

The culture, politics, and realities of smaller-scale, family farming in the Parry Sound District: What's next?

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Overview

- About me and the project
 - Some key questions
- Results so far
- Discussion about next steps

About me

- Anthropologist working with farmers since 2003
- Agricultural and dietary transitions
 - Politics, economics, environment and climate, food security
 - Food crops versus cash crops

Project goals

- Develop an in-depth understanding of the diversity of food production in this area
 - Experiences, challenges, innovations
 - Values, priorities
- Inform public and policy discussions about agriculture in this area

Some key questions

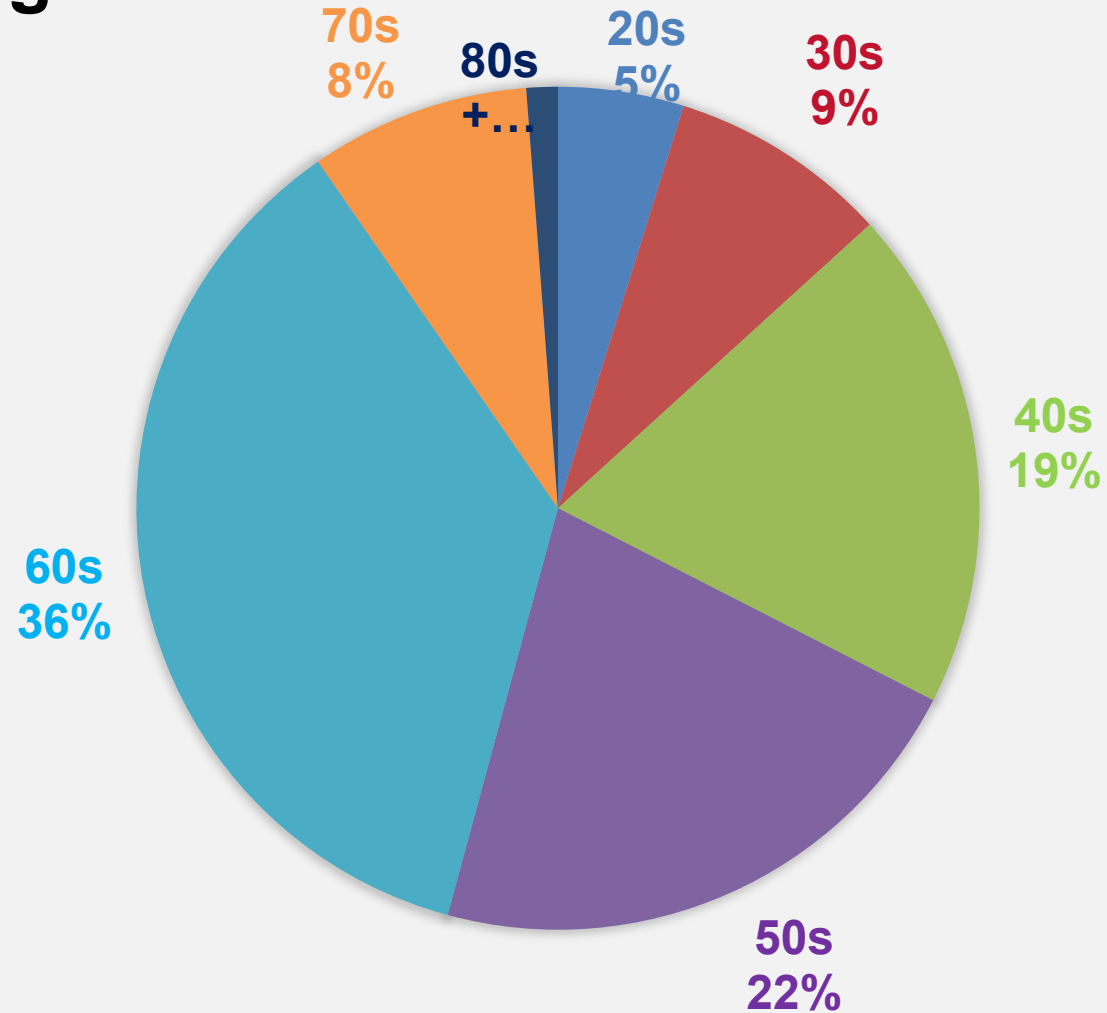
- **Experience and practical questions:**
 - What are some of the day-to-day challenges you experience as a farmer in this area?
 - Do you feel that current agricultural policies meet your needs?
 - What kinds of policies do you think would make a difference for farmers in this area?

Some key questions

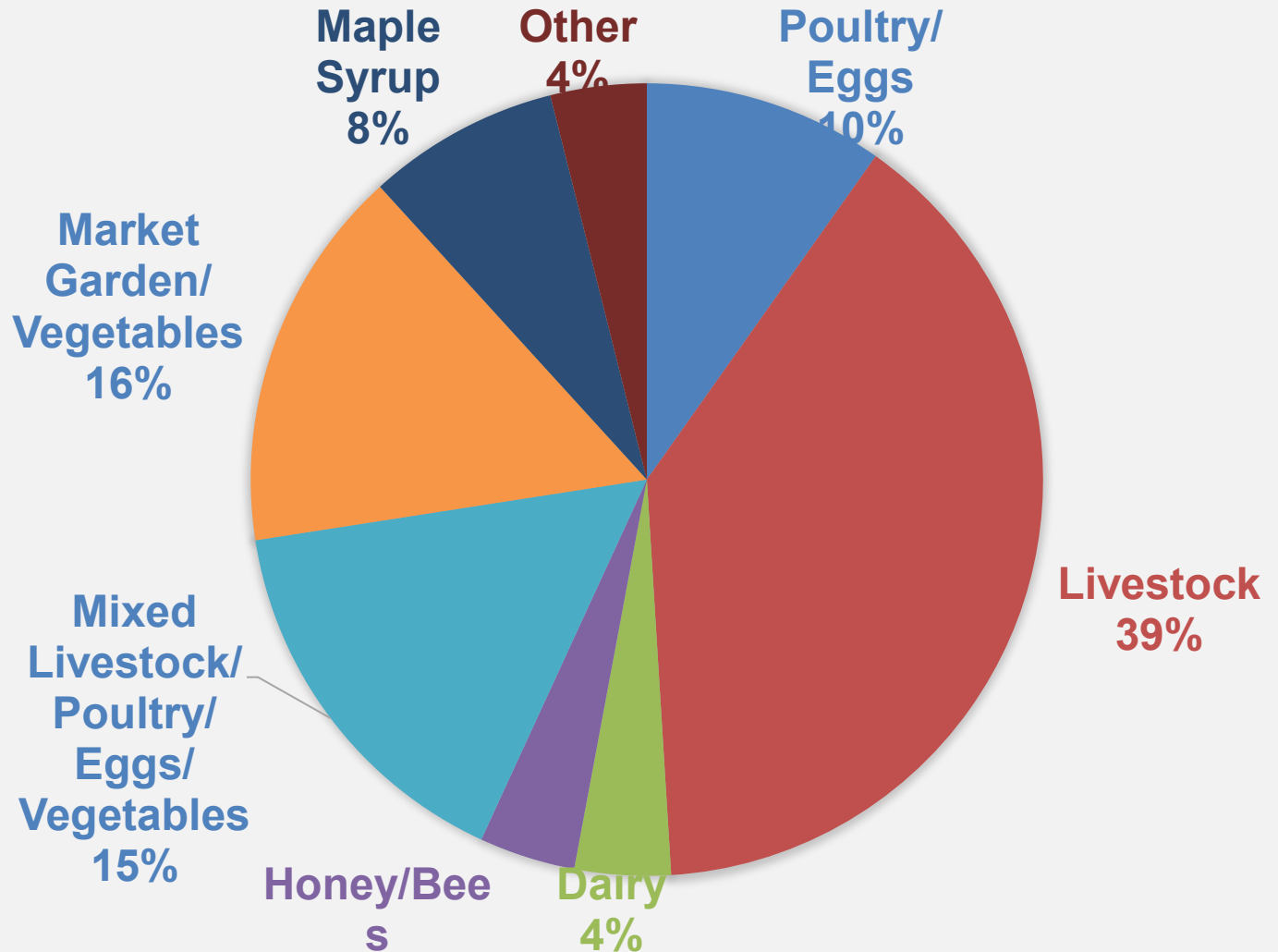
- **Potentials questions:**
 - What kind of potential do you think this part of Ontario has for farming?
 - How would you describe a local food system? Is this possible in the area?
- **Values questions:**
 - Can you tell me about your personal philosophy when it comes to farming?
 - What does sustainability mean to you?
 - What does 'good food' mean to you, when it comes to farming?

Who are the participants?

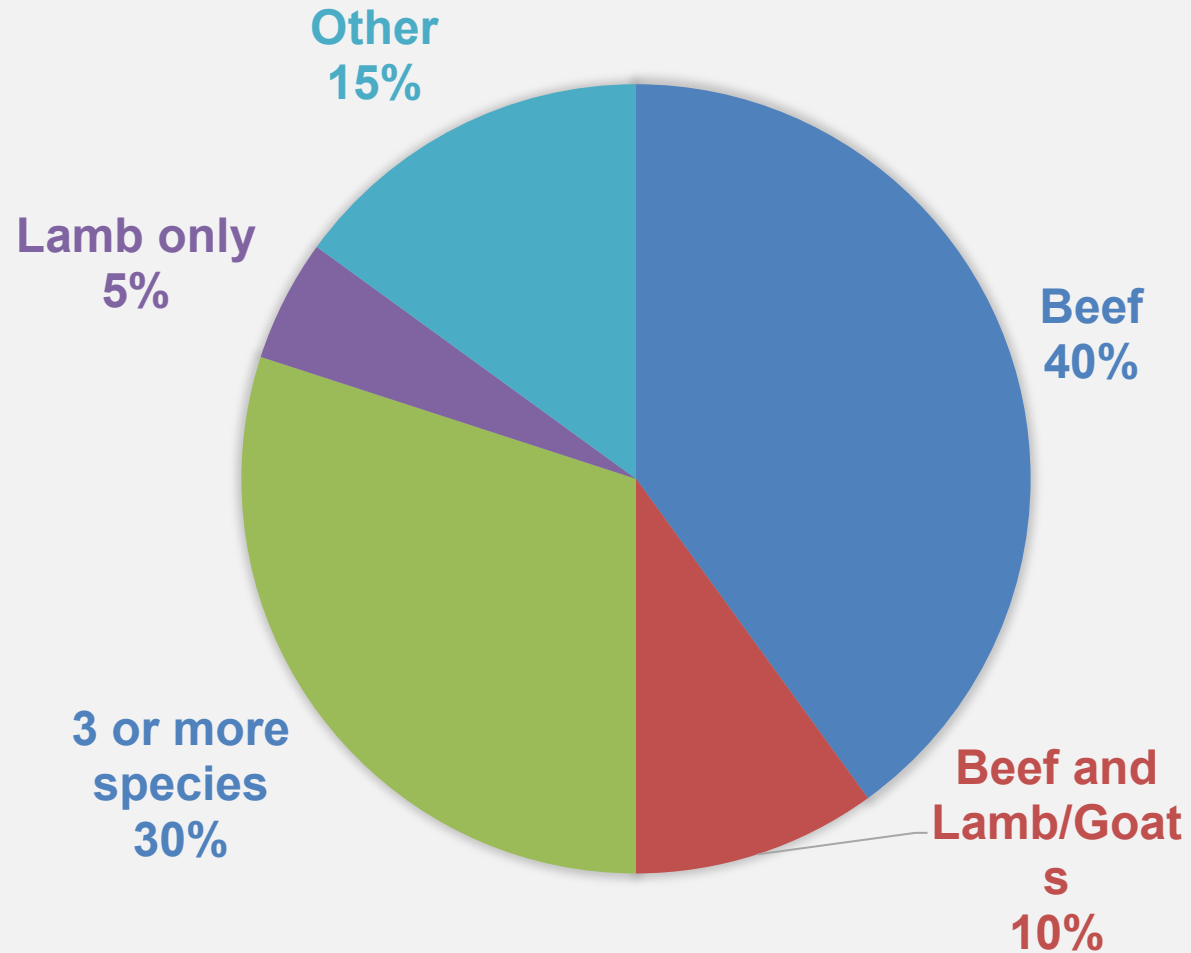
By age:



What are people producing?



'Livestock' breakdown



Experience and practical questions

- **Challenges:**

- Access to resources (equipment, feed, limestone, fertilizer, fence posts, drainage, Vets, knowledge and knowledge sharing)
- Climate – unpredictability
- Animals/predators
- “It tires you.” (**Beef farmer**)

What kinds of policies do you think would make a difference for farmers in this area?

- “The financing. It's expensive and you don't get it (money) until the end. With the SNAPP grant you need to have \$5000 first to get their money. And there's a lack of information – we don't get the same support as in the south.” **(Market gardener)**
- You can't carry prescription medicines now, you have to get them from the vet, but they don't come and look at the bees, so what's the point?... One of the medicines is preventative, and if you can't prove to the vet that you have the disease, you can't buy the medicine.” **(Beekeeper)**

What kinds of policies do you think would make a difference for farmers in this area?

- “Sometimes it’s about creative things that figure out how you can improve/address your problems. But there are so many problems and it costs so much. The government wants farming to be successful. But what are they putting in? It shouldn’t be free, but I’m pretty sure I’m putting in **my** work...I’m feeding Ontario, but I’m not earning anything...I’m doing the math, and what I’m doing for \$25 000 would leave any accountant asking what I’m doing. No other business would do this...**So I’m subsidizing Ontario’s food.**” (Beef farmer)
- “We're such a small area, we get overlooked and we have unique challenges.” (Beef farmer)

What kind of potential do you think this part of Ontario has for farming?

- **The land is ideal for beef, cow-calf, goat, sheep, dairy**
 - But, hay is an issue → especially with
 - **1) Old farms needing to be re-cleared/drained**
 - **2) Tourism and selling land for cottages (in some parts of the district)**
 - **3) Inability to get long-term haying contracts with non-farmer land-owners (unpredictability; disincentive)**
- **Market gardeners tend to see significant potential**
 - Climate change, longer seasons → **The potential for experimentation and expansion**

Values Questions: Can you tell me about your personal philosophy when it comes to farming?

- “Look after the animals, keep them healthy. It's to our benefit they're healthy.” (**Beef farmer**)
- “Build a strong community as much as we can...we participate in local organizations, we support the local butcher. We try to work with the natural system and build a resilient local community system.” (**Mixed livestock farmer**)

Values Questions: Can you tell me about your personal philosophy when it comes to farming?

- “I want to take care of the environment...I see the need for GMOs to help prevent diseases, but pounding all the herbicides and fungicides is a problem. Go for a holistic approach, above and under the soil. Like rotational grazing – it works. It’s better, it takes more time, but it can mean more animals on the ground, and taking care of the ground.”
(Mixed livestock farmer)

Values questions: What does sustainability mean to you?

- “Being able to have money in the bank, make a profit and still not have to go against your morals and what you stand for. And still be able to do improvements and keep going forward with it.” (**Mixed livestock farmer**)
- “We’re stewards of the land, everybody knows that...You’ve got to look after your land, your cattle. You’ve got to work together. People should see what farmers are doing, how cattle are raised, how everything is done. If you don’t look after your animals, you’re not going to make any money...” (**Mixed livestock farmer**)

Values questions: What does sustainability mean to you?

- “The OMAFRA point of view is that it’s easier to back one big farm than smaller ones. It’s not the way to go, but they will do it that way.” (**Mixed livestock farmer**)
- “The Endangered Species Act is part of our philosophy. We have a management program for grassland birds, and we try to avoid prime habitats, and not cut for hay until they’re done nesting.” (**Mixed livestock farmer**)

Local farmers have:

- The **passion and determination:**
 - For the work
 - For the animals
 - For the land
 - For communities
 - For growing or raising high-quality, healthy, and delicious food for Canadian families

Passion and determination

- “It’s a great job, I absolutely love it. I love to finish baling, looking at the whole field of round bales, and it’s, ‘I did that.’ When things are going well, I’m on a high.” (**Beef farmer**)
- “I think probably the whole lifestyle of being connected with the animals and nature and all of it. The connectedness, and something new everyday, and the learning never stops. The pure joy of seeing a calf being born and those chickens, and knowing that you're doing the best that you can with as little harm to the earth as well.” (**Mixed livestock farmer**)

Local farmers have:

- The **skills**:
 - Wealth of agricultural knowledge – established best practices and new techniques

Central practical question:

- What is needed, in terms of policy, programs, and infrastructure to **strengthen the economic and food contributions that farmers in this district are *already* making, and that could be pushed further?**
- How can we nurture this with explicit policy decisions, to better support farmers?

Discussion: Where should this project go next? What are *your* priorities?

- **What should be the priorities in determining:**
 - How to share the results so far?
 - Who should be reading the results?
 - How to use the results for specific goals?
- **Who else should I be talking to?**
 - Have I missed anything in my approach so far?

Many thanks to:

- All participants: Thank you for welcoming me to your homes, and sharing your time.
- The East Nipissing-Parry Sound OFA Board
- The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and University of Guelph (research funding)
- Elizabeth Holmes and Ellie Ruggles (Public Issues Anthropology MA graduate students)