



# Disaster Experiences of Florida Farming Communities After Hurricanes Helene, Debby, and Idalia

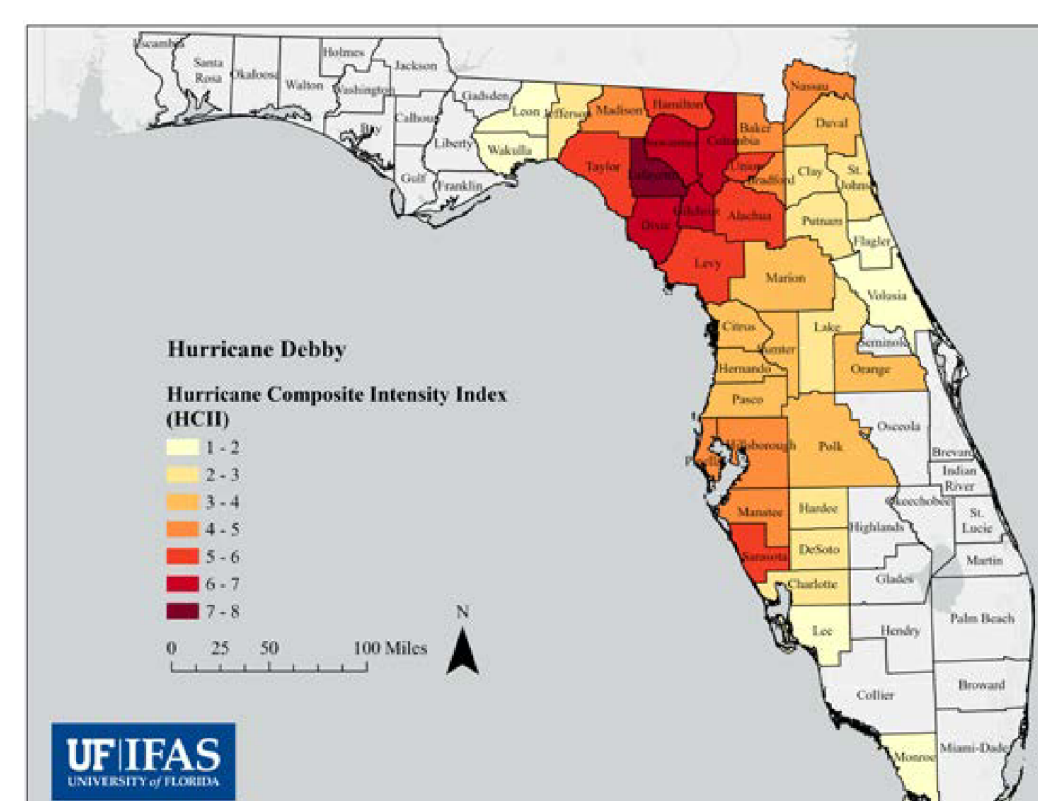
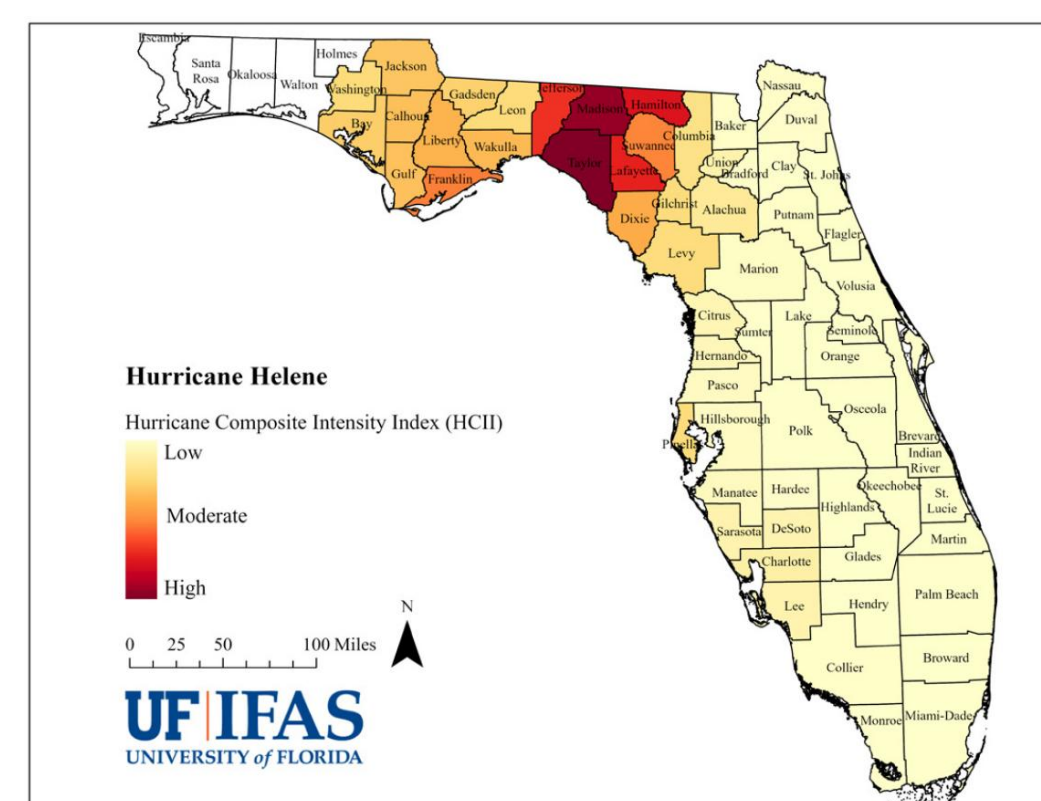
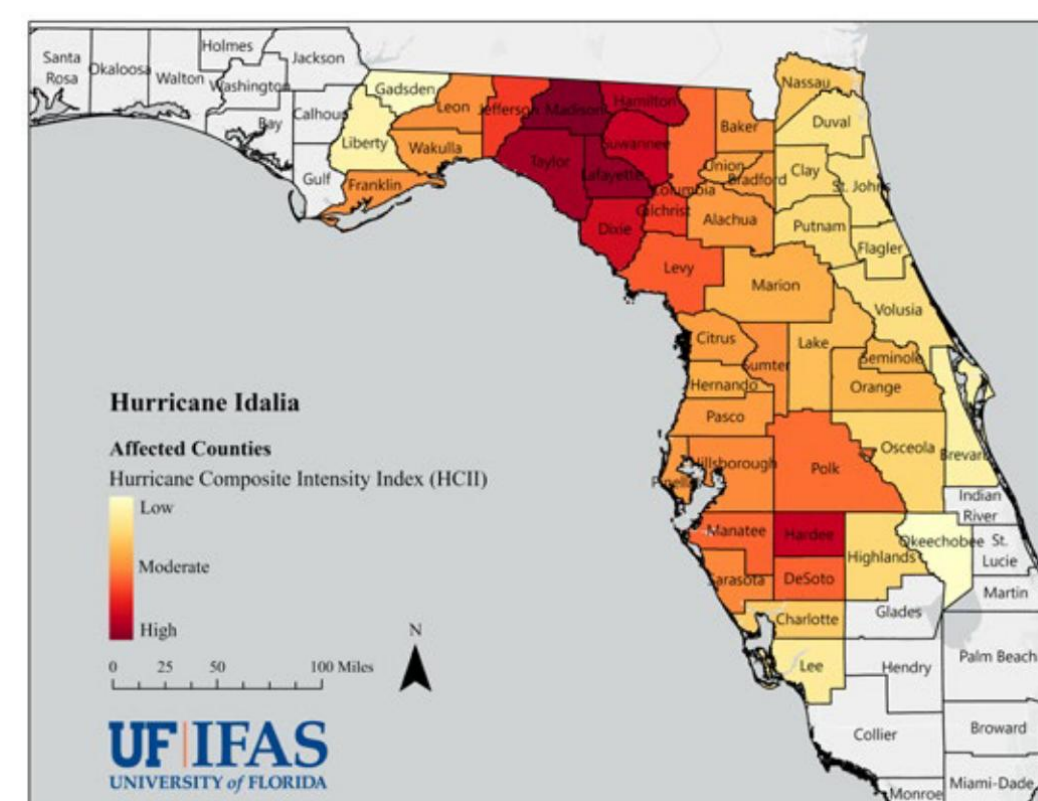


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## INTRODUCTION

Farming communities in Florida's Big Bend and Suwannee River Valley Region have experienced multiple hurricanes in the last few years, including Hurricane Idalia (2023), Hurricane Debby (2024), and Hurricane resulting in severe agricultural production losses. This research explores the impact of these hurricanes on farms in the region and how their recovery is progressing.



Court, C. D., Qiao, X., Li, M., McDaid, K. (2023). Preliminary Assessment of Agricultural Losses and Damages Resulting from Hurricane Idalia. UFIFAS Economic Impact Analysis Program, Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida.

Court, C. D., Qiao, X., Koenek, R., & McDaid, K. (2024). Preliminary Assessment of Agricultural Losses and Damages Resulting from Hurricane Helene. UFIFAS Economic Impact Analysis Program, Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida.

Court, C. D., Qiao, X., Koenek, R., McDaid, K. (2024). Preliminary Assessment of Agricultural Losses and Damages Resulting from Hurricane Debby. UFIFAS Economic Impact Analysis Program, Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida.

## Farm Statistics for Counties Impacted by Hurricanes Helene, Debby, and Idalia

County	Total Farms	% Family Farms	Average Farm Size (Acres)	Total Acres	% Cropland	% Pastureland	% Woodland	Total Market Value (\$ millions)
Columbia	867	97%	103	89,621	34.8%	31.8%	24.9%	\$63.5
Dixie	154	91%	336	51,720	16.2%	(D)	48.1%	\$10.8
Gilchrist	549	97%	194	106,752	58.6%	23.8%	11.8%	\$216
Hamilton	275	98%	261	71,711	45.3%	15.8%	27.9%	\$52.6
Lafayette	250	91%	422	105,429	39.5%	25.0%	25.1%	\$153
Levy	993	95%	200	198,497	35.7%	27.1%	23.6%	\$145
Madison	645	95%	247	159,522	37.2%	22.9%	29.9%	\$169

(D) – Withheld by USDA to avoid disclosing data for individual farms. Source: The State of Agriculture in Florida 2022 USDA AG Census Update, Reprinted from: <https://comedia.fdaacs.gov/content/download/118013/file/2022-florida-usda-census-of-agriculture-update.pdf>

## METHODOLOGY

### Full Survey

- A full survey was mailed to 320 parcels zoned for agriculture in areas with high wind speeds from Hurricane Idalia.
- The survey asked questions about infrastructure damage, repair and replacement decisions, farm characteristics, financial assistance, and social networks.
- The survey packet included an introduction letter, the survey, a damage assessment sheet with photos of different farm infrastructure and levels of damage severity, and a paid return envelope.
- There were three rounds of mailing and 42 complete surveys were returned.

### Pivot Irrigator Survey

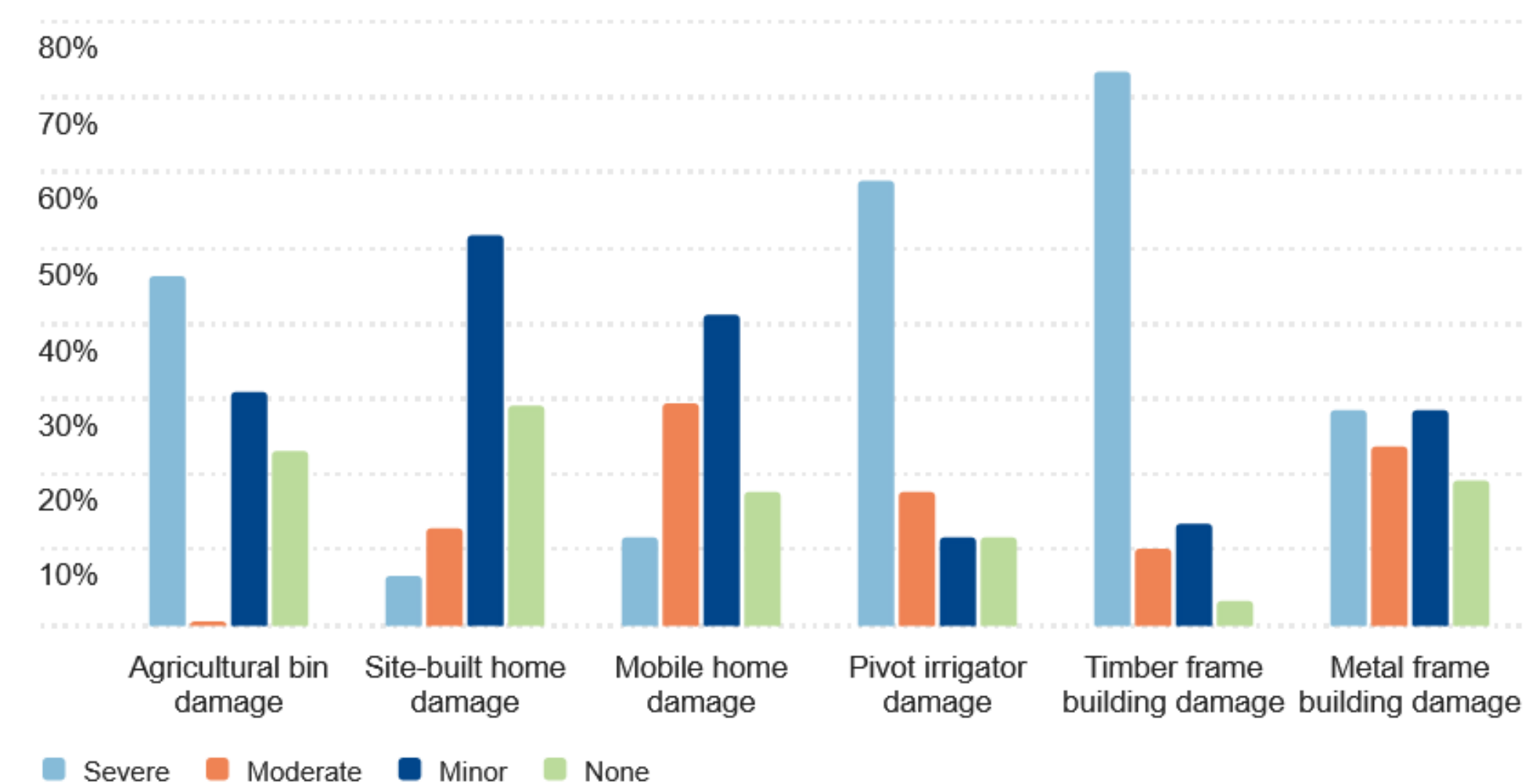
- Because of the scale of pivot irrigator damage in the region, a targeted survey on their design and damage was conducted with the assistance of UF IFAS Extension to better understand their structural vulnerabilities. This is still ongoing.

### Interviews and Site Visits

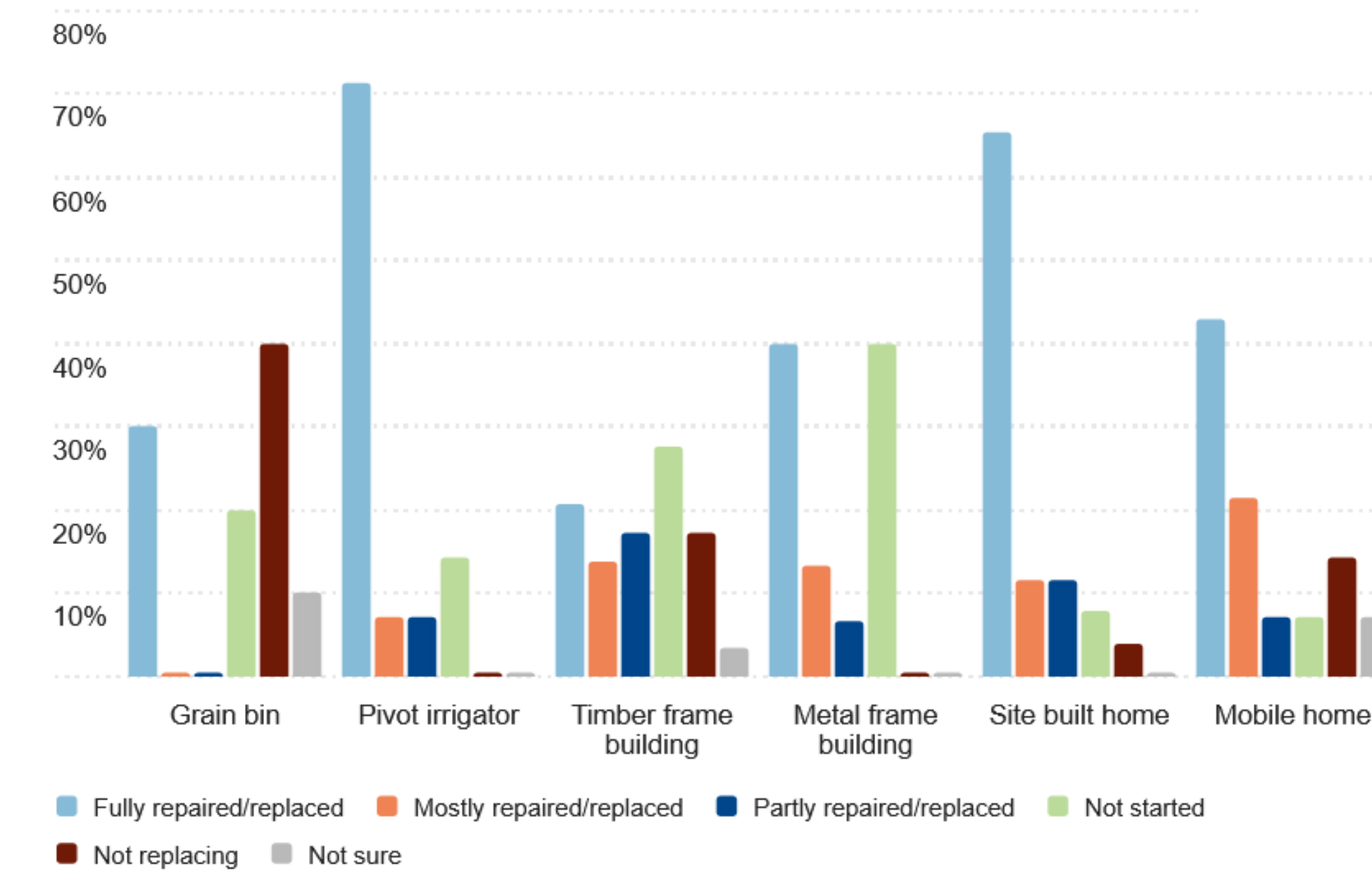
- In-person visits are ongoing with 150 parcels that have the same mailing and farm address. These conversations involve recovery from Idalia as well as further impacts from Hurricanes Helene and Debby.
- Interviews were also conducted with larger growers and other organizations involved in recovery.

## RESULTS

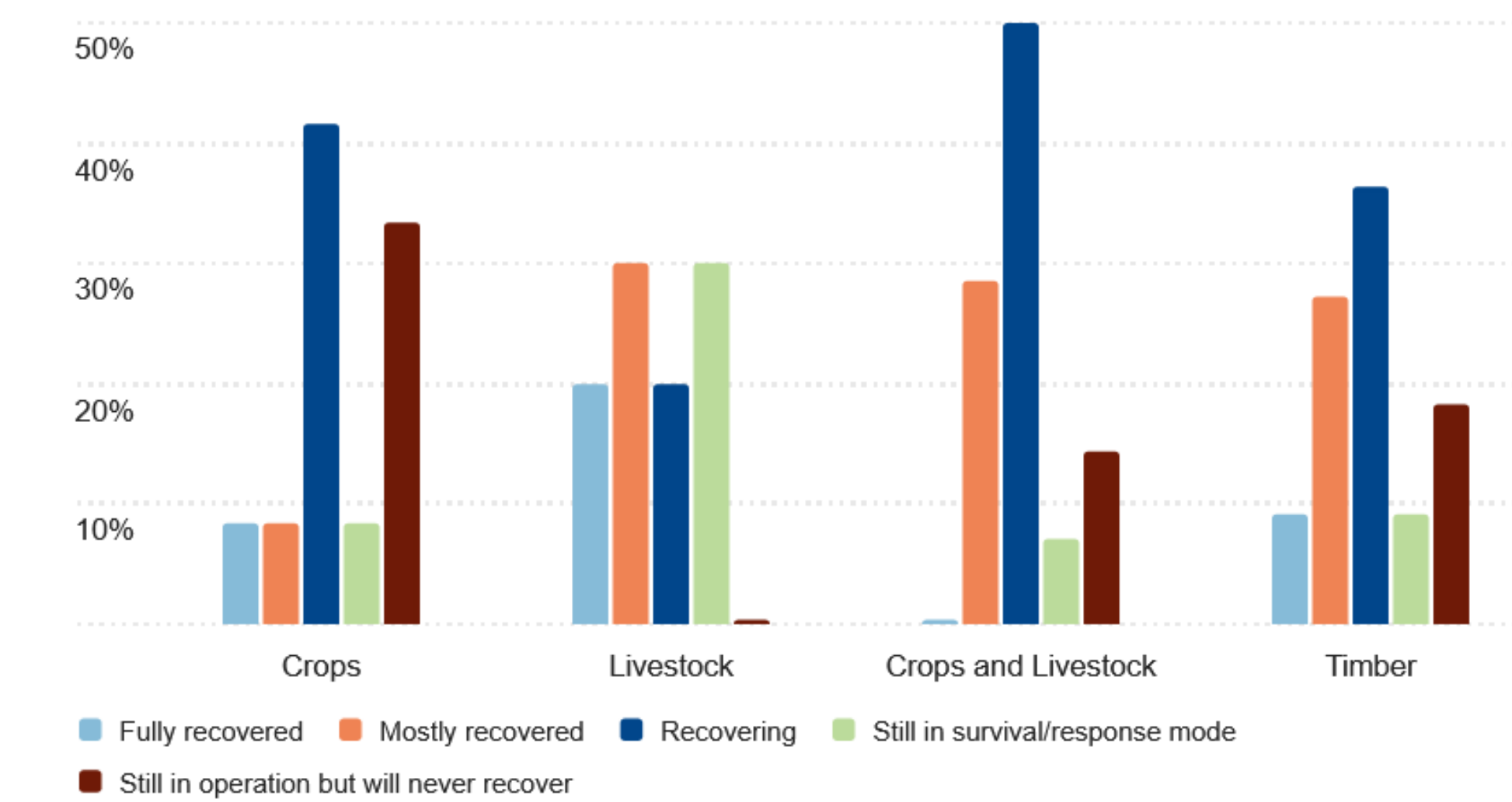
### What was the severity of the damage?



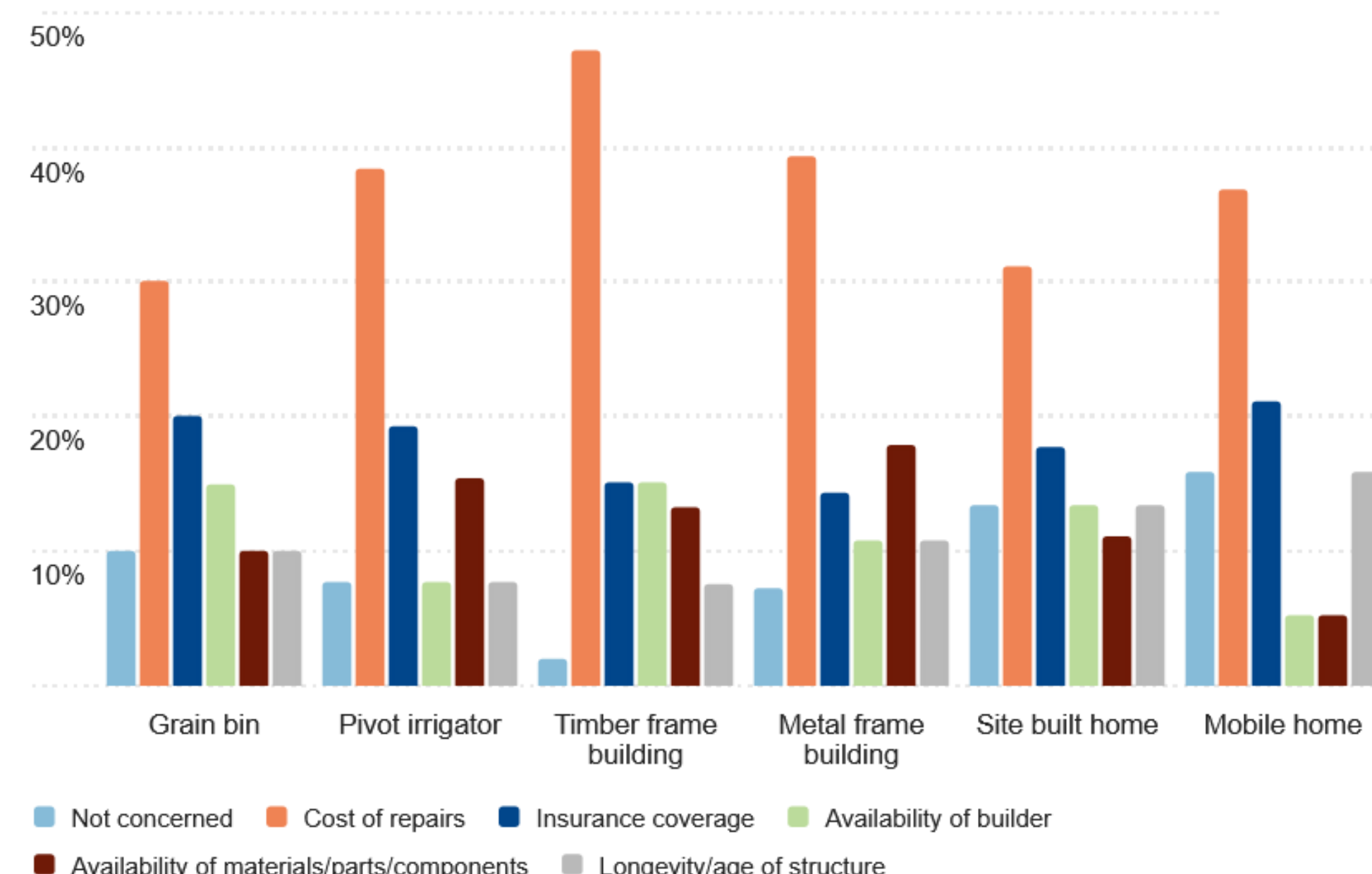
### What is the status of repair/replacement of the damaged structures?



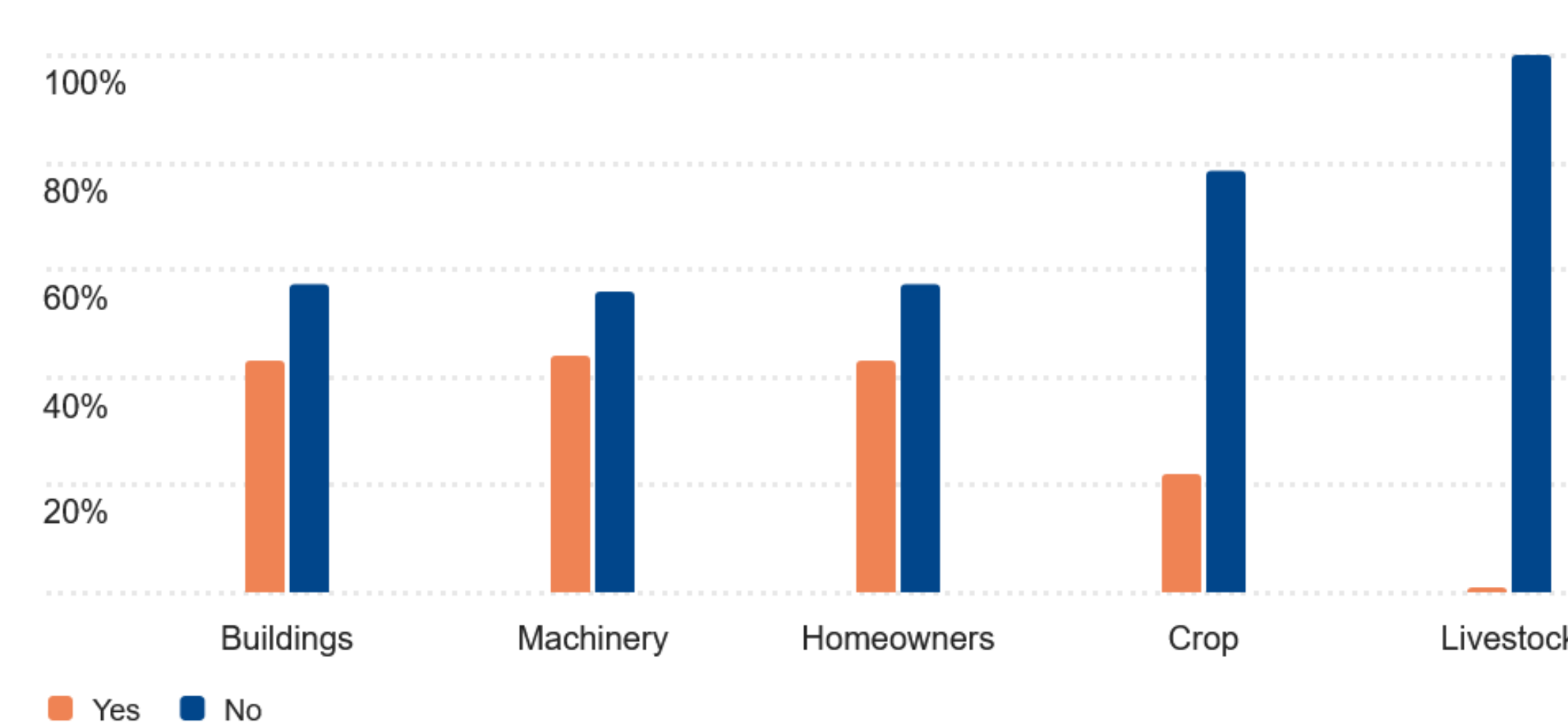
### Where is the farm in the recovery process?



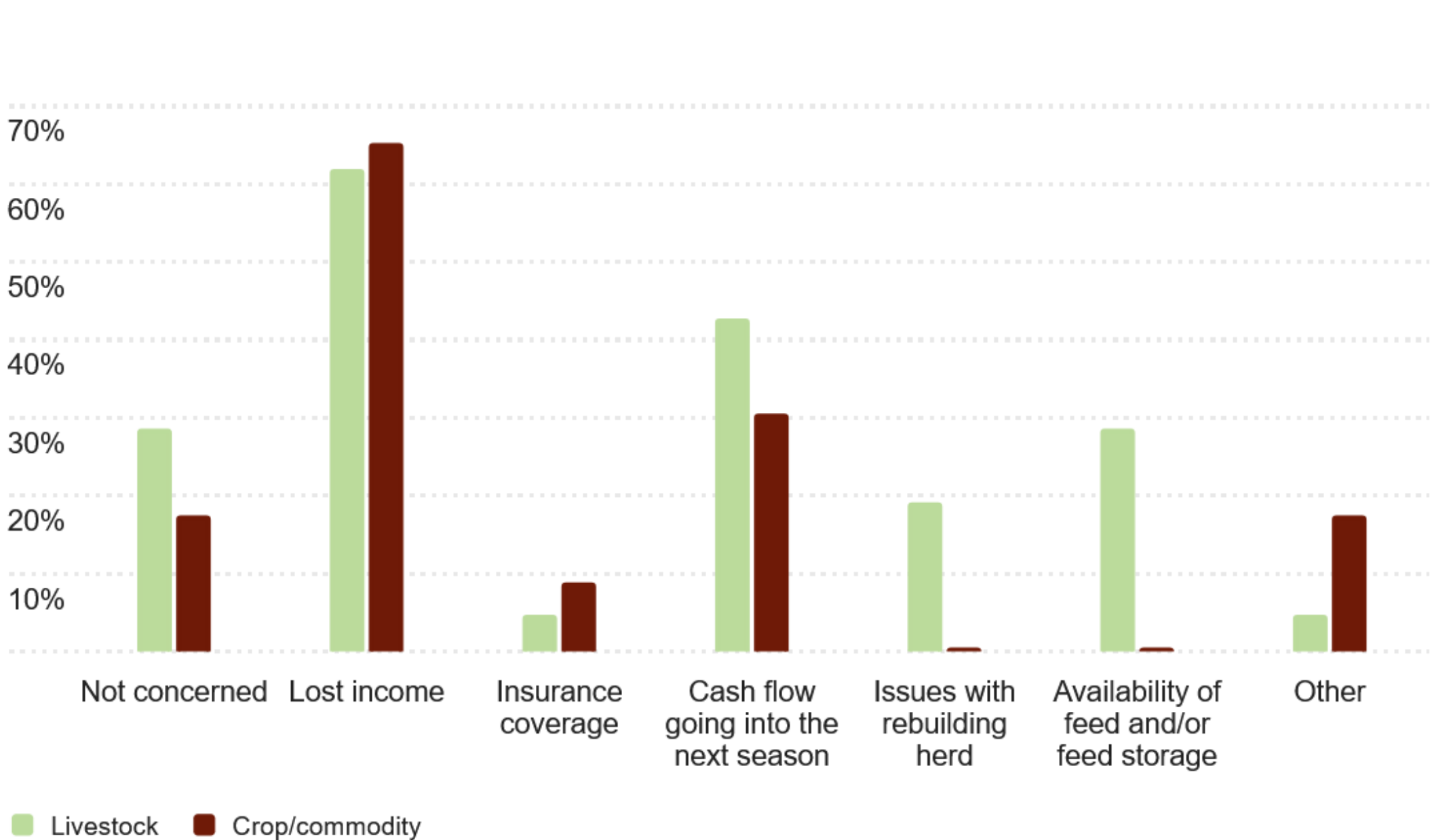
### What are/were your concerns regarding structural repair/replacement?



### Did the farm have insurance for any of the following?



### What are/were your concerns regarding livestock and crop losses?



## DISCUSSION



Poultry house damage



Metal frame building damage



Timber frame building damage



Pivot irrigator damage

### Preliminary Findings

- Recovery is still ongoing for most farms. Less than 10% report being fully recovered. 17% say they will never recover due to the extent of the damage.
- The most severe damage was seen in agricultural bins, pivot irrigators, and timber frame buildings (which include poultry houses). To reduce losses from grain bin damage, most farmers sold their crop or commodity early. A few found temporary storage.
- A majority of farmers do not have insurance. Crop insurance and livestock insurance had the lowest rates of coverage. However, for those with insurance, almost everyone received money after filing a claim and the insurance assessment of the damage matched their own assessment.
- Very few farms received financial assistance. Most assistance came from friends, family, and other social groups..
- There was a lot of support for pivot irrigators from government and manufacturers and many have been replaced. Poultry houses are largely still unrepaired.

### Research Lessons Learned

- Building trust was important. In-person visits to farms, attending agricultural events, working closely with local extension agents, and taking a long-term approach were essential.
- Different approaches and surveys were needed for large-scale producers versus smaller farms, and for the different kinds of land and operational arrangements.