



UNIVERSITY OF  
**GEORGIA**  
EXTENSION

Northeast District

# Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program Engages New and Beginning Fruit and Vegetable Farmers in Northeast Georgia

Stewart, R. L.<sup>1</sup>, Cranston, S.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>County Extension Coordinator, University of Georgia, Lincolnton, GA 30817; <sup>2</sup>Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, University of Georgia, Thomson, GA 30824

## Objectives

The objective of this program was to allow new and beginning farmers to improve business practices and recordkeeping, encourage best practices for small fruit and vegetable production, and provide a hands-on opportunity to learn from and network with a successful local producer.

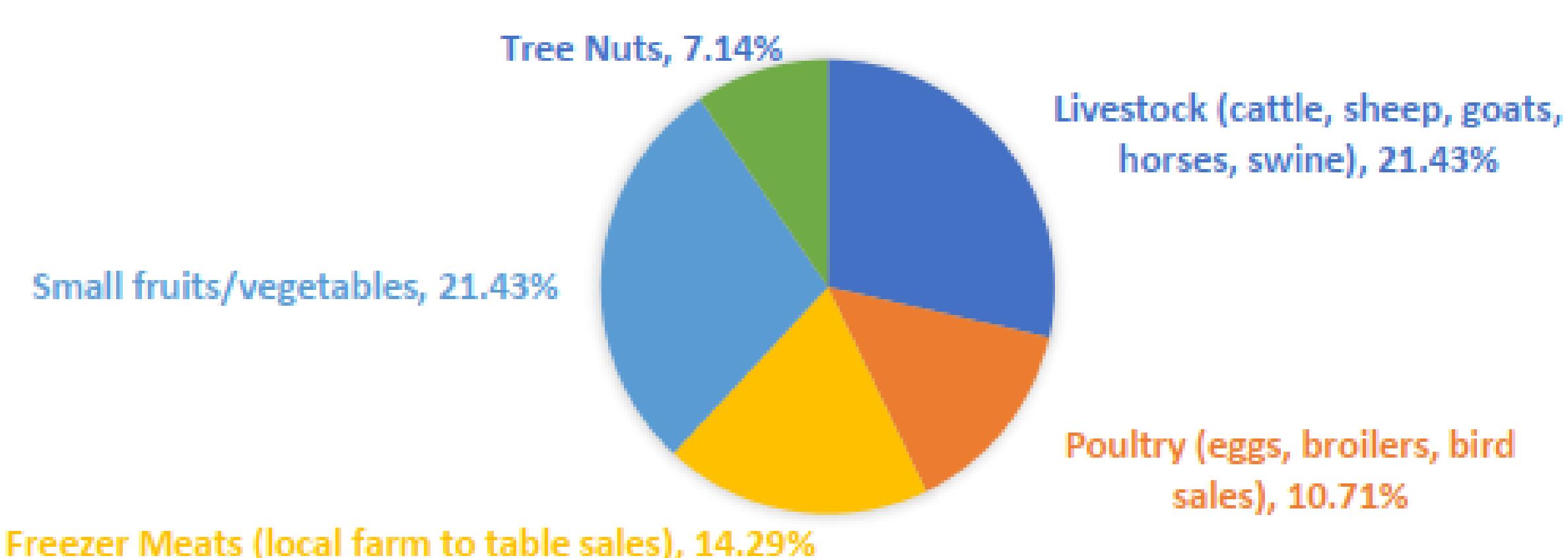
## Introduction

According to USDA data, 35% of farms in Georgia are categorized as new or beginning operations\* and account for 24% of agricultural land use in the state. A critical role of agricultural support organizations is to help improve small farm sustainability and profitability for long-term success in the industry.

## Needs Assessment

- Respondents to formal Lincoln County Needs Assessments conducted in 2020 and 2022 indicated interest in:
  - Farm development (50%) and fruit and vegetable production (75%) (2020, n=7).
  - Small farm development (7%) and fruit and vegetable programs (18%) (2022, n=8).
- So, You Want To Be A Farmer program offered in 2021 reached 186 registrants from 105 Georgia counties and 2 states.
  - More than 20% of attendees indicated interest producing fruits, vegetables, and associated commodities.

### AREAS OF PRODUCTION INTEREST FOR NEW AND BEGINNING FARMERS (N=28)



Participants in the 2021 program "So You Want To Be A Farmer" indicated an interest in programs focusing on small fruit and vegetable production.

## Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program

The UGA Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program was developed in 2015 to provide agribusiness and production education to new and beginning farmers. In 2022, Lincoln and McDuffie Extension hosted the program consisting of a one-day AgAware workshop in collaboration with AgGeorgia, seven educational sessions on fruit and vegetable production, group discussion and homework activities, and a farm tour of a local operation.

## Outputs

- The **AgAware** workshop focused on business planning and recordkeeping was attended by **34 individuals** from **8 counties** in Georgia.
- The **Small Fruit and Vegetable Production Series** was attended by **27 participants** from **5 counties** in Georgia,
- Double Branches Farm and Produce Market, a Lincoln County U-Pick operation, hosted a **farm tour** for **10 participants** in the Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program.
- After meeting attendance and examination requirements, **19 participants received certifications**.
- Of the 27 attendees, 43% were producing for themselves or as a hobby, 29% were producing as a business, and 28% were diversifying an existing agricultural operation.
- Attendees also indicated their length of production with the majority producing for less than 1 year (57%), others between one and three years (29%), and a few for longer than three years (14%).



Participants in the 2022 Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program attend a tour at Double Branches Farm and Produce Market, a successful operation in Lincoln County.

## Results & Knowledge Change\*\*

- Prior to attending this program:
  - 10% of participants had attended an Extension program in the past
  - 25% had used Extension services
  - 20% had both attended a program and used services
  - 45% were not familiar with Extension at all
- Overall satisfaction with the series was ranked excellent (70%) or good (30%) by participants.
- The majority of attendees (95%) indicated they would definitely use the presented information in their own operations.
- All participants indicated an increase in knowledge of fruit and vegetable production.
- After the program, 60% of attendees reported feeling very or extremely knowledgeable about fruit and vegetable production compared to 0% prior to the series.
- **Future Programming**
  - Participants expressed interest in the following programs:
    - Food Preservation (Canning class held July, 2022)
    - Chicken/Flock Production (August-September, 2022)
    - Small Ruminant Production (Spring, 2023)
- **Participant Feedback**

"Both instructors were very knowledgeable in the subject matter and personable. Over the next 2-3 years, I expect to be a frequent contact of UGA Extension services."

**85% of attendees indicated they were extremely likely to attend an Extension program or use Extension services in the future.**

## Behavioral Change & Economic Impact

In August of 2022, participants were contacted with a follow-up survey to evaluate how they were using the information they had learned (n=8)

As a result of the **AgAware Workshop**, attendees:

- Implemented practices to improve record keeping (46%)
- Developed or modified a business plan (31%)
- Increased the frequency of profit/loss evaluation (15%)
- Changed marketing and customer development efforts (7%)

As a result of the **Fruit and Vegetable Production** training, participants:

- Implemented conservation practices like no-till and cover crops (20%)
- Soil tested and made amendments based on recommendations (17%)
- Developed a crop rotation plan (17%)
- Planted varieties and cultivars appropriate for our region (14%)
- Installed an irrigation system (11%)
- Improved food safety and handling practices on-farm (9%)
- Acquired new equipment (6%)
- Implemented an Integrated Pest Management plan (6%)

**These behavioral changes have resulted in:**

- Reduced weed/insect/disease pressure and damage (39%)
- Increased produce yields (28%)
- Reduced input costs (17%)
- Increased profitability (11%)

**100% of participants indicated their operation has improved as a result of attending the Journeyman Farmer Certificate Program through healthier plants and soil and/or improved yields, and/or improved profitability!**

\*New and beginning farmers are identified as those who have been in production less than 10 continuous years (USDA, 2022).

\*\*Evaluated using post-program survey, n=20