



Small Farms

ACH12-34/September 2016

88 percent of U.S. farms, 48 percent of farmland, 20 percent of sales

Top States (small farms as percent of total)

West Virginia	97
Tennessee	95
New Hampshire	95
Alabama	95
Oklahoma	94

Of the 2.1 million farms in the United States in 2012, 97 percent were family owned operations. Eighty-eight percent of all farms were small family farms with less than \$350,000 in gross cash farm income. Mid-size and large family farms accounted for 9 percent of farms. Only 3 percent of U.S. farms were not family owned.

Small family farms operated 48 percent of all farmland, owned 47 percent of the value of farm real estate (land and buildings), accounted for 20 percent of agriculture sales, and earned 5 percent of the country's net farm income. (Table 1)

Table 1
Profile of U.S. Farms, by Type, 2012

	U.S. Total	Family Farms			Nonfamily Farms
		Small	Midsize	Large	
		percent of U.S. total			
No. of farms	2.1 million	88	6	3	3
Farmland	915 mil. acres	48	20	20	11
Value of land and buildings	\$2.3 trillion	47	20	25	8
Agriculture sales	\$394.6 billion	20	19	45	16
Net farm income	\$78.6 billion	5	26	56	13

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

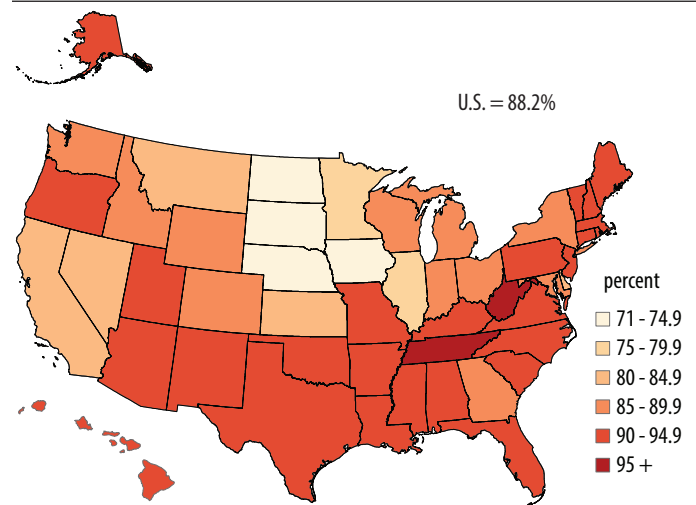
Farm Typology

The 2012 Census of Agriculture farm typology categorizes farms on the basis of ownership, whether farming is the principal operator's primary occupation, and gross cash farm income (GCFI), a measure of the total receipts the operator receives from the farming operation. For more information on farm typology, see <http://bit.ly/2012AgCensusTypology>.

To learn more about small and other family farms, the 2012 Census of Agriculture, and how to access national, state, and county data, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.

States ranged in the proportion of their farms that are small farms from 97 percent in West Virginia to 71 percent in North Dakota. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1
Small Family Farms as Percent of Total Farms, by State, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Top Commodities

Small family farms held 40% of the U.S. cattle inventory and 89% of the horse inventory in 2012, and grew 64% of all acres in forage production. A third of small family farms specialized in beef cattle (meaning that more than half of their income came from beef cattle) and 25 percent specialized in production of a variety of crops.

Types of Small Farms

Small family farms include four types of operations:

- *Farms whose operator has a primary occupation other than farming.* This is the largest category of farms, accounting for 38 percent of all U.S. farms.
- *Farms whose operator's primary occupation is farming.* This includes farms with:
 - *Low sales* (annual gross cash farm income is less than \$150,000)
 - *Moderate sales* (annual gross cash farm income is \$150,000 to \$349,000)
- *Retirement farms* (principal operator is retired but continues to farm on a small scale). Sixteen percent of U.S. farms are retirement farms.

Small family farms together accounted for 58 percent of direct-to-consumer sales, selling through farmers markets, roadside farm stands, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements. They accounted for 17 percent of organic sales. (Table 2)

Table 2
Small Family Farms: Selected Agriculture Assets and Receipts
(percent of U.S. total)

	All Small Family Farms	Primary Occupation Off-farm	Primary Occupation On-farm		Retirement
			Low Sales	Moderate Sales	
Share of farms	88	38	16	5	29
Assets					
Farmland	48	14	11	10	12
Value of land and buildings	47	16	10	8	13
Receipts					
Agriculture sales	20	4	4	8	3
Organic sales	17	2	5	9	1
Direct-to-consumer sales	58	14	20	13	11
Government payments	44	13	8	10	13

Subcategories may not add exactly to small family farm total due to rounding.
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Producer Characteristics

Only 16 percent of small family farms depended upon the farm for the majority of their household income in 2012. However, 76 percent of operators in the moderate-sales group did so, with 82 percent having positive net income from their farm. In the low-sales group, 31 percent depended upon the farm for the majority of household income.

Operators whose primary occupation is off the farm were the youngest small farm operators (52.8 years). Operators of retirement farms were the oldest (69.3 years – eleven years older than the average for all farmers). Retirement farms and low-sales farms had higher proportions of female principal operators (17 and 18 percent, respectively) than did all U.S. farms (14 percent). (Table 3)

Retirement Farms: Top States (percent of farms)

West Virginia	41
New Mexico	37
Mississippi	37
Alabama	37
Georgia	37
Tennessee	36
South Carolina	36
Texas	35
Florida	35
Oregon	35

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Table 3
Small Family Farms: Key Characteristics of Principal Operators, 2012
(percent)

	All Small Family Farms	Primary Occupation Off-farm	Primary Occupation On-farm		Retirement
			Low Sales	Moderate Sales	
Gender					
Male / Female	85 / 15	87 / 13	82 / 18	96 / 4	83 / 17
Worked off farm					
Yes / No	64 / 36	95 / 5	56 / 44	35 / 65	32 / 68
Years on present farm					
<10 / 10+	23 / 77	30 / 70	27 / 73	15 / 85	14 / 86
Internet access					
Yes / No	68 / 32	75 / 25	67 / 33	72 / 28	59 / 41
Positive income from farming					
Yes / No	41 / 59	36 / 64	44 / 56	82 / 18	41 / 59
50% or more of household income from farming					
Yes / No	16 / 84	6 / 94	31 / 69	76 / 24	11 / 89
Average age (years)	n/a	52.8	54.6	54.5	69.3

Principal operator is the person responsible for the day-to-day operation of the farm.
Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.