

## FARM LABOR

## CHARACTERISTICS OF OPERATORS

The average age of farm operators in the North Central States in 1954 was 49 years. This is only slightly older (about two-tenths of a year) than it was in 1945. In the United States as a whole, however, the average age of farm operators in 1954 was about a year older than in 1945. In the South the average age was almost 2 years older than in 1945.

Information on average age and age composition of operators gives some indication of the age of retirement and of the rate of replacement of older operators by younger men. From 1945 to 1954 in the North Central States, the decrease in number of operators under 25 years old was relatively greater than the decrease in number of farms. The proportion of operators 25 to 34 years of age in 1954 was practically the same as in 1945, while the proportion 35 to 44 years of age increased. The proportion of operators in the 45- to 64-year group declined, but the proportion in the 65-years-old and over group increased. This indicates that relatively few young men (under 25 years) had been entering farming during the decade, but that, on the other hand, farmers of 25 to 44 years of age had stayed in farming to a relatively greater extent than the older age groups. Apparently, the farms or farm lands freed by the operators of age 45 and over who retired or departed from farming were taken up by the younger group. However, farmers reaching age 65 who continued to operate farms, were a somewhat larger proportion of the total number of farmers than in 1945.

Among the factors that in recent years have deterred young men from becoming farm operators are, on the one hand, the relatively attractive opportunities and incomes in nonfarm work and, on the other hand, the relatively large amount of capital that is required to equip and operate a farm. The large capital required also tends to restrain a young man from going into farming until he has accumulated more capital or obtained a stronger financial backing than was necessary a generation ago.

Reports on age were obtained in the 1954 Census from practically all farm operators. Nearly half of all the commercial farm operators in the Corn Belt were 35 to 54 years old in 1954. The largest 10-year-span age group was the 35- to 44-year group, but operators in the 45- to 54-year group were almost as numerous. Relatively few operators were under 25 years of age and the total number under 35 years was less than the number who were 35 to 44 or 45 to 54 years old. About a fifth of the operators were 55 to 64 years old and about a seventh were 65 years old or over (table 43). Older operators were relatively most numerous in the Southern and Eastern Corn Belt, while the Northern Corn Belt had the largest proportion of younger operators. In general, there was a relatively larger proportion of younger operators on cash-grain farms than on livestock farms. It is usually easier to get started in cash-grain farming than in livestock farming. Less capital is needed for the total investment in machinery and livestock and, although the land requirement is large, the land often may be rented.

Class II farms had the largest percentage of operators under the age of 35 (table 44). On Classes I, II, and III farms, from about 19 percent to 24 percent of the operators were under 35 years, while on Classes IV, V, and VI farms, this age group accounted for only 4 percent to 19 percent of all the operators. For both cash-grain and livestock farms, as we go from the large to the smaller sizes of farms, we find a larger proportion of the operators in the older age groups. Nearly 39 percent of the Class VI cash-grain farms and almost 47 percent of the Class VI livestock farms were operated by farmers 65 years old or over.

TABLE 43.—NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF COMMERCIAL FARM OPERATORS, BY AGE, BY TYPE OF FARM, IN THE CORN BELT AND COMPONENT REGIONS: 1954

Region and type of farm	Operators reporting age		Percentage distribution of operators reporting age				
	Total	Percent of all operators	Total operators reporting	Age under 35 years	Age 35 to 54 years	Age 55 to 64 years	Age 65 years and over
<b>Total Corn Belt:</b>							
All commercial farms.....	787, 218	98.7	100.0	18.5	47.7	20.1	13.7
Cash-grain farms.....	260, 982	98.7	100.0	20.8	47.8	19.2	12.2
Livestock farms <sup>1</sup> .....	322, 886	98.8	100.0	17.5	48.1	20.6	13.8
<b>Eastern Corn Belt:</b>							
All commercial farms.....	174, 535	98.5	100.0	16.2	44.8	21.5	17.5
Cash-grain farms.....	67, 159	98.3	100.0	18.6	45.9	20.3	15.2
Livestock farms <sup>1</sup> .....	50, 684	98.5	100.0	14.9	44.8	22.2	18.1
<b>Central Corn Belt:</b>							
All commercial farms.....	165, 707	98.7	100.0	20.6	49.5	18.5	11.4
Cash-grain farms.....	68, 126	98.7	100.0	21.1	48.6	19.1	11.2
Livestock farms <sup>1</sup> .....	71, 263	98.9	100.0	20.3	50.9	17.9	10.9
<b>Northern Corn Belt:</b>							
All commercial farms.....	107, 557	99.1	100.0	21.6	50.9	17.8	9.7
Cash-grain farms.....	27, 200	99.0	100.0	21.5	48.8	19.0	10.7
Livestock farms <sup>1</sup> .....	40, 290	99.2	100.0	21.3	50.7	18.4	9.6
<b>Western Corn Belt:</b>							
All commercial farms.....	184, 218	98.9	100.0	20.7	48.7	19.4	11.2
Cash-grain farms.....	58, 306	99.0	100.0	23.4	48.6	18.0	10.0
Livestock farms <sup>1</sup> .....	90, 392	98.9	100.0	19.3	49.3	20.1	11.3
<b>Southern Corn Belt:</b>							
All commercial farms.....	155, 201	98.6	100.0	14.2	45.2	22.8	17.8
Cash-grain farms.....	40, 185	98.3	100.0	19.7	47.6	19.5	13.2
Livestock farms <sup>1</sup> .....	70, 257	98.8	100.0	12.1	44.3	24.1	19.6

<sup>1</sup> Livestock other than dairy and poultry farms.

TABLE 44.—NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF COMMERCIAL FARM OPERATORS, BY AGE, BY TYPE AND ECONOMIC CLASS OF FARM, IN THE CORN BELT: 1954

Type and economic class of farm	Operators reporting age		Percentage distribution of operators reporting age				
	Total	Percent of all operators	Total operators reporting	Age under 35 years	Age 35 to 54 years	Age 55 to 64 years	Age 65 years and over
All commercial farms.....	787, 218	98.7	100.0	18.5	47.7	20.1	13.7
<b>Cash-grain farms:</b>							
Total.....	260, 982	98.7	100.0	20.8	47.8	19.2	12.2
Class I.....	6, 414	98.7	100.0	19.6	59.9	14.7	5.8
II.....	61, 308	98.9	100.0	24.3	55.2	14.7	5.8
III.....	89, 259	99.1	100.0	22.5	50.3	18.2	9.0
IV.....	61, 178	98.6	100.0	18.9	42.7	23.0	15.4
V.....	33, 187	97.8	100.0	16.7	40.5	22.7	20.1
VI.....	9, 636	96.9	100.0	10.0	26.4	24.8	38.8
<b>Livestock farms:<sup>1</sup></b>							
Total.....	322, 886	98.8	100.0	17.5	48.1	20.6	13.8
Class I.....	22, 413	98.7	100.0	22.9	55.9	15.2	6.0
II.....	82, 644	98.9	100.0	24.1	54.8	15.4	5.7
III.....	93, 789	99.2	100.0	18.9	51.9	20.0	9.2
IV.....	66, 189	98.8	100.0	13.6	44.8	24.8	16.8
V.....	39, 349	98.4	100.0	10.1	37.8	26.0	26.1
VI.....	18, 502	98.0	100.0	4.1	22.0	27.2	46.7

<sup>1</sup> Livestock other than dairy and poultry farms.

Less than 8 percent of the commercial farm families in the Corn Belt had incomes from other sources exceeding the value of all farm products sold (table 45). This emphasizes the importance of the farm business and farm incomes to the vast majority of farm families in the Corn Belt. The proportion of farm families with other incomes larger than the value of farm products sold was smallest in the Central and Northern Corn Belt. It was largest in the Eastern Corn Belt; there about 14 percent of the operators