

Trends in Rural Pennsylvania

March/April 2004

About Trends in Rural Pennsylvania

This fact sheet is the seventh in a series of nine that examines trends in rural Pennsylvania. Each fact sheet focuses on a specific area of interest, and is based on the mandates outlined in the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's enabling legislation (Act 16 of 1987). The areas of interest are agriculture, economic development, local government capacity and fiscal stress indicators, transportation, socio-demographics, health care and human services, the environment and natural resources, education and the condition of existing local infrastructure. For more information on any of the data presented, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy research within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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The Dirt on Pennsylvania Agriculture

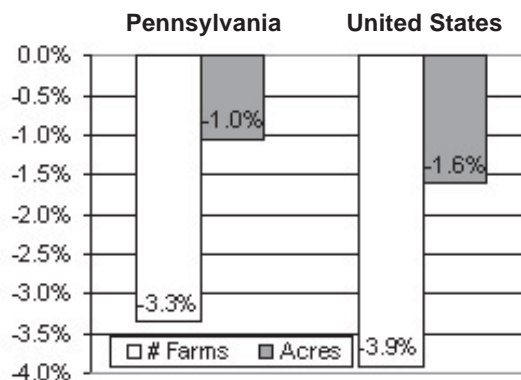
Agriculture provides a common image of rural life and is an integral part of the Pennsylvania landscape and culture. The Census of Agriculture is a useful tool for examining this rural asset. In February 2004, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released preliminary data from the 2002 Census of Agriculture. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania compared the new data with data from the previous census in 1997 to show the evolving story of agriculture in the Commonwealth. In this analysis, Pennsylvania data is compared to data from the nation and other states because county statistics are not yet available. To round out the picture, information on farmland preservation and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis data on farm receipts and expenditures are also included.

Farms and farmland

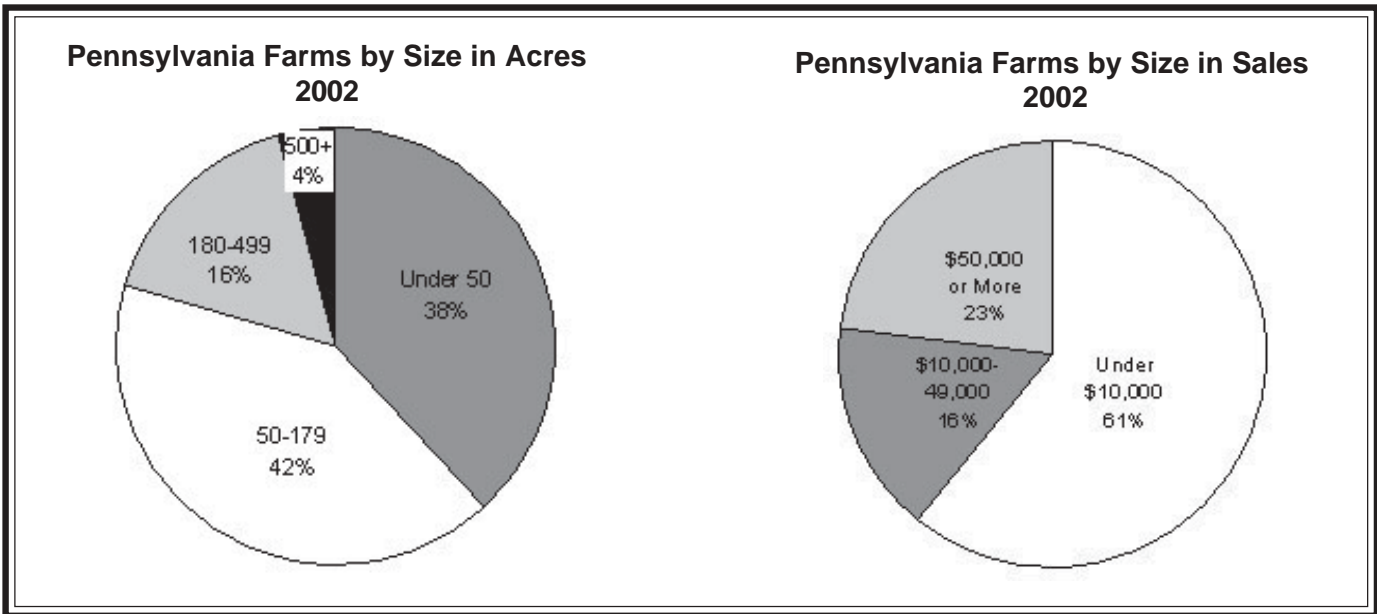
The Census of Agriculture defines a farm as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. In 2002, there were 58,209 farms in Pennsylvania. This represents a 3 percent decrease from the 60,222 farms of five years earlier in 1997.¹

Another side of the agriculture picture is acres of farmland. In 2002, farms covered 7.7 million acres, or 27 percent of all the land in Pennsylvania. In 1997, there were 7.8 million acres of farmland, indicating a decrease of 1 percent in five years. These changes are similar to but slower than

Change in Farms and Farmland
1997-2002



¹ It is not possible to determine long-term trends in Census of Agriculture data. The data gathered in the 2002 Census was much more complete than in previous censuses. Because of this improved accuracy, there is a large discrepancy between new and older figures. To provide a degree of comparability, USDA adjusted many 1997 figures but did not go back to earlier censuses. Therefore, only 1997 and 2002 data can be compared with reasonable results. In addition, the 1997 figures reported here will not match those reported in the 1997 census due to the adjustments, and some 1997 data items have not been adjusted so no comparisons can presently be made.



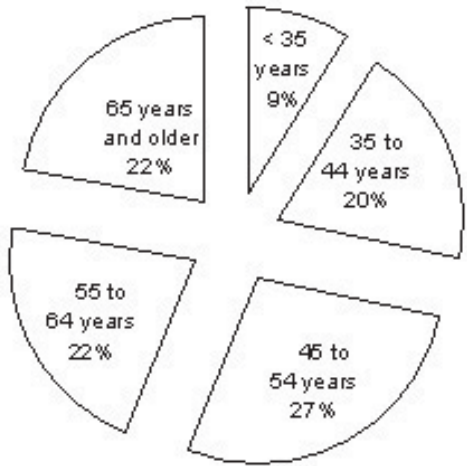
those happening nationwide, where farms decreased by 4 percent in number and 2 percent in acreage.

Pennsylvania lost about two acres of farmland for each 10-person gain in residents between 1990 and 2000. Nationwide, the figure was nearly five acres per 10 additional people. Although Pennsylvania lost more than 82,000 acres, Texas lost 3.76 million acres, almost half the area of Pennsylvania's total acreage.

Changes in the number of farms and farm acres combined demonstrate a change in the average size of farms. Pennsylvania farms have increased in size from an average of 130 to 133 acres. More than one-third, or 38 percent, are very small farms of under 50 acres while 4 percent have at least 500 acres. Nationally, farms are larger

in physical size than in Pennsylvania. Farms nationwide have an average of about 440 acres; 35 percent have fewer than 50 acres and 16 percent have more than 500.

Age of Pennsylvania Farmers 2002

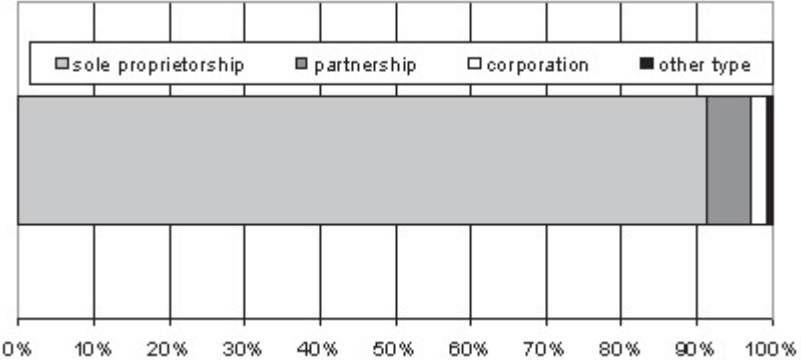


Farm size can also be examined by sales. Sixty-one percent of farms in the Commonwealth each sold less than \$10,000 of agricultural products in 2002, while 23 percent sold \$50,000 or more. In 1997, there were fewer small sale farms: 55 percent sold less than \$10,000 and 25 percent sold \$50,000 or more. The distribution of U.S. farms by sales size category is about the same as in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania farms are under a variety of types of ownership. The vast majority, 91 percent, are family or individual sole proprietorships. Partnerships are the second most common type, comprising 6 percent.

The remaining 3 percent of farms are under other types of ownership, such as corporations (family held or otherwise), cooperatives, institutions, and estates or trusts. These same proportions are reflected in the United States as a whole. In 1997, 90 percent of farms were sole proprietorships in the Commonwealth and 7 percent were partnerships.

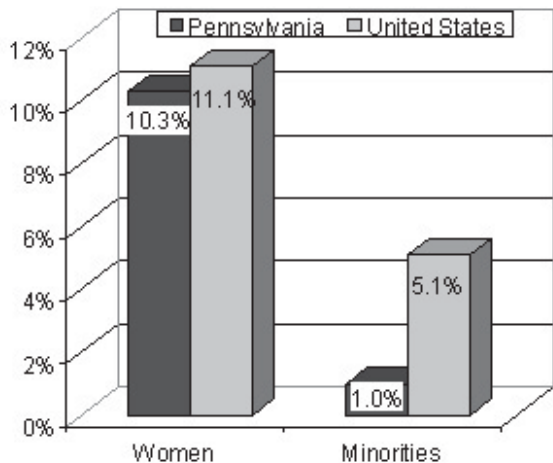
Ownership Types for Pennsylvania Farms, 2002



Farmland Preservation

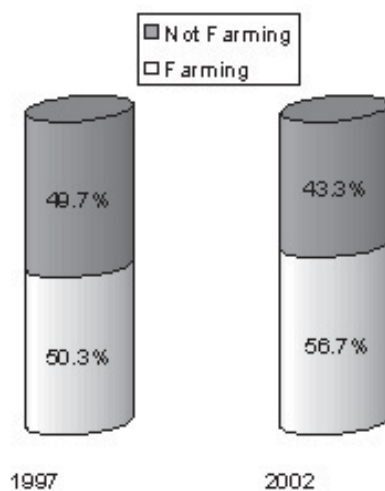
Pennsylvania is a national leader in farmland preservation, a program in which farmers can sell easements on their farmland in return for keeping

Women and Minority Farmers 2002

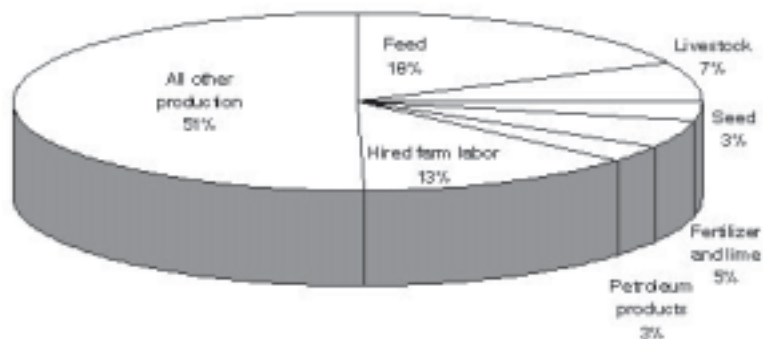


the land in agricultural use in perpetuity. The Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program enables state, county and local governments to purchase conservation easements, or development rights, from owners of quality farmland. The first easements were purchased in 1989. Many farmers use the proceeds from easement sales to reduce debt loads, expand operations, and pass on farms to the next generation. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Farmland Preservation statistics show that the program has helped to preserve more than 270,500 acres as of December 2003. This is an average of about 1,500 acres per month since

Primary Occupation of Pennsylvania Farmers 1997 and 2002



Farm Expenses by Type in Pennsylvania 2001



the program began. These acres make up 2,322 farms and were purchased at an average price of about \$2,000 per acre.

Farmers

The average age of a farmer in the Commonwealth is 53 years, one year older than the 1997 average. Nearly one-quarter, or 22 percent, are 65 years old or older and 1 percent are under age 25. At the national level, the average age of farmers is 55. Twenty-six percent are 65 years old or older.

Nearly 6,000 primary operators of Pennsylvania farms are female. This accounts for 10 percent of the state's farmers, slightly less than the 11 percent nationwide. Fewer than 600 Pennsylvania farmers, or 1 percent, are members of minority groups.² Nationally, this figure is more than 5 percent.

Many Pennsylvania farmers work off the farm to supplement their income. In fact, 2002 data show that 43 percent of farmers had a primary occupation that was not farming. This is a significant decrease from 1997 when 50 percent worked primarily in a non-farming occupation. National statistics

show the same trend – farm operators working primarily off the farm fell from 53 to 42 percent of total farmers between 1997 and 2002.

In 2002, 88 percent of farmers in Pennsylvania and 79 percent of farmers nationally resided on the farm they operate. And nearly three-quarters, 72 percent in both the Commonwealth and the nation, have been on their present farm for at least 10 years.

Farm income and expenditures

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) collects annual information on farm income and expenditures. To

provide a five-year illustration as with the Census of Agriculture data, this analysis compares 2001 data, the most current available, with 1996 data.

² Minorities include non-Whites and Whites of Hispanic/Latino origin.

