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ESCS-86 – August 1980

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# U.S. FARM POPULATION, 1979

CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

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The number of persons living on U.S. farms averaged 6,241,000 in the 12-month period centered on April 1979. 1/ This is about 260,000 lower than the estimate of 6,501,000 for 1978, but such a decrease is statistically insignificant; the chances are about 1 out of 15 that a decline of this magnitude would have been obtained from the sample without any real change in the farm population between 1978 and 1979. The U.S. farm population estimate for 1979 was also not significantly different from that of 6,194,000 for 1977.

These estimates are based on the new definition of a farm, first introduced into farm population statistics in 1978. Under this definition, the farm population consists of persons living in rural territory on places that sold, or normally would have sold, $1,000 or more of agricultural products in the reporting year. The previous definition, in use since 1960, defined the farm population as all persons living in rural territory on places of 10 acres or more with at least $50 worth of agricultural products sold, and places of under 10 acres with at least $250 worth of agricultural products sold.

A related report issued jointly by the Bureau of the Census and the U.S. Department of Agriculture noted that the change in definition had the following effects on the 1978 farm population estimates: 2/

- There was a substantial reduction (1.5 million) in the number of persons counted as living on farms.
- The demographic and social characteristics of the farm population were not significantly altered.
- The population reclassified from rural farm to rural nonfarm was primarily white, older, and less likely to be in the labor force or, if in the labor force, were supported chiefly by off-farm work.

Estimates of the geographic distribution of the farm population under the current definition in 1979 and under both definitions in 1977 are presented in table 1. 3/ Examination of these distributions reveals some slight, but not significant, differences in each area's proportion of the total. The relative rank of all regions and divisions by the number of their farm residents was the same in 1979 as in 1977 under both definitions.

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1/ The estimate of the U.S. farm population is an annual average computed by using quarterly data for the year centered on the April date for which the estimate is prepared. In this case, quarterly estimates for October 1978 and January, April, July, and October 1979 were used with a weight of one-eighth given to each of the two October estimates and a weight of one-fourth to each of the estimates of the other 3 months.

2/ Banks, Vera J., and Diana DeAre. Farm Population of the United States: 1978. Current Population Reports, Series P-27, No. 52. U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating. 1979.

3/ Similar 1978 data are not available.

The North Central States, with 45 percent of the national farm population in 1979, had the largest farm population of all regions under both the current definition as well as the previous definition of a farm. This region also had more farmland than any other region (35 percent of the U.S. total in 1979). 4/ The Southern States, which until the middle of this century ranked first in number of farm people, ranked second in 1979. The Northeast and West have traditionally had small numbers of farm residents and together contained less than a fifth of the total farm population. The West North Central division had the largest farm population in 1979 among the geographic divisions.

Definitions.--In addition to the definitions of farm population cited above, it should be noted that the estimates presented in this report relate to the rural civilian population living on farms, regardless of occupation. Under both definitions, persons in institutions, summer camps, motels, and tourist camps, and those living on rented places where no land is used for farming are classified as nonfarm.

Sources and Reliability of the Estimates.--April-centered annual estimates of the total number of people living on U.S. farms are obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the Bureau of the Census. These estimates are subject to sampling variability; tables of standard errors for April-centered annual averages for 1977-79 are presented in the annual Census-USDA farm population report for 1979. 5/ Estimates for geographic areas are based on data obtained from the CPS and USDA's June Enumerative Surveys. Since the estimates are based on sample data, they may differ somewhat from the figures that would be obtained if a complete census had been taken. As in any survey work, the results are subject to error of response and reporting as well as to sampling variability.

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4/ U.S. Department of Agriculture. Farm Numbers. SpSy 3 (12-79). Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service.

5/ Banks, Vera J., and Diana DeAre. Farm Population of the United States: 1979. Current Population Reports, Series P-27, No. 53. U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating. 1980.

Table 1--U.S. farm population by region and division, April 1977 and 1979 1/

| Area | Farm population 2/ | | | Percentage distribution | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Current farm definition | | Previous farm definition, 1977 | Current farm definition | | Previous farm definition, 1977 |
| | 1979 | 1977 | | 1979 | 1977 | |
| | - - - - Thousands - - - - | | | - - - - Percent - - - - | | |
| United States | 6,241 | 6,194 | 7,806 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Region: 3/ | | | | | | |
| Northeast | 417 | 418 | 561 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 7.2 |
| North Central | 2,825 | 2,946 | 3,598 | 45.3 | 47.6 | 46.1 |
| South | 2,242 | 2,118 | 2,684 | 35.9 | 34.2 | 34.4 |
| West | 757 | 712 | 963 | 12.1 | 11.5 | 12.3 |
| Division: 3/ | | | | | | |
| New England | 81 | 89 | 126 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.6 |
| Middle Atlantic | 336 | 329 | 434 | 5.4 | 5.3 | 5.6 |
| East North Central | 1,269 | 1,337 | 1,652 | 20.3 | 21.6 | 21.2 |
| West North Central | 1,556 | 1,610 | 1,946 | 24.9 | 26.0 | 24.9 |
| South Atlantic | 756 | 702 | 924 | 12.1 | 11.3 | 11.8 |
| East South Central | 776 | 762 | 1,007 | 12.4 | 12.3 | 12.9 |
| West South Central | 710 | 653 | 753 | 11.4 | 10.5 | 9.6 |
| Mountain | 329 | 325 | 410 | 5.3 | 5.2 | 5.3 |
| Pacific | 427 | 388 | 553 | 6.8 | 6.3 | 7.1 |

1/ Data may not add because of rounding.
2/ Similar estimates for States are not available.
3/ States in the geographic regions and divisions are:

Northeast
New England--
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
Middle Atlantic--
New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania

North Central
East North Central--
Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin
West North Central--
Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota

South
South Atlantic--
Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia
East South Central--
Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee
West South Central--
Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas

West
Mountain--
Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming
Pacific--
Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington

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