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2012 Census of Agriculture Reveals New Trends in Farming

USDA Reports Record Sales Moderated by Rising Expenses; Agriculture is Increasingly Diverse; Farming and Marketing Practices are Changing

Washington, May 2, 2014 –There are now 3.2 million farmers operating 2.1 million farms on 914.5 million acres of farmland across the United States, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The agriculture census presents more than 6 million pieces of information, which provide a detailed look at the U.S. farm sector at the national, state and county levels.

“Once every five years, farmers, ranchers and growers have the unique opportunity to let the world know how U.S. agriculture is changing, what is staying the same, what’s working and what we can do differently,” said Dr. Cynthia Clark, the retiring head of USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, which administered the survey. “Today, we can start to delve into the details.”

Census data provide valuable insight into the U.S. farmer demographics, economics and production practices. Some of the key findings include:

- Both sales and production expenses reached record highs in 2012. U.S. producers sold \$394.6 billion worth of agricultural products, but it cost them \$328.9 billion to produce these products.
- Three quarters of all farms had sales of less than \$50,000, producing only 3 percent of the total value of farm products sold while those with sales of more than \$1 million – 4 percent of all farms – produced 66 percent.
- Much of the increased farm income was concentrated geographically or by farm categories.
 - California led the nation with 9 of the 10 top counties for value of sales. Fresno County was number one in the United States with nearly \$5 billion in sales in 2012, which is greater than that of 23 states. Weld County, Colorado ranked 9th in the top 10 U.S. counties.
 - The top 5 states for agricultural sales were California (\$42.6 billion); Iowa (\$30.8 billion); Texas (\$25.4 billion); Nebraska (\$23.1 billion); and Minnesota (\$21.3 billion).
- Eighty-seven percent of all U.S. farms are operated by families or individuals.
- Principal operators were on average 58.3 years old and were predominantly male; second operators were slightly younger and most likely to be female; and third operators were younger still.
- Young, beginning principal operators who reported their primary occupation as farming increased 11.3 percent from 36,396 to 40,499 between 2007 and 2012.
- All categories of minority-operated farms increased between 2007 and 2012; the Hispanic-operated farms had a significant 21 percent increase.
- 144,530 farm operators reported selling products directly to consumers. In 2012, these sales totaled more than \$1.3 billion (up 8.1 percent from 2007).
- Organic sales were growing, but accounted for just 0.8 percent of the total value of U.S. agricultural production. Organic farmers reported \$3.12 billion in sales in 2012, up from \$1.7

billion in 2007.

- Farms with Internet access rose from 56.5 percent in 2007 to 69.6 percent in 2012.
- 57,299 farms produced on-farm renewable energy, more than double the 23,451 in 2007.
- 474,028 farms covering 173.1 million acres were farmed with conservation tillage or no-till practices.
- Corn and soybean acres topped 50 percent of all harvested acres for the first time.
- The largest category of operations was beef cattle with 619,172 or 29 percent of all farms and ranches in 2012 specializing in cattle.

“This information is critical to understanding the conditions of U.S. agriculture and determining future policy,” said incoming NASS Administrator Dr. Joseph T. Reilly. “Today’s data release is the culmination of years’ worth of planning and work that NASS has made openly available for public use.”

Conducted since 1840, the Census of Agriculture accounts for all U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The Census tells a story of how American agriculture is changing and lays the groundwork for new programs and policies that will invest in rural America; promote innovation and productivity; build the rural economy; and support our next generation of farmers and ranchers.

For access to the complete data series and tools to analyze this information, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov. A link to census data will also be available on the USDA Open Data portal, www.usda.gov/data.

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