

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

Keeping Them Down on the Farm

Community Indicators are intended to stimulate thoughtful dialogue about your community. They can help identify potential issues, opportunities and problems facing your community. This communication piece is also intended to increase use and understanding of readily accessible demographic data on the web.

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The Relationship Between “Farm” and “Non-Farm Employment”

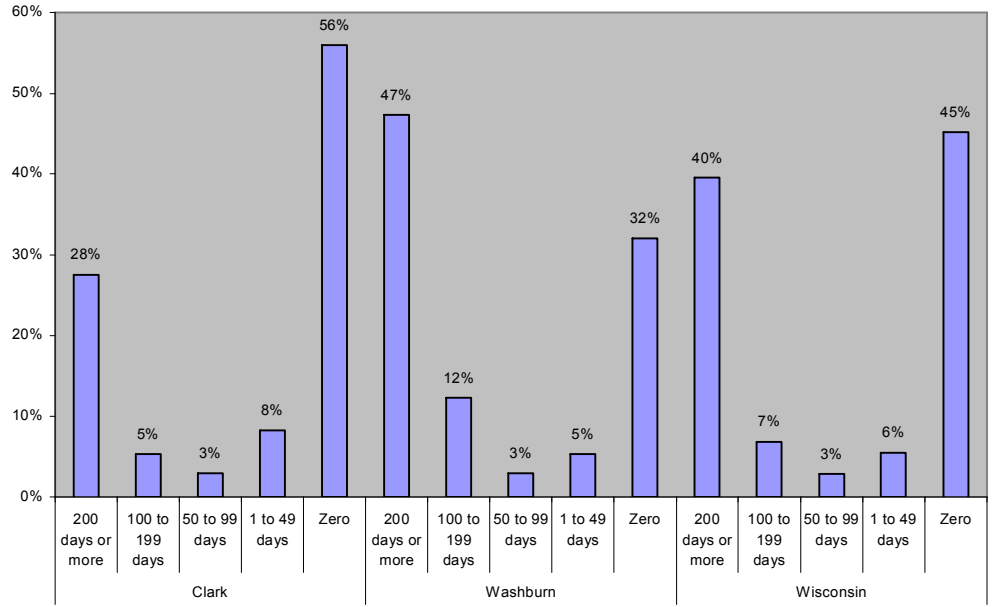
County data on the number of days worked off farm and a pie chart illustrating the data is available at:

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/documents/farm_daysworkedofffarm_000.xls

To create a bar chart with data on multiple counties like the one here, click on the “chart tab”, and then select “chart type” and select a bar chart option.

Typically, government sources report “farm” and “non-farm” employment data separately. That distinction does not fit most Wisconsin farmers. In addition to operating their farms, 47% of all of the principal farm operators in Wisconsin worked more than 100 days off the farm. The percentage of principal farm operators working 100 days or more off of the farm ranges from a low of 33% in Clark County to a high of 60% in Washburn and Bayfield Counties.

Principal Operator: Number of Days Worked Off Farm (2002)



58% of farm families that had a full-time wage and salaried employee, also had an employer provided health care plan. Only 24% of farm families without a full-time wage and salaried employee, had employer provided health care.

Source: *Health Status, Use of Medical Services and Health Insurance Coverage: A Comparison Between Farmers, Other Self-Employed, and Wage/Salary Workers in Wisconsin*, J. Whitaker, and D. Slesinger, PATS, U.W. Extension.

http://www.pats.wisc.edu/pdf%20documents/rr12_2.pdf

County data on these “non-traditional” ag sales and customizable charts are available at:

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/documents/indicators_nontraditional.xls

Many farmers maintain non-farm jobs to stabilize or supplement their incomes and benefits, or simply sustain their farm operations. The Farmer’s reliance on off-farm income means that they too have a stake in local non-farm job creation efforts.

Health insurance benefits may be one motivating factor for seeking off-farm employment. A 2002 U.W. Extension study showed that 58% of farm families that had a full-time wage and salaried employee, also had an employer provided health care plan. Only 24% of farm families without a full-time wage and salaried employee, had employer provided health care.

An Entrepreneurial Opportunity?

One opportunity that this data might support is the notion of trying to encourage more entrepreneurship on the farm. Farmers are already business people with business experience. An analysis of ag census data suggests that there might be a number of opportunities for expanding ag enterprises into non-traditional areas. Between the 1997 and 2002 Census, the number of farms, land in farms, and the market value of production all dropped about 3% in the state of Wisconsin. During this same period of “decline”, the direct sale of ag products to the consumer for human consumption increased by 22% in the State. That lagged behind the national increase of 37%. And yet, only 6% of Wisconsin farms sold agricultural products directly to the consumer. Total income from “farm-related” sales (Which includes income from recreational services, custom work and ag services provided to other farmers and neighbors, sale of forest products etc.) increased by 44% during this same five year period. This compared to an increase of 66% for the nation. And while there was nearly \$21 million in certified organically produced commodities in the state in 2002, less than 1% of farms were involved in these sales.

Percentage of Farms That Sold Agricultural Products Directly To The Consumer (2002)

