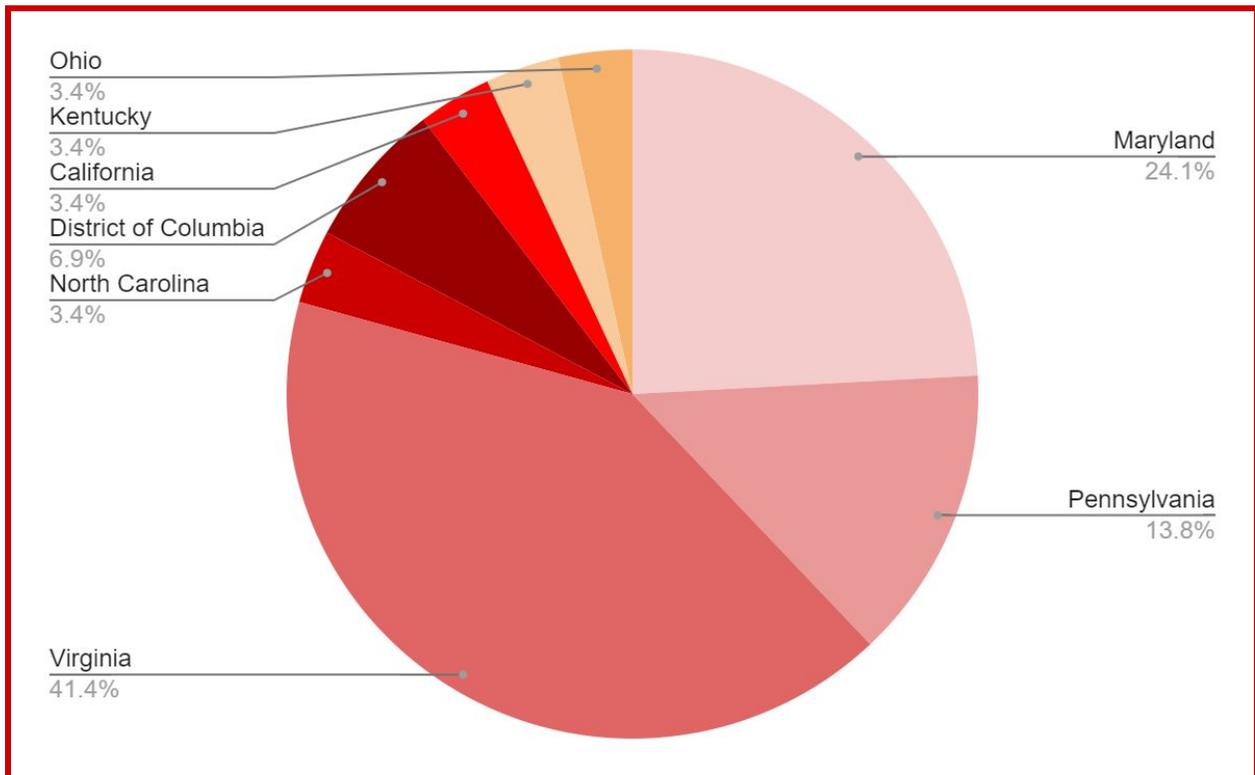


53 producers participated. This map on the left shows where the producers' farm businesses were located.

On average each of these farms employed at least one additional person besides themselves. The most reported employees for a single farm business was eleven.

Answers were provided to this survey between September 1, 2020 until October 12, 2020.

69.8% of respondents sold products in West Virginia only; 30.2% of respondents participate in interstate commerce.



Common Concerns Throughout the Survey:

- Processing Facilities
 - Large livestock slaughterhouses and other meat processing facilities
 - Produce processing facilities for dehydration and preservation
 - Unknown availability of canning facilities
 - Obtaining processing authority is unaffordable
 - Uncertainty among producers about what requires process authority
- Regulations, fees and permits required from all agencies
 - Individual producers do not know what is needed for licenses on federal, state, county, and city levels
 - DHHR/WVDA inconsistencies within some counties
 - DHHR frequently fights rabbit exemption
 - Inspections from USDA, DHHR, and WVDA for one product
 - Define “local”
- Business Development Assistance
 - Identifying and maintaining sales outlets
 - Insurance for on-farm processing poultry
 - Understanding labeling requirements
- Travel, distance, and infrastructure
 - Road conditions and distance to sales outlets
 - Low population density
 - Lack of consistent internet access
- Land Availability for Agriculture
- COVID-19 as it relates to businesses and families

Producers provided their awareness of each of the following:

Recent Legislative Change	Known	Unknown	Other
Micro Dairy Exemption	20.3%	42.7%	37.0%
On-Farm Poultry Processing Exemption	44.4%	24.2%	31.4%
2019 Cottage Food Bill - Legalized non-potentially hazardous foods	69.8%	20.8%	9.4%
Transfer regulation of Farmers Markets to WVDA	62.3%	37.7%	-
Cottage Foods for Permitted Vendors	52.9%	37.7%	9.4%
On-farm Rabbit Exemption	35.9%	26.4%	37.7%
Dual Permitting Requirements between DHHR and WVDA	39.6%	32.1%	28.3%
Reduced Permitting on Egg Producers	41.6%	35.9%	22.6%

Producer Barriers in Public Policy						
Major Concern	Access to Capital					Low Concern
	13.7%	11.8%	15.7%	15.7%	43.1%	
	Taxes and Fees					
	7.4%	16.7%	20.4%	29.6%	25.9%	
	Regulations and Public Policy					
	13.2%	18.9%	28.3%	26.4%	13.2%	
	Workforce					
	10.9%	14.5%	27.3%	20.0%	27.3%	
	Sales Opportunities/Outlets					
	20.4%	22.2%	27.8%	11.1%	18.5%	
	Environmental Concerns					
	17.0%	11.3%	28.3%	18.9%	24.5%	
	Access to Property					
	11.5%	15.4%	5.8%	17.3%	50.0%	
	Lack of Equipment					
	21.2%	13.5%	9.6%	25.0%	30.8%	
Access to Education or Training						
3.8%	7.5%	20.8%	28.3%	39.6%		
Broadband or Reliable Internet Connection						
32.7%	15.4%	13.5%	11.5%	26.9%		

Comments from Producers

On Transfer of Regulations to WVDA:

"I am still required to get a food establishment permit to sell meat at a farmers market. Our health department told us three different things that we needed to be legal, when we knew we needed a food establishment permit. We currently have a valid mobile food permit that they gave to us, because they don't even know their own rules. It is also ridiculous they could come into my house and inspect me, even though my meats are USDA processed. Get health departments out of farmers markets 100%."

"I am having to rebuild my working relationship with regulators but it is as expected. I do have more effort and expense on my part to get the samples out - have to pack them in ice (which I have to purchase) and get over to the UPS store to ship my samples whereas before they picked them up and did all the shipping work."

"It would be better if the health department had zero input and the Dept of Ag would be firm, take control and not make excuses that all 55 counties are different and that we may have to get permission from our local health dept in order to operate our businesses."

On Dual Permitting Requirements between DHHR and WVDA:

"I have a food manufacturing permit and grade A dairy distribution permit and dairy permit and then in addition I have to get a food manufacturing permit in any county where a market I participate in is located. Redundant and costly. Seems just like a money grab."

On Reduced Permitting on Egg Producers:

"Health department is still not allowing upgraded eggs as of September 25, 2020."

"We got an egg permit once, back when we had chickens. I don't think it made our eggs safer. But it was also one of the easiest pieces of paperwork I've ever had to fill out, and it cost less than the cartons. I don't think I would worry about this one."

On Barriers in Public Policy affecting Agriculture Businesses:

"I'm looking forward to hearing more about the federal bill to override USDA regulations for on-farm meat sales."

"These are the kind of changes we need to keep small farms in business. Need more information on what is going on."

"Any reduction of government regulations will positively affect agriculture in our state. If you are concerned about food safety regarding canned products being sold at markets, then have people go through a class so they know what they should do to properly make those products. Don't outsource regulations and testing to other states. One regulation that needs to change is the WV DOH sign permitting. We are not allowed to post a sign for a farmers market on the interstate because we aren't open for a minimum 40 hours a week. If you want people to attend farmers markets, let farmers markets apply for a Wv doh permit so markets can more easily be known to customers. This is common sense regulation that can be approved. I will testify in the capitol to get this bill through."

"Covid restrictions had a huge impact on the viability of farmers markets. Those that remained open and allowed on site selling did well and have recovered, those that shut down completely and then opened with severe restrictions have really suffered. And my supply has been greatly impacted. For example I couldn't get paper towels for our creamery operation. We have had a hard time buying enough brown sugar for our caramel. We couldn't get gloves for a while, or rubbing alcohol which is used in our dairy and creamery for various tasks. The shutdowns are responsible for these shortages."

"Anything that would help other farmers, or encourage others to become farmers or producers, would benefit our market, which in turn would benefit my business."

"We notice a lot of our fellow market vendors taking advantage of new opportunities, thank you for your work!"

"Interstate Commerce and Dual Permitting!! Please help us tackle these."

"SNAP Stretch allows me to price products at a farmer-fair price point; one that accounts for the labor we put into it. But they ran out of money in the middle of the summer. The State of WV should help fund that program."

On Favorable Laws in Other States:

"Before the changes above, the regulations are about the same as ours on what we sell. With the changes, ours will be easier to comply with."

"Costs are less at our DC market - no food manufacturing permit required, no sales tax required. Virginia sales tax hurts us, so that is something West Virginia is more favorable."

“Easier and less complicated permitting, for sure.”

On Current Regulations Causing Hardships for Producers:

“USDA and WVDA inspection availability and accessibility.”

“The lack of tax benefit for food donations, especially considering compared to MD and MD/DC suburbs.”

“Raw milk. On farm poultry processing.”

“We need a common sense approach when it comes to the Past. Milk Ordinance. It is a one size fits all set of rules and regulations. We operated a small dairy farm that was permitted and IMS listed to produce and bottle cream line whole milk. We wanted to produce other products but could not afford the approved equipment at 10 times the cost. We underwent countless inspections every year even though there was not a problem with anything. We would like to get back in business whenever we can afford to.”

“Cottage food laws- we can't sell baked goods at markets across state lines. Poultry exemption-can't sell across state lines”

“Antibiotic Testing of every batch (despite knowing I haven't given goats any antibiotic so there can't possibly be any in my milk). Duplication - inspection by FDA for Food Manufacturing Permit, inspection by WV for food manufacturing permit, inspection by FDA for milk processing, inspection by WV for milk processing (PMO), Dept of Health permit for food manufacturing in each county for markets I participate in, and from Dept of Health for Food Manufacturing statewide.”

“Again, the USDA inspection requirement on meat. I raise the animals in WV, transport to MD to be processed at a USDA facility, haul frozen meat back to WV, store it and then sell. That requirement is extremely burdensome this year because processing plants are backlogged. I had to sell most of my lamb crop at the sale barn because it would not hold until the slaughter date I was given.”

“Issuing WIC and Senior Vouchers earlier in the season would benefit some of our farmers with early season crops such as strawberries and asparagus.”

“WV restrictions on canned goods that need checked, commercial kitchen information. Unable to find anyone who can tell us what is required for a commercial kitchen.”

“Egg permits costing more money than I can make from sales is a big problem.”

"I don't really feel like regulations cause hardship to my business. I feel like it's everything else -- competing with the cheap food at Kroger or Piggly Wiggly, the loss of well-paying jobs that leads to fewer customers able to purchase food at farmer-fair prices, monopolization of groceries and the loss of neighborhood grocery stores, the lack of effective treatment options for people suffering from addiction (because they can't get jobs that allow them to afford my produce, and because it makes it hard to find farm labor), the overwhelming costs of higher ed and healthcare, the lack of investment in roads, the poisoning of land, air, and water by coal and gas companies, and the inability of local policy makers to take agriculture seriously as a type of economic development. Don't get me wrong, I don't think it's fun to fill out forms and all that; regulations are annoying. But we've been cutting regulations in this country my whole life (I'm almost 40), and I don't think it's helped agriculture at all."

Suggestions for changes to regulations causing hardships:

"Open up an option for at least intrastate purchases of farm processed meats... some sort of rental processing trailer or something... I don't have a problem following reasonable guidelines, but there has to be a way to work around centralized processing (which has failed)."

"Increase the amount of tax benefit for donating food to non profits and food shelves. We'd like to do more work with them and our community needs it."

"Thru WV Department of Agriculture and US Department of Agriculture."

"Rewrite the Past. Milk Orn. with regulations that are applicable for small producers."

"Ohio gives their cottage food producers a license similar to a commercial kitchen so they can cross state lines. Also health departments are horrible and don't know what they're doing."

"Exempt micro creameries from testing their own milk and instead do random sampling of product to confirm no antibiotics. Allow different agencies to accept permits from other entities so we don't have to get them from each locality."

"Allow state inspected meat to be sold across state lines."

"Issue vouchers in April or early May."

"The shutdowns hurt us in the spring. We are plant sellers. Our peak season was over by July When restrictions became more relaxed."

“Be able to sell home canned goods at markets without restrictions or being able to have them checked near us with no charge. Get correct information on this and commercial kitchen requirements.”

“Lower costs of permits and consolidate into one department.”

“Eliminate the DHHR from permitting food establishment permits.”

Answers to the question “What other policy changes are needed that would positively affect your business or farmers market?”:

“Streamline regulations.”

“We need regional milk processing to spread the cost of equipment to a number of farms, not just one. This also could be connected with a college or other educational organization and they can operate it. The business department can market it. The products can be used by the college and other state organizations as well as private sales.”

“Young farmers can’t afford property to start farming and leasing isn’t the answer. We need new ideas like tax incentives to sell to approved young farmers or something along those lines. Also farmers are receiving so much money from oil and gas, they are using farms as a tax write off. This is also another reason why not much land is available.”

“Address the issue of deer damage to crops.”

“Free healthcare & higher ed for all citizens, raise the amount of money people on food stamps get, triple the minimum wage, make polluters clean up after themselves, and give free farmland (& free utilities) to anyone who's actually going to use it to grow crops.”

Final Remarks:

“The Frontier Communication lines have deteriorated so badly in our area that we had to cancel our internet because it either didn’t work or was too slow. Now we have to do all of our social media marketing via cell phone.”

“Introduction of additional product lines to better serve current customers [of the WVFMA].”

"[Additional challenges include:] Covid. Lack of childcare. Distance learning."

"Online sales have not made up for face to face selling."

"We have increased our social media presence and added a few additional vendors."

"[We] advertised on facebook"

"Increase social media presence, also assist with more community events to help spread word."

"COVID-19 has kept some farmers market vendors from attending markets. We also can't have our chef give out food samples at the market due to WVDA/DHHR rules. This has drastically affected our sales at markets. Also there are farmers that are selling produce bought at auction and are not properly labeling their produce where it is sourced. WVDA has looked the other way, and small farmers can't keep up. Our farm business can't expand more because farmers buy at an auction and sell it as their own."

"Using online sales in the initial part of the season helped offset the lower sales at market. Sales at markets that shut down or dramatically changed their protocols were hugely reduced and have not recovered significantly. Sales at markets where safety measures were implemented but procedures were minimally changed saw increase in sales and they have remained strong. We've seen big increases in on-farm sales that have slowed some, but remain up from previous years. I finally updated my website and that has been of benefit both in sales and in reaching my customers."

"The inability to harvest animals has caused a decline in gross receipts and loss of customers."

"Targeted social media has done well for us, but due to COVID-19 restrictions we could not do food demos or have events with children (unless it was very small and scheduled and that just doesn't work at our market). I do think we lost a lot of population this year since we did not have many placemaking activities."

"More online sales, more delivery, transition to tourism to provide outdoor safe recreation."

"Online sales and increased social media have been positive."

"No fall festivals extremely hurt our business. We sell 60 percent of our farm income at fairs and festivals. Offering contactless porch pick up on-farm was added and successful."

“More farm site sales”

“Increased expenditures for special packaging due to COVID-19. Sales down 30% from 2019.”

“Retail exemption with a federal inspected product, social media platform, and honestly COVID-19 has been a positive in the sense that people are beginning to understand and rely on their local producers.”

“Our community (farmers) market started later than usual this spring due to confusion and fear of COVID-19.”

“Increased social media [usage].”

“Online sales and social media have improved exposure.”

“We started a Facebook page for our market. It worked very well at the beginning of the season and then fizzled toward the end.”

“[We started] online sales.”

“Increased social media [usage].”

“Honestly, the pandemic. It feels awful to say so, but it seems like people only want to buy local when they can't find it at the grocery store. Increased social media usage didn't really seem to do anything, and increasing crop varieties (diversification) seems to have hurt us a bit -- it's made us less reliable.”