

Operators by Tenure Arrangement

Responding to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, 62.4 percent of Virginia farm operators responded that they own all of the land that they farm (Table 30). Although the proportion of full-owner operators among Virginia farms has fallen only 2 percent since 1987, the number of full-owner farms fell by 848 farms from 1992-97 (equal to 75 percent of all Virginia farms lost), and the trend is moving slowly against full-owner farms. Full owners controlled 40 percent of Virginia farmland in 1997. The average size of farm for full-owner operators in 1997 was 130 acres, considerably less than the overall state average farm size (200 acres), and the average size of full-owner farms was virtually identical to 1992.

Extension District	Full-owner (%)	Part-owner (%)	Tenant (%)
Central	60.4	33.5	6.1
Northeast	53.7	38.3	8.1
Northern	66.3	26.6	7.1
Northwest	62.9	30.2	6.9
Southeast	46.2	37.5	16.3
Southwest	66.3	27.2	6.5
Virginia	62.4	30.3	7.3

Three of every ten Virginia farm operators are part-owners who rent or lease some of their farmland. Farms operated by part-owners are considerably larger than full-owner farms, averaging 346 acres between owned (46.6 percent of farmland) and rented/leased land (53.4 percent of farmland). From 1987-97, the average size of part-owner farms has risen from 335 to 346 acres, and the proportion of land owned by part-owners has fallen from 50 percent to 47 percent. The trend is clearly towards more part-owner farms, of larger size, and relying more on rented/leased land.

Farmers who rent/lease all their land, classified in the Census as tenants, include only 7 of every 100 Virginia farm operators. The average farm size of 197 acres is nearly equal to the state average, and the average farm size has risen by 30 acres since the 1987 Agricultural Census. The proportion of tenants among Virginia operators has not changed from 1987-97.

Farmland rented from others, whether from other farmers or non-farmers, has become a much larger proportion of total farmland. The proportion of all land on Virginia farms that is rented/leased from others has risen from 30.9 percent in 1987 to 35.1 percent in 1997.

Across extension districts, Northern and Southwest Districts have a somewhat higher proportion of full ownership than other districts. More distinct from the state average are low full-ownership percentages and high part-owner percentages in Northeast and Southeast Districts. These two districts, which together produce 1/2 to 2/3 of Virginia corn, soybeans, and wheat, are characterized by large acreages and, typically, by reliance on renting from non-farmer landowners. In Southeast, reliance on renting is present to the extent that one in six farm operators owns none of the farmland he or she manages.