

Farmland Preservation Survey Results

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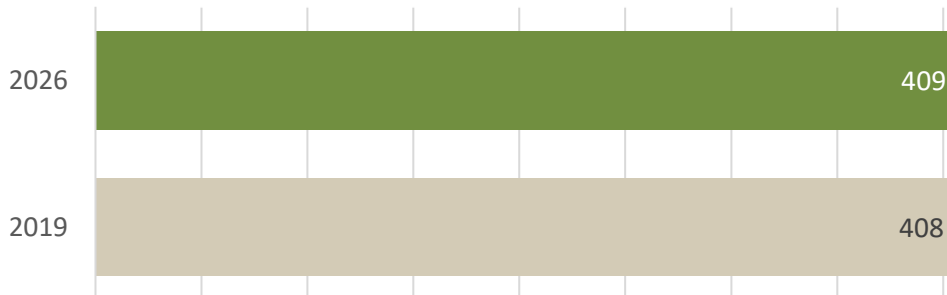
INTRODUCTION

The 2026 Agricultural Survey is an initiative of the Ottawa County Farm Bureau and County Department of Strategic Impact to gather information on public opinion regarding farmland preservation. The four-page survey was mailed to every owner of agricultural zoned land within Ottawa County.

Included in this report is the latest 2026 data, as well as longitudinal comparisons between the 2019 and 2026 surveys. Throughout the report, all changes greater than 10%, between 2019 and 2026 responses are marked using arrows. Single **▲** arrows denote changes increasing or decreasing **between 10%-19%**. Double-arrows **▼** indicate changes increasing or decreasing **more than 20%**. The direction of the arrow indicates the direction of change, up for increase, down for decrease.

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The 2026 survey was mailed to **1,645 addresses** and **received 409 responses**. This tied the 2019 survey with a **response rate of 25%**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2026 Farmland Preservation survey builds off the results of the 2019 survey, identifying and prioritizing local efforts to slow the loss of farms, farmers, and farmland in Ottawa County. The new 2026 data reaffirms the need for farmland preservation and its growing importance to Ottawa County cultivators. Survey data shows a 7 percentage point increase from 2019-2026 in both respondents' thinking farmland loss is now or could be a problem and respondents that think it is important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County. These increases bring both totals to 89% — nearly 9 out of 10 farmers recognize the issue and importance of farmland preservation. The top four priorities of local farmers to preserve farmland, ranked below by popularity, align with the County's existing initiatives and provide new insights.

1. Protecting farms through planning and zoning: Data reveals reducing the conversion of farmland to non-agriculture uses is more important than ever to Ottawa County farmers. Support for planning and zoning experienced the largest increase from 2019 to 2026 — 12 percent more respondents strongly agree it is an important preservation strategy. Though this is now the most favorable strategy, zoning constraints and requirements was the least reported factor believed to be contributing to farmland loss. This perspective could potentially be related to recent commercial, residential, and energy-related developments in the region. No matter the cause, the survey data identifies strategic planning and zoning as a priority for preservation efforts.

2. Enhance economic viability of farming: This was the only strategy of the top four to fall in popularity. However, with 83% support, it remains the second most important. It will be imperative to listen to farmers' needs and continue to find new ways to support the farming industry and economic outlook for new and existing growers. Analysis of the 2026 data shows first-generation farmers are less likely to report their earnings as primary or supplemental income than multi-generational farmers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

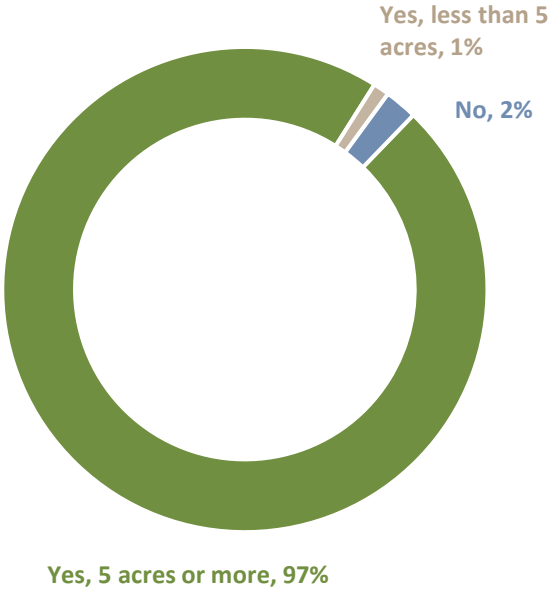
3. Planning for succession: Succession planning outreach and programs keep the communication lines open and provide opportunities for new relationships between growers. Succession planning-related data was mixed - there was a 23 percentage point decline in farmers owning their farmland and renting farmland to others. The number of farmers reporting they plan to sell land or assets to another farmer also fell 10 percentage points.

4. Creating agricultural conservation easements: Support of the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program remains steady, with marked success in communication efforts. Data showed there was an 11 percentage point increase in respondents' awareness of the farmland preservation program. And for those interested in preserving their farmland, there was an 11 percentage point increase in farmers who would consider permanently preserving their farmland in less than five years.

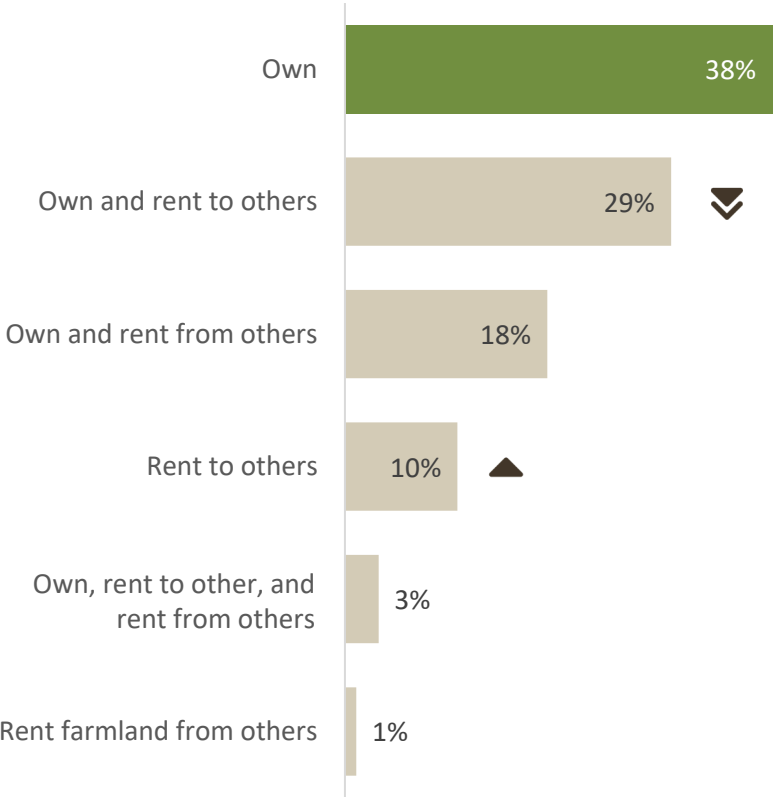
Besides receiving valuable data to shape Ottawa County's farmland preservation efforts, nearly 100 individuals were identified for future outreach. Additionally, the survey shows each township has at least one landowner who could be a candidate for the PDR program. This data will continue to guide and inform Ottawa County and the Ottawa County Farm Bureau in their efforts to support our vital agricultural ecosystem.

DEMOGRAPHICS

97% of respondents own and/or rent 5 or more acres of farmland in Ottawa County



Of those who own and/or rent farmland in the county, 38% of respondents own their farmland



Notes Total responses by question: acres – 369; own and/or rent – 349. Longitudinal changes between 2019-2026 include: +10% Rent to others; -23% Own and rent to others.

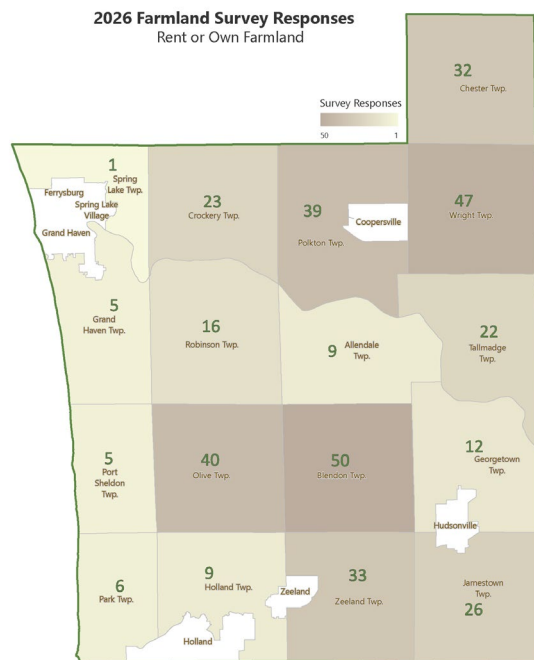
Farmland Preservation Survey Results

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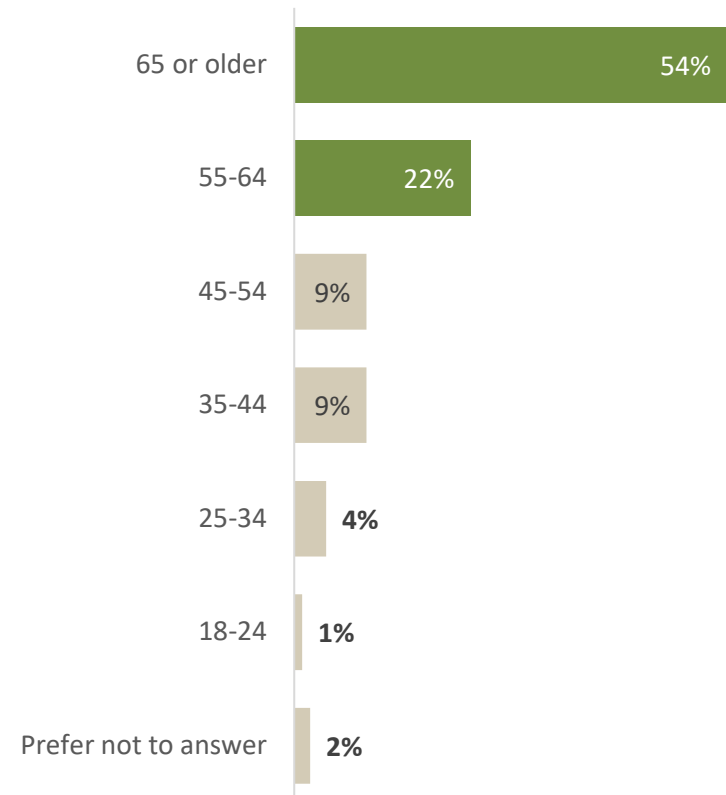
DEMOGRAPHICS

How many survey respondents own and/or rent farmland in each Ottawa County local unit?

76% of respondents are 55 or older



Over half of the responses came from 5 townships:
Blenden, Wright, Olive, Polkton, and Zeeland

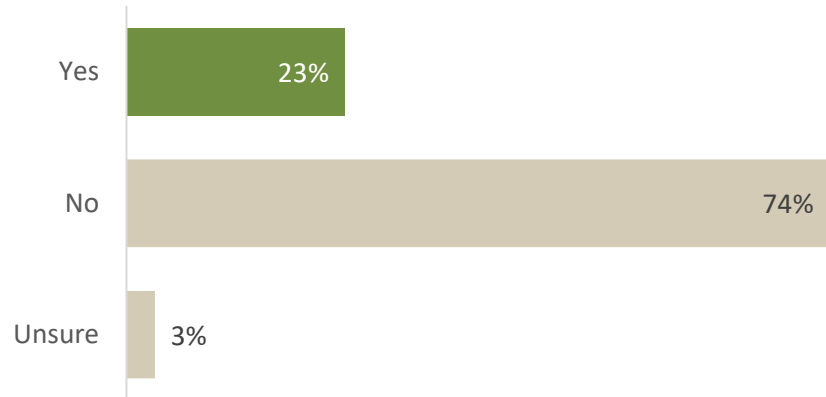


Farmland Preservation Survey Results

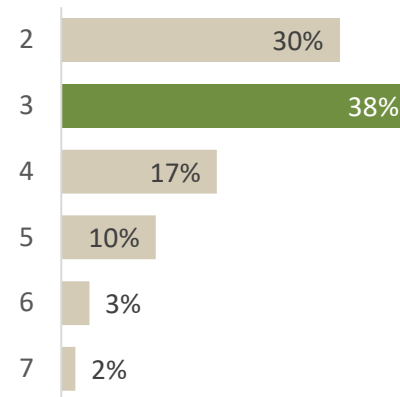
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DEMOGRAPHICS

23% of respondents are first-generation farmers



Of those who are multi-generation farmers, 38% of respondents have farmed for 3 generations

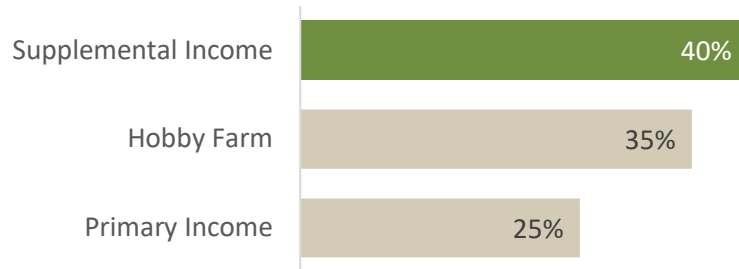


Farmland Preservation Survey Results

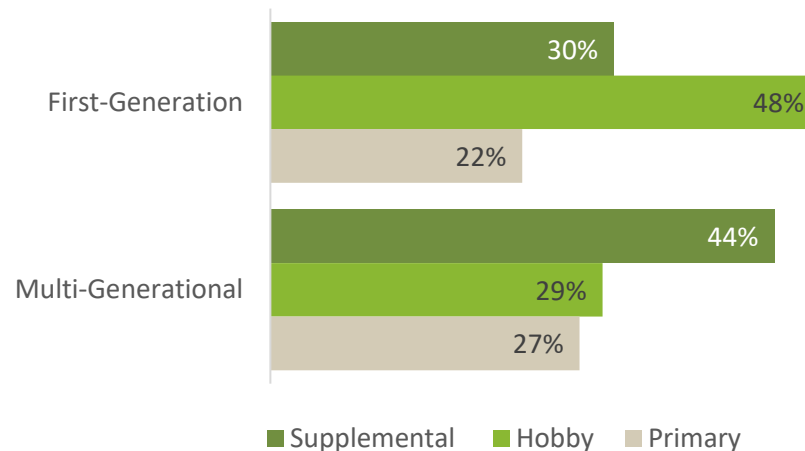
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DEMOGRAPHICS

40% of respondents report their farm earnings as supplemental income



First-generation farmers are most likely to report their farm earnings as hobby farms (generate minimal income or operate at a loss).



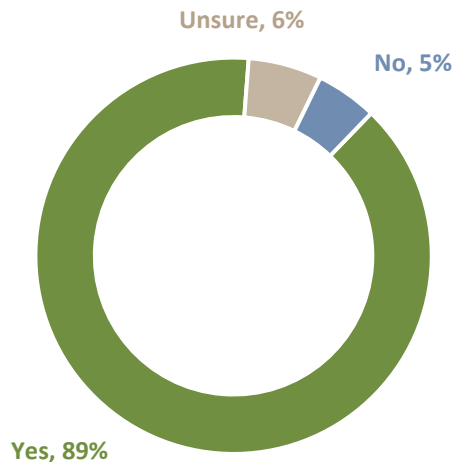
While multi-generational farmers are mostly likely to report their earnings as supplemental income.

Farmland Preservation Survey Results

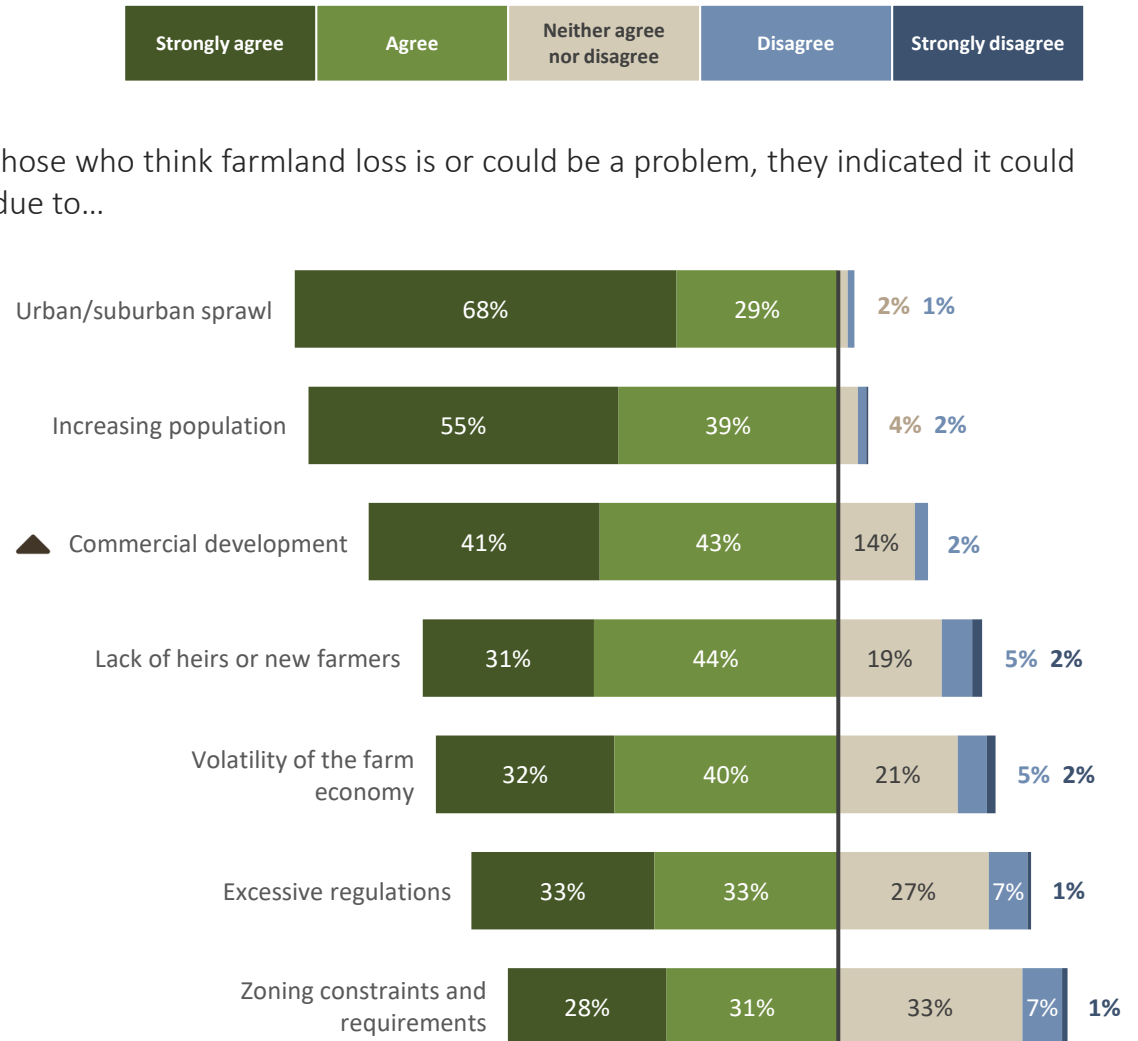
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FARMLAND LOSS PERSPECTIVES

89% of respondents think farmland loss is or could be a problem in Ottawa County, 7% higher than 2019.



Of those who think farmland loss is or could be a problem, they indicated it could be due to...

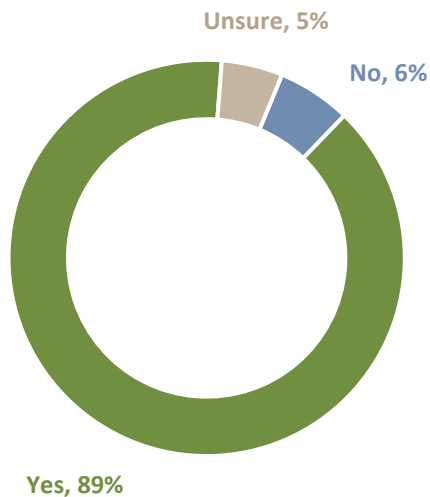


Farmland Preservation Survey Results

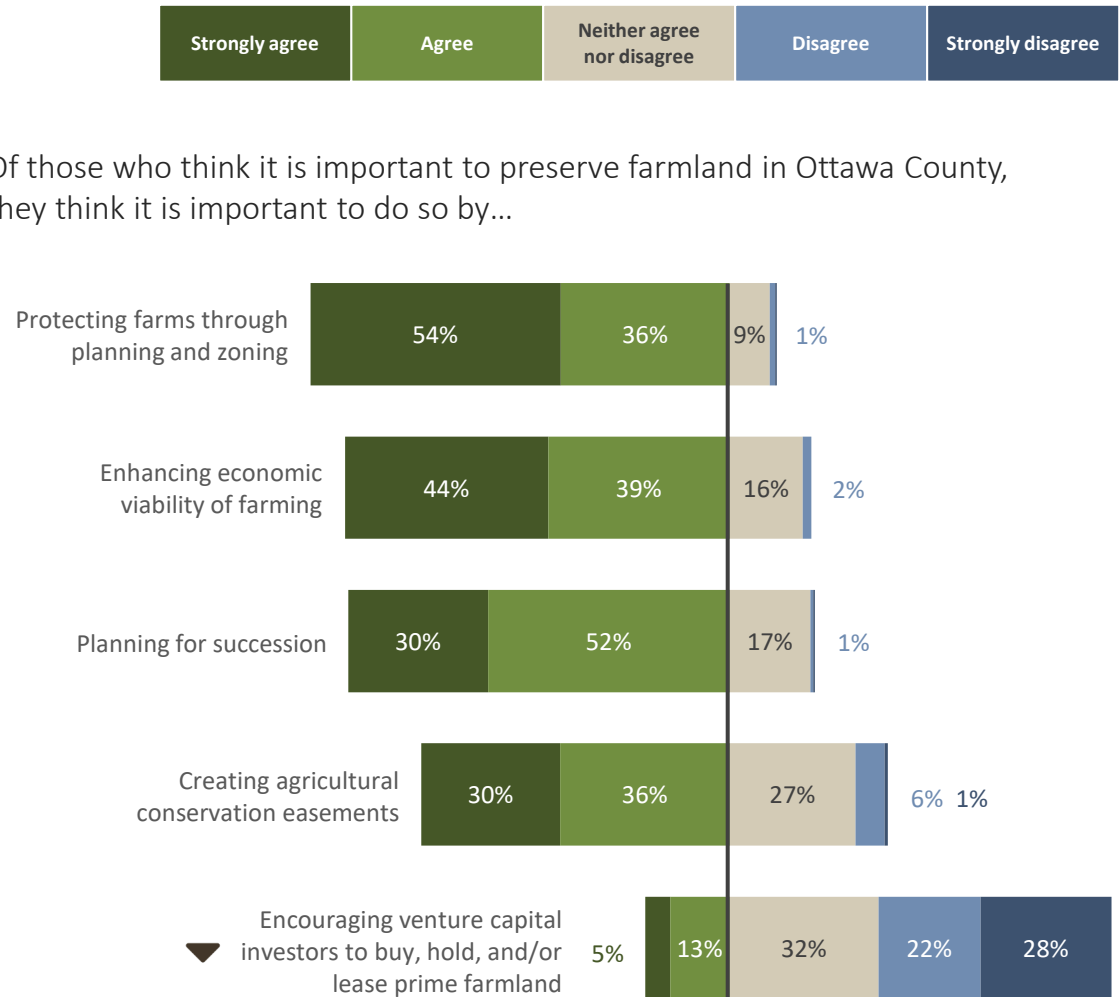
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FARMLAND PRESERVATION PERSPECTIVES

89% of respondents think it is important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County, 7% higher than in 2019.



Of those who think it is important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County, they think it is important to do so by...

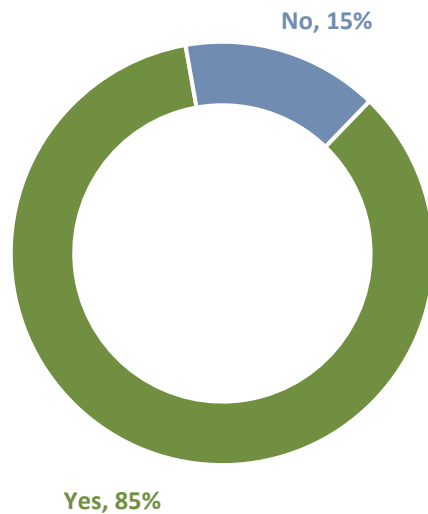


Farmland Preservation Survey Results

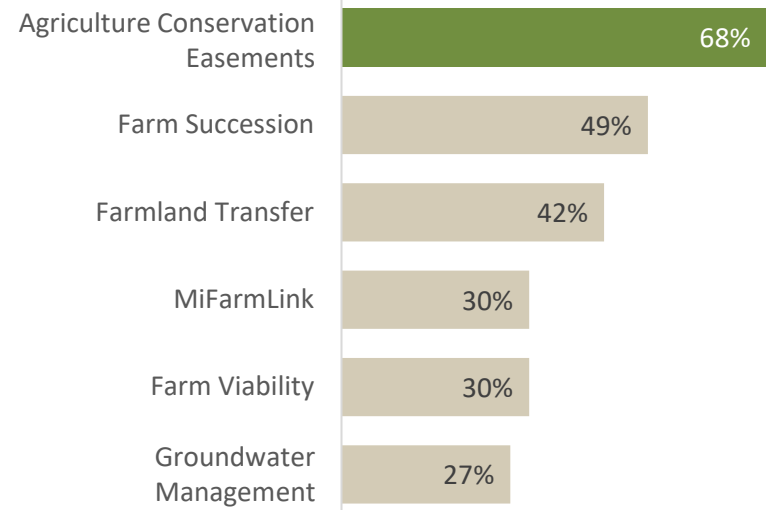
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OTTAWA COUNTY'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

- ▲ 85% of respondents were aware of Ottawa County's farmland preservation program prior to taking the survey



Of those interested in learning more, 68% or 77 individuals would like to learn more about Agricultural Conservation Easements

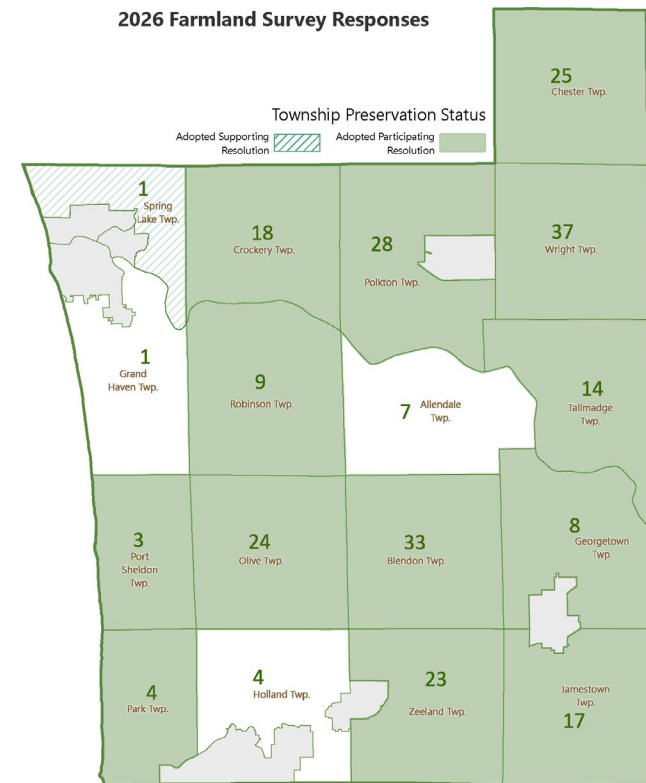


OTTAWA COUNTY'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Of those who are currently **considering permanently preserving their farmland** or may be **open to the idea** in the future, the number who own farmland in each local township include...

Since the 2019 survey was conducted, **six additional townships** have passed program participating resolutions, and one (Spring Lake Twp.) has passed a supporting resolution.

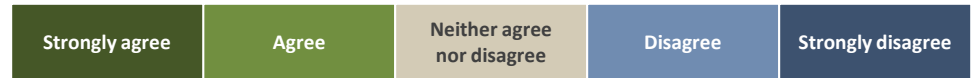
For 2026, **at least one farm** in each Ottawa County's 17 townships report they are either **considering** permanently preserving their farmland or may be **open to the idea** in the future.



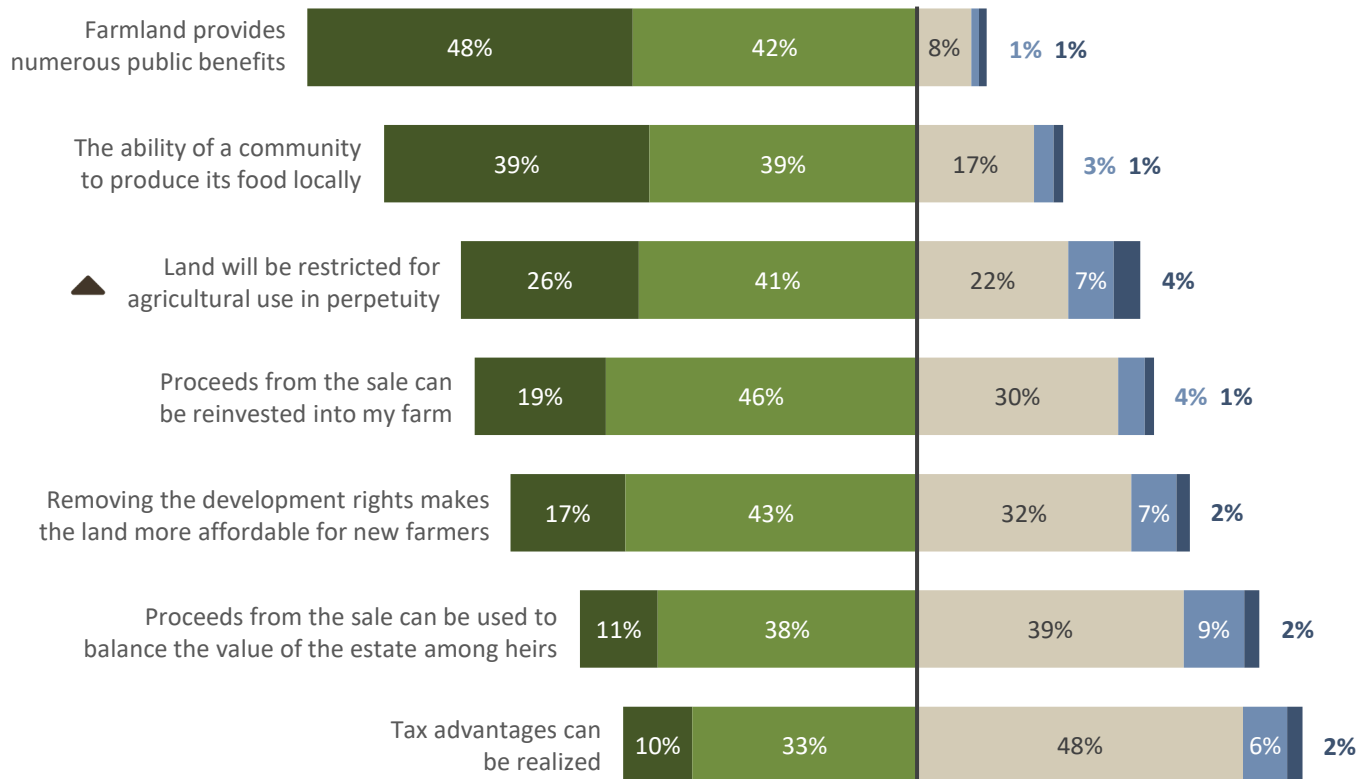
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OTTAWA COUNTY'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM



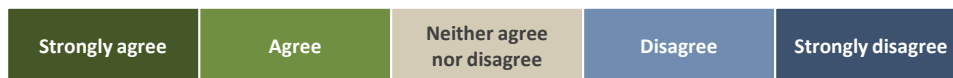
Participating in Ottawa County Farmland Preservation could be valuable because....



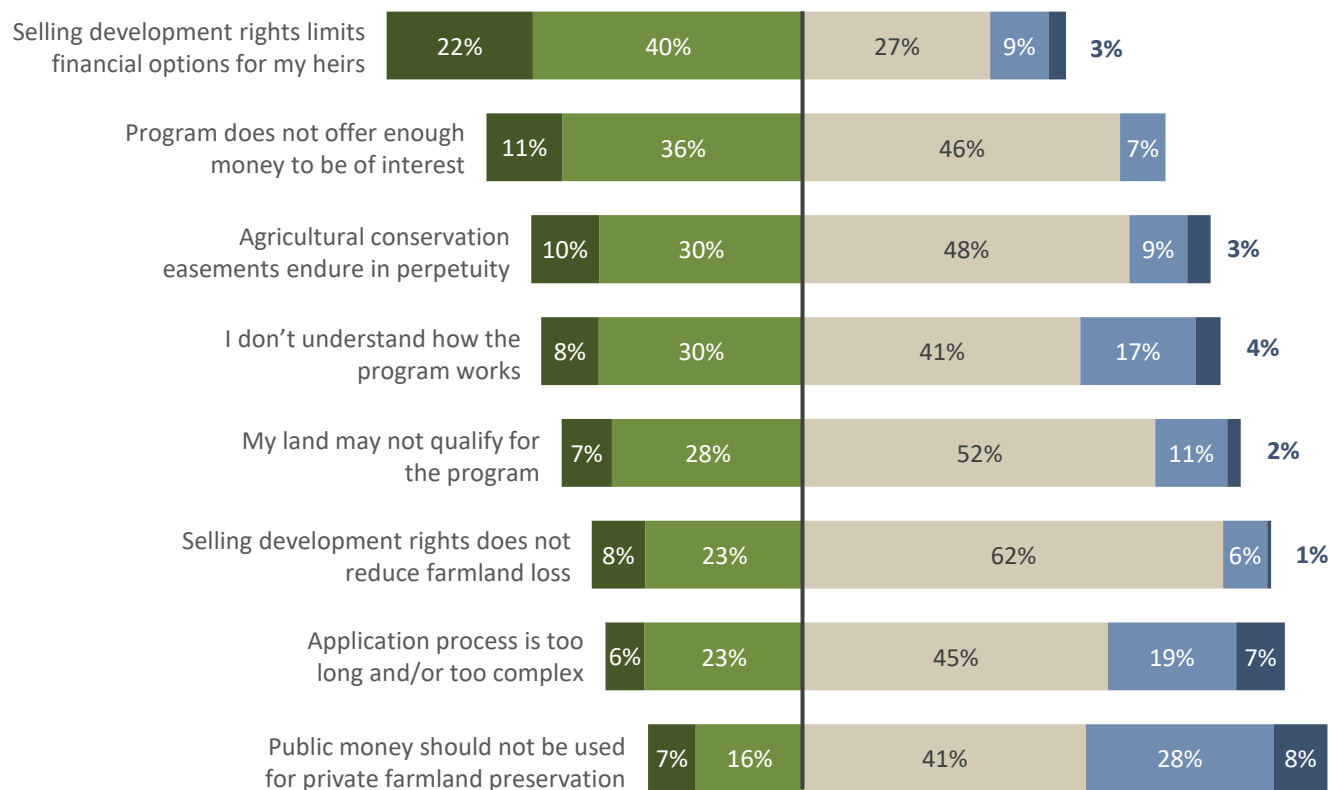
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OTTAWA COUNTY'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM



I would not participate in Ottawa County Farmland Preservation because....

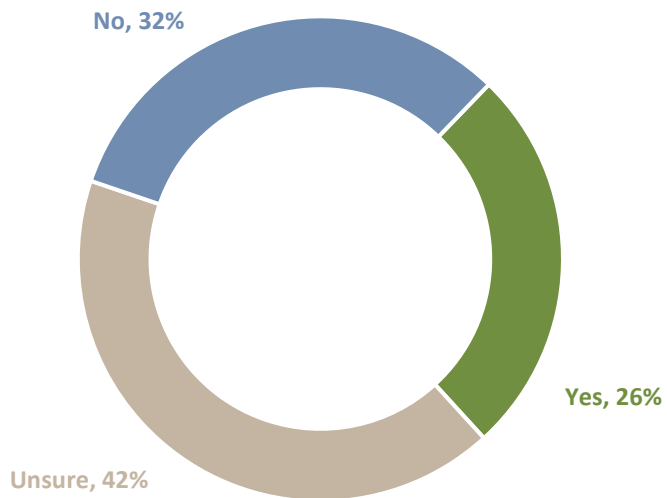


Farmland Preservation Survey Results

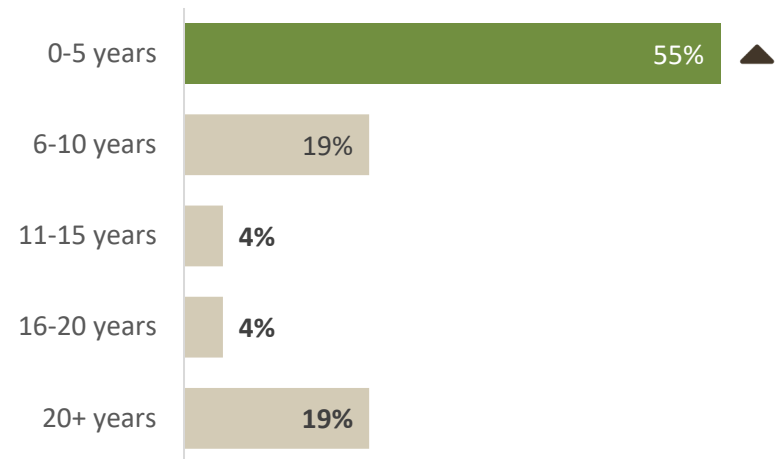
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OTTAWA COUNTY'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

26% of respondents are considering permanently preserving their farmland



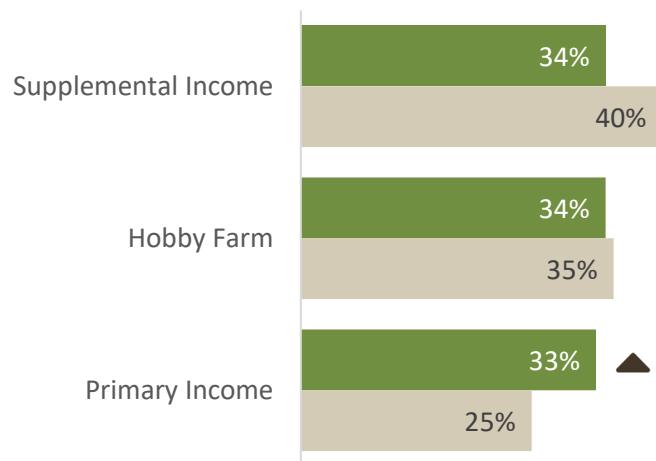
Of those interested in preserving their farmland, 55% of respondents would do so in 0-5 years



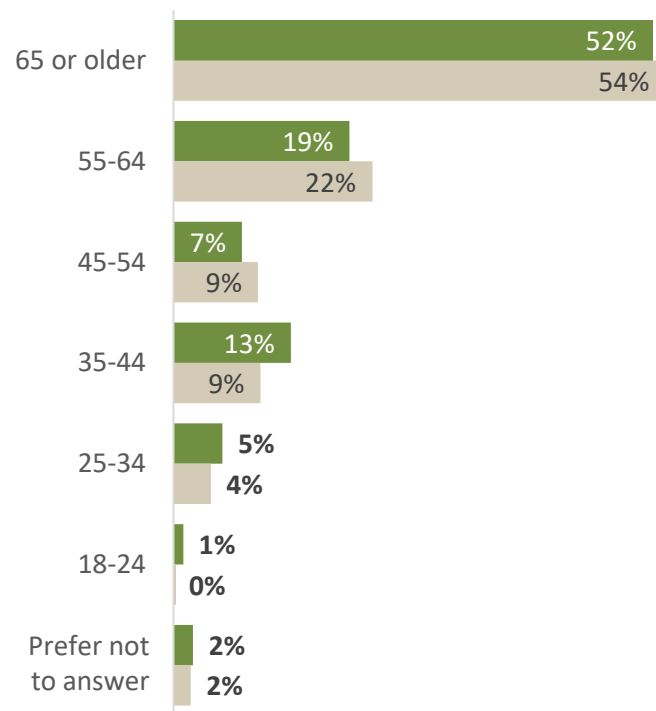
OTTAWA COUNTY'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Comparing those **interested in preserving their farmland** to **all responses**....

Of those interested in preserving their farmland, **33%** of respondents consider farm earnings as their **primary income**.

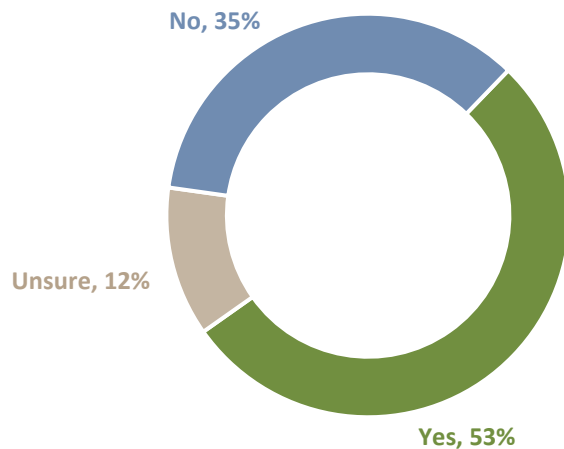


Of those interested in preserving their farmland, **52%** of respondents are **65 or older**.

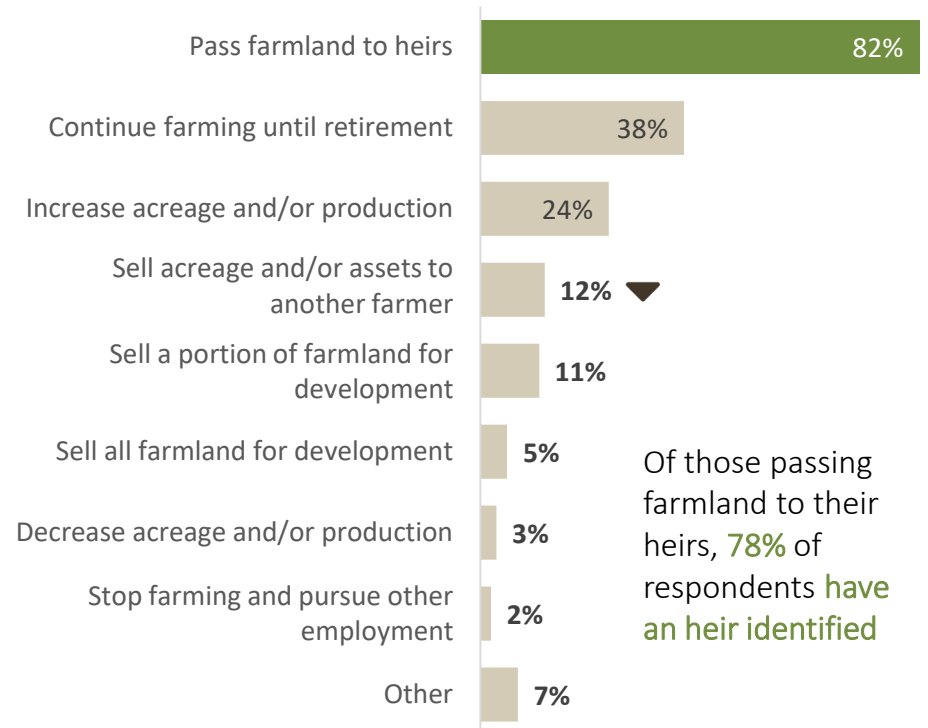


SUCCESSION PLANNING

53% of respondents have a succession plan



As farmers plan for the future, 82% of respondents are considering passing farmland to their heirs



Demographics

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Do you own and/or rent farmland in Ottawa County?			
Yes, 5 acres or more	99%	97%	-2%
Yes, less than 5 acres	0%	1%	1%
No	1%	2%	1%
If yes, please check all that apply.			
Own	29%	38%	9%
Own and rent to others	52%	29%	-23%
Own and rent from others	17%	18%	1%
Rent to others	0%	10%	10%
Own, rent to others, and rent from others	1%	3%	2%
Rent farmland from others	1%	1%	0%
Age			
65 and older	51%	54%	3%
55-64	27%	22%	-5%
45-54	11%	9%	-2%
35-44	7%	9%	2%
25-34	3%	4%	1%
18-24	1%	1%	0%
Prefer not to answer	0%	2%	2%
Are you a first generation farmer?			
Yes	22%	23%	1%
Unsure	2%	3%	1%
No	76%	74%	-2%
If no, how many generations of your family have farmed/owned your land?			
2	39%	30%	-9%
3	33%	38%	5%
4	19%	17%	-2%
5	7%	10%	3%
6	2%	3%	1%
7	0%	2%	2%
Average			0%
How would you characterize your farm income?			
Supplemental Income	46%	40%	-6%
Hobby Farm	33%	35%	2%
Primary Income	21%	25%	4%

Succession Planning

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Are you considering permanently preserving your farmland?			
Yes	24%	26%	2%
Unsure	47%	42%	-5%
No	29%	32%	3%
If yes, when might you consider permanently preserving your farmland?			
0-5	44%	55%	11%
6-10	25%	19%	-6%
11-15	9%	4%	-5%
16-20	10%	4%	-6%
20+	12%	19%	7%
Do you have a succession plan?			
Yes	Not asked	53%	
Unsure	Not asked	12%	
No	Not asked	35%	
As you plan for the future of your farmland, which of the following actions are you considering?			
Pass farmland to heirs	75%	82%	7%
Continue farming until retirement	35%	38%	3%
Increase acreage and/or production	20%	24%	4%
Sell acreage and/or assets to another farmer	22%	12%	-10%
Sell a portion of farmland for development	11%	11%	0%
Sell all farmland for development	8%	5%	-3%
Decrease acreage and/or production	2%	3%	1%
Stop farming and pursue other employment	2%	2%	0%
Other	0%	7%	7%
If you selected 'pass farmland to heirs', do you have an heir identified?			
Yes	Not asked	78%	
Unsure	Not asked	8%	
No	Not asked	14%	

Farmland Loss

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Do you think farmland loss is now or could be a problem in Ottawa County?			
Yes	82%	89%	7%
Unsure	9%	6%	-3%
No	9%	5%	-4%
If yes, farmland loss in Ottawa County could be due to...			
Urban/suburban sprawl			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	97%	97%	0%
Strongly Agree	58%	68%	10%
Agree	39%	29%	-10%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2%	2%	0%
Disagree	0%	1%	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	-1%
Increasing population			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	95%	94%	-1%
Strongly Agree	47%	55%	8%
Agree	48%	39%	-9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3%	4%	1%
Disagree	2%	2%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%
Commercial development			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	70%	84%	14%
Strongly Agree	23%	41%	18%
Agree	47%	43%	-4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23%	14%	-9%
Disagree	6%	2%	-4%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	-1%
Lack of heirs or new farmers			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	76%	75%	-1%
Strongly Agree	33%	31%	-2%
Agree	43%	44%	1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	16%	19%	3%
Disagree	6%	5%	-1%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%	0%

Farmland Loss

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
If yes, farmland loss in Ottawa County could be due to... (continued)			
Volatility of the farm economy			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	74%	72%	-2%
Strongly Agree	31%	32%	1%
Agree	43%	40%	-3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20%	21%	1%
Disagree	4%	5%	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%	2%	1%
Excessive regulations			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	62%	66%	4%
Strongly Agree	29%	33%	4%
Agree	33%	33%	0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	30%	27%	-3%
Disagree	6%	7%	1%
Strongly Disagree	2%	1%	-1%
Zoning constraints and requirements			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	60%	59%	-1%
Strongly Agree	23%	28%	5%
Agree	37%	31%	-6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31%	33%	2%
Disagree	8%	7%	-1%
Strongly Disagree	1%	1%	0%

Importance of Preservation

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Do you think it is important to preserve farmland in Ottawa County?			
Yes	82%	89%	7%
Unsure	14%	5%	-9%
No	4%	6%	2%
If yes, I feel it is important to preserve farmland by...			
Protecting farms through planning and zoning			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	88%	90%	2%
Strongly Agree	42%	54%	12%
Agree	46%	36%	-10%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	10%	9%	-1%
Disagree	2%	1%	-1%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%
Enhancing the economic viability of farming			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	88%	83%	-5%
Strongly Agree	42%	44%	2%
Agree	46%	39%	-7%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	12%	16%	4%
Disagree	0%	2%	2%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%
Planning for succession			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	78%	82%	4%
Strongly Agree	28%	30%	2%
Agree	50%	52%	2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21%	17%	-4%
Disagree	1%	1%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%

Importance of Preservation

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
If yes, I feel it is important to preserve farmland by... (continued)			
Creating agricultural conservation easements			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	63%	66%	3%
Strongly Agree	23%	30%	7%
Agree	40%	36%	-4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31%	27%	-4%
Disagree	5%	6%	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%	1%	0%
Encouraging venture capital investors to buy, hold, and/or lease prime farmland			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	30%	18%	-12%
Strongly Agree	12%	5%	-7%
Agree	18%	13%	-5%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	40%	32%	-8%
Disagree	20%	22%	2%
Strongly Disagree	10%	28%	18%

Farmland Preservation Participation

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Prior to taking this survey, were you aware that Ottawa County has a farmland preservation program?			
Yes	74%	85%	11%
No	26%	15%	-11%
Participating in the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Program could be valuable because...			
Farmland provides numerous public benefits			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	85%	90%	5%
Strongly Agree	40%	48%	8%
Agree	45%	42%	-3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	11%	8%	-3%
Disagree	4%	1%	-3%
Strongly Disagree	0%	1%	1%
The ability of a community to produce its food locally			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	78%	78%	0%
Strongly Agree	27%	39%	12%
Agree	51%	39%	-12%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	17%	17%	0%
Disagree	5%	3%	-2%
Strongly Disagree	0%	1%	1%
Land will be restricted for agricultural use in perpetuity			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	56%	67%	11%
Strongly Agree	17%	26%	9%
Agree	39%	41%	2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	34%	22%	-12%
Disagree	8%	7%	-1%
Strongly Disagree	2%	4%	2%
Proceeds from the sale can be reinvested into my farm			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	62%	65%	3%
Strongly Agree	13%	19%	6%
Agree	49%	46%	-3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31%	30%	-1%
Disagree	6%	4%	-2%
Strongly Disagree	1%	1%	0%

Farmland Preservation Participation

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Participating in the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Program could be valuable because... (continued)			
Removing the development rights makes the land more affordable for new farmers			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	54%	60%	6%
Strongly Agree	13%	17%	4%
Agree	41%	43%	2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	36%	32%	-4%
Disagree	9%	7%	-2%
Strongly Disagree	1%	2%	1%
Proceeds from the sale can be used to balance the value of the estate among heirs			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	45%	49%	4%
Strongly Agree	7%	11%	4%
Agree	38%	38%	0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	45%	39%	-6%
Disagree	8%	9%	1%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%	0%
Tax advantages can be realized			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	45%	43%	-2%
Strongly Agree	8%	10%	2%
Agree	37%	33%	-4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	44%	48%	4%
Disagree	9%	6%	-3%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%	0%
I would not participate in Ottawa County Farmland Preservation because....			
Selling development rights limits financial options for my heirs			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	65%	62%	-3%
Strongly Agree	21%	22%	1%
Agree	44%	40%	-4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26%	27%	1%
Disagree	7%	9%	2%
Strongly Disagree	2%	3%	1%
Program does not offer enough money to be of interest			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	46%	47%	1%
Strongly Agree	12%	11%	-1%
Agree	34%	36%	2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	48%	46%	-2%
Disagree	5%	7%	2%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	-1%

Farmland Preservation Participation

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
I would not participate in Ottawa County Farmland Preservation because.... (continued)			
Agricultural conservation easements endure in perpetuity			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	39%	40%	1%
Strongly Agree	9%	10%	1%
Agree	30%	30%	0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	49%	48%	-1%
Disagree	10%	9%	-1%
Strongly Disagree	2%	3%	1%
I don't understand how the program works			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	40%	38%	-2%
Strongly Agree	11%	8%	-3%
Agree	29%	30%	1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	39%	41%	2%
Disagree	18%	17%	-1%
Strongly Disagree	3%	4%	1%
My land may not qualify for the program			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	33%	35%	2%
Strongly Agree	4%	7%	3%
Agree	29%	28%	-1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	61%	52%	-9%
Disagree	5%	11%	6%
Strongly Disagree	1%	2%	1%

Farmland Preservation Participation

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
I would not participate in Ottawa County Farmland Preservation because.... (continued)			
Selling development rights does not reduce farmland loss			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	28%	31%	3%
Strongly Agree	4%	8%	4%
Agree	24%	23%	-1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	44%	62%	18%
Disagree	22%	6%	-16%
Strongly Disagree	6%	1%	-5%
Application process is too long and/or too complex			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	32%	29%	-3%
Strongly Agree	5%	6%	1%
Agree	27%	23%	-4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	62%	45%	-17%
Disagree	5%	19%	14%
Strongly Disagree	1%	7%	6%
Public money should not be used for private farmland preservation			
Favorability (Strongly Agree and Agree)	24%	23%	-1%
Strongly Agree	6%	7%	1%
Agree	18%	16%	-2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	44%	41%	-3%
Disagree	25%	28%	3%
Strongly Disagree	7%	8%	1%

Mapping

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
How many survey respondents own and/or rent farmland in each local unit?			
Allendale	24	9	-15
Blendon	38	50	12
Chester	46	32	-14
City of Hudsonville*	2	0	-2
Crockery	17	23	6
Georgetown	7	12	5
Grand Haven	9	5	-4
Holland	9	9	0
Jamestown	28	26	-2
Olive	48	40	-8
Park	9	6	-3
Polkton	34	39	5
Port Sheldon	8	5	-3
Robinson	14	16	2
Spring Lake	2	1	-1
Tallmadge	21	22	1
Wright	35	47	12
Zeeland	28	33	5

*The City of Hudsonville was the only city represented in the 2019 survey. No cities were represented in the 2026 survey.

Mapping

Metric	2019 Results	2026 Results	2019 to 2026
Of those who are considering permanently preserving their farmland, the number who own farmland in each local unit of government include....			
Allendale	6	1	-5
Blendon	10	11	1
Chester	14	13	-1
City of Hudsonville*	1	0	-1
Crockery	6	8	2
Georgetown	0	0	0
Grand Haven	1	0	-1
Holland	3	2	-1
Jamestown	5	5	0
Olive	10	8	-2
Park	1	1	0
Polkton	10	10	0
Port Sheldon	2	2	0
Robinson	3	2	-1
Spring Lake	0	1	1
Tallmadge	3	4	1
Wright	10	17	7
Zeeland	6	12	6

*The City of Hudsonville was the only city represented in the 2019 survey. No cities were represented in the 2026 survey.