Center for RURAL Pennsylvania

A LEGISLATIVE AGENCY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Executive Summary

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Analysis of 2017 Census of Agriculture Data

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This study examined the agricultural industry in Pennsylvania and provides descriptive profiles of farm operations and farmers, as well as trends in Pennsylvania agriculture.

The researchers used Pennsylvania data from the 2017, 2012 and 2007 Censuses of Agriculture (Ag Census). They also interviewed representatives from key farm organizations to gain additional perspectives about the current state and future trends in agriculture.

Key Findings

- Between 2012 and 2017 the number of farms in Pennsylvania decreased 10 percent, land in farms declined 6 percent, and average farm size increased 5 percent.
- In 2017, the largest number of farms (42 percent) were small-sized, between one and 49 acres, followed by medium-sized farms between 50 and 179 acres (38 percent). These farms were mostly (74 percent) family-owned or individual proprietorships.
- Pennsylvania farms sold $6.5 billion (adjusted for inflation, using 2007 as the deflator) in agricultural products in 2017, down 2 percent since 2012. Sales from livestock outpaced crop sales in 2017, and within livestock, dairy constituted the largest sector.
- Organic product sales increased substantially over the prior decade. The number of farms producing organic products increased from 680 in 2007 to 1,048 in 2017. Total organic product sales increased from $70.9 million in 2012 to $598 million in 2017 (data adjusted for inflation, using 2007 dollars). Federal initiatives, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture Organic Research Extension program, and, more recently, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Act) have helped support and expand the organic sector.
- There has been an increase in the number of farms using renewable energy systems in recent years, with the greatest increase being in the use of geothermal and geo-exchange systems.
- More recently (2012-2017), there has been a surge in the number of new primary producers, reversing the previous trend (2007-2012). However, there was a 12 percent decline in primary producers with more than 10 years on the present farm.
- The average age of primary producers in 2017 was 57 years, a year higher than 2012. More than one-third (33 percent) of primary producers in Pennsylvania were 65 years or older. This trend is similar to the overall U.S. figures.
- A little over half (51 percent) of primary producers' reported farming as their primary occupation

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in 2017. Out of these, 35 percent operated on large farms of more than 500 acres.

- In 2017, about 21 percent of primary producers were female, a substantial increase from 14 percent in 2007 and 2012. This indicates a trend toward an increased number of female primary producers in the commonwealth over time.
- Dairy cattle and milk production represented the higher share of net farm income as reported in the last three Ag Censuses (2017, 2012 and 2007). The relative contribution of poultry and egg production, as well as hog and pig farming, have increased significantly between 2007 and 2017.
- In the regional analysis, comparing Pennsylvania to the 13 states in the northern crescent farm resource region, only two states (Ohio and New Jersey) had an increase in farmland acres between 2012 and 2017. The commonwealth saw an increase of 5 percent in average farm size between 2012-2017, and was one of six states with an overall increase in average farm size.
- In the Pennsylvania county analysis, the 10 counties with the largest decreases in the number of farms between 2012 and 2017 were: Clinton, Forest, Warren, Montour, Lehigh, Delaware, Wyoming, Crawford, Jefferson, and Luzerne (listed in descending order).

Visit www.rural.pa.gov for a copy of the full report, *Analysis of 2017 Census of Agriculture Data*.