

Number of Farms by Acreage Group

The average size of Virginia's 41,095 farms was 200 acres in 1997, virtually unchanged from 1992 (Table 6). Overall, farmland acres decreased by 68,785 acres (-1 percent) from 1992-97, and by 448,110 acres (-5 percent) from 1987-97. The table shows the number and percentage of farms by five acreage groups: 1-49 acres, 50-179 acres, 180-499 acres, 500-999 acres, and greater than 1,000 acres. The number of farms decreased in every acreage group. In terms of absolute farm losses, most farms that disappeared were in the two smallest acreage groups. Among very small farms of 1-49 acres, 493 farms either grew larger or disappeared.

In Central District, farms of 1,000 acres or more increased by 7 percent (17 farms), while farm numbers in all other acreage groups decreased. There was a sizable percentage increase in the largest farms in Amherst, Franklin, Henry, Buckingham, Charlotte, and Nottoway counties. There were sizable decreases in farms of the smallest two acreage groups in Pennsylvania, Henry, Brunswick, Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Nottoway, representing primarily the loss of small tobacco farms.

Farm numbers changed very little in Northeast District except for the smallest acreage group, which fell by 7 percent (64 farms). The largest proportional losses of small farms occurred in the Middle Peninsula Planning District and in York County.

In Northern District, the change in farm numbers across acreage groups was very different from the state pattern. High land values and urban pressures have caused downsizing and disappearance of large Northern Virginia farms. Farms of the two largest acreage groups fell by 7 percent and 9 percent, respectively. On the other hand, the number of small farms increased by 7 percent. This pattern is very similar across all planning districts within Northern District. With respect to the smallest acreage group, Loudon (550 farms), Fauquier (337 farms), and Albemarle (227 farms) had 47 percent of the district's smallest farms. Loudon (34 farms), Fauquier (42 farms), and Albemarle (28 farms) also have 42 percent of the district's largest farms.

In Northwest District, there has been very little change in the number of farms by acreage group. The largest group decreased by 5 farms, and the smallest group increased by 40 farms.

In Southeast District, middle-sized farms (180-499 acres) decreased by relatively large proportions, while the number of farms of the largest acreage category group increased. There is evidence of consolidation of farms in Southeast District, as the number of farms of the largest acreage group increased by only 13 farms, while the number of farms disappearing in the three middle acreage groups was much larger. As noted earlier, the average size of most Southeast farms increased dramatically from 1992-97.

There was a large proportionate decrease in farms of the smallest acreage group in Southwest District (541 farms, -12 percent). This decrease in number of farms in the smallest acreage group is equivalent to 48 percent of all farm losses in Virginia from 1992-97. Farms in the largest acreage group decreased by 9 percent, and farms of this acreage group decreased in 10 of the Southwest District's 18 counties.

Extension District	1-49 Acres (% Change)	50-179 Acres (% Change)	180-499 Acres (% Change)	500-999 Acres (% Change)	1000+ Acres (% Change)
Central	1,995 -4.5	3,973 -3%	2,357 -4%	660 -1.3%	259 +6.6%
Northeast	881 -15.9%	853 +0.1%	460 -2.7%	199 +1%	166 -2.4%
Northern	2,383 +6.9%	2,395 +1.4%	1,331 +0.6%	403 -6.9%	247 -9.2%
Northwest	2,695 +1.5%	3,089 -0.7%	1,645 +2.9%	443 +2.8%	152 -5.6%
Southeast	719 -1.1%	618 -9.9%	449 -11.4%	271 -21.2%	263 +5.2%
Southwest	4,474 -11.8%	5,010 -3.4%	2,051 -0.7%	493 +11.3%	161 -8.5%
Virginia	13,147 -4.2%	15,938 -2.2%	8,293 -1.5%	2,469 -1.9%	1,248 -1.9%