

Farm productivity up despite cropland loss

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Despite a sharp drop in its harvested cropland, Pennsylvania farmers experienced a 175 per cent increase in the market value of farm products sold over a

25-year period computed by the Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

This is reflected in a comparison of already published data from the five-

year farm censuses completed by the Bureau for 1949 and 1974. The review, offering a significant long range perspective of trends in farm methods, products, and income is to be updated

with the 21st Census of Agriculture in January 1979.

The market value of Pennsylvania's Farm products soared to \$1.5 billion from \$546 million in 1949, a 175 per cent gain.

Field and nursery crops brought a total of \$448 million in 1974, up 232 per cent, while livestock, poultry and their products brought in \$1 billion, a 157 per cent gain over 1949. The State was

third in the Nation in value of nursery and greenhouse products sold in 1974 (\$138 million) with Chester County first among U.S. counties in this category.

The State increase occurred even though the number of farms dropped from 147,000 to 43,000 in 1974, and harvested cropland was reduced from 5.6 million to 3.9 million acres.

Other highlights of the 25 year Pennsylvania agriculture review include the following:

Among all States, it ranked fourth in 1974 in production of apples, and fifth in peaches and grapes, despite a 54 per cent drop in orchard land to 64,000 acres.

It was fourth in clover and timothy hay acreage in 1974. Alfalfa grown for hay rose 87 per cent during the period to 523,000 acres. Corn cut for silage increased 65 per cent to 396,000 acres, and soybeans rose 140 per cent to 53,000 acres.

The State was fifth in dairy production and number of milk cows in 1974. Lancaster County rose to fifth among U.S. counties in dairy products sold with \$65.6 million, up from seventh place in 1949 with \$15 million in sales.

Between 1954 and 1974, the number of beef cows was up 377 per cent to 192,000 while cattle and calves rose seven per cent to 1,762,000; and broilers increased 109 per cent to 56.5 million.

The propagation of mushrooms under glass nearly doubled to 32 million square feet of growing space.

The farm census, which today provides the only U.S. set of uniform agricultural data at the county level, covers 17 principal items of information ranging from acreage and machinery to fertilizer and fuel storage.

Because of agriculture's importance to the national economy, the census data since 1920 has been compiled and published every five years, for years ending in 4 and 9. Beginning in 1982 the agricultural census will be conducted in years ending in 2 and 7 so as to coincide with the Bureau's economic censuses.

When information from the 1978 census is aligned with the current 25-year review, the result will constitute the most important overview of the character and growth of U.S. agriculture since World War II. Report forms for the 1978 census will be distributed to farmers and ranchers in December.

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