

# **CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FLORIDA TOMATO INDUSTRY**

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# Florida Tomato Industry

- The last few years have not been easy for tomato growers and the tomato industry ...



# Storms





# Freezes



# Diseases





# Gov Regulations



- BMP: Best Management Practices
- EPA: US Environmental Protection Agency
- Fumigant REDs
- FDACS: Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- FDEP: Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- FWC: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Committee
- H<sub>2</sub>A
- SFWMD: South Florida Water Management District
- TGAPS
- TMDL's
- WPS: Worker Protection Standard
- etc, etc, etc

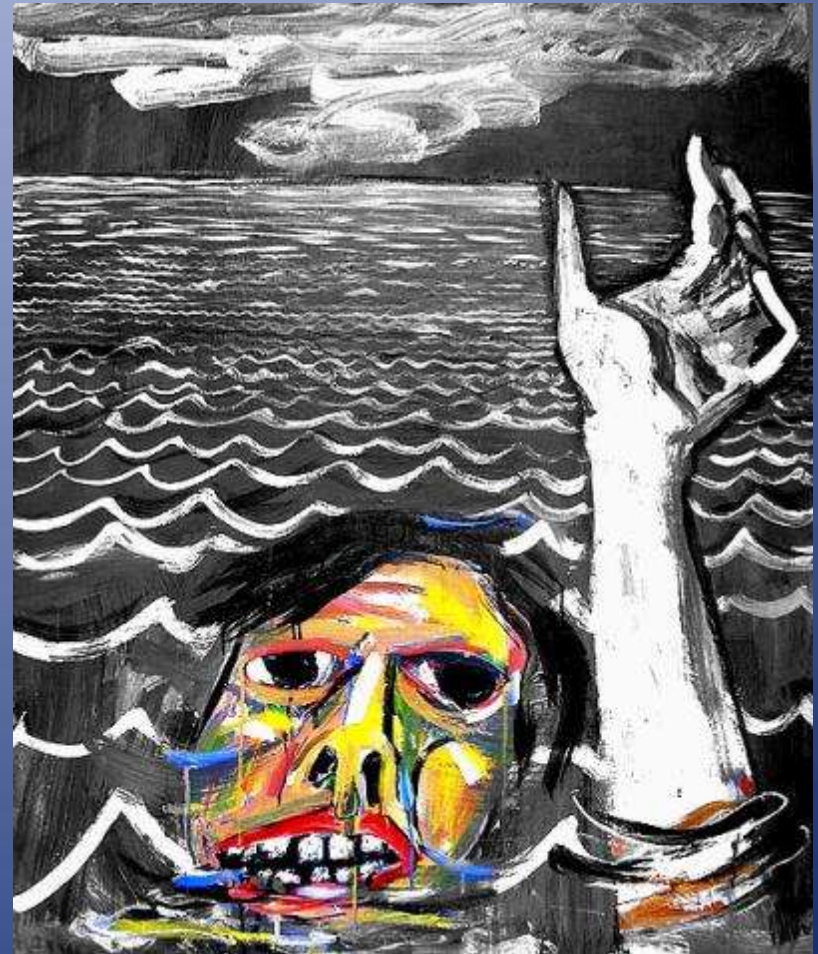
**Successfully negotiating the regulatory environment has become a daunting task. The acronyms for the rules and the names of the agencies that administer them present a veritable alphabet soup for the typical grower.**





# Background

- The prolonged freezing temperatures in late 2009 and early 2010 in Florida, along with concerns about labor costs and availability, modified production practices, and the increased regulatory environment has prompted some growers to question the long-term sustainability of the tomato industry in Florida





# Background

- As a result, a detailed survey was designed in March 2010 by a team of researchers, extension agents and industry representatives.
- What are growers thinking and feeling



# The Survey

- The objective of this questionnaire was to identify preliminary information on problems and limitations, as well as opportunities for improving tomato production and sustainability through appropriate research and extension efforts.
- How and where IFAS can help.





# Sample Demographics

- The questionnaire was distributed to tomato growers mainly in the main production areas of Florida, regardless of harvested acreage, and it was either administered in person or received by fax, regular mail and electronic mail.
- Sample size (n) = 16
- Cumulative acreage = 21,803
- Average tomato seasons per year = 1.9

# Sample Demographics

- The questionnaire covered 21,803 acres which is approximately 50% of the annual planted area in Florida
- Operations were located in Manatee, Hendry, Collier, Broward, Hillsborough, Leon, St. Lucie, Palm Beach, and Hardee Counties.
- Identity of the owners and respondents not disclosed

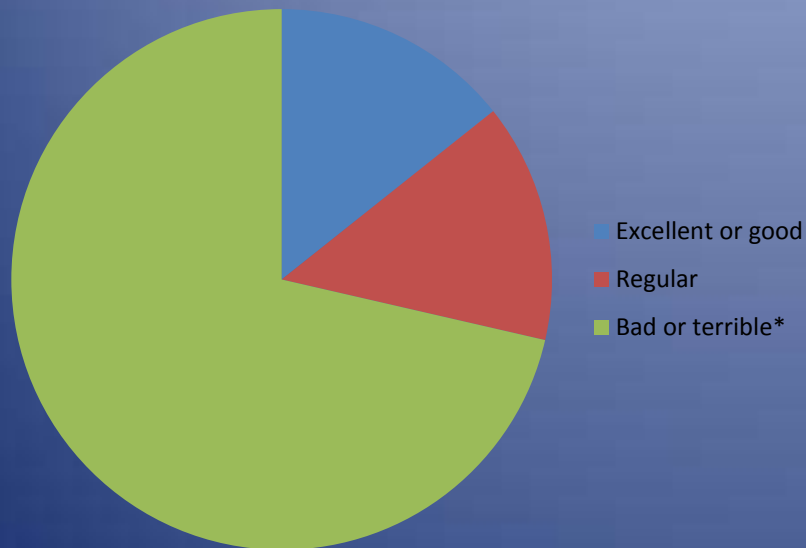


# Scope

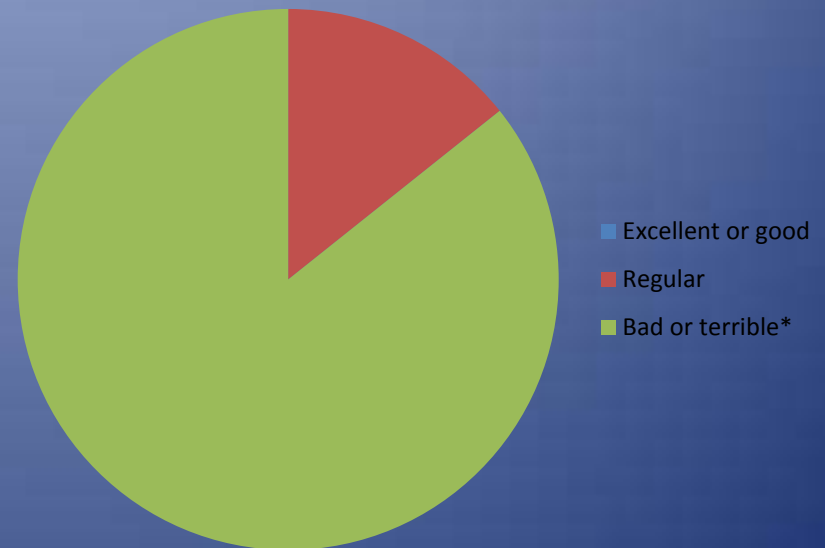
- The covered subjects were soil fumigation, breeding, water and fertilizer management, alternative production systems, pest management, water/nutrient/fumigation regulations, food safety regulations, and labor laws.

# How do you rank the future of the tomato industry

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



Growers  $< 500$  acres



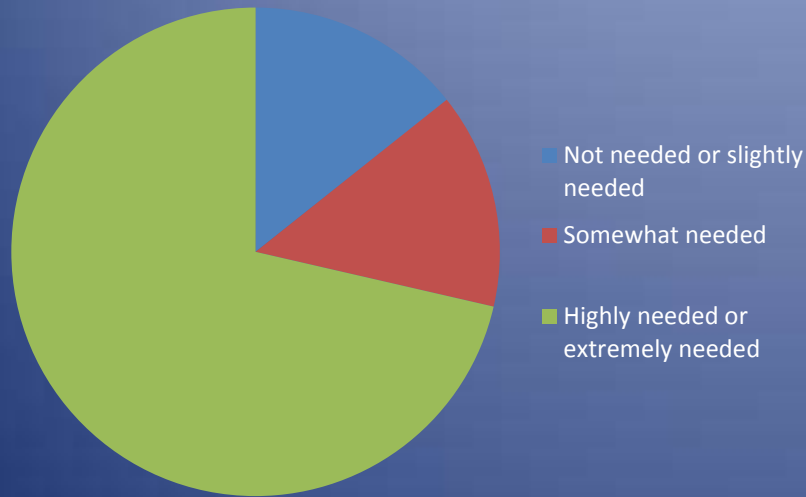
significant



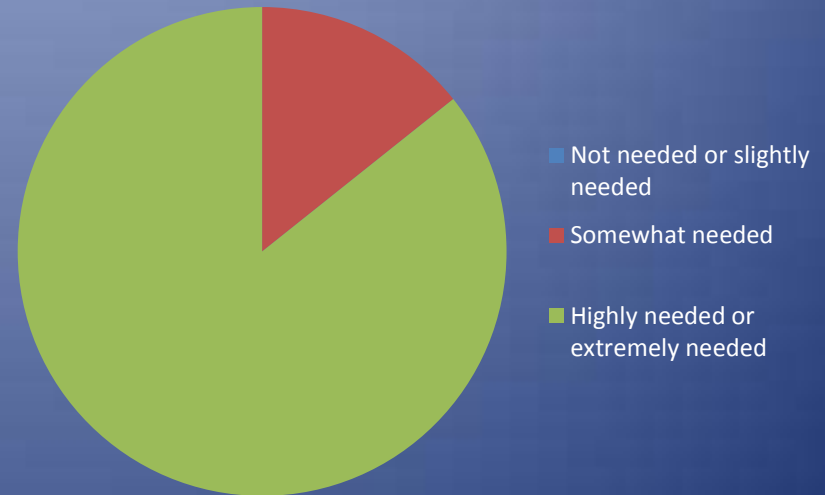
How do you rank for the next five  
years the need for...

# need for...new cultivars/varieties?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



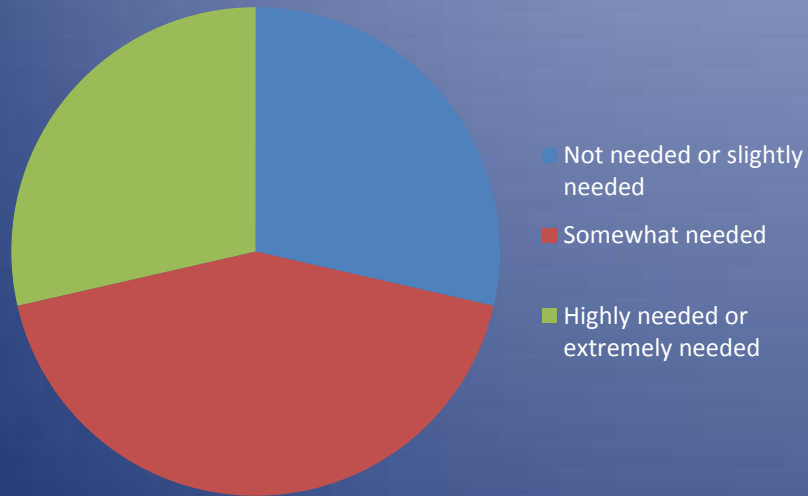
Growers  $< 500$  acres



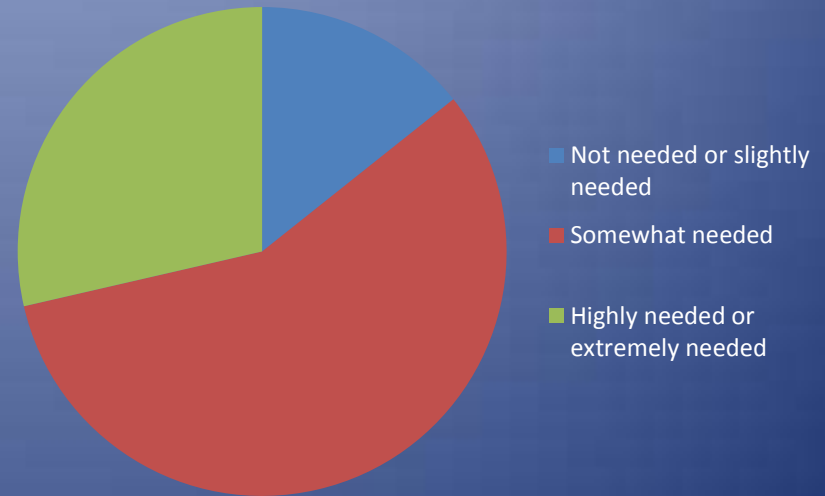
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# need for...new water and fertilizer management practices?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



Growers  $< 500$  acres

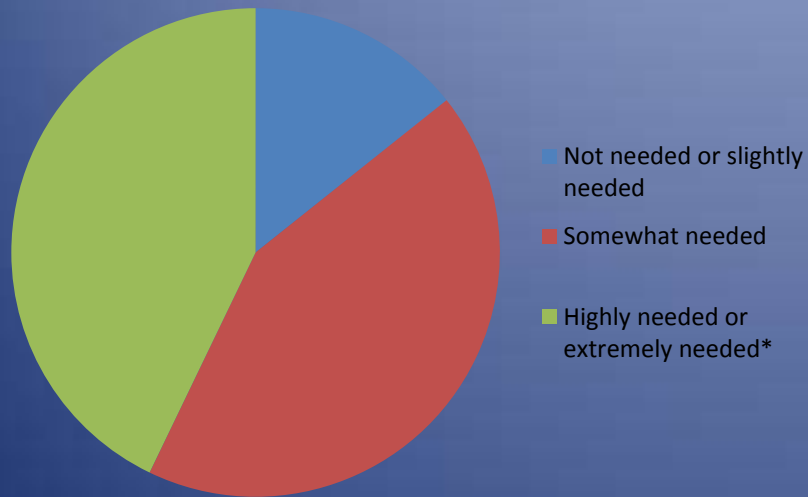


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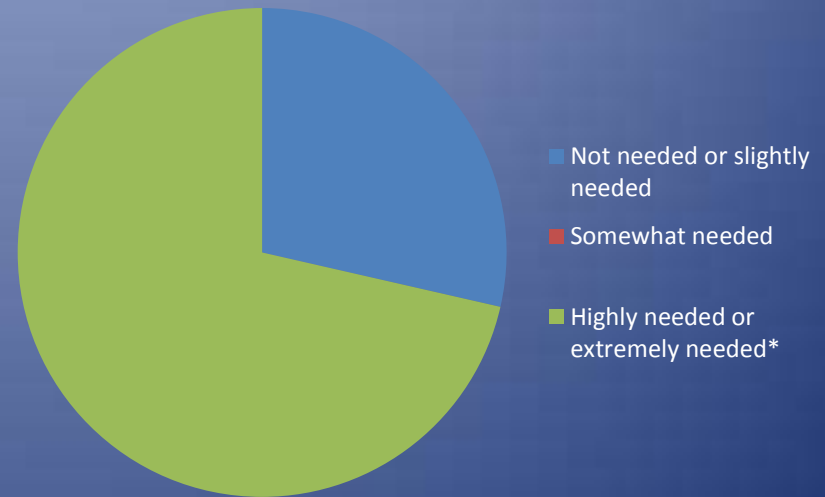


# need for ... research on alternative production systems?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



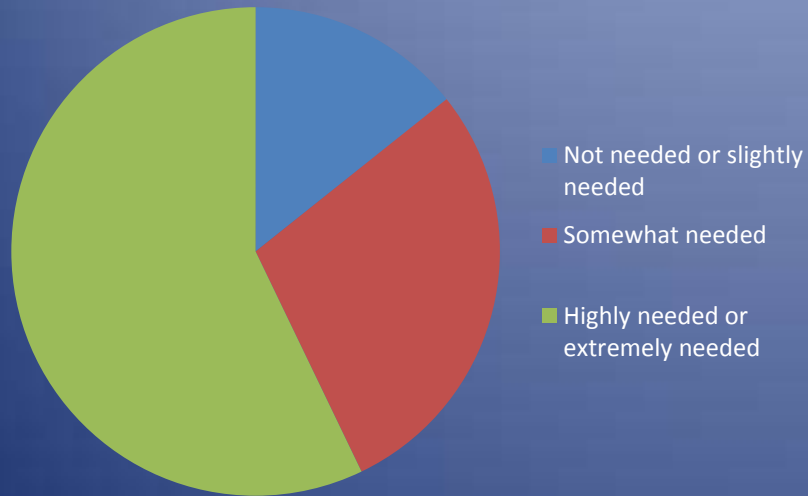
Growers  $< 500$  acres



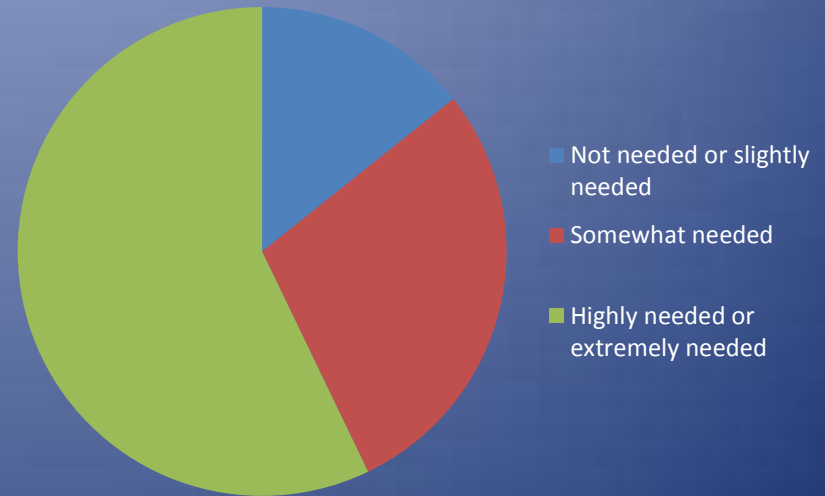
significant

# need for ... new pest management practices?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



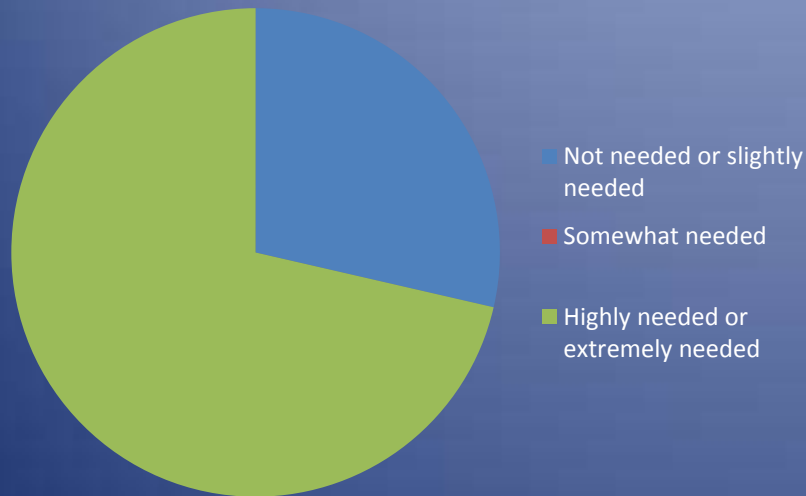
Growers  $< 500$  acres



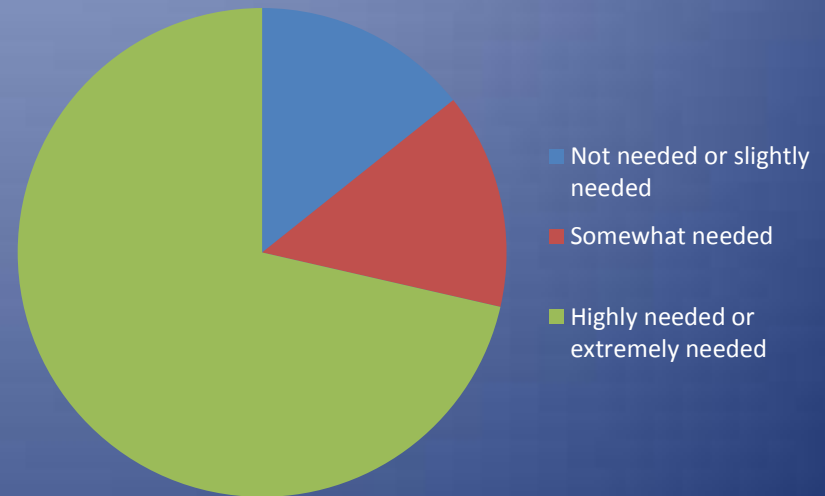
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# need for ... new labor rules and laws to facilitate production and packing?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



Growers  $< 500$  acres



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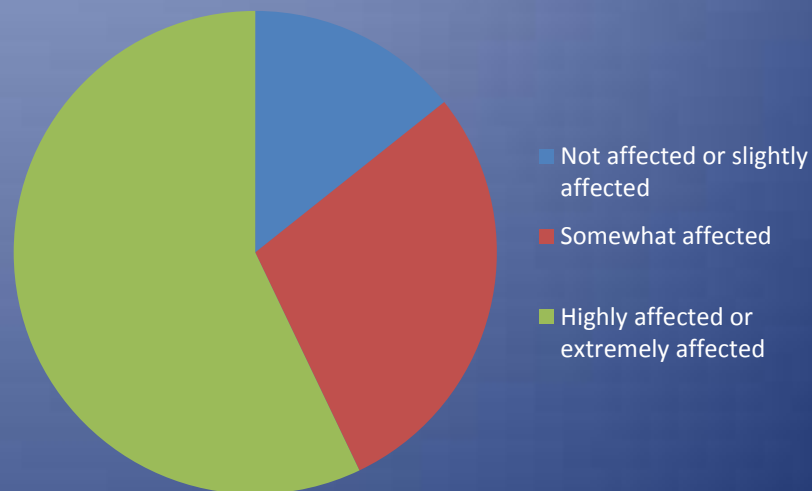
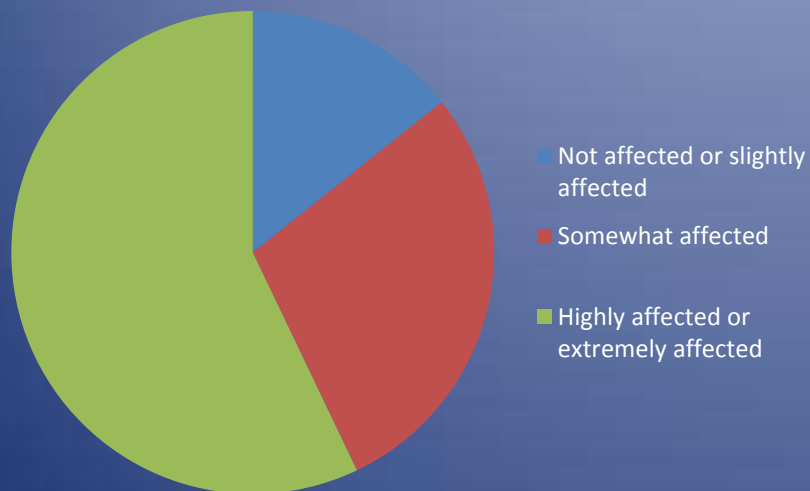
How do you think that current...



# ... water/nutrient/fumigation regulations will affect your operation?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres

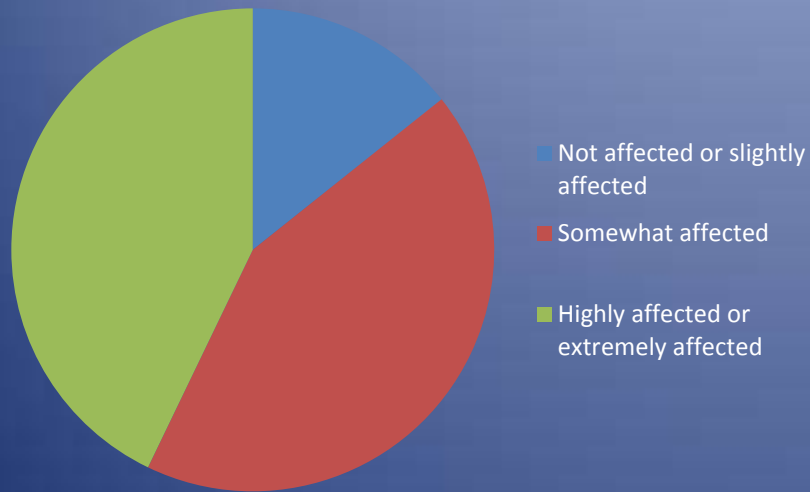
Growers  $< 500$  acres



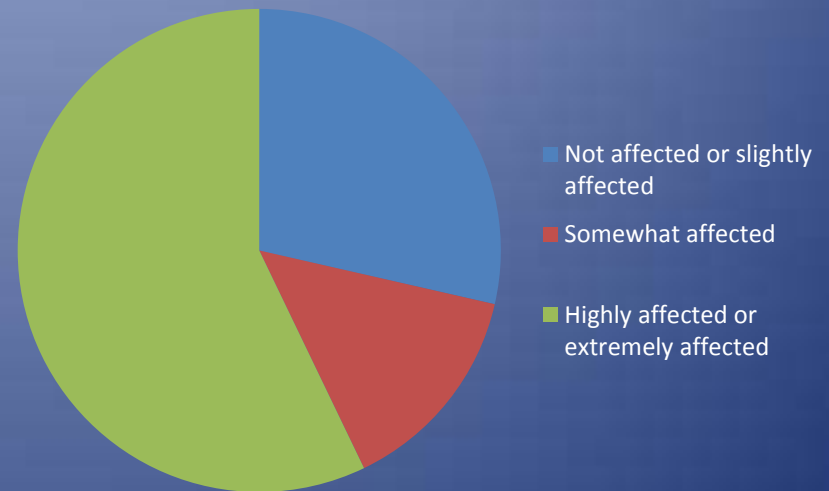
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# ... food safety regulations will affect your operation?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



Growers  $< 500$  acres



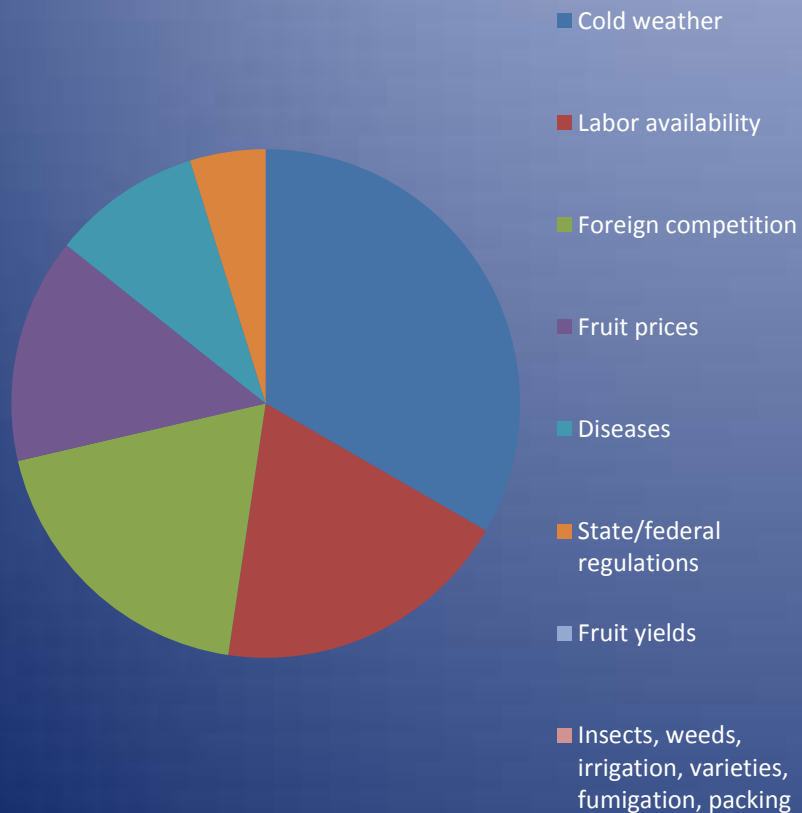
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# 2010 Season

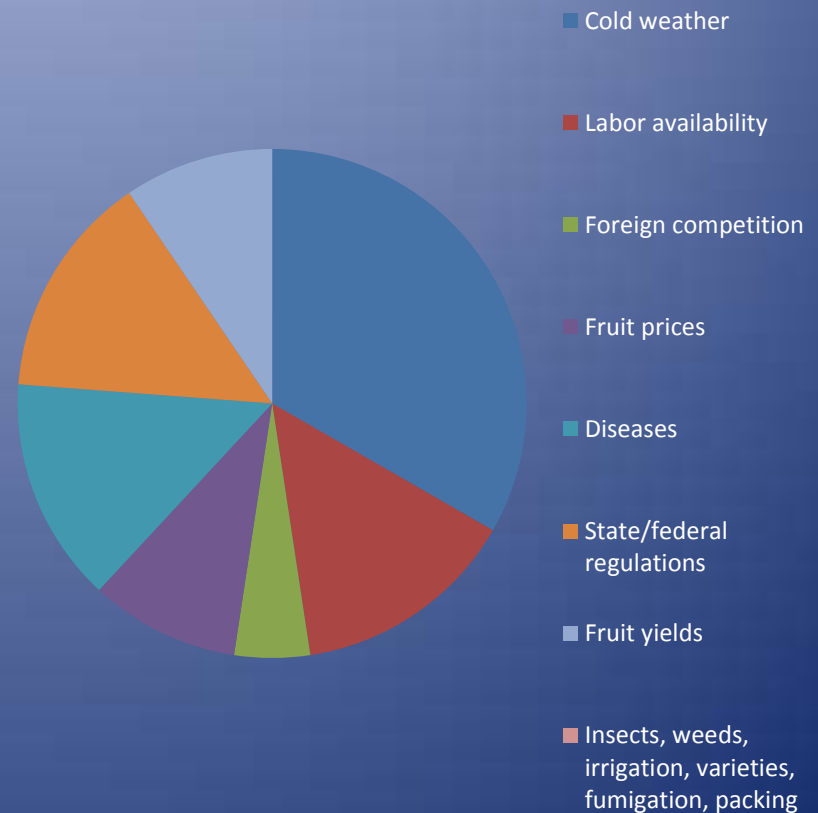
- Among the most limiting factors cited for growing tomatoes in 2010, cold weather was the most frequently answered reason (33% of all the answers), followed by labor availability (19%), foreign competition (19%), and fruit prices (14%).

# What were the most limiting factors for growing the crop in 2010:

## Growers $\geq 500$ acres



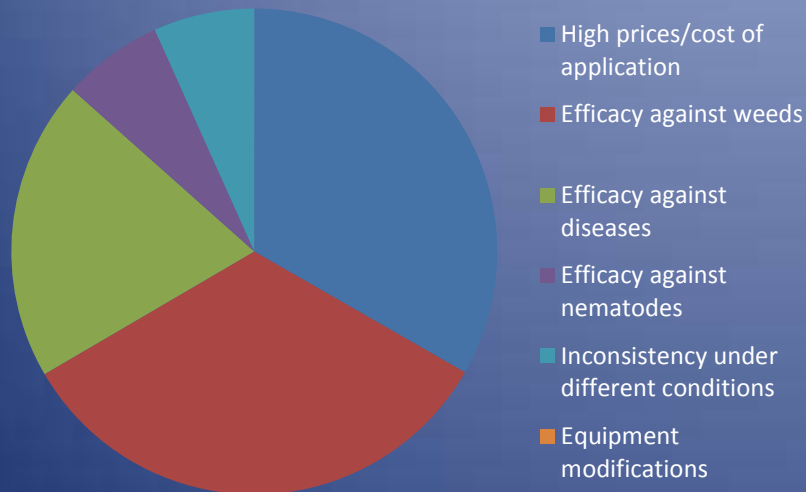
## Growers < 500 acres



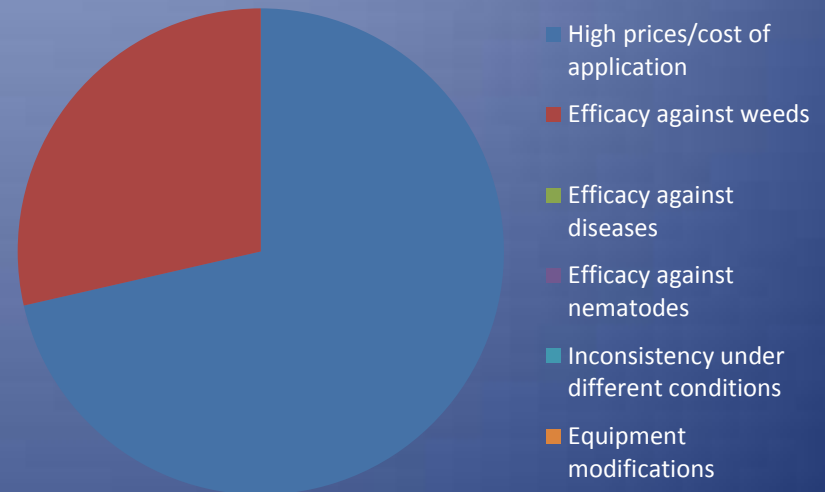


# What are the most concerning issues on soil fumigation?

Growers  $\geq 500$  acres



Growers  $< 500$  acres



# Pile On



What they said ...

# Future of the Tomato Industry

- There was significantly higher skepticism among growers with  $\geq 500$  acres than those growing  $< 500$  acres.
- About 71% of the growers with  $\geq 500$  acres (representing 17,800 acres) responded “terrible” or “bad”, in contrast with only 29% of growers with  $< 500$  acres of tomato.





# Soil Fumigation

- The majority of those interviewed, regardless of farm size, considered that the main issues with soil fumigation were application regulations, high prices and costs of application, and efficacy against weeds and diseases.



# New Varieties



- Characteristics of new varieties/cultivars. Resistance to bacterial spot and speck and tomato yellow leaf curl virus (64% of the surveys), and nematodes (21%). Better taste (29%), higher yields and fruit size (29%), and firmer fruit (21%).

# Fertilizer/Water Management

- Fertilizer/water management research.
- Efficient drip irrigation and fertilizer placement, reduced application costs, correct nutrient ratios
- Compliance with EPA numeric standards
- Proper organic fertilization
- Knowledge of controlled-release fertilizers.





# Pest Management

- Resistance through breeding new varieties
- New practices and products to control diseases





# Regulations/Competition



- Regulations
- Unfair trade/uneven playing field
- Doubts about foreign competition adhering to food safety standards enforced in the U.S.
- Implementing of best management practices might not be economically feasible/practical.

# Need for alternative production systems

- For this question, growers with <500 acres seemed more open than their larger counterparts (72% vs. 43%) to explore non-traditional production systems, such as protected agriculture, soilless culture, and organic production.
- Especially smaller growers



# The Challenge

Florida Tomato Growers



**Florida Agricultural Experiment Station**



**Industry Partners**



# Questions



UF/IFAS Hendry Co  
Extension Office



# Go Gators

