FE805

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

2007 Agricultural Census Tidbit: Florida Farm Acreage Down[1]

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Introduction

The 2007 agricultural census data were reported for states and counties throughout the United States in February 2009. National, state, and local policy makers look forward to the census report for several reasons: they use the information to show the importance and size of the industry in their state and counties, and to show the importance of the industry in the state and local economy; and they use the information to make policy decisions. One of the limitations of the agricultural census is that the report, for the most part, is just data with limited or no discussion. This publication is one in a series of five that reorganizes some of the data collected in the census and offers some comments on trends and gaps in the data. The other publications in the 2007 Agricultural Census Tidbit series can be accessed online at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

Many Floridians, including those not directly involved in farm production, keep a close watch on the numbers of acres used by farm producers in the state. The interest in this topic is varied. Floridians who are not farmers may be concerned that too much farmland loss is occurring because of Florida's rapid population growth. Agricultural producers' interest in the topic is more frequently centered on the impacts of disease, weather, prices, etc. and the difficulty in sustaining farm operations. The bottom line is that the census does not identify *why* land in farm operations increases and decreases. Rather, the census simply reports a *snapshot* of land used in agriculture every five years.

Census of Agriculture

The Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years and is an attempt by the U.S. government to collect data on the entire U.S farm population in every state. Of course, not all agricultural producers provide the information requested and there is always the possibility for error in the data reported. A farm is defined as a place in which $1,000 of agricultural products were produced or sold, or typically would have been sold during the census year, including any government payments.

Farmland Use

Land in farms in the U.S. for 2002 and 2007 is reported in Table 1 and the states are ranked by the amount of land reported in the 2007 Census of

1. This is EDIS document FE805, a publication of the Food and Resource Economics Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Published November 2009. Please visit the EDIS website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.
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Agriculture. In the United States in 2007, there were slightly more than 922 million acres of land used in farm production, which is down from just over 938 million acres reported in 2002. Texas reports by far the most land devoted to farms, with over 130 million acres. It has more than double the farmland of the next closest state (Montana).

Florida ranked 30th in the amount of land used for farms (9.2 million acres) as reported by the 2007 census. While the census numbers for land in farms for Florida are comparable with those for other states in 2007, the numbers reported for Florida are somewhat misleading. The amount of land in farms does not include landholdings of large timber corporations in the state. If these numbers were captured by the census, many more million acres would be included in the Florida total. This would also be true in other states with vast timber landholdings by major corporations.

Table 2 reports land in farms by state for 2002 and 2007, as ranked by change in land in farms between the 2002 and 2007 census. Nationally, the amount of land in farms between the two census periods declined over 16 million acres, or about 1.7 percent. In total, 35 states reported less land in farms in 2007 than they reported in 2002.

Nationally, Florida reported the third largest decline of land in farms (11.4%) in the United States between the 2002 and 2007 census. As mentioned previously, the census does not identify why land in farm operations increases or decreases, and it does not reveal the reason for the decline in Florida. It would not been unreasonable to assume that many factors, such as the hurricanes in 2004 and 2005, citrus canker and greening, declining commodity prices, increasing energy prices, and development, contributed to the decline in acreage reported in farms.

Some other factors related to farmland are notable from the census. Of the 15 largest states in terms of sales (Table 3), 14 of the states reported less land in farms in 2007 than in 2002. Only Texas reported more land in farms in 2007 and the increase reported was less than one-half percent. Florida's average farm size is on the low side for a large farm sales state, at 195 acres per farm in 2007. Of the leading agricultural sales states, all but one (Nebraska) reported average farm sizes lower in 2007 than in 2002.

Florida's decrease in size between the 2002 census (236 acres) and the 2007 census (195 acres) was not only the result of decreasing land in farms, but also due to the fact that the numbers of farm operators in the state increased from 44,081 in 2002 to 47,463 in 2007.

Summary

The amount of land in farms has decreased nationally by about 1.7 percent between 2002 and 2007. The rate of decrease in Florida was much larger (11.4%), giving the state the third highest percentage decline between the 2002 census and the 2007 census. Based on the 2007 census, Florida is ranked 30th nationally in the amount of land in farms. Like most other states with large agricultural sales, Florida's average farm size and the amount of land in farms declined between 2002 and 2007.

The census offers no explanation of the increases or decreases in the amount of land reported in farms. Likewise, census data do not address the quality of land that is no longer used in production. It is important to keep a watch on land in farms reported by the census. However, a census report of decreased land in farms is not in itself cause for concern. The land base in Florida agriculture is just one item of many that must be monitored over time in order to accurately assess the health of the industry in the state.

References

USDA/NASS. 2007. *2007 Census of Agriculture, United States Summary and State Data*, Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 51. United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Washington, D.C.

Table 1. Land in farm acres by state, 2002 and 2007, ranked by land acres reported in the 2007 Census.

Rank	State	2007 Land in Farm Acres	2002 Land in Farm Acres
	United States	922,095,840	938,279,056
1	Texas	130,398,753	129,877,666
2	Montana	61,388,462	59,612,403
3	Kansas	46,345,827	47,227,944
4	Nebraska	45,480,358	45,903,116
5	South Dakota	43,666,403	43,785,079
6	New Mexico	43,238,049	44,810,083
7	North Dakota	39,674,586	39,294,879
8	Oklahoma	35,087,269	33,661,826
9	Colorado	31,604,911	31,093,336
10	Iowa	30,747,550	31,729,490
11	Wyoming	30,169,526	34,402,726
12	Missouri	29,026,573	29,946,035
13	Minnesota	26,917,962	27,512,270
14	Illinois	26,775,100	27,310,833
15	Arizona	26,117,899	26,586,577
16	California	25,364,695	27,589,027
17	Oregon	16,399,647	17,080,422
18	Wisconsin	15,190,804	15,741,552
19	Washington	14,972,789	15,318,008
20	Indiana	14,773,184	15,058,670
21	Kentucky	13,993,121	13,843,706
22	Ohio	13,956,563	14,583,435
23	Arkansas	13,872,862	14,502,793
24	Idaho	11,497,383	11,767,294
25	Mississippi	11,456,241	11,097,543

Table 1. Land in farm acres by state, 2002 and 2007, ranked by land acres reported in the 2007 Census.

Rank	State	2007 Land in Farm Acres	2002 Land in Farm Acres
26	Utah	11,094,700	11,731,228
27	Tennessee	10,969,798	11,681,533
28	Georgia	10,150,539	10,744,239
29	Michigan	10,031,807	10,142,958
30	Florida	9,231,570	10,414,877
31	Alabama	9,033,537	8,904,387
32	North Carolina	8,474,671	9,079,001
33	Louisiana	8,109,975	7,830,664
34	Virginia	8,103,925	8,624,829
35	Pennsylvania	7,809,244	7,745,336
36	New York	7,174,743	7,660,969
37	Nevada	5,865,392	6,330,622
38	South Carolina	4,889,339	4,845,923
39	West Virginia	3,697,606	3,584,668
40	Maryland	2,051,756	2,077,630
41	Maine	1,347,566	1,369,768
42	Vermont	1,233,313	1,244,909
43	Hawaii	1,121,329	1,300,499
44	Alaska	881,585	900,715
45	New Jersey	733,450	805,682
46	Massachusetts	517,879	518,570
47	Delaware	510,253	540,080
48	New Hampshire	471,911	444,879
49	Connecticut	405,616	357,154
50	Rhode Island	67,819	61,223

Table 2. Land in farm acres by state, 2002 and 2007, ranked by change in land in farm acres.

Rank	State	2007 Land in Farm Acres	2002 Land in Farm Acres	% Difference
1	Hawaii	1,121,329	1,300,499	–13.8%
2	Wyoming	30,169,526	34,402,726	–12.3%
3	Florida	9,231,570	10,414,877	–11.4%
4	New Jersey	733,450	805,682	–9.0%
5	California	25,364,695	27,589,027	–8.1%
6	Nevada	5,865,392	6,330,622	–7.3%
7	North Carolina	8,474,671	9,079,001	–6.7%
8	New York	7,174,743	7,660,969	–6.3%
9	Tennessee	10,969,798	11,681,533	–6.1%
10	Virginia	8,103,925	8,624,829	–6.0%
11	Georgia	10,150,539	10,744,239	–5.5%
12	Delaware	510,253	540,080	–5.5%
13	Utah	11,094,700	11,731,228	–5.4%
14	Arkansas	13,872,862	14,502,793	–4.3%
15	Ohio	13,956,563	14,583,435	–4.3%
16	Oregon	16,399,647	17,080,422	–4.0%
17	New Mexico	43,238,049	44,810,083	–3.5%
18	Wisconsin	15,190,804	15,741,552	–3.5%
19	Iowa	30,747,550	31,729,490	–3.1%
20	Missouri	29,026,573	29,946,035	–3.1%
21	Idaho	11,497,383	11,767,294	–2.3%
22	Washington	14,972,789	15,318,008	–2.3%
23	Minnesota	26,917,962	27,512,270	–2.2%
24	Alaska	881,585	900,715	–2.1%
25	Illinois	26,775,100	27,310,833	–2.0%
26	Indiana	14,773,184	15,058,670	–1.9%

Table 2. Land in farm acres by state, 2002 and 2007, ranked by change in land in farm acres.

Rank	State	2007 Land in Farm Acres	2002 Land in Farm Acres	% Difference
27	Kansas	46,345,827	47,227,944	–1.9%
28	Arizona	26,117,899	26,586,577	–1.8%
	United States	922,095,840	938,279,056	–1.7%
29	Maine	1,347,566	1,369,768	–1.6%
30	Maryland	2,051,756	2,077,630	–1.2%
31	Michigan	10,031,807	10,142,958	–1.1%
32	Vermont	1,233,313	1,244,909	–0.9%
33	Nebraska	45,480,358	45,903,116	–0.9%
34	South Dakota	43,666,403	43,785,079	–0.3%
35	Massachusetts	517,879	518,570	–0.1%
36	Texas	130,398,753	129,877,666	0.4%
37	Pennsylvania	7,809,244	7,745,336	0.8%
38	South Carolina	4,889,339	4,845,923	0.9%
39	North Dakota	39,674,586	39,294,879	1.0%
40	Kentucky	13,993,121	13,843,706	1.1%
41	Alabama	9,033,537	8,904,387	1.5%
42	Colorado	31,604,911	31,093,336	1.6%
43	Montana	61,388,462	59,612,403	3.0%
44	West Virginia	3,697,606	3,584,668	3.2%
45	Mississippi	11,456,241	11,097,543	3.2%
46	Louisiana	8,109,975	7,830,664	3.6%
47	Oklahoma	35,087,269	33,661,826	4.2%
48	New Hampshire	471,911	444,879	6.1%
49	Rhode Island	67,819	61,223	10.8%
50	Connecticut	405,616	357,154	13.6%

Table 3. Miscellaneous census information for selected states, 2002 and 2007.

Rank in Sales	State	2007 Sales	Farmland Decrease	2007 Average Farm Size	2002 Average Farm Size
		($1,000)	(%)	(Acres)	(Acres)
	United States	297,220,491	–1.7	418	441
1	California	33,885,064	–8.1	313	346
2	Texas	21,001,074	0.4	527	567
3	Iowa	20,418,096	–3.1	331	350
4	Nebraska	15,506,035	–0.9	953	930
5	Kansas	14,413,182	–1.9	707	733
6	Illinois	13,329,107	–2.0	348	374
7	Minnesota	13,180,466	–2.2	332	340
8	North Carolina	10,313,628	–6.7	160	168
9	Wisconsin	8,967,358	–3.5	194	204
10	Indiana	8,271,291	–1.9	242	250
11	Florida	7,785,228	–11.4	195	236
12	Missouri	7,512,926	–3.1	269	280
13	Arkansas	7,508,806	–4.3	281	305
14	Georgia	7,112,866	–5.5	212	218
15	Ohio	7,070,212	–4.3	184	187