

Multifunctional Agriculture in the Northeast: Motivations and Impacts of Diversified Farm Activities

This research examines the importance of multifunctional agricultural practices on small and medium sized farms in Vermont and the Northeast. Multifunctional activities can contribute to the economic viability and long-term sustainability of agricultural ventures in the northeast, and by contributing to economic wellbeing of farms in The Northeast, multifunctional activities, indirectly play a role in contributing to the health of rural economies.

The small to medium sized farm is thought to be a cornerstone of many rural economies and while there has been continued growth in the agricultural sector, that growth has been limited to the small and large scale agricultural enterprises found on the extremes of the farm-size spectrum. It is believed that through activities like agritourism, value-added product creation and on farm activities small to medium sized farms can find new avenues of wealth creation that can lead to increased economic sustainability.

Data collected from a voluntary mail-response census of Northeast farmers will provide an overview of multifunctional activities across the region. The individual farms' participation in activities including direct sales to consumers, creation of value-added products, and participation in diversified on-farm activities will all be self-reported by the operators. The extent to which these farmers participate in each of these activities is also measured and can be quantified. Through these data a snapshot of where these activities occur across the region will be created and can be compared to the varying levels of regions' economic strength.