

This land is whose land?

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Draw a line from the western border of Minnesota south to the southern edge of Missouri and then east below Kentucky and Virginia.

Take the combined land area of the 22 States to the north and east of that line, add in North Carolina, and the total is about equivalent to the 493 million acres of U.S. land owned by farmers and ranchers.

Although farmers account for only 8 percent of all landowners, they hold the deed to nearly 40 percent of all privately owned land in the Nation (excluding Alaska).

Looking specifically at farm and ranch land — which represents about 871 million acres out of 1.25 billion acres of private U.S. land — farmers own about half. Around 431 million of their 493 million acres are used in farms and ranches.

Other groups owning farm and ranch land include the retired (in many cases, retired farmers), white and blue collar workers, and big business.

Corporations and large partnerships own about 106 million acres of farm and ranch land, only about 12 percent of the total.

However, for all private land (farm and nonfarm) their share is 16 percent, even though they comprise only 5 percent of all land owners.

At 203 million acres, their total holdings are about equal to the combined land area of California, Oregon, and Washington State.

These figures are among the results of a recent USDA survey on the ownership of privately held land. More than 37,000 individuals, partnerships, and corporations were surveyed in 1978 by the Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service in an effort to find out more about some 28.8 million owners of 1.25 billion acres of private U.S. land —

urban, rural, timber, ranch, and farm land.

Of course, privately held land excludes national forests and all other public lands which, including Alaska, account for about 4 out of every 10 acres of U.S. land.

Of this, there are 762 million acres owned by the Federal Government and 136 million acres owned by State and local Governments. In addition, some 51 million acres are held by, or in trust for, American Indians.

One important use of survey information will be to help policymakers design programs which affect land use, such as conservation, farm production, supply management, credit, and technical assistance programs.

When combined with soils and land use data, the information can also provide a check on how prime agricultural land is being used and whether it's still in the hands of farmers and ranchers.

Although the survey shows, as indicated, that farmers and corporations own a much larger share of the land than their numbers might indicate, the reverse is true for other major groups of owners.

For example, 25 percent of all U.S. landowners are professionals or other white collar workers, but this group of owners holds the deed to only 13 percent of all private U.S. land.

Similarly, blue collar workers own just 8 percent of the land, although they account for 26 percent of all owners.

For both groups, the majority probably own residential properties which are typically much smaller than farm or corporate land holdings. However, both groups together do own about a fifth of U.S. farm and ranch land acreage.

Farmers' share of all private land varies from

place to place.

By region, they own the largest proportion in the Mountain States, which stretch from Montana south to Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. They also hold over half of the private land in the Northern Plains, which includes the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas.

Farmers own the smallest proportion of land in the Northeast (Maryland and Pennsylvania north to Maine).

There the white and blue collar groups dominate in overall landownership, but farmers own about 45 percent of the land in farms.

In its profile of landownership, the survey also provides other important information on these characteristics of owners of private land:

More than 9 out of 10 owners of land (farm and nonfarm) reside in the same county as the land that they own. These landowners hold 80 percent of all privately owned land.

Another 5.6 percent of landowners, with 14.5 percent of the land, reside outside the county but within the same State.

Only 5.5 percent of the land is owned by the 2 percent of the owners who live in another State. And, perhaps more important still, only one-tenth of 1 percent of those owning U.S. land — and a mere 400,000 acres of land (or less than one-tenth of one percent of U.S. land) — is owned by those residing outside the U.S.

Although an estimated 28.8 million owners have title to some U.S. land, landownership by size of holding is highly concentrated. Overall, one percent of the landowners (including individuals, partnerships, and corporations) hold about half of all private land.

At the same time, about 75 percent of the owners hold only about three percent of

the land, with title to less than 10 acres of each. Of course, the majority of landholders own residential or commercial properties on small lots, and these may still have considerable value.

Among owners of farm, ranch, and forest land, with their extensive uses, land holdings are more evenly distributed.

The largest one percent of owners have less than 30 percent of the land in farms and ranches, a substantial proportion but sharply less than the share held by the top one percent when it comes to all private land.

Concentration is also less pronounced in areas where crop farming dominates than in those where ranch or forestry use is prevalent.

Almost 70 percent of all private land is owned by those over age 50. Only about 16 percent of the owners who

hold six percent of the land are under 35.

In the category of ownership patterns by sex, more than 80 percent of the survey respondents were male, but this statistic does not fully reflect joint female ownership through husband-wife holdings and family partnerships.

About a third of the private land is owned jointly by husband and wives.

In the area of race, 9 out of 10 landowners are white and non-Hispanic. They own 97 percent of the land. Blacks, representing four percent of all owners, hold just one percent of the private land, with their largest share — 5.4 percent of the land — in the Delta States of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

More years of education do not necessarily mean more land owned according to the landownership figures.

Those with 8 or fewer

years of schooling account for about a fifth of all landowners and own about a fifth of privately held land; both proportions match those of college graduates.

According to the landownership survey, only 18 percent of the private land was inherited. About 80 percent of the land was purchased, and three-fourths of that from nonrelatives.

Acquisition from relatives is most common in the Northern Plains where more than 40 percent of the land was either inherited or bought from relatives.

The proportion is only 23 percent of the land in the Pacific States of Washington, Oregon and California.

Purchase from nonrelatives ranges from a low of 51 percent in the Northern Plains up to 69 percent in the Pacific States.

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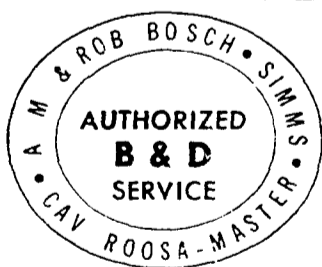


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