



# Women-led small-scale farming in Minnesota

## Characteristics, successes and barriers for women farmers

Women-led farming plays an important role in Minnesota's food system. We know women have great capacity to build and nurture social networks, and play vital roles within their families and communities. Supporting women in all types of agriculture benefits all of Minnesota.

The USDA defines small-scale farms as operations with annual sales of less than \$250,000. Data from the USDA *Farms and Land in Farms 2021 Summary* report shows there were 67,400 farms in Minnesota. Of these, 78% had annual sales of \$249,999 or less. However, farms with annual sales of \$99,999 or less accounted for 85% of all small-scale farms in Minnesota<sup>1</sup>.

This narrative provides a snapshot of the characteristics of small-scale women farmers in Minnesota. Additionally, it identifies both successes and barriers for women farmers.

The data used is from the 2022 Statewide Cooperative Partnership (SCP) Survey. The Statewide Cooperative Partnership (referred to as the Partnership) is led by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the University of Minnesota (UMN). The Partnership includes over 40 organizations that work in and support Minnesota agriculture. The Partnership was formed to:

1. Collect data on local and regional markets.
2. Inform market development decisions.
3. Promote collaboration of Partnership members.

For more information on the Partnership and the survey, visit the website

<https://www.mda.state.mn.us/marketing/local-regional-partnership>

## Demographics

The SCP Survey was sent to producers from February to August 2022, and 464 were completed.

### Farmer characteristics

Self-selected description	% all SCP respondents
Woman	35%
New and beginning farmer*	57%

\*10 years or less experience farming

Note: survey respondents could select more than one description to which they identified

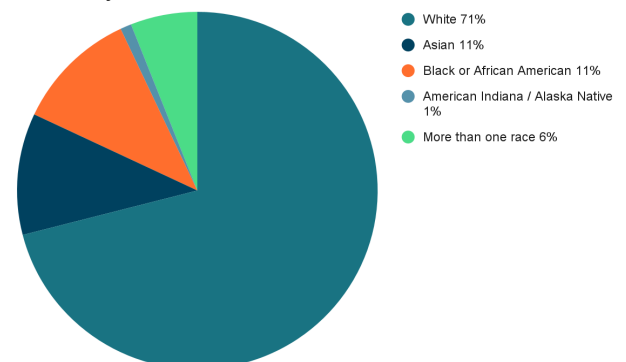
Women may not traditionally be thought of as farmers, but this data shows over one-third of small-scale farmers identified as women in Minnesota.

Also of note, 57% of small-scale farmers identified as new or beginning farmers. A new or beginning farmer has 10 or less years of experience.

Understanding the needs of and supporting these small-scale farmers will have a positive impact on Minnesota agriculture.

### Race

The SCP survey data does not include a breakdown of women by race.



1. USDA. (Feb 2022). *Minnesota Ag News - Farms and Land in Farms*. National Agricultural Statistics Service. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Minnesota/Publications/Other\\_Press\\_Releases/2022/MN-Farms-02-22.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Minnesota/Publications/Other_Press_Releases/2022/MN-Farms-02-22.pdf)

## Farm Descriptions and Land Access

The data below provides a picture of the types of small-scale farms and how these farms are financed.

### Farm description

	Count	% Responses	Avg farm sales	Avg crop acres	% farming specialty crops	% raises animals	% Land ownership
<b>All SCP Respondents</b>	464	100%	\$ 95,815	50	65%	44%	72%
<b>Women-owned</b>	215	46%	\$ 70,777	39	68%	45%	73%
<b>LGBTQ+-owned</b>	15	3%	\$ 26,036	4	79%	40%	80%

Women-owned and LGBTQ+-owned farms are smaller than the average small-scale farm. The number of farms owned by women and LGBTQ+ is higher than other small-scale farms where the land may be rented or leased.

### Financial

	Count	% Responses	Land owners	Self-finance w/ non-farm funds	Self-finance w/ farm funds	Barrier: lack of info	Barrier: logistics
<b>All SCP Respondents</b>	464	100%	72%	69%	57%	28%	20%
<b>Women-owned</b>	215	46%	73%	76%	54%	37%	26%
<b>LGBTQ+-owned</b>	15	3%	80%	100%	70%	43%	14%

Women-owned and LGBTQ+-owned farms are self-financed with non-farm funds at a higher percentage than other small-scale farmers. Additionally, these groups face financing barriers at higher rates which may negatively impact the farm size, crop yields, annual sales and resiliency of these farms.

## Market access

The data below shows the sales routes used by small-scale farmers, and barriers that impact their ability to expand.

## Market sales

	Count	% Responses	Avg DTC share	Avg DTI share	Avg sales to supply chain share	Avg sales to community	Avg donation share
<b>All SCP Respondents</b>	464	100%	63%	9%	10%	3%	5%
<b>Women-owned</b>	215	46%	71%	9%	8%	2%	5%
<b>LGBTQ+-owned</b>	15	3%	84%	11%	2%	2%	4%

DTC = direct to consumer sales (eg. farmer's markets, CSA boxes)

DIT = direct to institutions (eg. schools, restaurants, healthcare)

Supply chain = distributors, manufacturers, retailers

Community = food shelves, hunger relief programs

Donation = no money is paid for products

There is an opportunity to promote local purchasing from all types of small-scale farmers by institutions, supply chain and community programs.

## Barriers to market participation

	Lack of processing	Price below cost	Buyer demand	Volume	Cert. needs	Labor shortage	Finding buyers	Racism/discrimination	Language
<b>All SCP Respondents</b>	18%	33%	13%	25%	10%	20%	37%	3%	7%
<b>Women-owned</b>	22%	40%	14%	34%	13%	26%	43%	4%	10%
<b>LGBTQ+-owned</b>	21%	43%	29%	43%	7%	14%	64%	7%	7%

Small-scale farmers currently face many barriers to entering a market or expanding their share of the market for a variety of reasons. In general, women-owned and LGBTQ+-owned farms are confronted with these barriers more frequently than other small-scale farmers.



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## Summary

Women significantly contribute to Minnesota's local food system through small-scale farming, and this is in spite of barriers challenging their access to different markets. Celebrating and investing in women-led and LGBTQ+-led farming can have a positive impact on local communities and Minnesota as a whole.

The women and LGBTQ+ farmers represent a diversity of races. This diversity impacts the type of crops being grown on small-scale farms. Stroll through almost any farmers' market and you will see Minnesota grown foods representing cultures from all over the world.