

A Decade of Change in Texas Agriculture

Texas Agriculture Overview

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While the Lone Star State has a long history of producing a wide variety of farm products, agriculture in Texas is undergoing major changes. An analysis of data from the three most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture *Census of Agriculture* reports shows that:

- The number of farms in Texas has increased by 8.4 percent since 1997. This increase was led by small farms.
- With the increase in the number of farms came a decrease in the average size of farm, from 587 acres per farm in 1997 to 527 acres in 2007.
- There were 6,046 farms with gross sales of over \$500,000 in 2007, compared to 3,817 in 1997.
- Farming is a part-time pursuit for many operators in Texas: In 2007, 50 percent worked off the farm for more than 100 days, and 90 percent received more than half of their household income from off the farm.
- The average age of the principal farm operator has increased in Texas. The average age was 56 years in 1997, 56.9 years in 2002, and 58.9 years in 2007. For the largest category of farms, with gross sales over \$1 million, the average age was 54.0 in 2007.
- More Texas farmers are women—29 percent more. There were 35,011 female principal operators in 2007, up from 27,192 in 2002.

- The percentage of Spanish, Hispanic, and Latino farm operators has also increased, from 6.2 percent in 2002 to 7.6 percent in 2007.
- The number of organic farms in Texas increased by 48 percent from 2002 to 2007.
- Dairy production is experiencing the greatest structural change, with consolidation into an increasing number of large dairies and fewer small dairies.

Agriculture in Texas is big, diverse, and dynamic. Because its climate and terrain vary greatly across the state, Texas produces a wide range of commodities from many sizes and types of farms. Around Lubbock, there is cotton as far as you can see. The area north of Dallas has many small farms, while West Texas has vast ranch land. In South Texas, green vegetable crops are grown along much of the Rio Grande River.

Every 5 years, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service publishes a *Census of Agriculture* report to describe the agricultural industry. Analysis of census data from 1997, 2002, and 2007 shows that the value of agricultural products sold per farm has increased in Texas, while the number of acres of land per farm has decreased (Table 1).

The USDA census focuses on the farm as the production unit. 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.

The data also show Texas's ranking within the United States in gross sales for several leading commodities and total gross farm sales over the past decade (Table 2). For

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Table 1. Texas agricultural highlights from the 2007, 2002, and 1997 census.

Factor	2007	2002	1997
Number of farms	247,437	228,926	228,173
Land area per farm (acres)	527	567	587
Value of agricultural products sold per farm (\$)	84,874	61,744	61,427
Estimated market value of land and buildings per acre (\$)	1,270	768	616
Estimated market value of machinery and equipment per farm (\$)	64,350	40,553	37,795
Farms organized as family or individual operations (% of total)	88.2%	88.2%	88.2%
Principal operator worked off-farm 200 days or more (% of total)	39.4%	40.0%	42.5%
Principal operator listed primary occupation as farming (% of total)	39.9%	53.6%	40.4%
Average age of principal operator (years)	58.9	56.9	56

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 1997, 2002, 2007 (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>).

many years, the Lone Star State has led the nation in the production of cattle and cotton, and it ranks second in gross sales of all agricultural commodities combined.

This publication series examines Texas agriculture from several perspectives:

- **The Structure of Texas Agriculture** (Extension publication E-591): How is the size distribution of farms and ranches changing? Are there more large farms? Are there more small farms?
- **Production of Crops and Livestock** (Extension publication E-592): Are the food and fiber prod-

Table 2. Leading agricultural commodities and Texas's rank within the United States.

Commodity	Texas' rank in the U.S. (based on gross sales)		
	2007	2002	1997
Cattle and calves	1	1	2
Cotton and cottonseed	1	1	1
Grain sorghum (for grain)	2	2	(a)
Wheat (for grain)	4	5	(a)
Total gross farm sales	2	2	2

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 1997, 2002, 2007
(a) Because of the reporting methods used in 1997 (and prior years), the individual rankings for wheat and grain sorghum are not available.

ucts increasing in quantity and value? Is the mix of output changing? Is production of some products moving from one part of the state to another? Are the smaller operations responsible for the majority of production, or the larger?

- **Farm Inputs and Expenses** (Extension publication E-593): How much have expenses increased? How do farm operating expenses vary by farm size? How is the investment in machinery and equipment changing?
 - **Land and Natural Resource Use** (Extension publication E-594): What are the types of uses for land in Texas, and how has this changed in recent years? How has the value of farm real estate changed? Has irrigation increased?
 - **Farm Operator Characteristics** (Extension publication E-595): What are the demographics of Texas' farm operators and how have they changed? What are the operators' primary occupations, days worked off-farm, and computer and Internet usage?
- These snapshots of the Texas agricultural industry over the past decade reveal changes in the industry that affect the state's economy.

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