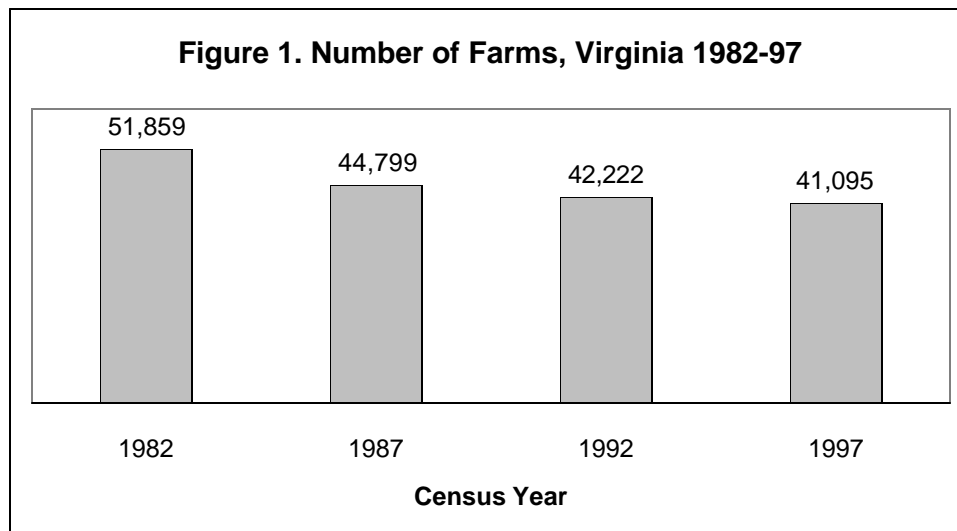


Farm Numbers

The 1997 Census of Agriculture indicates that Virginia had 41,095 farms, a decline of 1,127 farms (2.7 percent) from the 1992 Census. The decline is smaller in relative and absolute terms than any Census since 1982. From 1982 to 1997 (Figure 1), Virginia lost on average more than 700 farms per year. However, from 1992-97, the Commonwealth lost only somewhat more than 200 farms per year. Although farm losses are not large in historical terms, the relative loss of farms still exceeded the U.S. average percentage decline. U.S. farm numbers declined by only 13,441 farms (0.7 percent) from 1992-97.



Changes in farm numbers by county varied widely across the state (Figure 2). In general, counties in the Southwest, Southside, and Southeast regions suffered the highest relative losses of farms. Consolidation or disappearance of small farm operations, primarily tobacco farms, was the principal cause of farm losses in Southwest and Southside. Farm losses in Southeast and other counties along the I-95 Corridor were likely to be associated with the impacts of rapid urbanization in these areas. Counties which suffered 10 percent or more loss in farms included many that are among Virginia's highest-ranking counties in terms of value of agricultural production. Southampton (fifth), Pittsylvania (sixth), and Washington (eighth) are among this group.

Figure 2. Percent Change in Number of Farms, Virginia 1992-97

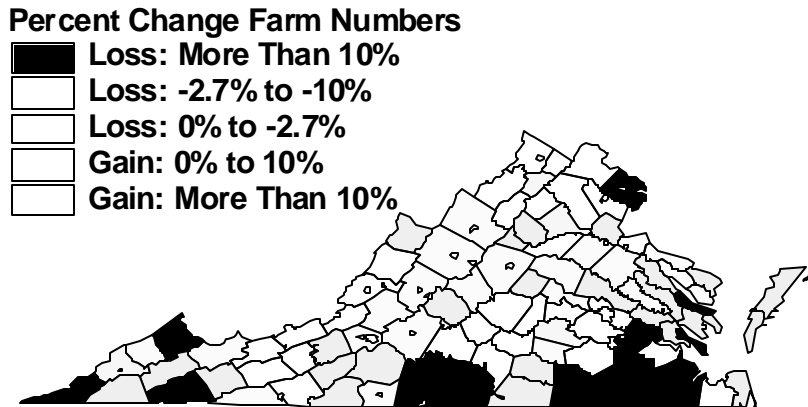


Table 2 shows the number and relative change in farm numbers by extension district. Central and Northeast Districts lost farms at a rate approximately equal to the state average. Northwest District, which produces a large proportion of the state's agricultural products, was relatively unchanged. Northern District shows a small increase of 139 farms (2.1 percent). The districts experiencing greatest losses were Southwest and Southeast. The former district lost farms at more than twice the state average and accounted for more than two-thirds of net farm losses. Washington County in Southwest lost 242 farms, more than any other county. Although losses in Southeast District were only 192 farms, Southeast farms are generally much larger than the average Virginia farm, and agriculture represents a critical non-urban land use for the region. The average size of Southeast farms increased dramatically between 1992-97. For example, the average Southampton farm increased from 542 acres to 670 acres in only five years.

Extension District	Farms 1997	Change 1992-97 (percent)
Central	9,244	-3.2
Northeast	2,559	-3.0
Northern	6,759	2.1
Northwest	8,024	0.8
Southeast	2,320	-7.7
Southwest	12,189	-5.8
Virginia	41,095	-2.7

Table 3 shows the number and relative change in farm numbers by planning district. Among planning districts that increased farms are Piedmont (PD14), Northern Virginia (PD8), Rappahannock-Rapidan (PD9) and Lord Fairfax (PD7). Relatively large losses in farm numbers can be observed in Peninsula (PD21), Southeastern Virginia (PD20), Lenowisco (PD1), and Southside (PD13). In general, farm number changes by planning district follow the same pattern as observed by extension district: the Southwest, Southside, and Southeast regions of Virginia lost relatively more farms than other regions.

Planning District	Farms 1997	Change 1992-97 (%)
Central Virginia	2,578	-1.2
West Piedmont	2,949	-6.9
Southside	1,838	-9.2
Piedmont	2,415	4.8
Richmond Regional	1,374	-1.9
Northern Neck	491	0.8
Middle Peninsula	597	-5.8
Peninsula	97	-16.4
Northern Virginia	1,415	4.5
Rappahannock-Rapidan	2,672	4.1
Thomas Jefferson	1,943	-1.3
Radco	729	-0.3
Fifth	1,114	0.9
Central Shenandoah	4,376	-1.4
Lord Fairfax	2,534	4.9
Crater	867	-5.7
Southeastern Virginia	1,033	-10.5
Accomack-Northampton	420	-4.8
Lenowisco	2,643	-10.4
Cumberland Plateau	1,686	-6.5
Mount Rogers	5,365	-4.9
New River Valley	1,959	-1.7