

Loving Our Land:
An Analysis of Support Systems for
Sustainable Farming Methods in
Rhode Island

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Project Outline

- Background
 - Importance
 - Definitions
 - Rhode Island farm data
- Methods
 - Quick overview
- Results
 - Summary
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
 - Focus in on four





Thesis Question

To what extent do farmers in Rhode Island utilize farm subsidies, tax programs, and other grant programs to enhance the sustainability of their operation and what are their motives for utilizing these services?

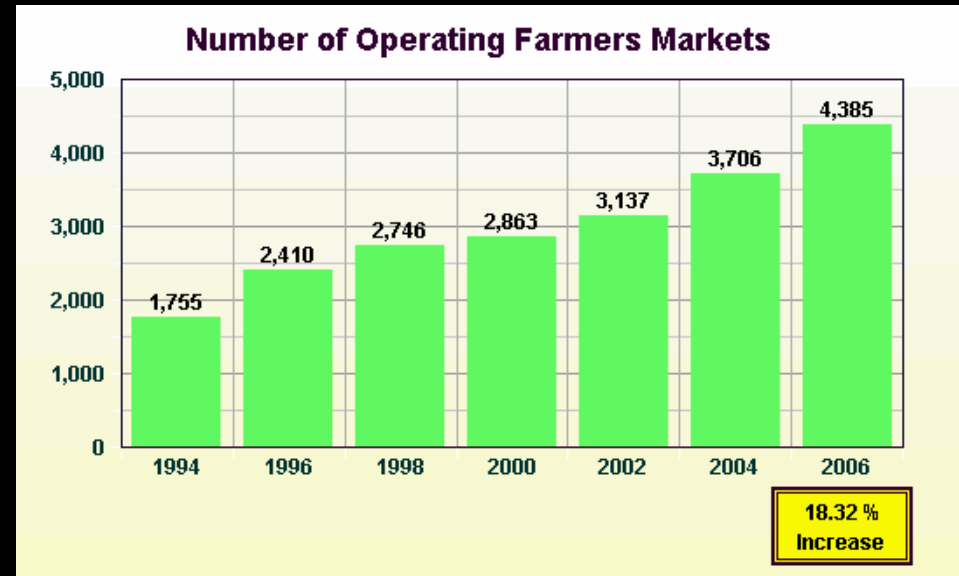
How does the Rhode Island “sustainable” farming model fit into the context of Rhode Island farming generally?

Hypotheses

- Farm subsidy payments
 - Conventional subsidies
 - Conservation focused subsidies
- Alternative options
- Small scale farming

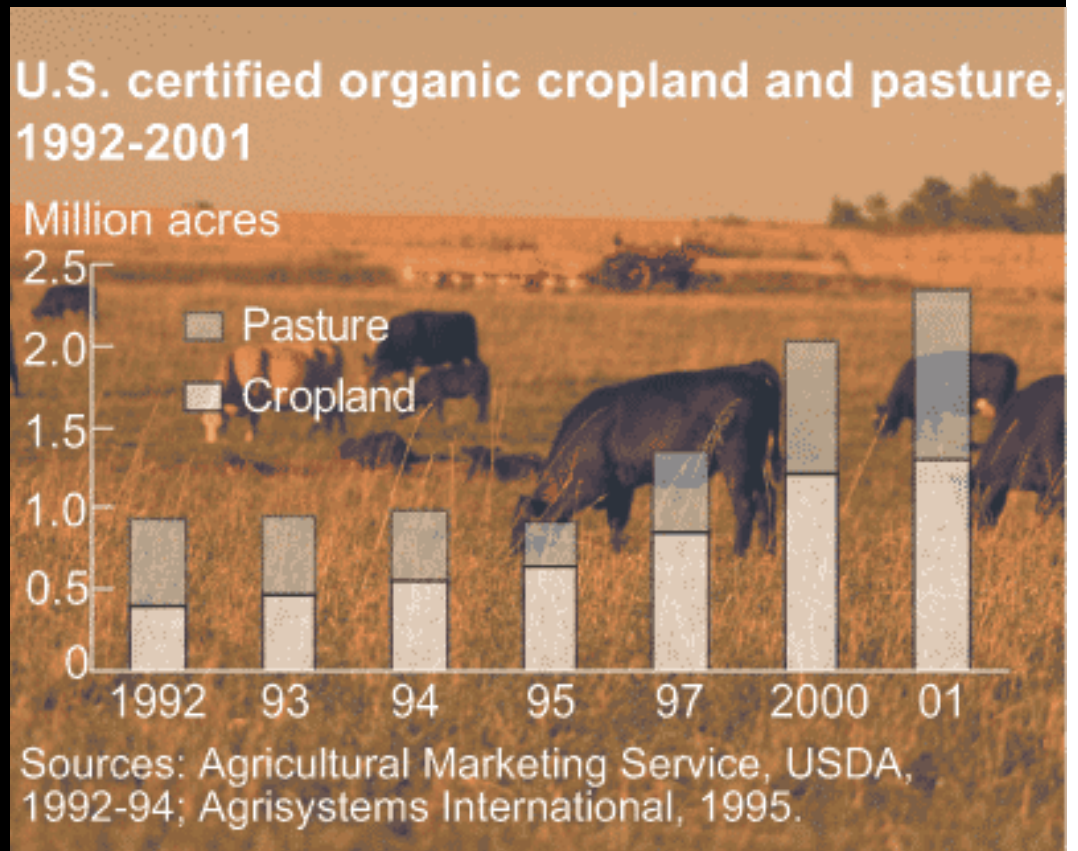
Why Research Support Systems for Sustainable Farming Methods?

- Personal Interest
- Local Food Movement
 - National Trends
 - Example: Pollan, Nestles, Singer
 - Slow Food USA-170 chapters
 - Farmers Markets



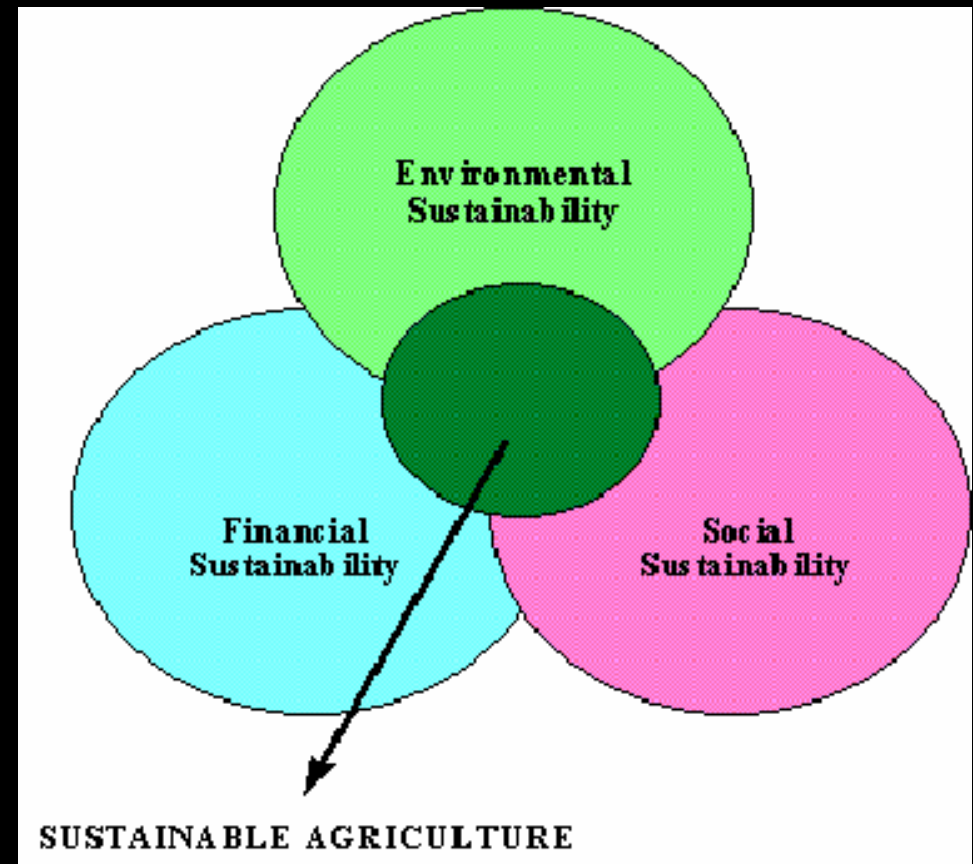
Why Research Support Systems for Sustainable Farming Methods Cont...

- Organics
 - Farmland
 - Purchasing
- Available Resources
 - Subsidy database, grant information, people to interview



Definitions

- Sustainable Agriculture



- Farm

Overview of Rhode Island Farms

- 858 farms, 81% are family or individually run (US 89%)
- Average of 71 acres (US 441 acres)
- 61,000 acres of farmland in the state (9.2%)
- Ranked #2 in sales of fruits and vegetables from farm to consumer on a per farm basis in 2006, #1 in 2005 –USDA Survey, DEM
- Average net income of \$26,035/yr per farm

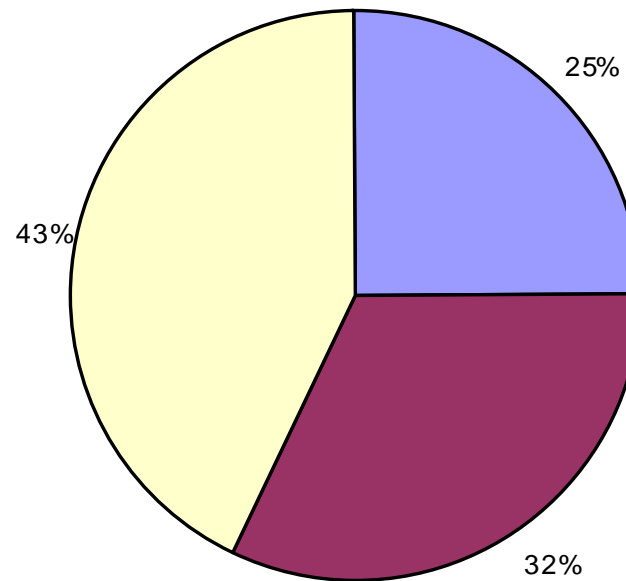
Methods

- Analysis
 - Environmental Working Group Subsidy Database*
 - USDA Census Data
- Online Survey
 - Farming practices and history, subsidy and grant usage, opinions on sustainable farming methods/future
- Interviews
 - Federal and State Agencies, Departments
 - NGOs
 - Farmers

Subsidy Utilization

•6 % of Rhode Island farms utilize subsidies
n=52

Subsidy Program Utilization in Rhode Island from 1995-2005

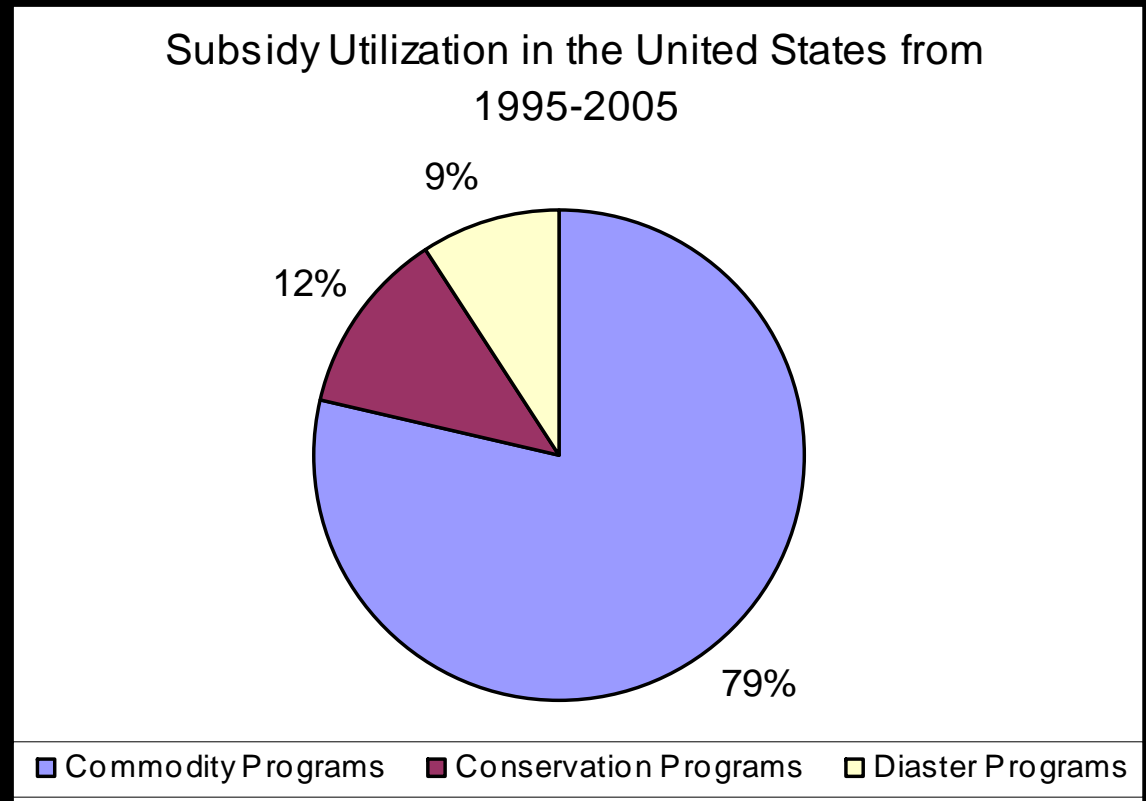


■ Commodity Programs ■ Conservation Programs ■ Disaster Programs

Rank	Program	Number of Beneficiaries	Total program years 2003-2005
1	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	16	\$875,493
2	Environmental Quality Incentive Program	76	\$706,450
3	Grasslands Reserve Program	11	\$342,392
4	Dairy Program Subsidies	32	\$308,186
5	Corn Subsidies	48	\$189,700
6	Wetlands Reserve Program	2	\$76,500
7	Total Conservation Security Program	3	\$13,023
8	Conservation Reserve Program	1	\$4,189
9	Sorghum Subsidies	4	\$206
10	Wool Subsidies	2	\$171

Subsidy Utilization, In Context

- 33% of US farms utilize subsidies
- Corn, Wheat, and Cotton subsidies are the most popular subsidy programs, with \$129.5 billion going to all commodity programs in the US from 1995-2005



Subsidy Utilization, US Comparison

Area	Year	Subsidy total	Harvested cropland (in production)	Subsidy \$/Acre of Harvested Land
US	2002	\$12,949,467,468	302,697,252.00	\$42.78
RI	2002	\$650,992	17,820.00	\$36.53
WI	2002	\$332,096,359	8,928,083.00	\$37.20
CA	2002	\$773,697,737	8,466,321.00	\$91.39
MA	2002	\$6,043,575	159,253.00	\$37.95
TX	2002	\$1,305,629,865	17,750,938.00	\$73.55
NH	2002	\$3,801,584	95,983.00	\$39.61

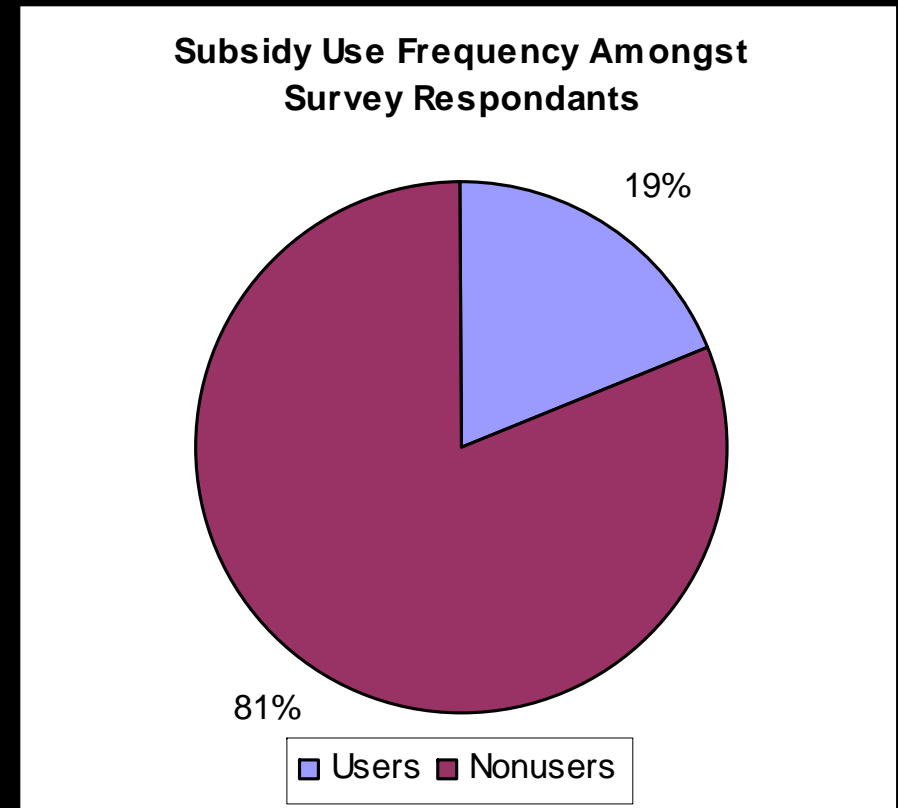
Why Not??

- Qualifications
- Application Process
- Distrust of USDA

•“I have never done a farm subsidy.....I would take one if it was offered to me but I don't feel that it is any kind of solution. I feel it is a kind of a band-aid.” –Eric, Ledge Ends Farm

Farmer Survey

- Farmer Diversity, n=37
- Sustainability
 - Farmstands, CSA, localized market (<100 miles)
- Grant usage trends
- Other Programs
 - RICAPE, FarmFresh, DEM FFOS, NRCS, Cooperative Extension
- Misc.
 - Sell land rights to land trusts
- Sustainability is concern amongst a diverse group of farming operations
 - Moonstone Oysters
 - Barden Orchards
 - Cedar Edge Farm



Interview Results, Farmers

- Sustainability Focus

- No Input, Environment

- Katie Miller, Scratch Farm

- Economics, Environment

- Jan, Sweet Berry Farm

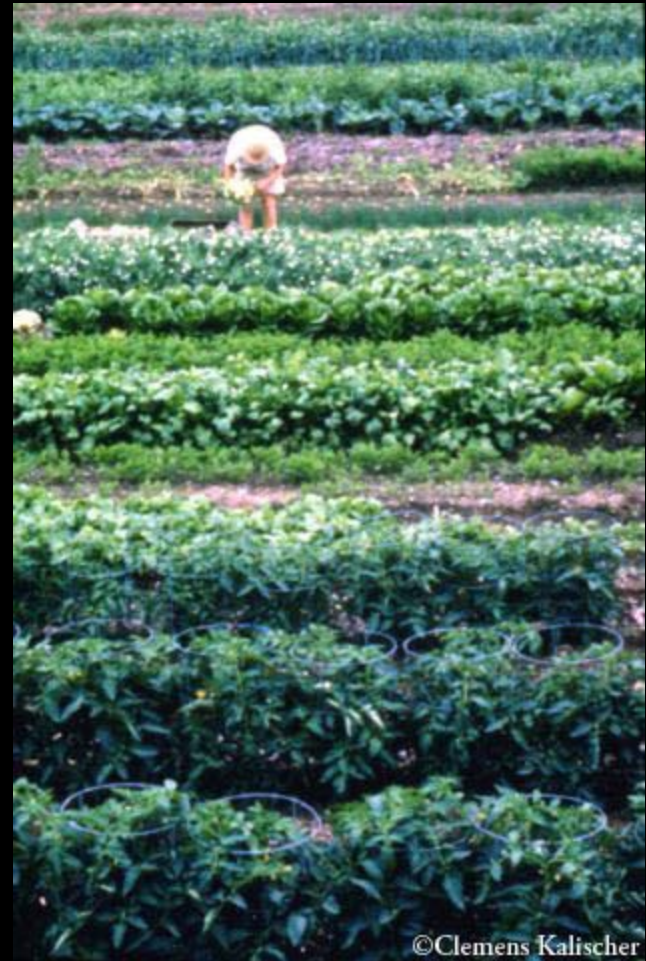
- Program Utilization

- Conservation programs (EQIP, WHIP), Cooperative Extension, FFOS

- Awareness and desire to respond to local food movement

Major Obstacles

- Small farm size
- Limited resources
 - Lack of appropriate machines
 - Lack of training
 - Lack of information, access



Interview Results, Non-Farmers

“

- Sustainability Focus

- Environmental, Economic, Social

- Kristen Dame, Cooperative Extension

- Production characteristics, community

- Noah, FarmFreshRI

- Offered Programs

Obstacles

- Major Obstacles
 - Short training window
 - “You have 10-12 week training window. So it is not just a matter of certain [training sessions] not being available, it’s that there are many things working against it.” -Stu Nunnery, RICAPE
 - Energy Usage
 - Not enough USDA funding for organics training and conservation programs
 - Federal land classing
 - Land Preservation

Needs for Successful Future

- Needs and Potential for Future
 - Non-Farmers
 - Connect new farmers with old farm land owners
 - Expand training opportunities
 - USDA shift in focus
 - Cooperative Extension program expansion
 - Farmers
 - More cohesiveness and communication between government programs
 - More intuitive grant application process
 - Assistance for value-added product development and production
 - Alter grant programs to focus on research projects and potentially add grant program for machine purchases

Conclusions

- Rhode Island farmers are not heavily dependent on USDA subsidies
- NRCS has large demand for conservation subsidies and the trend in subsidy usage is toward conservation subsidies
- Farmers feel that commodity subsidies are not useful for long term sustainability
- Farmers tend to use a combination of other programs such as FFOS, RICAPE grants, and Conservation programs more than subsidy programs

Conclusions

- Farmers find the grant writing process difficult and time-consuming
- There is no real agreement on the exact attributes of sustainable agriculture in the state
- A variety of farms, conventional and organic, utilize programs or are interested in utilizing, programs that enhance sustainability
- There is a shift in Rhode Island Agriculture, as indicated by changes in subsidy utilization and the increasing focus on direct sales to consumer, toward a more localized market, regardless of farm categorization.
- Farmers would like to have a greater scope of services available to them, specifically training on how to incorporate organic/no-pesticide crops into their operation

Recommendations

- Increase Funding for Organics Research
 - USDA Integrated Organic Program
 - SARE Research and Education Grants
- Grant Database
 - Farm Viability Grant
 - SARE Sustainable Community Grant
 - EDC
- Grant Writing Workshop
 - National Research Initiatives Agricultural Prosperity for Small and Medium-Sized Farms grant
 - SARE Sustainable Community Innovation Grant
- Sustainability Definition
 - two-tiered model
 - Aid agricultural programs in setting concrete goals to support sustainable production and essential characteristics

Thank You!

“I have worked for a number of states and I have never seen such strong support for agriculture as I have here by local residents. It is a very strong support.”

–Eric Scherer, NRCS

“Small farms have been the backbone of our country for 200 years and they still are in a lot of ways. They are providing our food, they are providing open spaces, they are providing quality of life and if you don’t support them we will lose all of that...it is good for us to be able to sustain ourselves.”

-Kristen Dame, Cooperative Extension

Thanks to:

Caroline Karp, Thesis Advisor

Stephen Volpe, DEM

Kristen Dame, Extension Agent

Wei Ying Wong, Rhetoric Fellow

The Environmental Working Group

FarmFreshRI

Rhode Island Farmers

My Interviewees

My Friends and Family