

# **Upstate New Yorkers' Perceptions of Agriculture**

Results from the 2004 Empire State Survey

**Gilbert W. Gillespie Jr.,**

Department of Development  
Sociology & Community, Food  
and Agriculture Program

**Duncan L. Hilchey,**

New Leaf Associates, Ithaca, NY

**David L. Kay,**

Cornell Local Government Program

**R. David Smith,**

Department of Animal Science,  
Cornell University

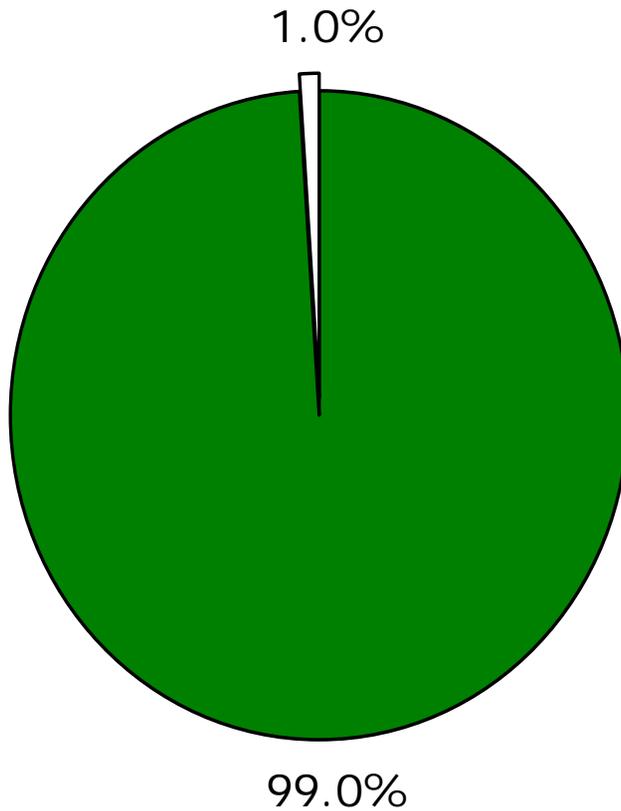
# Survey Results

## Empire State Poll Survey Results:

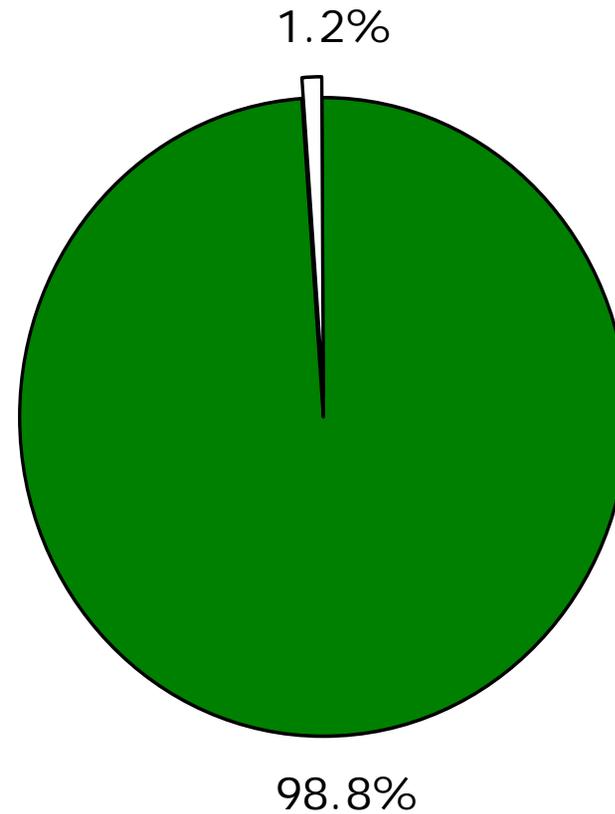
- Focus groups of residents in Upstate New York showed strong support for agriculture and a wide range of perceived impacts (economic, open space, and cultural contributions). To verify these qualitative findings we included three items in the 2004 Empire State Poll conducted by telephone with 400 residents in upstate counties. Because rural residents comprise a small proportion of the population, a separate sample of 200 was drawn from the more rural counties.
- The first two of the following questions and responses were generally consistent with the focus group findings. Respondents in both the upstate and the upstate rural samples were nearly unanimous in their view that agriculture in New York is important. Somewhat surprisingly given our focus groups, among the least commonly cited reasons were preservation of open space and rural heritage, perhaps due in part to asking the respondents to choose only one reason. People seemed to have a tendency to think first about the economic impacts, and then about the non-market aspects.

# Do you feel having agriculture in New York State is important today?

## Rural Upstate

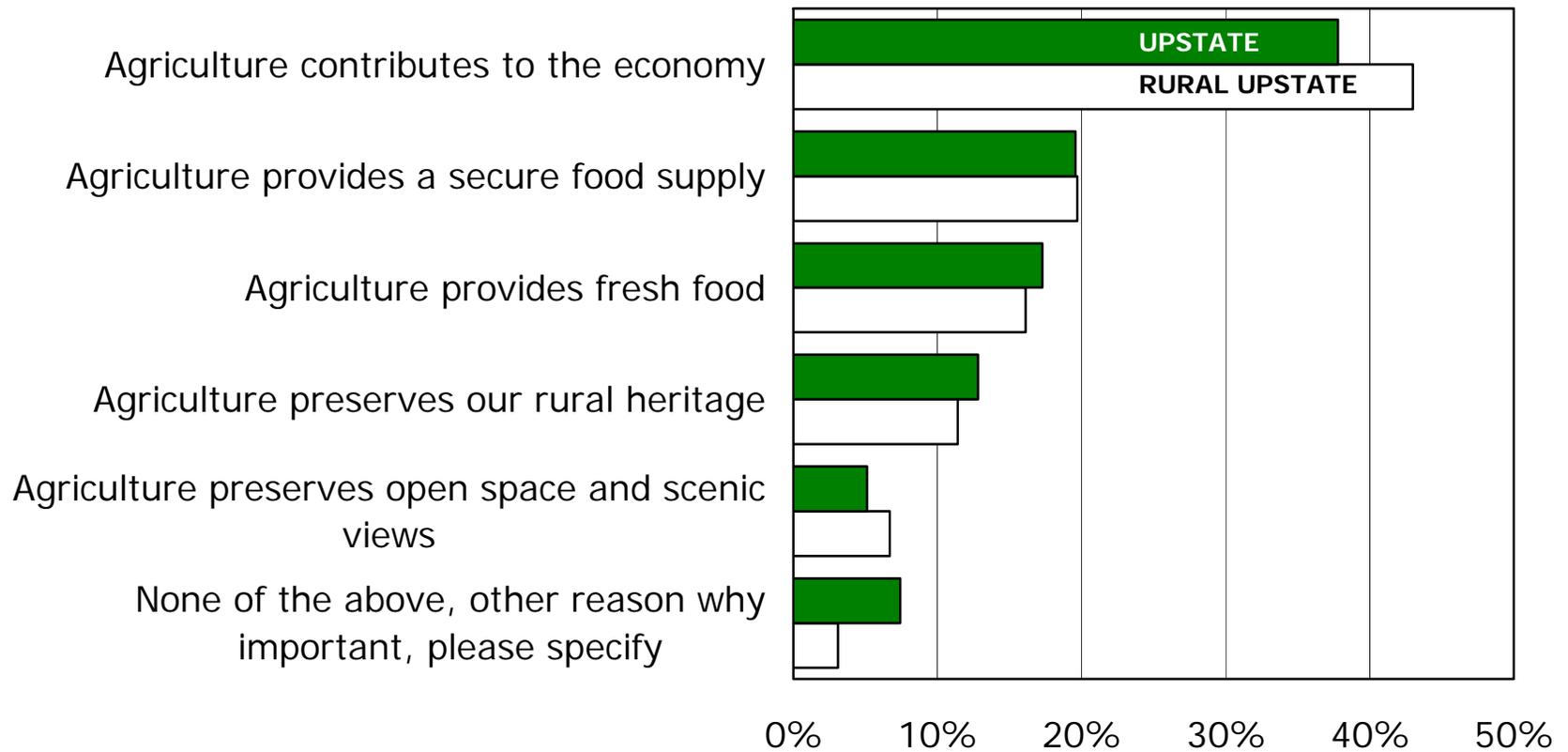


## Upstate

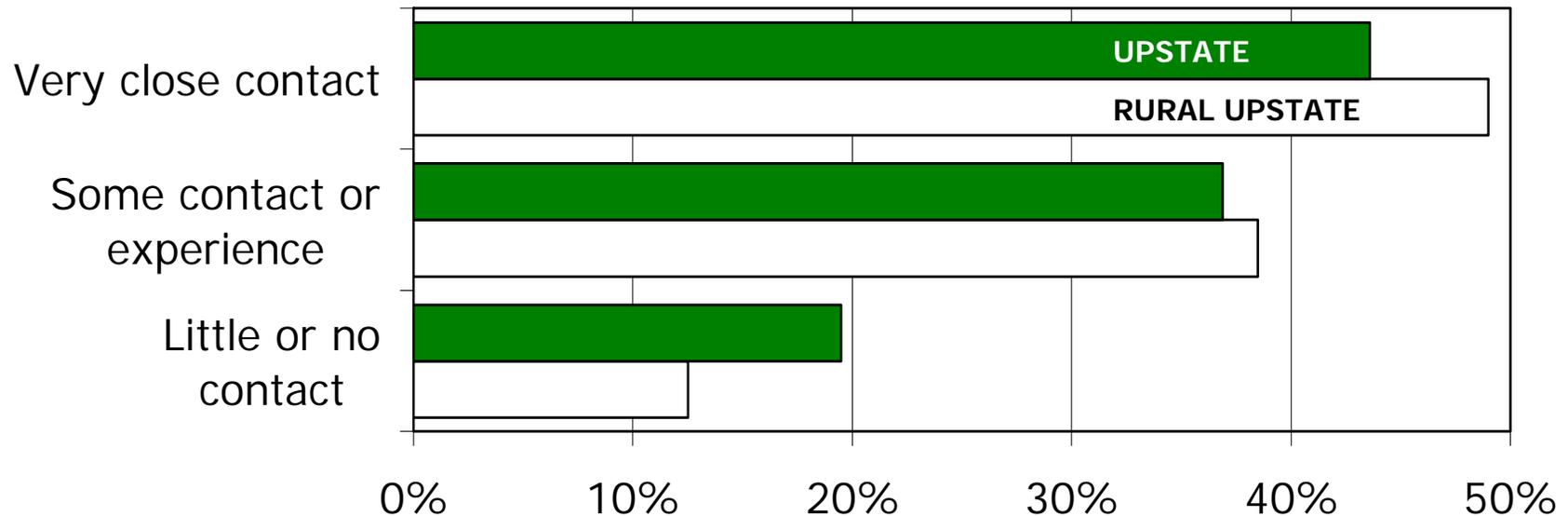


■ Yes  
□ No

# The most important reason why having agriculture in the state might be important to you



## Which best describes the level of contact you have had with farmers in your life?



With only about 2% of the population engaged in agriculture and the increasing insularity of agriculture, the finding that nearly half of the respondents deemed that they had “very close contact” with farmers is surprising. We think that this finding reflects the condition of many people knowing or having as relatives people who farm among their many social contacts.

# Conclusion

The economic impacts of agriculture tend to be the first to come to people's minds. However, nonmarket effects are also important, even to people without direct agricultural experience. Identifying and bringing these nonmarket considerations into discussions of issues may be important for preserving local agriculture.