

What Makes a Good Farmer: The Difference in Beliefs of Amish and Non-Amish Farmers in the Sugar Creek Watershed

Bethany L. Herman, Dr. Richard H. Moore, Dr. Rachel Hintz
Ohio State University- OARDC

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, a survey was distributed to Iowa farmers to gather thoughts and concerns regarding climate change, its causal factors, and its effects on agriculture in the corn-belt. The survey, headed by Dr. J Gordon Arbuckle Jr. of Iowa State University, was a part of the USDA NIFA grant titled “Climate change, mitigation, and adaptation in corn-based cropping systems” and a USDA NIFA grant U2U led by Linda Propokpy.

This project serves as an extension of Dr. Arbuckle’s Iowa survey. The survey was slightly reconstructed in order to localize it to specific Ohio regions, specifically areas surrounding the Sugar Creek Watershed. A few questions were added that touched on observational phenology, algae quantities in nearby water sources, as well as changes in corn varieties, calving, and oats harvesting. In addition, two demographic questions were added, one of which asked farmers to indicate if they were Amish or non-Amish, with specific options for Amish. The other question asked farmers to indicate their age group.

The part of the survey focused on was a comparison of the beliefs of the Amish and non-Amish farmers on what they believe to be most important in a farmer, what farmers should be concerned with and what should be of less concern. Also looked at was how aware the farmers are of phenology and if they use it to help them make decisions in farming.

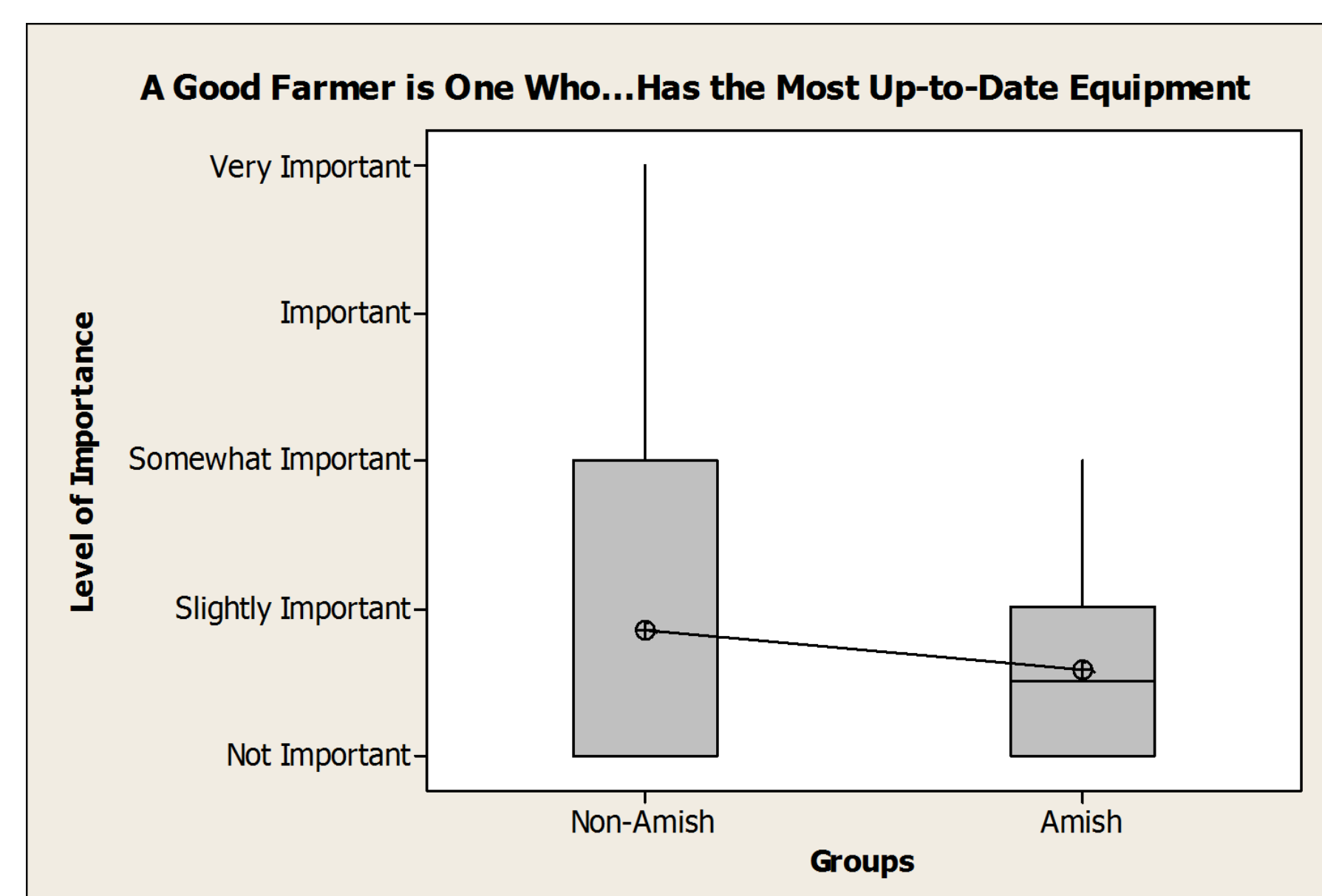
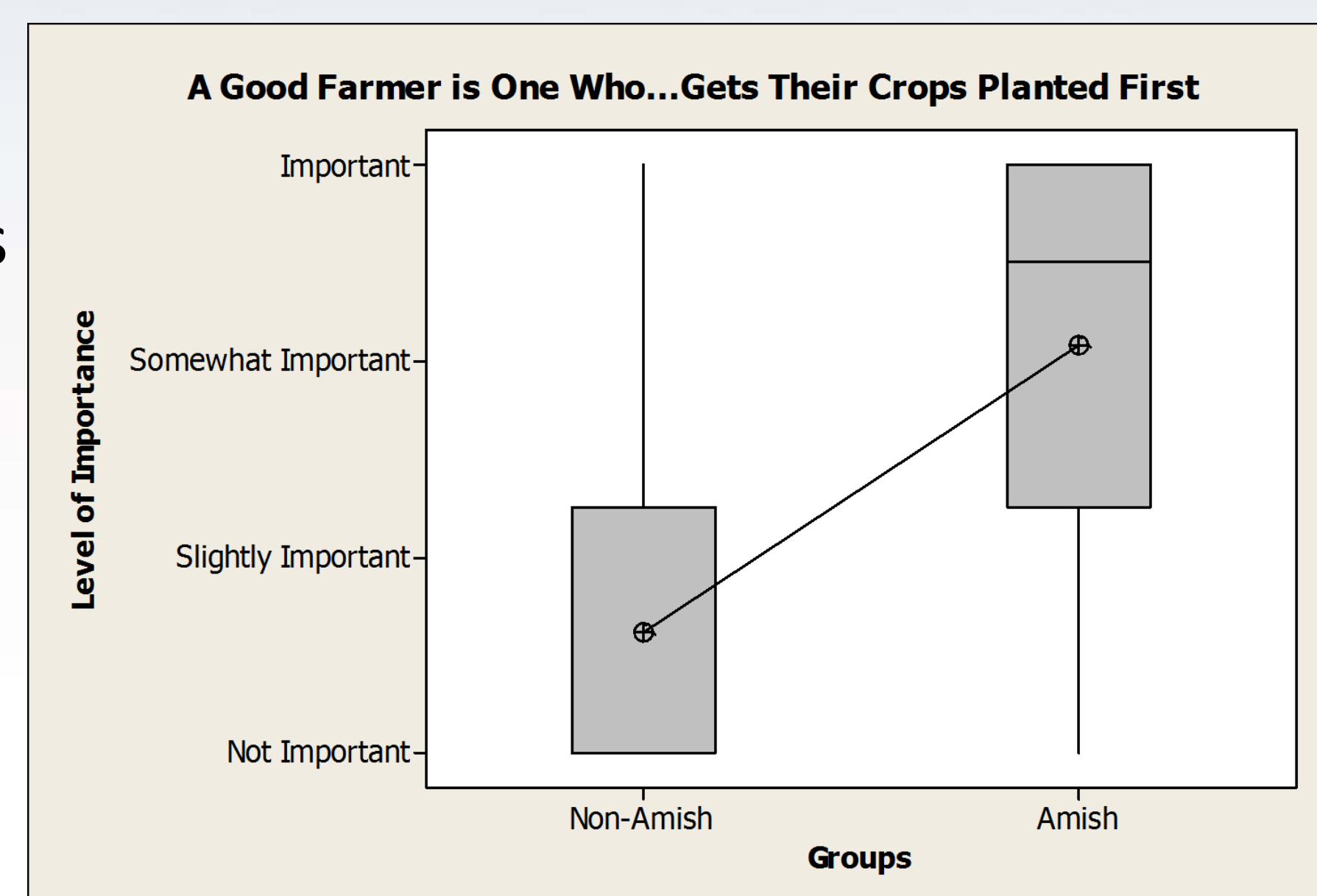


MATERIALS & METHODS

Farming statistics from previous surveys of the Sugar Creek Watershed farmers were reviewed. Surveys, which include opinion polls on the qualities of a good farmer and questions concerning farmers’ attention to phenological events, were distributed to the farmers in the Sugar Creek Watershed. The results from the surveys were analyzed and will hopefully be compared to the survey results from the survey given in Iowa.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Out of the seventeen examples of what a good farmer is, only one of the examples was of significant contrast. The Amish seem to believe that the importance of getting their crops planted first, was higher than the Non-Amish, who chose the not important or slightly important response. The other sixteen examples of what makes a good farmer seemed to have the same kind of responses from the Amish and Non-Amish. This shows most farmers have the same thoughts towards farming and how they think of farming. They agreed that managing their farm to reduce income volatility, considers health of streams, minimizes soil erosion, minimizes nutrient runoff into waterways, cares about the surrounding watershed, maintains soil organic matter, minimal use of pesticides, manages for profitability and environmental impact, and puts long-term conservation of farm resources before short-term profits are all examples of what makes a good farmer. The Amish farmers and Non-Amish farmers also agreed on the examples that are not important parts of being a good farmer. These were having the most up-to-date equipment, using the latest seed and chemical technology, and maximizing government payments. As for the phenology results, most farmers did not respond to the related questions. From the responses that were received, most of the farmers agreed on seeing the same changes. The changes seen were an increase of quantity of robins, cardinals, and martins. Also most of the birds seem to be arriving earlier in the year. The farmers also agreed that the weeds and spring flowers grow sooner in the season and an increase of weeds.



CONCLUSION

Overall, most of the farmers that were surveyed have the same thoughts and practices on farming. The Amish farmers favored the relative importance of having one’s crops planted first. This may be related to the need for Amish to start hauling manure early and plowing early with their horses since it takes longer to plow their fields. The Non-Amish didn’t agree and thought that it was not an important part of being a good farmer.

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