

Beef Cow Inventory and Herd Size

The Census reports that beef cow inventory in Virginia rose slightly from 1992-97. The inventory of 688,000 cows in 1997 represented a 2 percent increase from 1992 (Table 19). However, the number of Virginia farms with beef cows fell by 3 percent to 21,753. Most of the farms that disappeared from the Census were the smallest beef farms of 1-19 cows. Farms of the larger size brackets (50-99 and 100 plus) increased by 4 percent, while 927 of the smallest beef farms disappeared from the Census. The average number of cows on Virginia beef farms was 32 cows in 1997, up slightly from the average of 30 cows reported in 1992. As indicated in the table below, the largest 1,199 beef farms (those with 100 or more cows) had in inventory nearly 213,000 beef cows in early 1997, an average of 177 cows per farm. The 35 very largest beef farms (those with 500 or more cows) had nearly 26,000 cows, an average of 738 cows per farm. The two medium size groups (with 20 to 99 cows) comprise 42 percent of beef farms and have 54 percent of beef cows. At the small end of the size spectrum (1-19 cows), 11,200 farms or 52 percent of beef farms had 107,000 beef cows in inventory, only 16 percent of all Virginia beef cows. These small farms average only 10 cows per farm.

Size Group (Cows)	Number of Beef Farms (% of Virginia Farms)	Number of Beef Cows (% of Virginia Cows)
1-19	11,232 (52%)	107,125 (16%)
20-49	6,825 (31%)	205,442 (30%)
50-99	2,497 (11%)	163,230 (24%)
100+	1,199 (6%)	212,744 (30%)
Total	21,753	688,541

Central District had 5,347 beef cow farms in 1997, or 25 percent of all Virginia beef cow farms (Table 20). Central Virginia Planning District had 32 percent of all beef cow farms in the district. However, this district lost 128 beef cow farms from 1992-97, a decrease of 7 percent. Bedford County had the largest number of farms of any county in the district, but Bedford lost more than 9 percent of its beef cow farms from 1992-97, and 8 of those farms had 100 or more cows. Pittsylvania County was the second most important beef cow county, with 667 farms in 1997. Pittsylvania also lost smaller farms but increased farms with more than 100 cows. The third most important beef cow county in Central District was Franklin with 553 farms. Franklin County lost only 2 percent of its beef farms from 1992-97.

Extension District	Size Group				Total
	1-19 cows	20-49 cows	50-99 cows	100+ cows	
Central	2,653	1,748	660	286	5,347
Northeast	471	223	68	31	793
Northern	1,648	1,113	483	304	3,548
Northwest	2,139	1,453	547	285	4,424
Southeast	263	160	57	18	498
Southwest	4,058	2,128	682	275	7,143
Virginia	11,232	6,825	2,497	1,199	21,753

Northern District had only 16 percent of all Virginia beef cow farms in 1997 but had 25 percent of farms with more than 100 cows. Rappahannock-Rapidan Planning District alone had 14 percent of the state's largest beef cow farms, led by Fauquier and Loudon counties. These two counties had 8 percent of the largest beef farms in Virginia and increased their total number of beef farms from 1992-97. The Rappahannock-Rapidan Planning District had a very different distribution of beef cow inventory than the state. Only 15 percent of its beef farms had 1-19 cows, while 25 percent of farms had 100 or more cows.

Northwest District had 20 percent of Virginia beef cow farms in 1997. The size distribution of farms is similar to that of the state, but the district had 24 percent of Virginia farms with more than 100 cows. Central Shenandoah Planning District had 52 percent of beef cow farms in the district, with large numbers of such farms in Augusta (19 percent) and Rockingham (18 percent). Augusta County predominates in larger farms, having 28 percent the district's largest farms, an increase of 40 percent in farms with more than 100 cows since 1992.

Southwest District had a somewhat larger percentage of small beef farms (57 percent) and a somewhat smaller percentage of large beef farms (4 percent) than the state, but the district had fully one-third of all Virginia beef cow farms. The predominant planning district is Mount Rogers, with 42 percent of all district beef cow farms. Washington County had by far the most beef farms (922), followed by Scott (772), Lee (656), and Russell (654), but Wythe and Smyth counties had the largest number of farms with more than 100 cows (37 and 34, respectively).