Dry Farming Institute: What our community needs to advance their water resilience work

Background

In Summer of 2025, the Dry Farming Institute launched a short survey to better understand the network of growers, land tenders, service providers and others who are interested in and engaged with dry farming & water resilience work in the region (and beyond).

We received 192 responses with 50% of them identifying as historically underserved (based on USDA definition). We asked participants to submit their zip codes and the majority were from Oregon (67%) while another 15% were from Washington state, with the remainder being from other U.S. States, with California being the largest state represented in that list (only 5% of those who answered) and around 4% from outside of the U.S.

Those who responded represent a diverse group of growers and land tenders. All respondents were invited to choose all the roles that best represent them, with respondents invited to select "all that apply". The top four largest categories, in order of most selected, include: **Land tender/homestead/gardener/seed keeper; Farmers; Educators and Technical Service Providers.** Seventy-four percent of the respondents own the land they grow on while the other 25% have a mixture of short and long-term leases.

Engagement Methods

When asked how respondents (n=134) were engaged in water resilience/dry farming efforts, the majority (72%) are experimenting with dry farming and other water resilience practices on their own. Sixteen percent reported having worked directly with Dry Farming Institute while 19% report having worked with OSU's Dry Farming Collaborative.

Practices

When asked what water resilience practices they were implementing on their farm or with farmers in their community, respondents' top ten practices are represented in *Table 1*. **Applying organic amendments, cover cropping, and no-till/reduced till** were the most frequently selected, yet 50% or more also selected dry farming and drip irrigation/high efficiency irrigation.

Table 1. Practices currently being implemented on respondents farms. Respondents chose all that apply to their situation.

Practices	Percent Selected
Applying organic amendments (e.g., mulch, compost, manure, biochar)	85%
Cover Cropping	75%
No-till / Reduced till	73%
Diligent Weed Control	59%
Native plants	58%
Perennials	56%
Drip irrigation or other high efficiency irrigation type	55%
Dry farming	50%
Crop varietal selection (e.g., drought tolerant and/or drought avoidant crops)	48%
Planting early or experimentation with planting densities	47%

Motivations

When asked what motivated their adoption of these practices, respondents most frequently reported that they wanted to **1. Increase their resilience to extreme weather events (e.g., drought, flooding) (74%) ; 2. Increase their options with limited/no water rights (49%).** Fewer were interested in reducing weed pressure on their farm (33%), improving crop yields/boosting productivity on their farm (27%) and expanding to land where irrigation is not available (20%).

Challenges

When asked what their biggest challenges were (*Figure 1*), respondents indicated that **limited capital for investment, lack of time, and limited technical assistance for relevant practices were their most limiting factors**.

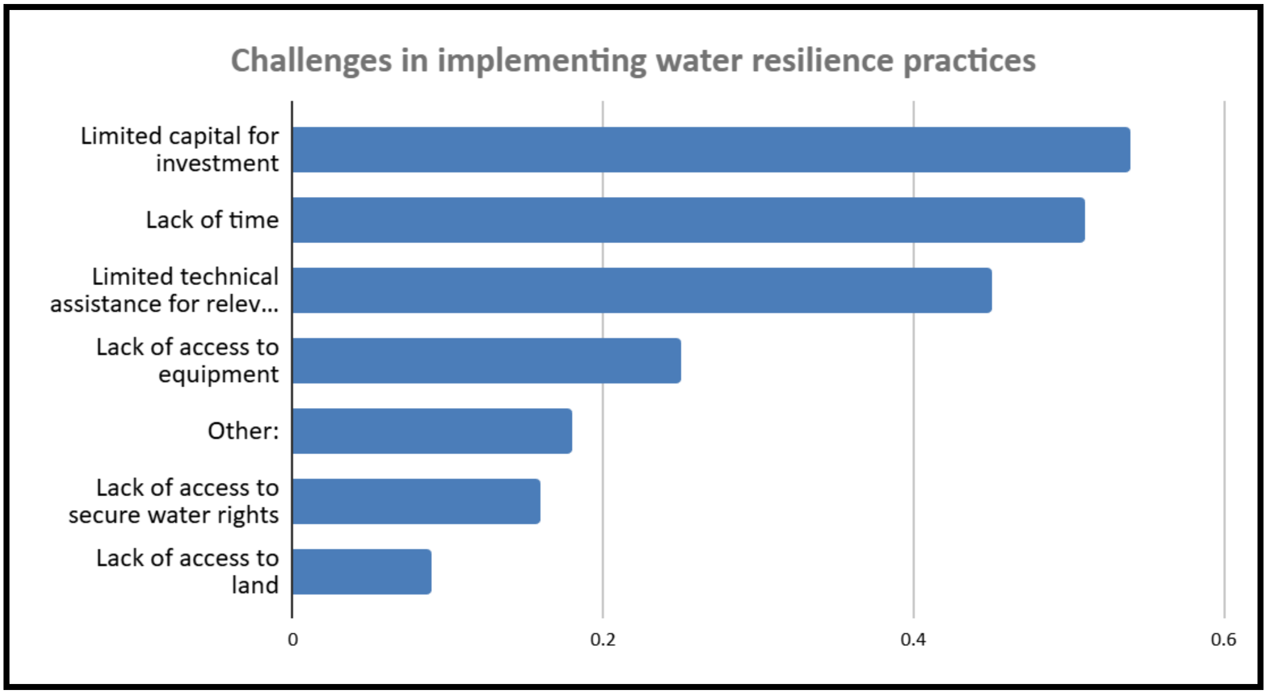

Figure 1. Top challenges as identified by respondents

Additional support

Respondents were asked (*Table 2*) what additional resources and support would be most valuable in advancing water resilient goals on their farms or in their area. The top two responses asked for **more information on implementing practical strategies for improving water resilience (50%) and more information on crop variety selection in my region (49%)**.

Table 2. Additional resources and support needed by respondents to support their farm or other farmers/ranchers in their area in advancing water resilience goals. Respondents could select all that apply.

Statements	Percent Selected
More information on implementing practical strategies for improving water resilience	50%
More information on crop variety selection in my region	49%
More information for understanding water resilience within the specific contexts of my clientele (water, climate, soil)	35%
More information on soil moisture monitoring and how it can help with water resilience	31%
More engagement with network to share ideas/experiment together	28%
Funding for in-field assessment tools (e.g., water sensors, rain gauges)	26%

More technical support on how to facilitate water resilience on-farm demonstrations	20%
More financial support to implement demonstrations/host field days	18%
More technical support on how to lead a farmer network with a focus on water resilience goals	10%
Other:	6%

Big questions

Finally, respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question about what big questions they had around advancing water resilience and dry farming in their area. The main themes that emerged were wide-ranging, but the primary interest centered around the following themes:

- Wanting more information on farming with less water (using new tools/technology/equipment or new management strategies)
- Wanting specific information on crop varieties that work well for dry farming/low water situations
- Wanting more information on the right strategy/crop/management approach for their context
- Wanting more in-field troubleshooting/management support/guidance
- Exploring soil health and amendment questions

Next Steps

Understanding the community of practice we work with is critical to guiding our collective work to support farmers in thriving with less water in a climate changed future. Our hope is to build on this inquiry by engaging in future conversations, research and outreach with those in our network to explore challenges, opportunities and support needed to advance water resilience on our farms and gardens.

For more information: www.dryfarming.org