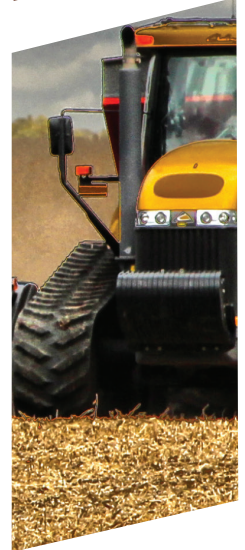
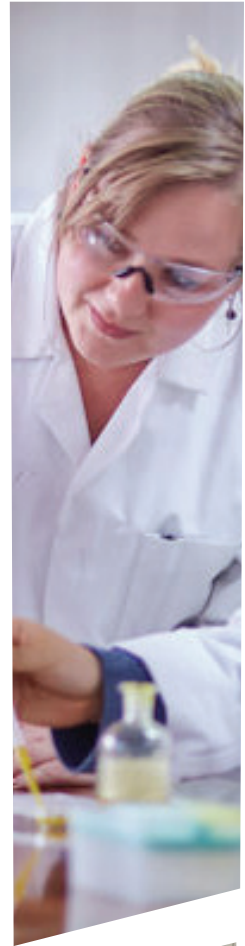




**GREENSEAM™**



THE  
STATE  
OF

**AGRICULTURE**

**2021 REPORT**

# Thank you to our partners!

The focus groups and State of Ag Survey would not be possible without the support from many individuals and organizations. We are so grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate on these projects. Thank you to the following organizations for hosting a focus group, as well as spreading the word on the Survey:



Special thank you goes to the team at the College of Business at Minnesota State University, Mankato and Dr. Shane Bowyer for moderating the focus groups, leading the survey design, and engaging students. Thank you to Henze Ag Innovators for their involvement in the focus group and to Jacob Wessels of the Center for Excellence in Scholarship and Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato for the analysis of the survey responses.



# 2020: The Year of Resilience

Resilience is what comes to mind when looking at this past year. The entire Ag supply chain has laced up its boots each morning and went to work with one thing on their mind – to solve problems. This is the second year of the State of Ag report which tells the story of the GreenSeam Ag ecosystem. It shows the challenges and the opportunities from the lens of farmers, manufacturers, professional service, and others.

To start the State of Ag report, eight focus groups hosted by partners touched every region of the state with participants sharing their experiences of the past year as well as what they see down the road ahead. Discussions focused on barriers concerning talent, policy, mental health, and COVID-19 issues that businesses face every day. In addition, opportunities were highlighted around entrepreneurship, Ag businesses hiring, commodity prices, and advancing technology.

As you look at the 2021 survey, you will notice the presence of resilience. More respondents than last year believe the State of Ag is heading the right direction and more than half of surveyed businesses are looking to hire additional employees. Almost a quarter of respondents believe immigrant workers provide an option to grow their business.



**SAM ZIEGLER**  
DIRECTOR, GREENSEAM

The goal of this report is to provide deeper insights into the overcoming the challenges and putting a spotlight on the future promises of agriculture and food as key industry sectors across the state. This information will enable us to address barriers to growth and leverage action. GreenSeam will use the results to help increase collaboration, develop innovation, and guide policy. This report provides a better understanding of the complex dynamics of the Ag ecosystem and will help us ensure we leave it better than we found it.



**GREENSEAM®**

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# 2021 State of Ag Survey Summary

Minnesota has a strong presence of agriculture and food-related industries, along with numerous supporting businesses and organizations. The State of Ag Report examines the current outlook and opinions of related stakeholders.

The method of the report started with eight focus groups made up of constituents from across the state. Then, based on feedback of the focus groups, new questions were developed and added to the previous year's survey.

For the second year in a row, the initial question asked respondents if they felt the state of ag in their region was headed in the right direction. Overwhelmingly, 92% believe the state of agriculture is headed in the right direction, up 16 % from the previous year. Digging deeper into this question, data showed strong yields and good crop prices as leading reasons for the positive outlook, along with advances in innovation and sustainability. On the negative side, regulation and monopolization were detriments to the future.

Forecasting the change of their business in the next year, 60% reported they foresee growth, while only 12% think their business will decline. Similar to the initial question, this is a positive increase of 15% from the previous year. As a possible result, 66% of the respondents indicated they plan to hire additional employees in the upcoming year.

When asked about the top three threats to business growth, respondents indicated the threats or barriers are policy/regulation, talent/employees, and taxes. It was interesting to note that, when broken down by organization size, organizations with more than 100 employees did not indicate taxes as a top threat and their talent/employees increased. In addition, a new question on this year's survey asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their business. Data showed 51% of the businesses said COVID-19 had a negative impact but also indicated some positives, such as not having travel expenses and saving money with employees working from home.

The lack of available talent/employees was also a leading discussion in the focus groups. The survey dug further into the issue finding a number of ways the industry is trying to attract the younger generation. The top activities were offering internships and speaking to classes/clubs. Furthermore, respondents indicated when looking to hire employees, the top skillset they are seeking are strong individual skills (work ethic, emotional intelligence, integrity, etc.) while collaborative skills (communication, leadership, cultural awareness, etc.) was second.

New to this year's survey were a couple questions about entrepreneurship. 64% of respondents have seen an increase in people in agriculture engaging in gig work or side jobs to supplement income. The top types of gigs included construction, trucking, factory work, and food service. When it came to biggest need of entrepreneurs, respondents indicated those were access to capital/funding and knowledge of financial skills.

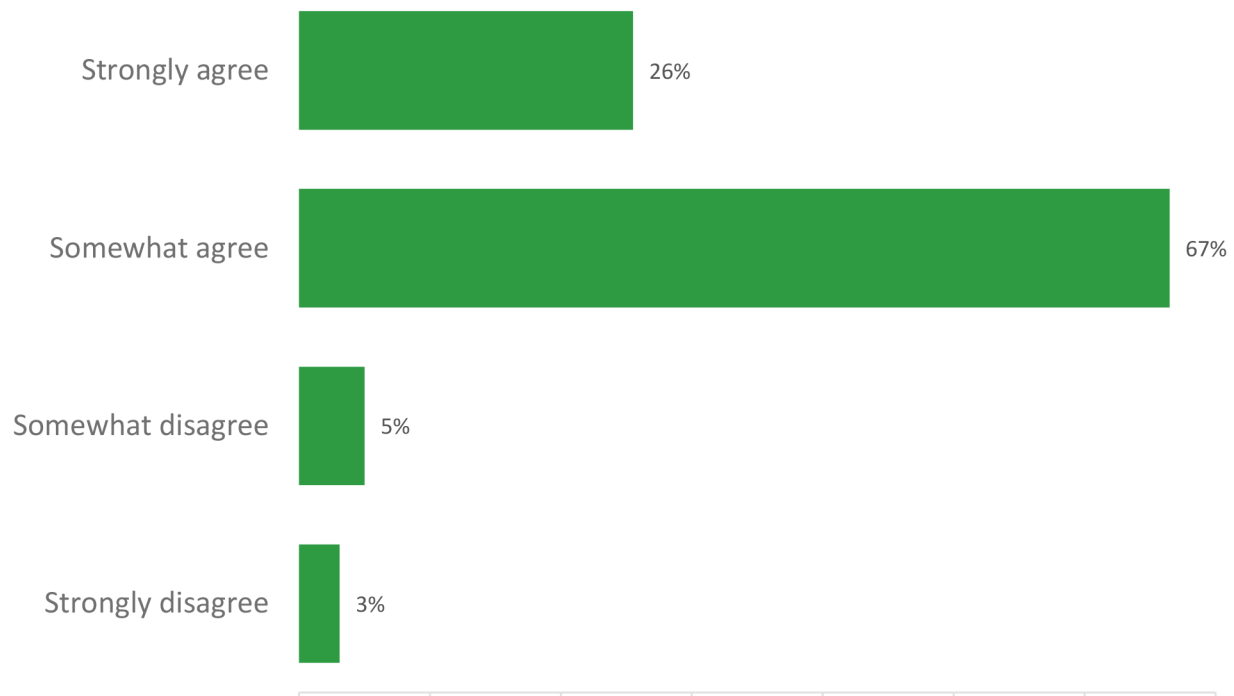
Overall, the sentiment about the agriculture and food industry is positive and growing; however, there are barriers to growth. When asked how communities and businesses can work together to promote opportunities and address challenges of Greater Minnesota, the number one response was educating the public and creating awareness of the wonderful opportunities in the industry and in rural Minnesota. The story needs to be told.

# 2021 State of Agriculture Survey Report

Response Count: **257** respondents

Completion Rate: 47.5% of surveyed individuals answered 85% or more of the questions.

**1.** Generally speaking, do you believe that, as a whole, the state of agriculture in your region is moving the right direction?



## 2. Explain why you feel the way you do about the future of Ag.



### Themes

**Market Prices:** Many participants agree that the future of Ag is heading the right direction. Some attributed good market prices of products and commodities as an explanation for their feelings. Certain products (i.e. grain, corn, etc.) rebounded significantly and these increases led to renewed optimism and other positive benefits among many farmers.

*“Farmers had great yields in 2020 and corn and bean prices are strong. New crop prices are above break evens, and most farmers have their input costs locked in for 2021.”*

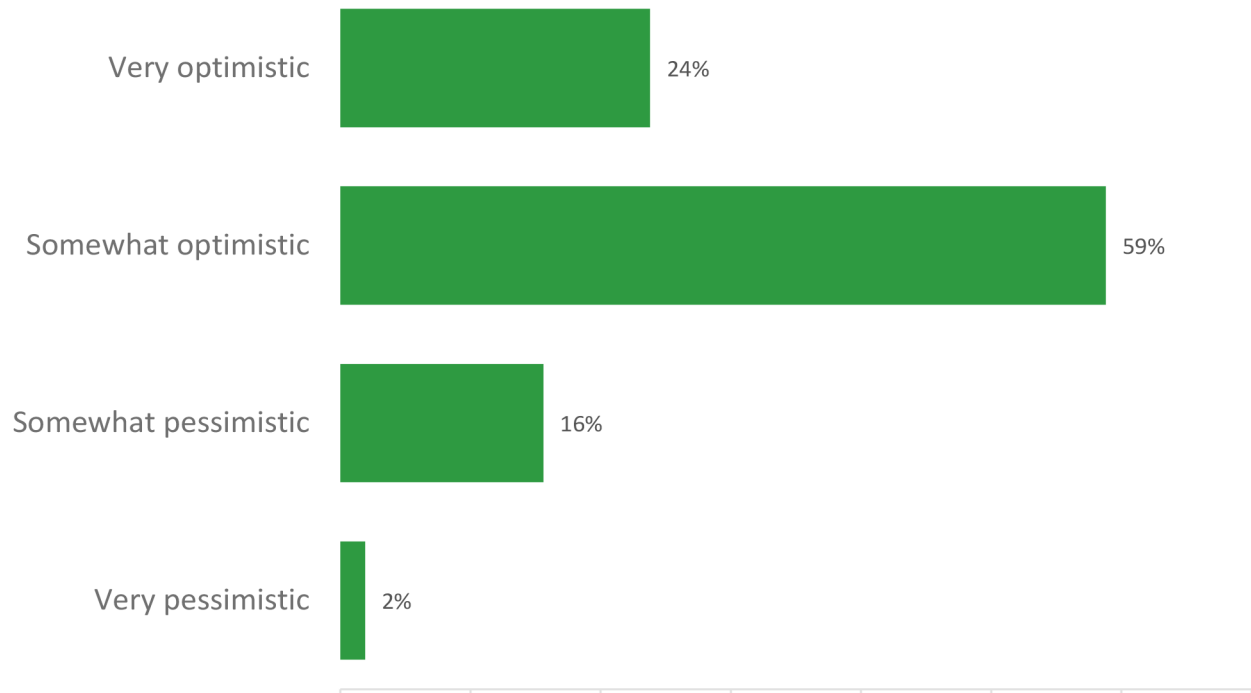
**Sustainability & Innovation:** Participants held mixed feelings regarding the sustainability of Ag practices for the foreseeable future. Some praised the increased interest and technological advances made in the area, while others believed there is still much to be done in creating sustainable practices.

*“Although progress is being made in the realm of sustainability and solid economic vision, marketing and advertising tends to push sales for the sake of retailer profit above farmers and environmental interests.”*

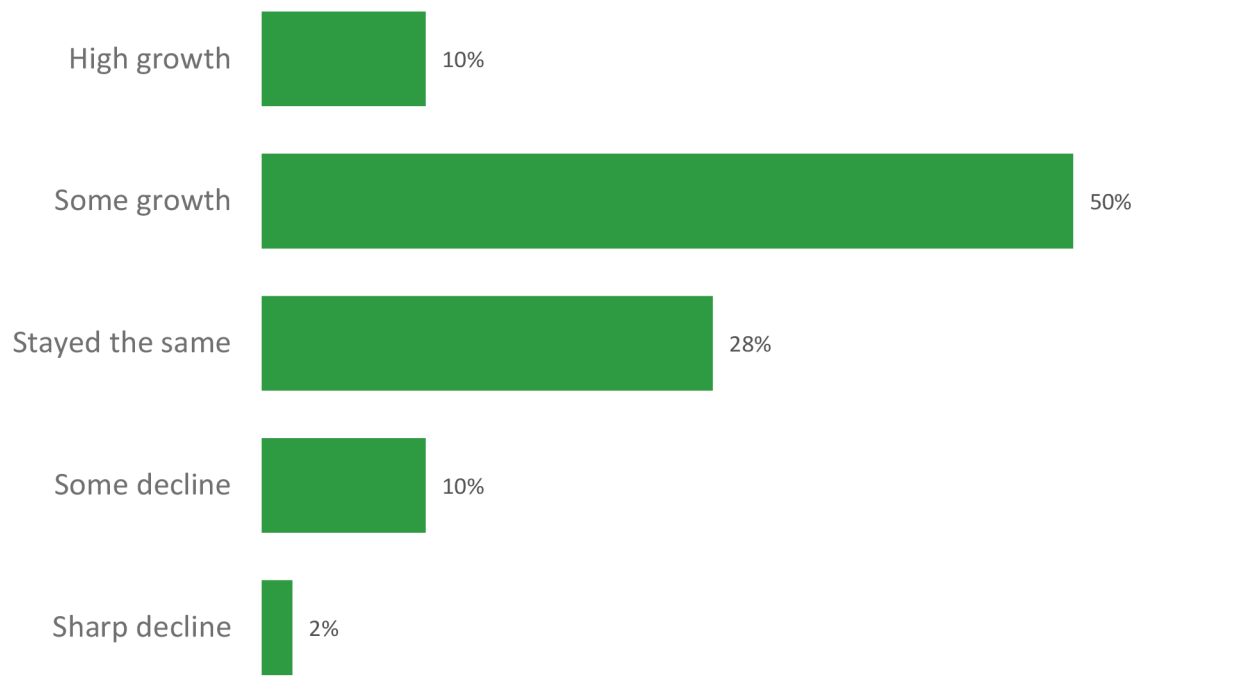
**Monopolization & Regulation:** Individuals concerned with the state of Ag cited government regulation and big corporation takeovers as major problems for the industry. Some found that regulations impede the productivity of their farms and large corporation have negatively impacted small farmers in the area.

*“Private enterprise is trying to move in the right direction, increase in government regulations is holding ag back.”*

**3.** How would you describe your personal attitude about the economic prospects of your community in the next 2 - 3 years?

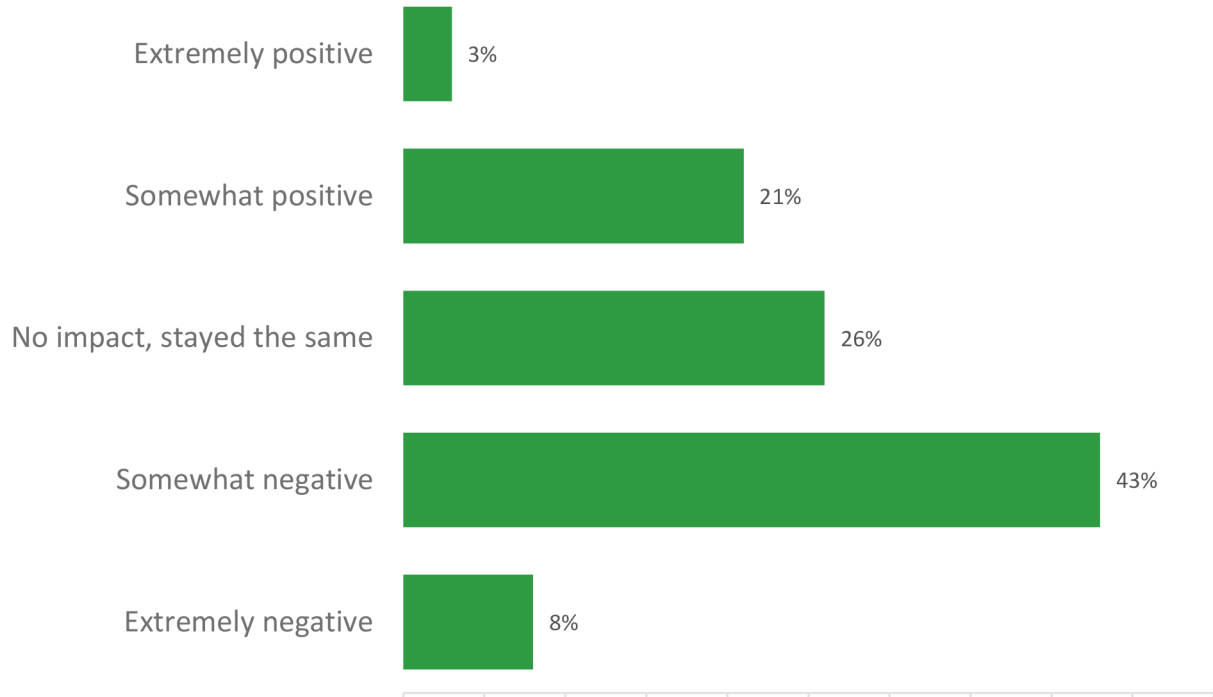


**4.** Thinking about 2020, how would you describe any changes in your business coming in 2021?





5. What type of impact did COVID-19 have on your business in the past year?



**6.** In a few words, please explain the impact of COVID-19 on your business.



## Themes

**Health & Safety:** One of the major impacts of COVID-19 on businesses was the general fear among workers about getting sick from the virus. Additionally, concerns over health and safety led to increased spending for safety training/equipment, as well as limited relationship-building/networking abilities among workers.

*“A lot of training spent money on PPP and with a large amount of worry for employees from getting it and be short of help.”*

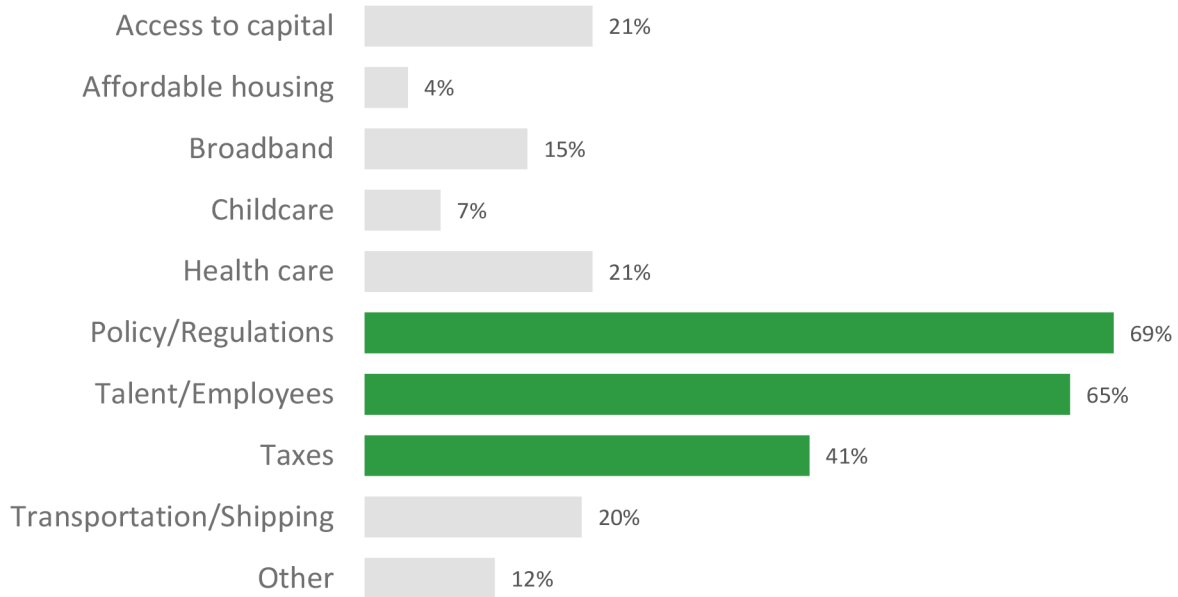
**Financial & Process Impacts:** In addition to farming, some individuals also felt declines in their small businesses with less consumer interest. Other participants experienced issues transporting products in and out, while others saw entire site shutdowns at the onset of the pandemic.

*“We are farmers and small business owners also. We felt it in our small business as we had far less people walking in the door. In addition, getting products has been a huge challenge since manufacturers cannot run at 100%.”*

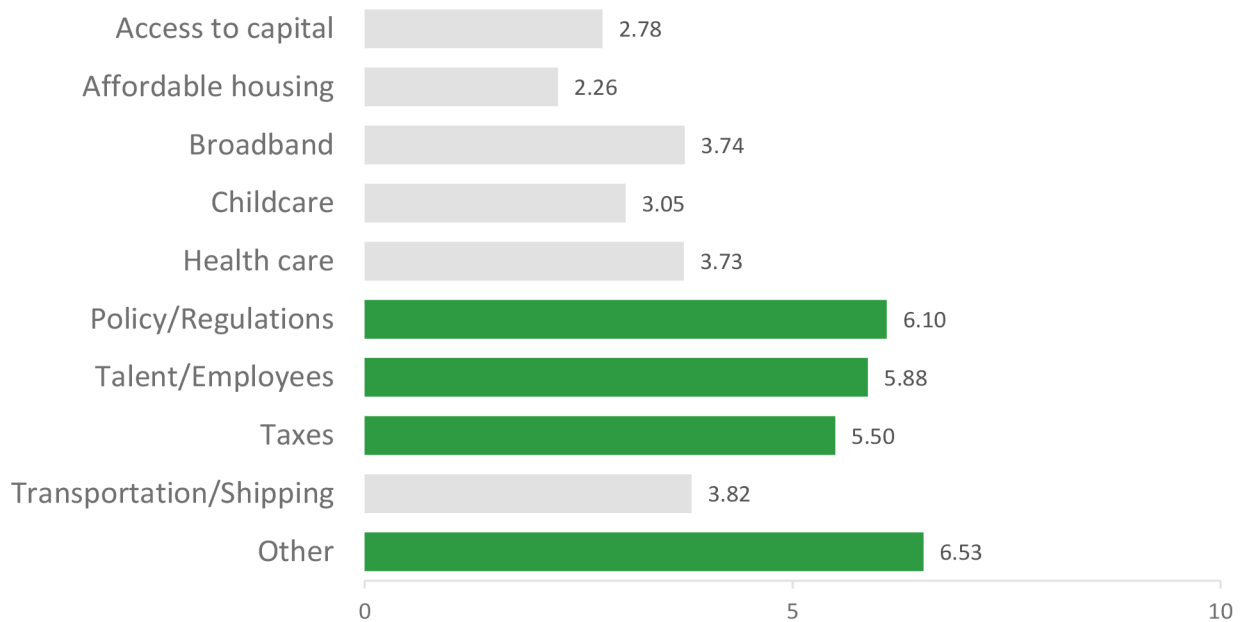
**Positive Impacts:** A small number of participants saw improvements to their business due to COVID-19. Some individuals saw improved markets and increased sales due to consumer habits, while others were able to adapt to remote work and decreased travel.

*“We were still able to grow our business while reducing expenses such as traveling. The team members were able to work from home as well.”*

**7.** Which three of the following issues threaten your business's ability to grow the most? (Select up to three.)



**8.** How much of a negative impact have the following issues had on your business?



9. Do you have ideas on how communities and businesses can work together to promote opportunities and to address some of the challenges Greater Minnesota is facing?



## Themes

**Education & Awareness:** Many participants believe that building a better relationship between communities and businesses begins with greater efforts to bring awareness to the importance of Ag. Some believe efforts should be targeted at legislators and consumers, while others believe it is important to start young and begin recruiting students in schools.

*“Continue to educate people about the effects of ag in the community.”*

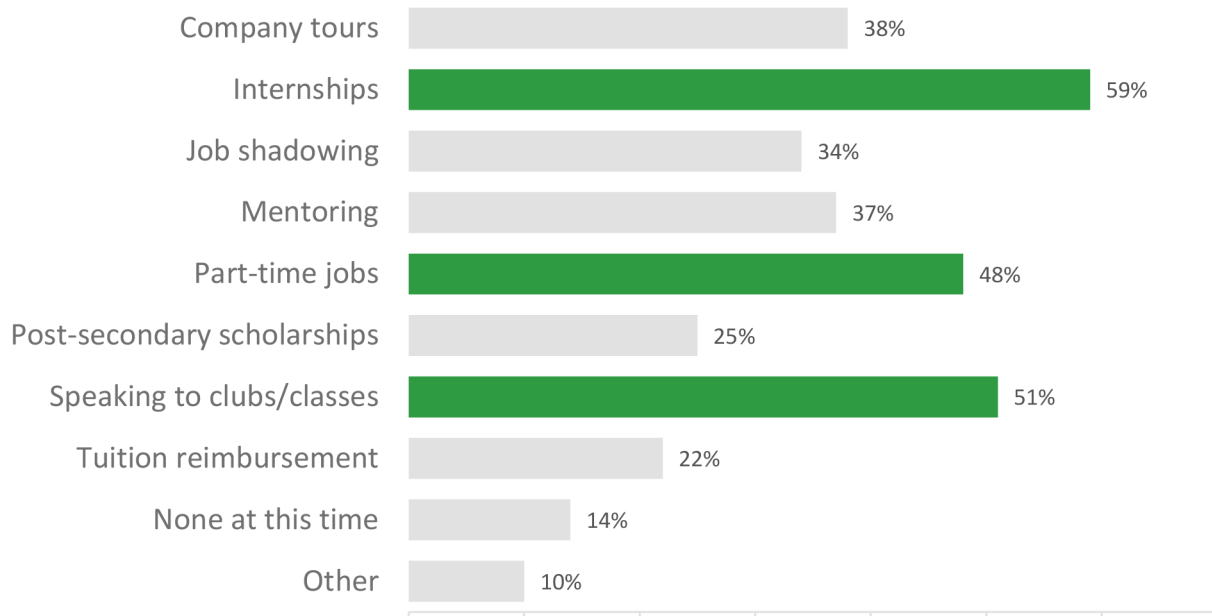
**Cooperation & Coalitions:** Other participants believe efforts to address challenges in the area should involve improved cooperation between business. Some individuals call for less competition and ego-driven decision making, while others believe joining coalitions to voice opinions and other concerns would increase the weight these messages hold.

*“Stop competing with one another and see all of us in this area as a unit competing with other regions and the world together.”*

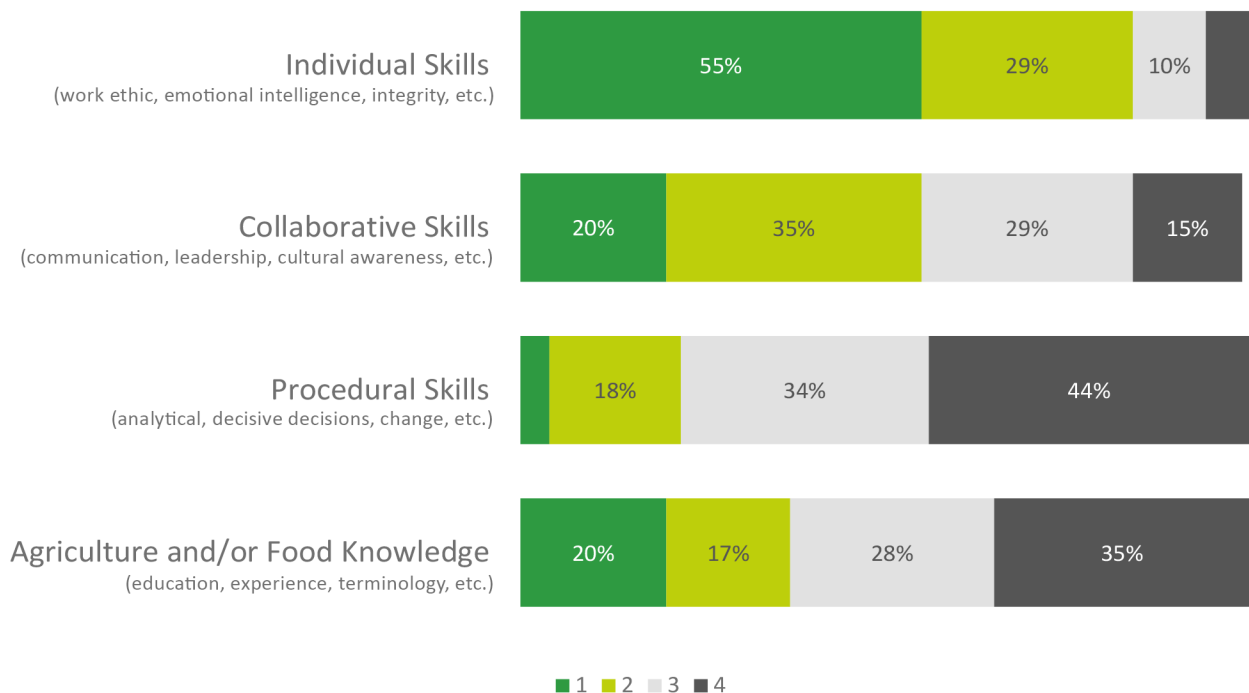
**Communication:** Broadly, individuals agree that strong communication pathways between communities are important for tackling many of the region’s problems. Some suggest national ad campaigns, while others are concerned at the local level, suggesting leaders hold town halls to improve communication.

*“Have our representatives hold town halls at least once a month with a web-based forum. They need to hear the voice of their districts at large to make sure they are on track with what we need.”*

**10.** Which options does your business offer to students to learn more about career opportunities in your industry? (Select all that apply.)



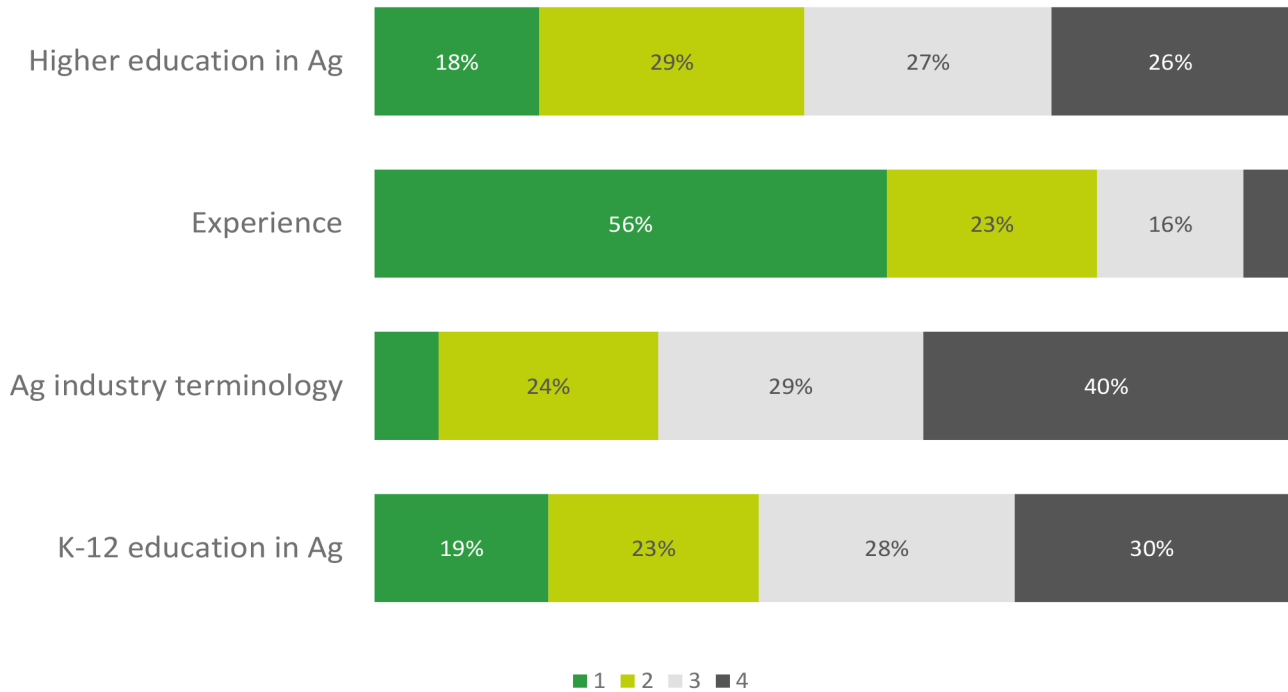
**11.** Please rank which skills you have the strongest need for in your job candidates. (Use (1) for the greatest and (4) for the least.)



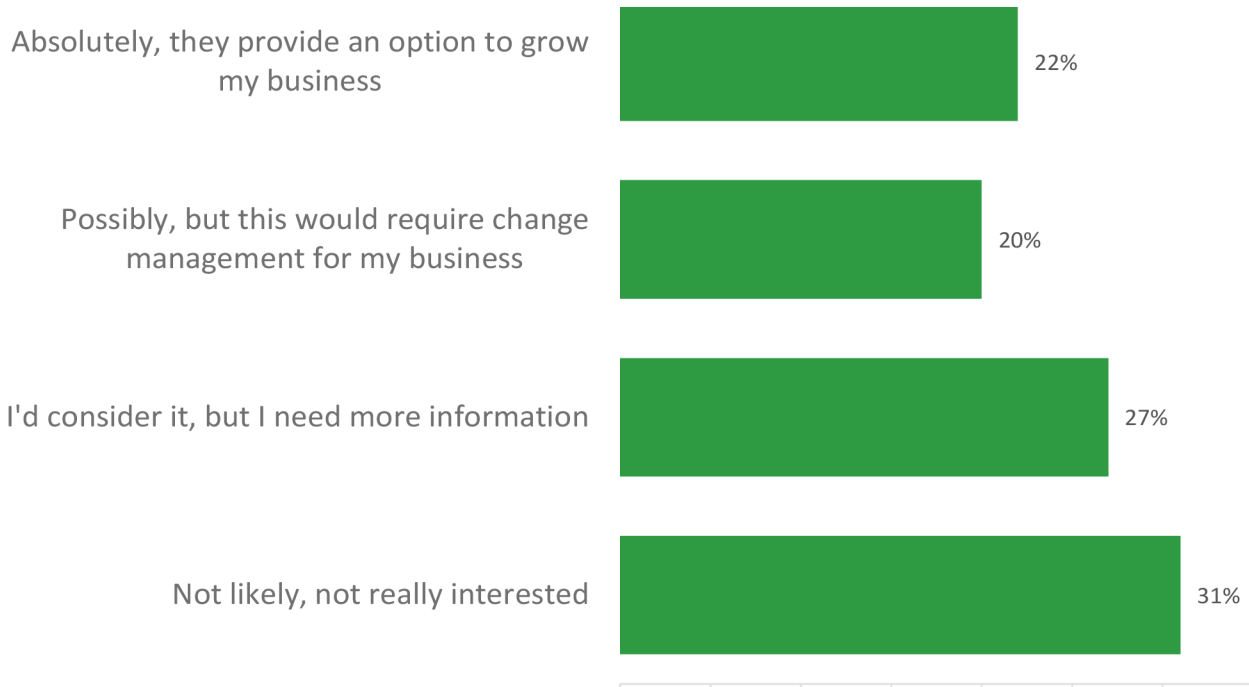


**12.** With Ag and/or food knowledge in mind, rank the following in order of importance to your business.

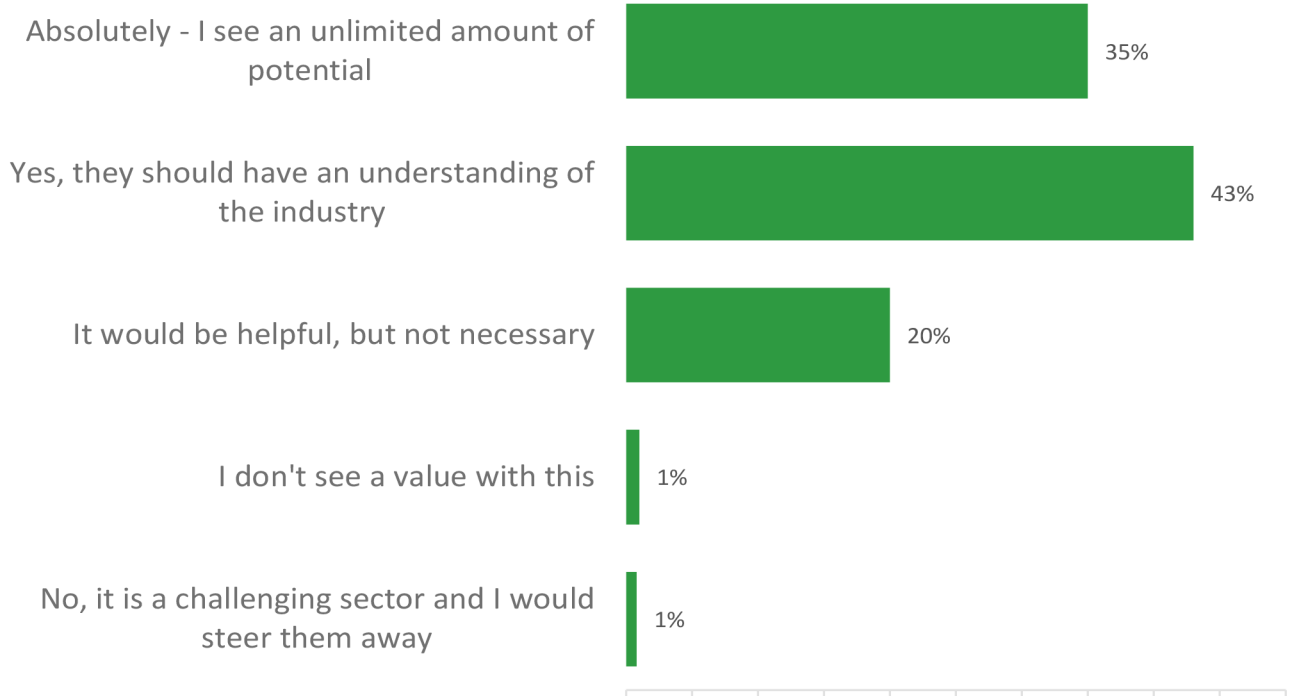
(Use (1) for the greatest and (4) for the least.)



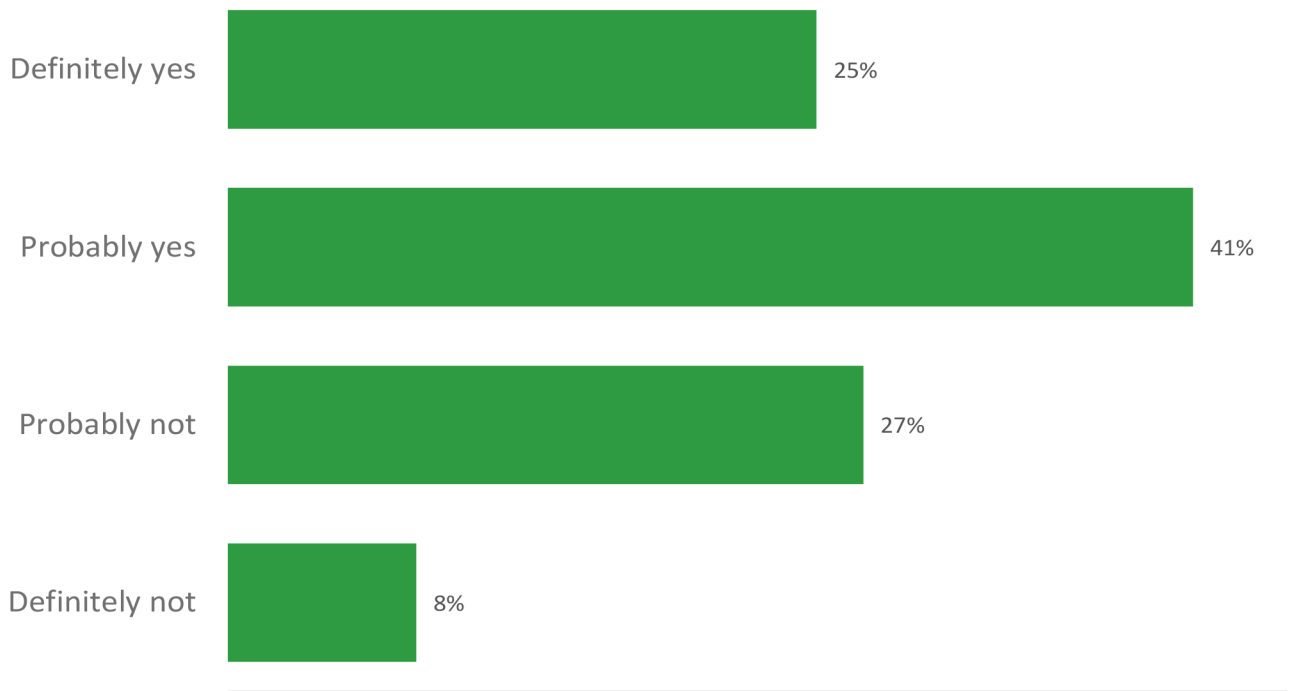
**13.** Do you think an increased number of immigrant workers would help alleviate the talent shortage in your business?



**14.** Are you encouraging your family, and others, to take food, agriculture, and natural resources classes and courses in K-12 and higher education?



**15.** Do you plan to hire additional employees in the next 12 months?



**16.** Have you noticed an increase in people in agriculture who engage in gig work or side jobs to supplement their income?

Yes



64%

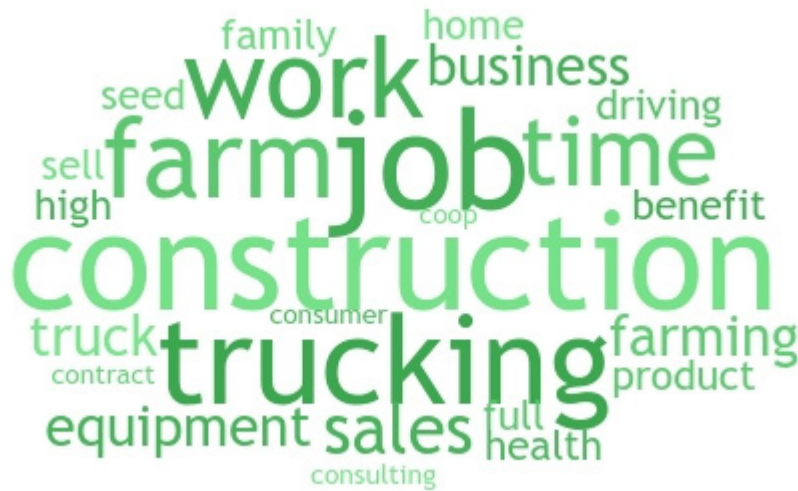
No



36%



## 17. What gig/side jobs have you seen people engage in lately?

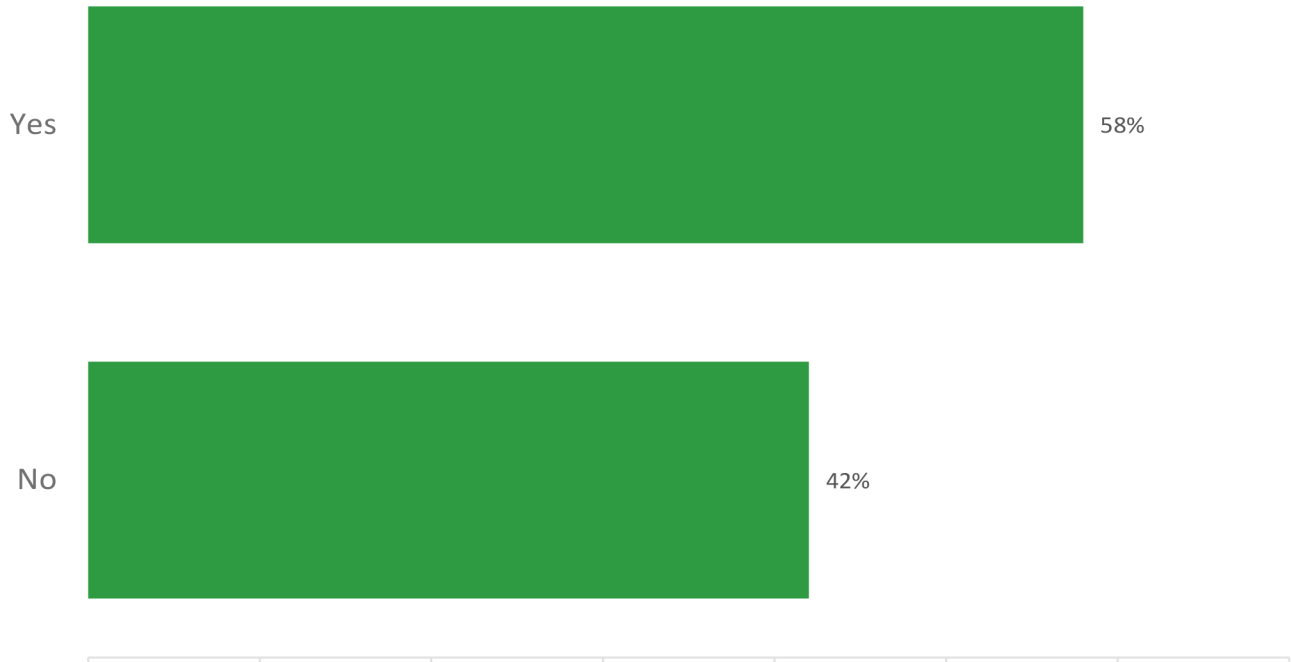


### Themes

Overall, individuals have been engaging in a variety of side jobs centered around flexible or seasonal work. Below is an abbreviated list of some of the occupations/industries cited.

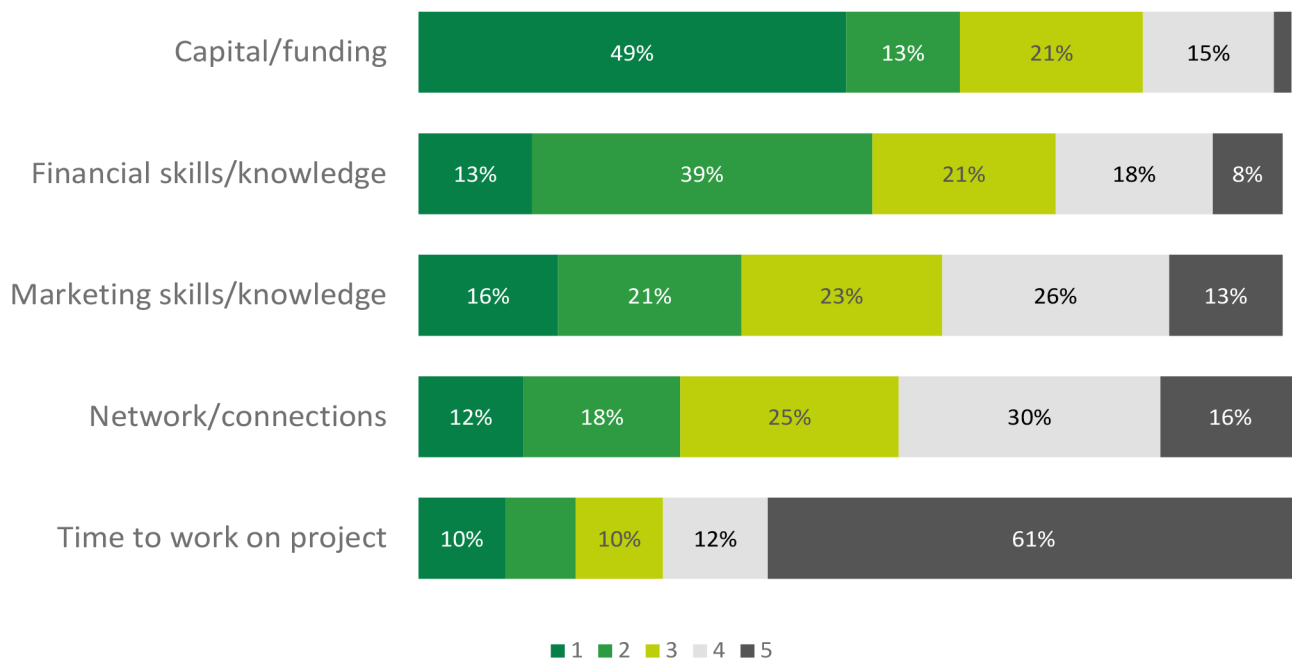
- » Construction
- » Trucking
- » Factory work
- » Food service
- » Nursing home care
- » Consultation
- » Teaching
- » Equipment sales
- » Technology
- » Seed sales
- » Insurance
- » Tile installation
- » Welding
- » Mechanic
- » Finance
- » Retail

## 18. Are you, or have you been entrepreneur?



## 19. Please rank the following aspects agricultural entrepreneurs face, ranging from largest to smallest need.

(Use (1) for the greatest and (4) for the least.)





**20.** Are there any additional challenges or opportunities in agriculture not addressed in the survey? Please identify and explain what comes to mind.



## Themes

**Perception of Farmers:** Some participants feel the public holds a negative perception of farming and agriculture. Many marketing campaigns have been targeted at agriculture which has led to negative outcomes felt by workers in the industry.

*“The negative perception of agriculture and farmers by the urban population.”*

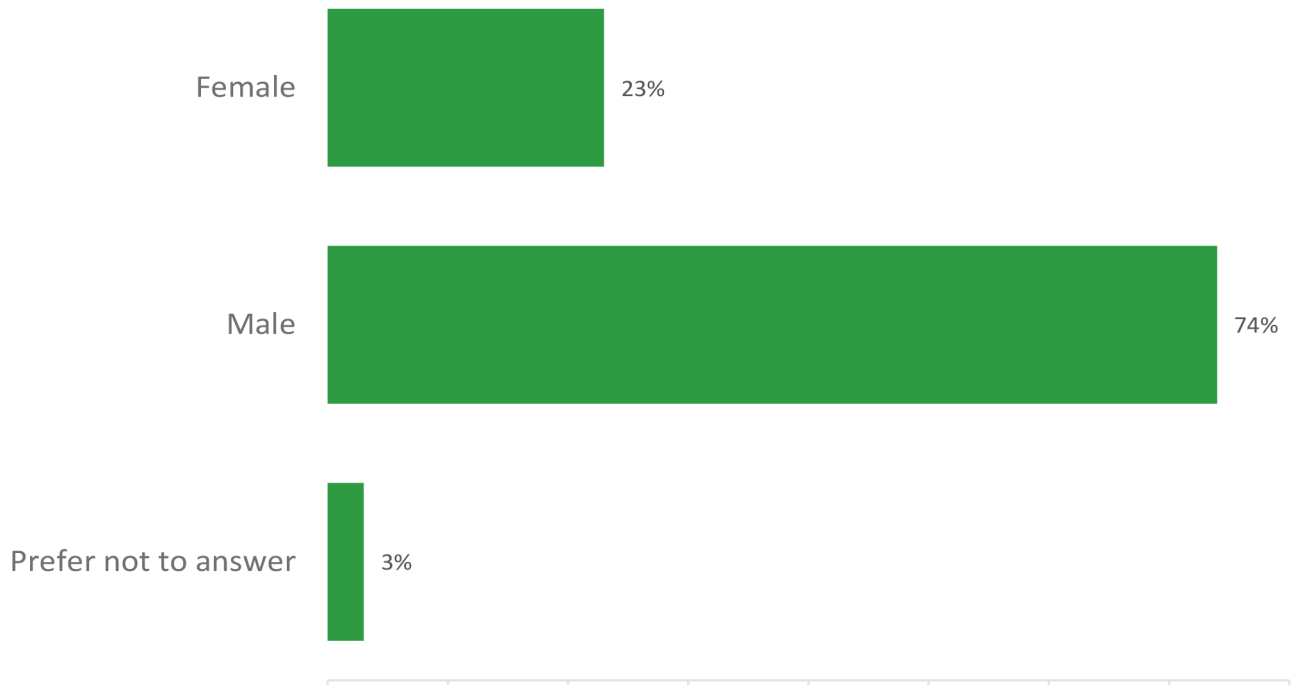
**Talent & Transitional Planning:** Some participants also feel that recruiting and retaining qualified workers has been a major challenge for them and has led to issues with growing as a business. In addition, others believe greater support and resources should be given to the transition process of passing a farm/business to the next generation of management.

*“Transitional planning, passing the farm on to the next generation.”*

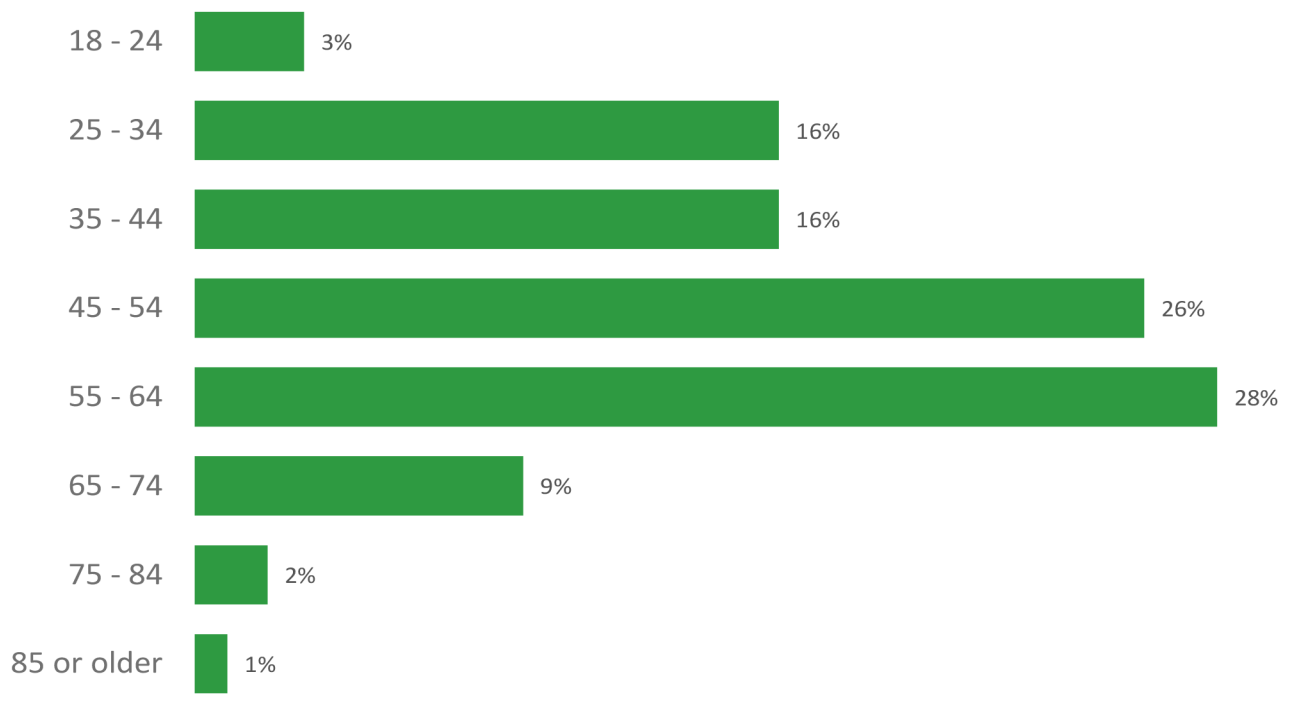
**Diversity & Inclusion:** A few participants believe greater attention should be given to diversity and inclusion efforts among agricultural businesses.

*“Increasing inclusion of women and diverse communities as business owners, suppliers, etc in/to local agriculture companies.”*

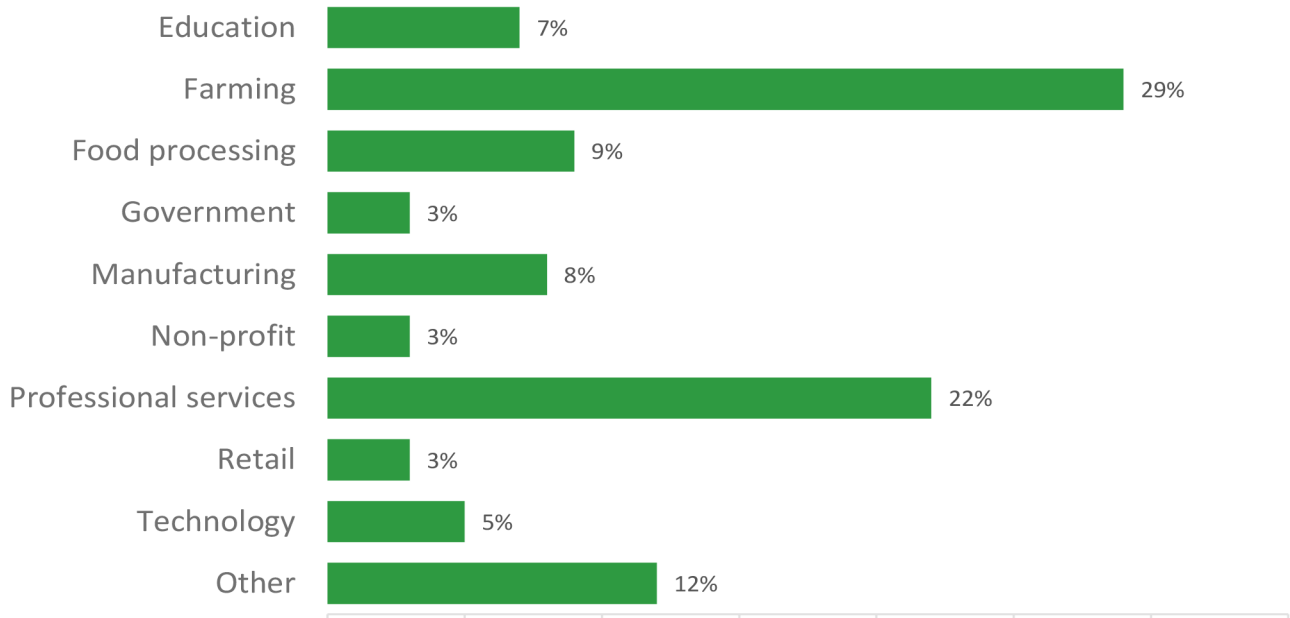
## 21. Gender



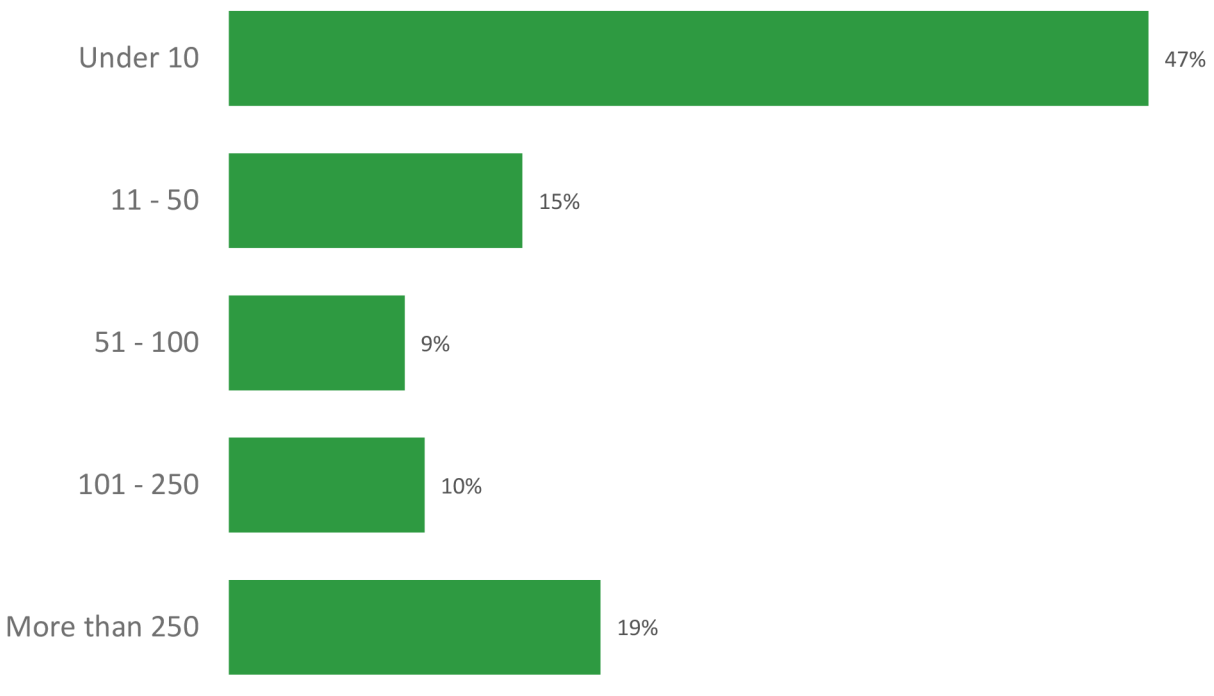
## 22. Age



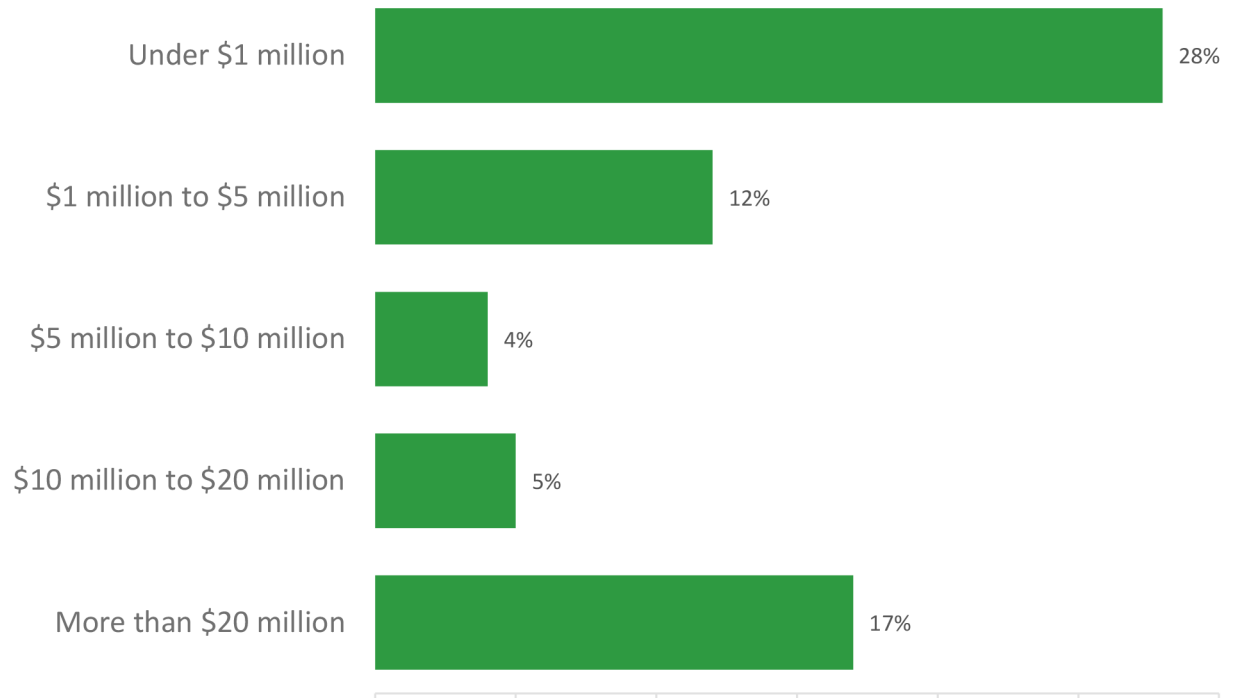
**23.** Which of the following describes your line of work or entrepreneurial industry?



**24.** How many people does your business employ in Minnesota?

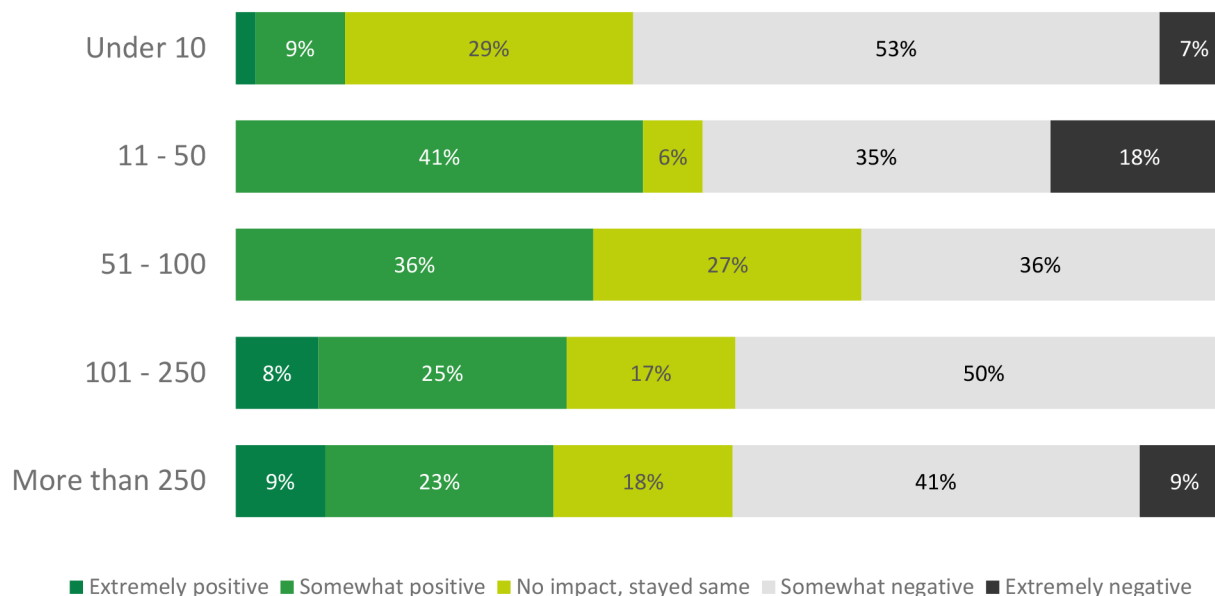


## 25. What is your approximate annual business gross revenue?



# 2021 State of Agriculture Survey Report: Results by Business Size

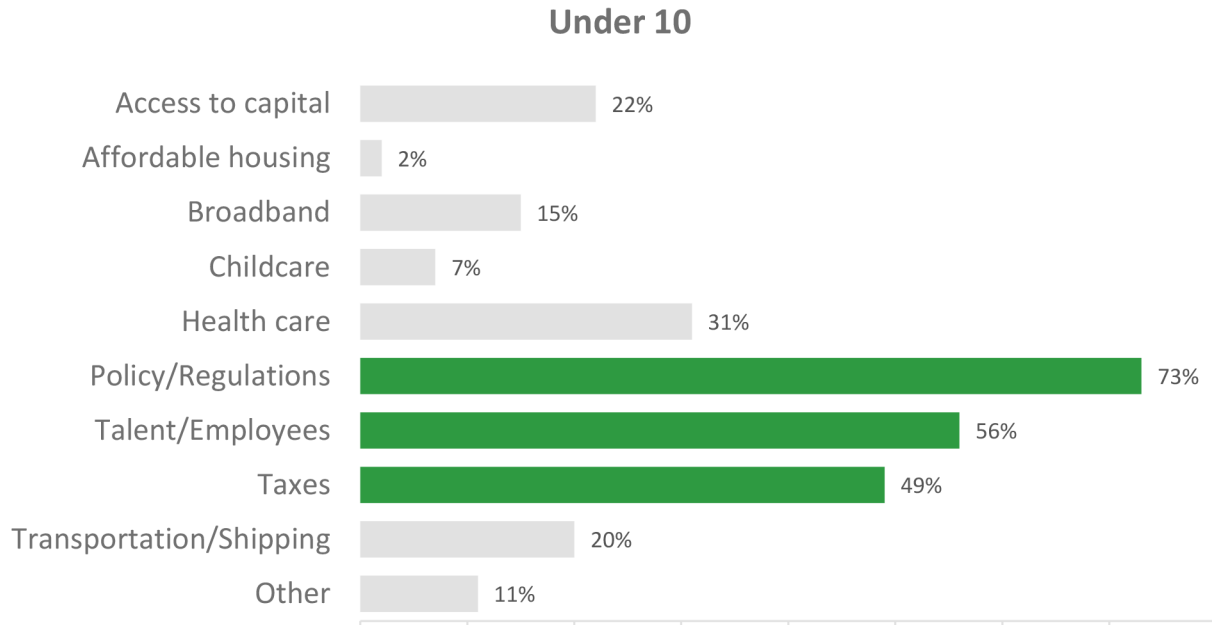
## 1. What type of impact did COVID-19 have on your business in the past year? *(by Business Size)*



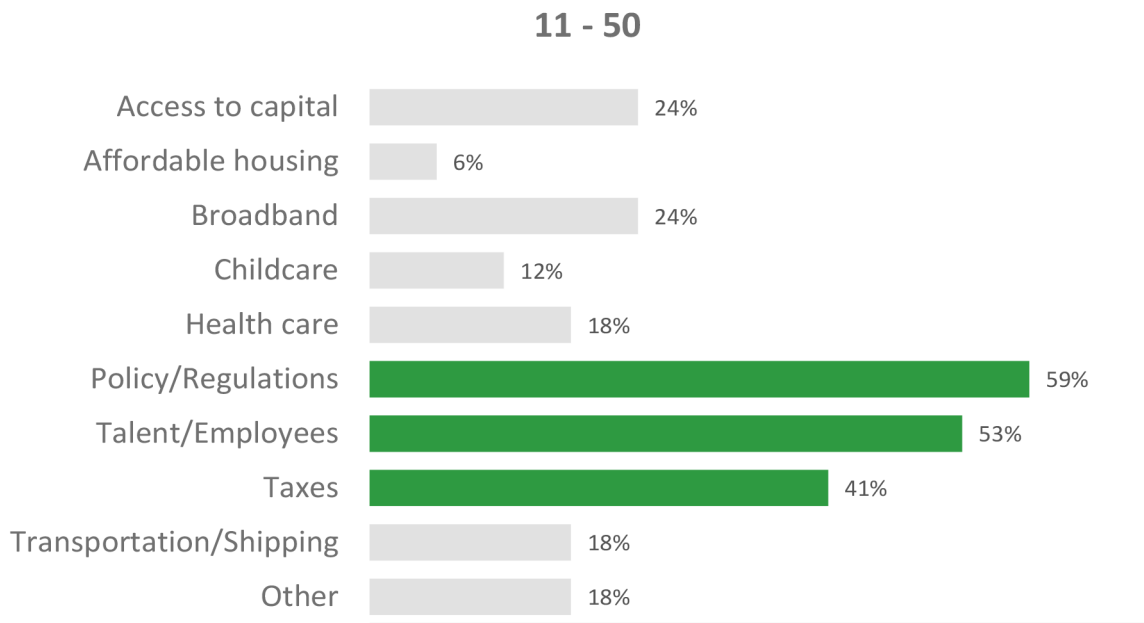


**2.** Which three of the following issues threaten your business’s ability to grow the most? (*by Business Size*)

**Under 10 Employees**

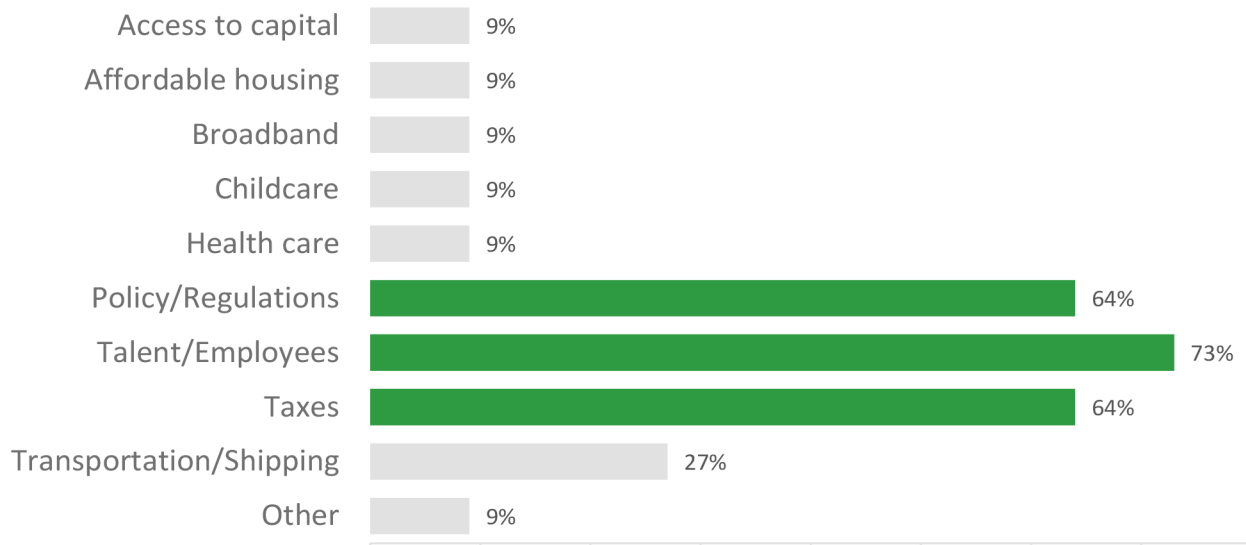


**11 - 50 Employees**



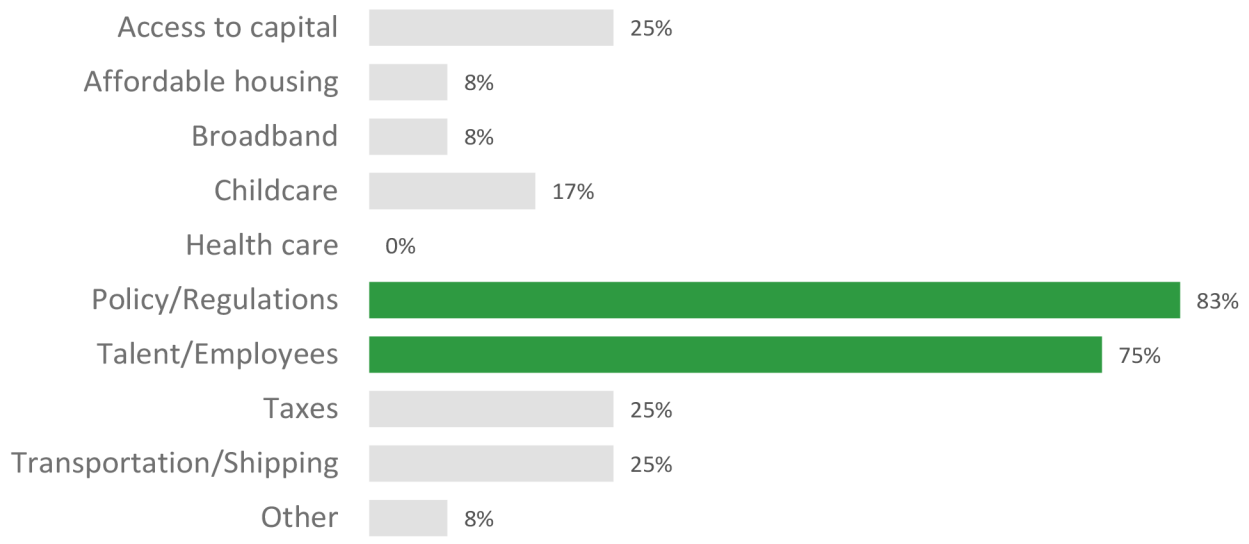
## 51 - 100 Employees

### 51 - 100

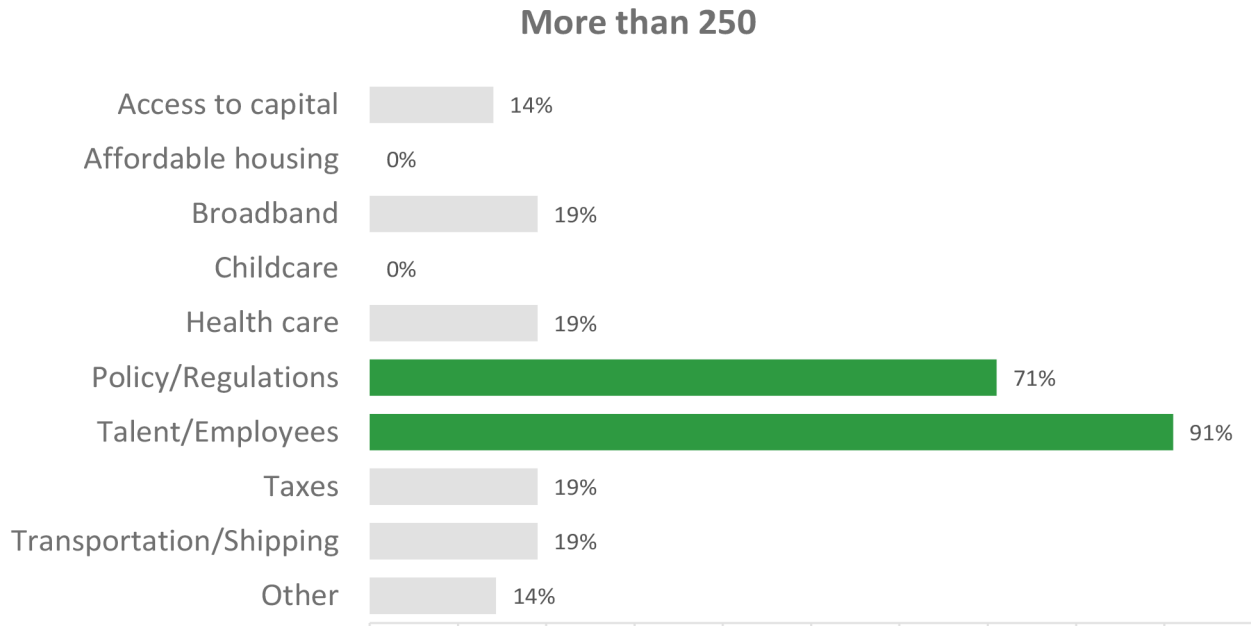


## 101 - 250 Employees

### 101 - 250

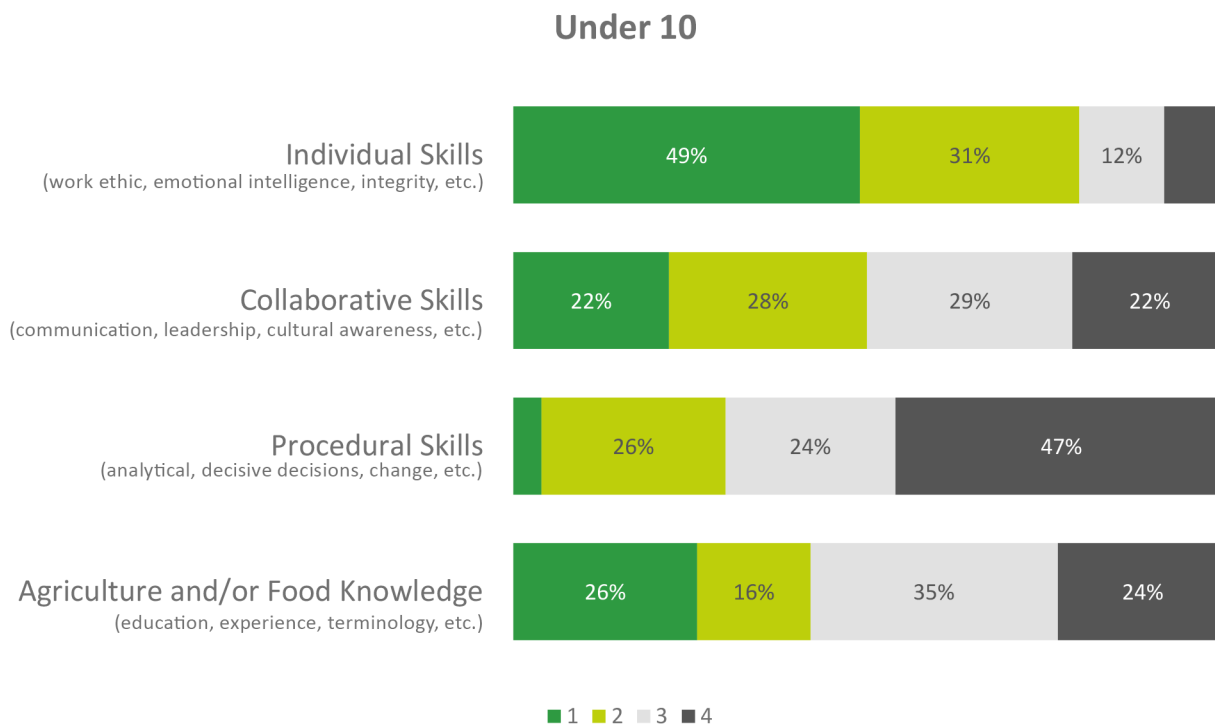


## More than 250 Employees



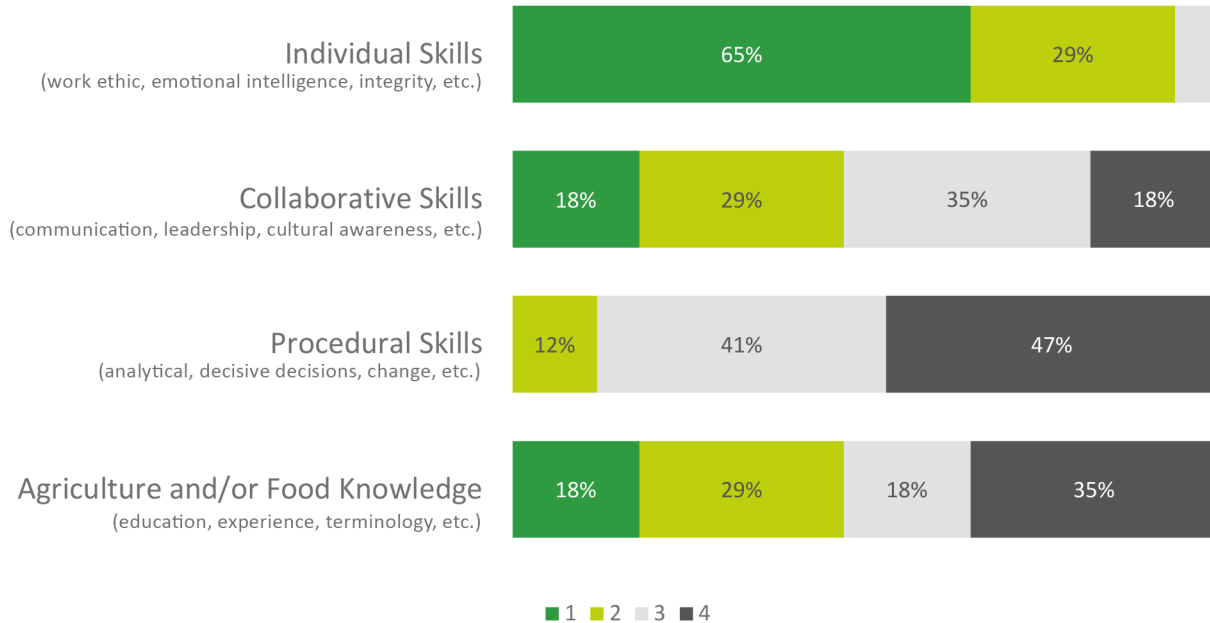
**3.** Please rank which skills you have the strongest need for in your job candidates. *(by Business Size)* (Use (1) for the greatest and (4) for the least.)

## Under 10 Employees



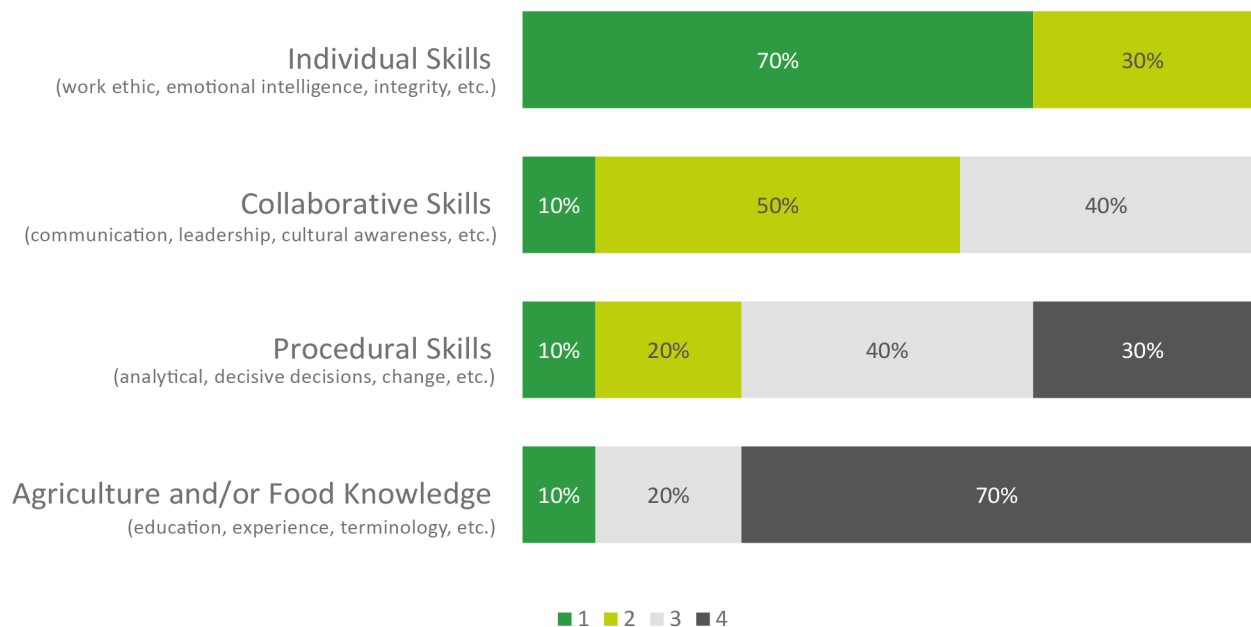
## 11 - 50 Employees

### 11 - 50



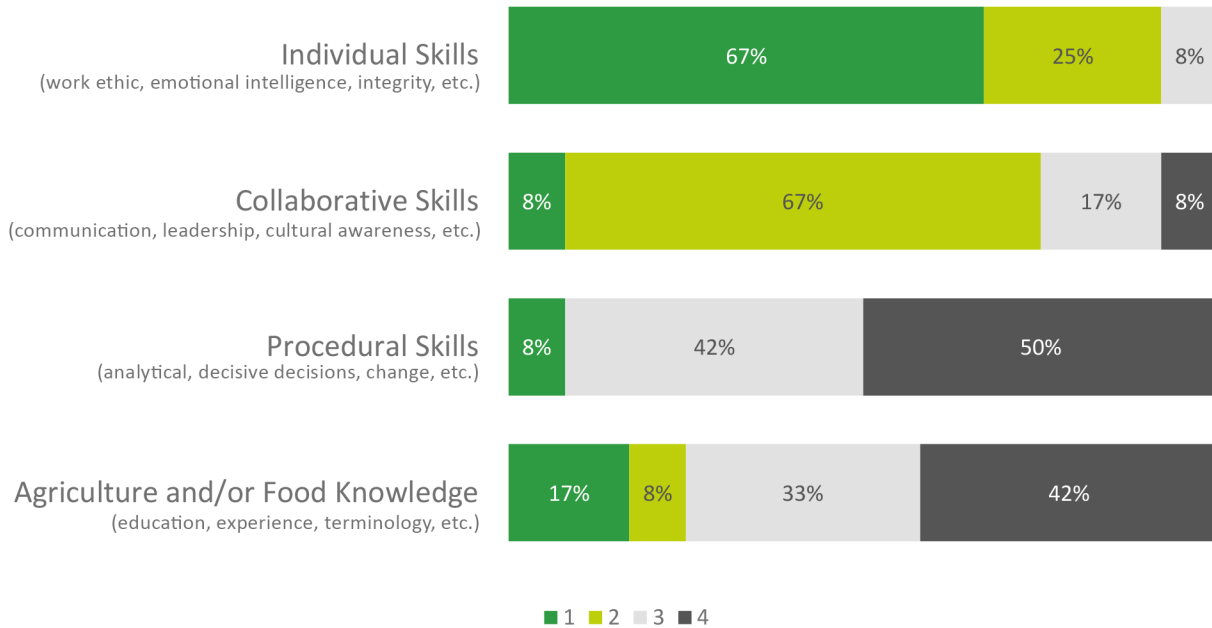
## 51 - 100 Employees

### 51 - 100



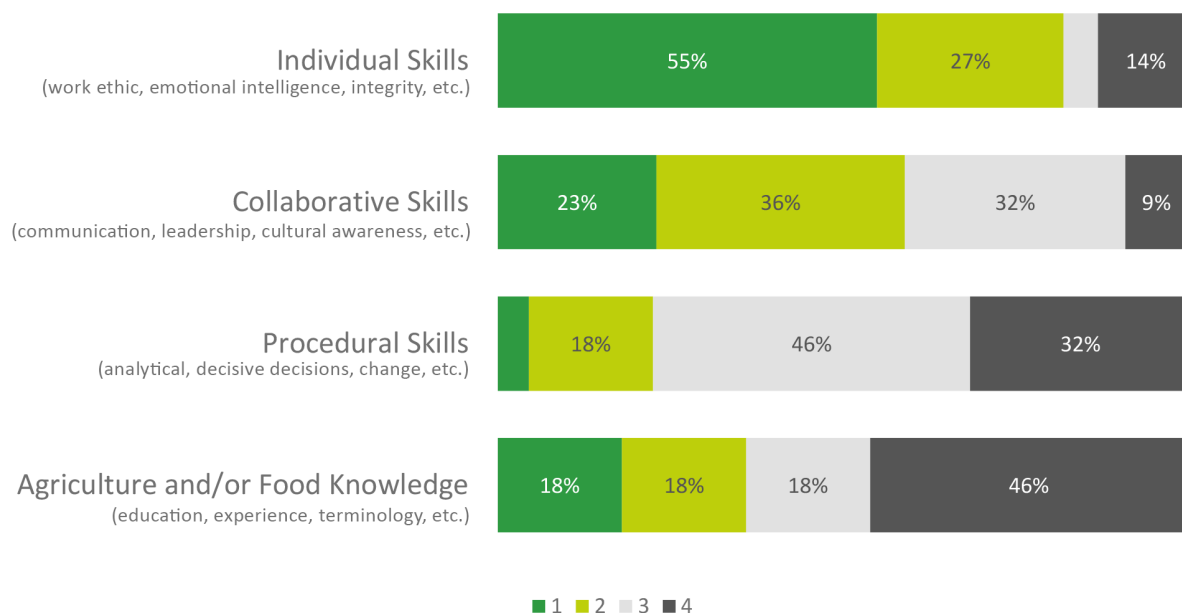
## 101 - 250 Employees

### 101 - 250



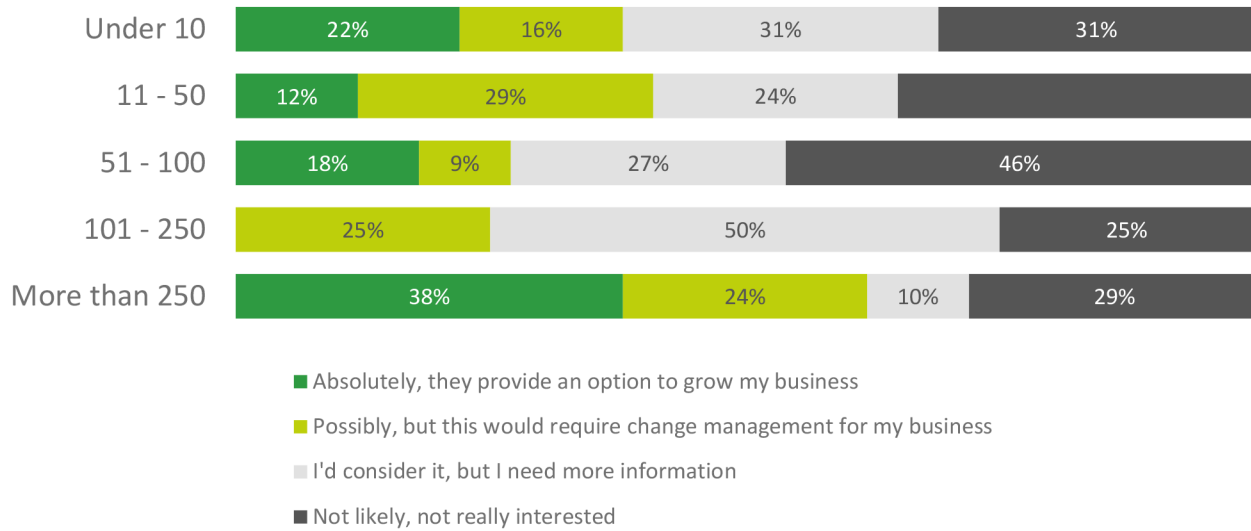
## More than 250 Employees

### More than 250

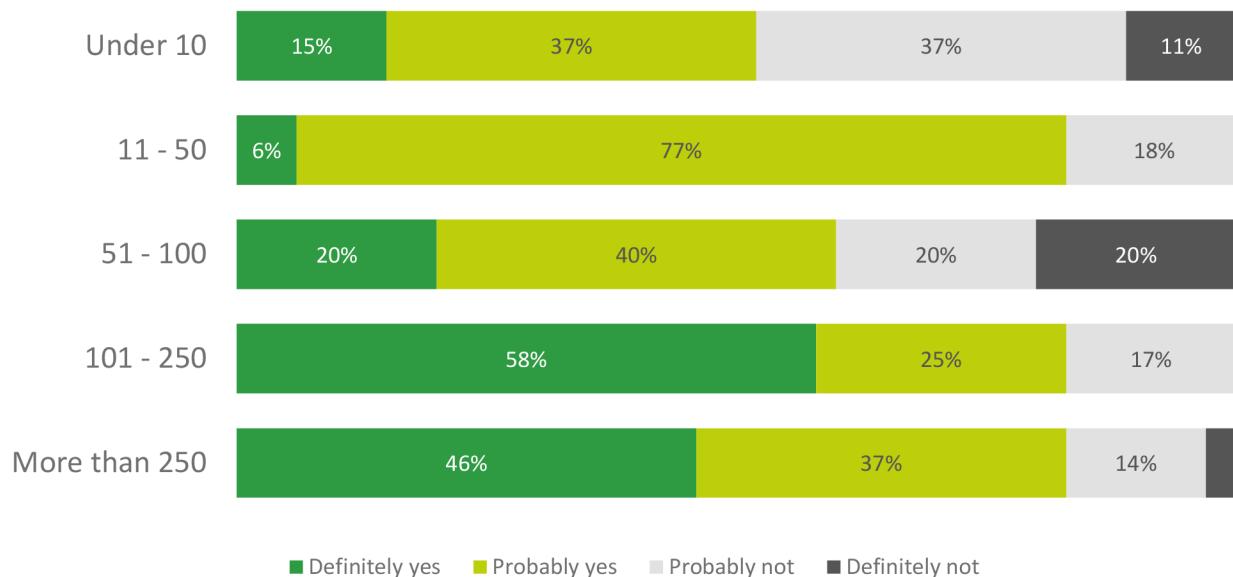




**4. Do you think an increased number of immigrant workers would help alleviate the talent shortage in your business?  
(by Business Size)**

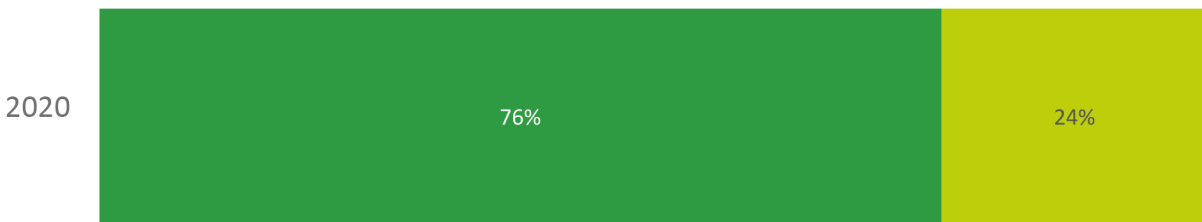
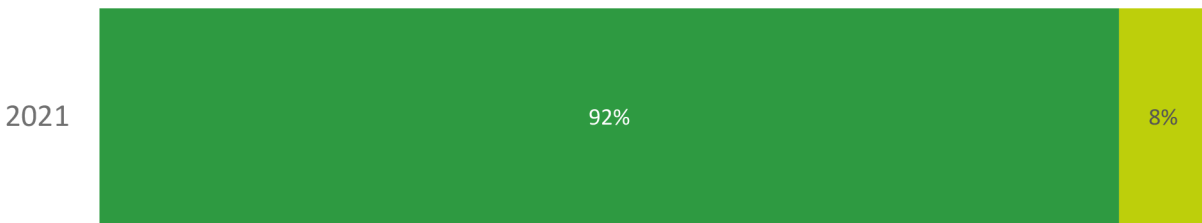


**5. Do you plan to hire additional employees in the next 12 months?  
(by Business Size)**

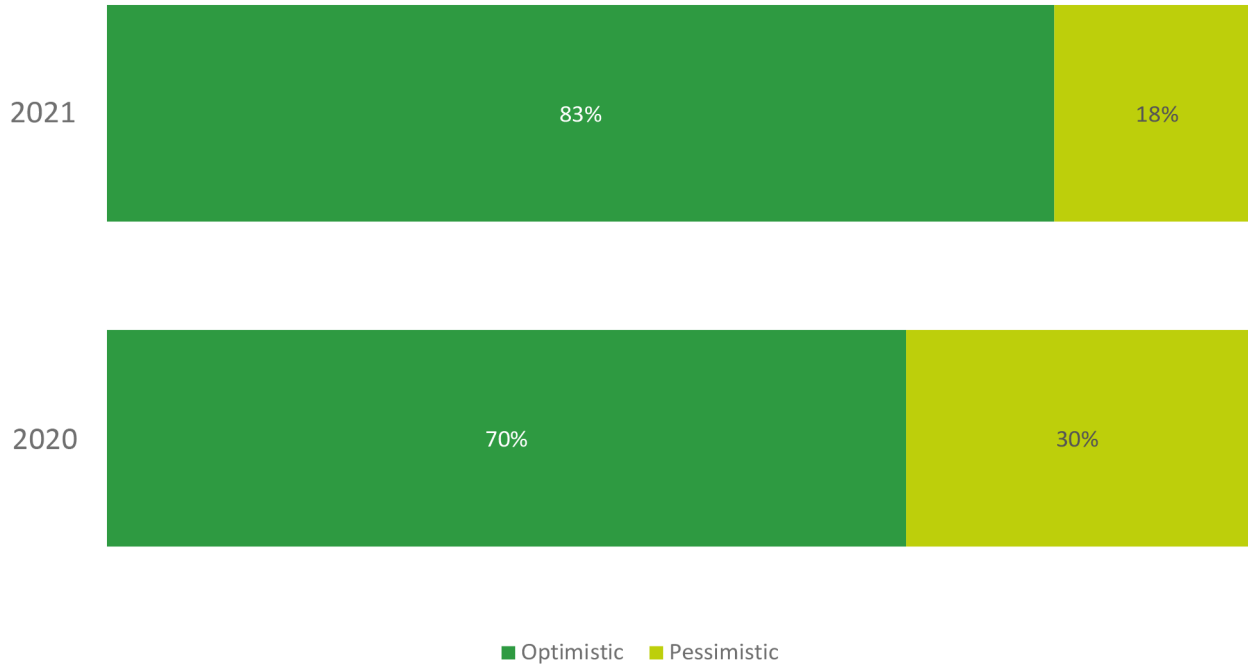


# 2021 State of Agriculture Survey: Change-Over-Time-Analysis

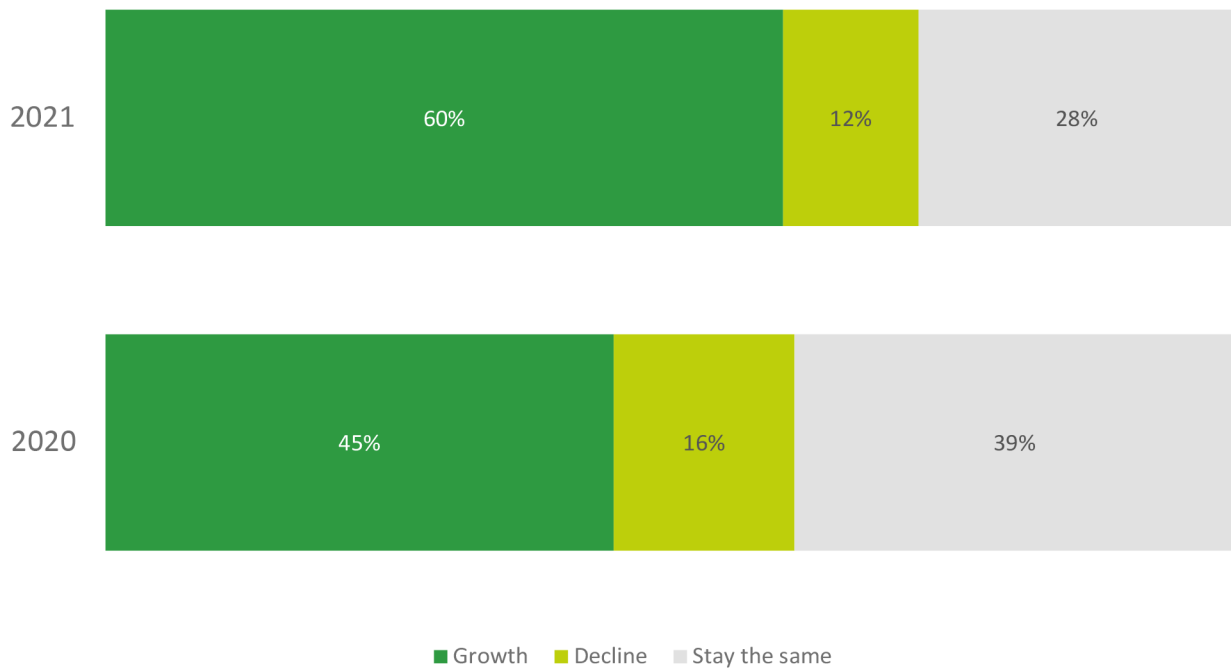
1. Generally speaking, do you believe that, as a whole, the state of agriculture in your region is going the right direction?



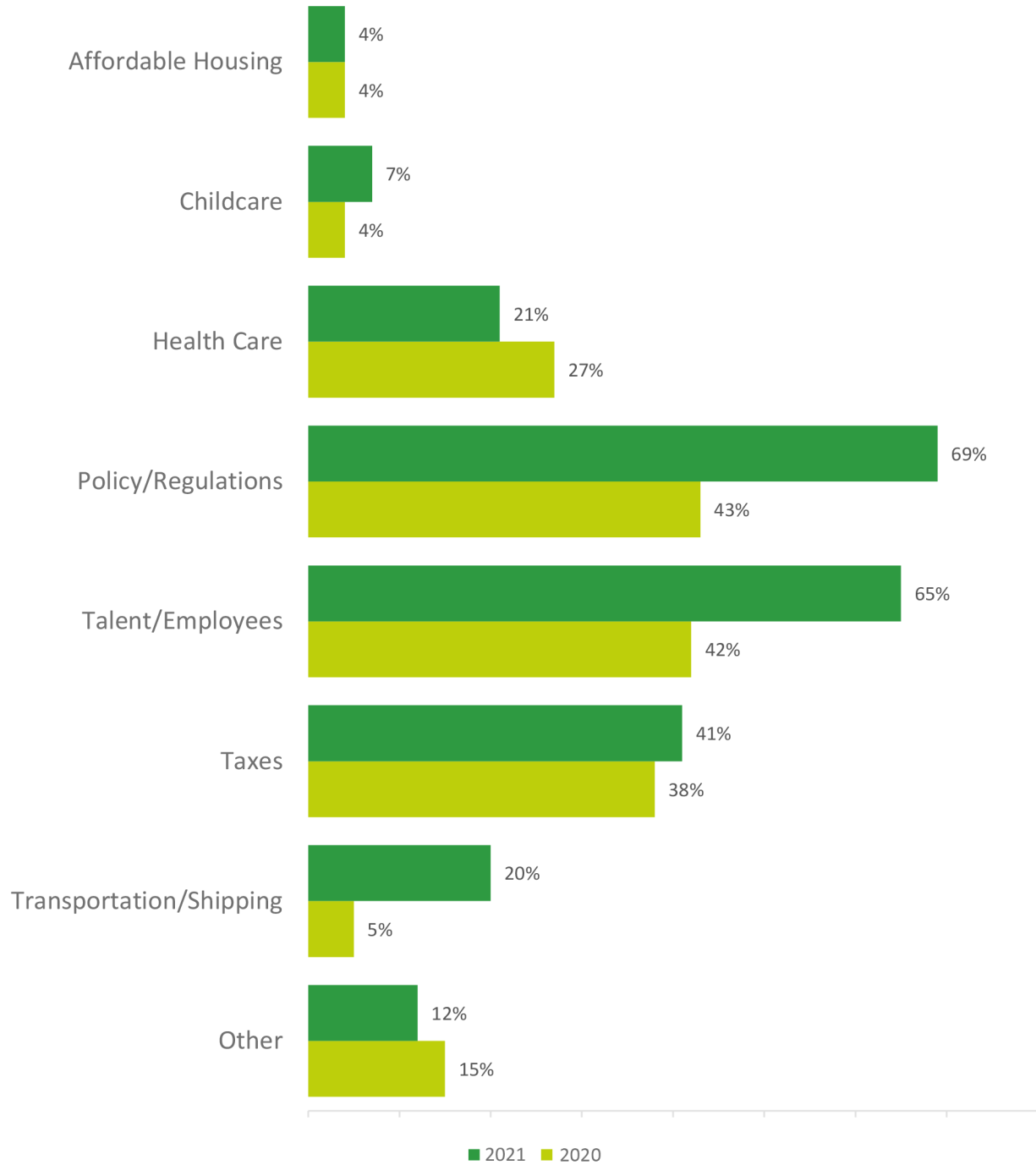
**2.** Would you describe your attitude about the economic prospects of your community in the next 2 - 3 years as optimistic or pessimistic?



**3.** Thinking about 2020, how would you describe any changes in your business coming in 2021?



#### 4. Which three of the following issues threaten your business's ability to grow the most?



# State of Ag Report: Focus Groups

## Focus Group Summary

### AgCentric

This focus group started very positive, noting a profitable year for many in agriculture and people's attitudes remaining cautiously positive. However, a question was raised about how much of the impact was a result of government subsidies and what this meant long-term. Barriers to growth were also mentioned, and they focused on talent, specifically, CDL drivers. This group also noted the unfortunate increase in substance abuse, which has also had an impact on the workforce. Different needs and barriers related to location and non-traditional agriculture were mentioned. Population density, as well as timber, posed issues around transportation, access to service, and broadband.

### Minnesota AgriGrowth

The diverse industry representation in this focus group led with a discussion on the impact of regulatory issues and the desire for the State and Federal governments to address real needs in the agriculture and food industries. As the discussion turned to the need for talent, the opportunities for new technologies and innovation drove the discussion. Energy, artificial intelligence, and supply chain topics offered insight into how the industry could secure a path to growth. Yet, the conversation continued to infuse talent with the theme of increasing a collective, positive message to high school students so they can "see a path to a career in Ag."

### Agriculture Utilization Research Institute (AURI)

This focus group had a strong base of business service providers and producers. The positive conversation noted the future of value-added innovations in the industry; although, barriers for entrepreneurs still existed around capital and developing a network within the supply chain infrastructure to grow and advance new products. The importance of the environment was also discussed. In addition, urban and rural mindsets need to have more dialogues to find commonalities. A suggestion was made that rural communities need to do a better job of telling their positive stories.

### The City of Faribault

This group centered on the strength of the community around food processing and the niche businesses associated with the industry. Measures such as relocation packages, access to capital and new business initiatives have provided benefits to the agriculture and food industry. Recognizing the need for employees, the community and employers have been working together to provide opportunities for high school students to learn and engage with the industry. However, other barriers, such as lack of affordable housing and rural broadband, have impacted the region. Discussion around COVID-19 also noted the shift towards more people eating at home, which had an impact not only on the restaurants, but on the ways food is processed and packaged.

## The City of Jackson

This focus group for southwestern Minnesota began by sharing positive news about major employers hiring again, driving the local economy. It was noted the community has done a good job trying to stay ahead of the infrastructure and local amenities to make itself attractive to new employees. The county invested in broadband access, as lack thereof has been a barrier to rural growth and small business development like in many counties in the state. Although, government regulations and the general business climate of Minnesota have been a hindrance. It was noted that being close to the border has posed a challenge as “Iowa and South Dakota are hungry.”

## Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL)

The MARL was represented by several producers and Ag professionals from across the State. They mentioned many of the same barriers to growth as the previous State of Ag: broadband, housing, childcare, and labor. The infrastructure of roads and bridges needs to be better maintained by the State because funding seems to follow where the most people are, which is not in rural areas. It was noted there is exciting innovation happening in the industry, but the story needs to be told, especially to the younger generation. In turn, the older generation needs to make more opportunities for the younger people to enter agriculture. The global pandemic brought many challenges, especially the increase in EMT calls related to alcohol and drug in the rural areas, coupled with the lack of trained professionals to address the issue.

## Marshall Area Chamber

Participants in the focus group started with the discussion of positive yields and commodity prices positioning producers well going into 2021. Disruptions to the pork industry and corn deliveries to ethanol plants because of COVID-19 were noted as a negative impact on the Ag industry. Government restraints and competition from other states were amplified during the pandemic. Trucking and rail regulations (transportation) are shifting concerns, as well as developing a plan for immigration, which is needed for obtaining employees. Talent as a whole was a concern across all sectors, requiring an increase in sharing of the positive aspects of careers in agriculture and rural living. Opportunities for attraction lay in the sciences, as well as in the growing benefits of rural living, especially considering the impact the pandemic has made on lifestyles in general.

## Southern Minnesota Center of Agriculture

This focus group brought together people from across southern Minnesota who noted the positive outlook as a result of crop yields this past year. Optimism was two-fold around buying land, as there is huge demand driving up prices. This is good for current landowners, but it hinders new and small farmers. The Beginning Farmer Loan Program is helping, but it is uncertain if that's enough. Ag-related industries are in need of employees and need to work with education institutions to continue to promote the abundance of available careers. People need to appreciate and know where their food comes from. Finally, government regulations around planning and zoning hinders building, while regulations such as chemical application are continuing to be a burden for producers.





# Focus Group Comments

## AgCentric

### **What are some examples of positive activities happening in your communities?**

- In our Mill Lacs/Aikin area there is an aggregation of about 115 local small volume growers working together to expand their markets.
- Last year was profitable for farmers, but assisted by government funding.
- Consolidation is going to drive efficiencies, yet niche markets can be viable.
- Our co-op customers are doing well with good commodity prices.
- Precision Ag is making things better and stronger economically.

### **What do you see around talent?**

- Positive of number of available opportunities in Ag.
- Need to see more people entering sales and marketing as well as diesel mechanics.
- We are seeing growth, but having trouble with the entry level employees.
- Most of our employees are local, but we do not advertise too far out.
- Many potential entry-level employees struggle to pass drug testing.
- Interns are way down this year because of COVID-19.
- We are losing some students across the border.
- High school students and parents do not recognize the career opportunities in Ag.
- Our company struggles to find employees with CDL licenses.
- There is going to be a trend of more employers finding ways to engage at the high school level to attract students. More hybrid models of education.
- High competition for employees as more people retire. Big companies competing with smaller businesses and farms. Community needs to work together.
- Pay is competitive, but many students do not know that.
- Since employee pool is limited, we are working hard to retain them.

### **How do we get the message out about agriculture? Attract more people.**

- Career and trade shows help get message out, but most of those have been shut down because of the pandemic. Messaging now needs to be virtual.
- We need to be aware and focus more on the new populations entering the workforce.
- Target-specific populations.
- We need good infrastructure, roads, and schools so the metro people come to the rural parts.
- New generation values family more than money in a job so we need to work with them to provide the opportunities they are looking for. Balance is important.



### **How do we continue to grow the food/Ag economy? (Barriers/opportunities):**

- One major barrier when students and parents search careers on the web: the DEED website statistics do not show growth and leave out all the service areas in Ag.
- In northern Minnesota, small dairy farmers have to travel quite a way for services and do not have the support like they used to when there were more farms. Challenge of infrastructure.
- Northern Minnesota has supply chain differences than southern in density issues.
- We struggle with high school students not getting driver's licenses.
- Lack of broadband is limiting capacity in homes with more children taking classes online.
- Housing is an issue. Definitely a problem when trying to attract people who desire affordable housing. Old houses needing to be replaced.
- We are going to see an increase in environmental, managing waste, water, cover crops are going to make us use precision and technology like we have never before.
- Data and precision Ag are going to be important and there are opportunities.

### **What policy issues are impacting agriculture?**

- The visa issue is impacting our ability to bring in employees. Too much paperwork makes it hard and is cost-prohibitive.
- Immigrants make up a large part of the workforce and if procedures relax, the situation will improve.
- Create pathways to citizenship.
- Climate issues will continue to play an important role in our local economies.
- There is a disconnect between agencies.

### **How do we continue as a region to work together across the entire supply chain?**

- Communication is important, especially in the COVID-19 world. We need to change the way to a more virtual manner.

### **What impact of COVID-19 have you seen?**

- We have struggled to recruit students into higher Ag education because they do not want to take classes online, so they are going straight into the workforce or are taking time off.

### **Have you seen an increase in Ag entrepreneurship and are there barriers?**

- Biggest barrier in our region is the ability to tap into e-commerce. If they can, they are more successful. Also, the lack of FedEx and UPS drop-offs limits shipping.
- I have never seen so much interest in people starting their own businesses like meat cutters and indoor growing in containers. Although the barrier is can it be economically viable.
- Start-up capital is difficult to come by.
- Wadena County is working together to provide resources because they do not know where to look.

# Minnesota AgriGrowth

## **How do we continue to grow the food/Ag economy? (Barriers/opportunities)**

- One of the main issues with the state of Ag currently is the lack of workers to help with the industry.
- Linking students to jobs and professional organizations is the next step in expanding the industry.
- Address regulatory issues as they negatively impact moving projects forward.
- Keeping staff in manufacturing plants and finding new staff is one of the biggest challenges.
- The Ag businesses affect the rural and urban areas and there are ways businesses can improve to better utilize the urban economy. Additionally, the use of technology in corporate areas will help expand and urbanize the rural areas.

## **Moving Forward, what is the outlook for growth as a state in the agriculture region?**

- Advancing technology, increasing recruiting and industry awareness, and the time it takes to adjust to COVID-19 protocols are the main factors for future success.
- Connecting students to jobs that are available is one of the best ways to forward the industry.
- AI will be important and need a strong technology position in Ag.
- When companies can hire qualified employees and forego onsite training it saves everyone time and allows businesses to recruit at a faster pace.
- Partnering with community colleges and incentives within companies help create local interest.
- Hormel foods offers high school graduates a free 2-year degree, as well as students of Hormel employees as an incentive to enter the industry and stay local.
- Changing student depictions of industry jobs is critical in growing the young portion of the industry.
- Growing the workforce is an opportunity for Ag.

## **How do we continue as a region to work together across the entire supply chain?**

- Staying local and using each other to grow will help solve the Ag talent issue and match the professional opportunities in the workforce.
- Have a common ground where people can talk about issues and solve problems.
- Incentivizing good work and the positive contributions to the industry would create a better connection between local and large companies.
- We have the farmer base, but need to connect to new technologies in order to innovate.
- We need to lock arms with each other to strengthen the supply chain.

## **Have you seen side gigs farmers being adopted to combat COVID-19?**

- Swap: a third-party program to connect farmers with projects that they can complete at their discretion and connects the farmers with industry suppliers.
- Develop accounting teams, technology support, backlogging emails, marketing team, etc.
- Still looking to see if it would work smoothly with manufacturing plant models.

## **What do you see around talent?**

- We need to do a better job of matching talent with jobs.
- Message students with a purpose so they can “see a path.”
- Promote there is a lack of talent.

# Agriculture Utilization Research Institute (AURI)

## How do we continue to grow the food/Ag economy? (Barriers/opportunities)

- There is a big opportunity when it comes to employment.
- Silver lining for rural America is people are more mobile.
- South Africa ban on travel is hurting bringing in employees we have had in the past.
- There are more and more new market opportunities in crops, such as industrial hemp.
- Value/supply chain.
- In our northern county, two companies that are not in Ag employ half of the population, which leaves very few people available for Ag jobs.
- Opportunities around the roles farmers play in the broader society concerning water and land.
- Cautious optimism out there right now.
- Access to capital funding is an issue with smaller businesses, but loosening up and seeing more investment funding exploring opportunities.
- Concerning broadband, there are the haves and have nots. Lack of reliable broadband hurts rural education and business.
- Lots of ideas, but funding is still lacking. E-commerce is helping.
- Healthcare continues to be an issue for farmers; it is a crime how much it costs. We need a better system for rural America.
- There is a need for rural and urban to understand the value of each other.
- Provide better housing options.

## How are regulations impacting agriculture?

- Government is good at one-size-fits-all, which is hard to implement in the Ag industry and the Farm Bill.
- Communication from government around regulation is lacking.
- Speed of regulators is too slow and hampers investment. Assessment needs to happen faster.

## What are some examples of positive activities happening in your communities?

- Despite a little dip, a number of new businesses and innovations have been still occurring.
- Banks do have access to capital and there are opportunities.
- Education systems are good and provide opportunities.

## How do we continue as a region to work together across the entire supply chain?

- People want to collaborate, but don't know how. Maybe a clearinghouse of some sort is needed.
- Need for collaboration is super high, but we can't think beyond.
- Sustainability is important to the supply chain, not just looking at the economics.
- Motivate companies to drive sustainability. Push corporate social sustainability endeavors, like Cargill working to reduce 30% in greenhouse gasses.
- Support the farmers to implement new practices.
- Need a collaboration Co-op.
- There is a gap in co-manufacturing plants and kitchens, which makes it hard for businesses scale.

### **What impact of COVID-19 have you seen:**

- The pandemic made it hard to find replacement workers because there was no pool and the skills for food manufacturing were limited.
- Exit of females from the workforce because of COVID and the school situation. This could be long-term because of online instruction and homeschooling.
- PPP loans have been beneficial to rural banking industry and keeping farmers and businesses on the job.
- A number of small clients did not feel they would qualify for PPP so they did not apply.
- Not experienced full impact of the pandemic on mental health.

### **What do you see around talent?**

- Lots of opportunities for students, but they are looking to other industries first.
- In our area, we are seeing more high school student tours in Ag companies.
- We need to promote the quality of rural America and cost of living to cities.
- Tell the story of rural living.
- There needs to be amenities in the rural areas to attract people, not just jobs.
- Focus time and energy on 30–40-year-olds who want to come back to rural areas or move for a different lifestyle.

## **The City of Faribault**

### **How does Faribault grow the regional Ag and the food economy?**

- Our economic development attempts to connect with the businesses in the area and focus on the niche industries: food processing, advanced manufacturing, and foreign and direct investment.
- Some of the local businesses, specifically Living Greens Farm, attempt to continuously make changes and innovate the processes that they operate through. An example of this is keeping products fresh and getting to the market within 24 hours.
- We are fortunate with strong companies like Jennie O Turkey and Faribault Foods.
- The Community Venture Network, our version of Shark Tank, has helped food-related businesses get off the ground.
- Connecting with local farmers and creating a solid relationship between the small and large businesses in the industry helps growth as a whole. Additionally, Ag education has become a big priority to help students learn about careers in agriculture.

### **How do you manage Ag education/what are some barriers with the program?**

- High schools have added a 7th period to the school day to allow students to have the option of participating in Ag education.
- Working through grants and other means, the publicity and transparency of funding coming from Ag companies. Also trying to involve the younger community, such as farm tours for younger children. The main struggle is the lack of funds for transportation.

### **What are some employment needs for the region at all levels?**

- All employers are desperately searching for employees, mainly looking for trading positions with 2-year degrees, but also the influx of foreign investments has created more jobs.
- The pandemic has also created more “side hustles,” where farmers or other workers have found small ways to make extra money.
- Over the last 9 months the employment rate has held steady, but this is mainly because Faribault was able to meet demands of the grocery stores and other businesses.
- South Central College is a strong source of well-trained students to enter the workforce.

### **What are some views of the Ag economy in the future (5 years+) as well as threats?**

- The views are cautiously optimistic in the community.
- The local farmers considered the last harvest to be the best in the last 10 years, but as an industry connecting different producers and farmers with each other can help provide additionally income and stimulate the market.
- There is a lack of resources and money for local farmers to compete. Family farms cannot keep up with larger scale operations.
- Working with banks to be a little more open to lend money to smaller farmers to grow their business. Larger companies also have an advantage with technology and capital to put behind it.
- Funding is always the biggest challenge for small farmers to grow their business. With a small maximum capacity, they already are at a disadvantage compared to the larger companies.

### **Other interesting comments:**

- An example of a local policy the community had to address was the concern of chickens in people’s backyards. It became an issue because of (health) security for the birds at the local Jennie O plant.
- There are 200 more housing units coming into the market to help attract people because we have had a lack of affordable housing.
- More people are cooking at home (because of the pandemic) and changing the way they eat, which has put a strain on the supply chain.



## The City of Jackson

### **What are some examples of positive activities happening in your communities?**

- AGCO is hiring again; the key employer in town with good wages and a number of Ag engineers.
- Retaining employees is recognized by the community development.
- Our community has good access to healthcare and the communities.
- Jackson County has very good broadband and we are fortunate and in a good spot.
- We have a diversity of businesses in the community.

### **What do you see around talent?**

- MinnWest Community College offers strong programs to educate for trades.
- We see people leaving before age of 25, as well as after 65, and we need to educate the younger generation to look at pathways programs.
- The school district and the community collective as a whole need to continue to expose students to the opportunities.

### **How do we get the message out about agriculture? Attract more people.**

- The community has good amenities and continues to invest to make it attractive and livable to new potential employees. This is a message we need to promote.

### **How do we continue to grow the food/Ag economy? (Barriers/opportunities)**

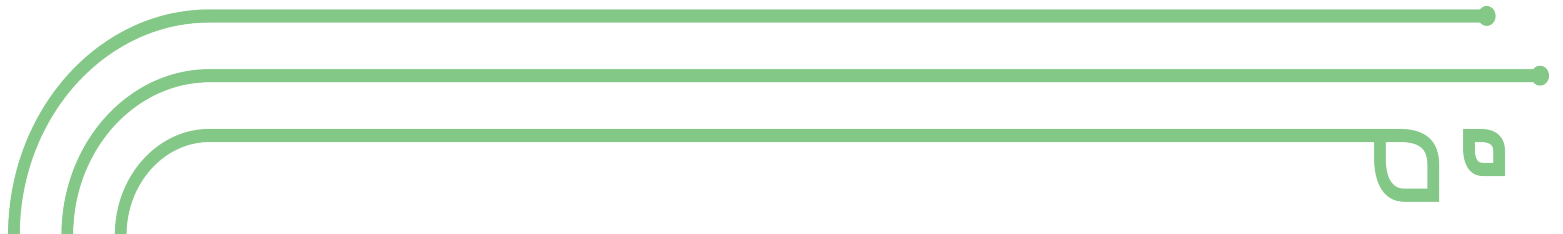
- Our tight labor market and need to address.
- Housing is an issue in Jackson and we have missed in the past is getting the right housing. Our higher wage rates do not necessarily mean we need affordable housing so we are working with contractors to supply various types of housing.
- Finding CDL drivers is a barrier to growth for companies like Crystal Valley.
- The business climate in Minnesota is a challenge for us so close to Iowa.
- When it comes to site selection, building costs are higher in Minnesota.
- There is an increase of more food production businesses looking to relocate in the area but the hard part is to have the utilizes available.

### **What policy issues are impacting agriculture?**

- Iowa and South Dakota are hungry. They are aggressively offering incentives, which makes it harder for us.

### **Have you seen an increase in Ag entrepreneurship and are there barriers?**

- Distance of the SBDC to assist is a barrier to getting businesses started.





# Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL)

## How do we continue to grow the food/Ag economy? (Barriers/opportunities)

- Try new technology like autonomous robot to check turkey farms. One of the biggest barriers is the access to capital and funding support.
- Labor availability is tough. Year-round workers who enjoy being on the farm are difficult to find. Even with good wages it is hard to find labor.
- Attempting to increase technology can be difficult in smaller rural areas. A broadband grant that had been submitted was rejected for Northland College.
- Connecting to the consumer and telling their stories can be difficult with less access to the urban economy.
- Using client portals is an effective way to communicate and do business with consumers, especially during the global pandemic, but the downside is that some farmers and clients don't have access to the broadband or Wi-Fi.
- Managing the supply chain helps all areas operate smoothly and maximize their working potential.
- New round-a-bouts, bridges, ton limits on streets make things difficult for Ag transportation.
- Funding from local government is a crucial part of the industry potential, but money is going to where people are in cities.
- It can be difficult for businesses to pursue help from the government when the process is long and tedious.
- The (MN) counties close to the two states by us have a disadvantage. The states are more competitive and offer more funding.

## What is the mental health situation in the Ag industry?

- Co-ops offer free access to mental health counselors and advocates if people are struggling. It is talked about more in the industry which helps to break the stigma of the Ag culture.
- Farmers were able to stay home more and work because of COVID-19, but the effects of animal farmers and the pandemic saw the most stressful times.
- Access to hospitals and care that farmers are in need of plays a big role in farmers stepping up to take care of themselves. If the care isn't close enough to the farmers there is a good chance they won't travel extremely far to seek care unless the situation is very serious.
- If there isn't the population needed by the healthcare industry it is difficult to get the care there.
- Not enough trained people.
- Alcohol and drug abuse, domestic abuse, and truancy with young students has increased because of the pandemic.

## What ways can we work together to move the economy forward?

- The old generation needs to give opportunities to the younger generation earlier so that they can understand and appreciate the farming industry.
- Old farmers who never quit hurt their chances of successfully passing on their farm since their children are middle aged adults by the time they take over. Can't start farming at 45.
- We need to do a better job telling our story.
- Don't need to push all high school kids to college.



### **What do you see around talent?**

- Our industry needs to take action in a way that turns heads in high school to recruit and retain interest in fields of agriculture.
- Ag gets cut short because we lose so many of our job titles and economic impact to other areas, such as manufacturing.
- Break the barriers of college choices and look at 2-year programs as a way to enter the workforce sooner without all the student debt.
- Manufacturers in our area wanted to give students a taste of working in cutting-edge manufacturing, so they worked together to build a fantastic program here from welding, machining, and more to get kids hooked and it works!
- Find a way to talk about our rapid growth in innovation and technology so we can find young talent to keep in our fields of Ag.

## **Marshall Area Chamber**

### **What are some examples of positive activities happening throughout the community?**

- Outside of farms, businesses in the commercial area are re-opening and returning closer to the previous normal. Restaurants are opening back up and this is helping farms get their produce back into the community.
- Small local businesses are opening back up and bringing back customers who were traveling out of town to larger commercial cities.
- We have a CTE coordinator position to bridge Ag and welding careers.

### **What effects did weather have on crop yield this season?**

- The 2020 schedule was 100% driven on weather and was reflected most directly on beans. This shaved off about 5 to 10 bushels on the beans. Before August, it appeared there would be potential for them to reach the upper 60/70 range, but the season dried off. This caused the roots to stay closer to the surface and scavenge for extra moisture and nutrients which hasn't happened in the last couple years.

### **What are some negative effects of Covid-19 throughout the community?**

- The shutdowns impacted pork producers and the rest of the livestock industry that were forced to kill their animals. They had no extra space for the surplus and could not sell the excess fast enough with restaurant shutdowns.
- A farm that relied primarily on a vendor who bought large amounts to make vodka paused during the pandemic and used their facilities to produce hand sanitizer instead. This paused the selling of corn for the farm and created issues with income, transportation, logistics, etc.
- The pandemic has slowed the hiring, recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding process of jobs.



### **What are your thoughts about talent?**

- Filling positions during the pandemic has been difficult for the farming industry because people are reluctant to make life changes, move cities, and take large risks.
- Retail-related Ag positions were more difficult to fill than local farm positions. Some of the positions that get filled are by people who need current work but aren't serious about a career in the field.
- Businesses are looking into partnering with high schools and universities to implement programs that teach students about the agribusiness industry and can help introduce them to the career field.
- Help students get experience at a younger age and promote the industry.
- Broadband is limiting talent.
- Hard to move from rural to city and vice versa.

### **How can agribusiness marketing be adjusted to create a more desirable connotation of the industry?**

- One of the main reasons for the difficulty in agribusiness recruiting is the lack of knowledge about the industry and the association between ag and farming.
- The scope of Ag jobs is massive, but we don't do a great job of communicating the positions.
- There is a direct correlation between STEM and Ag, but the two are never promoted together and the farming industry still isn't looked at by urban society as a progressive position.
- Ag is missing boat on sciences.
- Ag needs to change its name!
- The possibility of changing the name to wipe off old stigma about the industry was introduced. The industry now is much larger with more Ag-related positions in offices than in the past. However, most of urban society does not know about the ag roles in the industry.
- Consumers trust farmers. Not necessarily big Ag.

### **Other interesting comments:**

- South Dakota border is hurting business.
- My husband and I made a list of the impact of our small farm. There were 600 people/companies that we have done business with on our farm.
- Too much red-tape around hiring immigrants. Need a plan.



## Southern Minnesota Center of Agriculture

### What are some examples of positive activities happening in your communities?

- We had very positive cash flows this past year.
- There is a huge demand for land making prices high. The State needs to keep working on establishing better programs for beginning farmers because land prices are so high.

### How do we continue to grow the food/Ag economy? (Barriers/opportunities)

- With low interest rates, companies and farmers need to continue to look at expansion ideas.
- I see a need for more accountants in the Ag industry.
- Broadband expansion is important to attract jobs and people.
- Regulations continue to be a barrier to Ag companies, for example the chemical application regulations changing and making it hard on the farmers.
- Planning a zoning hinders building for housing.
- There is a lack of diversity especially when it comes to real estate and the Minnesota ownership laws make it tough.
- Living in rural communities has its advantages and we need to promote the positives.

### How do we continue as a region to work together across the entire supply chain?

- Companies and people need to buy more local.
- Virtual assistants can play a role.

### What impact of Covid-19 have you seen?

- Covid highlighted a positive light on the need for production and manufacturing.
- Covid slowed people down. No county fairs.
- People appreciate more where their food comes from.

### What do you see around talent?

- It is easy to train people, we need employees who want to learn.
- As an industry we need to start educating at the elementary age kids.





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