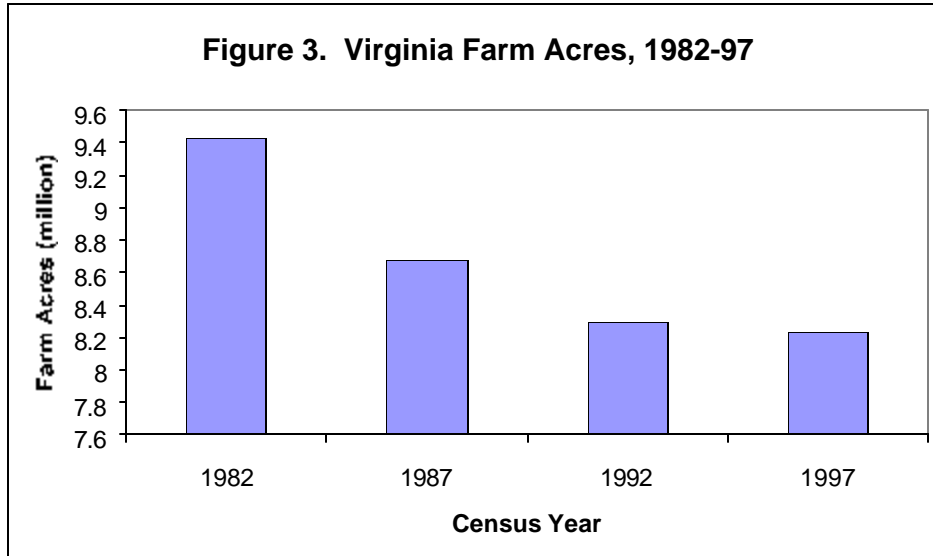


Virginia Farm Acreage

Virginia farm acreage decreased by 68,785 acres (-1 percent) from 1992-97, a slower rate of decline than for other census years. Figure 3 shows acres across all land uses on Virginia farms from 1982 to 1997. Although the rate of decline is down substantially from 1982-87 (-8 percent) and 1987-92 (-4 percent), approximately 14,000 acres per year left agricultural land uses from 1992-97. The Census of Agriculture, unfortunately, gives no clues as to the new land use of acreage leaving agriculture.



Across extension districts and their constituent planning districts, the change in farm acreage varies considerably. Table 7 shows 1997 farm acreage by extension district and the percentage change in acreage since 1992. Central, Northeast, and Southwest Districts lost farm acreage at about the same pace as the state average. Southeast District had a smaller percentage drop than the state average, but Northwest District stood alone in increasing farm acreage by 0.7 percent (slightly over 9,000 acres). Northern District lost 47,412 acres (-3.2 percent), by far the largest absolute and proportionate loss.

| Table 7. Farm Acreage by Extension District and Percent Change 1992-97 | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Extension District | 1997 (Acres) | Change 1992-97 (%) |
| Central | 2,019,675 | -0.6 |
| Northeast | 634,638 | -0.7 |
| Northern | 1,435,295 | -3.2 |
| Northwest | 1,407,027 | 0.7 |
| Southeast | 908,249 | -0.3 |
| Southwest | 3,745,260 | -0.7 |
| Virginia | 8,228,226 | -0.8 |

Table 8 shows the same information broken out by planning district. The four PDs making up the Northern District (Northern Virginia, Rappahanock-Rapidan, Thomas Jefferson, and Radco) each lost at least 5,000 acres from farm use. Thomas Jefferson PD lost 21,000 acres from farm use. Within that PD, Albemarle County alone lost more than 16,000 acres (-8.7 percent), equivalent to 24 percent of the total state acreage lost from agricultural land use. Loudon County, in the Northern Virginia PD, lost about 10,500 acres (-5.4 percent), or 2,100 acres per year from 1992-97. Other PDs with unusually large percentage losses include West Piedmont (-7.4 percent), Peninsula (-9.1 percent), and Cumberland Plateau (-4.9 percent). In the West Piedmont Planning District, Pittsylvania County lost 30,185 farm acres (10.2 percent). The City of Virginia Beach in the Southeastern Virginia PD lost more than 13,000 farm acres (-30.9 percent) of farm acres. Washington County in the Mount Rogers PD lost over 11,500 farm acres (-6.1 percent), equivalent to 58 average-sized farms in that county.

Some planning districts and counties increased farm acreage by a significant proportion. Piedmont PD gained 37,618 acres (+7.1 percent), Loudon County gained 15,121 acres (+3.8 percent), and Accomack-Northampton gained 4,850 acres (+3.4 percent). Among counties with unusually large increases in farm acreage, Charlotte (Piedmont PD) gained 18,643 acres (+16.5 percent), and Bath (Central Shenandoah PD) gained 11,261 acres (+24 percent). As noted at the beginning of this article, the Census does not indicate either the prior use of county land now occupied in agricultural uses, nor does it indicate the fate of land lost from Virginia farms.

| Table 8. Farm Acreage by Planning District and Percent Change 1992-97 | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|
| Planning District | 1997 (Acres) | Change, 1992-97 (%) |
| Central Virginia | 504,980 | 0.2 |
| West Piedmont | 548,234 | -7.4 |
| Southside | 473,800 | -2.4 |
| Piedmont | 566,851 | 7.1 |
| Richmond Regional | 251,024 | 0.1 |
| Northern Neck | 154,352 | -1.2 |
| Middle Peninsula | 218,425 | -0.8 |
| Peninsula | 10,837 | 9.1 |
| Northern Virginia | 233,237 | -4.5 |
| Rappahanock-Rapidan | 627,572 | -1.7 |
| Thomas Jefferson | 417,060 | -4.8 |
| Radco | 157,426 | -3.1 |
| Fifth | 193,937 | 0.5 |
| Central Shenandoah | 802,284 | -0.9 |
| Lord Fairfax | 410,806 | 3.8 |
| Crater | 318,989 | -0.8 |
| Southeastern Virginia | 440,373 | -1.1 |
| Accomack-Northampton | 148,887 | 3.4 |
| Lenowisco | 281,114 | 1.6 |
| Cumberland Plateau | 293,015 | -4.9 |
| Mount Rogers | 773,066 | 0.1 |
| New River Valley | 363,338 | 0.8 |