

Reflections on Vegetable and Berry (and more) Farming in Vermont

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January 24, 2023

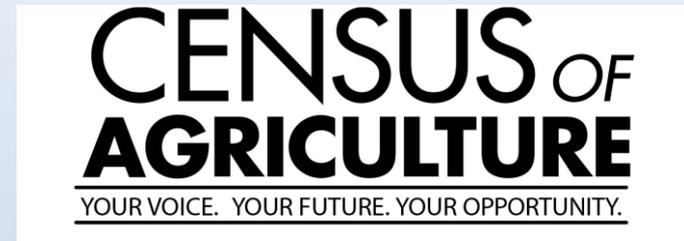


THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
EXTENSION

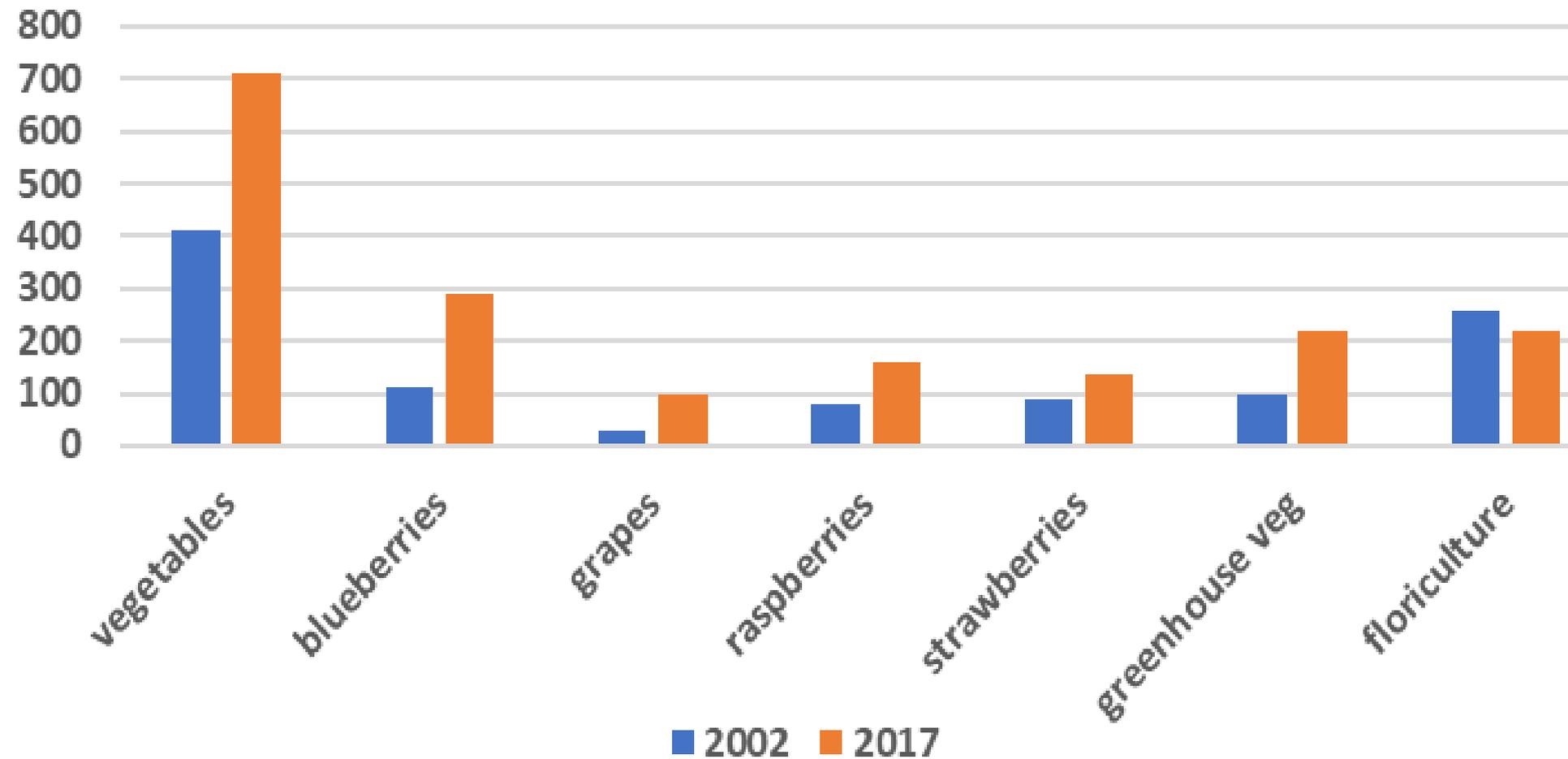


Data and Perceptions

- Census of Agriculture
- VVBGA members
- My brain



Number of Vermont farms selling horticultural crops from census of agriculture

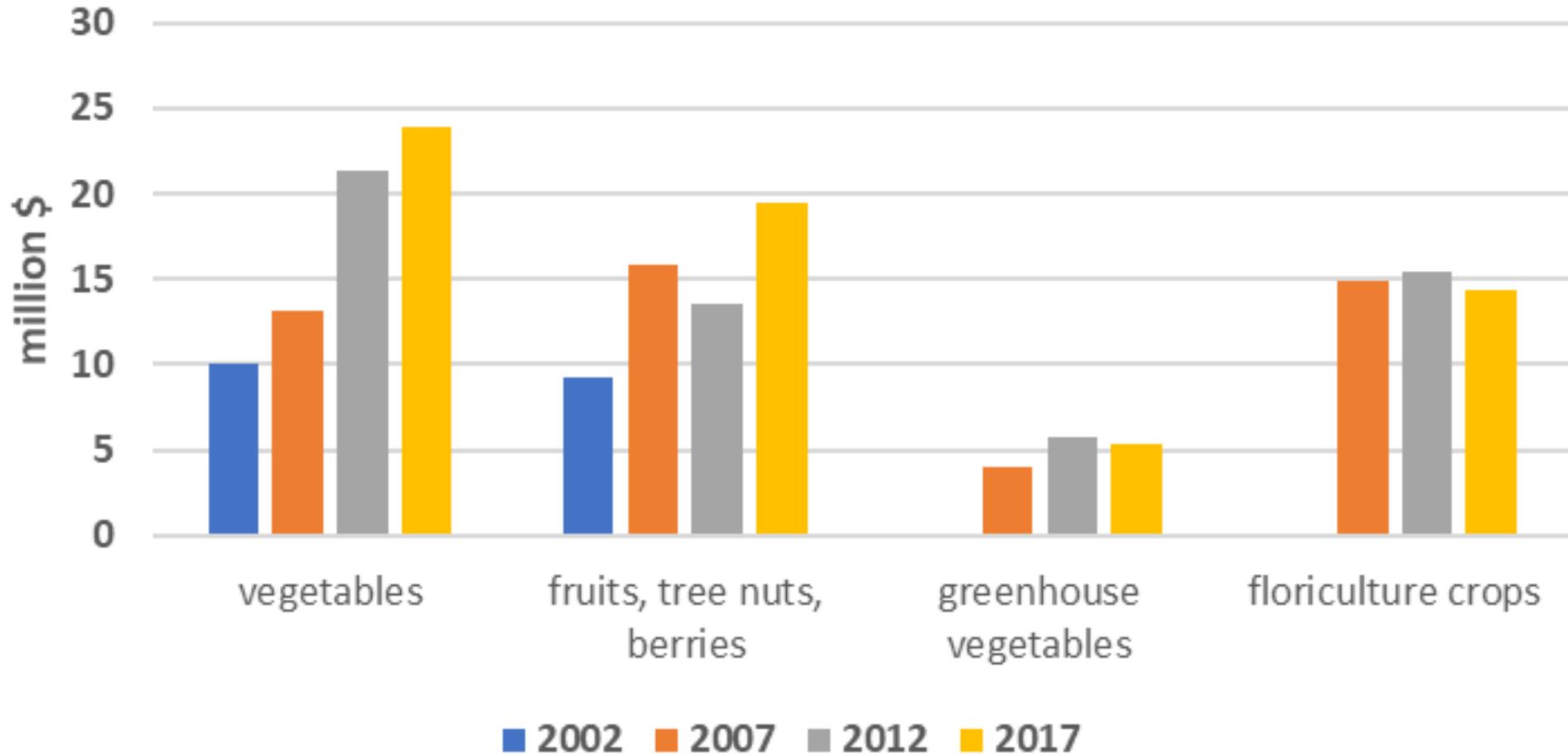


1,076 farms in 2002 1,829 farms in 2017 = 70% increase.

Categories overlap so cannot identify individual diversified farms.

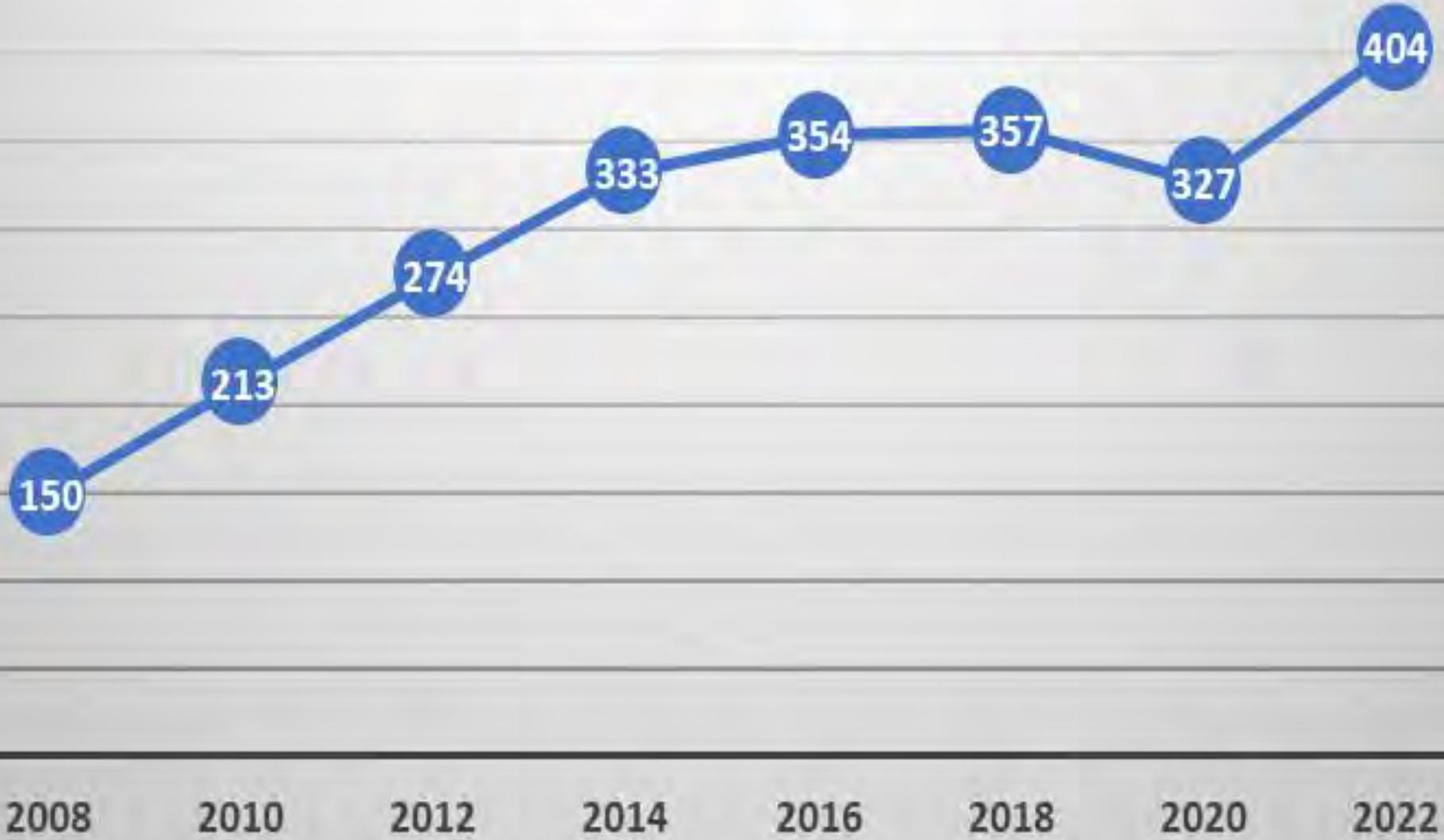
Sales of horticultural crops by Vermont farms

from census of agriculture

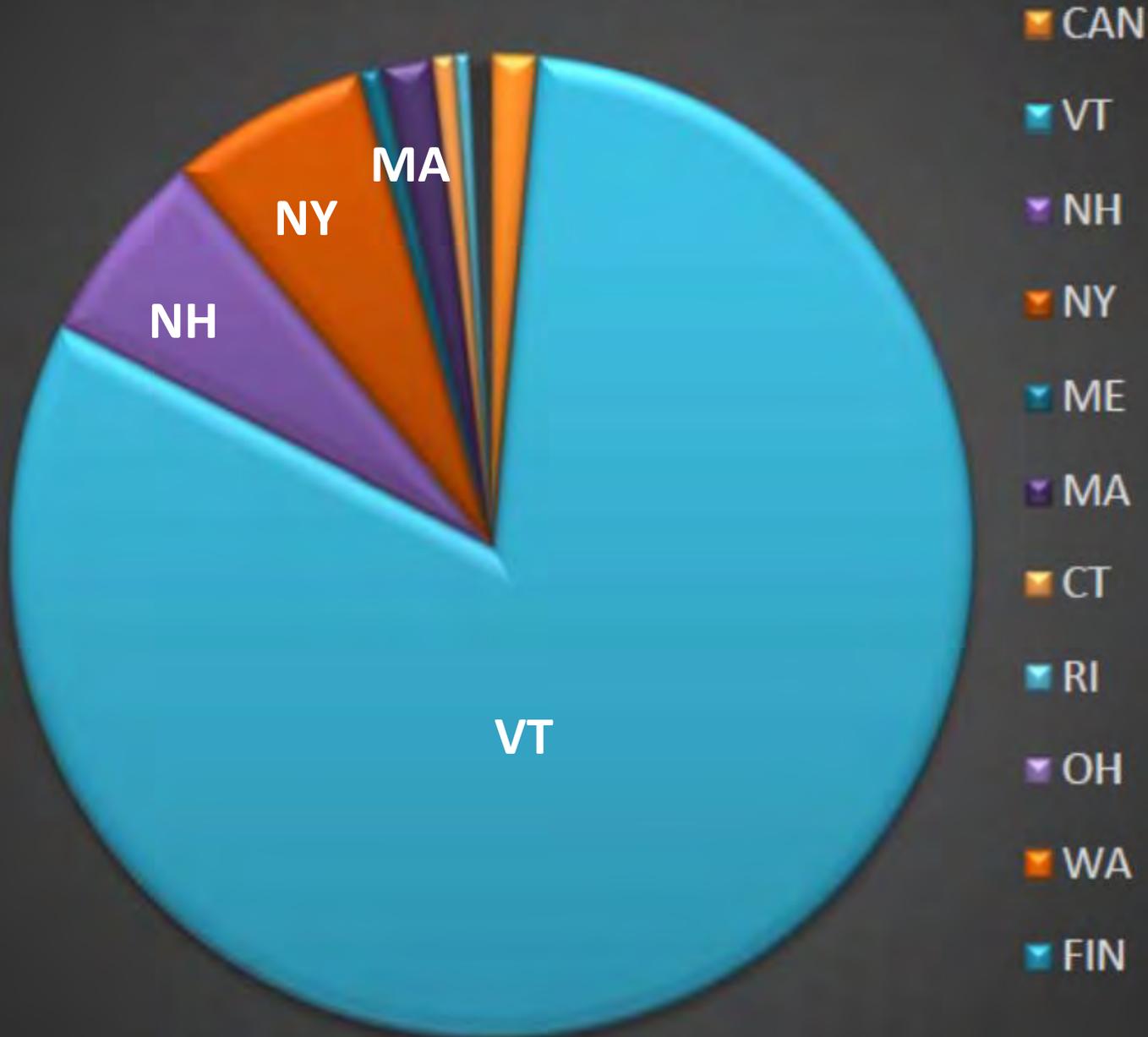


In 2017 total sales = \$64 million
and the total number of farms =1,763 but they overlap

VVBGA Member Farms

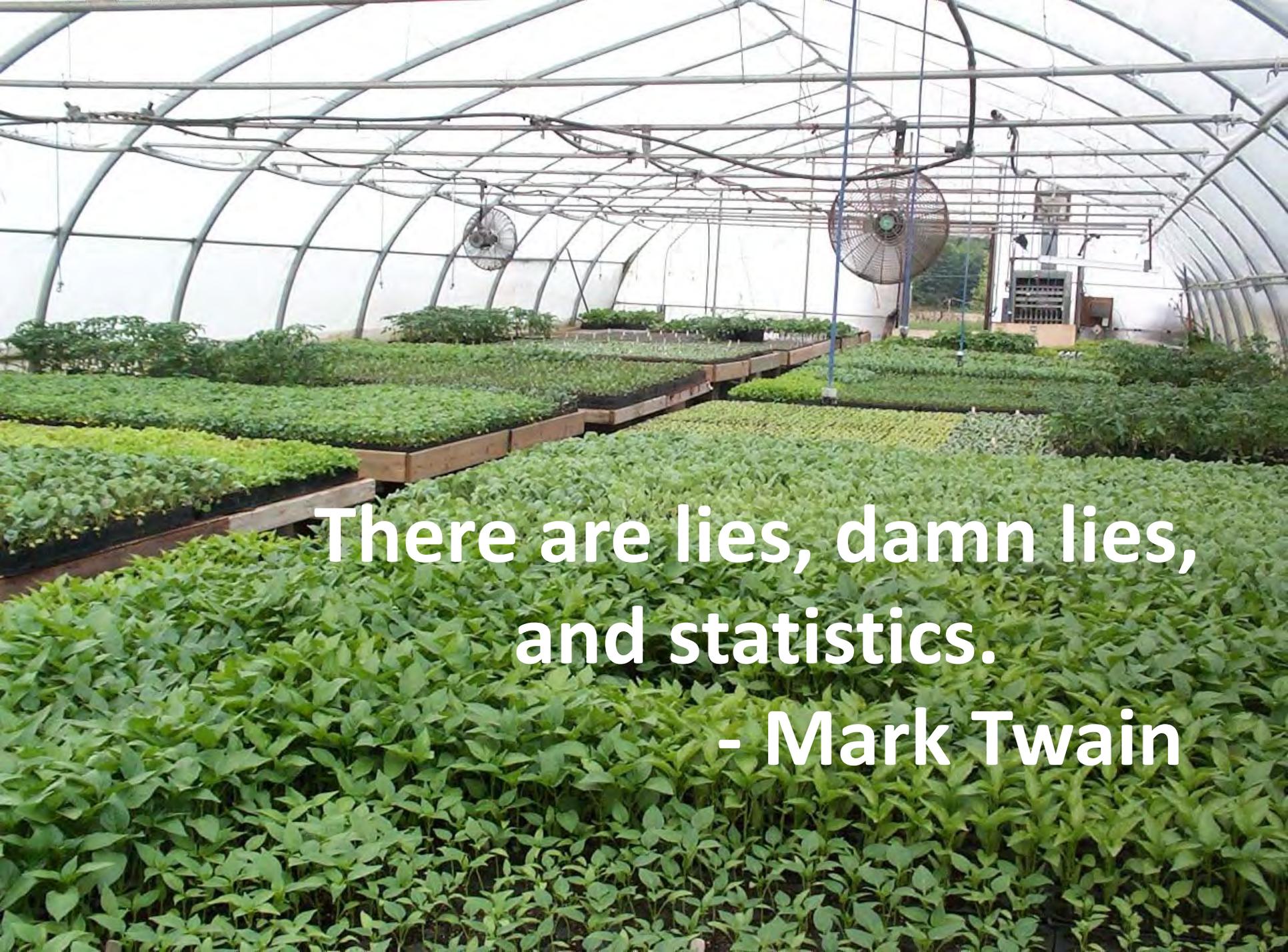


VVBGA Membership By State



2023 VVBGA member survey results



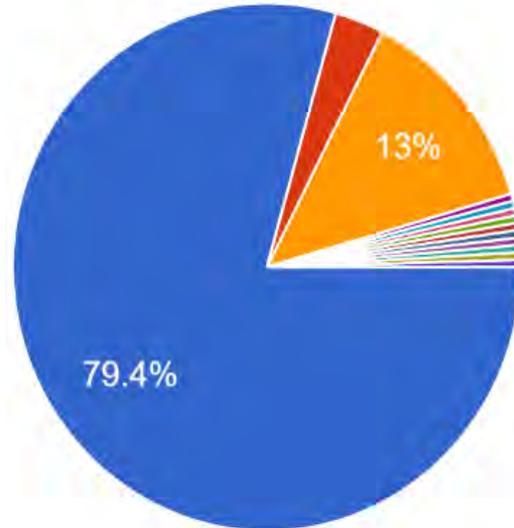


**There are lies, damn lies,
and statistics.
- Mark Twain**

223 responses = 23% of listserv

1. What is your primary role in agriculture?

223 responses



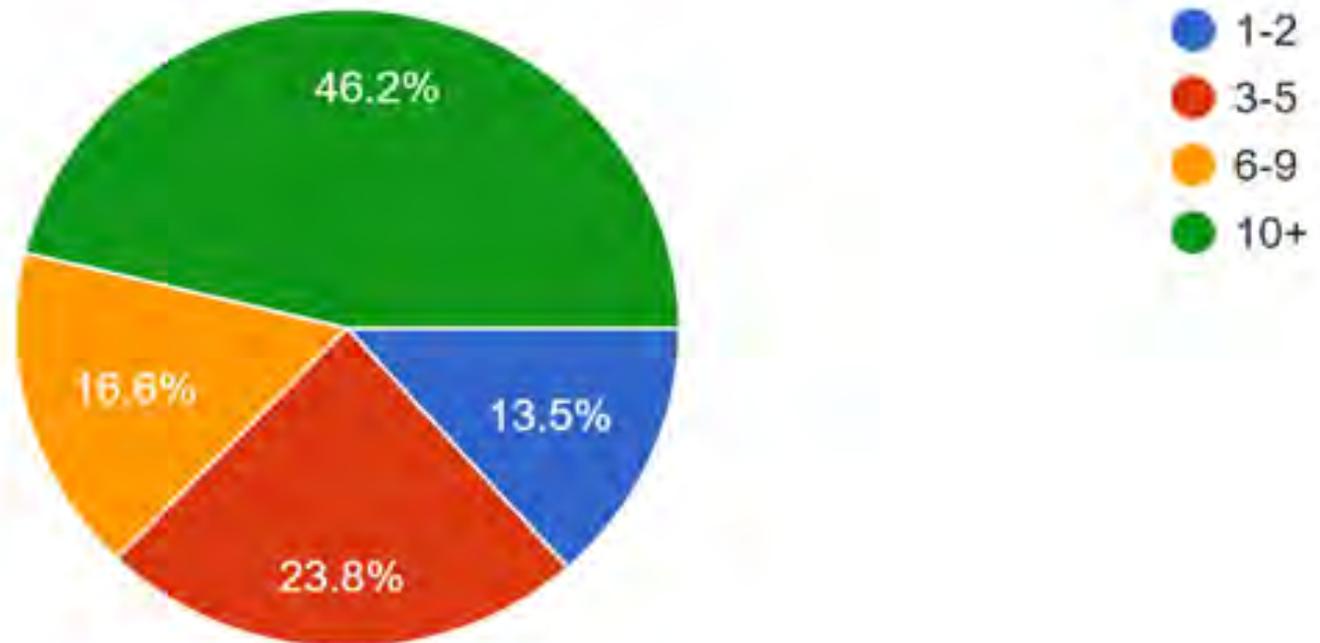
- I am a farm owner or farm manager
- I am a farm employee
- I work with farmers (agency, business, ...)
- I am a student
- non profit
- Homesteading now, farmed commerci...
- Homesteader
- Distribution

**177 farm owner/manager respondents
= 44% of all VVBGA member farms**

respondents have been members for a while

2. For how many years have you been a VVBGA member?

223 responses

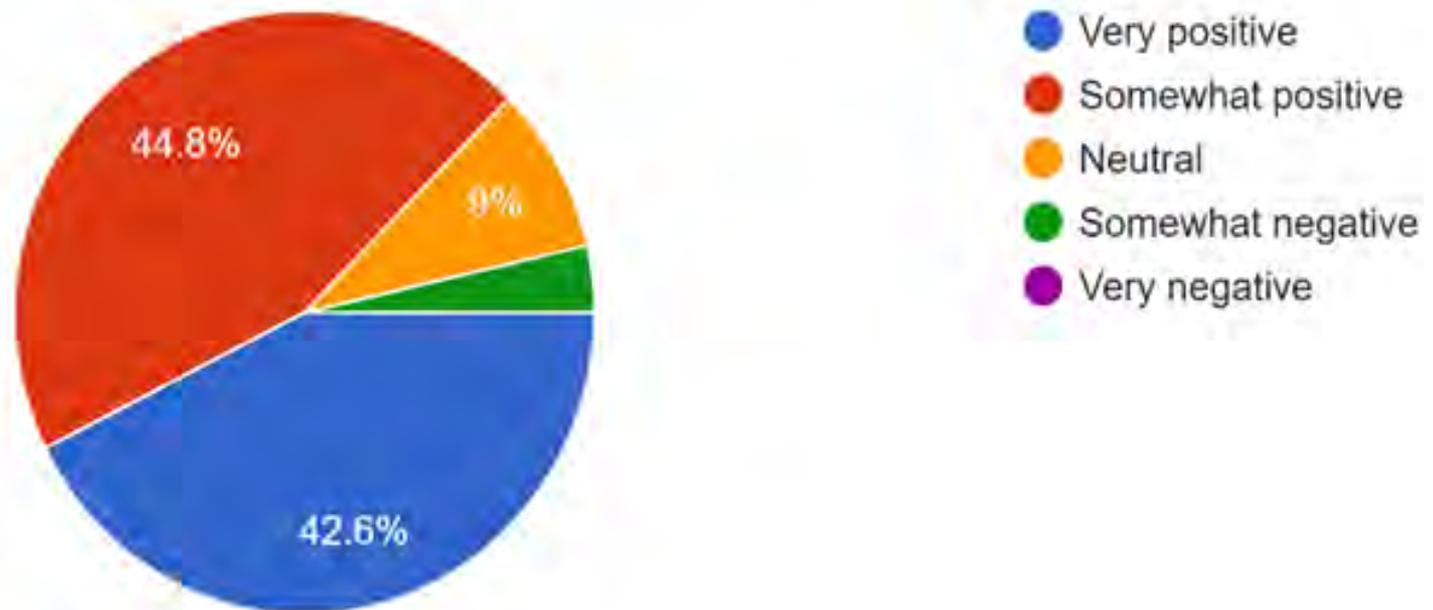


2/3 have been members for over 5 years

respondents are pretty optimistic about the future of vegetable and berry farming

5. What is your view of the future of vegetable and berry farming in our region?

223 responses



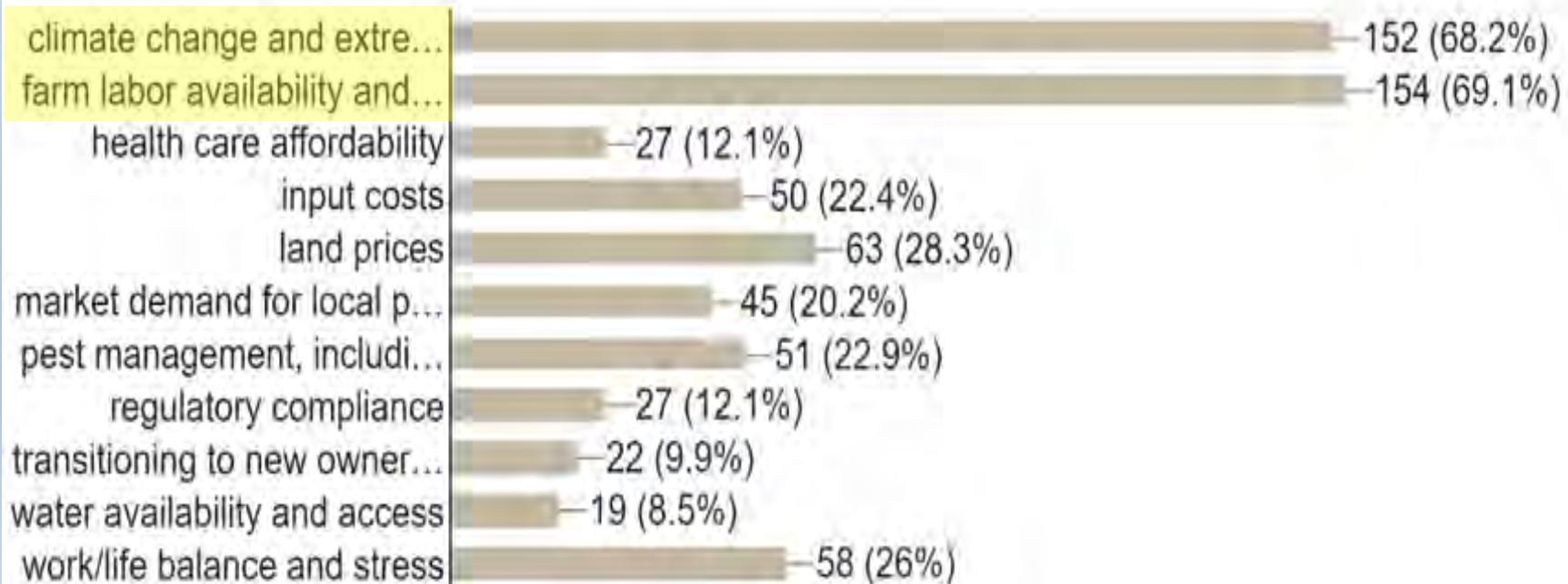
87% have a very or somewhat positive view

Top concerns:

farm labor availability and retention,
climate change and extreme weather

6. Please select three issues below that you think will most significantly affect the future success of vegetable and berry farms in our region.

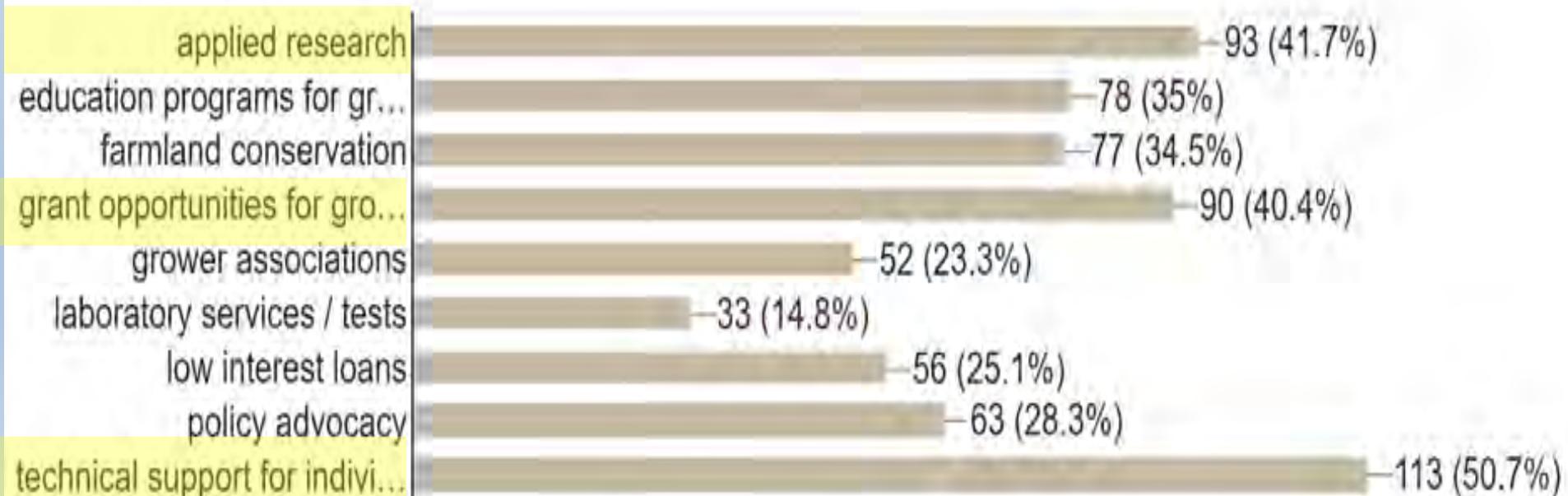
223 responses



Most important resources: technical support for individual farms, applied research, grant opportunities

7. Please select the three types of support resources that you think are most important to the future success of vegetable and berry farms in our region.

223 responses



Half of farms irrigate most or all their crops



1/6 of farms use little or no irrigation

1/3 of farms have no employees



10% of farms have more than 10 FT employees

**3/4 of farms sell half or more
of their crops directly to consumers**



1/8 of farms sell mostly or all wholesale

Our farms are diversified!

Berries
116 farms

271 acres
2.3 acres average

64% of farms

Vegetables
165 farms

1,870 acres
11.3 acres average

92% of farms

Ornamentals
117 farms

112 acres
1 acre average

65% of farms

GH / tunnels
159 farms

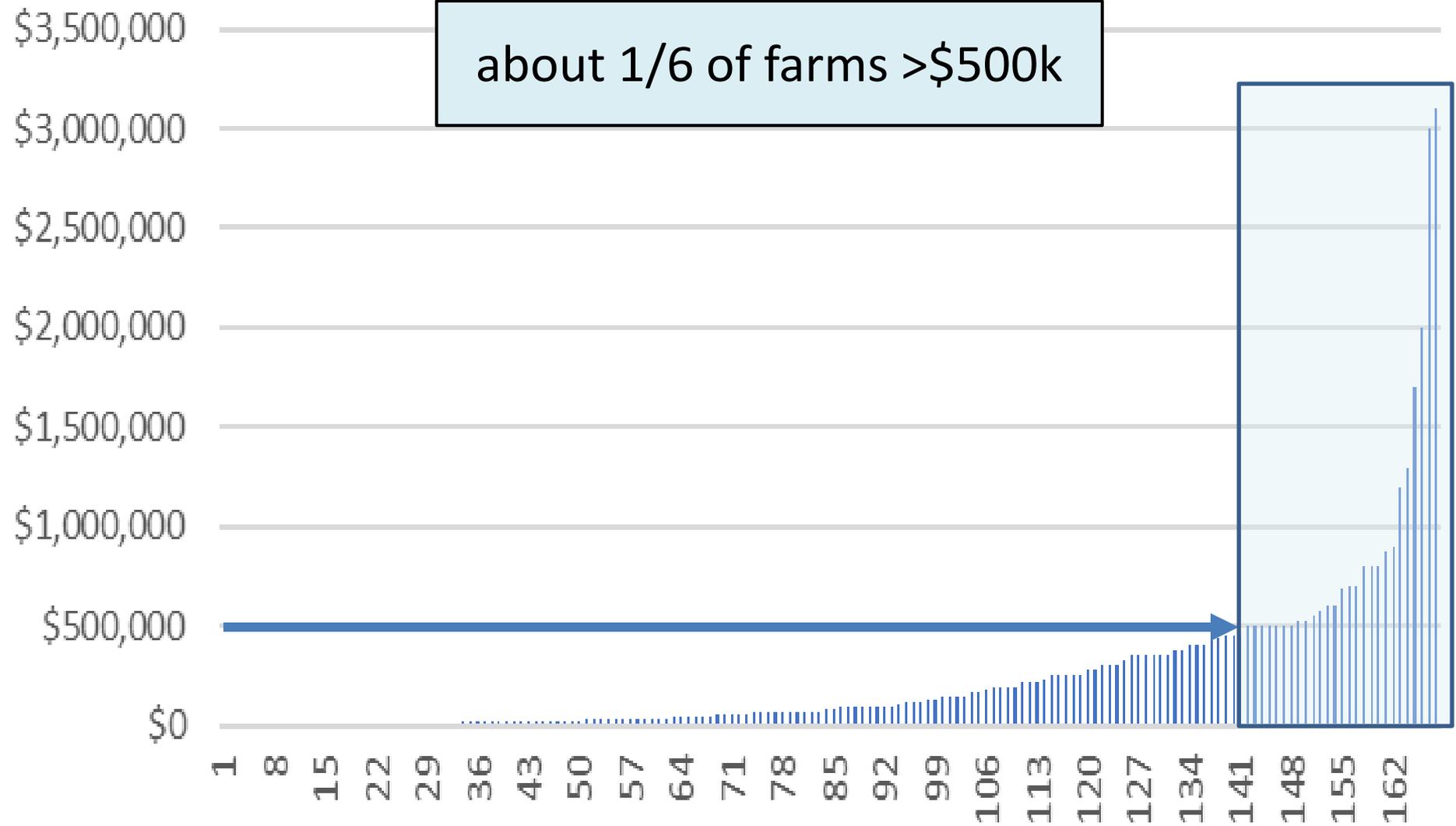
2.2 million sq. ft.
14K sq. ft. average

88% of farms

2022 sales of vegetables and berries = \$41.8 million \$24K average
168 farms

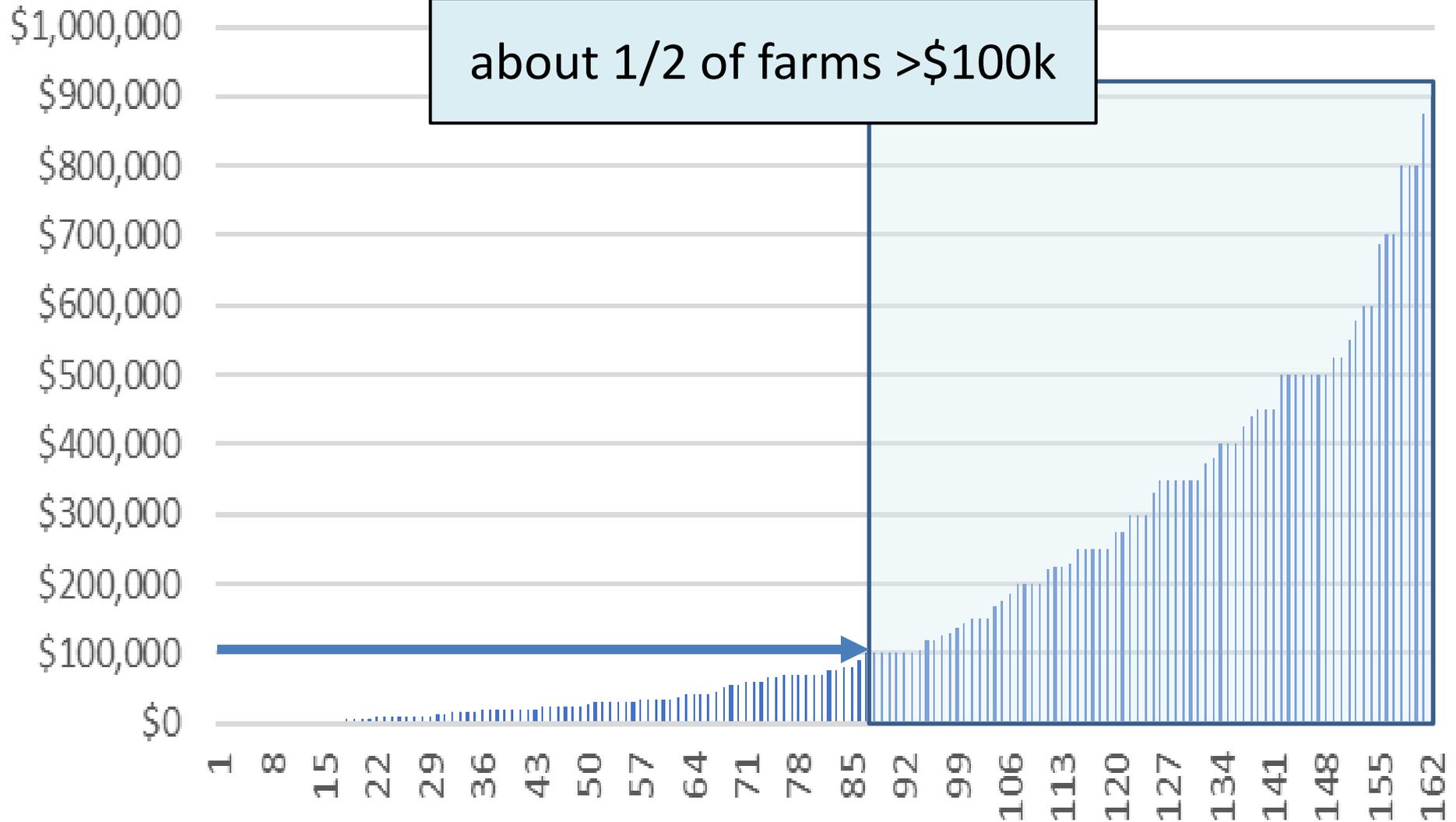
vegetable and berry annual sales

168 VVBGA farms



vegetable and berry annual sales

162 farms, excluding 6 farms with > \$1m sales



some resources
supporting our farms



- Vermont Land Trust **conserved 5,300 acres of land for 53 vegetable** farms in the last 20 years, spending \$8 million on easements.
- Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program worked on **business planning for 250 vegetable and berry farms** in the last 20 years. In 2021, 71% of clients reported increased gross sales, 61% increased net income.

more resources supporting our farms

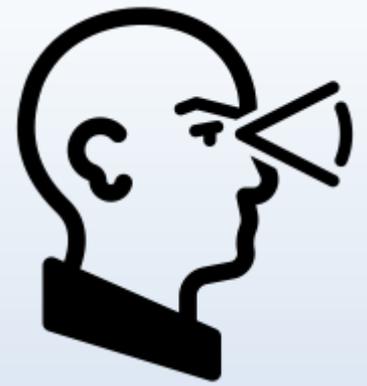
- NRCS-Vermont has **funded 325 high tunnels** in the past 11 years (or more?)
- UVM agricultural testing lab has performed **7,919 commercial vegetable and berry soil tests** in the last 13 years
- UVM Extension has produced **437 vegetable and berry grower newsletters** since 2007

some observations



- Our farms are highly diversified, selling many horticultural products (and maple, livestock, etc.)
- The economic impact of horticultural farms is undervalued (by the census of agriculture).
- Our farms contribute many benefits that are not measured: food security, food quality, rural vitality
- Small, medium and large farms fill different market niches. All are important to food security, the working landscape, and a viable agriculture

more observations



- There's a long list of issues that challenge the viability of our farms.
- These issues are often considered in isolation, it is farmers must integrate how they cope with them.
- There's a big range in size and capacity among farms, yet they face similar demands. That's especially hard for smaller farms.
- There are many resources supporting our farms, but access / utilization by farms varies a lot.

A large field of rows of leafy greens, likely lettuce, under a cloudy sky with hills in the background. The plants are arranged in neat, parallel rows, with some showing reddish-purple leaves and others green. A white irrigation pipe runs across the foreground. The background features a dense line of trees and rolling hills under a bright, overcast sky.

There's so much knowledge,
integrity, kindness, and good will
in our community.

Thank you!

Check out my lunchtime slide show of ~180 farms over 33 years

