

State Census Summary

The number of Virginia farms declined from 42,222 to 41,095 over the period 1992-97. Although the decrease in farms was only 1,127 farms (-2.7 percent), this amounts to about 225 farms per year. This percentage decrease in the number of farms was the smallest recorded in the past three Censuses of Agriculture. Although the rate of decline of the number of Virginia farms from 1992-97 was slower than in previous periods, it should be noted that there are 10,764 fewer Virginia farms than in 1982. With respect to the number of farms by category of sales, the number of small-sized farms was down marginally, mid-sized farms were down dramatically, and larger farms were up marginally. In 1997, there were 4,121 Virginia farms in Virginia with sales over \$100,000, which is likely to be the smallest farm that can produce a significant proportion of family income. The 24,956 farms with sales less than \$10,000 are unlikely to contribute more than a few thousand dollars net returns to the family income.

Over all agricultural commodities, the market value of agricultural products sold in 1997 was \$2.34 billion. Virginia agricultural product sales were 14 percent greater in 1997 than in 1992 in nominal terms. However, farm production expenses were 13 percent higher, indicating no significant improvement in the farm economic situation from 1992. The average value of crop sales per producing farm was approximately \$42,750 in 1997, while sales per farm producing livestock, poultry, and products was \$53,650. Crop sales per producing farm were 25 percent greater in 1997 than in 1992, while livestock sales per producing farm were 18 percent greater.

Approximately 8.25 million acres are in agricultural land use in Virginia. The 1997 Census of Agriculture indicates that 33 percent of the land acreage by county was in agricultural use. This percentage of agricultural land use varies from 2 percent for a coal county such as Buchanan and 3 percent for a metropolitan county such as York, to over 50 percent for agricultural counties such as Fauquier and Clark. Total Virginia farm acreage decreased by nearly 69,000 acres or 1 percent from 1992-97, and by 5 percent since 1987. Although the rate of decline is small, this figure indicates that approximately 14,000 acres per year have left agricultural land use in Virginia between the last two Census periods. Since the number of farms decreased by 1,100 between 1992 and 1997, the question arises whether different size farms decreased acreage or increased acres. Examining five acreage categories shows that number of farms decreased in all size categories. Decreases in the number of farms were largest amongst the smallest farm size groups (1-49 acres and 50-179 acres). The loss of nearly 600 small farms of 1-49 acres is equal to nearly one-half the net loss of all Virginia farms. The loss of small farms, particularly in the 1-49 acre category, may be principally attributable to the loss of small tobacco farms in southern Virginia. On the other hand, the number of farms with greater than 1,000 acres decreased by only 24 farms (-2 percent) in the period 1992-97. On Virginia farms in 1997, there were 4.3 million cropland acres, a slight increase of 10,500 acres (0.2 percent) from 1992. Acres used for pasture were 3.2 million acres (-3 percent), and acres used for hay were 2.5 million acres (-3.3 percent).

There are approximately 5,200 farms in Virginia that produce some grains; 5,900 that produce tobacco; 1,000 that produce vegetables and melons; 700 that produce fruits, nuts, and berries; 1,700 that produce nursery and greenhouse products; 26,000 that produce beef cattle; 1,300 that

produce dairy products; 1,800 that produce poultry and eggs; and 800 that produce hogs. These are farms that produce the product in some quantity or other. From 1992-97, there was a 20 percent decrease (1,300 farms) in the number of farms producing cash grains. The number of tobacco farms fell by 30 percent (2,500 farms), the number of farms producing vegetables or melons fell by 17 percent (200 farms), and the number of farms producing fruits and nuts fell by 23 percent (200 farms). In contrast, the number of farms producing cotton increased by more than 200 percent (298 farms). The number of nursery and greenhouse farms rose by 64 percent (650 farms) from 1992-97. The number of beef cattle farms remained steady from 1992-97. The number of dairy farms fell by 24 percent (400 farms) between the two Census years. The number of poultry farms remained steady from 1992-97. The number of farms producing hogs fell by nearly one-half (800 farms).

Virginia soybeans were ranked first in 1997 in terms of acreage harvested (fourth in terms of value of production). However, the number of harvested soybean acres decreased by nearly 21,000 (4 percent) over the period 1992-97. The number of corn acres, ranked second in terms of crop acres harvested in 1997 (third in terms of value of production), decreased by 43,000 acres (12 percent). Wheat was ranked third in terms of crop acres harvested in 1997 (fifth in terms of value of production), and harvested wheat acres increased by 16,000 (6 percent) over 1992. Tobacco was the number one crop in terms of value of production in 1997. Approximately 54,000 Virginia crop acres were devoted to tobacco in 1997, representing a decline of nearly 1,400 acres (2.5 percent). Hay was ranked eighteenth in terms of harvested acres in 1997 (second in terms of value of production), representing an increase of nearly 88,000 acres (8 percent) over 1992.

Total Virginia crop sales were slightly over \$780 million, comprising 36 percent of 1997 agricultural sales. Of the top nine commodity groups (comprising together 87 percent of all crop sales), only tobacco and nursery/greenhouse account for more than 20 percent of crop sales. Tobacco was the number one commodity in terms of sales (\$187 million, or 24 percent of all crop sales). Even though tobacco accounts for nearly one-fourth of all crop sales, its sales made up only 8 percent of Virginia 1997 agricultural sales. Nursery and greenhouse crops constitute 21 percent of all crop sales (\$166 million), and grew at a rapid pace from 1992-97. Sales were 66 percent higher in 1997 compared to 1992, and the number of farms producing nursery and greenhouse crops was 64 percent higher. These figures indicate the growing importance of this sector of the Virginia agricultural economy.

The total number of farms with beef cows in Virginia decreased by 3 percent from 1992-97 (794 farms), but total beef cow inventory rose by 2 percent. The average size of beef cow herd per farm in Virginia is still very small: only 32 cows per farm. Small beef cow operations (1-19 cows) made up most of the beef cow farm losses (927 farms). The number of farms in the larger herd groups (50-99 cows and over 100 cows) each went up by 4 percent. In 1997, 52 percent of beef cow farms had 1-19 cows, with such beef herds accounting for only 16 percent of total Virginia beef cows. At the other extreme, beef cow herds of more than 100 cows accounted for 30 percent of Virginia beef cows, but made up only 6 percent of beef cow farms.

In 1997, 1,671 farms in Virginia had one or more milk cows. This represented a decline of 29 percent in the number of farms with milk cows from 1992. Although all size categories suffered declines in farm numbers, the most dramatic decrease in number of farms was observed in farms with 1-19 milk cows (-45 percent). The number of farms with 20-49 cows decreased by 24 percent, and the number of farms with 50-99 cows decreased by 25 percent. The number of farms with 100 or more milk cows decreased by 9 percent from 1992-97.

The proportion of total agricultural product sales from livestock has not changed dramatically in the past ten years, averaging approximately two-thirds of all agricultural sales. Total sales of livestock products were 15 percent greater in 1997 than in 1992. However, across the principal livestock commodities, only poultry and hog sales were higher in 1997 than in 1992. Poultry sales exceeded \$716 million, 33 percent higher than in 1992. Although hog sales were only 5 percent of total livestock sales in 1997, such sales did increase by 17 percent from 1992-97. Dairy product sales decreased by 6 percent from 1992-97, cattle sales declined by 1 percent, and sheep sales plummeted by 24 percent. Over all, poultry sales were 49 percent of total livestock sales; sales of dairy products were 17 percent; cattle sales were 25 percent; hogs were 5 percent; and sheep sales were only 0.3 percent. Other livestock specialties, such as sales of bees and honey, aquaculture, and others, were \$59 million in 1997.

Farms with sales of more than \$10,000 market 96 percent of all Virginia's agricultural products. Such farmers in the Agricultural Census were asked to report the value of their machinery and equipment, plus the value of their land and buildings. Adjusted for inflation, the value of machinery and equipment per acre, and the value of land per acre changed little between 1992 and 1997. The average value of machinery and equipment per farm was approximately \$70,000, while the market value of land and buildings per farm was \$650,000. On average, Virginia farmers valued their land and buildings at nearly \$1,800 per acre. The 16,139 Virginia farms with sales over \$10,000 averaged approximately \$111,400 in production expenses and \$139,800 in sales, leaving \$28,400 per farm for depreciation expense, taxes, new investment, and profit for the farm family.

The number of operators reporting farming as their principal occupation fell by 1,161 from 1992-97 compared with a slight growth of 34 operators reporting farming as secondary occupation. The proportion of all operators reporting farming as their principal occupation fell to less than 45 percent in 1997, after holding at or above 46 percent since 1982. Another measure of operator activity on and off the farm is reflected in the Census data reporting operator days working off the farm. Overall, more than 15,000 Virginia farm operators reported working no days off the farm in 1997. At the other end of the spectrum, more than 16,000 operators reported working 200 or more days off the farm. Only 18 percent of operators responding to the Census question concerning days worked off the farm reported working between 1 and 199 days. These proportions have changed little since the 1992 Census.

The proportion of farms by tenancy arrangement changed little between 1992 and 1997. Overall, 62 percent of operators own all of the land that they farm, 30 percent of operators own part of the land that they farm, and 7 percent are tenants.

The average age of Virginia farm operators increased from 55.6 years to 56.4 years over the last two Census periods. Only 5.7 percent of operators (2,325 operators) were under 35 years of age in 1997, down from 7.5 percent in 1992. In 1997, 42 percent of Virginia farm operators were 60 years or older. The number of operators over 70 years old increased by 3 percent to 8,216 individuals in 1997. Based on age statistics, it can be expected that more than 17,000 farm operators are likely to leave agriculture within the next 15 years.

The proportion of Virginia farms operated by females continues to increase, from 8.5 percent in 1987, to 10 percent in 1992, and to 10.8 percent in 1997. Female-operated farms are smaller than the average Virginia farm (129 acres vs. 200 acres).

Operators who are ethnic or racial minorities operate 3.6 percent of Virginia farms. Farms operated by African Americans make up the largest proportion of such farms (2.7 percent of all Virginia farms, and 2.1 percent of farms with more than \$10,000 in sales). The number of farms operated by African Americans fell 13.2 percent (171 farms) between 1992 and 1997. Farms operated by Native Americans fell 19.6 percent (5 farms). Farms operated by Asian/Pacific Islanders rose 59.2 percent (16 farms), while farms operated by Hispanics rose 53.2 percent (81 farms). It is difficult to ascertain where farms that are operated by racial or ethnic minorities are located because of the non-disclosure rules of the Census. Nevertheless, it is likely that more than one-half of all African-American farms and more than one-quarter of all Hispanic farms are located in Central Extension District. The other extension districts with substantial numbers of operators include Southeast District (African-American operators) and Southwest District (Hispanic operators).