



*Graphic Summary of*

# FARM TENURE

*in the United States*

COOPERATIVE REPORT



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Charles Sawyer, Secretary  
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS  
J. C. Capt, Director

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Charles F. Brannan, Secretary  
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O. V. Wells, Chief

## HIGHLIGHTS

1. Fewer of the Nation's farms, as well as a lower percentage of such farms, were operated by tenants in 1945 than at any time since 1890.
2. In 1945, the number of owner-operated farms (full-owner and part-owner farms) was the highest in the history of the country.
3. The total number of farms was the lowest in 1945 since 1900.
4. Land prices for the country, by March 1947, had increased 92 percent above the 1935-39 average; in 1920, prices were 70 percent above the 1912-14 average. However, the March 1947 average for the United States was about 6 percent below the 1920 average.
5. In 1945, total farm indebtedness secured by mortgages had reached the lowest level since before World War I.
6. Average size of farm has increased by one-third since the beginning of the century. Part-owner farms have increased in average size by 103.4 percent; tenant farms have increased by 40.6 percent; and full-owner farms have decreased by 7.3 percent.
7. The number of small and large farms has increased since 1940, whereas the number of intermediate-sized farms has decreased appreciably.
8. Even with the increase in size of farms, the farm operators and their families represented a greater proportion of the farm labor force in 1945 than in 1910. The total number of persons employed in agriculture has declined steadily since 1910.
9. The most common method of renting farms is that of paying a share of the products as rent. It prevails in the areas that produce staple crops. Cash renting is most prevalent in the poorer land areas, in localities near urban centers, and in localities where livestock farming and the production of specialty crops are common. Share-cash renting is concentrated in the cash-grain areas.
10. Tenant operators, as a group, were 8.7 years younger than owners in 1945, but in the last 35 years they have increased in average age at a more rapid rate than owners. The average age of all farm operators has increased 4.2 years in 35 years.
11. Full-owner operators had operated their farms an average of 16 years in 1945 in comparison with only 7 years for tenants.
12. Only 5.8 percent of the farm operators did not live on the farms they were operating in 1945.

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## PREFACE

This special report on farm tenure provides a graphic presentation of the extent and general nature of the various forms of tenure under which farms are held and operated. Factors contributing to longer trends in farm tenure, those since 1880, have been considered and particular attention has been given to the changes that have occurred during the period of World War II. The basic data are primarily from the Bureau of the Census. In a few instances, which are indicated in connection with the graphs, data were gathered by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

Plans for this cooperative study were made by V. Webster Johnson, Head, Division of Land Economics, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and Ray Hurley, Chief, Agriculture Division, Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce. The report was prepared principally by Buis T. Inman, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and Warder B. Jenkins, Bureau of the Census.

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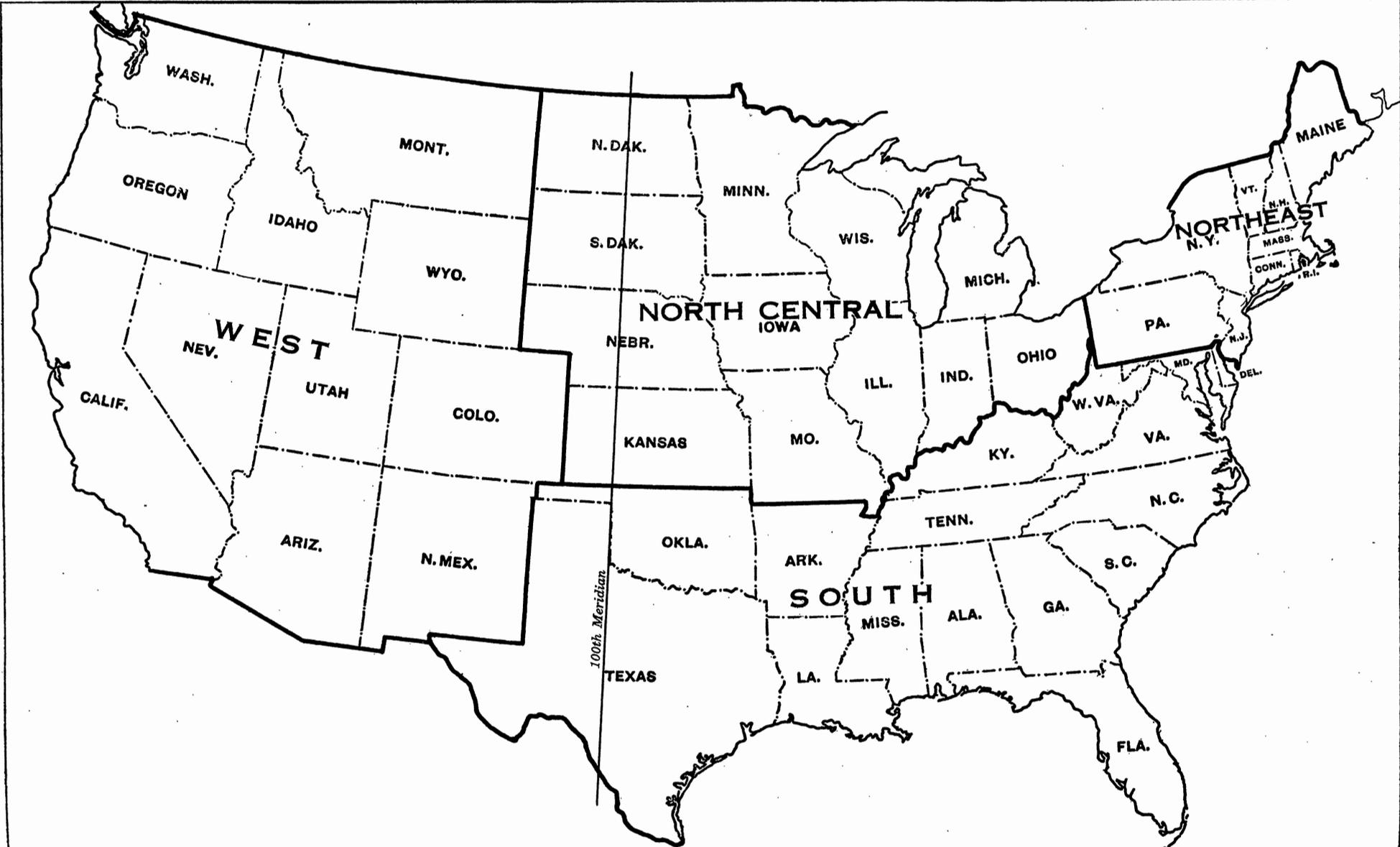
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# INTRODUCTION

Marked changes in farm tenure have occurred since the depression period of the 1930's. Before that time, more and more of the farms had been operated by tenants. Although technological improvements began to play an increasing part in agriculture soon after the turn of the century, their full effects were not felt until after the depression. Technological improvements, greater opportunities for employment outside farming, and important shifts in demands for farm products have contributed to changes in farm tenure. The number and proportion of the people required to produce the Nation's food and natural fibers have declined rapidly. Marked changes have taken place in number of farms in each tenure group, size of farms, farm values, and mortgage indebtedness. Many of these changes were hastened by conditions prevailing in the period of World War II. During the war, much greater agricultural production was achieved with fewer workers.

Tenure changes have been decidedly different in various regions depending upon the effects of such influences as the adaptability to new technological processes; changes in demands for products of the region; development of trade and industry; and governmental policies, such as the Taylor Grazing Act, tenant-purchase program, farm credit, and farm mortgage moratorium.

**Scope of this report.**—This study indicates for the Nation and for 4 large regions the major trends in tenure and in the current tenure pattern. The causes of the trends and the present pattern are indicated where it was possible to determine them in a general study of this nature. No attempt is made to evaluate the desirableness of the changes or to predict the future. The information here given should be valuable to students of land tenure when studying the over-all picture of farm tenure and will form the basis for further studies of local conditions and of particular aspects of tenure.

Most of the data for the graphic material were obtained from the various censuses of agriculture. In a few instances, as with information on farm employment and the land market, supplemental data from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, have been used. Interpretative material has been drawn from many sources, both Federal and State.

**Earlier graphic studies.**—Graphic studies of farm tenure have been published periodically by the U. S. Department of Agriculture since the first one, based on the 1920 Census of Agriculture, which appeared in the 1923 yearbook of the Department (also issued as Yearbook Separate 897). The second, based largely on the Censuses of 1930 and 1935, was published in December 1936, as Miscellaneous Publication No. 261. The third, based on the 1940 Census, appeared in April 1946 as a

multilithed publication. In addition, tenure data appeared in graphic form in the Graphic Summary of American Agriculture in the 1921 yearbook, based largely on the 1920 Census, and in Miscellaneous Publication No. 105, published in 1931, based on the 1925 Census.

For most of the censuses of agriculture, some graphic material on tenure has been presented in the Bureau of the Census reports, along with the statistical tables.

**Definitions and explanations.**—The terms in this study and their usage coincide with the terms and usage in the various censuses of agriculture. Through the years there have been slight variations in the definitions of a farm, the procedures of enumeration of farm lands, and the classification by tenure. Reports of each census for which data are given can be reviewed for exact definitions and for accompanying discussion of comparability. It is believed that the variations in definitions and procedures have not been large enough to affect the trends appreciably.

In this report the tenure of the operator, in general, is spoken of as though synonymous with the tenure under which the land is held. Data on the tenure status of the land in manager-operated farms were first obtained in the Census of 1945. Data have not been obtained in the censuses for the partial interest of operators who own land as members of a partnership or as heirs of an undivided estate. Two or more operating partners who own the land jointly are treated as one owner operator; likewise, an undivided estate, if operated by one or more of the heirs, is treated as one owner operator.

The 9 geographic divisions used by the Census have been combined into 4 regions for this publication. They are: (1) The Northeast, including the New England and Middle Atlantic Divisions; (2) the North Central Region, including the East North Central and West North Central Divisions; (3) the South, including the South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central Divisions; and (4) the West, including the Mountain and Pacific Divisions.

A number of physiographic regions are mentioned in connection with the tenure pattern. The boundaries of these regions are not always defined exactly, but they are those generally agreed upon by geographers.

In speaking of an occurrence, language is often used as though the various census years represented the beginning or culmination of an action. Thus, a statement is made that "The percentage of the Nation's farms operated by tenants was lower in 1945 than at any time since 1890." It must be recognized that such statements are made only on the basis of known data, in this case for census years. The peak or depth of any trend or cyclical change may occur in any intervening year.