

## Operator's Principal Occupation and Number of Days Worked Off Farm

Farm operators whose principal occupation is farming (as self-reported in the Census of Agriculture) have been in the minority since the 1978 Census (Table 28), and fell below 45 percent in 1997<sup>3</sup>. The number of full-time operators fell by 1,161 from 1992 (-6 percent), while the number of part-time operators rose by only 34 operators from 1992. From an historical perspective, the number of full-time Virginia farm operators has fallen by 24 percent since 1982, while the number of part-time operators has fallen by 18 percent. Planning districts that reported a majority of full-time farm operators in 1997 include Southside, Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, Central Shenandoah, Crater, Southeast Virginia, and Accomack-Northampton.

Census Year	Full-time Farm Operators		Operator Days Worked Off Farm	
	Number of Full-time Operators	Proportion of Total Operators (%)	No Days (%)	More than 200 Days (%)
1982	24,090	46.5	37.7	43.4
1987	20,617	46.0	38.7	43.4
1992	19,571	46.4	40.4	42.7
1997	18,410	44.8	39.7	42.7

No off-farm work was reported in 1997 by 39.7 percent of Virginia farm operators (15,297 of 38,512 responses). This proportion has remained relatively stable from 1982-97. The proportion of farm operators reporting more than 200 days worked off farm (42.7 percent) has also been quite stable throughout the period 1982-97. Across the state, relatively few operators report off farm work of less than 200 days. These overall figures indicate a fairly stable off-farm employment pattern for farm operators but do not give any indication of employment patterns within the operator's household.

Central Extension District had a slightly higher than state average proportion of full-time farmers in 1997 (Table 29). The proportion of farms with full-time operators fell by 3 percent between 1992-97, while the total number of farms fell by 3.2 percent. Farms with full-time operators in Central District declined by 427 from 1992-97. Central Virginia and Southside Planning Districts, however, differ markedly from the extension district. Central Virginia averages only 40.5 percent full-time farm operators. As a proportion of total operators, full-time farmers are particularly scarce in Amherst, Appomattox, and Bedford counties. Southside has 52.5 percent full-time farmers, a proportion maintained at that time by relatively good incomes from tobacco production.

<sup>3</sup> Operators reporting their principal occupation as 'farming' will be called 'full-time operators,' while those reporting another principal occupation will be called 'part-time operators.'

Extension District	Full-time Farm Operators		Operator Days Worked Off Farm	
	Number of Full-time Operators	Proportion of Total Operators (%)	Number of Days (%)	More than 200 Days (%)
Central	4,258	46.1	41.6	41.4
Northeast	1,202	47.0	42.9	39.8
Northern	2,959	43.8	37.9	42.1
Northwest	3,845	47.9	40.0	41.5
Southeast	1,369	59.0	52.5	32.2
Southwest	4,777	39.2	36.1	47.3
Virginia	18,410	44.8	39.7	42.7

Approximately equal proportions of Central District operators reported no work off farm and greater than 200 days off-farm work (41.6 percent and 41.4 percent, respectively). Southside Planning District had a much higher than average proportion of operators reporting no off-farm work (47.2 percent), while Central Virginia reported a much lower than average proportion (37.8 percent).

Northeast District had a higher proportion of full-time operators than the state average, and that proportion has been stable over the past few Censuses. The Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula Planning Districts had a majority of full-time operators (rising above 60 percent in some counties and often higher than in 1992), while the more urbanized Richmond Regional and Peninsula Planning Districts were well below the state average. Overall, 42.9 percent of Northeast District operators reported no off-farm work, while 39.8 percent reported more than 200 days worked off farm, a mirror image of the state average. The Northern Neck Planning District exhibited a much higher than average proportion of operators reporting no work off farm (49.5 percent), and a lower proportion of operators reporting more than 200 days worked off farm (37.6 percent).

Northern District had a slightly lower than state average proportion of full-time farm operators, and planning district proportions varied only between 39.7 percent (Northern Virginia) and 46.2 percent (Rappahannock-Rapidan). No county had a majority of full-time farm operators, and Loudon County had the lowest proportion of full-time operators in the district (38.3 percent). Given the availability of off-farm work and the high capital costs of farming in the Northern District, it is not surprising that only 37.9 percent of operators reported no work off farm. However, the proportion of operators working more than 200 days of farm was no higher than the state average. A relatively high 40.0 percent of Rappahanock-Rapidan Planning District operators reported no work off farm, and only 39.7 percent reported working more than 200 days off the farm. Not surprisingly, a low 33.4 percent of Northern Virginia Planning District farm operators reported no work off farm, and a high proportion (46.7 percent) reported working 200 days or more off the farm.

Since Northwest District produces 37 percent of all Virginia agricultural product sales, its number and proportion of full-time farm operators is particularly important. Overall, the district had a higher than state average proportion of full-time farm operators (47.9 percent), but the proportion fell somewhat since 1992. Fifth Planning District was considerably below the state average because Alleghany County is one of only three Virginia counties with less than 30 percent full-time farm operators. Lord Fairfax Planning District was slightly above the state average, and Central Shenandoah proportions were all above the state average except for Rockbridge County. Rockingham County's proportion of full-time farmers fell slightly from 1992, but remained well above 50 percent. In terms of days worked off farm, Northwest District exhibits a similar pattern to that of the state as a whole.

Southeast District is very different from the rest of Virginia in terms of the proportion of full-time farm operators. Full-time farm operators make up 59 percent of all operators, and the proportion has fallen little since 1992. Full-time farm operators make up 53-61 percent of all operators across the three planning districts. Excepting Dinwiddie, Prince George, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach, all counties have more than 60 percent full-time operators. Only the former two counties exhibit percentages less than the state average. Although the district suffered the loss of 194 farms from 1992-97, it is not clear that full-time farmers were disproportionate among those farms that ceased operation. The two principal counties that lost farms were Suffolk (-50 farms) and Southampton (-52 farms). The former county lost primarily part-time operators, while the latter lost primarily full-time operators. In terms of days worked off farm by the operator, Southeast District is also very different from the rest of Virginia. A very high 52.5 percent of farm operators reported working no days off farm, and only 32.2 percent reported working 200 or more days off the farm. The unusual proportions are similar across most non-urbanized counties. At the extreme, 56.5 percent of operators in Accomack-Northampton reported no work off farm, and only 26.6 percent reported working 200 or more days off farm.

Southwest District has the lowest proportion of full-time farm operators of any extension district, and the proportion of full-time operators is falling more rapidly than in other extension districts. However, the number of full-time farms is higher than any other extension district. In terms of the proportion of full-time farm operators, no planning district proportion approaches the state average, and Lenowisco and Mount Rogers planning districts have less than 40 percent full-time operators. Among the district's 17 counties, only one county (Bland) exceeds the state average proportion of full-time operators. Eleven counties have less than 40 percent full-time operators, and two counties (Buchanan and Dickenson) have fewer than 30 percent full-time operators. Buchanan County suffered the most dramatic decline in the state in the proportion of full-time operators between 1992-97. Southwest District also has the lowest proportion of operators reporting no work off farm of any extension district (36.1 percent), and the highest proportion of operators reporting more than 200 days worked off the farm (47.3 percent). The pattern is similar across most planning districts and counties in the district.