The sixth quarterly survey of agricultural credit conditions was conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis from September 11 through September 30; the results presented here are based on the responses from 47 agricultural banks within the boundaries of the Eighth Federal Reserve District. The Eighth District includes all or parts of seven Midwest and Mid-South states. Because these data are not adjusted for any seasonal irregularities (should they exist), users are cautioned to interpret the results carefully. In particular, users are cautioned against drawing firm conclusions about longer-run trends in farmland values and agricultural lending conditions.

Survey Results

Respondents indicated that farm income in the Eighth District increased modestly from the third quarter in 2012 (see Table 1). This increase (index value of 107) is in line with previous reports, which have generally indicated healthy farm economic and financial conditions in the District. Going forward, survey respondents expect farm income levels in the fourth quarter of 2013 to remain modestly above their levels from a year earlier (index value of 105). In addition, Table 1 reveals that our survey respondents also indicated that capital and household spending increased modestly in the third quarter relative to the same period one year ago. For the fourth quarter of 2013, bankers expect that household spending levels will remain above their year-earlier levels (index value of 105). By contrast, bankers expect that capital expenditures by farmers will fall modestly short of levels seen in the fourth quarter of 2012 (index value of 95).

Table 1 also reports values for farmland and cash rents. Quality farmland values across the District averaged $5,332 per acre in the third quarter of 2013. As seen in Figure 1, this was a noticeable decrease (6 percent) from the second-quarter average ($5,672). Despite this decline, District quality farmland values have increased by 9.1 percent since the third quarter of 2012. Table 1 indicates that bankers expect a further erosion in District quality farmland values over the next three months (an index value of 88). For reasons noted above, we caution readers not to infer too much from the drop in District quality farmland values in the third quarter. Figure 1 shows—according to survey respondents—that the value of District ranch or pastureland averaged $2,377 per acre in the third quarter, a gain of 1.4 percent over the past four quarters. Unlike quality farmland, survey respondents expect no change in the value of ranch or pastureland over the next three months relative to a year earlier (an index value of 100).

According to survey respondents, cash rents for quality farmland across the District averaged $181 per acre in the third quarter, which was down slightly from the second quarter ($183 per acre). However, cash rents for ranch or pastureland rose modestly in the third quarter ($62 per acre) compared with their second-quarter average ($57 per acre). Similar to land values, Figure 2 shows that average cash
rents have moved steadily upward since the second quarter of 2012—though at an uneven pace. Table 1 indicates that bankers expect that cash rents for both quality farm land and ranch or pastureland are expected to increase modestly over the next three months (an index value greater than 100). As detailed at the end of this report, we asked bankers two special questions about the type of flexible or variable cash rents employed by land owners in their area.

Table 2 shows that, for the most part, bankers’ expectations for farm income, expenditures, and several other key variables in the third quarter were exceeded relative to the expectations from three months earlier. In particular, expectations were exceeded for farm income, capital spending, availability of funds to extend loans, and the rate of loan repayment. By contrast, the demand for farm loans and household spending was a bit less than expected in the third quarter—though still modestly above year-earlier levels (index values of 105 and 116, respectively). Finally, expectations of loan repayment rates in the third quarter of 2013 exceeded banker expectations three months earlier (index value of 105). Figures 3 through 8 plot the actual and realized values for the six variables shown in Table 2 since the first publication of the Agricultural Finance Monitor.

Table 3 reports key financial market conditions for the farm sector in the Eighth District. In the upper half of Table 3, the demand for agricultural credit in the third quarter was modestly above its levels from a year ago (index value of 105). Banker respondents expect that, on average,
Demand for farm loans in the fourth quarter of 2013 will fall modestly below their year-earlier levels (index value of 98). Survey respondents reported that more funds were available to prospective borrowers in the third quarter than at the same time last year and that a similar condition is expected to prevail in the fourth quarter of 2013. District loan repayment rates in the third quarter were slightly above year-earlier levels (index value of 105) and, on balance, were expected to improve slightly further in the fourth quarter of 2013 (index value of 110). Table 4 reports average fixed- and variable-interest rates across the District for various types of agricultural loans. For the third quarter of 2013, fixed-rate loans increased by an average of 11 basis points compared with three months earlier. By contrast, interest rates on variable-rate loans were mostly unchanged. The one exception was for interest rates on variable-rate farm-land loans, which increased by 15 basis points.
Special Questions

As reported in our previous survey (2013:Q2), there was some anecdotal evidence that the method of determining cash rents may be changing. In particular, there were reports that rents have become more variable over time, in part because of profit-sharing arrangements. In an attempt to gauge the validity of this conjecture, we asked survey respondents two special questions. These questions are reported in Table 5. The first question asked bankers to assess the percentage of cash rental agreements that were written as flexible or variable rental arrangements. Respondents indicated that most rental arrangements in their area did not have these flexible or variable features. For example, 75 percent of the respondents estimated that a third (30 percent) or less of the rental arrangements involved these special features. The second question asks respondents to assess the main pricing features of flexible or variable cash rental arrangements in their area. A little less than half (43 percent) indicated that rents were based on crop yield. Roughly one-quarter (27 percent) were based on a base rent plus a bonus, with roughly one-fifth (22 percent) tied to a variable-rent arrangement based on gross revenues generated by the crop. Very few cash rental agreements are tied to a commodity-pricing scheme.

Notes

1 An agricultural bank, for survey purposes, is defined as a bank for which at least 15 percent of its total loans outstanding finances agricultural production or purchases of farmland, farm equipment, or farm structures.

2 The number of responses from each zone has been relatively small, which entails a higher-than-normal margin of error. Therefore, we have decided to discontinue publishing the zone-by-zone results. The results reported here refer to the entire Eighth Federal Reserve District. Please contact us if you would like to participate in our survey.

3 Since the composition and number of survey respondents tends to change each quarter, it might be more accurate to compare the results reported from the same respondents to this survey and the previous survey (second quarter of 2013). Such an exercise reveals that the average land price of quality farmland in the District was $5,803 per acre in the third quarter of 2013, which is a 4.4 percent increase from the $5,557 per acre average reported in the second quarter of 2013.