



Survey of Maryland Next Generation Farmland Acquisition (NextGen) Program Participants: Results Summary

Land Access Policy Incentives Research & Extension Project

[Indiana University Food and Agrarian Systems](#)

Julia Valliant (jdv@iu.edu) and Marie O'Neill (mtoneill@iu.edu)

In consultation with [American Farmland Trust](#) and [MARBIDCO](#)

Summary

Here are preliminary results from a 2023 survey of participants in Farmland Purchase and Protection Incentive Programs (FPPIs) in two Mid-Atlantic states, Delaware and Maryland, conducted by the Indiana University Food and Agrarian Systems Program as part of a USDA-funded [assessment of land access incentive policies nationwide](#). Maryland and Delaware offer distinctive but similar farmland access and protection incentives to their young and beginning farmers. Here are Maryland's results.

Over half of the 39 Maryland farmers who had purchased a farm through the [Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program](#) (NextGen) or [Small Acreage Next Generation Program](#) (SANG) since NextGen began in 2018 filled out the survey (24 respondents, or 62%). They represented ten Maryland counties. [Find more detailed survey results here.](#)



Takeaways to understand

Farmers overwhelmingly agreed that NextGen provided an opportunity to purchase farmland that they otherwise may not have had, and this opportunity contributed to the success of their farm operation.

Without the NextGen program, 92% of respondents said they would have needed to compromise more on the land they purchased and 88% agreed that NextGen helped their farm operation to succeed. We also asked if the NextGen farmer continues to face a land access challenge at the present time, even after purchasing a farm of their own; 42% agreed that they do still face a land access challenge, but a majority either were neutral on this statement or disagreed, saying they no longer face a land access challenge. A takeaway is that participating in NextGen provided most respondents with as much farmland access as they needed. In fact, a few farmers have even gone on to purchase more land since enrolling in NextGen, but a couple others have sold their NextGen farms.

Who is participating in NextGen?

The average age of farmers when they enrolled in NextGen is 32, with a range from 23 to 53. Most were aged 35 or under at enrollment (80%). Half of the respondents grew up farming while the other half did not. On this note, only 4 respondents purchased NextGen land from a relative, versus 8 who purchased land from someone they had not known previously. This indicates that Maryland's NextGen program is working to serve both inter-family transfer of farmland and also transfers to those who may not have otherwise had an opportunity within their families to purchase acreage.

Nearly half (11) of the NextGen respondents are growing feed-grade grains and the same number are raising livestock or poultry either as the sole operation or in combination with other products.

Of the survey participants, 6 are raising annual horticultural crops, 6 are raising forages, and 2 are farming timber. Most of the respondents (16) are selling their farm products directly to consumers or to intermediated markets, like grocers, while 9 are selling within commodity markets.

NextGen farmers purchased an average of about 80 acres through the program with a median (middle value) of 54 acres and a range of 20 to 182 acres. Eight NextGen farmers (one-third) reported that they lease additional land to farm - a median of 100 acres (range of 3 acres to 1,600 acres). The respondents' current landholdings are only slightly higher than the size of their NextGen farm purchases. As a group, these farmers aspire for their operations to reach 450 acres in size (median value, range of 25 to 2,000 acres). Only one farmer gained access through NextGen to the amount of land they aspired to farm. Most farmers hope to one day farm more land than what they purchased through NextGen. The respondents' ranging land bases underscore the diversity of farms NextGen and SANG are serving.

Given this overall pattern, their NextGen purchase of 50 acres represents one-ninth of the total agricultural land base the group hopes to operate one day.

When asked what percentage of their household income comes from farming, most respondents (58%) indicated that less than 25% of their household income is farm income, so most of their income comes from an off-farm source. Only 3 of 24 farmers indicated that 75-100% of their income is farm income. This means that NextGen is usually serving households whose livelihoods mainly come from off-farm sources.

In terms of other general demographics, most respondents were White only (88%). Two respondents also identified as another race. One-third of respondents were women while most of the respondents were men.

Farming practices and management changes

When farmers were asked if they had made any changes to the management of the land purchased through the NextGen program, 7 reported no changes from the previous farmer. Ten farmers mentioned crop rotations and four farmers mentioned reduced tillage as new conservation practices. Some farmers have added enterprises to the operation since purchasing the NextGen land. Additions include 6 NextGen farmers who have added livestock/poultry, 4 farmers who reported adding perennial crops, and one farmer who has added food-grade grains. A little over one-third of the NextGen respondents (38%) are enrolled in USDA/NRCS conservation programs. None of the farmers report being USDA Certified Organic, but one farmer has been certified in the [Naturally Grown](#) program. It appears that even though NextGen is helping people purchase land and provide long-term land tenure, most are not participating in USDA conservation programs.

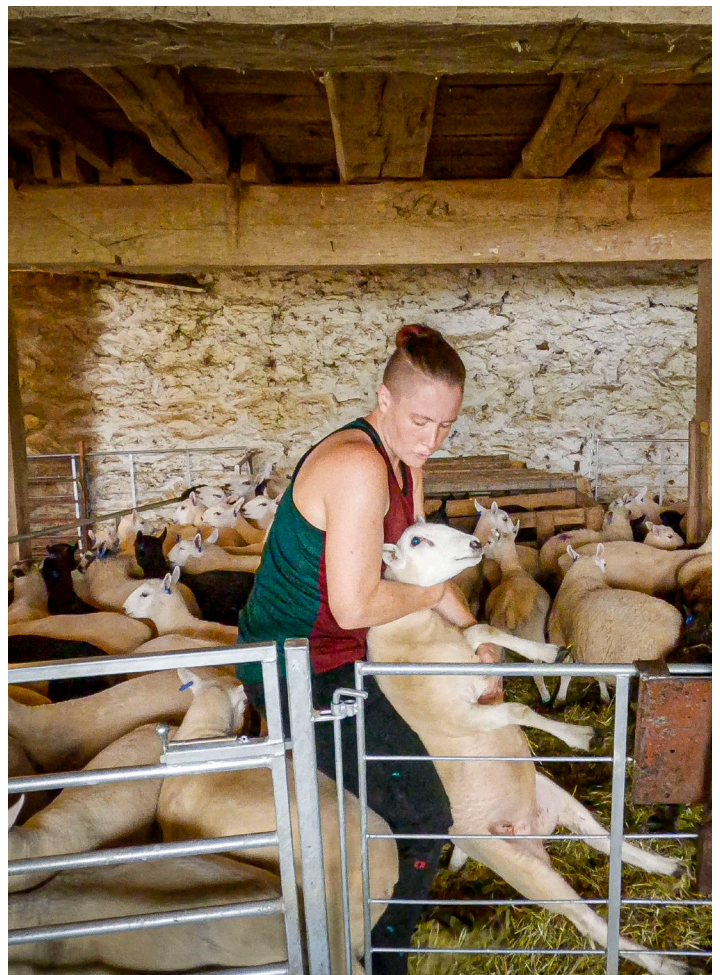
Farmland preservation

The 24 respondents have enrolled over 3,100 acres in NextGen. This means that these 3,100 acres are to be enrolled in farmland preservation and will be protected as farmland in perpetuity. When we asked farmers if they would have considered land preservation even if they had not participated in NextGen, 83% of farmers agreed with this statement. Only 1 farmer disagreed. The NextGen program offers the opportunity to protect agricultural land to those who value the preservation of farmland for future generations.

Difficulties using the program

We asked NextGen farmers to rate the difficulty of a few aspects of participating in the NextGen program. When asked about the overall difficulty, over half of farmers (15 / 62%) found the program easy to use or were neutral. Eight farmers found the program difficult to use (33%). Response patterns were similar around the specific difficulties of finding land that qualified for NextGen, and the challenge of organizing the transaction with the landowner. About one-third of respondents found these aspects to be difficult whereas two-thirds found them to be easy, or were neutral on the matter.

The greatest challenge is the time necessary to close on the purchase of the land. Several NextGen farmers noted that landowners can be unwilling or unable to wait for the farmer to organize the purchase using the NextGen program.



Land Prices and Purchase Funds

Half of respondents purchased a property for between \$500,000 and \$1 million. Seven respondents purchased a property for less than \$500,000 and 4 bought a property for over \$1 million. The average cost per acre of all respondents' properties was \$12,300. The median price was \$10,000 per acre, with a range from \$4,700 per acre to \$37,500 per acre.

Each NextGen farmer received funding from at least MARBIDCO and one commercial lender. The median amount loaned from MARBIDCO was \$250,000 while the median loan amount from the commercial lender was \$315,000. Farmers themselves provided a median of \$50,000 for the purchase, with 11 farmers indicating that they shouldered some cost of the purchase (46%). Other sources of funding reported include business partners, family gifts, and other formal lenders.

Farm Housing

[Access to housing](#) is a topic that often accompanies questions and solutions for farmland access. While not all farmers must live on the land they farm, it is preferable for many farmers. We wanted to dig into whether NextGen participants are now living on land they purchased. Over half of the NextGen farmers report that the land they purchased had a habitable residence on it. Presently, at least 8 respondents live on the property they purchased through the NextGen program. Two more residences were constructed since the land was enrolled in NextGen while 3 other farmers intend to build a residence in the future.

Expanding NextGen to serve more groups of Historically Underserved farmers

Our study looks at how other states' land access policies facilitate farmland purchases for beginning farmers as well as more types of Historically Underserved farmers. [Historically Underserved](#) is a USDA definition that includes beginning, limited resource, veteran, and socially disadvantaged or Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Asian, and other farmers of color. A question in the survey asked farmers in Maryland's NextGen program how much they would agree with expanding NextGen to serve more subgroups of Historically Underserved farmers. An overwhelming 88% of respondents were in agreement or neutral.

