



# Family Farms

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**97 percent of U.S. farms are family owned.**

## 88 percent . . .

. . . of U.S. farms are small family farms.

Of the 2.1 million farms in the United States in 2012, 97 percent were family-owned operations. Eighty-eight percent of all farms were small family farms, with less than \$350,000 in gross cash farm income, and nearly 9 percent were midsize or large family farms. Only 3 percent of U.S. farms were not family owned, but they accounted for 16 percent of the value of all U.S. agricultural products sold. (Table 1)

Table 1  
Profile of U.S. Farms, by Type, 2012

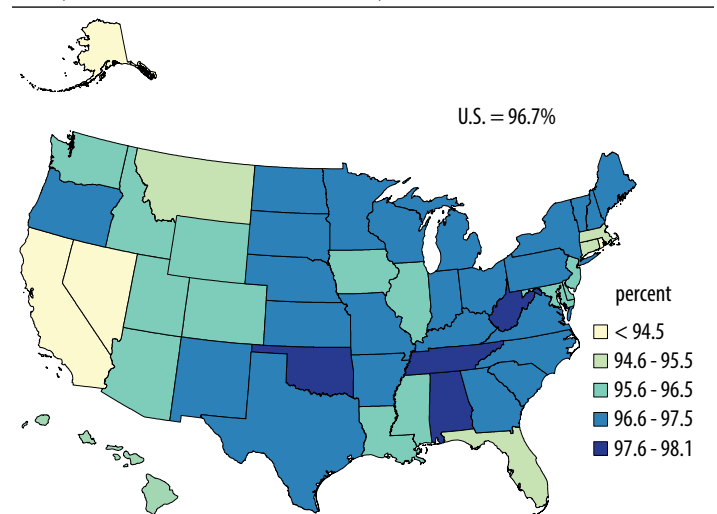
	U.S. Total	Family Farms			Nonfamily Farms
		Small	Midsize	Large <sup>a</sup>	
		percent of U.S. total			
No. of farms	2.1 million	88	6	3	3
Farmland	915 mil. acres	48	20	20	11
Value of land and buildings	\$2.3 trillion	47	20	25	8
Agriculture sales	\$394.6 billion	20	19	45	16

<sup>a</sup>Includes very large farms.

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Alabama have the highest concentrations of family farms. In each state, 98 percent of farms were family farms in 2012. The states with the lowest concentrations were Nevada (94), Rhode Island (94), California (93), and Alaska (92).

Fig. 1  
Family Farms as Percent of Total Farms, by State, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

## Farm Typology

The 2012 Census of Agriculture farm typology categorizes farms on the basis of ownership, whether farming is the principal operator's primary occupation, and gross cash farm income (GCFI), a measure of the total receipts the operator receives from the farming operation. For more information on farm typology, see <http://bit.ly/2012AgCensusTypology>.



## Small Family Farms

The 88 percent of U.S. farms that are small family farms operate almost half (48 percent) of all farmland and own 47 percent of the value of farm real estate (land and buildings). They accounted for 20 percent of agriculture sales and 5 percent of the country's net farm income in 2012. They held 40 percent of the U.S. cattle inventory and 89 percent of the horse inventory, and grew 64 percent of all acres in forage production. (Table 2)

The small family farms category includes four types of operations (see box on Farm Types). Farms whose principal operator has a primary occupation other than farming was the largest category of farms, accounting for 38 percent of all U.S. farms. The states with the highest proportion of such farms were Utah (46 percent), Oklahoma (45), Tennessee (44), Indiana (43), Kentucky (43), and Texas (43). This category of farms has a small net negative income in the aggregate. On average the farms have higher expenses than receipts. But all small farm categories, even those with aggregate negative net income, had a significant proportion of farms with positive returns in 2012.

### Farm Types

The 2012 Census of Agriculture farm typology report classifies all farms into unique categories based on three criteria: who owns the operation, whether farming is the principal operator's primary occupation, and gross cash farm income (GCFI). GCFI includes not just crop and livestock sales receipts, but also fees for delivering commodities under production contracts, government payments, and farm-related income.

**Small Family Farms (GCFI <\$350,000).** This category includes four subcategories:

- *Retirement.* Farms whose principal operator is retired but continues to farm on a small scale.
- *Primary occupation off-farm.* Farms whose principal operator has a primary occupation other than farming.
- *Primary occupation on-farm.* Farms whose principal operator's primary occupation is farming. These farms may be either *low-sales farms* (GCFI less than \$150,000) or *moderate-sales farms* (GCFI \$150,000 to \$349,000).

**Midsize Family Farms (GCFI \$350,000 to \$999,999).**

**Large-scale Family Farms (GCFI \$1 million or more).** This category includes two subcategories:

- *Large family farms.* GCFI is \$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999.
- *Very large family farms.* GCFI is \$5 million or more.

**Nonfamily Farms.** Principal operator and persons related to the operator do not own a majority of the business.

States with the largest shares of small family farms are West Virginia (97 percent), Tennessee (95), New Hampshire (95), Alabama (95), and Oklahoma (94). States with the smallest shares are South Dakota (74), Nebraska (74), Iowa (73), and North Dakota (71). (Fig. 2)

Table 2

**Small Family Farms: Selected Agriculture Assets and Receipts, 2012**  
(percent of U.S. total)

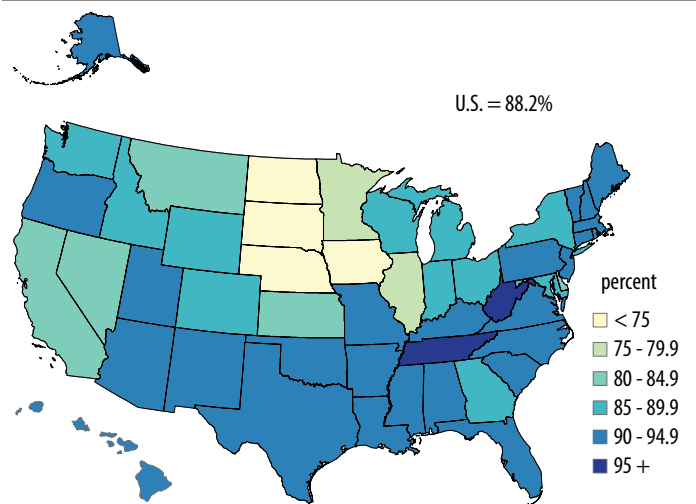
	All Small Family Farms	Retirement	Primary Occupation Off-farm	Primary Occupation On-farm	
				Low Sales	Moderate Sales
Number of farms	88	29	38	16	5
<b>Assets</b>					
Farmland	48	12	14	11	10
Value of land and buildings	47	13	16	10	8
Cattle inventory	40	10	12	10	9
Horse inventory	89	23	38	24	4
Forage acres	64	18	20	15	11
<b>Receipts</b>					
Agriculture sales	20	3	4	4	8
Organic sales	17	1	2	5	9
Direct-to-consumer sales	58	11	14	20	13
Government payments	44	13	13	8	10
Net farm income	5	0	-2	-1	7

*Subcategories may not add exactly to small family farm total due to rounding.*

*Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.*

Fig. 2

**Small Family Farms as Percent of Total Farms, by State, 2012**



*Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.*

## Top Commodities

More small family farms specialized in beef cattle than any other commodity; 32 percent had more than half of their sales come from beef. Beef was the top-ranking commodity for all subcategories of small farms except for moderate-sales farms; 45 percent of these farms specialized in oilseed and grain production. (Table 3)

Table 3  
**Small Family Farms: Top Commodities, 2012**  
(by commodity specialization<sup>a</sup>)

	All Small Family Farms	Retirement	Primary Occupation Off-farm	Primary Occupation On-farm	
				Low Sales	Moderate Sales
	percent of category				
Beef cattle	32	33	33	30	14
Combination crops <sup>b</sup>	25	31	26	18	8
Oilseeds and grains	14	9	12	17	45
Combination livestock <sup>b</sup>	12	11	13	13	2
Specialty crops	9	9	8	11	7
All other	8	7	8	11	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup>More than half of a farm's sales come from that commodity.

<sup>b</sup>Farms with no single majority commodity and farms specializing in miscellaneous commodities.  
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

## Producer Characteristics

Only 16 percent of small family farms depended upon the farm for the majority of their household income in 2012. However, in the moderate-sales group, 76 percent of operators did so, with 82 percent having positive net income from their farming operation. In the low-sales group, 31 percent depended upon the farm for the majority of household income; 44 percent had positive net income from the operation.

The youngest farmers were operators whose primary occupation is off the farm (average age of 52.8 years in 2012). The oldest are operators of retirement farms. At 69.3 years, their average age was eleven years more than the average for all U.S. principal operators (58.3 years). Retirement farms and

Retirement Farms: Top States (percent of farms)	
West Virginia	41
New Mexico	37
Mississippi	37
Alabama	37
Georgia	37
Tennessee	36
South Carolina	36
Texas	35
Florida	35
Oregon	35

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

low-sales farms had higher proportions of female principal operators (17 and 18 percent, respectively) than did all U.S. farms (14 percent). (Table 4)

Table 4  
**Small Family Farms: Key Characteristics of Principal Operators, 2012**  
(percent)

	All Small Family Farms	Retirement	Primary Occupation Off-farm	Primary Occupation On-farm	
				Low Sales	Moderate Sales
<b>Gender</b>					
Male / Female	85 / 15	83 / 17	87 / 13	82 / 18	96 / 4
<b>Worked off farm</b>					
Yes / No	64 / 36	32 / 68	95 / 5	56 / 44	35 / 65
<b>Years on present farm</b>					
<10 / 10+	23 / 77	14 / 86	30 / 70	27 / 73	15 / 85
<b>Internet access</b>					
Yes / No	68 / 32	59 / 41	75 / 25	67 / 33	72 / 28
<b>Positive income from farming</b>					
Yes / No	41 / 59	41 / 59	36 / 64	44 / 56	82 / 18
<b>50% or more of household income from farming</b>					
Yes / No	16 / 84	11 / 89	6 / 94	31 / 69	76 / 24
<b>Average age (years)</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>69.3</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>54.6</b>	<b>54.5</b>

Principal operator is the person responsible for the day-to-day operation of the farm.

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

## Midsize and Large Family Farms

Although midsize and large (including very large) family farms were fewer than 9 percent of all U.S. farms, they produced almost two thirds of agriculture sales. A midsize family farm has GCFI of \$350,000 to \$999,999; a large family farm has GCFI of \$1 million to \$4.9 million, and a very large family farm has GCFI of \$5 million or more (see box on p. 2)

Fewer than 6 percent of U.S. farms were midsize family farms, but this group accounted for 19 percent of all agriculture sales, 20 percent of farmland, 20 percent of the value of farm real estate, and 26 percent of

Large Family Farms: Top States <sup>a</sup> (percent of farms)	
North Dakota	11
Nebraska	8
South Dakota	7
Iowa	7
California	6

<sup>a</sup> Includes very large family farms.  
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

net farm income. Large and very large family farms together accounted for fewer than 3 percent of U.S. farms, but earned 56 percent of net farm income. (Table 5)

Table 5  
**Midsize and Large Family Farms: Selected Agriculture Assets and Receipts, 2012**  
(percent of U.S. total)

	Midsize	Large	Very Large
Number of farms	5.6	2.6	0.3
<b>Assets</b>			
Farmland	20	17	3
Value of land and buildings	20	20	4
<b>Receipts</b>			
Agriculture sales	19	26	19
Organic sales	13	21	28
Government payments	25	22	2
Net farm income	26	40	16

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

## Top Commodities

Fifty-eight percent of midsize family farms and 55 percent of large family farms specialized in oilseed and grain production in 2012, meaning more than half their farm's sales income came from production of these crops. Together, these two groups accounted for 70 percent of U.S. oilseed and grain sales.

Very large family farms differ in their commodity specialization from all other farms. One quarter of very large family farms specialized in dairy production in 2012, while another quarter produced specialty crops, which includes vegetables, fruits, berries, nuts, and greenhouse and nursery products. (Table 6)

Table 6  
**Midsize and Large Family Farms: Top Commodities, 2012**  
(by commodity specialization<sup>a</sup>)

	Midsize	Large	Very Large
	percent of category		
Oilseeds and grains	58	55	15
Beef cattle	10	7	6
Dairy	9	9	25
Combination crops <sup>b</sup>	8	8	6
Specialty crops	7	11	26
All other	8	10	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup>More than half of a farm's sales come from that commodity.

<sup>b</sup>Farms with no single majority commodity and farms specializing in miscellaneous commodities.

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

## Producer Characteristics

Operators of midsize and larger family farms are predominantly male; only 2 or 3 percent are women. Operators of these farms rely on the farming operation for the majority of household income, even though a substantial minority in each category still engages in off-farm employment. Most midsize and larger operators are experienced farmers, with ten plus years on their current farm in 2012. (Table 7)

Table 7  
**Midsize and Large Family Farms: Key Characteristics of Principal Operators**  
(percent)

	Midsize	Large	Very Large
<b>Gender</b>			
Male / Female	97 / 3	98 / 2	98 / 2
<b>Worked off farm</b>			
Yes / No	33 / 67	25 / 75	27 / 73
<b>Years on present farm</b>			
<10 / 10+	11 / 89	8 / 92	10 / 90
<b>Operator is a hired manager</b>			
Yes / No	7 / 83	12 / 88	27 / 73
<b>Internet access</b>			
Yes / No	83 / 17	91 / 9	95 / 5
<b>Positive income from farming</b>			
Yes / No	87 / 13	89 / 11	84 / 16
<b>50% or more of household income from farming</b>			
Yes / No	80 / 20	84 / 16	74 / 26
<b>Average age (years)</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>57.0</b>

Principal operator is the person responsible for the day-to-day operation of the farm.

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

To learn more about family farms, the 2012 Census of Agriculture, and how to access national state and county data, visit our website. Here you will also find additional resources on family farms, including maps featuring the various kinds of family farms, infographics, and more.

[www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov)