaction. Over 70% indicate they feel satisfied “a good deal of the time” or “all the time” with being a farmer.

Figure 1 shows that respondents to our survey value the independence and lifestyle of farming, but economic pressures, especially input costs and income, remain a significant challenge. Farmers report generally positive satisfaction with several aspects of their farm operations, particularly those related to autonomy and lifestyle. The data shows the importance of independence and work–life integration in farming. A large majority of farmers indicate satisfaction with their ability to be their own boss and spend time with family. Similarly, many farmers feel confident in their operational capacity and are satisfied with market access for their farm products. Satisfaction with production levels and access to markets was relatively high in 2024.

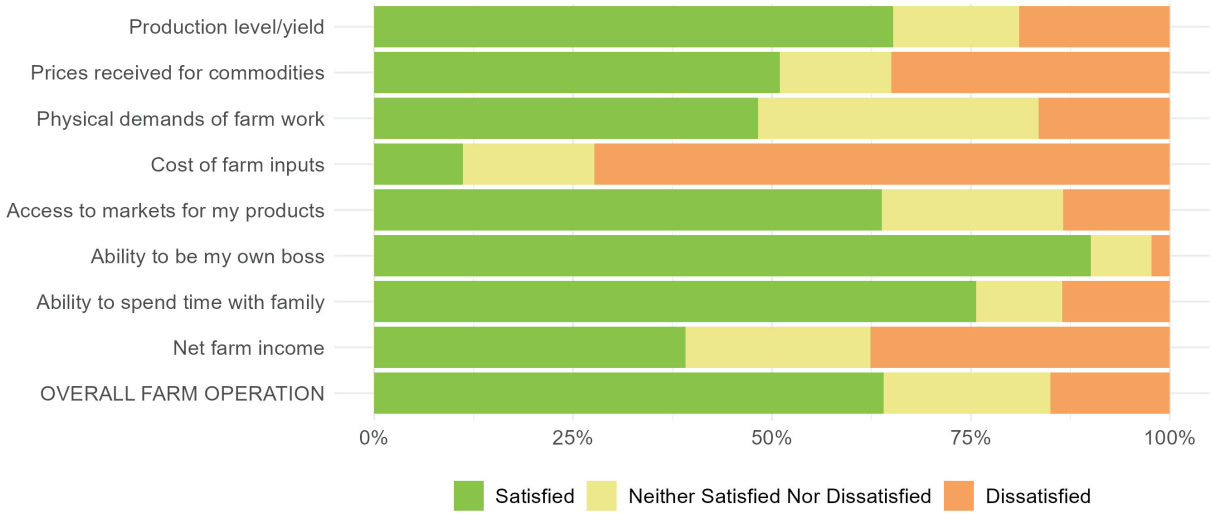


Figure 1. Satisfaction with farm operation components among farmers

However, there are persistent financial pressures that shape the day-to-day realities of farming, as economic factors remain a clear source of concern. Satisfaction is notably lower for net farm income, commodity prices, and especially the cost of farm inputs, where a substantial share of farmers report dissatisfaction. The physical demands of farm work occupy a middle ground, with many farmers reporting neutral or mixed levels of satisfaction.

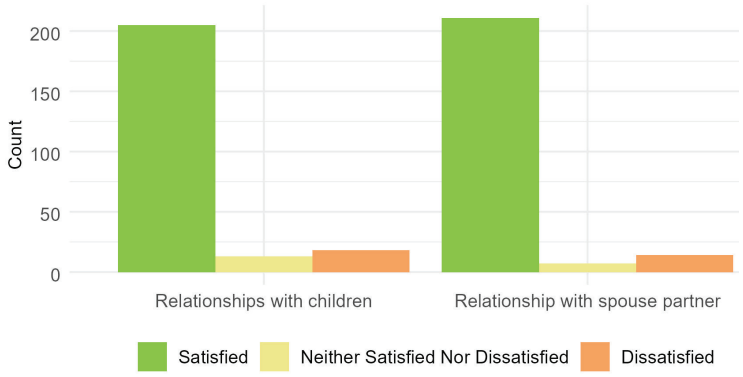


Figure 2. Satisfaction with family relationships among farmers

Another important section in the survey covers farmers' support system and their overall quality of life. The data highlights the importance of the household as a key support system for farmers. Respondents report consistently high levels of satisfaction with family relationships. The vast majority indicate they are satisfied with both their relationships with children and with their spouse or partner, with only a small proportion reporting neutral or dissatisfied responses (Figure 2). This low levels of dissatisfaction indicate that family dynamics are generally not a major source of stress for most respondents.

Satisfaction with broader aspects of quality of life presents a more uneven pattern. While most farmers report being satisfied with their overall quality of life and their relationships with neighbors, satisfaction declines notably for household income and time off from farming (Figure 3). Household income shows a higher concentration of neutral and dissatisfied responses. Similarly, many farmers report limited opportunities for rest or leisure, which may reflect the continuous and labor-intensive nature of agricultural work.

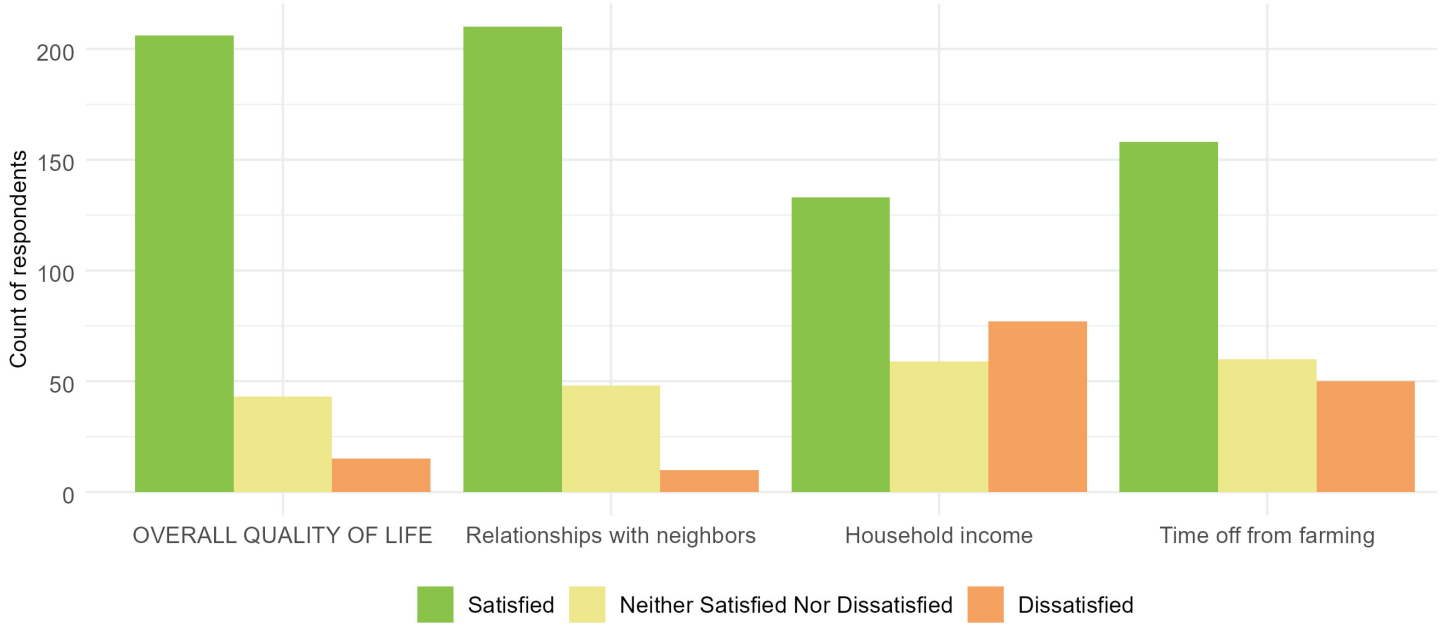


Figure 3. Satisfaction with key aspects of farmers' quality of life

II. Stress and economic pressure

When asking farmers about their overall impression of business conditions for their farms in 2024, a majority (54.6%) report that conditions are about the same as usual. However, a notable share (27.5%) reports that conditions are worse than usual, while fewer indicate improvement.

Respondents were also asked about various sources of stress that might affect their farm operations and households. Among our respondents, the major sources of stress are related to the costs of farm operations. More than 50% of respondents identified the cost of farm inputs and farmland as “very stressful” or “extremely stressful” for them, while around 40% also indicated that healthcare costs, direct costs, and insurance costs are major stressors. Of course, costs are a perennial concern for farmers, although this source of stress may be heightened due to persistent inflation in recent years.

Conversely, survey respondents indicated that the social and familial aspects of farming are not major sources of stress. For instance, less than 15% of survey respondents identified nonfarm neighbors, negotiating with family members about farm operations, and balancing farm work and home life as “very stressful” or “extremely stressful.” These results may indicate that for many farmers, building and maintaining relationships is part of what makes farming rewarding despite the stress.

Other stressors such as unfavorable weather, livestock and crop pests and diseases, market prices, environmental regulations, government trade policies, and farmland loss were considered only moderately stressful by our respondents. One moderate stressor that stands out is concern over the future of the farm, with around 37% of respondents to our survey indicating this as “very stressful” or “extremely stressful.” This indicates that farmers may experience stress due to uncertainty about the economic sustainability of their operations over the long haul.

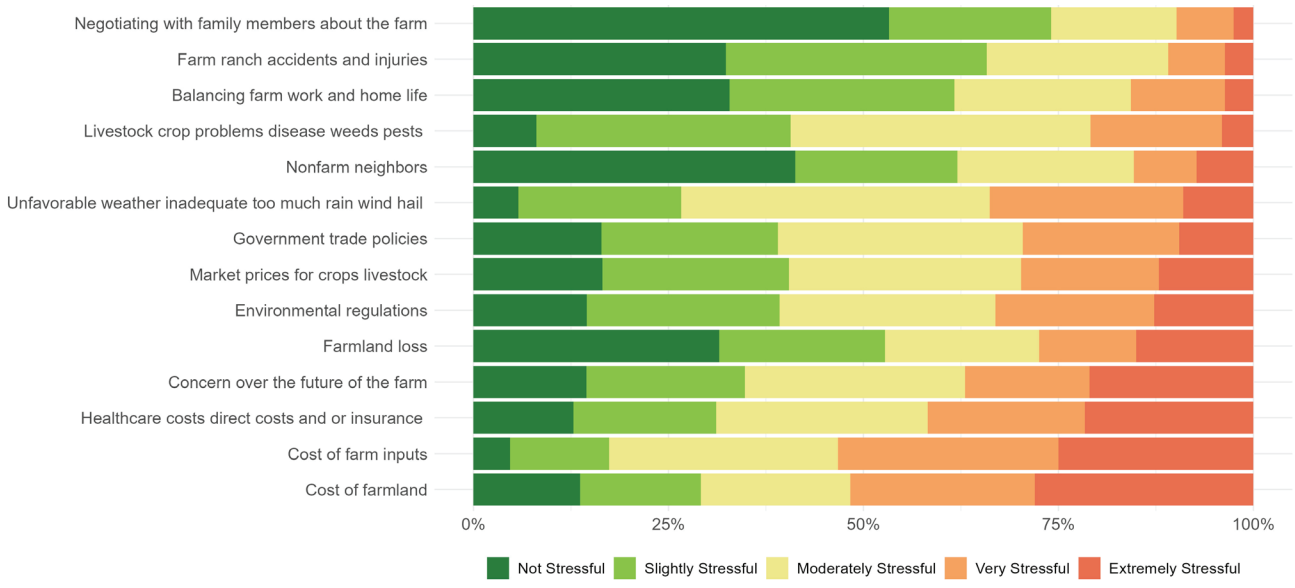


Figure 4. Sources of stress affecting farm operations and households



III. Adaptation

While a majority of respondents answered that increased input costs caused stress, it is worth noting how their behavior changed in response to these stressors. The largest change in behavior measured by the survey was reductions in farm inputs such as fertilizers, with 43% of farmers making that change in the past year. Similarly, 35.5% of farmers postponed major farm purchases such as land, while 23.1% delayed plans to expand the farming operation, and 18.4% put plans to retire or transfer the farm on hold. This pullback of spending, driven by higher costs for land and inputs, may have ripple effects on other aspects of the farm's profitability going forward if farms aren't able to expand their operations or bring in the next generation in the near term.

Not all farmers reported negative financial decisions during the survey period. Nearly 23% of farmers invested in major new farm machinery or buildings. For those farmers with available cash, this may be a time for investment to take advantage of positive movements in the farm economy when they first start to occur.

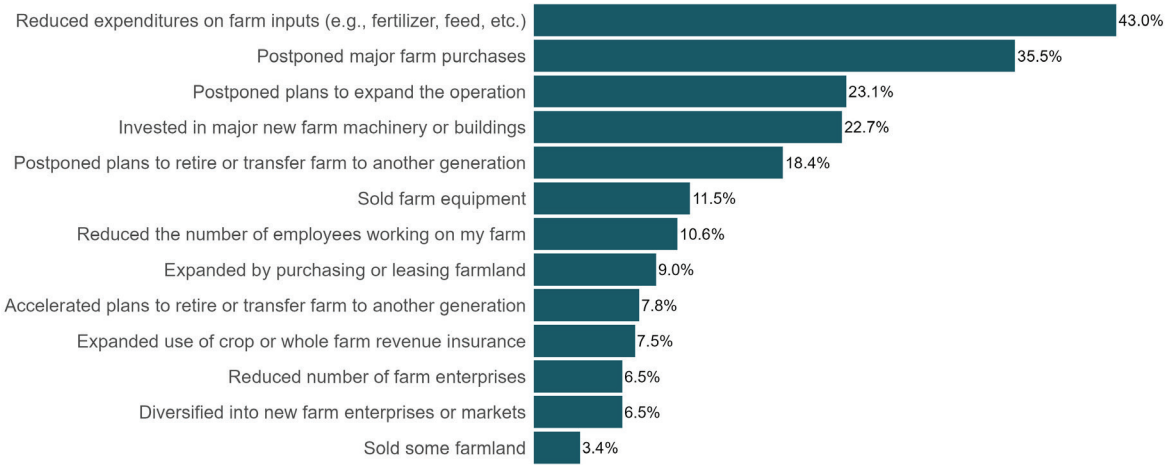


Figure 5. Changes to farm operations in response to economic and operational pressures

Farms and farm households are intertwined economically, making it useful to understand any changes in behavior by the household in response to economic downturns in the farm economy. Notably, nearly 31% of farm households cut back on social activities and entertainment expenses, while a similar percentage used savings to meet household expenses. Nearly 30% of households postponed major household purchases and 27.1% changed grocery shopping or eating patterns. These changes in the farm household have ramifications for the rural communities where they reside. If farm households cut back on spending, it may negatively impact the local businesses that rely on farming households for a portion of their income.

Other aspects of changed behaviors by farm households due to a negative farm economy include 15% of them buying more items on credit than previously, 11.2% having trouble paying bills on time, and 10.3% postponing medical care to save money. These adverse impacts on the farm household have the potential to become more acute if revenues from farming do not increase in the coming years.

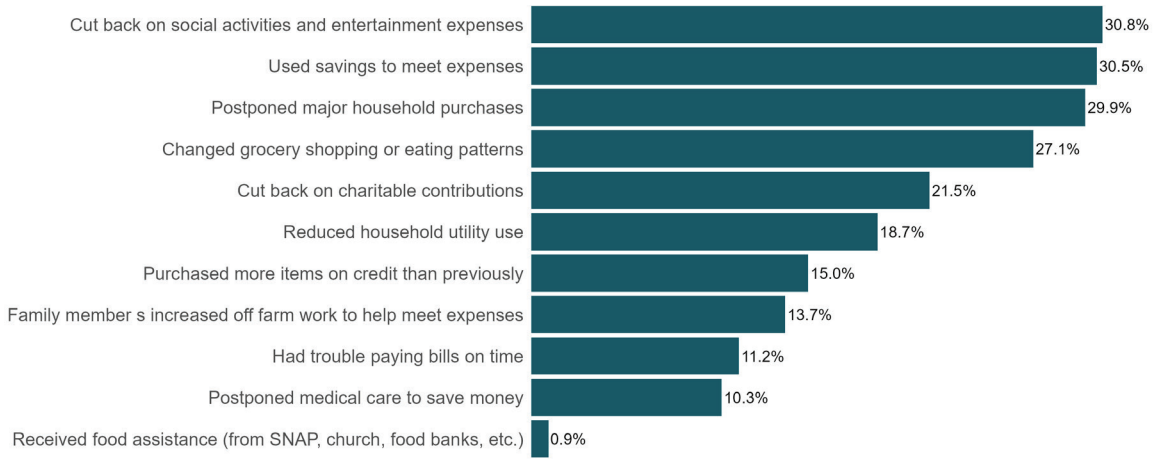


Figure 6. Household adjustments in response to financial pressures



IV. The future of farming

Our data reveals a strong underlying attachment to farming. Farming is not viewed solely as an economic activity, but also as a meaningful occupation tied to personal identity and lifestyle. Respondents express a high and consistent commitment to farming, both as a livelihood and as a way of life. A large majority report that they would choose to farm again if given the opportunity, and similarly indicate that they would continue farming even if they did not need to rely on it for regular household income (Figure 7). This willingness to continue farming in the absence of financial necessity highlights the intrinsic motivations that sustain engagement in agriculture. Relatively few farmers express uncertainty or indicate that they would not make the same choice again.

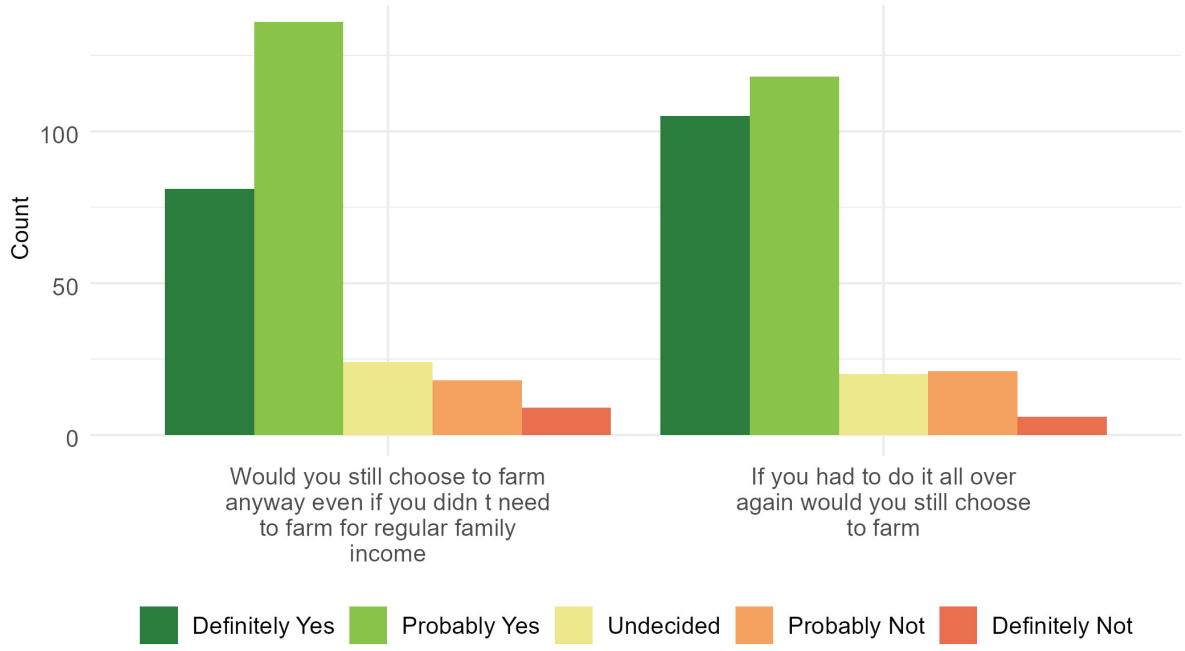


Figure 7. Farmers' commitment to farming

Farmers reflect on changes in well-being and economic conditions over time. Over the past five years, many farmers report that their family's quality of life has either improved or remained stable, with relatively fewer indicating a decline (Figure 8). Looking ahead, a large share anticipate that quality of life will remain the same, and a smaller proportion expects a decline. In contrast, farmers are less optimistic about broader economic conditions affecting agriculture. A greater share of respondents expect economic conditions to worsen rather than improve.

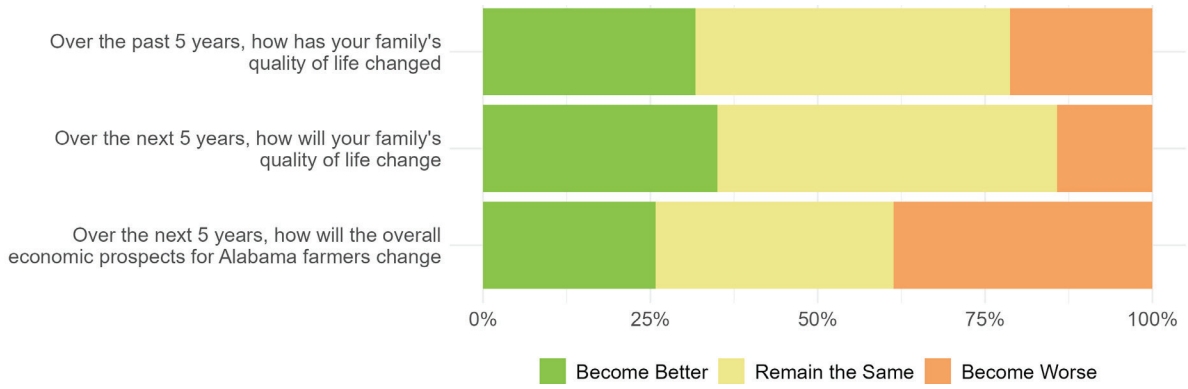


Figure 8. Perceptions of past and future changes in family well-being and economic prospects

While farmers feel supported socially and politically, they remain concerned about the long-term sustainability of farming (Figure 9). Most respondents perceive that the public in Alabama is generally supportive of agriculture. At the same time, respondents express concerns about the future of farming itself, as a strong majority indicate concern about the direction of agriculture in their area. There is also broad agreement that the state should increase investment in supporting young farmers.

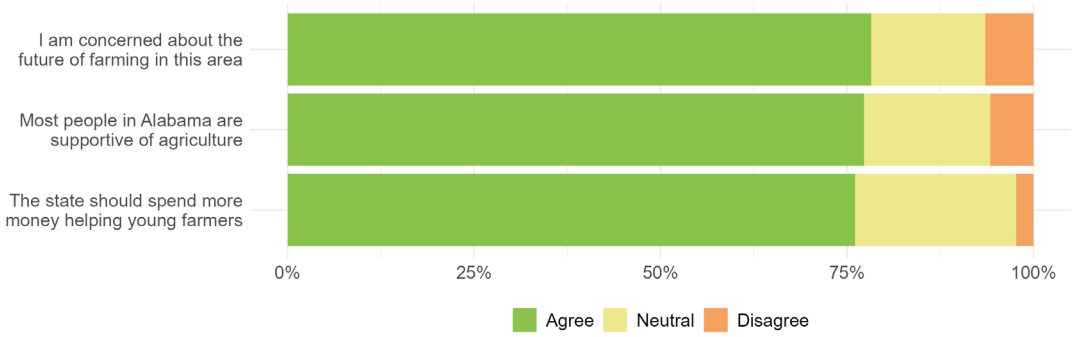


Figure 9. Farmers' perceptions of the future of agriculture and public support



IV. The future of farming (cont.)

Another important aspect regarding the future of farming in Alabama is succession planning. Our data shows notable gaps regardless of retirement intentions. Among farmers who do not plan to retire or quit farming in the next five years, a majority (54.6%) have not identified a potential successor, compared to 45.4% who have (Figure 10). Even among farmers expecting to exit in the near future, slightly more than half (51.1%) have not secured a transition plan, while 48.9% have made succession arrangements.

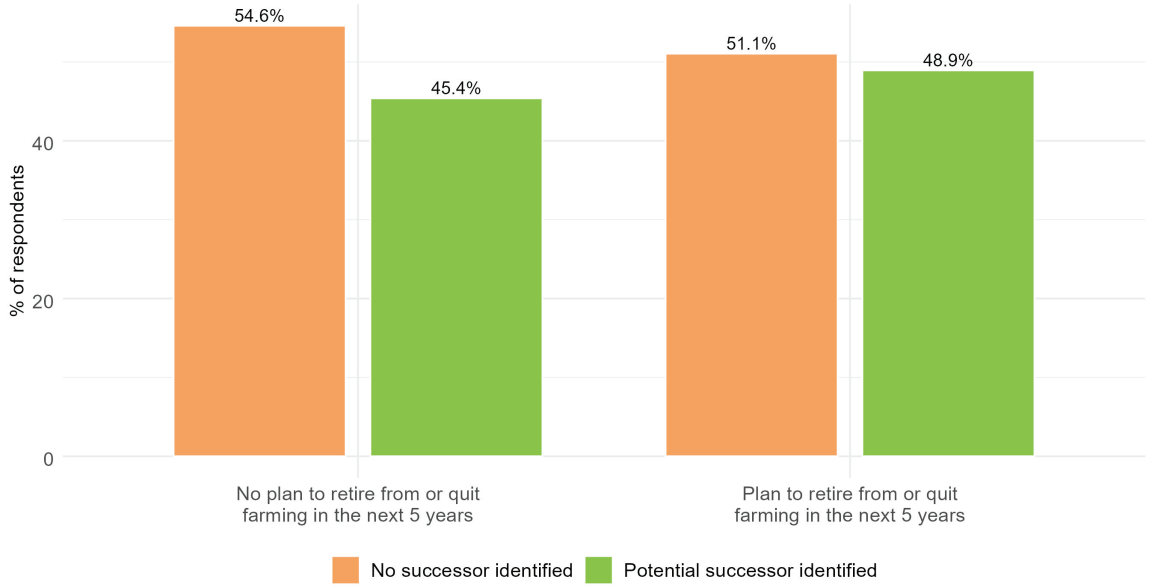


Figure 10. Succession planning among farmers by retirement intentions



Perspectives on intergenerational farm succession reveal a clear tension between aspiration and economic reality. Many farmers indicate that they would encourage their children to pursue farming, but a substantial share also agree that their children may not be able to afford to take over the farm (Figure 11). This suggests that sustaining family-based farming systems may require not only maintaining interest among younger generations but also improving the economic conditions that enable successful farm transitions.

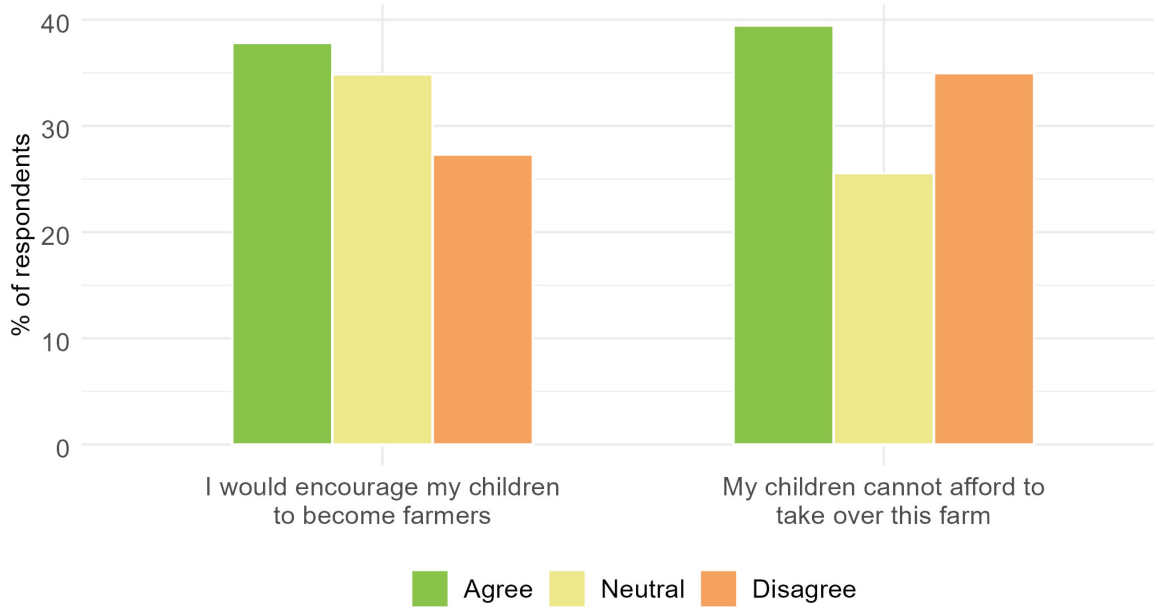


Figure 11. Farmers' perspectives on intergenerational farm succession



Conclusions

Overall, farmers responding to our survey share experiences that reflect a complex balance between strong personal commitment to farming and persistent structural challenges. While many farmers report satisfaction with their work, family life, and community relationships, economic pressures, particularly input costs, income stability, and access to time off, remain significant concerns. Respondents are actively adapting to these pressures, most often through cost-cutting and delaying investments, though fewer report pursuing expansion or diversification. At the same time, concerns about the future of farming and the ability to transfer farms to the next generation highlight broader questions about long-term sustainability. Therefore, addressing input cost pressures and supporting farm transition and succession programs will be critical to maintaining viable agricultural systems. There is also a clear need for continued support in financial management, risk mitigation, and decision-making tools.



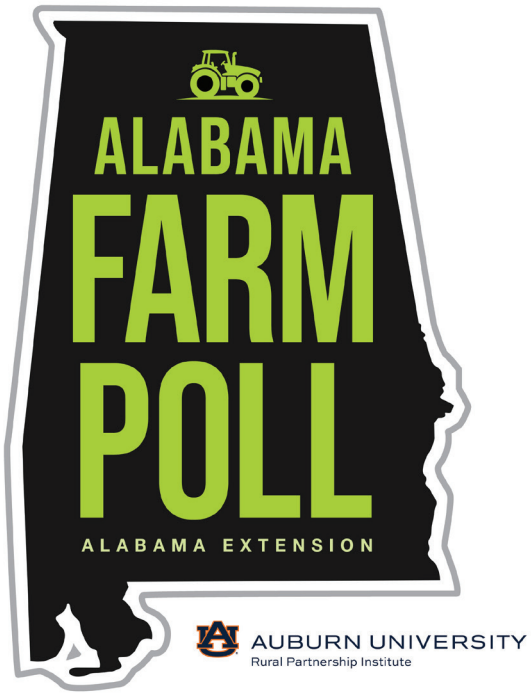






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