Supporting Midsize Producers

Midsize farms are vital to the long-term resilience of the global food system and the wellbeing of rural communities, the economy, and the environment.

Midsize farms (those with gross cash income of $350,000 to $999,999) spend relatively more money locally than larger farms and contribute to community goals and needs, such as economic development. Midsize supply chains can boost resilience to extreme weather, climate change, pandemics, and other disruptions, and farmland provides more ecosystem services than most developed land.

For decades, the number of midsize farms has been decreasing.

Changes within global agricultural markets, especially consolidation, contracting, and vertical integration, have made market access difficult for mid-scale farmers. Many midsize farms are too large to direct market their products, yet too small to successfully compete in commodity markets.

Researchers at land-grant universities nationwide are working together to better understand and support midsize producers.

Since 2012, this interdisciplinary project has brought together 30+ scholars from 18+ states. Long-term collaboration enables efficient, rigorous investigation and fosters innovation. With members in multiple states, the team can cover different environments and share solutions widely.

Quality data and research-based recommendations are key to reinvigorating the "Agriculture of the Middle" and its promise of economic, social, and environmental benefits.

This project is supported in part by USDA NIFA through Hatch Multistate Research Fund allocations to participating State Agricultural Experiment Stations at land-grant universities, which include: Auburn University, University of California, Berkeley, University of California, Davis, Colorado State University, Iowa State University, University of Kentucky, University of Maine, University of Massachusetts, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri, Montana State University, University of Nebraska, University of New Hampshire, Ohio State University, Oregon State University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Rhode Island, Rutgers University, University of Vermont, Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Washington State University, University of Wisconsin. Project participants may receive additional funding from other sources. **For more information and a full list of participants: bit.ly/NC-1198**

This Impact Statement was produced by the Multistate Research Fund Impacts Program, which is supported by agInnovation, the State Agricultural Experiment Stations, and the Hatch Multistate Research Fund provided by USDA NIFA. **Learn more: mrfimpacts.org**

Multistate Research Fund IMPACTS

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Project Highlights (2017-2023)

Improved access to data and tools

- Created the Food and Agriculture Mapper and Explorer, a one-stop-shop warehouse for local and regional food system data sets as well as visualizations that distill the complex data. *Colorado State University, University of Kentucky, Pennsylvania State University (USDA AMS)*

Provided evidence that mid-scale producers and supply chains contribute to community goals and needs

- Showed that midsize supply chains in the Upper Midwest play a key role in improving labor conditions, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and building community wealth. *University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Minnesota, University of Illinois*

Fostered community among midsize farmers, which helps them learn from each other and share resources

Connected midsize farmers with new buyers and markets, which can increase farmer profitability and improve consumer access to local, fresh food

- Connected midsize producers with emerging market opportunities and specialty food buyers, including university food service directors and staff, hospitals, and urban buyers, and helped them understand institutional purchasing requirements. *University of California, Davis, Colorado State University, Ohio State University*
- Conducted education and outreach to help midsize farmers incorporate agritourism, which can provide an additional revenue stream through direct sales and strengthen local food networks. *University of California, Davis (USDA FMPP), University of Vermont*
- Worked with the City of Madison to secure funding for a public food terminal that would serve midsize farmers. *University of Wisconsin-Madison*

Addressed social justice issues

- Examined ways that land access impacts midsize producers. *University of California, Berkeley*
- Worked with extension advisors and community organizations to make farmers markets more inclusive. *University of California, Davis*
- Developed Workers' Rights Reference Cards in English and Spanish for farm and food workers. *University of Wisconsin-Madison (AFRI)*
- Led webinars and supported workshops that discussed equity issues related to farmworkers, immigrant farmers, farmers of color, indigenous sustainable agriculture practices, and land justice. *University of California, Davis, Ohio State University*

Studied COVID-19 effects on mid-scale supply chains and supported farmers

- Investigated changes in supply chain infrastructure for local foods, CSA and box use, and farmers markets during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Auburn University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, University of California, Davis, University of Wisconsin-Madison (USDA AMS)*
- Estimated Covid-related losses for producers selling through local markets and provided the assessment to Congress to leverage support in the CARES Act. *Colorado State University with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition*
- Produced briefs to guide policymakers, philanthropy organizations, and nonprofits on the distribution of COVID-19 relief to farms.

Identified factors that influence the viability of midsize farms, shedding light on ways to support these farms

- Provided information that is helping the USDA Risk Management Agency and Congress determine if/how to create new insurance products to serve midsize producers. *Colorado State University*
- Identified social, economic, and policy strategies that could increase farm families' willingness and ability to use childcare, which can help prevent farm accidents, influence business decisions, and affect farm productivity. *Ohio State University with the National Farm Medicine Center Marshfield Health System (CDC-NIOSH)*
- Found that economic viability, extended family interpersonal dynamics, and access to professional legal and business assistance influence decisions about farm succession planning and the likelihood of successful transfer. *Pennsylvania State University, Washington State University, University of Massachusetts (AFRI)*
- Found that inconsistencies among the recommended water testing options recommended make it challenging for midsize producers to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act. *Auburn University*
- Explored how emerging trends and technologies (like artificial intelligence) will impact local food supply chains. *University of California, Davis, Ohio State University*
- Identified characteristics of financially successful midsize farms. *Iowa State University, Colorado State University*
- Created and shared a Business IQ spreadsheet for midsize farmers. *Virginia Tech (SARE-PDP)*
- Provided an economic outlook webinar for Extension and USDA personnel that shared crucial updates and management factors for midsize farms and food businesses in the post-COVID era. *Virginia Tech (SARE-PDP)*
- Created a database of 250+ values-based food supply chains, which distinguish themselves in the marketplace based on certain food, social, environmental, and community values (such as certified organic or fair trade) and could provide marketing channels and price premiums for midsize producers. *University of California, Davis*
- Surveyed 82 cider apple growers in Washington, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Vermont to better understand their needs and goals. *University of Vermont, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Michigan State University, Washington State University (AFRI)*

Guided policy that affects midsize producers and local food systems

- Helped ~12 food system partners in California agree on a set of goals for the region and protocols for gathering community input. *University of California, Davis (USDA AMS)*
- Provided advice on legislation to establish Farm to Community Food Hubs, which was passed in September 2021. *University of California, Davis*
- Provided research and Congressional testimony, which were cited by the American Farm Bureau as reasons for adding rural childcare programs to their 2023 Farm Bill policy agenda.
- Responded to the Administration's call to provide comments on supply chains and competition.
- Provided input for the United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021.