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In Short ■ by Joe Reilly and Janet Allen

The 1997 Census of Agriculture: Accessing this Warehouse of Information

Reviewing data from the 1997 Census of Agriculture is like walking through a showroom of agricultural statistics—and you can examine these data without ever leaving your home or office. As the complete source of comparable agricultural statistics for every county in the nation, the census provides data on production, chemical use, operator characteristics, income and expenses, capital, direct sales of agricultural products for human consumption, hired labor, injuries and deaths, and a wealth of other information. With the 1997 census, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) made the first efforts to account for American Indian operators on Indian reservations. In addition, 1997 was the first time the census included maple taps, short rotation woody crops, Christmas tree only farms, and farms whose entire acreage was enrolled in Conservation Reserve or Wetlands Reserve Programs.

Census on the Internet

The fastest way to obtain results from the newly released census of agriculture is via the Internet. Simply visit www.usda.gov/nass and click on "Census of Agriculture" to view, print, or download detailed County Profiles, National, State, and County Highlights Tables, graphical highlights, or the tables from the printed reports in Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format.

The County Profiles are new products from the census which offer brief, succinct doses of information on farmland, sales, net cash return, type of organization, and operator characteristics. In addition, the profiles provide comparisons of changes in farm counts and land over the past four censuses, and they highlight where each state or county ranks in their top commodities compared to other states or counties.

The website also offers past results from the 1992 census, announcements regarding additional upcoming census products, methods for ordering census products, and a slide show of key results from the 1997 census.

The National, State, and County Highlights Tables include basic data such as farms by size, land use, market value of sales, operator characteristics, livestock and poultry inventories, and major crops. Comparable statistics from the 1992 census are listed with the 1997 results.

Fans of the printed reports may download and print Adobe Acrobat portable document format (pdf) files of the printed tables in the volume 1, Geographic Area Series (one for each state and a U.S. summary).

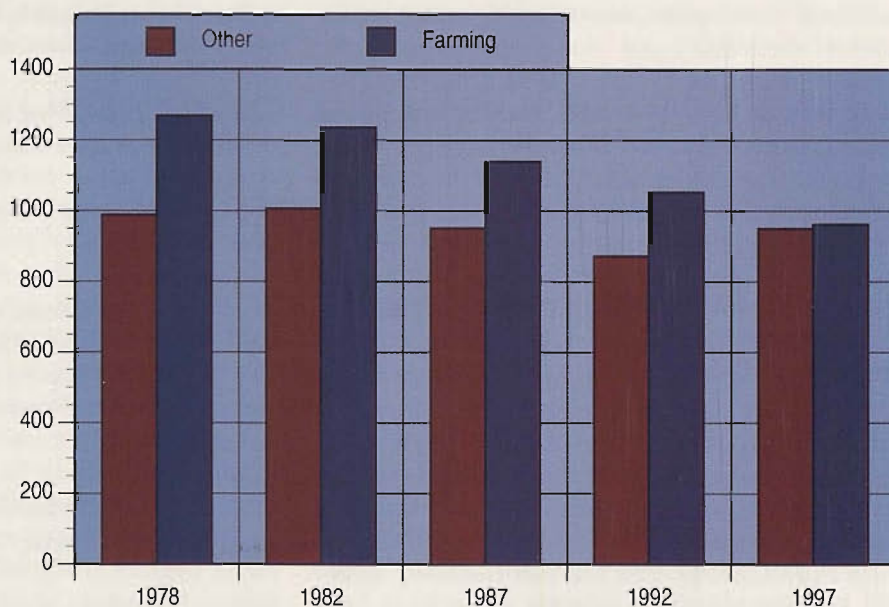
Three censuses of data on new CD-ROM

The best way to maintain census data for electronic analyses—complete with comparable figures from the 1992 and 1987 Censuses of Agriculture—is on

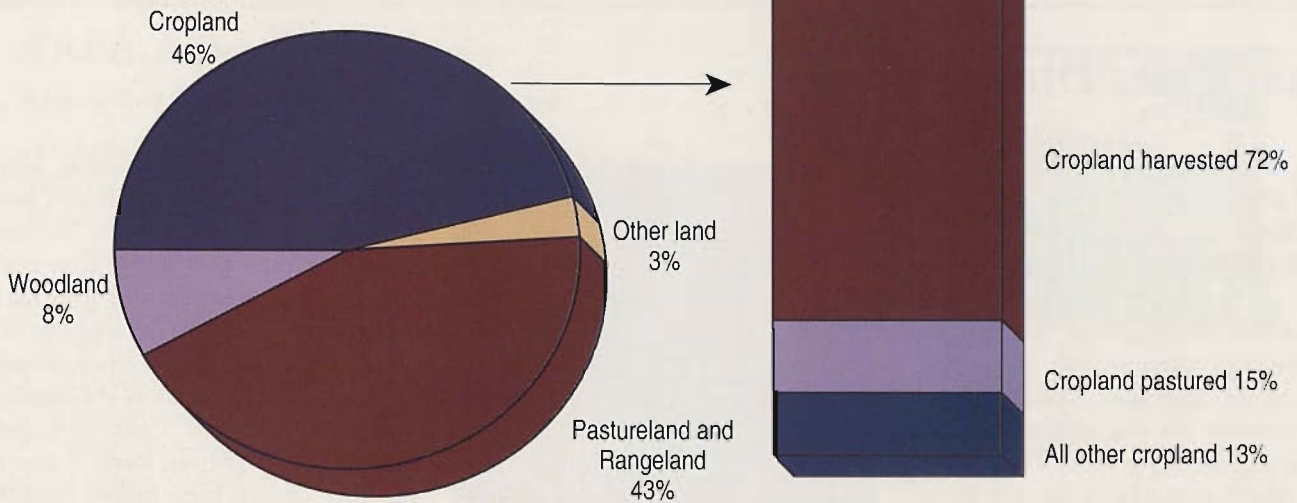
CD-ROM. Packaged with customized viewing and extraction software, the CD-ROM provides the complete published data set from the 1997 census in a 3-CD set. Two CD-ROMs contain the manipulable data for three full censuses at the national, state, and county level. The third CD-ROM houses the Adobe Acrobat (pdf) files of the printed volume 1 Geographic Area Series reports cover to cover. Although the complete set of printed reports for the census would cost \$842, customers can obtain the same data, plus an additional census year (1987) of data, on the CD-ROM for \$50.

Printed reports also available

For people who prefer to use hardcopy, published books are available. These printed reports from the 1997 census are similar to the 1992 census reports in layout and size, and they include comparable data from the 1992 census. The United States Summary contains na-



Operators by principal occupation: 1978 to 1997 (in thousands)

Land Use: 1997**Total acres: 931,795,255**

tional data and statistics for each state. The fifty state reports contain summarized state data and statistics for each county. Beginning in fall 1999, NASS will publish reports for the U.S. outlying areas (Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands). The books include graphics and maps for a few selected data items.

New customized tabulation service

NASS is providing a new service—the agricultural data lab. Data users desiring information beyond what is published in the census can request special tabulations of the data through a reimbursable agreement with NASS. For example, an analyst may need data on operators by principal occupation cross-tabulated against size of farm and government payments received. Or, perhaps a sociologist needs more detailed data on land use on farms operated by different types of operators. These types of special tabulations are available through the agricultural data lab.

Some researchers may want to conduct intense analyses and explore relationships among agricultural variables through access to the entire census data

set. In those cases, if it is not feasible to contract with NASS to do the work and produce a customized final data file, it may be possible for researchers to access these data in a secure envi-

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ronment. Although the current census data lab is physically located in Washington, D.C., five states have been chosen as test sites for satellite data labs: Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, and Michigan.

Use of the agriculture data lab is subject to strict data confidentiality laws that apply to all special tabulations and

research requests. Of course, absolutely no individually reported information can be removed from the data labs. With the ability to conduct customized studies with census data sets, researchers will not need to ask for the same data from farmers and ranchers that is collected by the census. This would lead to major steps toward reducing response burden. ■

■ For more information

To order the 1997 Census of Agriculture data on CD-ROM or in printed reports, call the NASS Order Desk at 1-800-999-6779. For further information about the agricultural data lab, or for an estimated cost to produce a customized special tabulation, contact Stan Hoge at (202) 720-5414. For general questions about the census data and other agricultural statistics available from NASS, call the Agricultural Statistics Hotline at 1-800-727-9540.

Joe Reilly is director of the Census Division, NASS, and has made agriculture and statistics the key focus of his twenty-four years in federal service. Janet Allen is an agricultural statistician at NASS with over a decade of experience in agriculture statistics and marketing.