

Superfast Northamptonshire Farm Demand Registration Survey

Results and Analysis

The completion of this survey will help the County Council understand the level of demand for superfast broadband services across Northamptonshire.

The collated results will help us to promote Northamptonshire as a place for broadband suppliers to invest by demonstrating the strength of demand for services.

The survey won't take longer than 5 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions about this research please the County Council's Superfast Northamptonshire Project Team at bigidea@northamptonshire.gov.uk

1. Please provide the your full postcode:

2. Are you the person who pays for the business utility bills, including internet access?

- Yes
- No
- I am not the bill payer but I am involved in purchasing decisions

3. How many people are employed by your business?

- Sole Trader
- 26-49 people

March 2014



Business Survey: Results and Analysis

Contents	Page
1.0 Context	3
2.0 Methodology.....	3
3.0 Summary of Key Survey Findings.....	5
4.0 Characteristics of the farms that responded to the survey.....	6
Figure 1: Number of people employed in surveyed farms.....	6
5.0 Survey findings.....	7
Figure 2: Farm dependency on internet connection.....	7
Figure 3: How likely are farms to take up a superfast service.....	7
Figure 4: How faster connection speeds would benefit farms.....	8
Figure 5: How likely are businesses to take up a superfast service.....	9
Figure 6: Current usage of internet applications and potential growth with superfast broadband.....	10
Figure 7: Current business internet speeds.....	11
Figure 8: Willingness to pay for a one off connection fee.....	12
5.1 Current service information.....	12
Figure 9: Current price of business internet service.....	12
Figure 10: How much more would Businesses pay for Superfast Services.....	13
Figure 11: Services included in bundles used by businesses.....	13
Figure 12: Preferred superfast internet service contract length for businesses.....	14
6.0 Conclusion.....	15

1.0 Context

The Superfast Northamptonshire project aims to secure access to superfast broadband for all homes and businesses in the county by 2017. Broadband would normally be provided by commercial providers but in some parts of the county, as elsewhere in the UK, a commercial solution is not viable. It is in these areas where the County Council is taking forward initiatives to help to secure access to superfast broadband services. Farm buildings can be located in deep rural villages or even completely isolated. These can be some of the most costly areas to serve through fibre based broadband due to the distances involved for a small service take up customer base. This can make these areas an unviable commercial proposition for the telecoms market.

The County Council is co-investing with BT and Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to subsidise the roll out of superfast broadband to over 50,000 premises by 2015; this will take coverage to around 90% of all premises in the county when combined with other commercial plans. The County Council published the Northamptonshire Next Generation Strategy in June 2013 which sets out its approach to extend coverage and meet the project's full coverage targets between now and 2017.

Demonstrating the potential demand for superfast broadband services is a key driver to help the county attract commercial investment. Telecoms infrastructure providers need confidence that they will secure a return on their investment over time through adequate revenues generated through the take up of superfast services. The County Council has embarked upon a number of demand registration surveys in 2013 to capture information on current service speeds which residents and businesses are experiencing, their desire for improved services, and to identify hot spots of demand for superfast broadband.

One of the surveys was targeted at farmers in Northamptonshire.

2.0 Methodology

The farmers demand registration survey began in July 2013 and ran for 2 months until late September. The survey was created in collaboration with the National Farmers Union (NFU) and technical consultancy ATKINS. It was run in tandem with a demand registration survey directed to the business community. The line of questioning established:

- If the respondent paid the utility bills
- The location of the farm and how many people were employed there
- The nature of the respondent's current internet service (connection type, connection speed, reliability, service bundle details, and which service provider they currently use).

- What they use the internet for and what they would plan to use it for if they had a faster connection.
- The cost of their current internet service/ bundle and how much they would be willing to pay for a superfast broadband service.
- If the farmer would be willing to pay a one off connection fee and if so how much, and over what period they would like a contract to run.
- How likely they would be to take up a superfast internet service should one be available.
- What impacts the respondent thought a superfast broadband connection would have on their farm as a business.

The survey was promoted through the NFU to its members in Northamptonshire and was presented on-line and accessed on 'Survey Monkey' (a survey specialist website). Hard copies of the survey were provided on request.

The survey collected 102 responses from farms across Northamptonshire. To encourage the farming community to respond, the County Council partnered with Avonline Broadband to offer survey participants the opportunity to be entered into a prize draw. The prize was a one year free satellite internet service supporting speeds of up to 20Mbps. A farmer from Glapthorn near Oundle in the north east of the county won the prize draw and the satellite service was installed in December 2013. A video filming the satellite installation, and the before and after experience, is available on the Superfast Northamptonshire project [website](#).

3.0 Summary of Survey Key Findings

Of the 102 farmers who participated in the survey:

- **3.8Mbps** was the average speed of internet connection experienced (based on reported on-line speed checker results).
- **82%** received less than 5Mbps download speeds.
- **85%** would be 'very likely' to or would 'definitely' take up a superfast service.
- **83%** indicated they were 'highly dependant' or more so on an internet connection.
- **41%** reported that they had a 'fairly unreliable' or worse connection.
- **83%** indicated that they would pay a one off connection fee for a superfast service.
- **99%** used the internet for e-mail and accessing information online.

The survey asked farmers what they thought the potential impacts would be if they had access to a superfast broadband survey:

- **49%** believed their customer service would be likely to improve.
- **53%** said that they would expect to see productivity increases.
- **54%** reported that superfast broadband would allow more flexibility in work schedules.
- **53%** said that it would improve communications with suppliers.
- **39%** believed it would result in the growth of their business.
- **19%** more of the farmers would create a website for their business.
- **32%** more would utilise video conferencing.
- **20%** more would use the internet for online training.
- **39%** more would use the internet to transfer files.

4.0 Characteristics of the farms which responded to the survey

102 farmers from across Northamptonshire completed the survey. 76% of the farms employed 5 people or less indicating that the majority were smaller independent operations. 37% of the survey were sole traders.

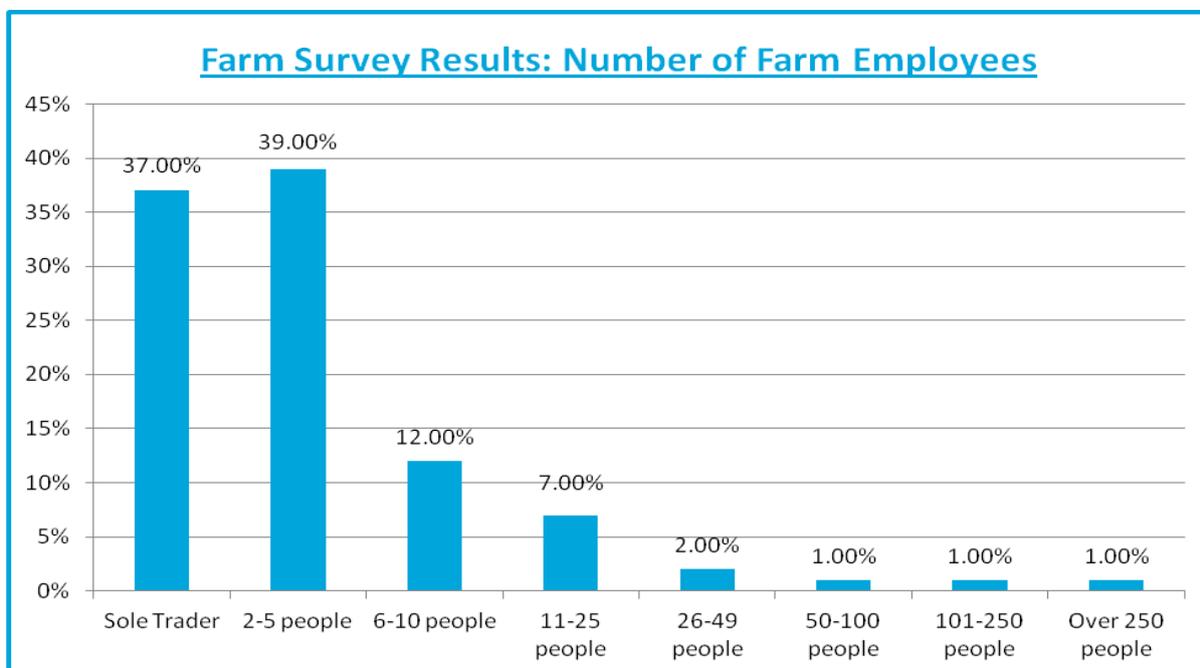


Figure 1: Number of people employed in surveyed farms.

All of the farmers who responded had an internet connection. It is likely that this is not indicative of the wider Northamptonshire farming community as the survey was primarily distributed by e-mail and therefore farmers without a connection may not have been aware of the survey or found it harder to access.

77% of the farmers had an ADSL connection, only 1% connected via satellite.

5.0 Survey Findings

The majority of farmers suggested that internet was essential to their farms. 83% said that they had a 'high dependency' or more on their internet connection. This is likely due to reporting the farm's yields and income to government on-line. The numbers of 'Essential' respondents will likely increase in the future as the government continues to provide more services and reporting requirements online.

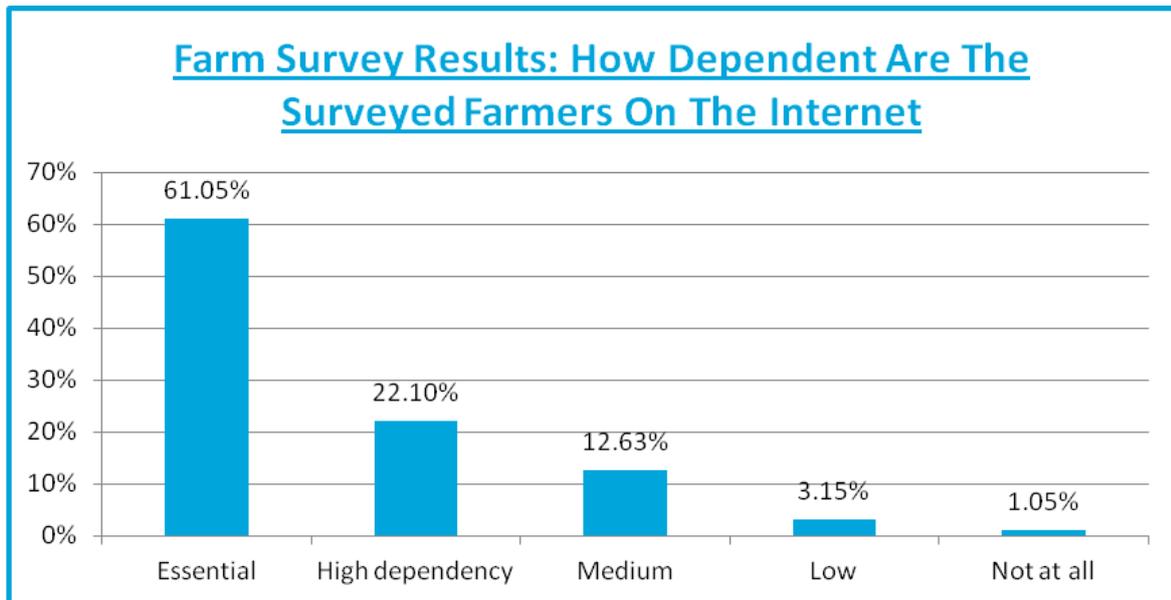


Figure 2: Farm dependency on internet connection.

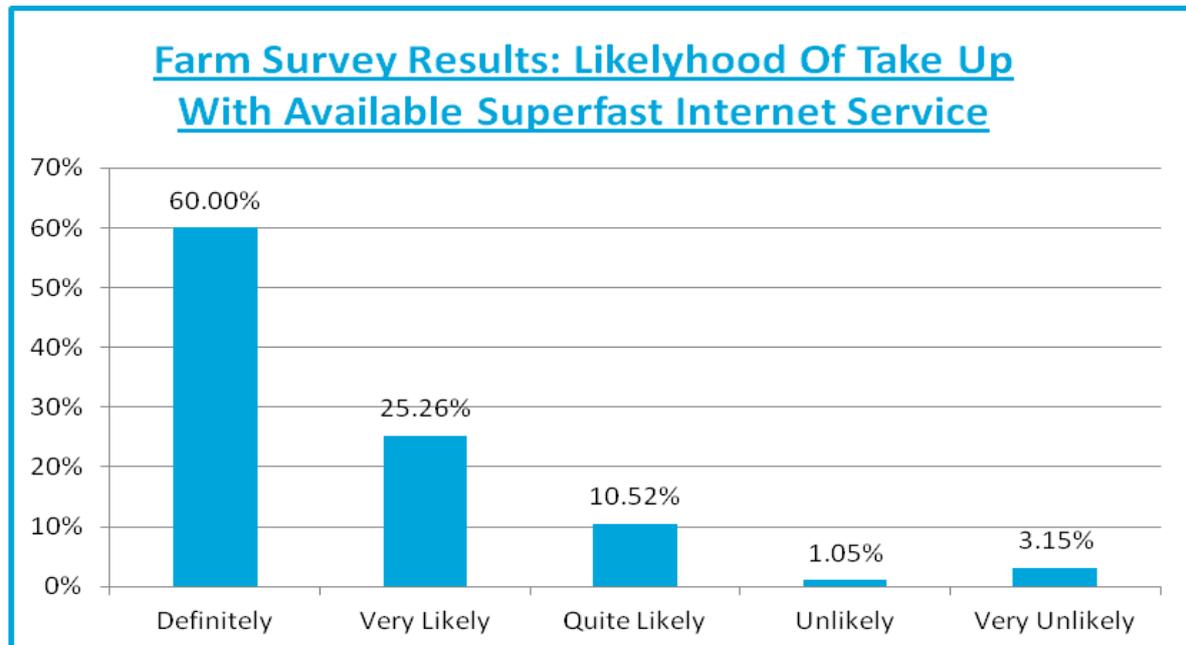


Figure 3: How likely are farmers to take up a superfast service.

85% of farmers would definitely, or be very likely, to take up a superfast broadband service should one become available. This mirrored the level of demand registered by the wider business community through the business survey undertaken at the same time. It highlights the high level of demand in the agricultural sector for these services.

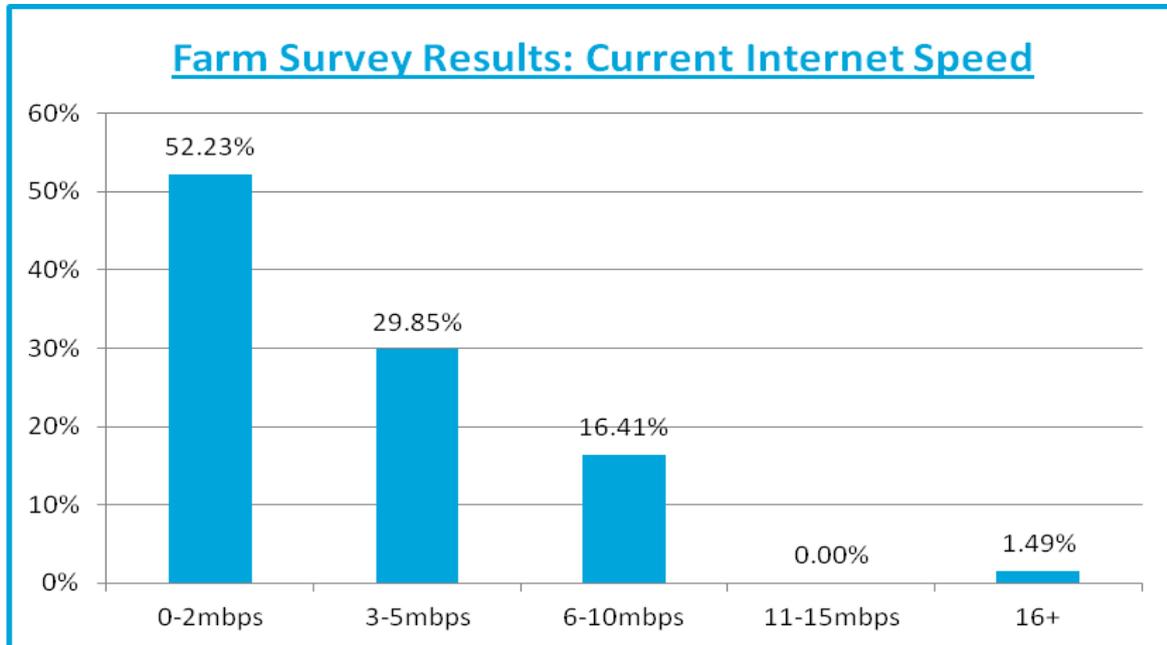


Figure 4: Current farm Internet Speeds

The farmers' survey results predictably revealed slower connections than Northamptonshire businesses as a whole, with 82% of respondents experiencing low speeds of 0-5Mbps compared to 74% of those businesses who responded to the business survey. A large proportion of respondents (38%) had data limits on their internet service, which was higher than the results from a communities survey also undertaken in 2013 which revealed 26% of respondents had limits on data.

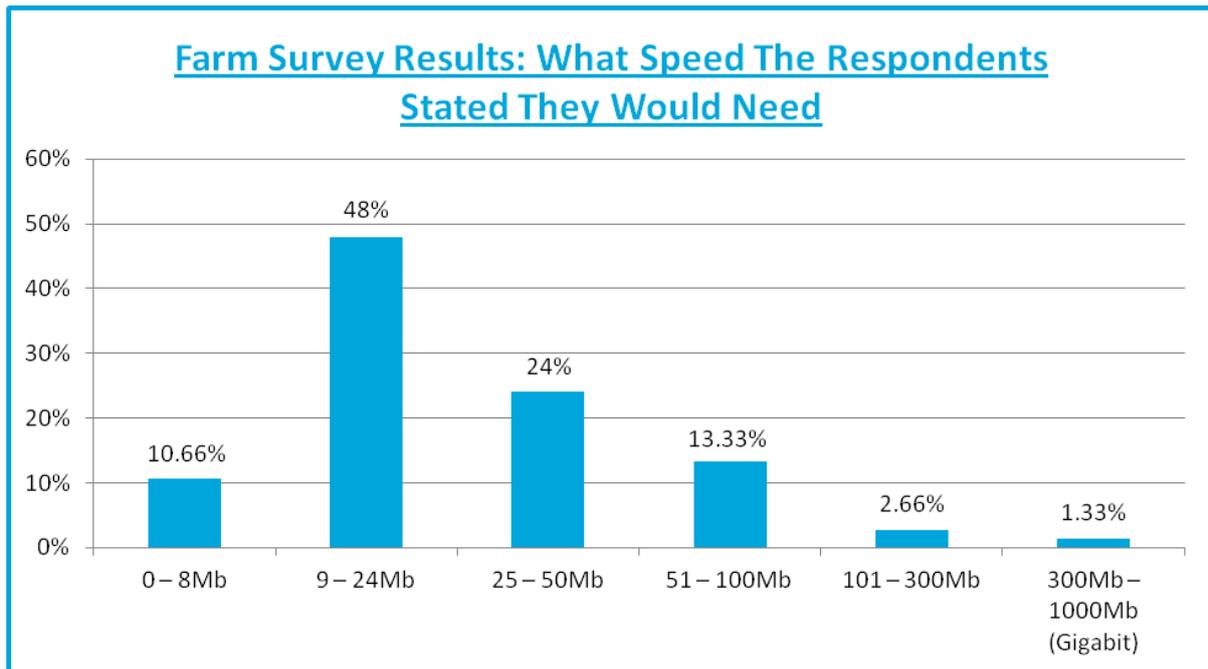


Figure 5: Surveyed farm connection speed requirement.

The survey respondents were asked what connection speed they thought they would require. The majority said that they would need 9-24Mbps at least 3 times faster than the average speeds, whilst over 41% wanted higher superfast broadband speeds.

The surveyed farmers were asked what they currently use their internet connection for and what they would then use it for if they had a faster service.

Figure 6 below shows that farmers would be likely do more file transfers, watching online video content and video conferencing if superfast broadband was available to them. This pattern follows the same increased utilisation shown in the community survey.

Although online training was not one of the most utilised services taken up by farmers who responded, the survey showed an approximate doubling of interest if farmers had access to superfast broadband, increasing from 17 farmers that utilise it currently to 36 who would utilise it with superfast broadband. This represents 20% of the total respondents who answered the question.

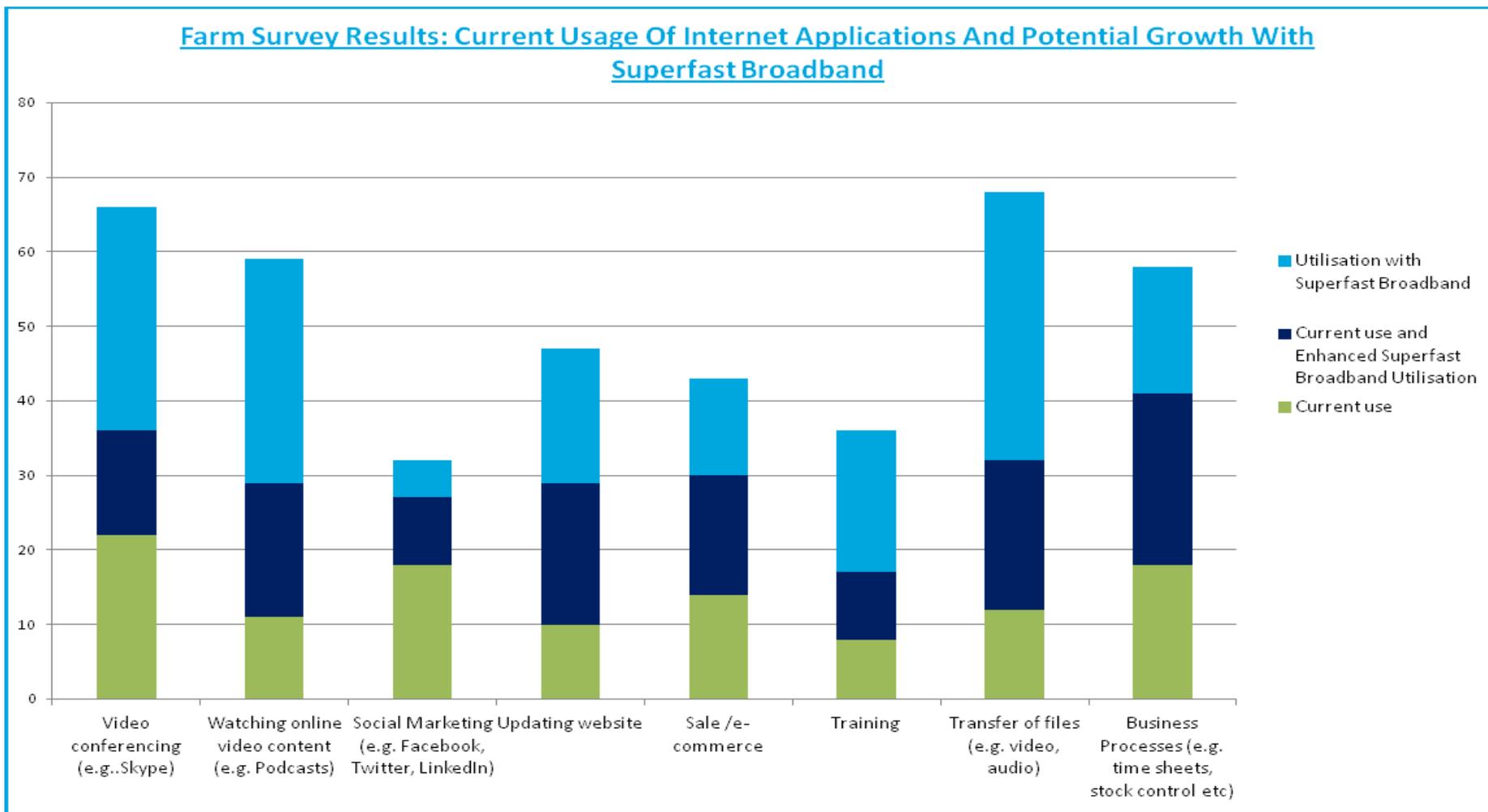


Figure 6: Current usage of internet applications and potential growth with superfast broadband.

This graph shows the proportion of farmer respondents who used each internet application and also a comparison of the three types of users - those who use it and don't plan any additional use if superfast broadband was available; those who both use it currently and would use it more with a faster connection; and those who don't use it now but would like to once superfast broadband was available. In addition to those uses illustrated in Figure 6, the most common use of broadband reported by farmers was simply for accessing information online (97%) indicating a high level of basic internet literacy.

Business Survey Results: How Faster Connection Speeds Would Benefit Farms

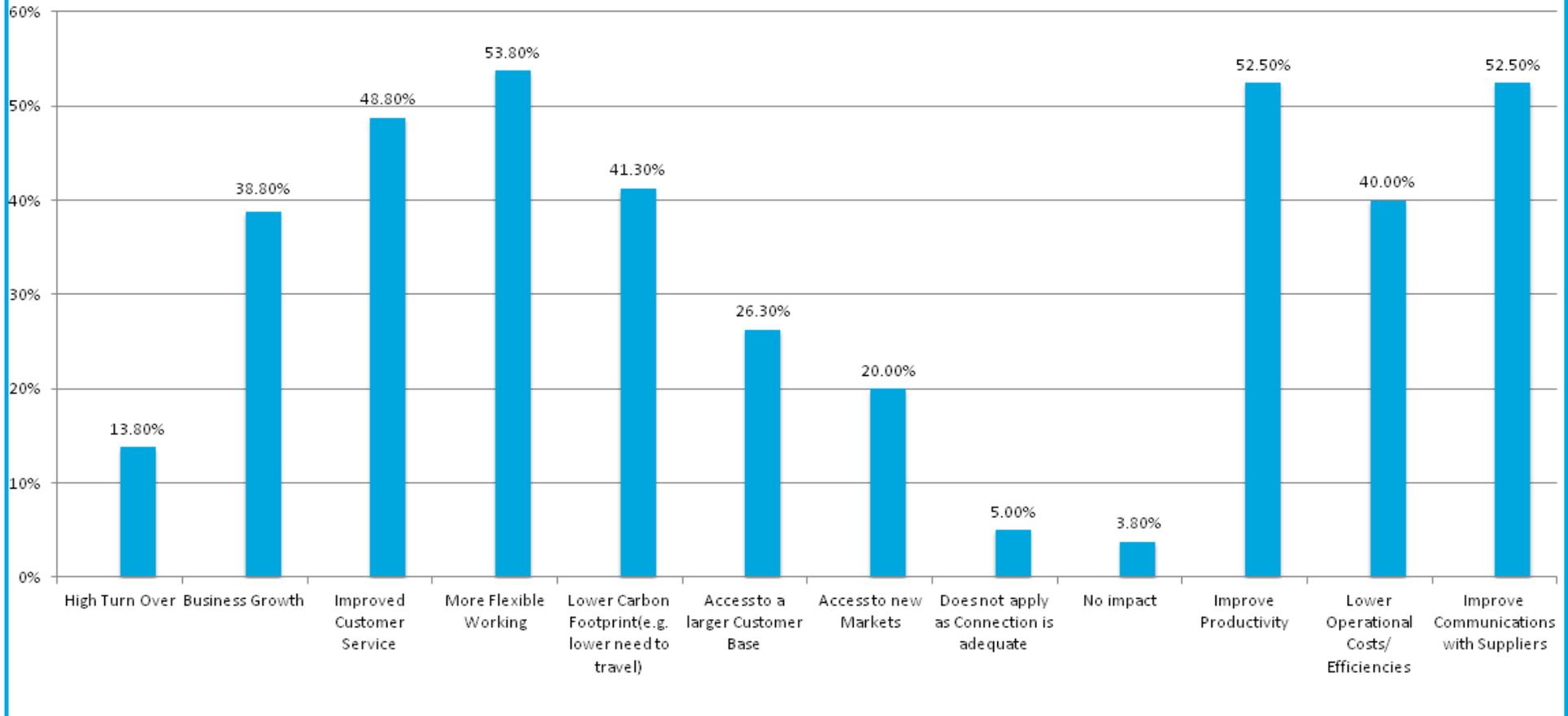


Figure 7: How faster connection speeds would benefit farms.

Over 50% of farmers indicated that with faster broadband they would expect to benefit from more flexible working, improvements in productivity and improved communication with suppliers. These three factors are focused around improving operational efficiency.

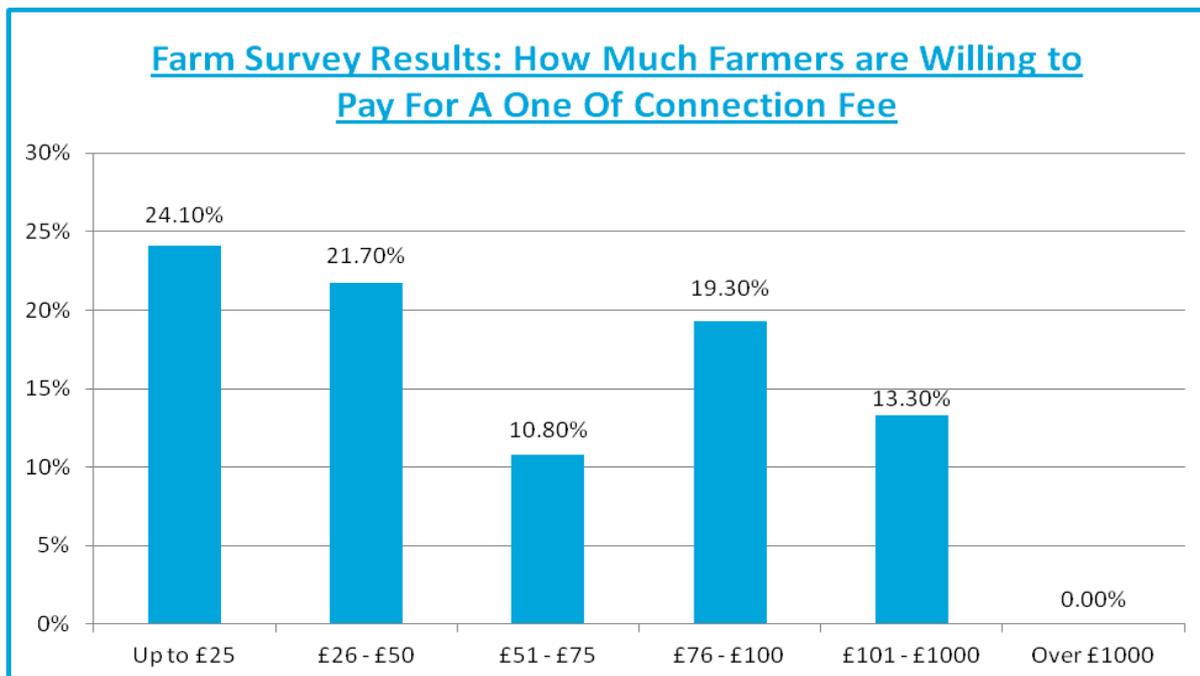


Figure 8: Willingness to pay for a one off connection fee.

83% of the surveyed farmers said they would be willing to pay a one off connection fee for superfast broadband, with 65% willing to pay over £25.

5.1 Current service information

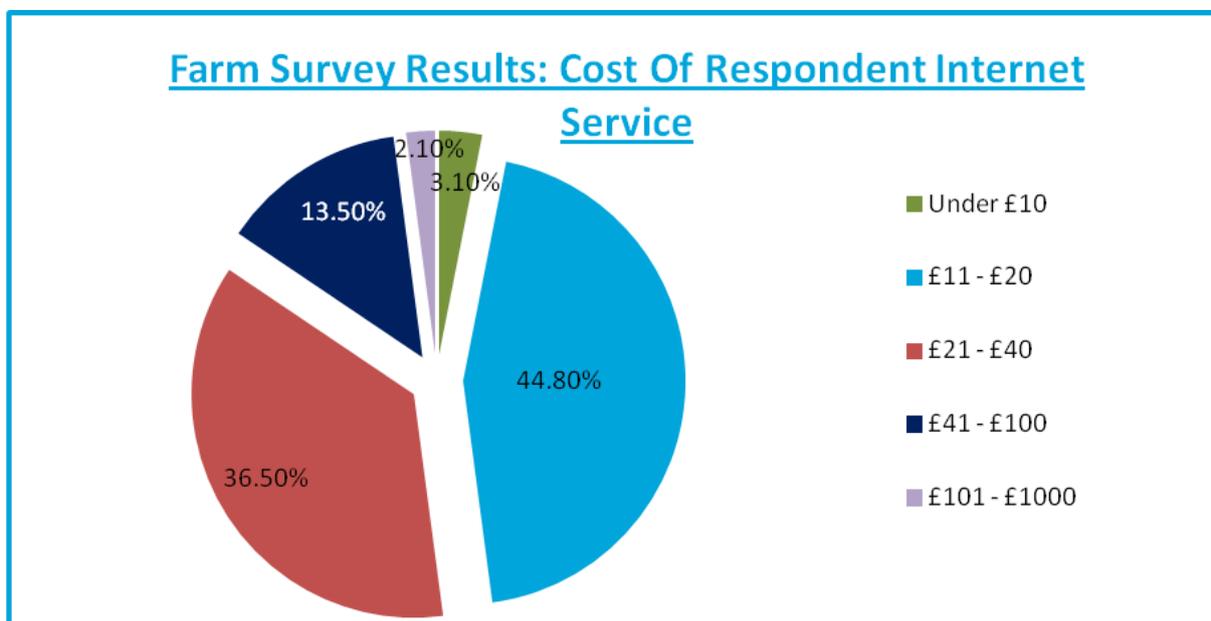


Figure 9: Current price of farm internet service.

Over 50% of businesses were paying over £21 for internet, with only 3% utilising what were most likely basic services under £10.

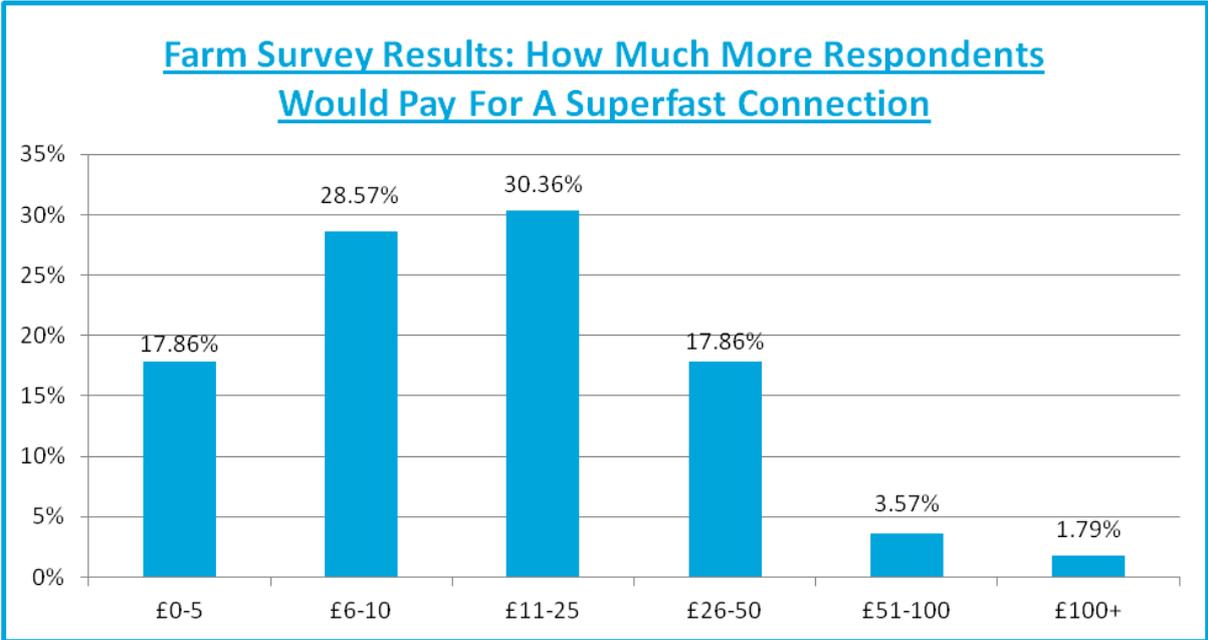


Figure 10: How much more would farms pay for Superfast Services.

Figure 10 shows that 54% of farmers who responded would pay over £10 more for a superfast service than what they were currently paying for internet. On average farmers would pay an additional £23 for their superfast service.

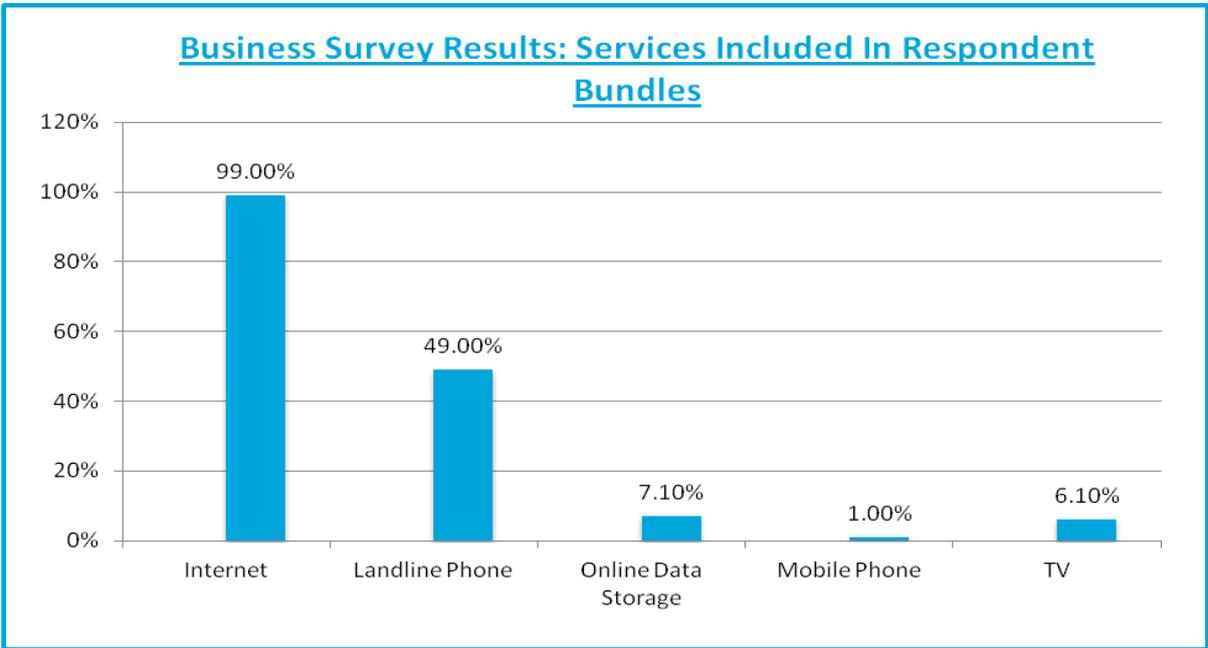


Figure 11: Services included in bundles used by farms.

Similar to the results of both the community and business demand registration surveys, the phone line/internet bundles were the most popular. However, the farmers survey also revealed that just purchasing an internet service alone was almost as popular.

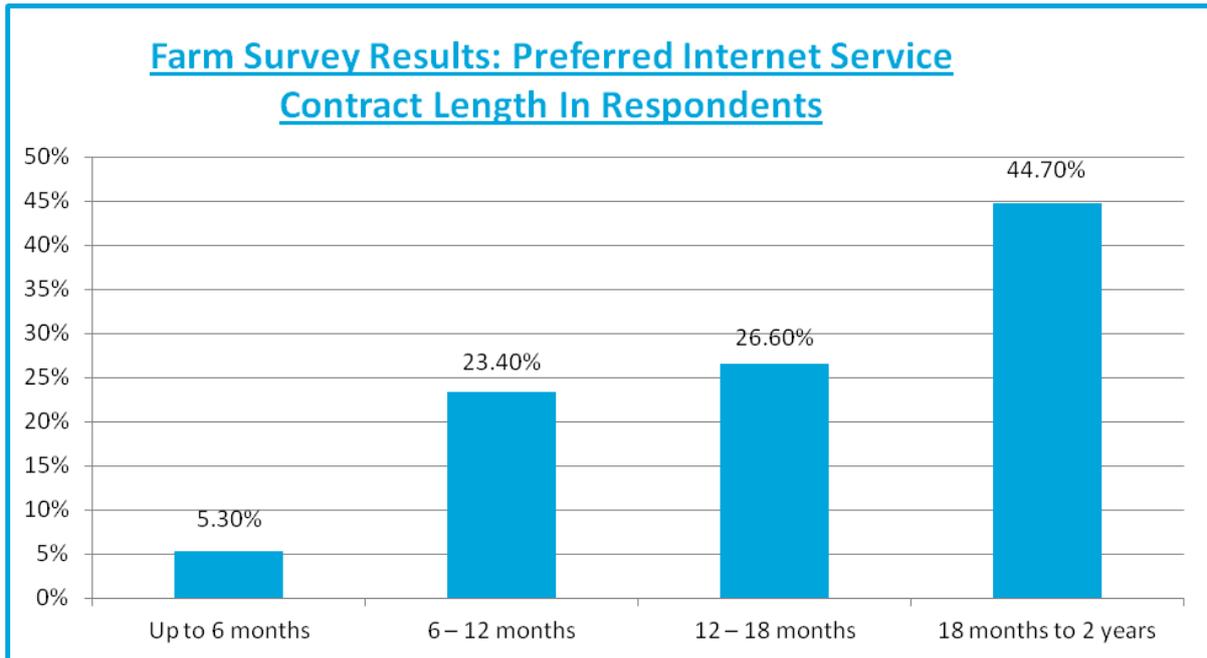


Figure 12: Preferred superfast internet service contract length for businesses.

The responses showed that farmers preferred longer service contracts than was the case for domestic users responding to the community survey. The preferred contract length for farmers was generally in line with those respondents to the business survey. The most popular contract length was 18 months to 2 years.

6.0 Conclusion

The outcome of the farmers demand registration survey provides an insight into the level of demand for superfast broadband in some of Northamptonshire's more rural areas, and a better understanding of what the key drivers are for internet usage within the farming community.

Some of these key drivers included the need for much faster speeds than their current services, with over 41% experiencing 'fairly unreliable' or worse levels of connectivity, and the strong desire for superfast broadband; demand to be able to watch online video content and being able to transfer files online; and importantly, recognition of the economic and business growth benefits of superfast broadband including expected impacts on productivity increases, more work flexibility and improved communication with customers and suppliers.

The survey revealed that on average farmers would pay £23 more for superfast broadband on top of their current service charges, with 83% also willing to pay a one of connection fee. The demand is very high in rural areas with 85% of respondents being 'very likely' or would 'definitely' take up a superfast service should one become available.

This survey results suggest that, when the broadband roll out being progressed through the Superfast Northamptonshire project reaches these rural communities, there is likely to be a significant take up of faster and superfast services. This is a positive indication of the overall benefit outcomes for the project as a whole.

For Further Information

Go to www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net