

# 1969 Farm Census Due January, 1970

How many farms are still operating in the United States? The 1969 Census of Agriculture may count fewer than three million for the first time since 1870.

After a peak of 68 million farms counted in 1935, each farm census conducted by the Bureau of the Census has shown a steady decline in the total number of farms and ranches in the nation. The 1964 census count was 3.2 million, a decrease of about 553 thousand from the previous census in 1959, which in turn showed a drop of about 1.1 million farms from the 1954 census. Contributing to the decline from 1954 to 1959 was a change in the

definition of a farm, accounting for a loss of about 232 thousand farms.

The smallest decrease in any five-year period since 1935 was the 238 thousand between the censuses of 1940 and 1945. A comparable drop in the period between 1964 and 1969 would bring the total below three million.

The decrease in the number of farms has been accompanied by an increase in size, although there has been a slight reduction in the total amount of land being farmed. The average acreage in 1964 was 352, an increase of 49 acres over 1959 and 109 acres larger than in 1954. In 1935, the

peak year for number of farms, the average size was only 155 acres.

The greatest boom period recorded was 1870-1880, reflecting the westward movement following the Civil War and the subdivision of large land holdings. The 4,008,907 farms counted in 1880 amounted to a 51 percent jump over 1870. The acreage listed in farms in 1880 was 536 million, a 10-year gain of 32 percent.

Beginning in 1840, the farm census was taken at 10-year intervals at the same time as the decennial census of population. After 1900, increasing demand for information at more frequent intervals to measure the effect of rapid agricultural changes resulted in a decision to take the census every five years, starting in 1925. Although each census listed inventory items on hand at the time of the enumeration, production figures were asked for the preceding year. Time of the census was shifted in the 1950's to those years ending in four and nine and both inventory and production figures were made to cover the same year.

The 1969 Census of Agriculture will be the first to be conducted entirely by mail. Questionnaires will be mailed to a master list of farms early in January of 1970 and farmers will be asked to fill them out and return them by mail. Computers will be used in the check-in of returns to identify those farmers who fail to respond or fill them out incorrectly. In those cases followups will be made by mail and telephone or enumerators will call to provide help.

In addition to the number and acreage of farms, the census will determine the value of land and buildings, cropland harvested, acreage of irrigated land,

acreage in major crops and numbers of principal kinds of livestock. Other items concern the number of farm operators by age, value of farm products sold, the amount of time farm operators worked off the farm, income from recreational use of land, and the number of autos, trucks, tractors, combines and corn pickers.

Among questions to be asked of operators with expected sales of \$2,500 and over are number of regular workers, acres fertilized, amounts of dry and liquid fertilizer used for almost all crops, acres limed and the number of grain-fed cattle sold. Information will be obtained on the amount of money spent

in buying seed, pesticides, gasoline and other farm fuels, machine hire, farm labor, livestock and poultry.

Each farmer's responses to the questionnaire will be completely confidential as in the past. The information acquired, minus names or clues to identification, will become a part of statistical totals and will be published in State and county groupings as well as for the entire nation.

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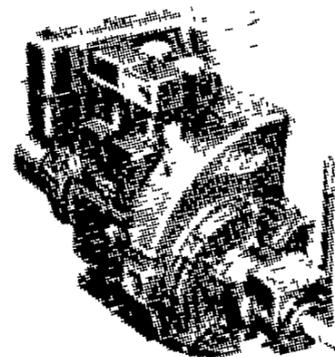
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