

2.5 million farms on 1 billion acres

# Census report charts gain by large, small farms

LANCASTER — increased numbers of small and large farms and decreases in those of medium size are outlined by data from a report released Monday by the Commerce Department's Bureau of the Census.

The U S Preliminary Report is based on findings from the 1978 Census of Agriculture.

The U S Summary publication summarizes reports issued for each county and state. In addition there are reports for each of the four geographic regions.

A farm, for census purposes, is defined as an operation which had, or normally would have had, \$1000 or more in agricultural product sales during 1978.

Comparison with totals from the last previous census (1974) should be made with caution because of significant improvements in data collection procedures in 1978. Bureau officials say they believe the improvements in data collection had a much greater effect on the count of farms than on measures of agricultural production. The effect of the improvements are discussed further below.

Census figures for 1978 show a total of 2,479,866 farms, averaging 416 acres in size, with one billion acres of land.

Based on 1974 census figures adjusted for undercoverage, the count of farms dropped by an estimated 150,000, the smallest drop in recent years. The estimated decrease in counts is subject to sampling error.

Census officials indicate that farms with less than 50 acres grew in numbers by about 20,000. Farms 500 acres or more increased about 7500 or two percent. During the same period, mid-size farms with 50 to 500 acres declined an estimated 175,000 farms, a loss of about two percent.

Total cropland, rose five percent from 440 to 461.9 million acres. A bigger gain was registered by irrigated land, up 23 percent, from 41.2 to 50.7 million acres four years later.

Cropland used only for pasture dropped 6.4 million

acres, from 82.7 in 1974 to 76.3 million in 1978, coinciding with the downward cycle in cattle herds during the period when cattle and calves inventory dropped from 113.2 to 105.9 million head and farms with cattle fell by 41,000 in number.

Two percent, 23,000 farms and ranches with 500 or more head of cattle, had inventories amounting to 29 percent of the U S total. The North Central States had a major share of the cattle industry, 40 percent of the farms and ranches and 41 percent of the inventories.

Dairy product sales from 221,000 farms in 1978 amounted to \$11.4 billion. Milk cow numbers declined nationally, from 10.7 to 10.4 million head. Farms having milk cows dropped from 404,000 to 334,000. Again, the North Central States led, with 4.7 billion cows and \$4.8 billion in sales.

Farms with hogs and pigs climbed from 470,000 with 45.5 million head to 513,000 farms with 58.9 million head. Farms having inventories of 500 or more now account for 42 percent of the Nation's hogs compared to 33 percent in 1974.

Broilers sold went up 25 percent from 2.5 to 3.1 billion birds on approximately 34,000 farms.

The number of farms harvesting corn, the leading U.S. crop in acreage, declined from 883,000 to 843,000, while acreage rose from 61.7 to 70.7 million.

Farms with soybeans were up from 542,000 to 551,000 in 1978, with 62 million acres harvested, a 29 percent increase over 1974.

Hay was cut on 1.2 million farms with 61.8 million acres harvested, five percent more farms and 10 percent more acres than in 1974.

Wheat dropped both in farms reporting — 534,000 to 384,000 — and in acreage harvested, 63 to 54.5 million.

Regionally, 562,000 North Central farms harvested 58.1 million acres of corn, 82 percent of the U.S. total, compared with 574,000 farms and 51.2 million acres in 1974 and grew 38 million acres of soybeans or 61 percent of the total.

The leading crop in the

South was soybeans, moving up in four years from 142,000 to 159,000 farms and from 15.3 to 23.6 million acres harvested.

Wheat was the dominant crop in the West, more than 14 million acres for both census years, but with farms declining from 55,000 to 46,000.

Hay led in the Northeast, up from 90,000 to 105,000 farms and from 4.9 to 5.8 million acres in 1978.

The average value of land and buildings per acre went up from \$336 to \$627. The average value of land and buildings per farm rose 78 percent from \$148,000 to \$263,000.

The sales of agricultural products rose 33 percent over the four-year period, from \$81.5 to 108.4 billion. The average sales per U.S. farm rose from \$35,000 to \$44,000. Sales of livestock and livestock products accounted for 47 percent of the U.S. total agricultural sales.

While gross sales were up, costs also grew rapidly. For example, feed costs rose 18 percent from \$13.6 to \$16.1 billion; commercial fertilizer up 25 percent from \$5.1 to \$6.4 billion, and gasoline and other petroleum products increased 64 percent from \$3.1 to \$5.1 billion.

Total energy costs on farms was about \$6.2 billion.

In farm product sales by geographic region, the North Central States with 41 percent of the farms held a strong lead, contributing 44 percent, \$47.6 billion to the U.S. total.

The South was next, with \$33.1 billion, followed by the West, \$22 billion, and the Northeast, \$5.7 billion. The average per farm sales was highest in the West, \$77,000

and lowest in the South, \$33,000.

Other facts on the U.S. agricultural industry brought out by the Census

include the following.

Eighty-eight percent or 2.2 million of the 2.5 million farms were operated by individuals or families,

241,000 by partnerships, and 54,000 by corporations, or which 48,000 were family held.

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