2012 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE *Highlights*

Farms and Farmland

Numbers, Acreage, Ownership, and Use

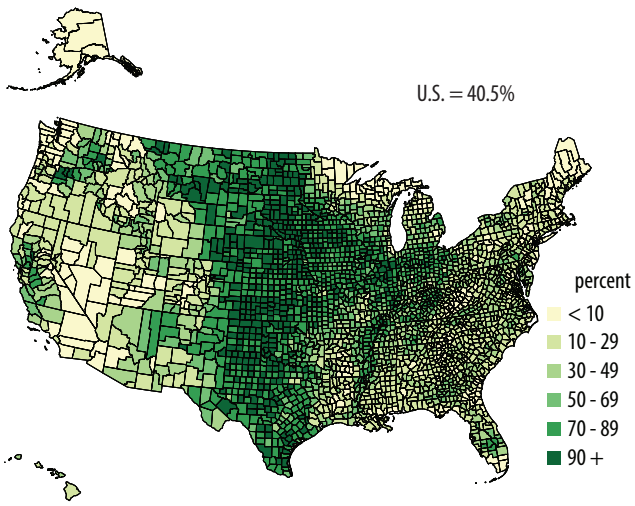
ACH12-13/September 2014

Two fifths of all land. . .

. . . in the United States is farmland. 915 million acres. 2.1 million farms and ranches.

In 2012, just over 40 percent of all U.S. land was farmland. The amount of land in farms essentially held steady between 2007, when the last agriculture census was conducted, and 2012. In that same five-year period, however, the number of farms in the United States declined, and average farm size increased. Farmland continued to be most heavily concentrated in the center of the country. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1
U.S. Farmland as Percent of Land Area, by County, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Understanding the Numbers

** = statistically significant change*

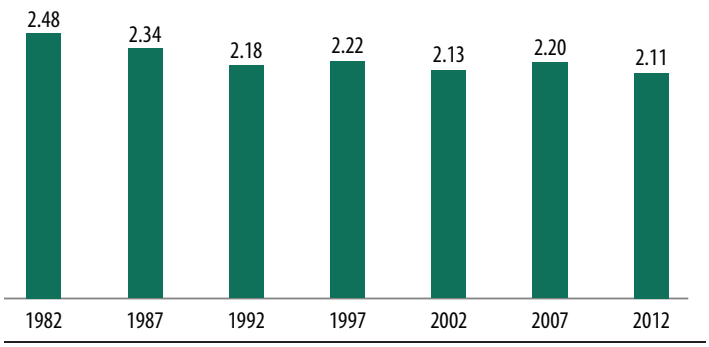
The 2012 Census of Agriculture contains a measure of relative reliability (the coefficient of variation) for every data item published. This Highlights document does not include these numbers, but shows through an asterisk (*) every number that is a statistically significant change from the 2007 Census to the 2012 Census (defined as two or more standard errors).

To learn more about statistical significance and census methodology, go to the frequently asked questions at www.agcensus.usda.gov.

Farms and Land

The United States had 2.1 million farms in 2012. This was 4 percent fewer than in 2007, continuing a long-term decline in the number of farms. (Fig. 2) During the same time, the amount of land in farms

Fig. 2
Number of U.S. Farms, 1982 - 2012
(millions)



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture and earlier census data.

United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

www.agcensus.usda.gov
(800)727-9540

changed little, declining from 922 million acres in 2007 to 915 million acres in 2012 (or 40.8 percent of U.S. land to 40.5 percent). The average size of U.S. farms in 2012 was 434 acres, 4 percent larger than five years earlier. (Table 1) Median farm size (that is, the point at which half the farms are larger and half are smaller) remained unchanged, at 80 acres.

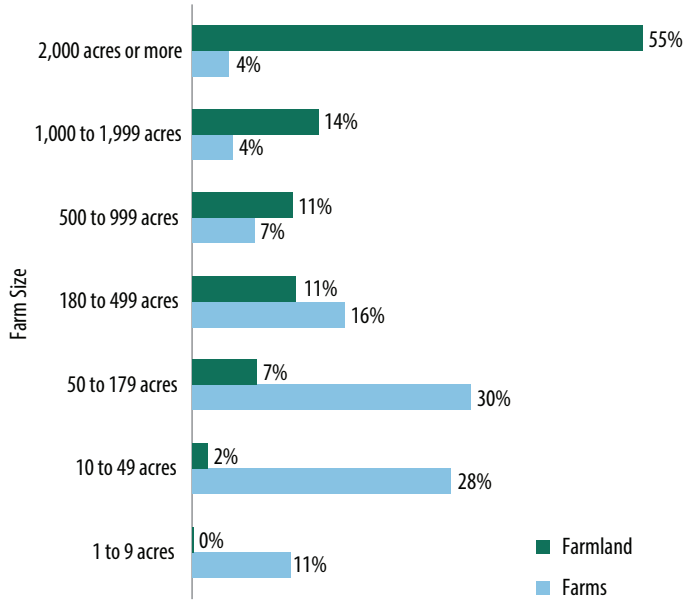
Table 1
U.S. Farms and Farmland, 2007 and 2012

	2007	2012	% change
Number of farms	2,204,792	2,109,303	-4.3*
Farmland (acres)	922,095,840	914,527,657	-0.8
Average farm size (acres)	418	434	+3.8*

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Between 2007 and 2012, the number of farms decreased in all size categories except the largest. Just over two thirds of farms had fewer than 180 acres in 2012, but the 4 percent of farms with 2,000 or more acres made up more than half (55 percent) of all farmland. (Fig. 3) Farm size varied by state; the average size of farms and ranches in the West was larger than for the United States overall.

Fig. 3
Share of Farms and Farmland, by Farm Size, 2012
(as percent of total)



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Land Use

Of the 915 million acres of land in farms in 2012, 45.4 percent was permanent pasture, 42.6 percent was cropland, and 8.4 percent was woodland. The remaining 3.6 percent was land in farmsteads, buildings, livestock facilities, etc. Although the amount of cropland overall was down 4 percent,the amount of cropland harvested was nearly 2 percent more in 2012 than 2007. (Table 2)

Table 2
Farmland by Use, 2007 and 2012

	2007 (millions of acres)	2012 (millions of acres)	% change
Total	922.1	914.5	-0.8
Permanent pasture	408.8	415.3	+1.6
Cropland	406.4	389.7	-4.1*
of which harvested	*309.6*	*315.0*	*+1.7*
Woodland	75.1	77.0	+2.5*
Other land	31.7	32.5	+2.4*

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

For the first time, corn grown for grain and soybeans together accounted for more than 50 percent of all cropland harvested (163.5 million acres). Of the principal crops harvested, soybeans (up 19 percent) and corn for silage (up 20 percent) had the largest percentage increases in acres from 2007 to 2012. Corn for grain and land in orchards also increased, while fewer acres were devoted to other crops such as forage, cotton, and vegetables. (Table 3)

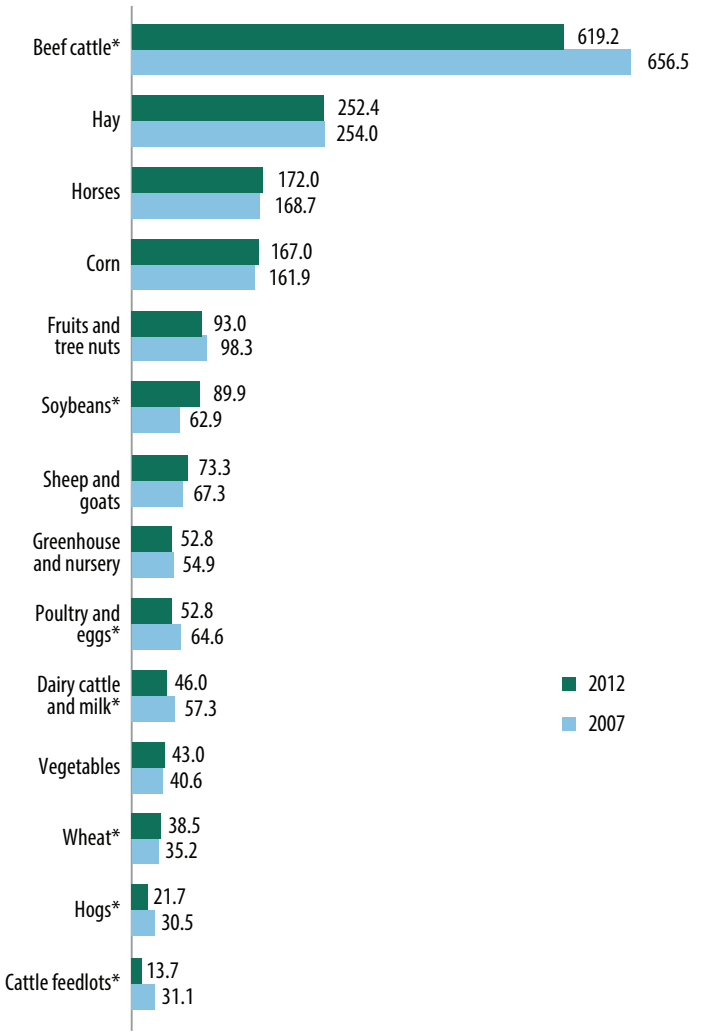
Table 3
Principal Crops Harvested, 2007 and 2012
(millions of acres)

	2007	2012	% change
Corn for grain	86.2	87.4	+1*
Soybeans	63.9	76.1	+19*
Forage	61.5	55.8	-9*
Winter wheat	35.8	34.7	-3*
Spring wheat	13.0	12.2	-6*
Cotton	10.5	9.4	-11*
Corn for silage	6.0	7.2	+20*
Orchard crops	5.0	5.2	+3
Sorghum for grain	6.8	5.1	-24*
Vegetables	4.7	4.5	-4*
Barley	3.5	3.3	-7*
Rice	2.8	2.7	-2
Durum wheat	2.1	2.1	0
Sunflower seed	2.0	1.9	-6*

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

It is also useful to look at changes in the number of farms by the commodities they specialize in. The number of farms specializing in horses, corn, soybeans, sheep and goats, vegetables, and wheat all increased. Poultry and egg farms and hog and pig farms showed the sharpest declines in number of farms. Beef cattle farming and ranching is the largest farm sector in value of sales and number of farms; more than 600,000 farms received most of their income in 2012 from producing cattle and calves. But the number of such operations declined 6 percent between 2007 and 2012. (Fig. 4)

Fig. 4
Farms by Commodity Specialization, Selected Commodities, 2007 and 2012
(thousands of farms)



"Commodity specialization" means more than half of a farm's sales came from that commodity.
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Land Ownership

The principal farm operator is the person making the day-to-day decisions for the farm or ranch operation, whether the person owns or rents the land they operate. Operators can be full owners (own all the land they farm), part owners (rent some farmland but own some as well), or tenants (rent all the land they farm). Only 25 percent of principal operators were part owners of their farms in 2012, but they controlled more than 50 percent of all farmland. Theirs were the largest farms, in terms of both acres operated and the value of agriculture sales. (Table 4)

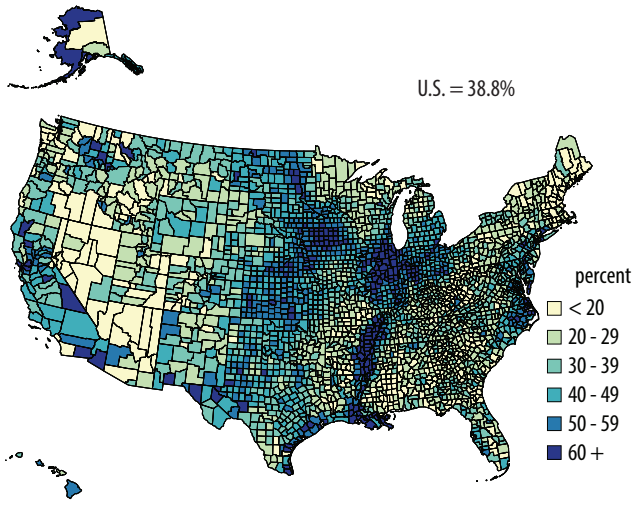
Table 4
Farm Ownership, 2012
(principal operator)

	% of Farms	% of Farmland	Average Size (acres)	Average Size (dollars)
Full owners	67.7	36.8	235	$98,984
Part owners	25.3	53.7	922	$393,577
Tenants	7.0	9.5	588	$293,858

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Nearly 40 percent of all farmland was rented/leased, but the proportion varied across the country. The Mississippi Delta region and the corn and soybean growing areas of the Midwest are among the places with high percentages of rented land. (Fig. 5). The states with the largest proportion of farmland rented from others are Alaska (76 percent), Illinois (60 percent), Delaware (53.5 percent), Indiana (53.4 percent), and Iowa (53.0).

Fig. 5
Percent of U.S. Farmland Rented or Leased, by County, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Snapshot of Farms and Land across the States

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

The decline in farms and farmland from 2007 to 2012 was not uniform across the country. The number of farms actually increased in sixteen states, and the amount of farmland increased in nineteen. The decrease in number of farms is particularly evident in the Southeast and Midwest. The modest decline in farmland is spread fairly evenly across the country.

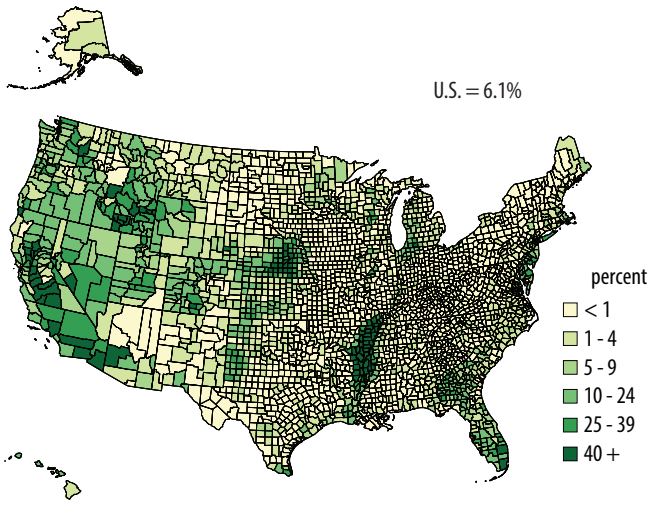
Top Ten States

. . . number of farms	. . . acres of farmland
Texas	Texas
Missouri	Montana
Iowa	Kansas
Oklahoma	Nebraska
California	South Dakota
Kentucky	New Mexico
Ohio	North Dakota
Illinois	Oklahoma
Minnesota	Colorado
Wisconsin	Iowa

Irrigated Farmland

In 2012, U.S. farmers irrigated 56 million acres, or 6 percent of all farmland. All states have some irrigated farmland, but irrigation is concentrated geographically and by crop. About 80 percent of all land in orchards, berries, and vegetables is irrigated. Other crops with more than 25 percent of total acres irrigated in 2012 include rice (100 percent), cotton (41 percent), alfalfa hay (35 percent), peanuts (32 percent), sugar beets (32 percent), dry edible beans (29 percent), and barley (26 percent).

Irrigated Acres as Percent of Farmland, by County, 2012



Farms Producing Energy

In 2012, more than 57,000 farms produced renewable energy for either the farm's direct use or for sale to others, more than double the number that did so in 2007. The most widely used systems were solar panels (36,331 farms), followed by geoexchange systems, wind turbines, biodiesel, and ethanol. Another 10,000 farms leased the wind rights on the land to others for energy production. The top states in farms producing renewable energy in 2012 were:

Number of Energy Farms		Energy Farms as % of Farms	
California	5,845	Hawaii	18%
Texas	4,824	Alaska	9%
Illinois	3,046	Vermont	9%
Iowa	2,463	California	8%
Indiana	2,397	Wyoming	7%

About the Census of Agriculture

The Census of Agriculture is the leading source of facts and figures about American agriculture. USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts the census once every five years, and conducted the 2012 Census of Agriculture in early 2013 based on 2012 end-of-year data.

The 2012 Census results are now available, providing information at national, state, and county levels about what agricultural products were raised in the United States in 2012, where, how, and by whom.

Census data are available in multiple formats to help all users, professional and casual, find and use exactly what they need. Available tools include:

- Quick Stats 2.0 – an online database to retrieve customized tables
- A new tutorial video – easy-to-follow instructions for Quick Stats
- An API for developers – In Quick Stats 2.0, click the "Developers" tab
- Desktop Data Query Tool – a downloadable desk top tool to analyze data without Internet access
- Agricultural Atlas – pattern and dot maps profiling many aspects of agriculture at the county level
- Infographics – fun, informative snippets of Census data and context
- Highlights – more documents like this one summarizing key facts on a topic

A link to census data is also available on USDA's open data portal, www.usda.gov/data.

www.agcensus.usda.gov