

**U. S. Department of Commerce**

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**Bureau of the Census**

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# United States Census of Agriculture: 1954

**Volume III**  
**SPECIAL REPORTS**

**Part 7**

**Popular Report—The American Farmer in 1954**

Prepared under the supervision of

**RAY HURLEY**

Chief, Agriculture Division

**FARMERS • STATUS • BROAD CHARACTERISTICS •**



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## PREFACE

Volume III, Special Reports, comprises a group of special studies and compilations based upon the results of the 1954 Census of Agriculture and related surveys. Part 7, Popular Report—The American Farmer in 1954, presents some aspects of present-day American agriculture that do not seem to be so widely understood, and gives an account of some of the changes that have brought agriculture where it is today. It is intended to be a general, easy-to-read, nonstatistical publication on the status and broad characteristics of United States farmers.

The material for this report comes mainly from the United States Census, including the 1954 Census of Agriculture. Most of the photographs were supplied by the United States Department of Agriculture. The planning, compilation of statistics, and the preparation of publications of the 1954 Census of Agriculture were under the supervision of Ray Hurley, Chief, Agriculture Division, Bureau of the Census. This report was prepared principally by Gove Hambidge.

DECEMBER 1956.

III

# UNITED STATES CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE: 1954

## REPORTS

**Volume I.—Counties and State Economic Areas.** Statistics for counties include number of farms, acreage, value, and farm operators; farms by color and tenure of operator; facilities and equipment; use of commercial fertilizer; farm labor; farm expenditures; livestock and livestock products; specified crops harvested; farms classified by type of farm and by economic class; and value of products sold by source.

Data for State economic areas include farms and farm characteristics by tenure of operator, by type of farm, and by economic class. Volume I is published in 33 parts.

**Volume II.—General Report.** Statistics by Subjects, United States Census of Agriculture, 1954. Summary data and analyses of the data for States, for Geographic Divisions, and for the United States by subjects.

### Volume III.—Special Reports

**Part 1.—Multiple-Unit Operations.** This report will be similar to Part 2 of Volume V of the reports for the 1950 Census of Agriculture. It will present statistics for approximately 900 counties and State economic areas in 12 Southern States and Missouri for the number and characteristics of multiple-unit operations and farms in multiple units.

**Part 2.—Ranking Agricultural Counties.** This special report will present statistics for selected items of inventory and agricultural production for the leading counties in the United States.

**Part 3.—Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, District of Columbia, and U. S. Possessions.** These areas were not included in the 1954 Census of Agriculture. The available current data from various Government sources will be compiled and published in this report.

**Part 4.—Agriculture, 1954, a Graphic Summary.** This report will present graphically some of the significant facts regarding agriculture and agricultural production as revealed by the 1954 Census of Agriculture.

**Part 5.—Farm-Mortgage Debt.** This will be a cooperative study by the Agricultural Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of the Census. It will present, by States, data based on the 1954 Census of Agriculture and a special mail survey conducted in January 1956, on the number of mortgaged farms, the amount of mortgage debt, and the amount of debt held by principal lending agencies.

**Part 6.—Irrigation in Humid Areas.** This cooperative report by the Agricultural Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of the Census will present data obtained by a mail survey of operators of irrigated farms in 28 States on the source of water, method of applying water, number of pumps used, acres of crops irrigated in 1954 and 1955, the number of times each crop was irrigated, and the cost of irrigation equipment and the irrigation system.

**Part 7.—Popular Report—The American Farmer in 1954.** This report is planned to be a general, easy-to-read publication for the general public on the status and broad characteristics of United States agriculture. It will seek to delineate such aspects of agriculture as the geographic distribution and differences by size of farm for such items as farm acreage, principal crops, and important kinds of livestock, farm facilities, farm equipment, use of fertilizer, soil conservation practices, farm tenure, and farm income.

**Part 8.—Size of Operation by Type of Farm.** This will be a cooperative special report to be prepared in cooperation with the Agricultural Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This report will contain data for 119 economic sub-

regions (essentially general type-of-farming areas) showing the general characteristics for each type of farm by economic class. It will provide data for a current analysis of the differences that exist among groups of farms of the same type. It will furnish statistical basis for a realistic examination of production of such commodities as wheat, cotton, and dairy products in connection with actual or proposed governmental policies and programs.

**Part 9.—Farmers and Farm Production in the United States.** The purpose of this report is to present an analysis of the characteristics of farmers and farm production for the most important types of farms as shown by data for the 1954 Census of Agriculture. The analysis deals with the relative importance, pattern of resource use, some measures of efficiency, and problems of adjustment and change for the principal types of farms. The report was prepared in cooperation with the Agricultural Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The list of chapters (published separately only) and title for each chapter are as follows:

Chapter I—*Wheat Producers and Wheat Production*

II—*Cotton Producers and Cotton Production*

III—*Tobacco and Peanut Producers and Production*

IV—*Poultry Producers and Poultry Production*

V—*Dairy Producers and Dairy Production*

VI—*Western Stock Ranches and Livestock Farms*

VII—*Cash-Grain and Livestock Producers in the Corn Belt*

VIII—*Part-Time Farming*

IX—*Agricultural Producers and Production in the United States—A General View*

**Part 10.—Use of Fertilizer and Lime.** The purpose of this report is to present in one publication most of the detailed data compiled for the 1954 Census of Agriculture regarding the use of fertilizer and lime. The report presents data for counties, State economic areas, and generalized type-of-farming areas regarding the quantity used, acreage on which used, and expenditures for fertilizer and lime. The Agricultural Research Service cooperated with the Bureau of the Census in the preparation of this report.

**Part 11.—Farmers' Expenditures.** This report presents detailed data on expenditures for a large number of items used for farm production in 1955, and on the living expenditures of farm operators' families. The data were collected and compiled cooperatively by the Agricultural Marketing Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of the Census.

**Part 12.—Methods and Procedures.** This report contains an outline and a description of the methods and procedures used in taking and compiling the 1954 Census of Agriculture.

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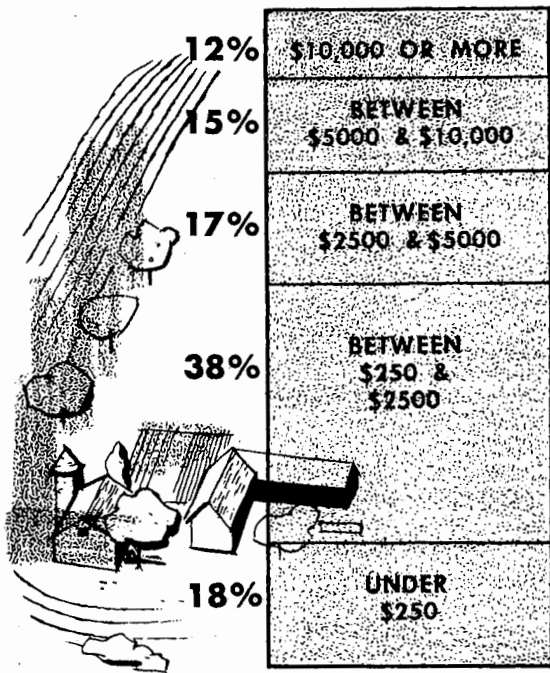
# POPULAR REPORT—THE AMERICAN FARMER IN 1954

GOVE HAMBIDGE

## INTRODUCTION

Farms and farmers differ

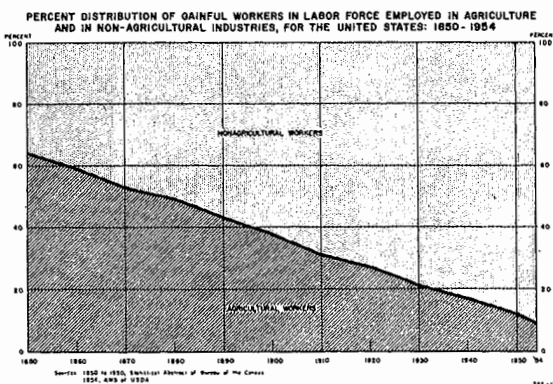
### HOW MUCH FARM PRODUCTS DO FARMERS SELL?



The 4.7 million Census farms in the United States include an immense range in the different kinds and sizes of farms operating under a very wide range of economic and social conditions. Some farms are only 1 acre in size; others have a physical plant containing as much as 100,000 acres; some have annual sales of \$200; others have Paul Bunyan operations with sales of as much as \$1 million; some are small enterprises operated by farmers who work at non-farm jobs; others provide full-time employment for the farmer, his family, and hired employees; some are farms devoted to the production of a single product; others are devoted to the production of a number of important farm products; some farmers control resources with a value of only a few thousands of dollars; others manage resources totaling more than a million dollars. Moreover, the operators of our 4.7 million farms and their families represent individual human beings, all differing in their abilities, experiences, ambitions, strivings, and problems.

The Census of Agriculture provides numerous and detailed summaries of cold facts indicating the differences and likenesses of our millions of farms and farmers. The purpose of this booklet is to give life and warmth to these Census agricultural facts by describing eight farmers and farms. These descriptions, based on the millions of cold facts drawn from a nationwide Census, do not relate to any actual, individual farmer or existing farm. There are tens of thousands of farmers and farms that differ from those described.

### The farmer's place in the world.



Farmers and farming have a place in the world that is very special. (Other occupants of that special place are those who harvest fish from the sea.) The stone, steel, and other materials that make our cities, railroads, highways, ships, airplanes, and automobiles are all important in this civilization of ours. The energy from electricity, coal, oil, and gasoline required to run our factories and our means of transport are likewise important. But more important than all of these is life itself—the life of the human beings who create the civilization and for whom its material and spiritual values exist. Life too requires fuel for its fires. The fuel is provided by food, which also furnishes a long array of complex substances needed to maintain the extraordinary mechanism of our bodies and minds—a mechanism far more marvelous and intricate than any atomic pile.

## POPULAR REPORT

To obtain this energy and these substances, each of us consumes on the average some 1,528 pounds of food a year, or a little over four pounds a day, day in and day out. With the United States population now about 170 million this means that as a people we require some 250 billion pounds of food a year. It is provided for us by those who harvest the crops from the soil and the sea. Their place is truly a special one; they are the maintainers of life.

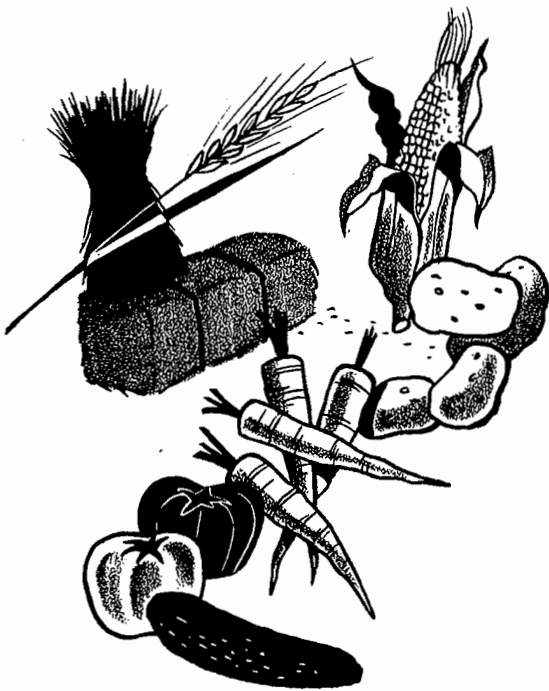
Their place has not diminished in significance in our modern economy, but it has diminished a great deal in magnitude. Anyone in the United States now over the age of 65 or 70 has lived during a period when almost every other person was a farmer. At the turn of the century, half the population was tied to the land to produce food for themselves and the other half working in other pursuits. Within the lifetime of many of us, that proportion has gradually been reduced, decade by decade, until now the farm population is about one-eighth of the total; and in 1954 only 8.5 million agricultural workers were required to produce the food supply for 164 million people.

**Farming is not what it used to be.**

This is as it should be. These workers had to be released from farming to do all the other things that make modern civilization possible.

So radically and rapidly has agriculture changed even within a single lifetime that it is difficult for us to realize what has happened. Farming obviously is not what it used to be, yet few people are more than vaguely aware of the nature and the extent of the transformation. We still tend to think of it in terms that no longer apply to modern conditions.

**These are stubborn problems.**



But it is important that we should understand; for if the proportion of our people now engaged in farming is far smaller than it used to be, which means that providing food is now far less of a burden for society as a whole than it used to be, nevertheless adequate and efficient food production is still the most fundamental need for further advances in civilization and for life itself. And in spite of all the revolutionary changes in agriculture, at least as revolutionary as those that have occurred in industry, and in spite of the long forward strides agriculture has made, efficient production adequate for our needs and those of the rest of the world is not easy to attain. Stubborn problems that seem to be inherent in the business of producing food for mankind still remain, and solving these problems is a continuing process requiring continuous attention on the part not only of farmers but of all who consume the food they provide.

**Census harvests the facts.**

This booklet presents some aspects of present-day American agriculture that do not seem to be so widely understood as they should be and gives an account of some of the changes that have brought agriculture where it is today. The material for the booklet comes mainly from the United States Census, including the 1954 Census of Agriculture. Every five years the Census Bureau sends a small army of men and women called enumerators out over the United States to garner a harvest of facts and figures. These people visit every farm in every county, asking questions designed to obtain the facts a nation needs to know about an activity as basic as agriculture. (Not all the information comes from this complete farm coverage. For some material, scientifically selected samples are used.) The answers to most of these questions are in quantitative terms, that is, in figures; and millions of these digits are subsequently poured into the machines in the central office of the Census Bureau and into the brains of the statisticians who are responsible for analyzing them and putting them into meaningful order.

**Cold facts.**

The masses of statistics resulting from the agricultural Census resemble an iceberg in a double sense: they seem cold to the average person, and much of their substance is below the surface where it cannot be seen without special searching. After all, the Census enumerators gather their statistics in the first instance from several million farmers who are not abstractions but individual human beings with ambitions and strivings and disappointments and difficulties. To give life and warmth to the facts, this booklet includes some recognizable landscapes and figures in the picture of present-day American agriculture—farmers who though fictional, not actual, might be considered to typify some of the outstanding characteristics of our agriculture. The first farmer is a wheat grower, whom we will call Dan West, living in the central part of the State of Kansas.

