

Census show ag products up, farms numbers, land down

Written by Gothenburg Times
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Census of Agriculture results. Key findings include an increase in the value of agricultural products sold in the United States totaling \$394.6 billion in 2012, up 33% (\$97.4 billion) from 2007.

The number of farms and land in farms were down slightly, but held steady. Additionally, agriculture is becoming more diverse.

The 2012 Census reported several historic changes in value of sales for agriculture producers in the United States:

In 2012, crop sales of \$212.4 billion exceeded livestock sales of \$182.2 billion. This occurred for only the second time in Census history; the other time was 1974.

Between 2007 and 2012, per farm average value of sales increased from \$137,807 to \$187,093, continuing a steady 30-year upward trend. The increase of \$52,285 was the largest rise in Census history.

Preliminary data from the 2012 Census of Agriculture also highlights national and state farm numbers, land in farms and farmer demographics.

The 2012 Census showed principal farm operators are becoming older and more diverse; following the trend of previous censuses. In 2012, the average age of a principal farm operator was 58.3 years, up 1.2 years since 2007, and continuing a 30-year trend of steady increase. The Census also accounted for minority-operated farms in 2012 than in 2007.

In 2012, the United States had 2.1 million farms - down 4.3% from the previous Census in 2007. In terms of farm size by acres, this continues an overall downward trend in mid-sized farms, while the smallest and largest-size farms held steady.

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Between 2007 and 2012, the amount of land in farms in the United States continued a slow downward trend declining from 922 million acres to 915 million. This is only a decline of less than one percent and is the third smallest decline between censuses since 1950.

Conducted since 1840, the Census of Agriculture accounts for all U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The Census tells a story of how American agriculture is changing and lays the groundwork for new programs and policies that will invest in rural America; promote innovation and productivity; build the rural economy; and support our next generation of farmers and ranchers.

“The release of the preliminary 2012 Census of Agriculture results is only a first look at the data and we are eager to publish the final report this May,” said NASS Administrator Cynthia Clark. “The 2012 Census was not conducted in a typical crop year, and drought had a major impact on U.S. agriculture, affecting crop yields, production and prices. NASS is still reviewing all 2012 Census items to the county level and therefore data are preliminary until published in the final report.”

For more information about the Census, including access to current 2012 Census of Agriculture preliminary report, additional materials and full final report when it is released in May, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.