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Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (1988)

U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
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Special tribute is paid to the thousands of farm and ranch operators who furnished the information requested. Only through their cooperation was it possible to collect and publish the data in this report.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The 1988 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (AELOS) is an integrated survey of farm finance and land ownership. Publication of data on land ownership characteristics began in 1880, with the classification of farm tenure. Varying elements of farm financial data have been collected since the first agriculture census was taken in the United States in 1840. The principal financial characteristics in earlier data collections were value of farm land and sales of agricultural products, but in 1890, census data were also requested on farm mortgage debt. In later censuses, farm taxes were included.

Beginning in 1960, special surveys were conducted in connection with the 1959 and 1964 Censuses of Agriculture on selected aspects of farm finance. In 1971, the 1970 Survey of Agricultural Finance was conducted as part of the 1969 Census of Agriculture. The survey collected data on land in farms, value of land and buildings, rents, capital and operating expenditures, credit used for purchasing specified items for farm use, outstanding debt by kind and source, value of agricultural products sold, construction of farm buildings and structures, as well as off-farm income.

The 1979 Farm Finance Survey was comparable to the 1970 Survey of Agricultural Finance. The 1979 survey included new sections on production contracts, income and expenses from farm-related sources, assets, acquisition and date land was purchased, off-farm work, education, and household characteristics; and repeated questions from the 1970 survey on debts, expenditures, income, and taxes. Data from all these items were collected from the operator, and most of it from the landlords. The landlord report form also included new sections on land ownership, sales of agricultural land, participation in management decisions, and type of ownership.

AELOS includes the majority of the financial measures collected in the 1979 and earlier Farm Finance Surveys and greatly expands the data on land ownership. AELOS includes estimates for every State and U.S. totals for acres of agricultural land owned, how it was purchased, type of ownership, and a measure of the number of acres acquired and sold for specified years. Land ownership data are included for landholders who operate farms as well as for landholders who are not farm operators.

SOURCE OF DATA

Except for a few text tables, all data shown in this report were from the 1988 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey, which was taken in 1989 to cover the 1988 calendar year. All data in tables referring to the 1987 Census of Agriculture were collected in 1988 for the 1987 production year.

To determine the content of the AELOS report forms, the Census Bureau consulted with the Census Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics. Suggestions also were received from government agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Bureau of Economic Analysis as well as from private organizations and associations including the National Farm Bureau, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, National Cattlemen's Association, and National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. Assistance provided by the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Farm Credit Administration, and the Federal Reserve Board was particularly noteworthy.

The AELOS operator and landlord report forms were tested in the spring of 1988. The pretest was accomplished by meeting with Farm Bureau members and young and adult farmer groups in vocational agriculture across the country. Meetings were conducted in the States of Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Wyoming, and California. Staff members gave the farmer groups an overview of the survey. Members of the groups were then asked to complete the report form for the operator or landlord, whichever applied to their farm/ranch operation. They offered suggestions about the layout of the reports and clarity of questions asked on the report forms.

Based on evaluation of the test and additional research, final report forms for data collection were developed for operators (88-A9A) and landlords (88-A9B). Copies of these report forms are in appendix B.

The data for the survey were collected principally by mail. Form 88-A9A was sent to a sample 44,125 of farm operators for completion of applicable items for the land which they operated. Form 88-A9B was sent to landlords listed on completed operator reports. Landlords were asked to complete items relating to land rented to the specified farm operators. A combination of essential items from the operator and landlord reports made possible the determination of total estimates for items applicable to all land in farms.

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PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data are published for the United States, 4 regions, 9 divisions, and each of the 50 States. Data are published in greater detail at the U.S. level than for smaller geographic areas. Tables 1 through 65 are primarily devoted to the financial characteristics of farms including assets, debt, etc., for the farm operator and for the associated landlords. Tables 66 through 113 describe land ownership and related characteristics for both landholders who operate farms as well as landholders who are not farm operators.

SPECIAL TABULATIONS

Custom designed tabulations can be developed to individual user’s specifications on a programming cost reimbursement basis. Inquiries about special tabulations should be directed to the Chief, Agriculture Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC 20233.

HISTORICAL DATA

No comparable historical data are shown in this publication. For earlier surveys or censuses see:

1987 Census of Agriculture—Volume I, Geographic Area Series, Part 51, Summary and State Data
1982 Census of Agriculture—Volume I, Geographic Area Series, Part 51, Summary and State Data
1978 Census of Agriculture—Volume I, Summary and State Data, Part 51, United States
1978 Census of Agriculture—Volume 5, Part 6, Farm Finance Survey

1974 Census of Agriculture—Volume II, Part 2, Chapter III, Farm Debt
1969 Census of Agriculture—Volume V, Part 11, Farm Finance Survey

ELECTRONIC DATA DISSEMINATION

The AELOS data are available on computer tapes. (Selected data will be available through electronic data services such as the AGRIDATA network, the CENDATA package on Dialog, the CompuServe on line services, and the Census Bureau’s State Data Center Bulletin Board.) Computer tapes are sold by the Customer Service Branch, Data User Services Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC 20233 (telephone (301)-763-4100).

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

The following abbreviations and symbols are used throughout the tables:

- Represents zero.
(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual farms.
(NA) Not available.
(X) Not applicable.
(Z) Less than half the unit shown.