# **Fair** share

(Continued from Page C28)

This aggravates the longstanding problem for beginning farmers of surviving lean early years. Partnerships, part-time farming, renting and leasing, and off-farm jobs are being used by new farmers to stay afloat.

While the general financial factors discussed dominate farm finances, income problems tend to vary by commodity mix, geographic region, size of business, tenure, and operator age. Obviously, variation in financial situations occur within each of these categories.

Commodity mix is a key income factor. Some commodities, such as fruits, are grown under production contracts that set prices in advance, thus lumiting but

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assuring a return. Others are protected by Government price supports to stabilize prices.

Some farms seek stability by diversifying. But many producers opt for economics of scale by concentrating on one commodity, even while recognizing its cyclical pattern offers feast or famine years.

Regional variations are considerable, due to farm size, soils, commodities produced, and weather patterns.

Farm net income in 1978 ranged for \$56,706 in Arizona to only \$811 in West Virginia. Arizona's high per capita income figure comes from the dominance of the relatively few large irrigated farms that dominate that State's agriculture. West Virginia,

on the other hand, is characterized by relatively small, part-time farming operations.

This geographic variation also relates to still another important element: variation by size or volume of business. Many farms, especially large farms, can do well without price and income support programs. But on the other hand small farms often cannot benefit much from programs that tie benefits to the quantity of а given commodity produced.

In between the large-small extremes, operators of medium-sized farms may face the worst squeeze of all. They are often less free than small farm owners to supplement their incomes with off-farm work. Yet they don't have the economic muscle to bargain for discounts on major inputs or price premiums for their produce. Some experts contend that these are the farms most in need of price and income support programs.

Farm owners aren't the only ones in need of help. Tenants and part owners still hold a significant number of farms, despite a decline in tenant farms from 42 percent of all farms in 1935, to about 11 percent in 1974. During that period, the percentage of farms operated by full owners rose from 47 to 63 percent, while those operated by part owners increased from 10 to 26 percent.

Part owners, who both own and rent land, control most U.S. farmland and produce the highest value in products sold. The part ownership increase in the 1970's reflected a painful dilemma for some farmers: While

from a cash flow standpoint, ownership offered considerable benefits in current and potential capital gains.

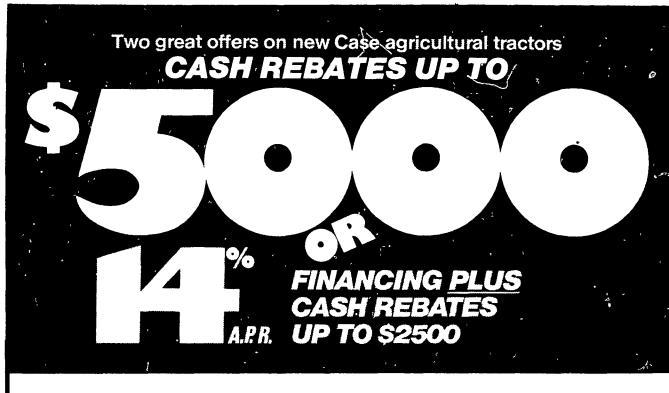
Lancaster Farming, Saturday, May 17, 1980-C29

A final factor is operator age. Young farmers tend to have a higher debt-asset ratio than older, more established farmers. Thus younger farmers, who still face large debts they incurred in getting started and a lower accumulation of assets in such capital items as land and equipment - are more likely to face cash flow problems. In other words, farmers nearing retirement are far better able to expand than young neighbors who have the energy and ambition to do so - but who lack the means to come up with the necessary money.

In devising future programs and policies, Government officials must

unable to justify buying land factors if they are to succeed in strengthening the position of the types of farmers who most need help-the young and new entrants, the medium-sized full-time operators, and the small farms.





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