

# 2017 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

## WHAT IS THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE?

The Census of Agriculture is a “complete count” of farms and ranches and the people who operate them for every state and county in the United States. Conducted every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the census is the only source of uniform, comprehensive, and impartial agricultural data. While data from the census provide a detailed picture of demographics, economics, land, and activities on the nation’s farms and ranches at a point in time, information from the census also can illustrate national and local trends in agriculture.

The first Census of Agriculture was conducted in 1840 by the U.S. Department of Commerce, when questions about agricultural production were included in the sixth census of population. By 1997, responsibility for the census was transferred to NASS, and in 1982 the census moved to a consistent five-year cycle. The 2017 Census of Agriculture is the nation’s 29th.

## DATA HIGHLIGHTS

The census collects data on many topics, but the information most frequently used is about land use and ownership, operator characteristics, crops, livestock and production practices, income, and expenditures. Information from the census serves as a valuable resource for people working to save farmland and rangeland for agriculture. Data from the census can be used to:

- Identify the extent of agriculture and how much land supports the current level of production.
- Track information about farm operator age and the amount of land operators own.
- Analyze the use of conservation practices on the nation’s land.
- Provide data about the economic contribution and health of farm and ranch operations.
- Supply statistics about the next generation of farmers, including new groups interested in farming.

The following highlights are a small sampling of data that are available and support the efforts of people who care about the future of agriculture and agricultural land.

**WHAT IS A FARM?**

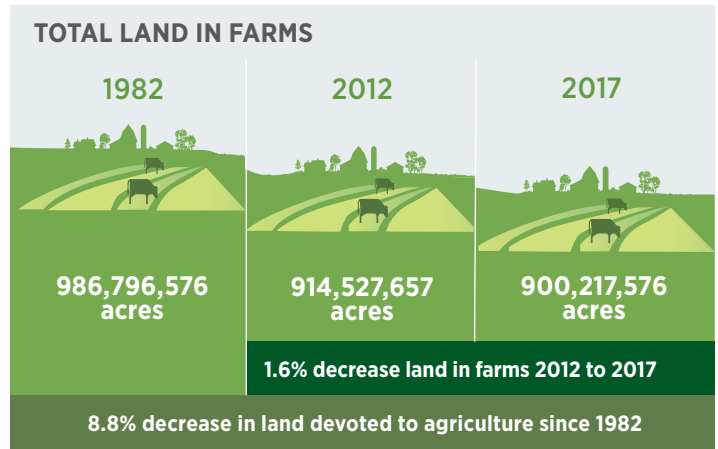
For the purpose of the Census of Agriculture, even a small plot of land—whether rural or urban—is counted. A “farm” is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMS (2017) 2,042,220 (2012) 2,109,303**

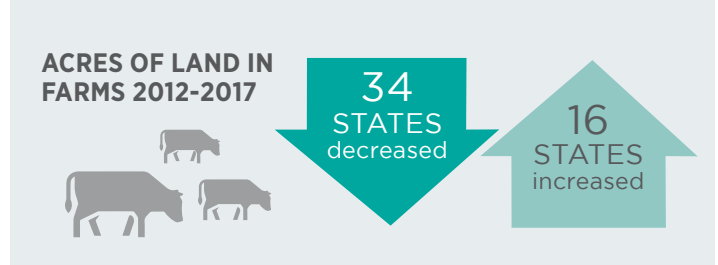
## Farm and Ranch Land

The census tracks the amount of farmland as “land in farms.” Land in farms includes total cropland, total woodland, permanent pasture and rangeland, plus land in farmsteads and buildings. While a decline in land in farms does not necessarily

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LAND USE TYPE	2017	Change
Cropland	396,433,817 acres	+1.7% from 2012
Permanent Pasture and Rangeland	400,771,178 acres	-3.5% from 2012
Woodland	73,092,054 acres	-5.1% from 2012
Land in Farmsteads (buildings, etc.)	29,920,527 acres	-8.0% from 2012



When using data on land in farms, decreases in numbers should not be used as a measure or indicator of farmland lost to development. One source for agricultural land conversion data is the National Resources Inventory (NRI), a statistical survey of natural resource conditions, land use, and trends on nonfederal land. The NRI is conducted by NRCS and reports on all land use changes over a given time period. Another source of data is Farms Under Threat, American Farmland Trust’s assessment of the conversion of U.S. farmland and rangeland to urban and low-density residential development.

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mean the land taken out of production has been developed, it is still concerning: Land that is no longer part of a farm may be more vulnerable to development; a shrinking supply of land in active agricultural use may create additional barriers for beginning and established farmers seeking suitable land (e.g., costs associated with clearing and restoring agricultural use); and, a smaller pool of land devoted to agriculture may limit opportunities to establish sound farming practices and/or management systems.

## CHANGES AND ADDITIONS IN THE 2017 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

- All individuals involved in making decisions for farm and ranch operations are now referred to as **Producers** (formerly “operators.”) Demographic information was collected for up to four producers per farm.
- Up to four producers could indicate whether they were a principal operator or senior partner on the farm, representing **principal producers**. In previous years a farm would designate only one “principal operator.”
- A **primary producer** is designated as the person making the most decisions for the farm. If multiple persons make the same amount of decisions, the person who spends less time working off the farm was selected by NASS as the primary producer.
- A bridging table was developed for comparison between a single “primary producer” in 2017 and the “principal operator” of 2012. The table also allows comparison of 2012 and 2017 data using the “all producer” items. NASS plans to eliminate this bridging table from the next census.
- **Value of food sold directly to consumers** replaces “Value of food sold directly to individuals for human consumption.” These data represent the value of edible products, including value added products, produced and sold for human consumption. In 2012 the category excluded value added sales so the two data items are not directly comparable.
- The census now tracks the **value of food sold directly to retail markets, institutions, and food hubs for local or regionally branded products**.
- **New and beginning producers** includes producers operating on any farm for 10 years or less, and may be on farms with producers who are not beginning producers. The census historically only published data for operators with “fewer than 10 years of experience” and tracked “years on present farm.” The new definition is more closely aligned with the USDA’s definition of a beginning farmer as an individual who has been operating a farm for 10 years or less.
- For the first time, the census included a **young producer** category, which represents producers 35 years old or younger. This differs from age groups presented in the published tables of “under 25 years,” and “25 to 34 years,” which excludes producers 35 years old.

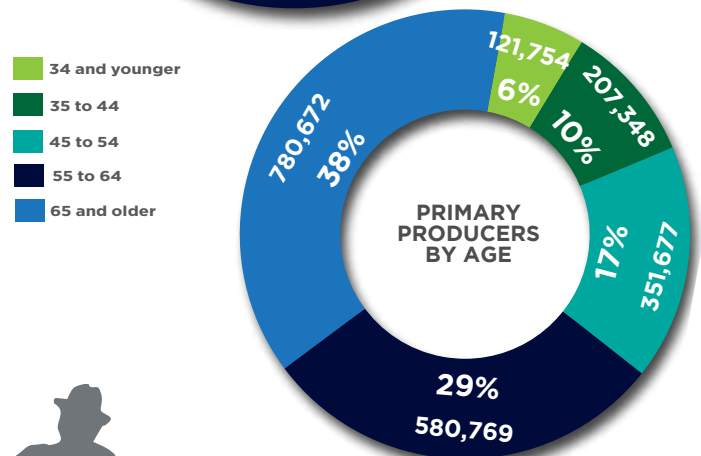
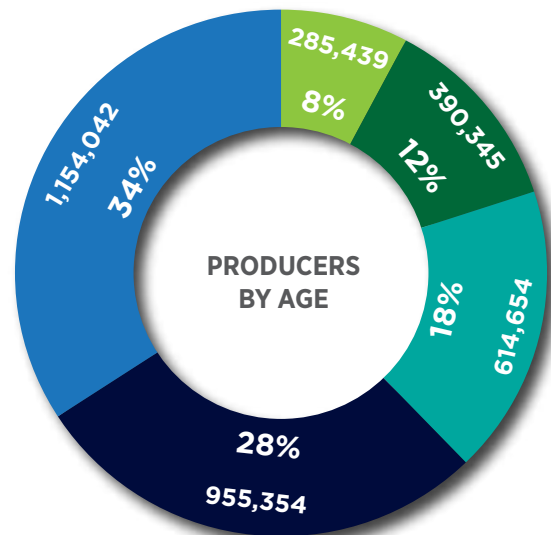
## PRODUCERS, PRINCIPAL PRODUCERS, AND PRIMARY PRODUCERS

In this census, the term producer designates a person who is involved in making decisions for the farm operation. Demographic information was collected for up to four producers per farm, which is a subset of all producers. Up to four producers on a farm could indicate whether they were a principal operator or senior partner—these represent principal producers. One primary producer was designated for each farm as the person making the most decisions on the farm.

ALL PRODUCERS	PRINCIPAL PRODUCERS	PRIMARY PRODUCERS
3,447,028	2,740,453	2,042,220

## Senior Producers

Understanding how much land is managed and owned by senior producers is important for assessing the amount of land potentially at risk of being developed. When farmers retire without a next generation in line, land is more likely to be sold for development than kept in agriculture.



AVERAGE AGE of PRODUCERS  
**57.5**

AVERAGE AGE of PRIMARY PRODUCERS  
**59.4**

**38.2%** of PRIMARY PRODUCERS are 65+

There are more than 6 times as many primary producers aged 65 and older than primary producers 34 and younger

Ownership by senior producers was captured in the 2017 census but was not included in published tables.

## NEW and BEGINNING PRODUCERS

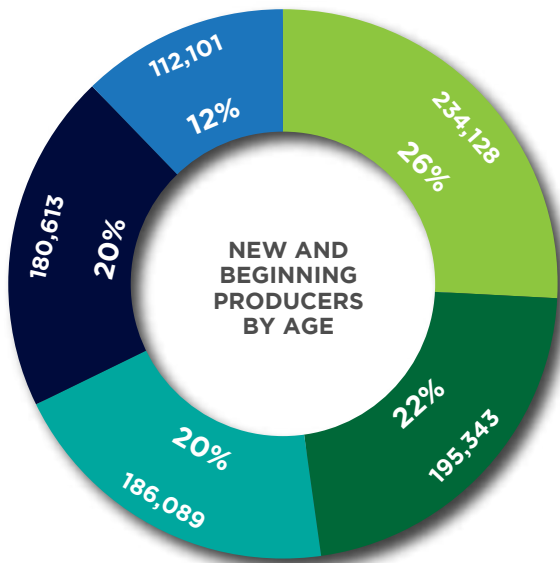
New and beginning producers have 10 years or less experience on any farm. The census historically only published data for operators with “fewer than 10 years of experience” and tracked “years on present farm.” The new definition aligns with USDA’s definition of a beginning farmer.

**NEW AND BEGINNING PRODUCERS**  
908,274

**NEW AND BEGINNING PRIMARY PRODUCERS**  
472,360

## Young, New, and Beginning Producers

In order for a vibrant agricultural industry to continue in the U.S., more young, new, and beginning farmers are needed, especially as the percentage of farmers nearing retirement increases. New and beginning farmers as a group are more diverse than U.S. producers as a whole.



34 and younger 35 to 44 45 to 54 55 to 64 65 and older

**32.2%** of NEW and BEGINNING PRODUCERS are AGE 55 and OLDER

**8.4%** of PRODUCERS are AGE 34 and YOUNGER (285,439 up from 257,454 in 2012)

**40.7%** of NEW and BEGINNING PRODUCERS are FEMALE\* (Compared to 36.1% of all PRODUCERS)

**4.5%** of NEW and BEGINNING PRODUCERS are HISPANIC\* (But only 3.3% of PRODUCERS)

**1.4%** of NEW and BEGINNING PRODUCERS are BLACK or AFRICAN AMERICAN\* (1.3% of all PRODUCERS)

*\*New and beginning producers include slightly larger percentages of women; people of Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish origin; Asian; Black or African American; and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders than all U.S. producers. Even so, 95% of new and beginning farmers are white and 59% are male.*

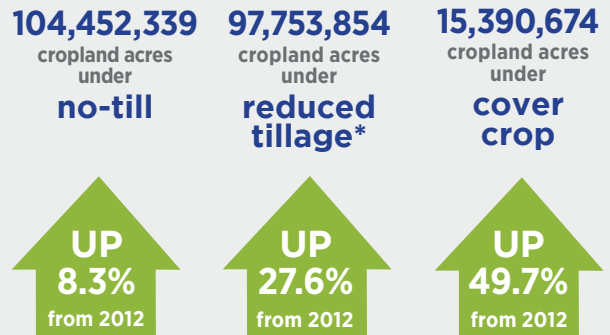
908,274 new and beginning producers now account for 26.7% of all producers in the U.S.

472,360 new and beginning primary producers represent 23.1% of all primary producers.

## Conservation Practices

Conservation practices—including no-till, reduced tillage, and cover cropping—maintain soil fertility by minimizing disturbance of the soil, reducing weed pressure, and decreasing water pollution. Additional benefits of on-farm conservation practices include the land’s ability to sequester more carbon, improved water infiltration, and wildlife and pollinator habitats. Farmers who implement these practices experience healthier crops as well as improved farm and ranch resiliency and profitability.

### CONSERVATION PRACTICES IN 2017

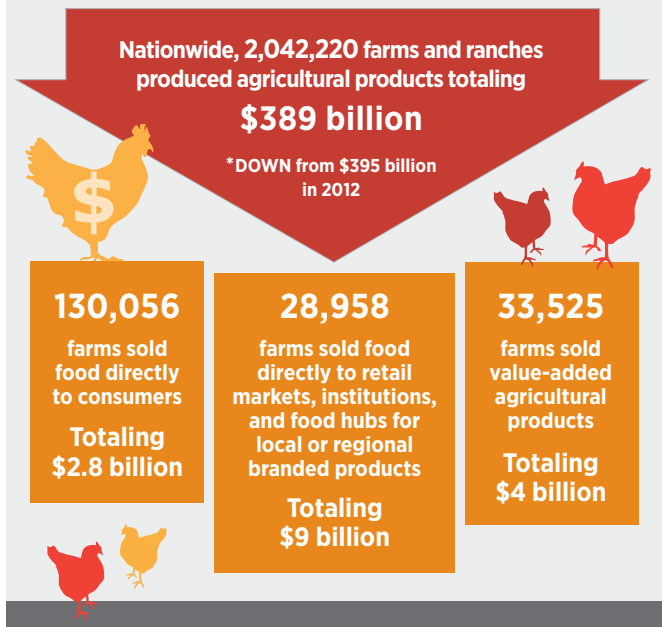


\* Known as “conservation tillage” in 2012

## Economic Viability

A crucial step toward preventing the loss of our nation’s farmland is to ensure a strong farm economy that supports thriving farm businesses. Assessing the economic health of farm and ranch operations and the industry as a whole is an important gauge of farm viability and long-term success.

### ECONOMIC VIABILITY



## HOW TO GET DATA FROM THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

The Full Report includes all data tables, an introduction, appendices, and an index. The introduction provides a brief overview of census goals, history, and data comparability. The appendices describe methodology, data changes, and definitions.

### DATA TABLES

The Census data tables are published by National, State, and County level. The website presents data from Chapters 1 and 2.

#### CHAPTER 1

##### VOLUME 1 CHAPTER 1

U.S. by Table  
77 Tables  
National-Level Data

##### VOLUME 1 CHAPTER 1

State-Level Data  
77 Tables  
State-Level Data  
for a single state

#### CHAPTER 2

##### VOLUME 1 CHAPTER 2

States by Table  
57 Tables  
State-Level Data for  
all states side by side

##### VOLUME 1 CHAPTER 2

County-Level Data  
57 Tables  
Data for each state and  
its counties side by side

For more information about the 2017 Census of Agriculture, including downloadable charts, maps and data visualizations, visit: [www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](http://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus)

### OTHER WAYS TO ACCESS THE DATA

#### Searchable Database

The most comprehensive tool for accessing data is Quick Stats. A user can customize a query by commodity, location, or time period. It can also compare most categories between years. An additional Census Query Tool can be used for each table and allows users on the website to export data tables for 2017 census only.

#### [Quick Stats](#)

#### Special Tabulations

If data have not been published elsewhere, a request for custom designed tabulations may be submitted to NASS Data Lab. Special tabulations are publishable, re-summarized data from information in the original Census. Requests can be submitted in an online form:

#### [NASS Data Lab](#)

#### NASS Staff

NASS staff are available to answer questions and provide more details about finding information. A directory of regional offices can be found on the NASS website:

#### [NASS Staff](#)

Access to additional, record-level information for authorized researchers may be granted by NASS. For more information contact the NASS Data Lab.

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Visit American Farmland Trust's Farmland Information Center for additional analysis of the **2017 Census of Agriculture** and for **AFT's 2019 Farms Under Threat** report.

For data on the nation's land use and natural resource conditions see USDA's **National Resource Inventory**.