

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

---

Cooperative Extension - Agriculture

Maine Food System

---

2022

## “Why Are You Seeking Out Farm Training?” 2022 New Farmer Survey Results

Jonathan Malacarne

Christina Howard

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/extension\\_ag](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/extension_ag)



Part of the [Agricultural Education Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Cooperative Extension - Agriculture by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).



+

## **“Why Are You Seeking Out Farm Training?” 2022 New Farmer Survey Results**

by Jonathan Malacarne, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Maine, and Christina Howard, Equipping New Farmers Program Manager, University of Maine Cooperative Extension



## “Why Are You Seeking Out Farm Training?” 2022 New Farmer Survey

**Results** by Jonathan Malacarne, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Maine, and Christina Howard, Equipping New Farmers Program Manager, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

The “Why Are You Seeking Out Farm Training?” survey received 118 responses in the winter of 2022 from new and beginning farmers. According to the USDA, new and beginning farmers are people who have been farming for less than 10 years. The responses came from every county in Maine (see figure 1). There were responses from every adult age bracket with the highest percentage (25%) in the 35-44 range. 71 percent of the respondents self-identified as women, 15% were veterans or in active military service, 71% self-identified as white, and 16% self-identified as having a disability. UMaine Extension educators will use the survey results to design farm trainings. These trainings will be based on the interests and needs of new and beginning farmers.

The funding for this survey is from the USDA-NIFA grant that funds the Maine New Farmers Project (MNFP). The goals of MNFP include teaching farm production and farm business practices to new farmers. The target is to reach underserved populations in Maine, specifically women and veterans.

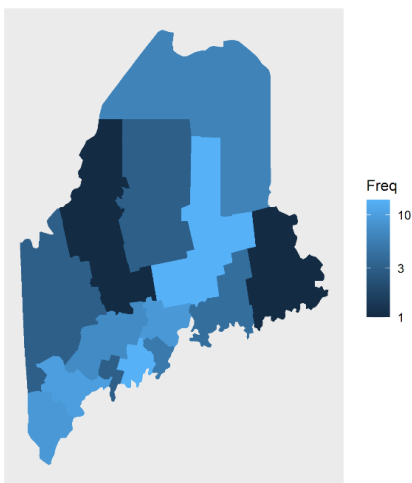


Figure 1: The survey generated 118 responses from across Maine with each of the 16 counties represented. This figure shows the counties denoted by bright blue (Penobscot and Lincoln) had the most responses and the counties in dark blue (Somerset and Washington) had the least responses.

As part of the survey, new farmers identified their current roles in Maine agriculture. They also shared their short-term (1–4 years) and long-term (5–10 years) goals (see figure 2). Most people responded that they are already working in agriculture and have recently started farms. Many of those farmers are planning to diversify their farm businesses over the next 10 years. A smaller number of new farmers are not yet involved in agriculture but are interested in starting farms in the short or long term. This information is useful for understanding the goals of new farmers who responded to the survey. It also is useful to show who did not respond to the survey. For example, we did not hear from many people who were currently working on farms that they do not own. We also didn't hear from people who hope to work on, but not own, farms in the longer term. When asked to choose their top 5 interests, respondents showed interest in growing vegetables (61 responses), small fruit and berries (56 responses), tree fruit (48 responses), forestry (38 responses), goats/sheep (30 responses), poultry (32 responses), hay/forage (28 responses), ornamentals (25 responses), swine (19 responses), beef (18 responses), and dairy (11 responses) and aquaculture (5 responses).

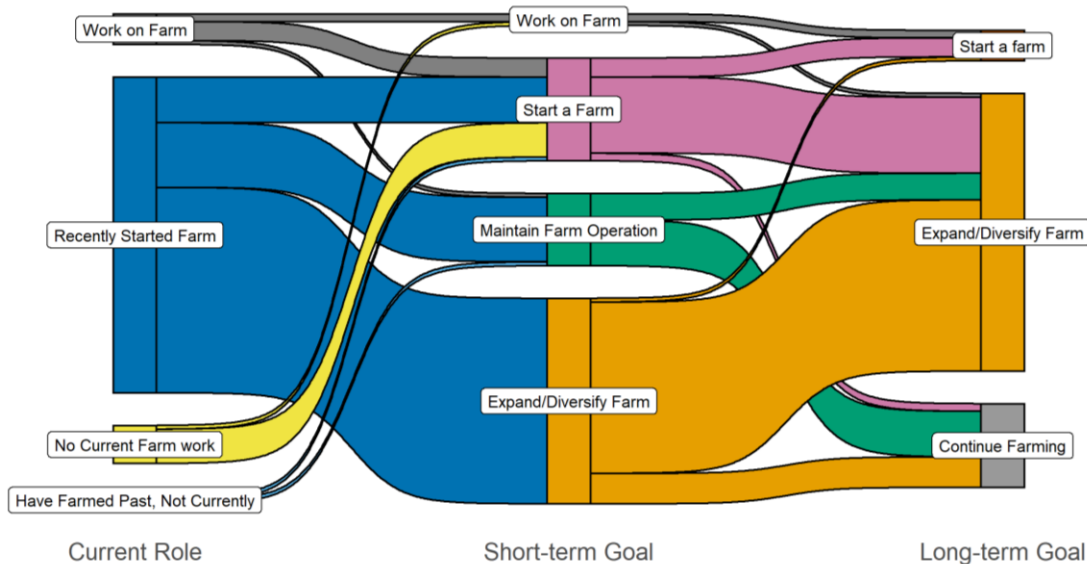


Figure 2: Farmers who responded to the survey showed how they are participating in agriculture (see the first column labeled “Current Role”). Follow the path of each “Current Role” to see their “Short-term Goal” (column 2) and “Long-term Goal” (column 3). If the “path” is wider, more new farmers responded that they are on that “path” and have similar goals.

The survey asked new farmers how they see and are affected by the challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. They were also asked to choose topics they want to be trained on. UMaine Extension educators will use this information to design production, sales, and management training sessions that will interest new and beginning farmers.

Figure 3 shows that production risk and the cost of inputs and labor are the top challenges facing Maine agriculture in general. Consumer demand for and willingness to pay for traits such as “local” and “organic” and value-added products to capture a greater share of the food dollar are seen as the greatest opportunities.

Figure 4 shows that collaborative marketing, online sales, and farm stands are the top three sales and management training needs mentioned. How to obtain financing, improve bookkeeping, and set business goals are tops among the business management training interests of survey respondents.

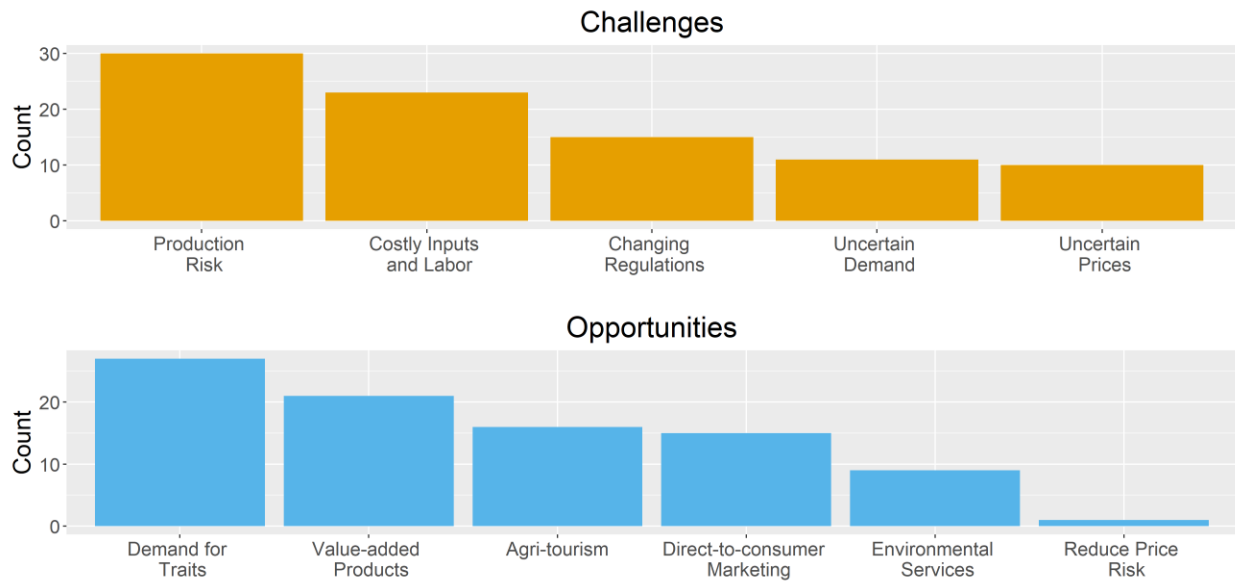
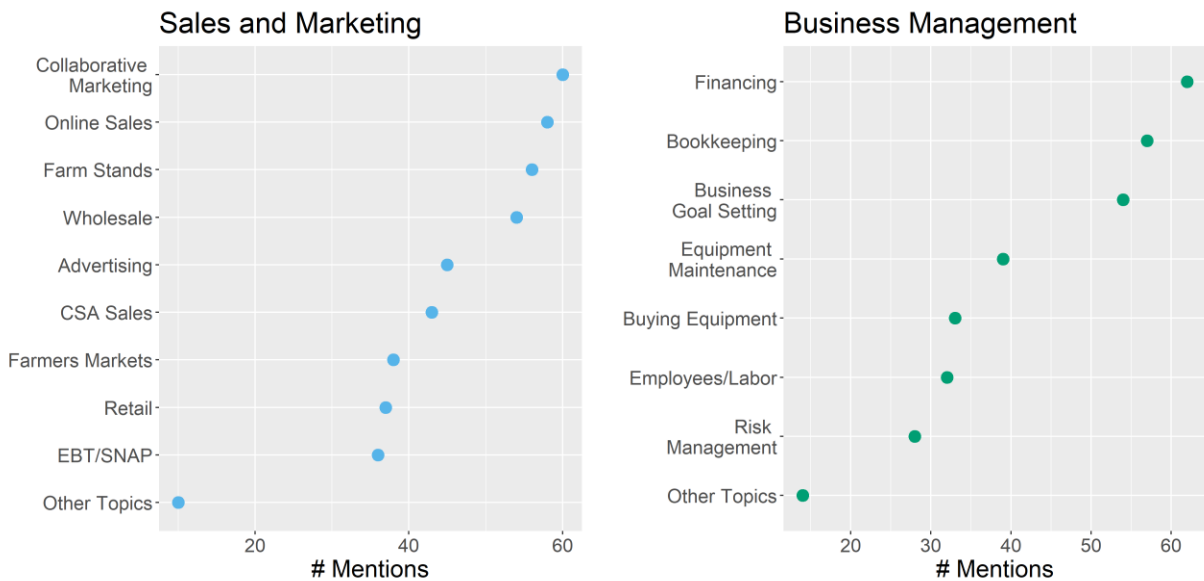


Figure 3: Respondents identified many challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. The top challenges identified were production risk and costly inputs and labor. The top opportunities identified were ‘capitalizing on consumer willingness to pay for specific product traits’ and value-added products.



Note: Respondents could select multiple topics (n = 118).

Figure 4: Information on training needs and priorities for ‘sales and marketing’ and ‘business management’ trainings will help program designers tailor their content to the needs of beginning and aspiring farmers. The top choices included collaborative marketing, online sales, farm stands, financing, bookkeeping, and business goal setting.

New farmers want different production trainings depending on what they produce (or want to produce) on their farms. Because the new farmers could select multiple areas of interest, they tended to pick similar ones. For example, if they grow or want to grow vegetables, they often picked Diseases/Insects/Weeds as well as Soil Science. Therefore, five groups emerged:

Group 1: Vegetables, Diseases/Insects/Weeds, and Soil Science

Group 2: Tree Fruit and Small Fruit/Berries

Group 3: Swine and Dairy

Group 4: Poultry and Goats/Sheep

Group 5: Beef and Hay/Forage

The remaining topics (Forestry, Ornamentals, Aquaculture) were not strongly associated with a group. The following figures detail each group's choices of what training topics they need.

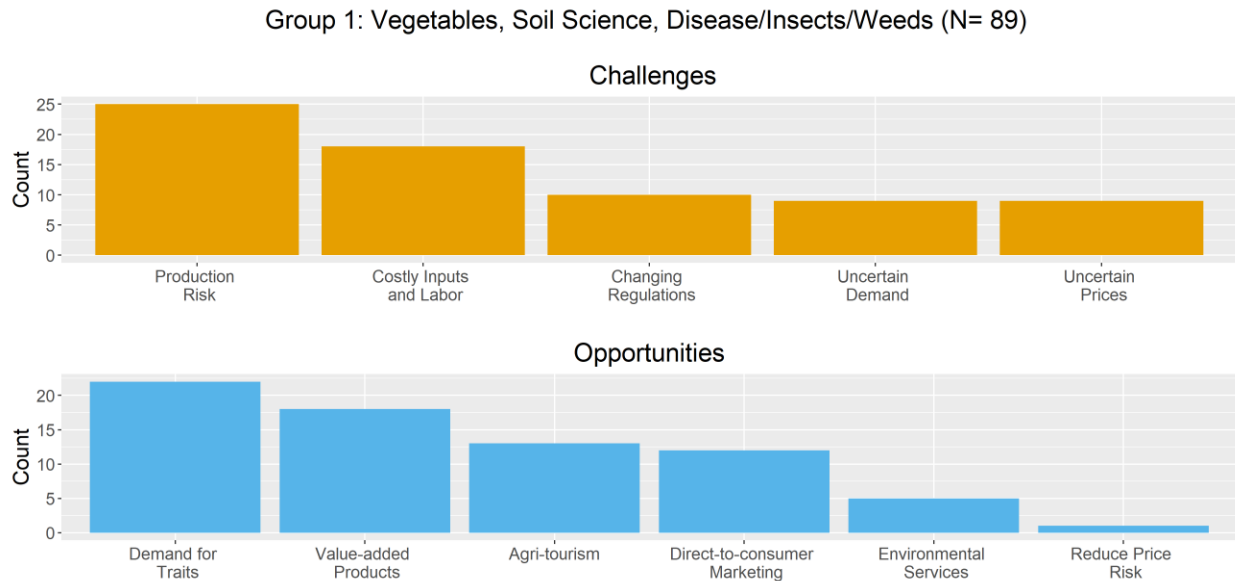


Figure 5: Farmers who chose vegetables, soil science, and diseases/insects/weeds as training interests identified similar challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. Similar challenges included production risk and costly inputs and labor. Similar opportunities included 'capitalizing on consumer willingness to pay for specific product traits' and value-added products.

Group 1: Vegetables, Soil Science, Disease/Insects/Weeds (N= 89)

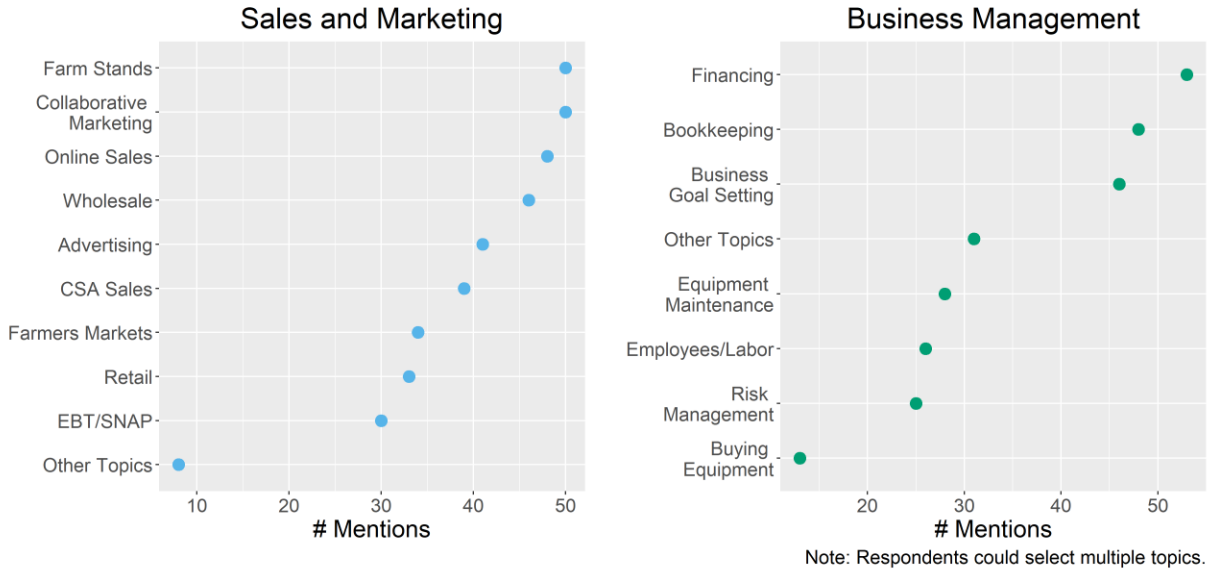


Figure 6: Farmers who chose vegetables, soil science, and disease/insects/weeds for production interests chose similar training needs and priorities. These included farm stands, collaborative marketing, and online sales, as well as financing, bookkeeping, and business goal setting.

Group 2: Tree Fruits & Small Fruits/Berries (N= 69)

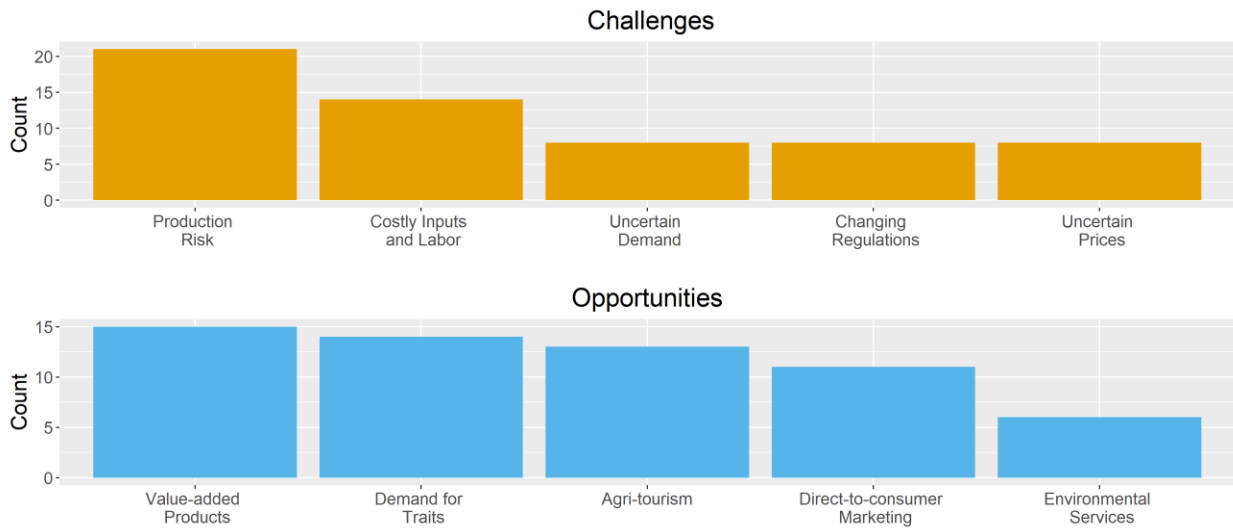


Figure 7: Farmers who chose tree fruits and small fruits/berries as training interests identified similar challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. Similar challenges included production risk and costly inputs/labor. Similar opportunities included value-added products and 'capitalizing on consumer willingness to pay for specific product traits'.

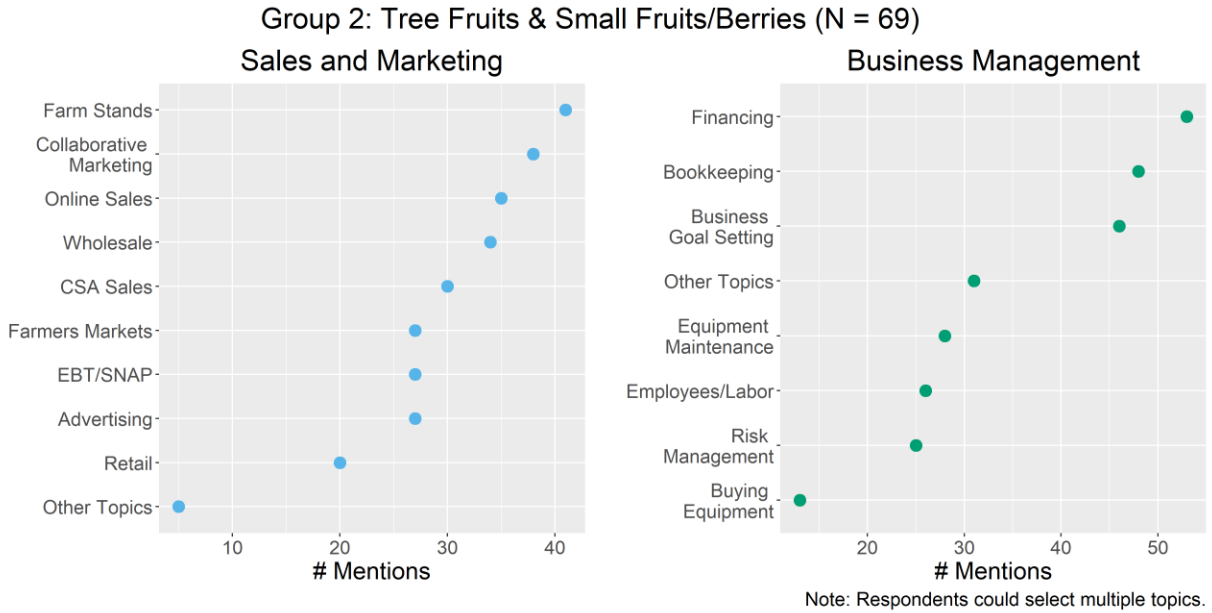


Figure 8: Farmers who chose tree fruits and small fruits/berries for production interests chose similar training needs and priorities. These include farmstands, collaborative marketing, online sales, financing, business goal setting and bookkeeping.

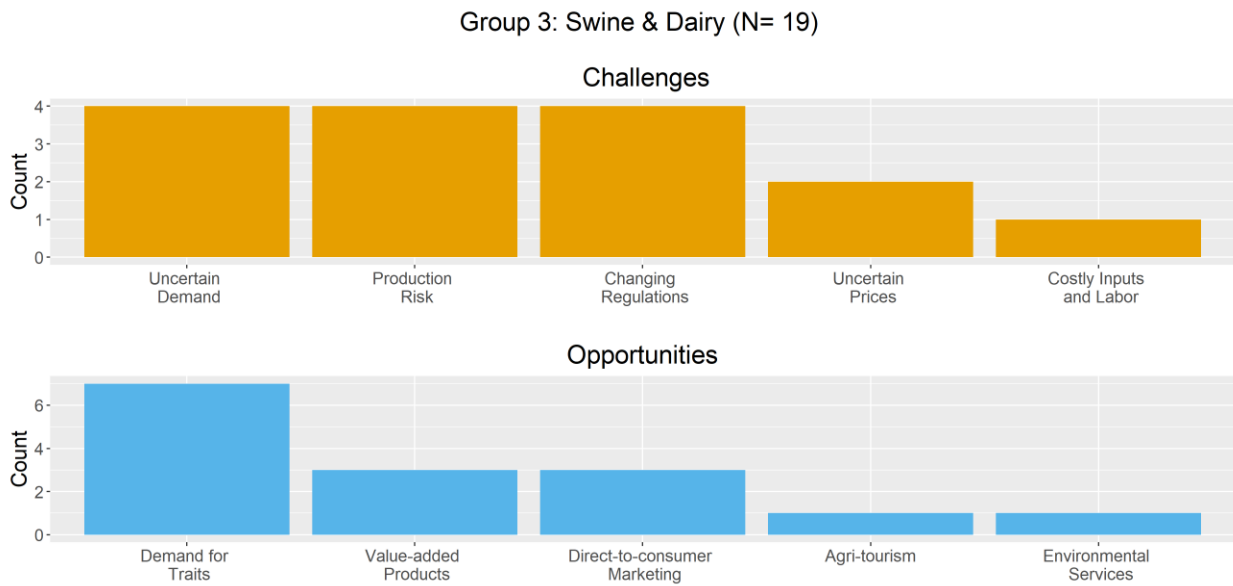


Figure 9: Farmers who chose swine and dairy as training interests identified similar challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. Similar challenges include uncertain demand and production risk. Similar opportunities include 'capitalizing on consumer willingness to pay for specific product traits' and value-added products.



### Group 3: Swine & Dairy (N= 19)

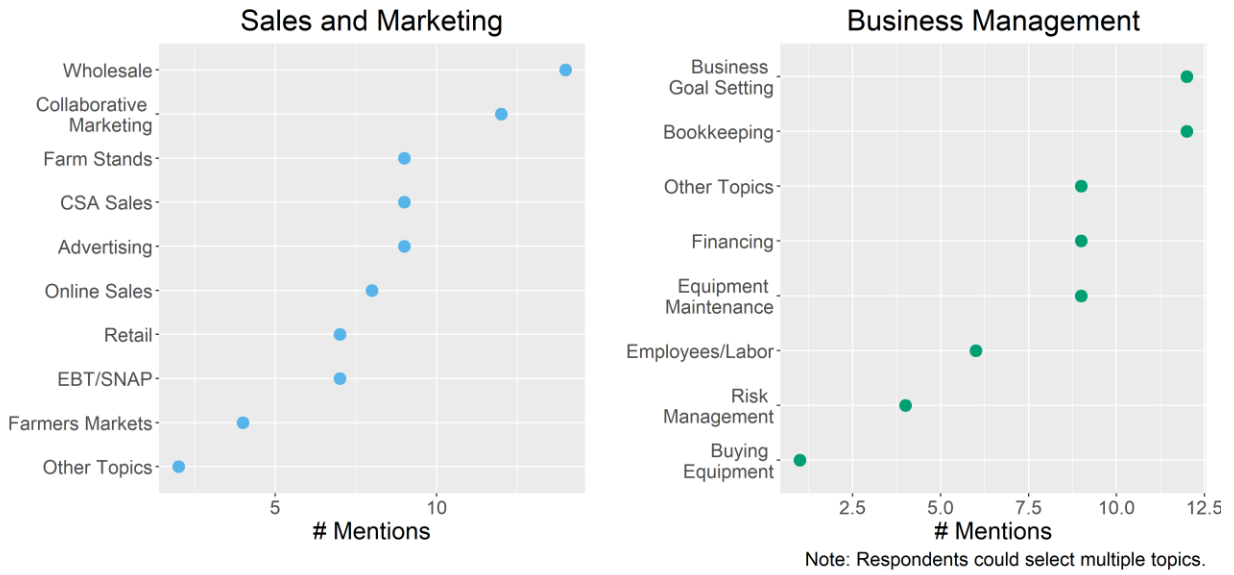


Figure 10: Farmers who chose swine and dairy for production interests chose similar training needs and priorities. These included wholesale, collaborative marketing, farmstands, business goal setting, bookkeeping, and financing.

### Group 4: Poultry & Goats/Sheep (N= 50)

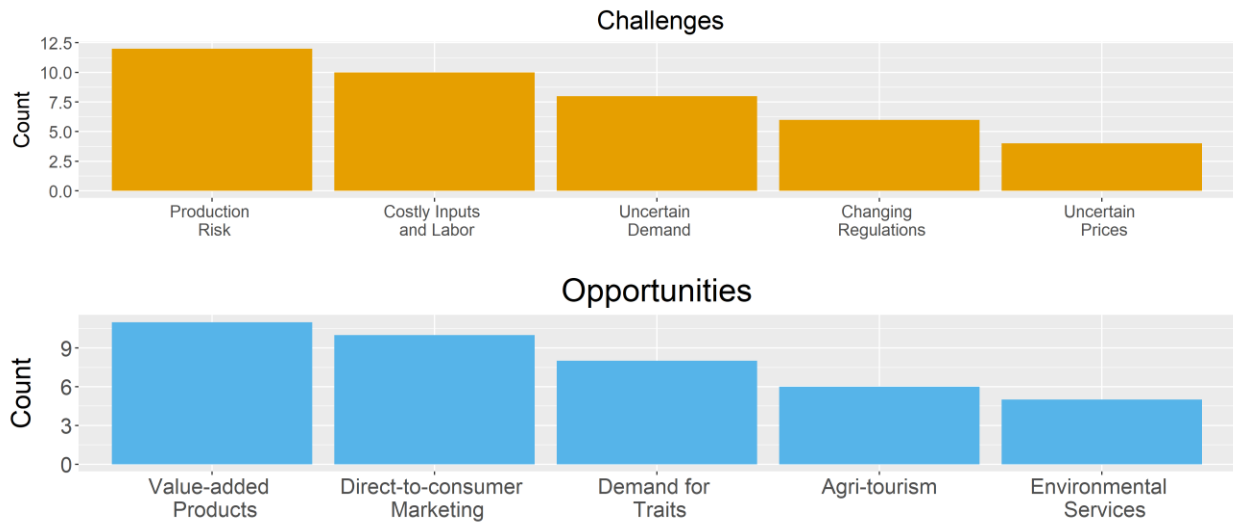


Figure 11: Farmers who chose poultry and goats/sheep as training interests identified similar challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. Similar challenges included production risk and costly inputs/labor. Similar opportunities included value-added products and direct-to-consumer marketing.

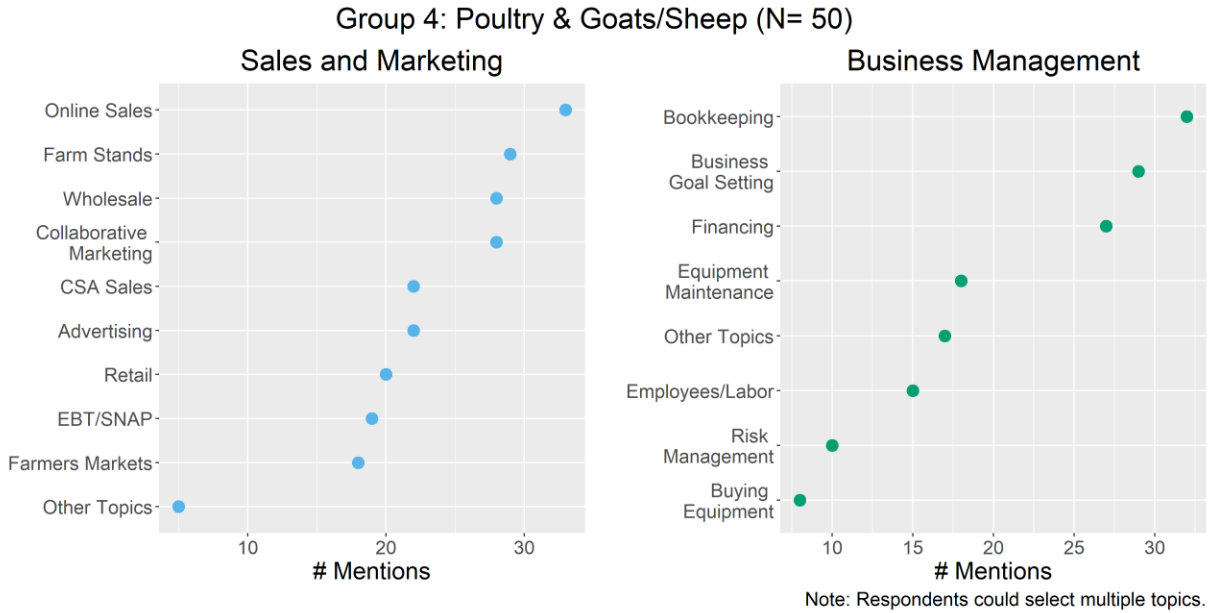


Figure 12: Farmers who chose poultry and goats/sheep for production interests chose similar training needs and priorities. These included online sales, farm stands, wholesale, bookkeeping, business goal setting, and financing.

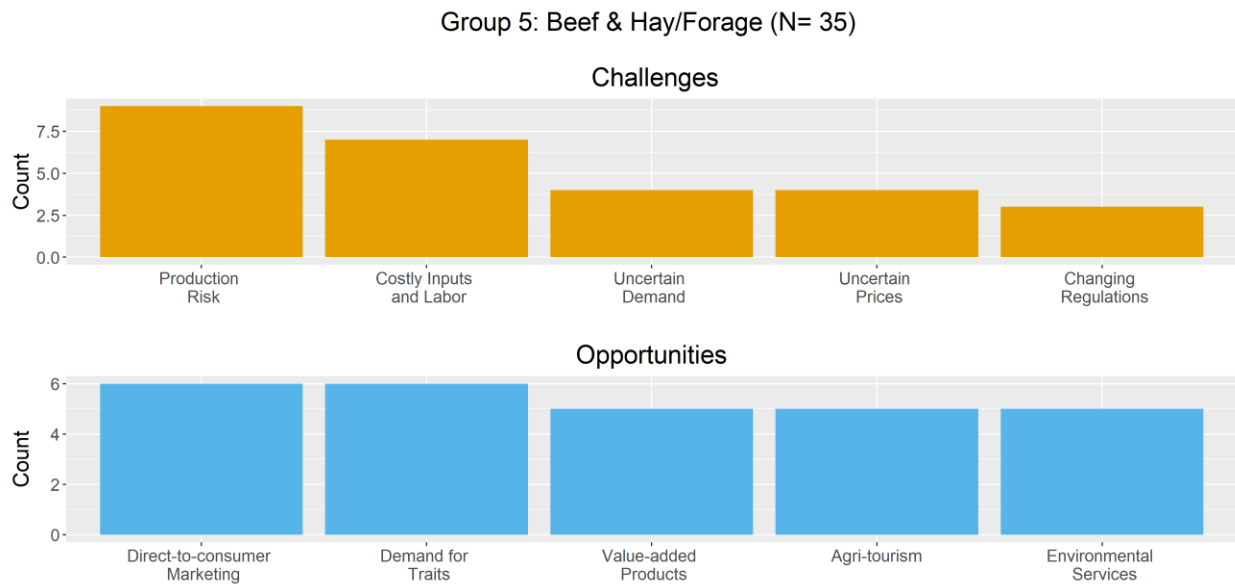
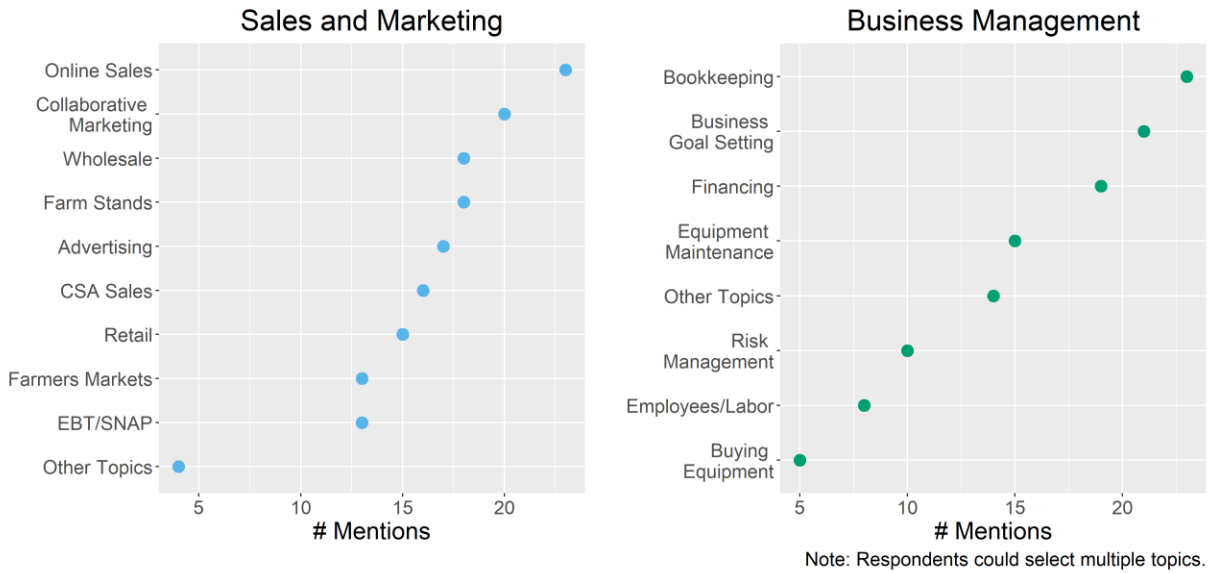


Figure 13: Farmers who chose beef and hay/forage as training interests identified similar challenges and opportunities facing Maine agriculture. Similar challenges included production risk and costly inputs/labor. Similar opportunities included direct-to-consumer marketing and 'capitalizing on consumer willingness to pay for specific product traits'.

Group 5: Beef & Hay/Forage (N= 35)



The “Why Are You Seeking Out Farm Training?” survey results provide a useful first step toward designing trainings to meet the needs of new farmers in Maine. They highlight areas of common interest and point toward what new farmers need for production training and sales/marketing and business management training. Thank you to everyone who filled out the survey. We look forward to continuing to improve our support for new and beginning farmers.

This work is supported by the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program [grant no. 2021-70033-35716] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.