2012 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE Highlights

Farm Demographics

ACH12-3/May 2014

U.S. Farmers by Gender, Age, Race, Ethnicity, and More

3.2 million farmers . . .

. . . operated 2.1 million farms covering 915 million acres that generated food, fuel, and fiber for Americans and people around the world. Who are they?

In 2012, U.S. farmers were older and more diverse than in 2007, the last time the agriculture census was conducted. The total number of farmers declined, with the percentage decline more for women than men. More minorities operated farms in 2012, and the number of beginning farmers declined.

How Many Farmers?

In 2012, 3.2 million farmers operated 2.1 million farms. Like the previous agriculture census, the 2012 Census of Agriculture collected data on up to three operators per farm. Whether counting only principal operators (the person primarily responsible for the day-to-day operation of the farm) or also second and third operators, the number of U.S. farmers declined between 2007 and 2012 – going down 4.3 percent in the case of principal operators. (Table 1)

Fourty-four percent of all farms reported having two operators, and 7 percent reported three operators involved in day-to-day decision making. Principal operators differ from second and third operators in a number of ways. They are on average older, more likely to be male, and more likely to consider farming their primary occupation. They work fewer days off the farm than do second and third operators, and in 2012, 78 percent were on their current farm ten or more years. (Table 2)

Two thirds (67 percent) of second operators are women, of whom 90 percent are the spouse of the principal farm operator. Most farm operations report that they are organized as a family or individual operation. Third operators are younger than principal operators and 45 percent were on their current farm less than ten years in 2012.

Table 1
Number of U.S. Farmers, 2007 and 2012

Operators	2007	2012	% change
Principal	2,204,792	2,109,303	-4.3*
Second	931,670	928,151	-0.4
Third	145,072	142,620	-1.7
All	3,281,534	3,180,074	-3.1

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Table 2
Gender, Primary Occupation, and Years on Farm, 2012
(percent)

Farm	Gender		Primary Occupation		Years on Farm	
Operators	Male	Female	Farm	Other	<10	10+
Principal	86	14	48	52	22	78
Second	33	67	37	63	31	69
Third	61	39	43	57	45	55
All	70	30	44	56	26	74

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Understanding the Numbers

** = statistically significant change*

The 2012 Census of Agriculture contains a measure of relative reliability (the coefficient of variation) for every data item published. This Highlights document does not include these numbers, but shows through an asterisk (*) every number that is a statistically significant change from the 2007 Census to the 2012 Census (defined as two or more standard errors).

To learn more about statistical significance and Census methodology, go to the frequently asked questions at www.agcensus.usda.gov.

USDA
United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service
www.agcensus.usda.gov
(800)727-9540

Fewer Women Farming

Of the 2.1 million principal operators in the United States, 288,264 were women (Table 3). This was a 6 percent decrease since 2007 – larger than the decrease in male principal operators. But for all female operators (principal, second, and third), the decrease was only 1.6 percent. Women were 14 percent of principal operators but 30 percent of all operators.

Some areas of the country have higher concentrations of women farmers than others. See particularly New England, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington (Fig. 1). In 16 states the number of female principal operators increased; in 34 states, they decreased.

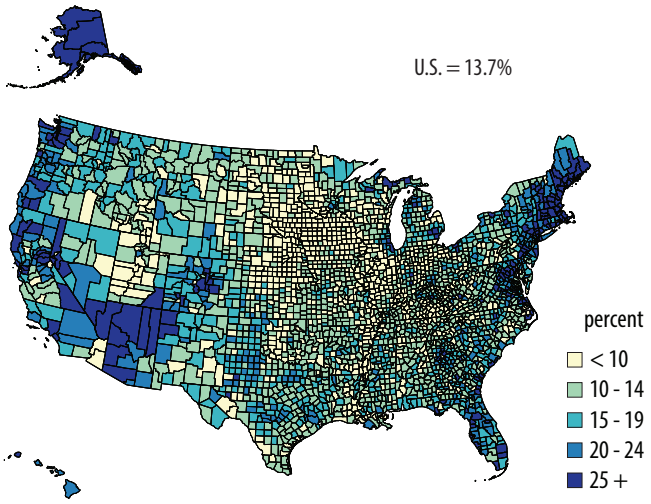
The number of women operating farms with annual sales of $10,000 or more increased in all categories, but 91 percent of farms with female principal operators had less than $50,000 in annual sales (Table 4).

Table 3
Female and Male Farmers, 2007 and 2012

	2007	2012	% change
Female Operators			
Principal	306,209	288,264	-5.9
All	985,192	969,672	-1.6
Male Operators			
Principal	1,898,583	1,821,039	-4.1*
All	2,296,342	2,210,402	-3.7*

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Fig. 1
Farms with Female Principal Operator, by County, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Table 4
Female Principal Operators, by Sales Class, 2007 and 2012
(number of operators and percent)

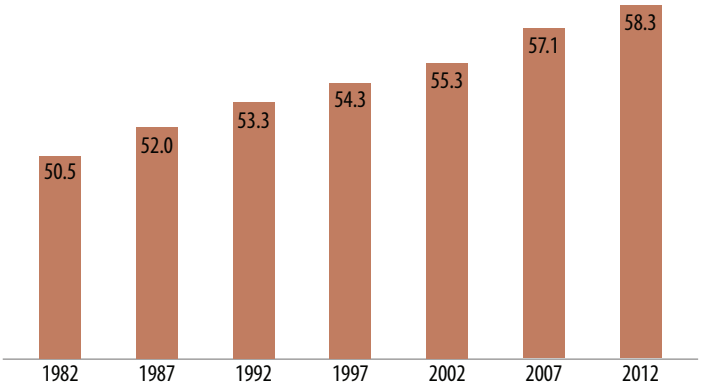
Annual Sales	2007 no.	2012 no.	2012 (%)
Less than $10,000	239,168	218,046	75.6*
$10,000 to $49,999	42,553	44,375	15.4
$50,000 to $99,999	9,111	9,951	3.5
$100,000 +	15,377	15,892	5.5
Total	306,209	288,264	100

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Average Age Rising

Consistent with a thirty-year trend, farmers' average age continued to increase (Fig. 2). For principal operators, average age increased 2 percent between 2007 and 2012. Although second and third operators are younger, their average ages increased 4 and 3 percent respectively (Table 5). Among principal operators, 6 percent are under 35 years old, 61 percent are 35 to 64 years, and 33 percent are 65 and older. The older age groups all increased in number. (Fig. 3)

Fig. 2
Average Age of Principal Operator, 1982 - 2012



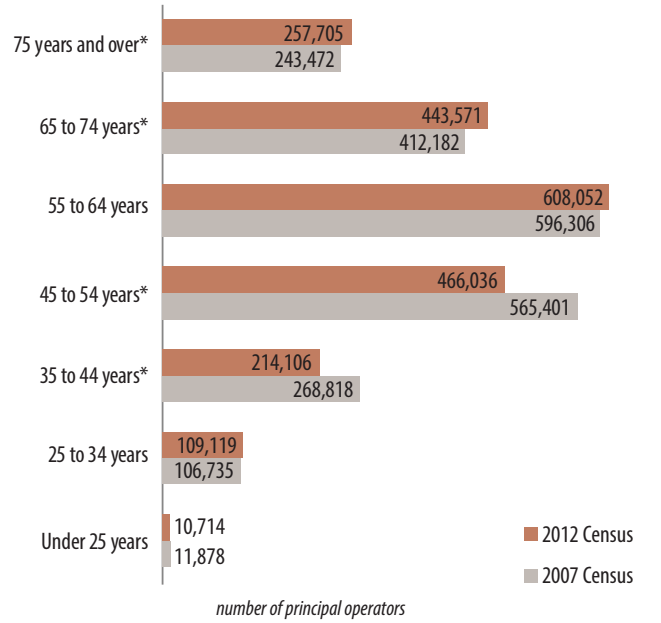
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Table 5
Average Age of Farm Operators, 2007 and 2012

Operator	2007 (years)	2012 (years)	% change
Principal	57.1	58.3	2.1*
Second	51.4	53.4	3.9*
Third	44.6	46.0	3.1*
All	54.9	56.3	2.6*

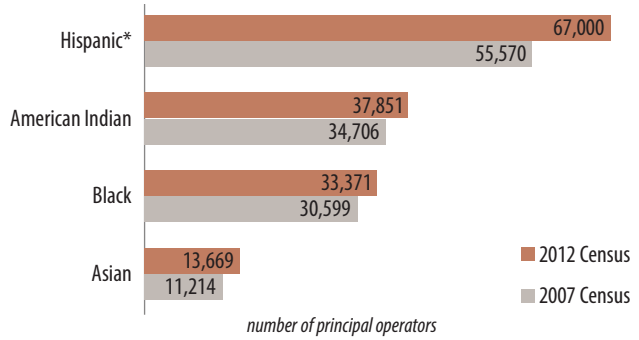
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Fig. 3
Principal Operators by Age Group, 2007 and 2012



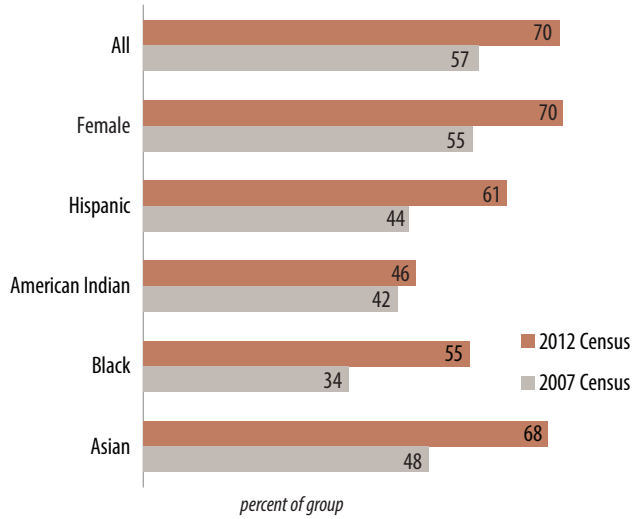
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Fig. 4
Minority Principal Operators, 2007 and 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Fig. 5
Internet Access, by Principal Operator, 2007 and 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Increased Diversity

All categories of minority-operated farms increased between 2007 and 2012 (Fig. 4). Hispanic-operated farms were up 21 percent. Although more than half of all farms had sales of less than $10,000, minority-operated farms (except for Asian operated-farms) fell disproportionately into this group. In 2012, more than a third of Asian principal farmers operated farms with sales of $50,000 or more. (Table 6)

In 2012, 70 percent of farms had Internet access, up from the last agriculture census. For all groups of minority farmers, access was higher in 2012 than 2007, with Black- and Asian-operated farms each having about a twenty percentage point increase. (Fig. 5)

Table 6
Share of Farms by Sales Class for Minority Operators, 2012
(percent of group)

Annual Sales	All Farms	Hispanic	American Indian	Black	Asian
Less than $10,000	56.6	68.4	78.1	78.9	43.4
$10,000 to $49,999	18.9	17.1	14.3	15.6	22.3
$50,000 to $99,999	6.1	4.5	2.9	2.4	7.5
$100,000 or more	18.4	10.0	4.7	3.1	26.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

The Average Farm

Those who consider farming to be their primary occupation (48 percent) differ in a number of ways from the other half of farm operators for whom farming is a secondary activity. Although "average" describes no one exactly, it is a useful way to look at some similarities and differences.

	Farming Primary Activity	Other Primary Activity
Acres farmed	674	214
Agriculture sales	$340,421	$46,789
Government payments	$13,546	$5,213
Age	60	57
Years on operation	26	20
Years farming	29	22

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Fewer New Farmers

In 2012, the number of new farmers who have been on their current operation less than ten years was down 20 percent from 2007. In 2012, nearly 172,000 were on their current operation less than five years; this group was down 23 percent from 2007 (Table 7). Within groups, the proportion of principal operators who were new farmers varied, with Asian principal operators having the largest percentage who had been on their operation less than ten years (42 percent).

Table 7
New Farmers, 2007 and 2012
(number of principal operators)

	2007	2012	% change
On operation less than ten years	583,286	469,098	-19.6*
On operation less than five years	223,741	171,550	-23.3*

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

About the Census of Agriculture

The Census of Agriculture is the leading source of facts and figures about American agriculture. USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts the census once every five years, and conducted the 2012 Census of Agriculture in early 2013 based on 2012 end-of-year data.

The 2012 Census results are now available, providing information at national, state, and county levels about what agricultural products were produced in the United States in 2012, where, how, and by whom.

Data are available in multiple formats to help all users, professional and casual, find and use exactly what they need. Tools include:

- Quick Stats 2.0 – an online database to retrieve customized tables
- A new tutorial video – easy-to-follow instructions for Quick Stats
- An API for developers – In Quick Stats 2.0, click the "Developers" tab
- Desktop Data Query Tool – a downloadable desk top tool to analyze data without Internet access
- Agricultural Atlas – pattern and dot maps profiling many aspects of agriculture at the county level
- Infographics – fun, informative snippets of Census data and context
- Highlights – more documents like this one summarizing key facts on a topic

A link to census data is also available on USDA's open data portal, www.usda.gov/data.

www.agcensus.usda.gov

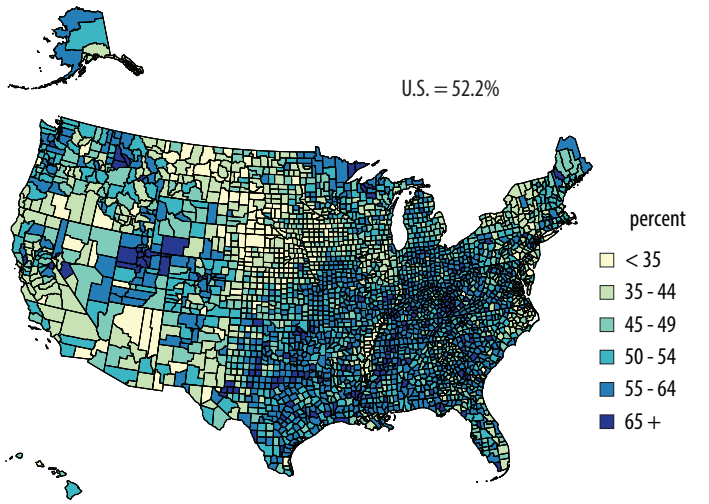
Snapshot of U.S. Farmers, 2012

The majority of the nation's 2.1 million farms are small in terms of sales; 75 percent sold less than $50,000 in agricultural products in 2012 and 57 percent had sales less than $10,000. The farm is the place of residence for three fourths of principal operators, but it does not provide the majority of their household income. For 1.5 million farm households, less than 25 percent of household income came from their farm. In 2012, 61 percent worked off the farm at least some days, and 40 percent worked off the farm for 200 or more days.

Selected Characteristics of Principal Operators

	2012 (number)	% of Principal Operators	% change since 2007
Agriculture sales under $50,000	1,591,804	75.5	-7.6*
Agriculture sales under $10,000	1,193,977	56.6	-9.5*
Lived on their farm	1,621,591	76.9	-4.2*
Less than 25% of household income came from farming	1,483,837	70.3	-6.3*
Had Internet access	1,468,106	69.6	+17.8*
Worked some days off the farm	1,285,644	61.0	-6.2*
Had a primary occupation other than farming	1,101,399	52.2	-9.9*
Had positive net cash income for the operation	972,445	46.1	-6.2*

Farms with Principal Operator whose Primary Occupation Is Not Farming, by County, 2012



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