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# Introduction

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## HISTORY

For more than 150 years, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, conducted the census of agriculture. However, the 1997 Appropriations Act transferred the responsibility from the Bureau of the Census to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The 1997 Census of Agriculture is the first census conducted by NASS.

The census of agriculture is taken to obtain agricultural statistics for each county, State, and the Nation. The first agriculture census was taken in 1840 as part of the sixth decennial census of population. From 1840 to 1950, the agriculture census was taken as part of the decennial census. A separate mid-decade census of agriculture was conducted in 1925, 1935, and 1945. From 1954 to 1974, a census of agriculture was taken for the years ending in 4 and 9. In 1976, Congress authorized the census of agriculture to be taken for 1978 and 1982 to adjust the data reference year so that it coincided with other economic censuses. This adjustment in timing established the agriculture census on a 5-year cycle collecting data for years ending in 2 and 7.

## CENSUS USES

The census of agriculture is the leading source of statistics about the Nation's agricultural production and the only source of consistent, comparable data at the county, State, and national levels. Census statistics are used by Congress to develop and change farm programs, study historical trends, assess current conditions, and plan for the future. Many national and State programs use census data to design and allocate funding for extension service projects, agricultural research, soil conservation programs, and land-grant colleges and universities. Private industry uses census statistics to provide a more effective production and distribution system for the agricultural community.

## AUTHORITY AND AREA COVERED

The census of agriculture is required by law under the "Census of Agriculture Act of 1997," Public Law 105-113 (Title 7, United States Code, Section 2204g). The law directs the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct a census of agriculture in 1998 and in every fifth year after, covering the

prior year. The census of agriculture includes each State, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

## FARM DEFINITION

The definition of a farm for census purposes was first established in 1850. It has been changed nine times since. The current definition, first used for the 1974 census, is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. The farm definition used for each U.S. territory varies. The report for each territory includes a discussion of its farm definition.

## COMPARABILITY OF DATA

Most data are comparable between the 1997 and 1992 censuses. A few important changes for the 1997 census may affect comparability for some data. Farms with all acreage in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) are included as farms in the 1997 census tabulations. For the 1992 census, farms that had all their acreage in the CRP or WRP were not included in the census tabulations.

For the 1997 census, farms were classified according to the new North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Due to NAICS, short rotation woody crops, which includes Christmas trees and maple sap gathering, are considered crop production. Emus, ostriches, and rhea are now tabulated in other poultry. In previous agriculture censuses, farms were classified by the Standard Industrial Classification System (SIC).

Items removed from the 1997 census:

1. Land diverted under annual commodity adjustment programs
2. Commodity Credit Corporation loans for honey and rye

Dollar values for expenses and agricultural product sales are expressed in current dollars and are not adjusted for inflation or deflation.

## REFERENCE PERIODS

Inventories of livestock, poultry, and machinery and equipment are measured as of December 31 of the census year. Crop and livestock production, sales, expenses,

income from Federal farm programs, irrigation, Commodity Credit Corporation loans, Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve Programs, direct sales, chemicals and fertilizer, farm-related income, and hired workers are measured for the calendar year, except for a few crops (such as citrus, avocados, and olives) for which the production year overlaps the calendar year.

## **TABLES**

All of the tables in this report show census counts and rank for the leading agricultural States and counties for selected items from the 1997 and 1992 censuses. Statistics from all places qualifying as farms in the 1997 census are included. Also, accompanying each table are data showing the cumulative percent of the U.S. total as each leading State or county is ranked.

For all tables except table 2, the leading States or counties were determined by the value of the agricultural resource, inventory, or production item. The State or county with the largest value for the selected item was ranked first, the State or county with the next largest value, second, and so forth.

Tables on all crop items, except fruits and pecans harvested, present the number of acres harvested along with the primary quantity of the harvested item, which determines the rank of State or county. The acres for fruits and pecans are total acres in the crop. The leading counties for the primary item are often not the same for the acres harvested, or acres in crop for fruits or pecans.

Comparative data and rank for the 1992 census are shown for the leading 1997 States and counties in most of the tables presented. Depending on the specified item ranked, the 1992 data and rank may be very similar to 1997.

Total lines for the leading States and counties show the sums of the data items for the States and counties listed. The crop tables show rank for both quantity harvested and acres harvested or acres in crop for fruits and pecans. In these tables, the primary ranking of the States and counties is by quantity harvested. The related ranking of the acres harvested is also shown.

## **QUALIFICATIONS OF DATA AND RANKINGS**

Census data for the leading agricultural States and counties usually indicate agricultural areas of commercial importance. The leading counties usually account for a significant part of the U.S. total as shown by the cumulative statistics in each table. For certain specialty crops and fruits grown in a few areas, the leading counties account for nearly all the production. For other more widespread items, such as alfalfa hay and cattle and calves on farms, the leading counties account for a smaller proportion of the U.S. totals.

It is important to note that the rank of counties is based only on data for the census year. Unusual weather or economic conditions during 1997 may have had a significant effect on the ranking of counties for certain items in certain areas. A ranking of counties based on the average of data for several years would undoubtedly show a number of differences in the rankings.

Occasionally the ranking of a county may be influenced by the assignment of all land, agricultural operations, and sales of farms with land in two or more counties to the county with the largest value of agricultural products raised or produced.

## **RESPONDENT CONFIDENTIALITY**

In keeping with the provisions of Title 7 of the United States Code, no data are published that would disclose the operations of an individual farm. However, the number of farms reporting an item is not considered a release of confidential information and is provided even though other information may be withheld.

## **SPECIAL STUDIES AND CUSTOM TABULATIONS**

Special studies, such as the 1998 Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey and the 1998 Census of Horticultural Specialties, are part of the census program. These special studies are for reference year 1998.

Custom-designed tabulations can be developed to individual user specifications on a cost-reimbursable basis. Inquiries about special tabulations should be directed to the Director, Census Division, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Room 436 Iverson Mall, 3737 Branch Avenue, Temple Hills, MD 20748-1405; by phone on 1-800-523-3215; or by e-mail at [nass@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov).

## **DATA PRODUCTS**

The 1997 Census of Agriculture is available on three different media: 1) printed reports, 2) CD-ROM, and 3) the Internet. The NASS home page is located at [www.usda.gov/nass/](http://www.usda.gov/nass/).

## **ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS**

The following abbreviations and symbols are used throughout the tables:

-	Represents zero.
(D)	Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual farms.
(NA)	Not available.
(X)	Not applicable.