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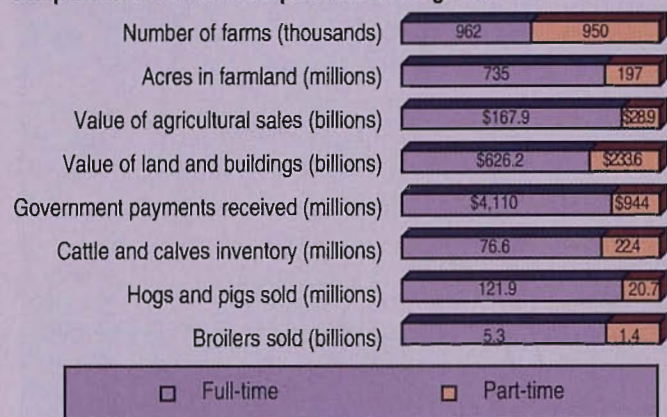
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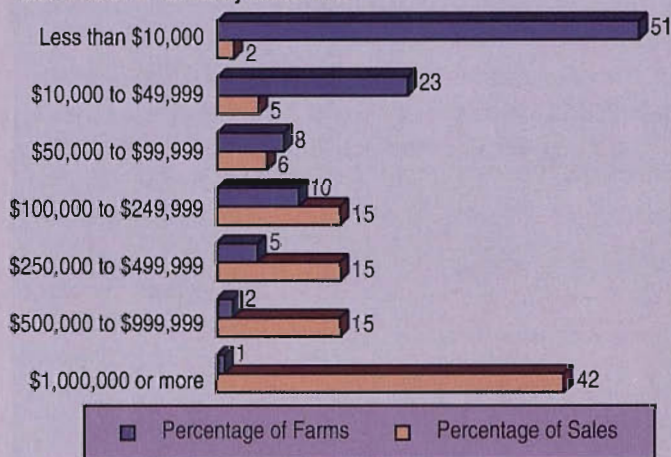
# Key Findings from the 1997 Census of Agriculture

by Don Bay, Joe Reilly, and Janet Allen

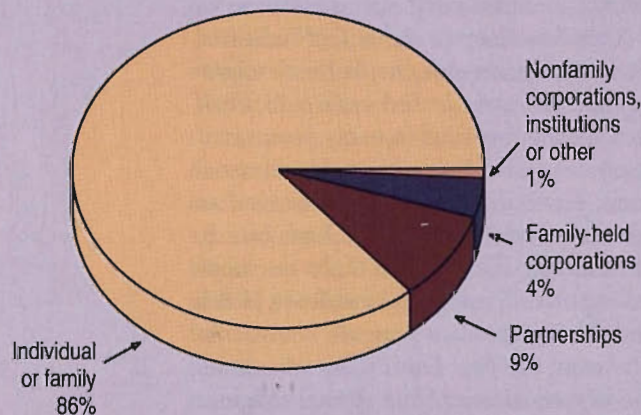
Comparison of full-time and part-time farming: 1997



Distribution of farms by sales: 1997



Type of organization: 1997



Results of the 1997 Census of Agriculture—the first conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture—were released on the Internet on 1 February 1999. This was exactly one year after the date the completed forms were due back from every farmer and rancher, and ten months earlier than release of the 1992 census. These results provide insight into the changing demographics of America's farm and ranch operators and identify trends at the state, county, and national level.

From 1992 to 1997, "part-time" farming increased significantly. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the percentage of part-time farm operators remained steady, at 45 percent. In 1997, that figure increased to 50 percent.

However, full-time farmers account for 85 percent of all agricultural production and receive 81 percent of total government payments.

The census showed a continuation of the spread between small and large farms. Farms with less than \$10,000 in sales value, which represented 51 percent of the nation's farms, accounted for only 2 percent of the total value of sales. In addition, that sales class was the only one to show a negative net cash return, with an average loss of \$2,711 per farm.

On the other end of the spectrum, farms with sales of \$500,000 or more, which represented only 3 percent of all farms, accounted for 57 percent of the total value of sales and realized, on average, a net cash return of \$373,731.

Producers who rented part or all of their land showed, on average, much higher sales than those who owned all of the land used in their operation.

For example, part-owners sold an average of \$160,000 worth of agricultural products, while full-owners averaged only \$70,000 in sales.

The majority of America's farms and ranches—90 percent—remain individual or family-owned businesses or family-held corporations. Nine percent are partnerships, and 1 percent are corporations or other forms of business structure.

Major crop commodities showed no great fluctuations in their relative share of agricultural sales. But, the story is different for livestock: while poultry sales rose by 5 percentage points to 23 percent of all livestock sales, and hogs and pigs rose by 3 percentage points to 14 percent of all livestock sales, cattle declined by 7 percentage points to 41 percent of all livestock sales.

Farmland use was virtually unchanged from 1992 to 1997, with 46 percent used as cropland and 43 percent kept as pasture or rangeland.

The continued rise in the average age of America's farmers over the past two decades has sparked questions over who will be our next generation of farmers. This trend is underscored by the fact that the number of farm operators over seventy years of age rose 10 percent from 1992 to 1997 while their replacements—farmers under age thirty-five—decreased 11 percent. However, for the nearly 157,000 farms which began operation within three years of the census (that is, 1995–97), 25 percent of the operators were under age thirty-five.

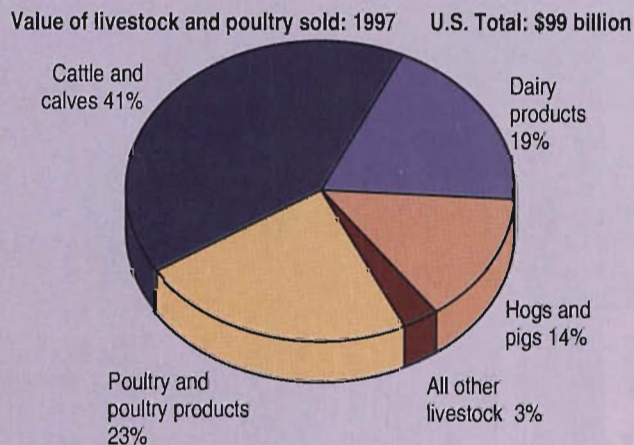
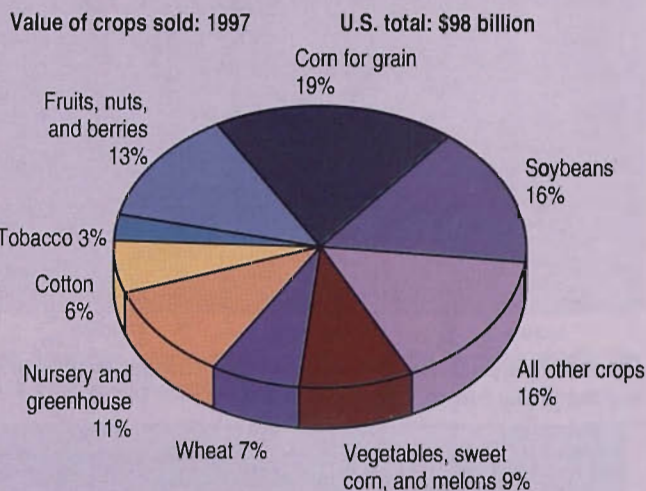
Census statistics show increased counts of farms operated by women, Hispanics, and American Indians. The 1997 census counted 1,911,859 farms compared to the 1,925,300 farms counted in 1992. While the total farm count virtually stabilized from 1992 to 1997, there was a 14 percent increase in the number of female farm and ranch operators and a 32 percent increase in the number of Hispanic operators. The 1997 Census of Agriculture represented the first effort to account for individual American Indian operators on reservations. In addition to the nearly 26 percent increase in the number of American Indian producers who submitted individual census report forms in 1997 versus 1992, the 1997 census counted over 8,000 operators on reservations who were not surveyed individually. Before 1997, the census showed each reservation as a single operation with one operator.

For these and other statistics from the 1997 Census of Agriculture at the state, county, and national levels, visit [www.usda.gov/nass](http://www.usda.gov/nass), e-mail [nass@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov), or call 1-800-727-9540.

**Farms Operated by Women, Persons of Spanish Origin, and Specified Racial Groups: 1997 and 1992**

	1997	1992
Women	165,102	145,156
Spanish origin	27,717	20,956
Black	18,451	18,816
American Indian	18,495	N/A
Individually reported	10,477	8,346
Other <sup>a</sup>	8,018	N/A
Asian/Pacific Islander	8,731	8,096
Other	9,838	8,229

<sup>a</sup>Operators on reservations who did not report individually.



**Percentage of farm operators by age group: 1997 and 1992**  
Average age: 54.3 years

