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Among Women Farmers, Different Specializations Dominate Farm Numbers, Farm Sales

by **Robert Hoppe**



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According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, women-operated farms—farms where a woman was the principal operator—numbered 306,200 in 2007, up from 128,100 in 1978. Most women-operated farms (62 percent in 2007) specialize in grazing livestock or miscellaneous crops, but these are mostly small operations that contribute relatively little to the total sales of women-operated farms. Most sales by women-operated farms (72 percent in 2007) come from farms specializing in poultry and eggs, specialty crops, grains and

oilseeds, and dairy.

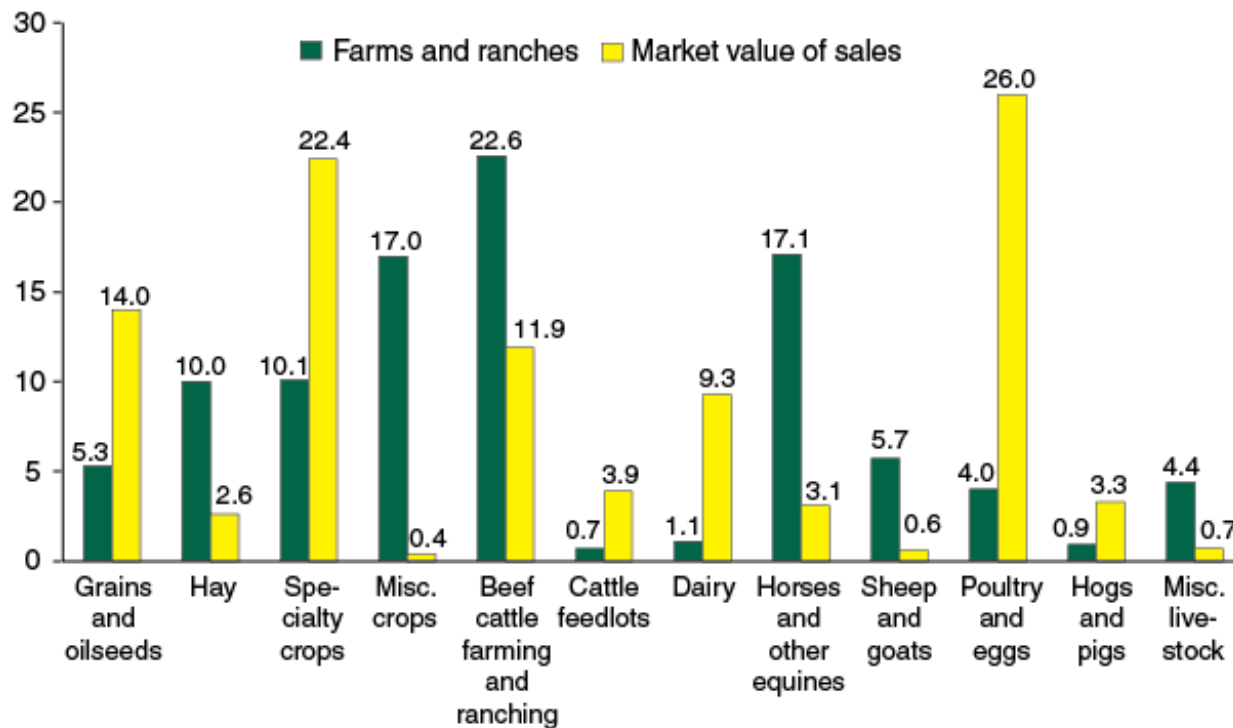
About 45 percent of women operators specialize in various types of grazing livestock, including beef cattle not in feedlots, horses, and sheep/goats. These three specializations, which often use pasture and rangeland extensively, also accounted for 51 percent of the land in women-operated farms (mostly on beef cattle operations) in 2007. Grazing livestock operations, however, accounted for only 16 percent of sales by women-operated farms in 2007, reflecting the small size of these farm businesses. A large majority of the women-operated farms in each of these specializations—72 percent for beef cattle farms and ranches, 90 percent for horse farms, and 94 percent for sheep and goats farms—had sales less than \$10,000.

Another 17 percent of women-operated farms are miscellaneous crop farms, but these accounted for less than 1 percent of total sales in 2007 by all women-operated farms. The miscellaneous crop category includes operations specializing in minor crops, or farms where no single crop accounts for a majority of production. But it also includes operations that qualify as farms only because they receive Government payments. Most women-operated farms in the miscellaneous crop category (85 percent) do receive Government payments, especially from land-retirement programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program. Most (98 percent) of these farms had no reported sales in 2007.

Although farms specializing in poultry, specialty crops, grains and oilseeds, or dairy accounted for the bulk of sales in 2007 by women-operated farms (72 percent), these operations represented only 21 percent of all women-operated farms. While many farms in these specializations had sales less than \$10,000, many others exceeded sales of \$100,000. Shares with more than \$100,000 in sales ranged from 11 percent for specialty crops to 44 percent for dairy; the share was 5 percent for all women-operated farms. Poultry and egg farms accounted for 46 percent of the nearly 2,000 women-operated farms with sales of \$1 million or more.

Farms specializing in poultry and eggs, specialty crops, grains and oilseeds, or dairy accounted for 72 percent of sales by women-operated farms in 2007

Percent of women-operated farms and their sales



Note: A farm is said to specialize in a particular commodity or commodity group if that commodity or commodity group accounts for at least half of the farm's market value of sales.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

This article is drawn from...

Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms, by Robert Hoppe and Penni Korb, USDA, Economic Research Service, April 2013



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