

## Taking care of the children during COVID-19 and implications on farm families' safety, well-being, and resilience



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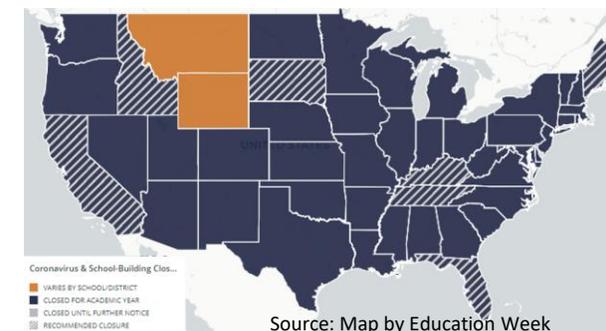
**Florence Becot, PhD**  
**MRASH – November 17, 2020**



## Starting in early Spring 2020

- Daycare and school closures
- Massive layoffs and furloughs
- Increase in telecommuting
- Older adults and those with pre-existing conditions most at risk

### 2019-2020 COVID-related school building closures



- **What do these changes mean for how farm families take care of their children?**
- **What are the implications on the safety, well-being, and resilience of farm families?**

# Role of childcare for farm families



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- **Farm safety:**
  - About 60% of agricultural-related injuries are sustained by non-working by standing children.
  - Importance of childcare off the worksite.
- **Farm business development and viability:**
  - Childcare supply shapes productivity, division of labor, physical layout of the farm, choice of marketing channels.
  - Larger connections to farm families' well-being and rural economic development.





- **Childcare bricolage** through the combination of multiple types of care
- **Preference for family and homebased care** as they are more flexible, more affordable, and/or align with values
- 61% of farm families experiencing **childcare difficulties**
- For two-third of Wisconsin dairy farm women, sometimes bringing children to farm due **to lack of other options**



Source: nhpr.org



- **Women** more likely to shoulder **childcare and homeschooling duties** and more likely to have left the labor market
- Parents left with **difficult childcare “choices”**
- 40% - 50% of surveyed **childcare providers** worry might have to **permanently close**
- Worries surrounding wide **long-term consequences** on **families, children**, the **childcare system**, and **economic growth**



## 'My Family Needs Me': Latinas Drop Out Of Workforce At Alarming Rates

October 27, 2020 · 5:01 AM ET

Heard on Morning Edition

SCOTT HORSLEY

4-Minute Listen



Fabiola Mercedes and her two sons Sebastian, 5, (left) and Lucas, 7, stand in their backyard in Fairview, N.J. Mercedes left her job as an assistant VP of HR at L'Oréal in August after working there for 17 years. As hundreds of thousands of women dropped out of the workforce in September, Latinos led the way, losing at nearly three times the rate of white women. Photo by Ken Lu for NPR.



- How has COVID-19 impacted the farm operation, off-farm work, and childcare and schooling arrangements?
- What are the adaptation strategies that farm parents have used to take care of the children during the early months of COVID-19?
- What are the difficulties farm parents have faced taking care of the children?



- **Primary data** collected through on-line survey and **secondary contextual data** from the Boston University COVID-19 U.S. state policy database
- Survey recruitment (August 3<sup>rd</sup> – September 22<sup>nd</sup>) using multi-pronged approach through targeted advertisements and posts on Facebook.com and sharing through listservs
- Analytical sample: 134 farm parents or primary caregivers from 38 states
- Analytical strategy:
  - **Univariate** and **bivariate analysis** on quantitative data
  - **Inductive approach** through **open-coding** and **content analysis** on qualitative data

# Summary of respondents' characteristics



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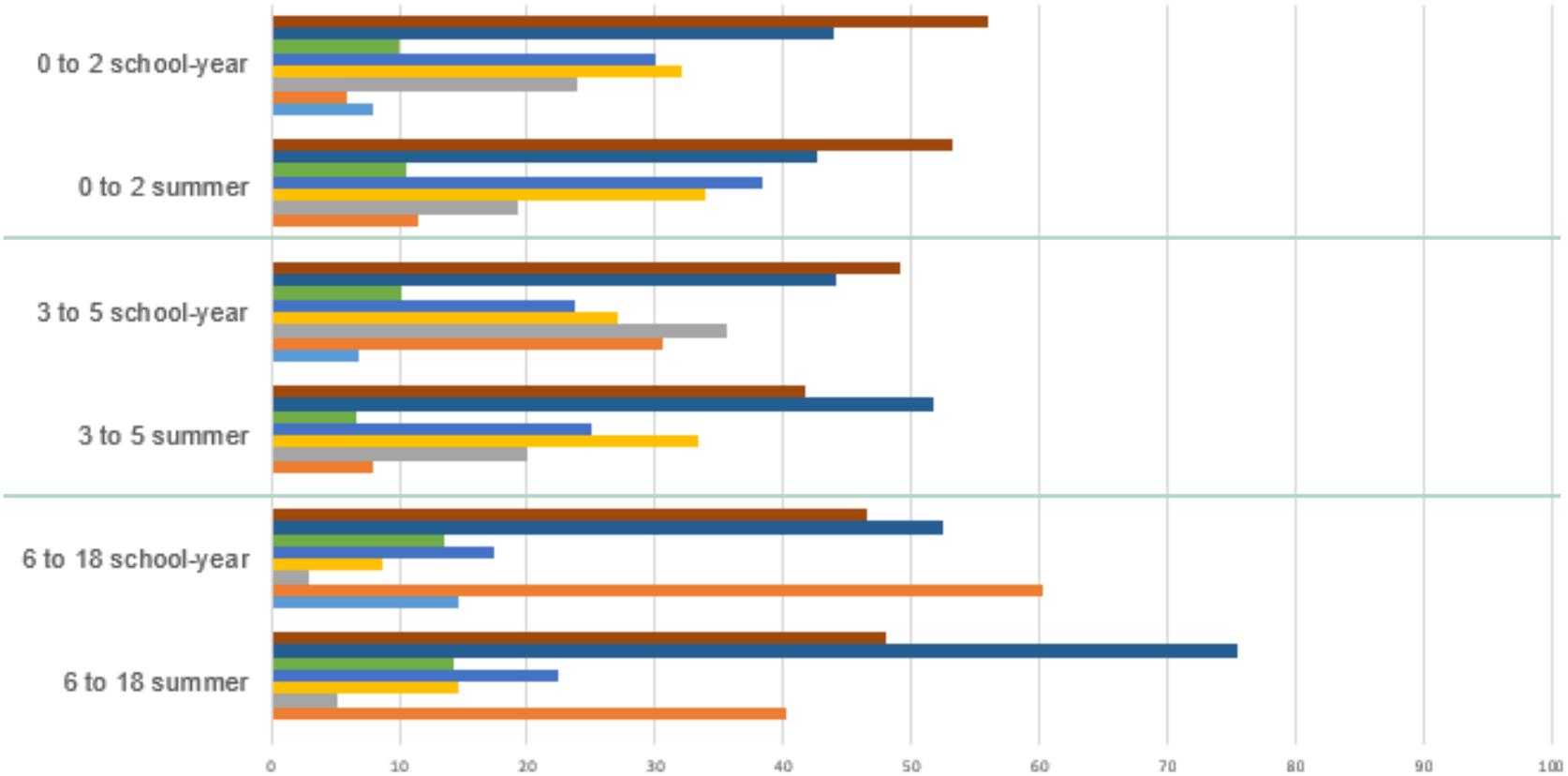
Female	73%
Average household size	4.5 (1.3)
Average number of children	2.4 (1.2)
Household income in 2019 pre-tax	
Up to \$59,999	35%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	46%
\$100,000 and over	19%
Farm sales	
Hobby (less than \$10,000)	24%
Small (\$10,000 to \$249,999)	55%
Medium (\$250,000 to \$499,999)	11%
Large (\$500,000+)	10%
State environment	
Mandated or recommended daycare closures	17%
Mandated or recommended K-12 schools closures	94%
Unemployment insurance expanded to cover quarantine	84%
Unemployment insurance expanded to cover childcare	44%

92% White, non-Hispanic/Latino  
55% Bachelor's degree +

84% have off-farm job  
61% most income from off-farm

51% beginning farmers  
81% first-generation farmers

# Arrangements pre-COVID-19



- 64% reported childcare problems
- Bigger problems for those with children 0 to 5 and those with smaller households

■ Home with a parent (playing, homeschooling)  
■ At the off-farm job with a parent  
■ Babysitter or home-based care  
■ K-12 school or summer programs (school/camp/sports)

■ On the farm with a working parent  
■ With a grandparent or other family member  
■ Daycare center or pre-kindergarten  
■ After school programs

# Changes in arrangements during COVID-19



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## Childcare options

No changes, 45%	Closed at one point, 44%
	Did not closed but challenges, 19%

## Schools

Distance learning, 75%	No changes, 19%
	Fully closed, 10%

## Summer activities

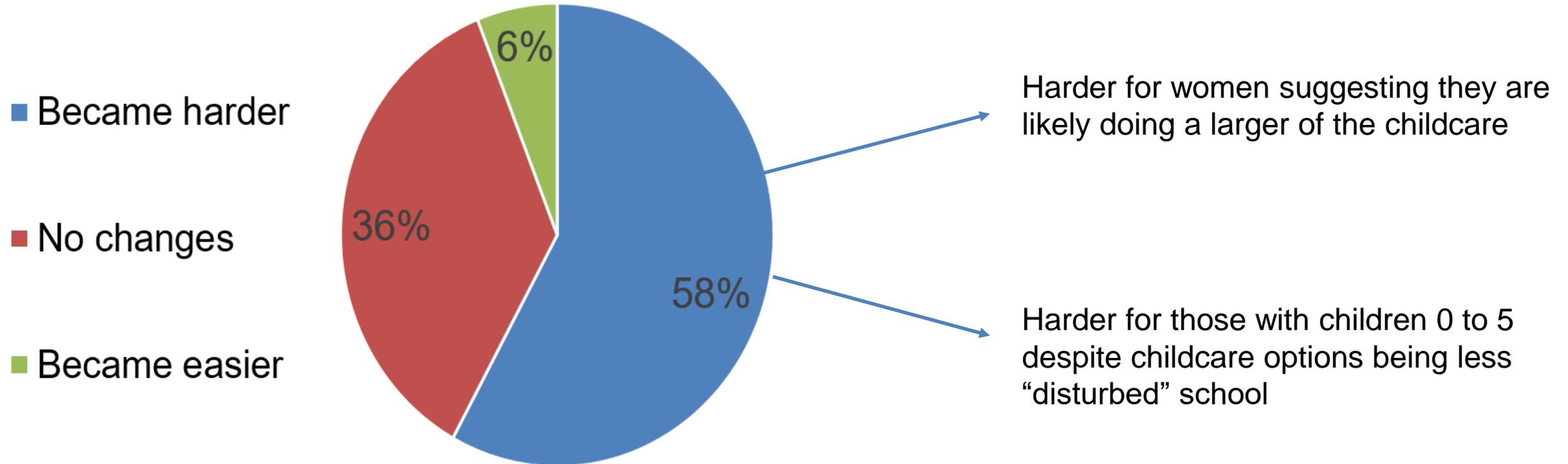
Cancelled, 60%	No changes, 25%
	Remote options, 17%

# Challenges during COVID-19



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Taking care of the children....

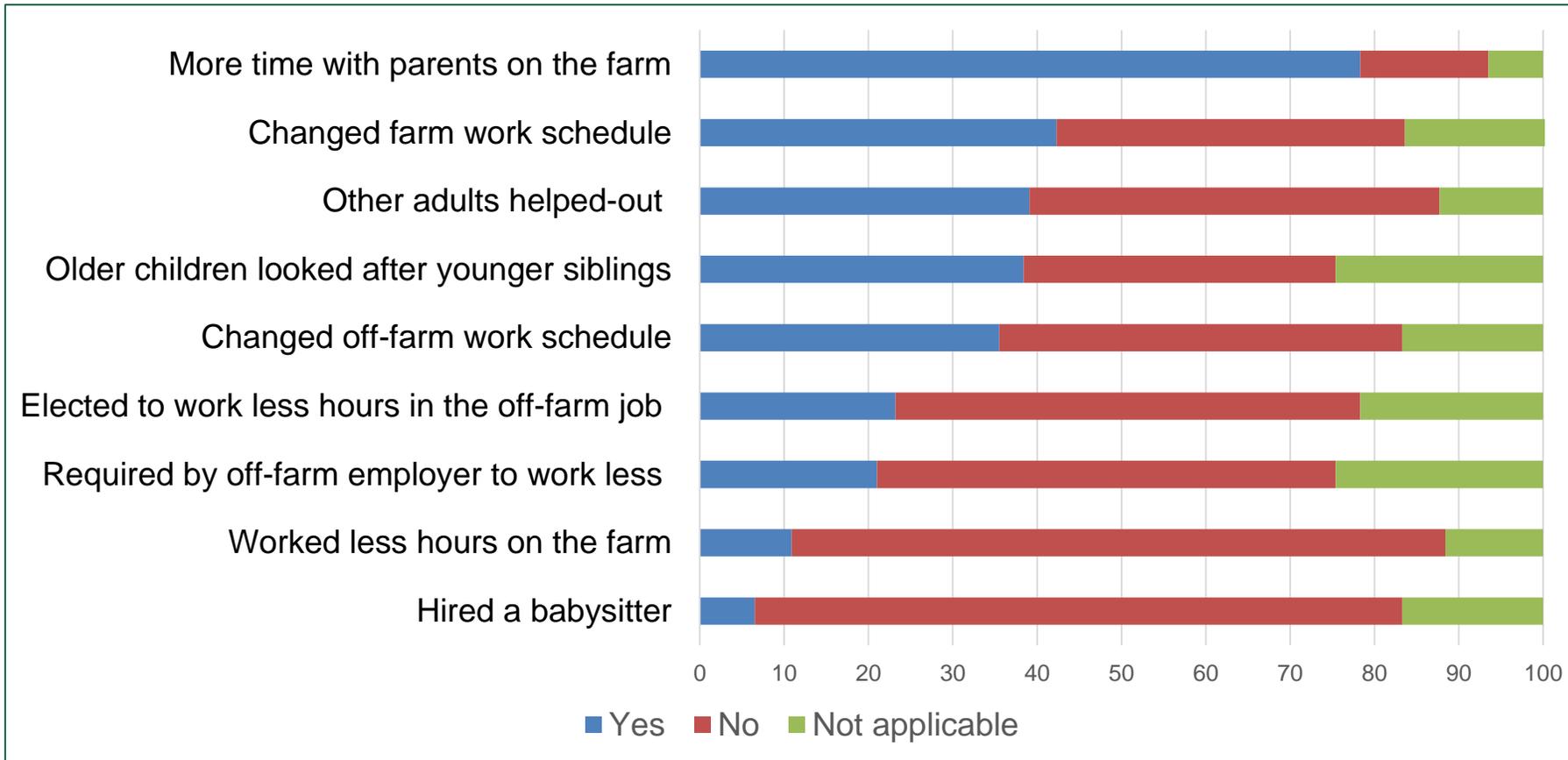


# Types of challenges faced



- Need to navigate new **childcare** landscape while reconciling **farm and off-farm duties**:  
*“I don’t have my daycare in the morning anymore. I work third shift. So I used to come home do my chores then get the kids from daycare. She is closed permanently”.*  
Mother of 3 children, MI – Farm sales <\$10,000 – Off-farm job
- Need to supervise **homeschooling** as an important **time stressor** and issues connected to **internet access**:  
*“I have to help my children with distance learning as they are too young to do it themselves and therefore do not have the time to get all of my farm chores done as I normally would. Therefore decreasing the amount of hours I sleep. Add a baby with a terrible sleep habits on top and you become very stressed.”*  
Mother of 4, WI – Farm sales: \$500,000 to \$999,999 – No off-farm job
- BUT for some, **changes** in childcare and homeschooling arrangements were **viewed positively**:  
*“COVID-19 has been a blessing for our family. A slowdown from all of the off farm kid activities has been wonderful, and well accepted. Our children are learning life skills on the farm that they can use for the rest of their lives.”*  
Mother of 3, WI - Farm sales: \$500,000 to \$999,999 – No off-farm job

# Adaptation strategies



Mix of **bringing children to worksite**, adjustments to **workload** within the household and **asking others for help**

**62% stopped asking family or friends** for help with childcare because of concerns of exposure to the virus



- For **58%** of respondents, the **increased childcare load affected ability to get farm work done** and those with children 0 to 2 more likely to report limitations.

*“The time spent doing distance learning for school really cut down the time I had to get farm work done. It was a lot of early mornings and late nights.”*

Mother of 3, MN - Farm sales \$10,000 to \$49,999 – Off-farm job

*“I was already maxed on time available so adding in school focus was an additional time crunch so something had to give. I readjusted HOW I worked off farm job, did utilize the boys more onsite but from my personal standpoint I worked less farm because of added responsibility.”*

Mother of 2, KS - Farm sales \$10,000 to \$49,999 – Off-farm job

# Adaptation strategies and safety



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- For **60%** of respondents, **children** were **on the farm more this summer** compared to last year and 67% adjusted tasks given to help get the farm work done, keep the children busy, and to support children's learning.
- BUT concerns associated with having the children around more:

*“Try to only allow children to tag along for ‘less hazardous’ jobs, changing who is able to complete certain tasks and when. Also lack of childcare has greatly limited the times that are available to complete tasks uninterrupted and while focused.”*

Mother of 4, WA – Farm sales: \$500,000 to \$999,999 – Off-farm job

*“How are you supposed to get jobs done with equipment with kids running around? Kids gets in a blind spot can be killed.”*

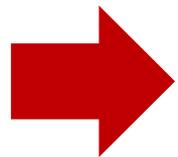
Father of 2, CO – Farm sales: \$50,000 to \$249,999 – Off-farm job



- Findings in line with expectations and concerns connected to:
  - Safety of farm children
  - Parental stress
  - Safety of farm parents
  - Decreased productivity
  - Economic viability and farm resilience

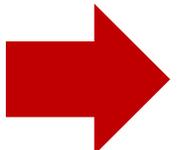


Source: Eurofinance.com



- How will COVID-19 impact farm families and their resilience in the long-term?
- How will these impact vary based on stages of life course and business development these families were in 2020?



- In previous crises, reliance on family members and off-farm income have been important strategies to weather the storms but for some families, these options were removed.
  - COVID-19 comes at the heel of several difficult years in agriculture.
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- Which farm families were able to adapt safer strategies?
  - Which farm families faced less challenges?
  - What type of COVID-19 government responses were associated with less challenges?

# Ensuring farm children's safety



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- COVID-19 giving visibility to the difficulties of families with childcare and to the frail childcare system.
  - Can coalitions be built/re-built to address the childcare challenges of working parents?
  - What type of childcare models would be acceptable to farm families? What models can we learn from?

- Individual level interventions to influence behaviors but findings point to limited choices of families and challenges adapting.
  - Dangers of focusing on micro-level sphere of influence?
  - Parallels with farm stress interventions.

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