

# **New York State**



# **Rural Landowner Survey**

# **Rural Landowner Survey 2005**

**Compiled and Issued by**

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NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE**

**September 2005**

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# New York State Rural Landowner Survey

Productive management of New York's idle and under-utilized land and forest resources can potentially contribute significantly to the economy of rural areas of the state. However, this potential can only be realized if the interests and motivation of those who control this property are better understood and better served. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the profile of rural landowners is changing, and that the motivation and interests of newcomers might vary from those of long-time rural residents. This survey was undertaken to provide a comprehensive, current view of how the current owners of the state's private open land resources are using their land holdings, and what they plan to do with them.

## **Survey Methodology**

This report summarizes results of a mail survey of landowners to gather insight into what is happening to open and forested land throughout New York State. Survey forms were mailed to owners of a sample of 6,600 parcels out of 291,022 tax parcels classified by local assessors as agricultural land, rural residences with acreage, other rural land, or private wild and forested land (see Appendix I)<sup>1</sup>. These land categories are referred to collectively as *undeveloped rural land* throughout this report. The parcels surveyed are representative of all land currently used for agriculture and forest product production (except licensed harvesting of timber on state land), as well as other land capable to be used for agriculture or forest production. Many include a year-round or seasonal residence, but with an average parcel size of about 50 acres, the residence, lawn and associated outbuildings generally occupy a small percentage of the land area. Together, the land classifications covered in the survey account for approximately 17 million acres out of the 30 million acres that fall within the geographic boundaries of New York State. They exclude state and federal land, wild, conservation and park land, land used to provide community services, and land developed for industrial, commercial and higher density residential use.

The response rate for this survey was 47 percent. This rate permits interpretation of results with considerable confidence at the state and regional level. Appendix II provides a list of counties defining the regions referenced in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Where it appeared that small parcels might be included in the Office of Real Property Services classifications included in the survey, the sampling plan attempted to focus on parcels of 5 acres or more, since the survey's focus was on land that might have some long-term potential for crop or forest product production. Just under 5% of the responses came from landowners of parcels which were less than 5 acres, despite the selection of categories and constraints in the sample design.

## Summary

Undeveloped rural land in New York State is classified by its owners largely in three categories: active agricultural land (41 percent), forest land (41 percent), or idle agricultural land (8 percent), although most parcels contain two or more land types.

Survey data suggest that the ongoing conversion of rural property from agricultural use to low-density residential use will continue in all regions of the state. While agricultural use is the primary reason given for ownership of 35 percent of undeveloped rural land, more than half of the subdivisions of undeveloped land parcels by current owners were for residential use. Seventeen percent of the parcels are owned by people who expect to sell some or all of their land within 10 years, and two-thirds expect that the next use will be residential. Of the 14 percent of owners of land **now** owned primarily for agricultural purposes who are planning to sell within 10 years, less than one-third expect that the buyer will be a farmer.

Property taxes were given as the most important reason for undeveloped land sales, followed by the desire to generate income. Sixty-two percent of rural undeveloped land is posted, while 41 percent of owners say they allow recreational use of their property with permission. Hunting was the use most commonly cited. Four-fifths of privately owned undeveloped rural land is owned by individuals rather than partnerships or corporations. Eighty-one percent of rural landowners live within the county where the property is located with at least 45 percent residing on the property itself or a contiguous property. One-third of the undeveloped rural land was purchased by its current owner within the last decade.

Newer owners do not appear to differ greatly from those who have owned their land for a longer period of time. Both groups are far more likely to have purchased the parcels surveyed than to have inherited them, and most have no plans to sell the land. They are equally likely to reside within the county where the property is located, though somewhat less likely to live on the parcel in question. About one third own the land primarily because it is the site of a current or future residence or second home, with agricultural use given as the next most common reason for ownership.

## **Ownership Patterns**

Eighty-one percent of the undeveloped rural land<sup>2</sup> in New York State is owned by people who live in the same county where the land is located. Forty-six percent of all owners of undeveloped rural land parcels reside on the property itself<sup>3</sup>. While this pattern holds true across the Upstate regions, Downstate landowners were much less likely to live on the property but more likely to live off the property but in the same county. Only about 7 percent of undeveloped land was held by non-residents of the state.

### **Percentage of Landowners, by Location of Residence and Region**

<b>Location of Landowner Residence</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Down-state</b>	<b>Eastern region</b>	<b>Western region</b>
On the property	46	30	46	54
Not on property, within county	35	57	30	30
Outside the county, within State	12	10	13	11
Outside the State	7	3	11	5

Undeveloped rural land in New York is predominantly owned by individuals or groups of related individuals (79 percent), followed by partnerships or corporations (15 percent). Notes on questionnaires indicated many of the partnerships and corporations are arrangements among close relatives. The most common land uses associated with corporate or partnership ownership are agriculture and forestry. Sixteen percent of land owned primarily for agricultural use is owned by partnerships or corporations, with 93 percent of these corporations or partnerships based either on the farm itself or within the same county. Half of the land owned principally for commercial forestry is owned by corporations or partnerships.

The average length of time undeveloped rural land parcels have been owned by current owners is 21 years, statewide. This average varies by less than one year by region. Current owners purchased 34 percent of the state's undeveloped rural land parcels since 1995. This percentage is uniform except downstate, where 39 percent of the undeveloped rural land parcels were purchased by current owners within the last ten years. From an acreage perspective, 30 percent of the currently undeveloped land changed hands during the last decade with slightly less than 13 percent changing hands since 2000.

More than half of the state's undeveloped rural land was previously owned by a farmer. The percentage of rural undeveloped land acquired through gift or inheritance was 18 percent for all undeveloped rural land, but only 17 percent in the case of land now owned primarily for agricultural purposes.

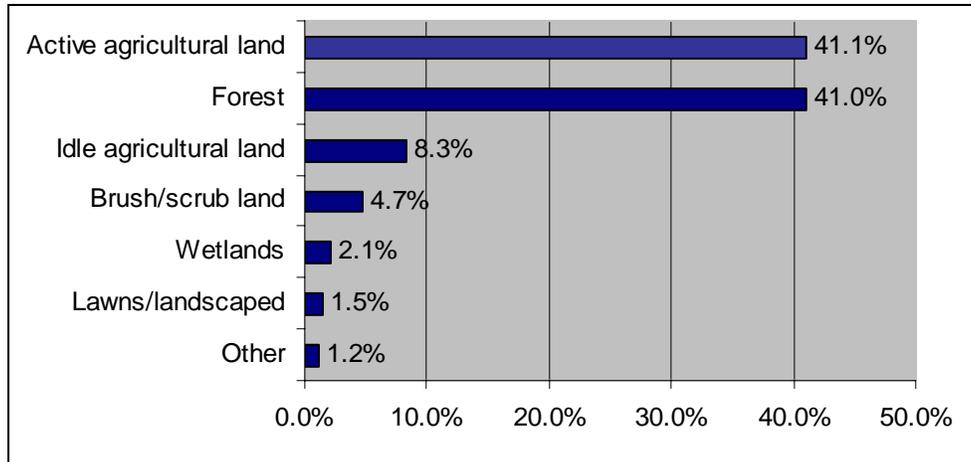
<sup>2</sup> When percentages refer to *land area* in this report, they have been adjusted or weighted for parcel size. When percentages refer to *land owners*, they treat each survey respondent equally, regardless of parcel size.

<sup>3</sup> Since rural landowners may own more than one contiguous parcel, it is likely that the actual percentage of owners living within the boundaries of their rural landholdings is somewhat larger than the percentage of those reporting that they reside on the specific parcel identified in the survey.

## Current Patterns of Use

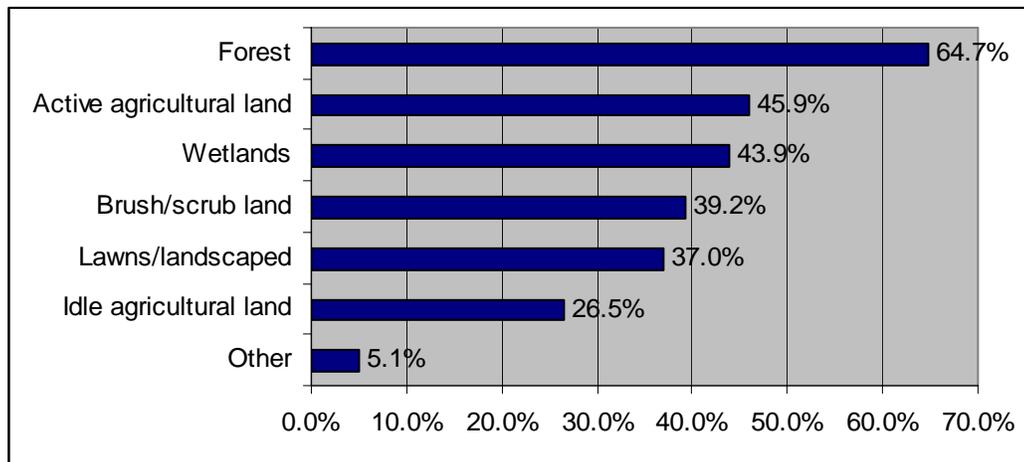
Owners of undeveloped land parcels were asked to identify the predominant type of land in their parcel. Survey responses follow:

### Undeveloped Land Area Classified by Predominant Land Type in the Parcel



Owners were also asked to identify all types of land within the parcel. Sixty-eight percent of parcels contained two or more land types, and 24 percent contained four or five different land types. The chart below indicates the percentage of undeveloped parcels that contain some land of each type:

### Frequency of Land Type Occurring in Undeveloped Parcels



Categorizing land type classifications, by itself, does not indicate why landowners purchased and retain their property. When asked why they owned the parcels surveyed, owners of 31 percent of the land covered by the survey responded with Agricultural Use, while 28 percent of the land was associated with Current Principal Residence as its principal use. Agricultural Use covered 51 percent of the undeveloped rural land Downstate, where very high prices of building lots discourage retention of open space other than land essential to a business and/or land protected by a conservation easement. The high percentage of Agricultural Use land Downstate

compares to only 22 percent of undeveloped land in the Eastern Region, and 40 percent in the Western region. Complete results follow:

**Land Area by Owner's Chief Reason For Owning Parcel (Percent)**

<b>Reason for Owning Property</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Down-state</b>	<b>Eastern region</b>	<b>Western region</b>
Agricultural use <sup>4</sup>	35	51	22	40
Current principal residence	22	15	29	25
Forest management/harvesting timber	10	<1	13	8
Long-term investment/security	8	8	10	5
Hunting	7	<1	8	7
Vacation or second home	4	5	7	2
Future principal residence	2	<1	3	2
Rental income - from farmer	1	<1	<1	1
Other recreational use	<1	<1	<1	1
Future subdivision	<1	<1	<1	<1
Rental income - other renter ( <i>non-farm</i> )	<1	<1	<1	<1
Location of non-agricultural business	<1	<1	<1	<1
Other	8	18	7	6

The predominant reason cited in the "Other" category, outdistancing all others by a 3 to 1 margin, was associated with keeping the land open and preserving open space or habitat. Of equal occurrence the second and third most reported reasons, were to keep a homestead together or in the family and because it was an adjoining property.

Of land identified by its owner as "active agricultural land," only two-thirds is owned primarily for agricultural use. Approximately 20 percent of this land is valued chiefly as the site of a current or future principal residence. Only 23 percent of the forest land is in the hands of owners who identify forest management and harvesting timber as a chief reason for owning the property. That is just below the 25 percent of parcels owned primarily as the site of a principal residence.

In New York, 62 percent of the undeveloped rural land area is posted to discourage unauthorized access. Owners of 59 percent of parcels said they do not allow recreational use of their property by anyone other than family members and close relatives. Of owners who allow recreational use by non-family members, the following uses were cited:

<sup>4</sup> Including all types of livestock, horse boarding, nursery/landscape industry and maple sugar production.

### Percentage of Owners Allowing a Particular Use

Allowed recreational use	Only with permission	Without emits
Hunting	70	15
Hiking	28	19
Snowmobiles	23	11
Horseback riding	22	11
Cross country skiing	21	17
Off-road vehicles	19	6
Fishing	18	9
Other	4	2

Owners of undeveloped rural land who do not allow recreational use of their property except by family members and close relatives cited the following reasons for not opening their property to outside use:

### Percentage of Owners Citing A Reason Not to Permit Use by Non-Family Members

Reasons	Ranked 1 <sup>st</sup>	Ranked 1 or 2	Any rank
Possible law suit	46	61	76
Don't want strangers on land	35	53	78
Possible damage to property	11	45	66
Other	14	16	33

Equally reported reasons under "Other" were that allowing use conflicted with the farming enterprise in some manner and that land owners wanted to retain their privacy and domain since they paid the taxes on the land.

### Characteristics of Newer Owners

Approximately 30 percent of the total rural land acreage in New York State was purchased by its current owner after 1995. Taking that year as a dividing line for analytical purposes, it does not appear that newer owners are substantially different in regard to areas explored in this survey than people who have owned their land for a longer period of time.

Like those who have owned their land longer than ten years, four out of five newer owners purchased the land rather than obtaining it through inheritance or some other transfer method. Newer owners are not much more likely to live outside the county where the land is located, though they are somewhat less likely to live on the property itself (40%, vs. 52% in the case of those who have owned their land longer).

They are slightly less likely to have plans to sell any of their land within the next ten years (15% vs. 18% among longer owners). Their expectation of who might buy the land is about the same that of those who have owned their land for more than ten years, with an individual planning to build a house in the top position (35%), and someone planning to farm the land (12%) well down on the list.

Forty-three percent of new owners indicated that they allow their land to be used for some recreational purposes, a slightly higher percent than that given by longer owners, though they are at least as likely as established owners to have their land posted. They are not much less likely to own land for agricultural purposes (29% vs. 31%), but more likely to report owning their land for lifestyle reasons (second home, recreation, maintaining open space, wildlife habitat, etc. -- 24% vs. 19%) The distribution of newer owners land holdings among cover categories (forest, active agricultural land, idle agricultural land, etc.) is hardly distinguishable from the holdings of longer owners, except for a somewhat lower percentage of active agricultural land.

### **Changes in Ownership and Use**

Eighty percent of all undeveloped rural land was obtained by purchase from its previous owner. Eighteen percent was inherited or received as a gift. Of undeveloped rural land owned primarily for agricultural purposes, 81 percent of the parcels were purchased from its previous owner with slightly less than 18 percent inherited or received as a gift. Farmers owned these undeveloped parcels 39 percent of the time prior to a current owner taking possession. Those current owners report farming as the chief purpose for owning that parcel only 31 percent of the time. Nearly thirty percent of land now owned primarily for non-agricultural uses was previously owned by a farmer.

Owners of 7 percent of the undeveloped rural land reported selling a part of the parcel within the past 5 years. Parcel subdivisions during that period were less common downstate (4 percent of parcels) and more common in the western region (8 percent). Subdivided parcels statewide were sold for the following uses by the new owner:

#### **Uses of Subdivided Parcels of Undeveloped Land by Subsequent Owner (Percent)**

<b>Reason for Purchase</b>	<b>New York</b>
Residential use	54
Agricultural use	26
Recreational use	10
Commercial/industrial use	2
Other uses	8

Seventeen percent of landowners plan to sell some or all of their land in the future. Of this percentage, eleven percent plan on selling **all** their land sometime in the future, with eight percent planning to sell all of it within 5 years. Another six percent of owners are planning to sell **part** of the parcel surveyed sometime in the future, with three percent planning to sell a part within the next 5 years.

#### Percentage of Owners Citing Reason for Sale of Parcel

Reasons for planned sale	New York	Down-state	Eastern region	Western region
Burden of property taxes too high	40	24	39	48
Need money from the sale	26	28	27	24
Relocation of home or business	10	12	9	10
Burden of managing the land	9	11	10	7
Other	15	25	15	11

The most common “other” reason given for selling the property was that the owner intended to retire and no longer had use for the parcel.

Of all parcel owners planning to sell some or all of their property, two-thirds expect the property to be primarily used as residential. There is considerable regional variation in terms of who they expect will buy their land, but the percentage of owners who expect the primary use to be residential (first three categories in the list that follows) varies little statewide:

#### Percentage of Parcels Whose Owners Plan to Sell by Expected Future Use

Expected buyer	New York	Down-state	Eastern region	Western region
An individual planning to build a house on the property	35	23	40	36
An individual who will live in an existing house on the property	16	15	13	20
A residential developer	16	30	13	13
A farmer	13	21	7	16
A non-farm business establishment	3	1	5	2
A municipal government	2	6	1	2
Other	14	3	20	13

Those who currently own land for agricultural or forestry uses account for 30 percent of the land likely to be sold within the next five years and 29 percent of the land likely to be sold within the next 10 years. Of individuals who own land primarily for agricultural use, 14 percent plan to sell some or all of their land within the next 10 years. Less than one-third of prospective sellers of agricultural land expect the next buyer to be a farmer.

**Additional Survey Results**

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and National Agricultural Statistics Service will conduct further analysis of landowner survey data, including follow-up surveys of owners of idle agricultural land and forest land. Results of that research will be made available on the Department of Agriculture and Markets web site ([www.agmkt.state.ny.us](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us)).

## Appendix I

## RURAL LANDOWNER SURVEY - LAND USE CATEGORIES

Breakdown of land types follows the classification established by the New York State Office of Real Property Services (ORPS). The acreage totals for the State should be treated as approximate since there may be some variation in how local property assessors interpret the predominant use of a parcel within the ORPS land use classification system. These totals, however, are based on aggregation of acreage by property classification.

ORPS Property Code	Description	Total acres statewide
100	Agricultural ( <i>not placed in any agricultural subcategory</i> )	21,654
105	Agricultural vacant land ( <i>productive--part of an operating farm</i> )	2,009,224
110	Livestock and products ( <i>not placed in a livestock subcategory</i> )	164,092
111	Poultry and poultry products	11,485
112	Dairy products	1,597,942
113	Cattle, calves, hogs	309,603
114	Sheep and wool	24,233
115	Honey and beeswax	1,557
116	Other livestock ( <i>goats, sheep, donkeys</i> )	58,212
117	Horse farms	76,347
120	Field crops	1,564,474
129	Acquired development rights ( <i>agricultural land under a conservation easement</i> )	12,957
130	Truck crops, muckland	35,334
140	Truck crops, not muckland	46,213
150	Orchard crops ( <i>not placed in an orchard subcategory</i> )	6,506
151	Apples, pears, peaches, cherries, etc. ( <i>tree fruits</i> )	84,975
152	Vineyards	54,536
160	Other fruits ( <i>strawberries, cane fruits, etc.</i> )	2,720
170	Nursery and greenhouse	25,214
180	Specialty farms ( <i>not placed in a subcategory</i> )	1,299
181	Fur products	71
182	Pheasant, etc.	1,503
183	Aquatic ( <i>oysterlands, fish and aquatic plants</i> )	59,661
184	Livestock ( <i>deer, moose, llamas, buffalo, etc.</i> )	3,627
190	Fish, game and wildlife preserves	27,275
	<b>AGRICULTURAL SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>6,200,714</b>
240	Rural residence with acreage ( <i>not placed in either subcategory</i> )	3,522,994
241	Rural residence with 10 or more acres, also used in agricultural production	334,971
242	Rural residence with 10 or more acres, recreational use	171,367
	<b>RURAL RESIDENTIAL SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>4,029,332</b>
320	Vacant land, rural ( <i>not placed in a subcategory</i> )	154,901
321	Abandoned agricultural land ( <i>not part of an operating farm</i> )	721,768
322	Residential vacant land over 10 acres ( <i>rural</i> )	2,057,601
323	Other rural vacant lands ( <i>waste lands, swamps, brush, etc.</i> )	671,729
	<b>VACANT LAND TOTAL</b>	<b>3,605,999</b>
910	Private wild and forest lands ( <i>except for hunting, fishing clubs</i> )	2,136,678
911	Forest land under section 480 of real property law	512,201
912	Forest land under section 480a of real property law	239,110
920	Private hunting and fishing clubs	212,977
	<b>PRIVATE FOREST LAND SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,100,966</b>
	<b>TOTAL FOR ALL SELECTED LAND USE CATEGORIES</b>	<b>16,937,011</b>

## Appendix II

### RURAL LANDOWNER SURVEY - REGIONS

#### Downstate Region

Nassau Co.  
Rockland Co.  
Suffolk Co.  
Westchester Co.

#### Eastern Region

Albany Co.  
Chenango Co.  
Clinton Co.  
Columbus Co.  
Delaware Co.  
Dutchess Co.  
Essex Co.  
Franklin Co.  
Fulton Co.  
Greene Co.  
Hamilton Co.  
Herkimer Co.  
Jefferson Co.  
Lewis Co.  
Madison Co.  
Montgomery Co.  
Oneida Co.  
Orange Co.  
Otsego Co.  
Putnam Co.  
Rensselaer Co.  
St. Lawrence Co.  
Saratoga Co.  
Schenectady Co.  
Schoharie Co.  
Sullivan Co.  
Ulster Co.  
Warren Co.  
Washington Co.

#### Western Region

Allegany Co.  
Broome Co.  
Cattaraugus Co.  
Cayuga Co.  
Chautauqua Co.  
Chemung Co.  
Cortland Co.  
Erie Co.  
Genesee Co.  
Livingston Co.  
Monroe Co.  
Niagara Co.  
Onondaga Co.  
Ontario Co.  
Orleans Co.  
Oswego Co.  
Schuyler Co.  
Seneca Co.  
Steuben Co.  
Tioga Co.  
Tompkins Co.  
Wayne Co.  
Wyoming Co.  
Yates Co.

