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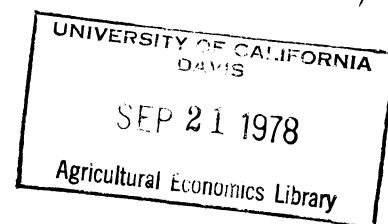
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Farmers



IDENTIFICATION AND CHARACTERIZATION OF SMALL FARM OPERATORS

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Recently, there has been much concern for the small farmers. Many questions have been asked, such as: Who are they, where are they, and what are they like?

Who Are They?

I have heard various arguments from different groups concerning these questions. They have been called, poverty farmers, part-time farmers, part-retirement farmers, limited resource farmers, hobby farmers, low income farmers and various other names. Some definitions include the total family income while others only include household head's income. Some include off-farm earnings while others only include income from farm sales.

The most widespread definition is one that uses gross agricultural sales. A few years ago, the most accepted definition was that a small farm was one in which the operator had annual gross sales of \$10,000 or less from agriculture products. Today, it is commonly thought that a small farm is one in which the farm operator has annual gross sales of \$20,000 or less from agriculture products.

The agricultural census is the best source of data available on farms and farm operators and since they classify

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farms according to sales, this paper considers a small farm as with farm sales \$20,000 or below.

Where Are They?

Over 65 percent of all farms in the U. S. are small, and they are found in almost every state of the nation. However, the percent of small farms is much higher in the South and Southeast. Fifty-three percent of the small farms in the U. S. are in the 16 southern states or the states with 1890 Land Grant Colleges and Universities. In some southern states, the majority of the farms are small for example, about 91 percent of the farms in Tennessee and 93 percent of the farms in West Virginia are small. Only two of these states (Delaware and Maryland) have fewer small farms than the U. S. average.

According to the 1974 census, there were 59,371 farms in the U. S. operated by black and other races. These farms make up only 2.6 percent of the total farms but, over 80 percent of these farms are located in the 16 states with 1890 schools. Of this 59,371 farms, 28,755 or nearly one half of them had farm sales below \$2,500. The percent of all farms with sales below \$2,500 during this same period was slightly over 26 percent.

What Are They Like?

There are not many studies describing small farms. In a recent study by Woodworth, et. al, of 344 farmers in three Tennessee counties, small farmers were found to be old (59 years of age) compared to larger farmers (45 years of age). However,

small full-time farmers were classified separately from part-time farmers. Part-time farmers were those farmers who were employed more than 1,000 hours in an off-farm job. This group of farmers were somewhat younger (average age 48). While for large farmers average age was only 45 years.

Education attainment followed the same pattern, small farmers had less education (9 year average) but over one half had less than 8 years. Part-time averaged 10 years while large farmers average 11 years.

In a study by Larson and Lewis, small farmers were found to be older than large farmers (53 years vs. 50 years) with one out of five small operators 65 years old or older. Another one-fourth were in the 55-64 age grouping.

Marshall and Thompson, in a study of small farmers in the south found that the south has a higher percentage of older farmers and a smaller percentage of young farmers. The older had smaller sales than the young. They also found that black farmers are older, on the average than whites. Over 58 percent of black and 46 percent of white operators in the south are 55 or older, only 5 percent of black and 11 percent of whites are under 35 years of age.

Small farmers tend to own land rather than rent while large farmers rent additional land. Small farmers also use less credit.

Table I. Selected Characteristics of Small Farms

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Farms in U. S.	2,314,013	--
Small Farms in U. S.	1,513,095	65.4
Black and Other Operated Farms	59,371	2.6
Black and Other Operated Farms With Sales Less Than \$2,500	29,755	48.4
All Farms With Sales Less Than \$2,500	--	26.7

Table II. Distribution and Incidence of Small Farms and Black and Other Operated Farms in the 16 States That Have 1890 Colleges and Universities

State	Percent of all Small Farms in the U.S.	Incidence of Small Farms in the State	No. of Black and Other Farms by State	Incidence of Black and Other Farms in the State	Percent of all Black and Other Farms in the U.S.
Missouri	5.5	76	397	0.3	0.7
Delaware	0.1	48	74	2.2	0.1
Maryland	0.6	64	528	3.5	0.9
Virginia	2.9	84	3,977	7.5	6.7
North Carolina	4.6	77	8,605	9.4	14.5
South Carolina	1.6	80	4,606	15.7	7.8
Georgia	2.5	70	3,963	5.4	5.0
Florida	1.6	76	968	3.0	1.6
Kentucky	5.7	87	1,053	1.0	1.8
Tennessee	5.6	91	2,391	2.3	4.0
Alabama	3.1	82	3,962	7.0	6.7
Mississippi	3.0	84	8,173	15.2	13.8
Arkansas	2.3	72	1,822	3.6	3.1
Louisiana	1.6	75	2,723	8.2	4.6
Oklahoma	3.4	72	1,628	2.3	2.7
Texas	9.0	81	3,698	2.1	6.2
TOTAL	53.1	--	47,568	--	80.2