

CHANGES IN SIZE OF FARM

All Farms

Significant decreases in the numbers of farms, accompanied by a substantial increase in farm size, has characterized American agriculture since 1935. Since 1935, the average size of farms has more than doubled from 154.8 acres in 1935 to 389.5 acres in 1969 (table 4). During the same period, the number of farms has dropped from a high of 6.8 million in 1935 to 2.7 million in 1969, while the acres of land in farms has changed very little.

Table 4. Average Size of Farm for the United States: 1850 to 1969

	Average size of farms (acres)		Average size of farms (acres)		Average size of farms (acres)
1969.....	389.5	1940.....	174.5	1900.....	146.6
1964.....	351.6	1935 ¹	154.8	1890 ¹	136.5
1959.....	302.8	1930.....	157.3	1880 ¹	133.7
1954 ¹	242.2	1925 ¹	145.1	1870 ¹	153.3
1950.....	215.5	1920.....	148.5	1860 ¹	199.2
1945 ¹	194.8	1910.....	138.5	1850 ¹	202.6

¹Alaska and Hawaii not included.

Since 1964, the average size of farms has increased 38 acres or over 10 percent. At the same time, the number of farms decreased 13.5 percent and land in farms decreased 4.2 percent. Even though the average size of farms varies considerably by State and geographic area, an increase in average size was reported for 47 of the 50 States in the 5-year period.

The number of farms with 500 acres and over has shown a steady increase since 1935, from 256,000 to 367,000 in 1969. The land accounted for by these farms has increased from 424 million acres to 726 million acres and in 1969 represented over 70 percent of all land in farms, as compared to about 40 percent in 1935. This increase in numbers of larger farms and the proportion of all farmland in such farms has been the result of farm consolidation and, for some States in the West, the inclusion in the census of additional Federal and other grazing lands in farms and ranches. However, there was essentially no change in the proportion of land in farms with 500 acres and over between 1964 and 1969.

Almost 60 percent of the total decrease in the number of farms between 1964 and 1969 occurred on farms with less than 100 acres. Since 1950, every size group below 220 acres has shown a considerable drop in the number of farms in each census. Table 5 indicates the historical changes in the number of farms in the various size groups.

Table 5. Farms by Size of Farm for the United States: 1935 to 1969

	Number of farms							
	1969	1964	1959	1954 ¹	1950	1945 ¹	1940	1935 ¹
Total.....	2,730,250	3,157,857	3,710,503	4,782,416	5,388,437	5,859,169	6,102,417	6,812,350
1 to 9 acres.....	162,111	182,581	244,328	484,291	488,530	594,561	509,347	570,831
10 to 49 acres.....	473,465	637,434	813,216	1,212,831	1,479,596	1,654,404	1,782,061	2,123,595
50 to 69 acres.....	177,028	211,398	258,195	346,323	427,025	472,415	510,585	581,352
70 to 99 acres.....	282,914	331,032	399,795	517,740	621,050	684,905	780,743	862,655
100 to 139 acres.....	278,752	324,652	394,505	491,458	579,244	633,851	688,479	754,076
140 to 179 acres.....	263,012	308,288	378,003	461,651	523,659	565,958	621,578	683,941
180 to 219 acres.....	165,209	191,254	225,576	257,189	275,049	282,839	279,577	294,309
220 to 259 acres.....	141,733	164,188	188,899	206,509	212,344	210,376	206,759	212,238
260 to 499 acres.....	419,421	451,301	471,547	482,246	478,170	473,184	459,003	473,239
500 to 999 acres.....	215,659	210,437	200,012	191,697	182,297	173,777	163,711	167,452
1,000 to 1,999 acres..	91,039	84,999	79,101	130,481	121,473	112,899	100,574	88,662
2,000 acres and over..	59,907	60,293	57,326					

¹Data for Alaska and Hawaii not included.

Although the number of farms in the under-10-acres size group has decreased in each census since 1945, the rates of change have varied from census to census more than for most other size groups. Changes in this group are attributed to the changes in the definition of a farm between 1954 and 1959, the relative completeness of each census enumeration, and to changes in census procedures, in addition to actual changes in the number of such places with agricultural operations.

The number of farms in the under-10-acre category declined about 11 percent between 1964 and 1969. Within that group, the number of farms with less than 3 acres increased by a third and the farms with 3 to 9 acres decreased about a third. Table 6 provides the number of farms in the under-10-acre group since 1880.

Table 6. Land in Farms for Farms Under 10 Acres, United States: 1880 to 1969

Year	Under 10 acres		Under 3 acres		3 to 9 acres	
	Number of farms	Land in farms (acres)	Number of farms	Land in farms (acres)	Number of farms	Land in farms (acres)
1969.....	162,111	567,589	78,968	93,443	83,243	474,146
1964.....	182,581	778,000	59,686	(NA)	122,895	(NA)
1959 ¹	244,328	1,052,591	79,083	(NA)	165,245	(NA)
1954 ²	484,291	2,259,817	99,896	(NA)	384,395	(NA)
1950.....	488,530	2,451,013	78,110	(NA)	410,420	(NA)
1945 ²	594,561	2,805,435	98,966	141,252	495,595	2,664,183
1940.....	509,347	2,679,405	37,022	52,334	472,325	2,627,071
1935 ²	570,831	3,057,166	35,573	51,269	535,258	3,005,897
1930.....	361,999	1,922,230	44,244	63,210	317,755	1,859,020
1925 ²	378,535	2,096,610	15,151	22,976	363,384	2,073,634
1920 ²	288,772	1,600,287	20,350	33,613	268,422	1,566,674
1910 ²	335,043	(NA)	18,033	(NA)	317,010	(NA)
1900.....	268,446	1,481,899	41,882	79,508	226,564	1,402,391
1890.....	150,194	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1880.....	139,241	(NA)	4,352	(NA)	134,889	(NA)

NA Not available.

¹Change in definition had a significant influence on the count of farms in the 3-to-9 acres group.

²Data for Alaska and Hawaii not included.

A significant part of the increase since 1964 in the number of farms with less than 3 acres may be due to a combination of differences in enumeration and processing procedures. In 1969, some respondents reported all land rented out, but at the same time reported the ownership of some poultry or livestock. In these cases, one acre and the livestock which were reported were retained and counted as a census farm if the value of products sold or normally expected to be sold, would qualify the operation as a farm. In prior censuses, the census enumerators were, in general, instructed to include the livestock owned by the landlord on the census report for the tenant.