

A Decade of Change in Texas Agriculture Characteristics of Texas Farm Operators

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Texas farmers are predominantly Caucasian (88 percent), male (86 percent), and nearing 60 years of age (average age: 58.9), according to analysis of data compiled in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2007 Census of Agriculture.

Comparisons of census data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that several changes have occurred in the characteristics of Texas farmers:

- More women are farmers in Texas. The numbers rose from 27,192 female principal operators in 2002 to 35,011 in 2007—a 29 percent increase.
- Texas has a higher percentage of Spanish, Hispanic, and Latino farm operators, up from 6.2 percent in 2002 to 7.6 percent in 2007.
- More farmers—a total of 60 percent—are getting most of their income from nonfarm jobs. The number of farms with 100 percent of the household income from farming dropped from 11,179 farms in 2002 to 4,341 in 2007. Most of the decrease came from the smaller farms.

Analysis of the agriculture census, which is taken every 5 years, reveals transitions in farm owners across the nation and state—including changes in demographics, Internet use, and income sources.

Principal operator characteristics in Texas agriculture

The 2007 Census of Agriculture shows a continuation of several trends regarding Texas farm operators. Their average age increased from 56.9 in 2002 to 58.9 in 2007 (Table 1). However, for multi-generation farms, the census includes the age of only the principal operator (usually the oldest person), which may partially account for this higher average age.

Although operators of the larger farms on average are younger—54 years for farms with gross sales of \$1 million or more—the average age increased across all categories at about the same rate.

The number and percentage of female farm operators increased since 2002. There were 29 percent more female principal operators in 2007; this number increased from 27,192 in 2002 to 35,011 just 5 years later. For all farm operations, the percentage of operators who are women increased from 11 percent in 2002 to 14 percent in 2007. The largest percentage these increases occurred in farms with gross sales of \$100,000 or less.

For Internet access, rural areas are often at a disadvantage when compared to urban areas. Even so, the farms with Internet access have increased modestly. The percentage of farm operations in Texas with Internet access increased from 49.6 percent in 2002 to 52.5 percent in 2007 (Fig. 2).

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Table 1. Demographics of average age and gender of primary farm operators in Texas in 2002 and 2007.

| Economic classification (gross sales) | Average age | | Male (%) | | Female (%) | |
|--|-------------|------|----------|--------|------------|--------|
| | 2007 | 2002 | 2007 | 2002 | 2007 | 2002 |
| All farms | 58.9 | 56.9 | 85.85% | 88.12% | 14.15% | 11.88% |
| \$1,000,000 or more | 54.0 | 52.3 | 95.76% | 95.82% | 4.24% | 4.18% |
| \$500,000 to \$999,999 | 55.1 | 52.5 | 96.02% | 95.64% | 3.98% | 4.36% |
| \$100,000 to \$499,999 | 57.2 | 53.7 | 94.10% | 95.22% | 5.90% | 4.78% |
| \$25,000 to \$99,999 | 60.7 | 57.4 | 89.97% | 92.23% | 10.03% | 7.77% |
| \$5,000 to \$24,999 | 60.4 | 58.5 | 87.73% | 89.64% | 12.27% | 10.36% |
| \$1,000 to \$4,999 | 58.2 | 56.7 | 86.03% | 87.74% | 13.97% | 12.26% |
| Less than \$1,000 | 58.5 | 56.4 | 81.46% | 84.14% | 18.54% | 15.86% |

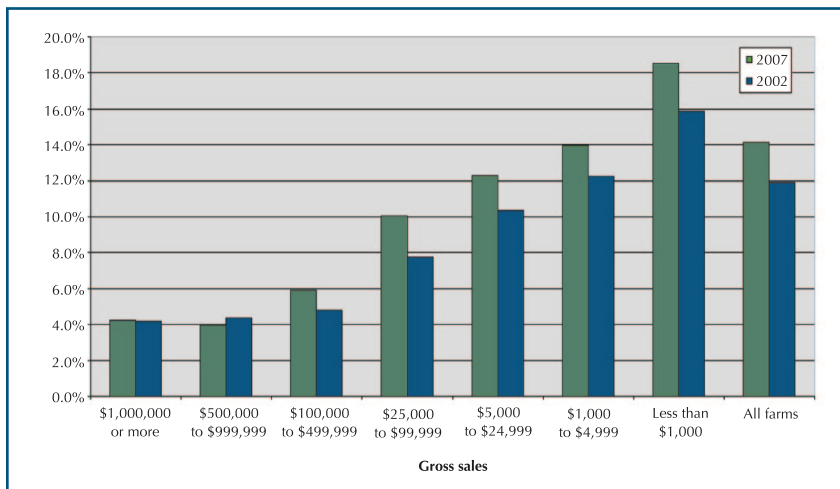


Figure 1. Percentage of women operators by gross sales size category, Texas, 2002 and 2007.

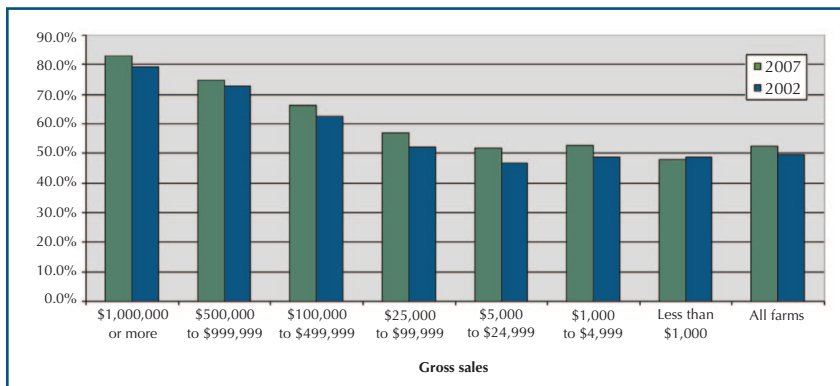


Figure 2. Percentage of farms with Internet access by gross sales size category in Texas in 2002 and 2007.

A higher percentage of the larger farms (with gross sales of \$100,000 or more) had Internet access than did smaller farms. This suggests the importance of Internet access to these businesses.

Of the 247,437 principal farm operators in Texas in 2007, 148,745 (60 percent) reported their primary occupation as being something other than farming. Of these farms, 91 percent have gross sales of \$24,999 or less. Except for farms with gross sales of \$500,000 or more, every farm size category showed an increase in the percentage of farm operators whose primary occupation was something other than farming (Fig. 3).

Nearly 171,000 principal operators, about 69 percent, reported working off the farm during some days of the year. Most of these operators (86 percent) are from farms with gross sales of \$24,999 or less (Fig. 4). The smaller the farm, the more likely the operator is to work some days off the farm.

From 2002 to 2007, farms of every gross sales range had about the same increase in percentage of operators working some days off the farm: 10 to 15 percent. Of the operators who reported working some days off the farm in 2007, 57 percent worked 200 or more days off the farm.

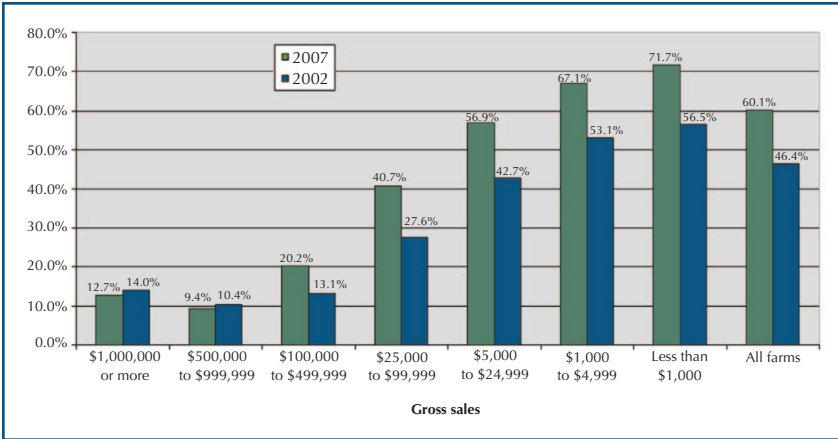


Figure 3. Percentage of operators reporting a primary occupation other than farming by gross sales size category, Texas, 2002 and 2007.

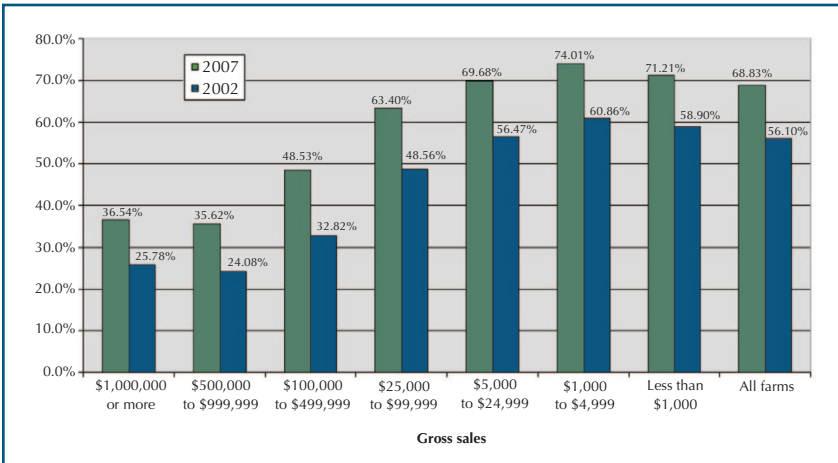


Figure 4. Percentage of farm operators working any days off the farm, Texas, 2002 and 2007.

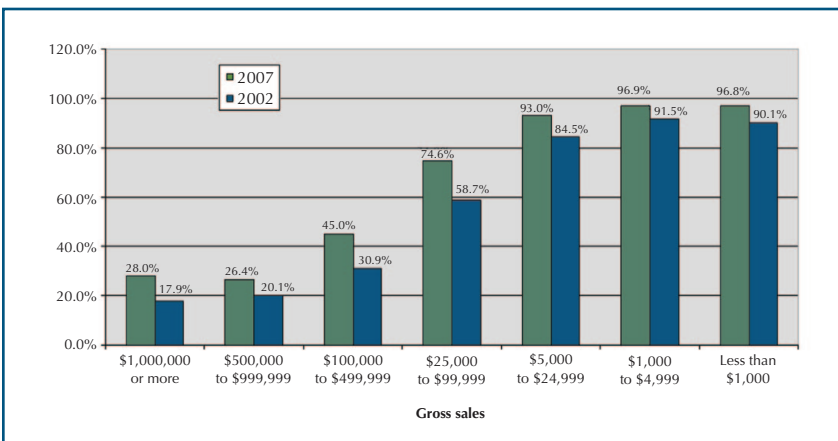


Figure 5. Percentage of farm operators with less than 50 percent of total household income from farming by gross sales size category, Texas, 2002 and 2007.

The number of farms with 100 percent of the household income from farming dropped from 11,179 in 2002 to 4,341 in 2007, with most of the decrease in the smaller farms. For farms with gross sales of \$500,000 or more, 23 percent reported 100 percent of their household income from farming in 2007, down from 30 percent in 2002.

Figure 5 plots the percentage of farms with in each gross sales range that reported less than 50 percent of their household income from farming. For all gross sales categories, this percentage increased in 2007 relative to 2002. For farms with gross sales of \$24,999 or less, more than 90 percent of the farms reported that less than half of their household income came from farming in 2007.

The percentage declines as farms get larger, with 28 percent of the farms with gross sales of \$1 million or more reporting less than 50 percent of their household income from farming, up from nearly 18 percent in 2002.

Of the 247,437 farms in Texas in 2007, about 88 percent of the principal operators were Caucasian. The number of principal operators of all races and ethnic backgrounds increased 8.4 percent from 2002 to 2007. As a percentage of the total farm operators, the Spanish, Hispanic, and Latino operators increased from 6.2 to 7.6 percent from 2002 to 2007 (Fig. 6).

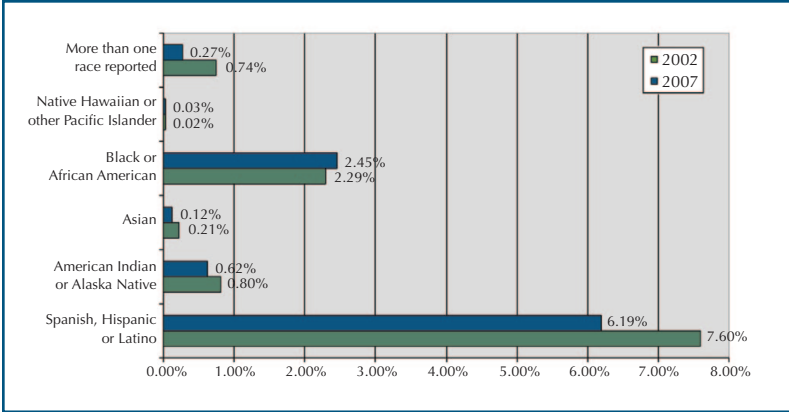


Figure 6. The number of farm operators by selected race and ethnicity as a percentage of total farm operators, Texas, 2002 and 2007.

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