

APPALACHIAN GROWN™ 2019 PRODUCER SURVEY REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

About the Appalachian Grown Program

ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. To support Southern Appalachian farms and build a local food system, ASAP developed the Appalachian Grown program in 2007 with the goal of expanding local market opportunities for farmers by providing a way for the public to easily identify products from local farms.

Appalachian Grown is a branding program for farms, farmers tailgate markets, retailers, and wholesalers that annually certifies food and agricultural products grown or raised on farms in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. This region includes 60 Appalachian counties in North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. A trusted label helps buyers and shoppers know when they are spending their dollars to the benefit of local family farms and communities. When consumers see the Appalachian Grown logo they know they're buying fresher foods that support family farms, strengthen the local economy, preserve rural culture, and protect the region's natural beauty.

In 2019, 917 farms were Appalachian Grown certified.

The Appalachian Grown 2019 Producer Survey

Every year since the Appalachian Grown (AG) program was founded, a survey has been sent to all AG farms to assess the impact of program services and support and gather feedback to shape the program's future direction.

In November 2019, this annual online survey was sent to 800 AG certified producers - those farmers for which we had a valid email address. The survey asked about their experiences in 2019. It opened November 1, 2019 and closed on November 25, 2019. A total of **225** out of the 800 producers completed the survey, a response rate of **28%**.

This report contains the findings from the survey.

KEY FINDINGS

Farmers and Farm Operations

Nearly ¾ of farmers farm in North Carolina - The largest number of respondents farm in Buncombe County followed by Henderson County.

Farmers produce food on a wide range of acres, but on average farms are smaller - the number of farm acres in production (including grazing and foraging lands) range from 1/4 of an acre to 1200 acres. The average was 59 acres, the median was 8.

¾ of farmers are new or beginning farmers - 75% of respondents have been farming for 10 years or less. This is much higher than the 29% of all Appalachian Grown farmers who are new or beginning.

Markets and Farm Sales

Farmers feel market opportunities are stable or increasing in 2019 - 89% felt there were the same number of market outlets or more market outlets available to them compared to 2018

Farmers' entering new market outlets is influenced by a number of factors - the top factor identified was increased market opportunities, followed by increased production.

Farmers use many strategies for building relationships with their customers - the highest rated strategies were sampling their products (84%), using social media (79%), and sharing their farm story (78%).

Farmers sell to both direct and wholesale markets - 92% of farmers sell to direct markets, 64% sell to wholesale markets. The average farmer sells to 3 different market outlets.

Farmers markets are the most popular market outlet, followed by restaurants and farm stores/stands- 61% of farmers sell some or all of their products at farmers markets, 49% sell some or all of their products to restaurants, 34% sell some or all of their products at farm stores/stands

Farmers reported increases in many market outlets in 2019 - The greatest number of farmers reported increased sales in CSAs (59%), online (55%), farm stores (53%), agritourism (52%), and farmers markets (50%).

Farmers expect to increase sales and expand into new market outlets in 2019 - the greatest number of farmers expect to expand into or increase sales in farmers markets (47%), restaurants (42%), and farm stands (36%).

Farmers sell primarily to local markets - 82% of farmers' total sales occurred within 100 miles of Asheville.

Farmers face multiple challenges in selling to local markets - among the most frequently cited challenges are production challenges, marketing, and competition (with both local and non-local products).

Participation in the Appalachian Grown Program

Farmers label their products with AG branding materials - 58% of farmers report labeling some or all of their products with AG materials (with labeling, boxes, twist ties, signage, etc).

Farmers report that the Local Food Guide is important for increasing their sales - of farmers that use the Local Food Guide, 69% reported the online guide is important for their sales, 77% reported the print guide was important for their sales

Farmers report that participation in the AG program impacts their farm business - the top reason given is the credibility the logo gives to their farm products which makes it easier for customers to buy local.

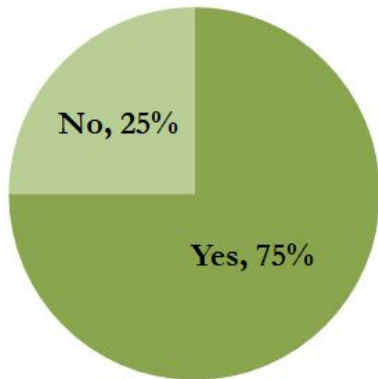
Summary of Key Findings Over the Last 4 Years

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Farmers and Farm Operations				
% of respondents who have been farming for 10 years or less	46% n=252	56% n=237	74% n=191	75% n=209
% of respondents who fit the USDA's definition of a limited resource farm	34% n=252	35% n=235	37% n=192	38% n=209
% of respondents currently growing or that have grown tobacco	15% n=253	18% n=239	14% n=193	16% n=211
% of respondents who are former tobacco quota holders	17% n=253	19% n=238	11% n=193	14% n=211
% of respondents growing on former tobacco land	31% n=252	31% n=239	32% n=193	37% n=211
Average # of farm acres in production (including grazing and foraging lands)	38.5 n=245	42.8 n=236	30.8 n=188	59 n=209
Markets and Farm Sales				
% of respondents who indicated that there are fewer market outlets available in the current year than in the previous year	13% n=231	10% n=228	14% n=175	11% n=185
Average % of respondents' sales that were sold to local markets (within approximately 100 miles of Asheville)	81% n=191	73% n=220	76% n=162	82% n=176

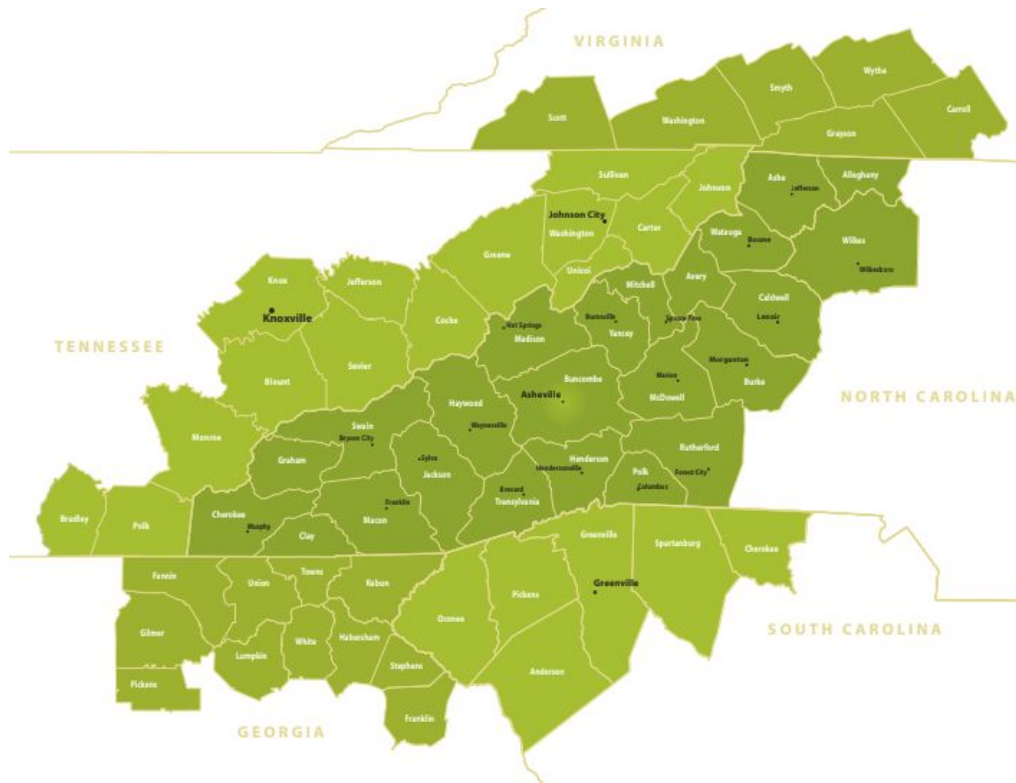
FINDINGS

Farms and Farm Operations

75% of farmers have been farming for 10 years or less



72% of Appalachian Grown farmers farm in North Carolina



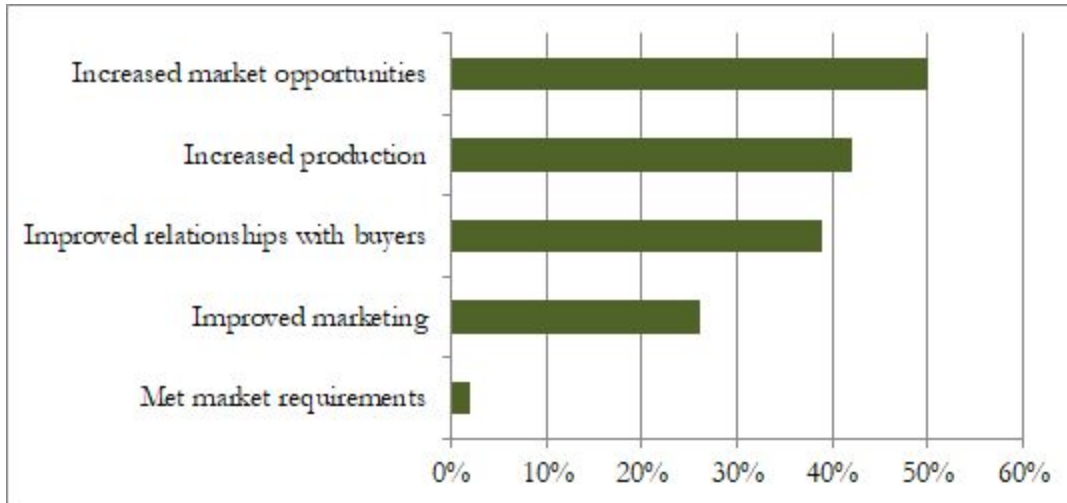
The average farm size is **59 acres**, the median is **8 acres**

Markets and Farm Sales

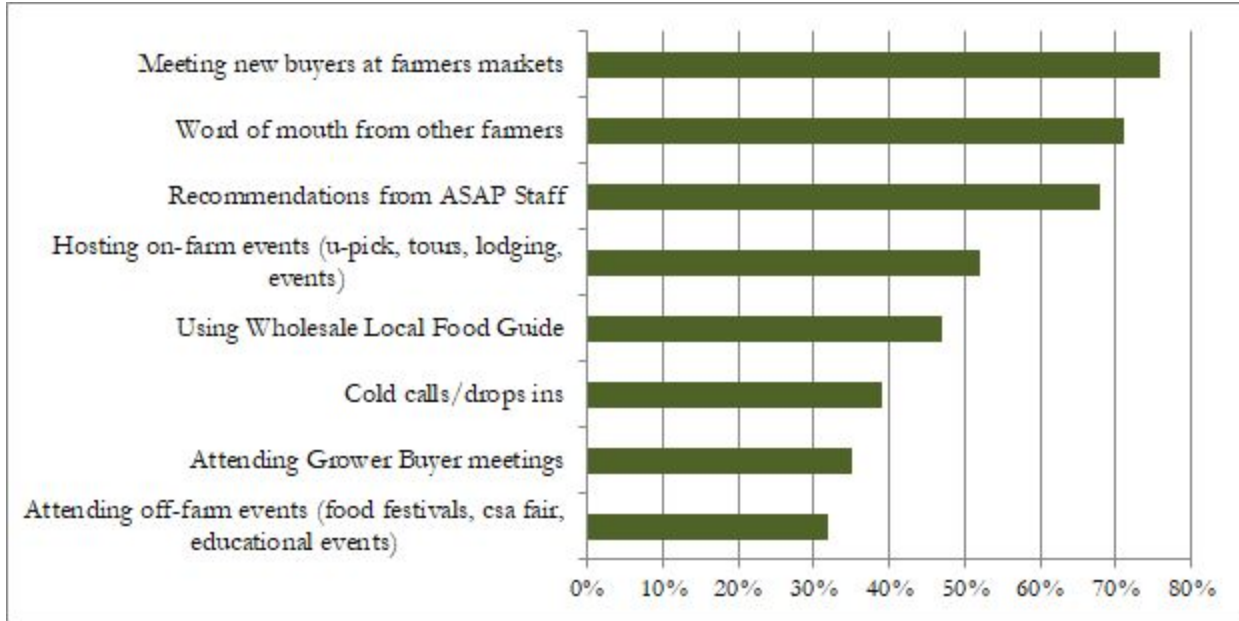
39% of farmers reported more market opportunities to sell their products in 2019 than in 2018



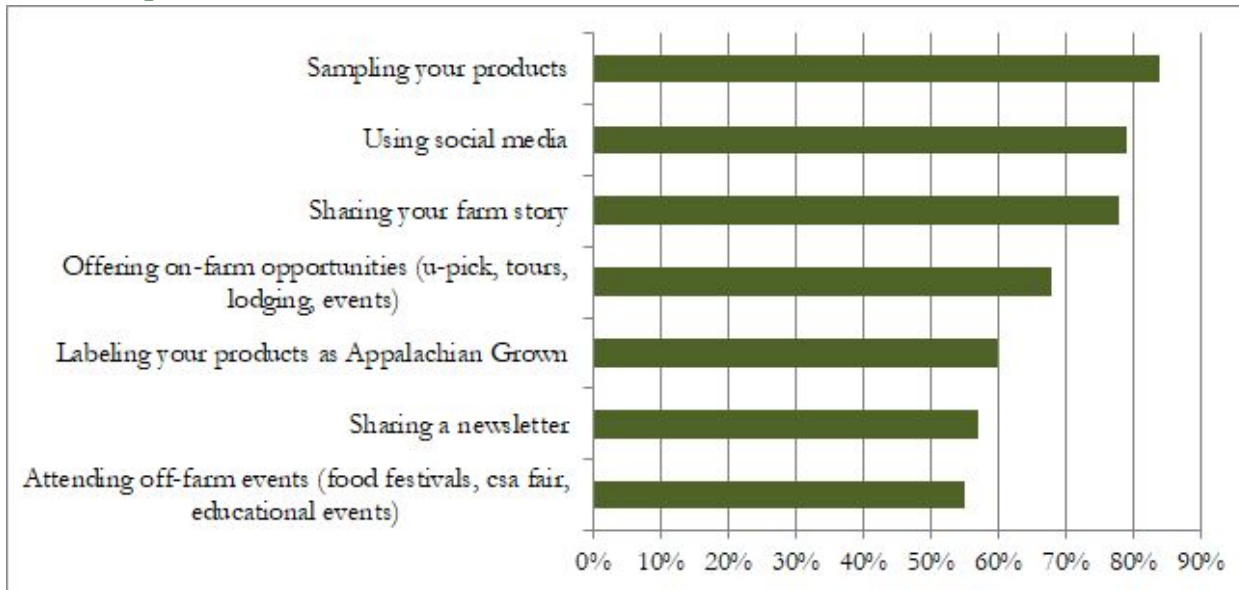
Factors that influenced farmers' expansions into new markets in 2019



Strategies farmers used and rated as ‘useful’ or ‘extremely useful’ for finding new buyers

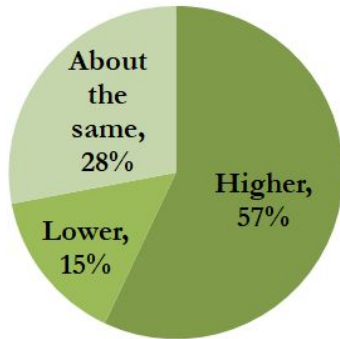


Strategies farmers used and rated as ‘useful’ or ‘extremely useful’ for building customer relationships

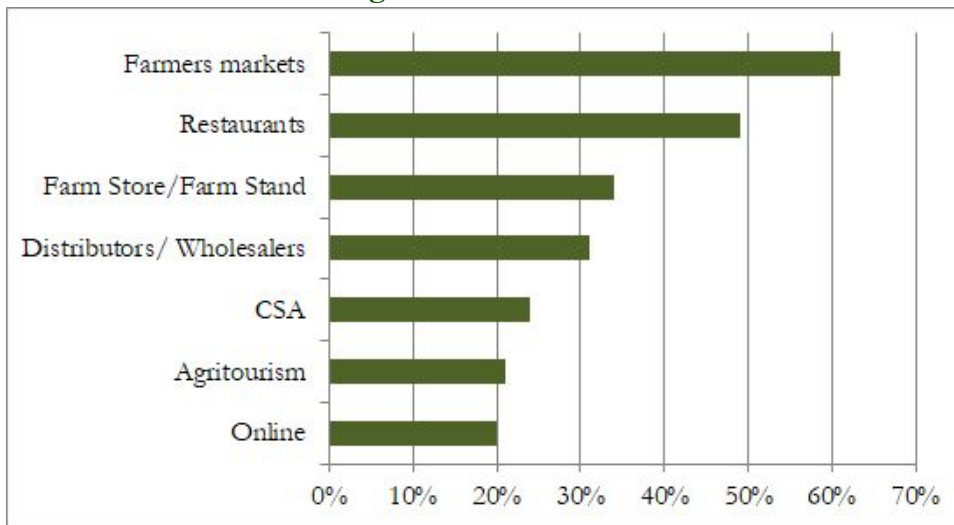


On average, **82%** of farmers’ total sales occurred within 100 miles of Asheville

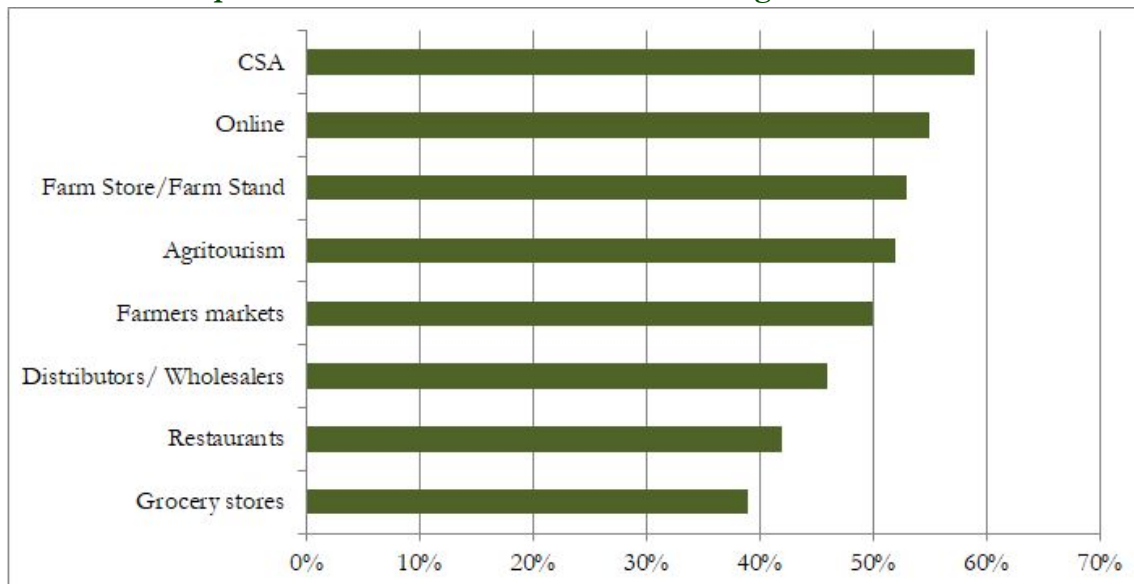
57% of farmers reported their gross sales were higher in 2019 than 2018



Farmers sell to the following market outlets



Farmers that experienced sales increases in the following markets from 2018 to 2019



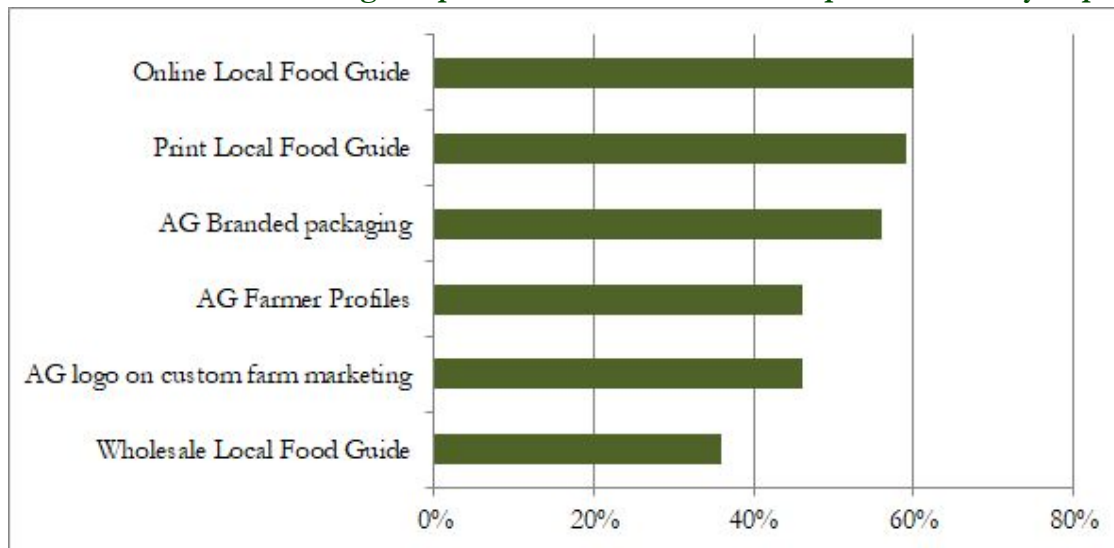
Farmers face the following challenges in selling to local markets

Emergent Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Marketing (n=17)	<p>“Creating and selling my story”</p> <p>“Clearly communicating our farm's value”</p>
Production challenges (n=17)	<p>“Access to working capital”</p> <p>“Land to increase the operation”</p>
Competition (n=16)	<p>“Competition from Washington State during our harvest season”</p> <p>“Getting to new restaurants before they've already made other connections.”</p>
Sufficient or Consistent Demand (n=15)	<p>“Getting more customers to the farmers markets where I sell”</p> <p>“Consistent sales. Chefs can't decide to shop buying mid-season”</p>
Challenges with market outlets (n=15)	<p>“Getting appointments with wholesale and restaurant accounts”</p> <p>“Getting settled into established farmers market”</p>
Sufficient or Consistent Supply (n=12)	<p>“Having enough product to meet demand”</p> <p>“Producing enough for consistent sales over several weeks”</p>
Time (n=12)	<p>“Working around market times”</p> <p>“Time for distribution”</p>
Pricing (n=11)	<p>“We cannot grow for the price restaurants want to pay for it”</p> <p>“Price compared to conventional”</p>
Customer Education (n=10)	<p>“Getting people to appreciate local food as a better choice for them and the environment”</p> <p>“Educating retail customers to buy local/ learn how to cook “non convenient” cuts- i.e. whole chicken, etc.”</p>
Labor (n=10)	<p>“Shortage of farm labor!”</p> <p>“Finding qualified labor, especially full-time, that would allow us to expand to meet demand”</p>
Distribution (n=5)	<p>“Post-growing costs like delivery costs are 75% of total production costs”</p> <p>“Keeping produce fresh during transport”</p>

Participation in the Appalachian Grown Program

58% of farmers reported identifying some or all of their products with AG labeling

Farmers rated the following AG promotional materials as ‘important’ or ‘very important’



The impact ASAP’s Appalachian Grown Program has had on farmers (selected testimonials)

“Appalachian Grown has helped our farm with the development of marketing materials since the beginning of our journey in agriculture. We couldn't imagine being where we are without ASAP and AG.”

“The AG program has not only provided us with many tools, connections, and information that has helped our farm move forward much quicker, but the program and the people in it have also helped us feel supported as beginning farmers: encouraging us to continue our efforts to fulfill our dreams!”

“People have stopped us in town and read the logo and are glad to see that we have it on our vehicle. Then they ask if we have a card.”

“A large selling point for our farm is the AG labeling of our products (especially our honey). It generates talking points with our customers and once they understand what ASAP is all about they become supportive.”

“The AG program was instrumental in helping us establish relationships with customers for our new online market.”