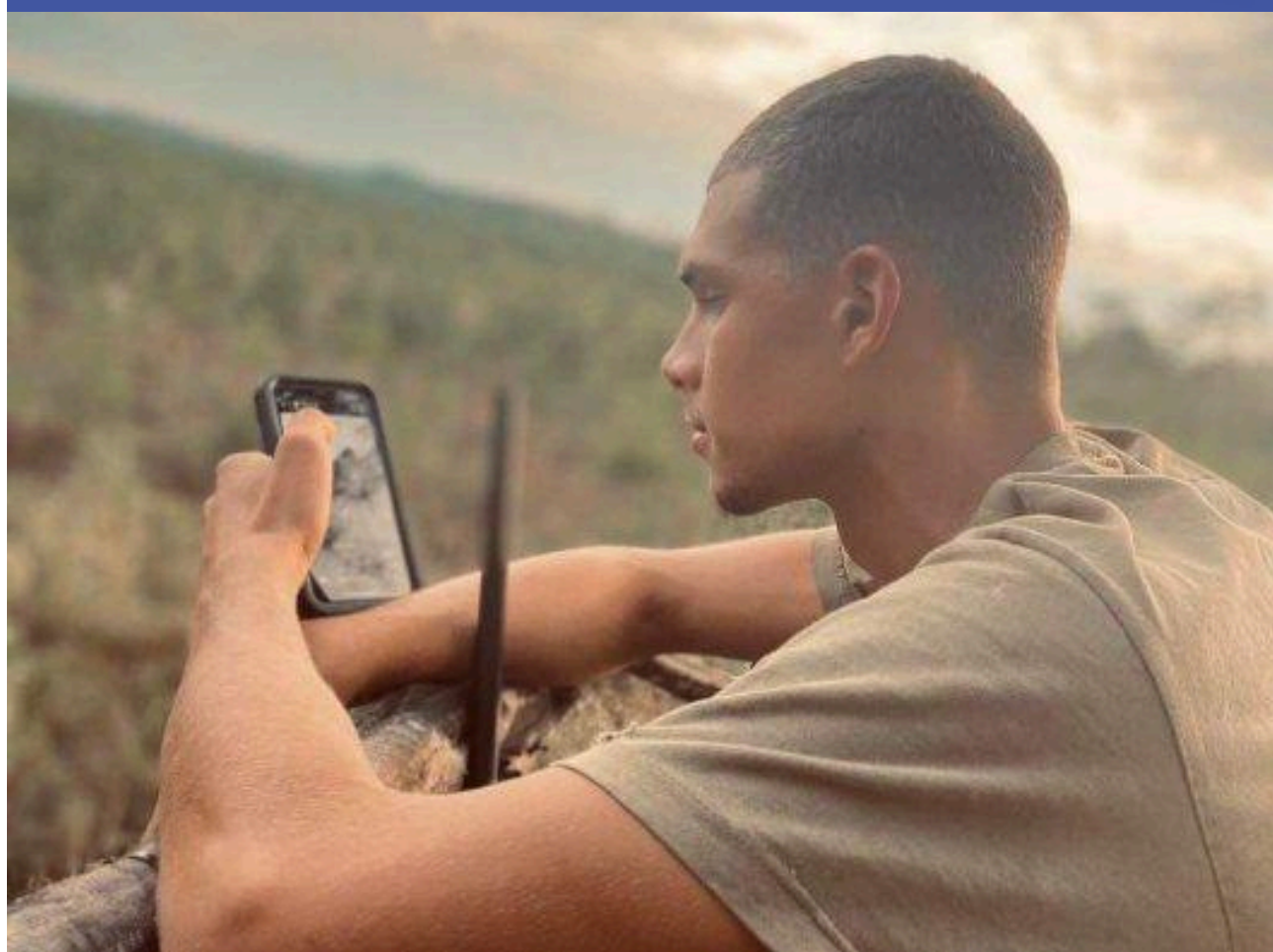


VISIONING OUR FOOD FUTURE

FOOD SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT FOR
BLADEN, COLUMBUS, & ROBESON
COUNTIES



Lumbee Farmer Survey 2024 Research Brief



Overview

In order to complement the 2022 interviews that the Visioning Our Food Future (VOFF) team conducted with 16 Black, Indigenous and People of Color farmers from the three-county study region, we gathered additional information about the population of farmers and their markets from a larger sample in 2024. We attempted to use two methods to find more farmers and gather their information. First, we worked with the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, which is the largest indigenous tribe in North Carolina and provides services to tribal members, including through the Tribe's Agriculture and Natural Resources Department.¹ We received permission from the Lumbee Tribe's Institutional Review Board (IRB), in addition to approval from NC State University's IRB, to use de-identified survey data gathered by the Tribe from a sample of 40 Lumbee farmers. The Lumbee Farmers Survey was administered with support to the Lumbee Tribe from the Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF). Second, we sent a survey with questions similar to the Lumbee-developed survey, including a few modifications (i.e., the VOFF survey), to farmers and to our network of partners who work with farmers in the VOFF region. We sent this group an email with the research study information and a link to the survey following a standard protocol, where they received the initial email and two follow-up email reminders. Overall, the VOFF survey was available for 4 weeks, after which we stopped data collection, even though we did not receive any responses from additional farmers within the study region.

As a result, the data, overarching findings, and analysis below focus only on the responses received from the 40 Lumbee farmers. In order to contextualize data interpretation, we compare the Lumbee farmers' responses to 2022 Census of Agriculture data,²⁻⁵ collected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for both Robeson County, where a majority of Lumbee farmer survey respondents live, and for the state of North Carolina (NC).

Results

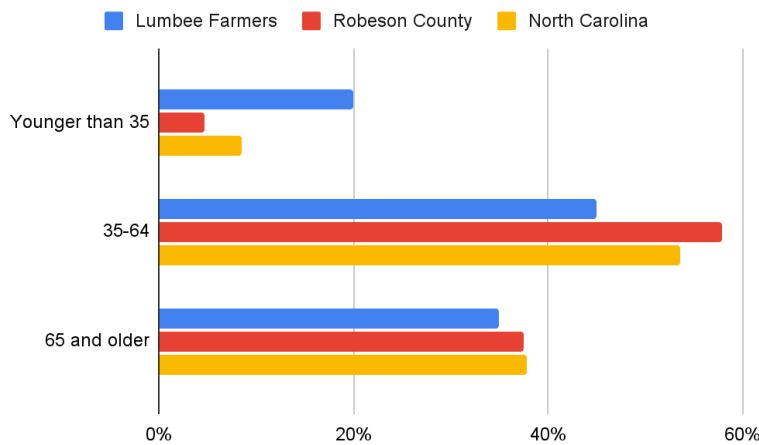
Farmer Information

Of the 40 Lumbee farmers, 92.5% are from Robeson County, and 2.5% each are from Columbus, Scotland, and Lee counties. As is expected, 100% of the respondents identified as Lumbee; by comparison, 68% of farmers in Robeson County and 1.2% of farmers in North Carolina reported Indigenous identity, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture.³

Lumbee farmers were asked to indicate if they own or rent land or are a sharecropper. In the Lumbee Tribe, the sharecropping model is when a farmer shares earnings at harvest with a landowner, usually who is in the farmer's family, but the farmer does not pay rent.

A large majority (85%) of Lumbee farmers own their farmland. Nearly 40% of Lumbee farmers also rent land and about 20% also sharecrop, with only 10% that rent land without owning additional land.

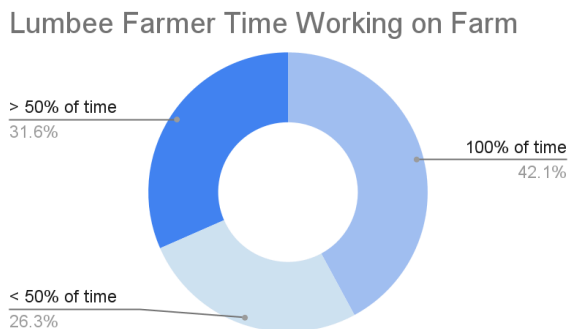
Figure 1: Age of farmers



Overall, Robeson County and North Carolina have a very similar spread of age groups for farmers (Figure 1), with the majority in the 35 to 64 range. The Lumbee farmer sample, however, has over double the amount of farmers who are less than 35 years old at 20%, compared to 4.6% for Robeson County⁴ and 8.6% for North Carolina.³

Lumbee farmers were asked to indicate how much of their working time was spent on the farm. Almost half (42%) work full time on their farms (Figure 2), which is similar to the percentage of producers in Robeson County (48%) and across North Carolina (42%) indicating farming as their primary occupation.³ Thirty-five percent (35%) of the participants in the Lumbee farmer survey indicated being retired from a previous career (equivalent data from the Census of Agriculture are not available).

Figure 2. Amount of Time Working on Farm

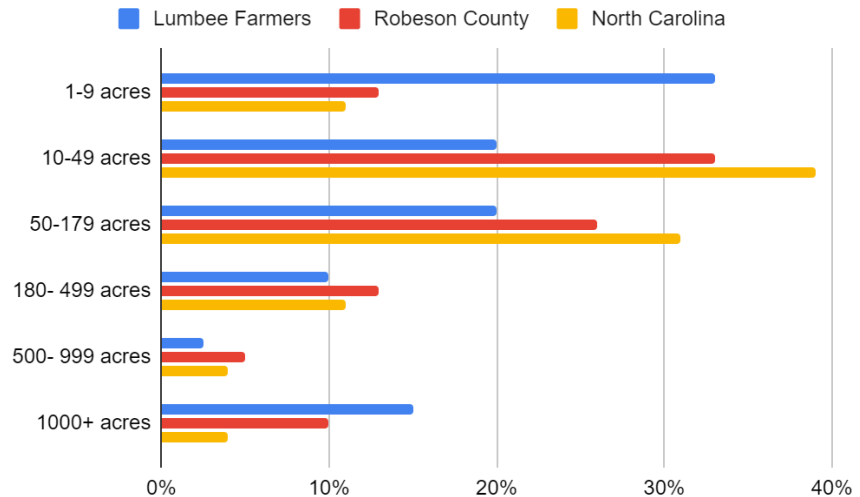


Almost half (48%) of the Lumbee farmers have been farming for more than 11 years compared to almost 70% of farmers at both the state and county levels.³ Thirty percent (30%) of Lumbee farmers indicated they have been farming for 5 years or less, compared to 15% of farmers at county and state levels,³ indicating a higher percentage of new and beginning farmers among the Lumbee farmers.

Farm Information

Figure 3. Size of farms

Farm size varied across Lumbee farmers, county, and state levels (Figure 3). There are more than double the number of small farms in the 1 to 9 acre category reported by Lumbee farmers (32%) as compared to Robeson County (13%) and NC (11%).² Lumbee farmers reported a higher percent (15%) of farmers in the 1,000-acres or more category compared to Robeson (10%) and NC (4%).²



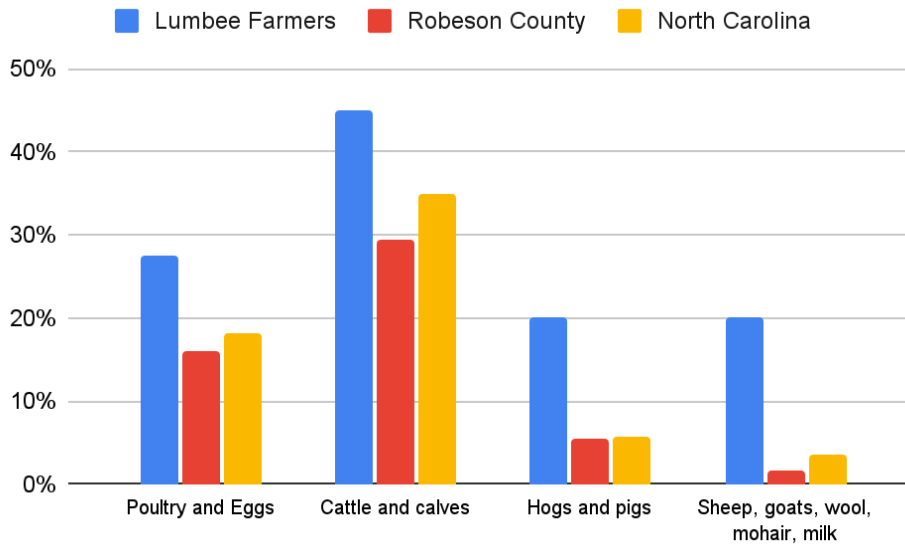
In other farm-size categories, there are fewer Lumbee farms compared to the county and statewide data. This indicates that there are a large number of small/very small-scale Lumbee farms.

Lumbee farmers reported internet access at similar levels as county and statewide farmers. Sixty-five percent (65%) of Lumbee farmers reported having internet at both their farm and at home, with an additional 28% having internet only at their home. For Robeson County, 72% reported having internet access, and 79% in North Carolina, though the Census of Agriculture does not distinguish between access at home and on the farm.³

Farm Products

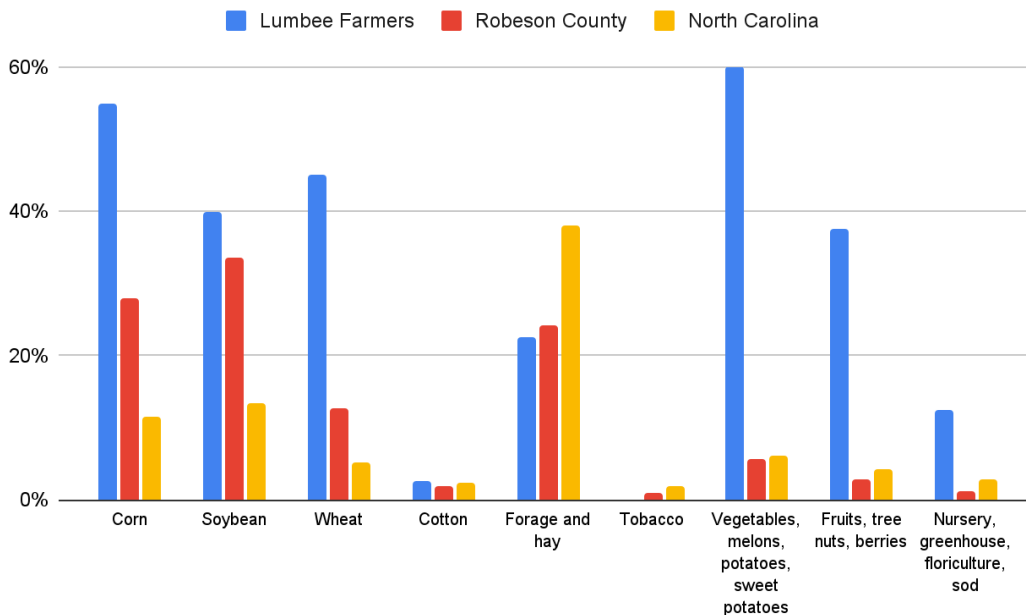
Lumbee farmers were asked to indicate what types of animal products they produce (Figure 4). Over a quarter (28%) of Lumbee farmers produce eggs and poultry, which is a higher percentage than farmers at the Robeson County (16%) and state (18%) levels.² Almost half (45%) of Lumbee farmers indicated they produce calves and cattle, which is higher than the county (30%) and state (35%) level production numbers.² Twenty percent (20%) of Lumbee farmers indicated they produce hogs and pigs, compared to 6% of farms producing hogs and pigs at both the county and state levels.² Twenty percent (20%) of Lumbee farmers also indicated they produced sheep, goats, wool, mohair, and milk, compared to less than 4% at county and state levels.² Overall, Lumbee farmers produce animal products at a higher rate when compared to county and state production.

Figure 4. Portion of respondents raising livestock, poultry and animal products



Lumbee farmers were also asked to indicate which crops they produce. Many Lumbee farmers grow grains, such as corn (55%), soybean (40%), and wheat (45%) (Figure 5). Over a third (38%) of Lumbee farmers grow fruits, tree nuts, and berries; and 60% grow vegetables, melons, and sweet potatoes. These rates are much higher than the county level of fruit and nuts (3%) and vegetable (6%) production, and state level of fruit (4%) and vegetable (6%) production.^{2,6} Lumbee farmers also reported a higher production of nursery, greenhouse, floriculture products at 12.5% compared to 1% in the county and 3% statewide.⁷ In addition, around a quarter (23%) of Lumbee farmers produce timber and other forest products (not included in Figure 5).

Figure 5. Portion of respondents growing crops



Farmers' Markets and Needs

Lumbee farmers were asked to indicate where they sell their products. Seventy-two percent (72%) reported selling products directly to the public, compared to 5% of Robeson County farmers⁴ and 9% of NC farmers.⁵ Twenty percent (20%) of Lumbee farmers report having flooding problems in their property. Approximately two-thirds of the Lumbee farmers indicated a need for both business assistance and agricultural education whereas half indicated a need for advocacy services. Approximately one-third of Lumbee farmers were interested in technical support.

In an open-ended question, Lumbee farmers were asked to indicate on which issues the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina should focus. We found six themes, and as is clear from the illustrative quotes in Table 1, many of the farmers' suggestions integrated several of them. They focused on providing food "for our people," the need for access to capital and resources such as land and support from government programs, and collective strategies to be able to do so.

Table 1: Issues of focus for the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

Theme (response number)	Quote
Local market opportunities for "our people" (8)	"To focus on buying from local small farmers who are more than capable to produce a healthy product that is more beneficial to our people."
Capital assistance (grants, low-interest loans, government programs; 6)	"Provide low interest loans for land purchase/ operations." "Information of government programs to help small producers."
Support for young and beginning farmers (4)	"To help other young farmers like myself get started in farming and to produce quality vegetables for our Lumbee people."
Collective food aggregation and processing (4)	"Processing faculty within the Robeson County area that is FDA regulated."
Natural resource management (soil health, drought, irrigation; 9)	"Help young farmers to purchase farm land and provide the capital to install irrigation systems to combat drought."

Overall lessons learned

- Compared to county and state averages, there are more younger Lumbee farmers, as well as newer, smaller-scale farms. Many farmers said new and beginning farmers should be a priority for the Lumbee Tribe. Specifically, they need capital, business, and educational assistance to help them access land and build their farming operations.
- Although there are more younger farmers in the Lumbee farmer sample than in the county and state, it's also important to note that around one-third of Lumbee farmers fall in the 65 and older category, indicating that issues related to farm transition as these farmers age out will also be important to consider. Programs could be considered that combine land access for young farmers and farm transition for older farmers.
- Lumbee farmers are more likely to produce fruit and vegetables than farmers in Robeson County and the state, and they are more likely to sell in direct markets. This indicates a need to identify and better support their current direct markets, so Lumbee farmers can flourish.
- Lumbee farmers indicated they wanted more market opportunities to sell within the Lumbee Tribal region and wanted support with aggregation and processing. Thus, one option is to create shared infrastructure which can help expand farmers' market opportunities. Another option is to provide training and support for farmers who are interested in entering local wholesale markets (such as institutional markets) to complement their current sales.
- Lumbee farmers prioritized markets for tribal members and grow a diverse range of products relative to the types of products sold at the county and state levels, indicating the potential to support food sovereignty and community food security.
- Lumbee farmers said natural resource management should be a concern for the Lumbee Tribe and said they have issues with drought and flooding, which means there is an opportunity to help them become more adaptable and resourceful following unpredictable weather and intense storms that may increase flooding and drought.

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