

I.3 Acres per Farm and Land Ownership

Nationwide, over the last half-century, the number of farms and the total land in farms have decreased, while the size of an average farm has increased. This trend has been less pronounced in California. While the average U.S. farm doubled in acreage between 1954 and 1997, the average California farm increased by about 25%.

However, changes in the *Census of Agriculture's* definition of a “farm” have influenced its statistics for the number of farms and the average farm size. The definition of a farm was changed in 1954, 1959, and 1974, to remove many of the smallest “farms” from census statistics. Each of these definitional changes decreased the reported number of farms and increased the average farm size. Since 1974 a “farm” has been defined in the *Census of Agriculture* as a place that generates agricultural sales of at least \$1,000 annually.

- Under the current *Census of Agriculture* definition, the acreage of the average California farm decreased by 24% between 1974 and 1997.

TABLE 9

Farm Acreage, Number and Acres per Farm, 1940-1997

Census Year	CALIFORNIA			UNITED STATES		
	Number of Farms	Land in Farms (1,000 acres)	Average Size (acres)	Number of Farms	Land in Farms (1,000 acres)	Average Size (acres)
1940	132,658	30,524	230	6,102,417	1,065,114	175
1945	138,917	35,054	252	5,859,169*	1,141,615*	195
1950	137,168	36,613	267	5,388,437	1,161,420	216
1954	123,075	37,795	307	4,782,416*	1,158,192*	242
1959	99,274	36,888	372	3,710,503	1,123,508	303
1964	80,852	37,011	458	3,154,857	1,110,187	352
1969	77,875	35,328	454	2,730,250	1,062,893	389
1974	67,674	33,386	493	2,314,013	1,017,030	440
1978	73,194	32,727	447	2,257,775	1,014,777	449
1982	82,463	32,157	390	2,240,976	986,797	440
1987	83,217	30,598	368	2,087,759	964,471	462
1992	77,669	28,979	373	1,925,300	945,532	491
1997	74,126	27,699	374	1,911,859	931,795	487

* Excludes Hawaii and Alaska

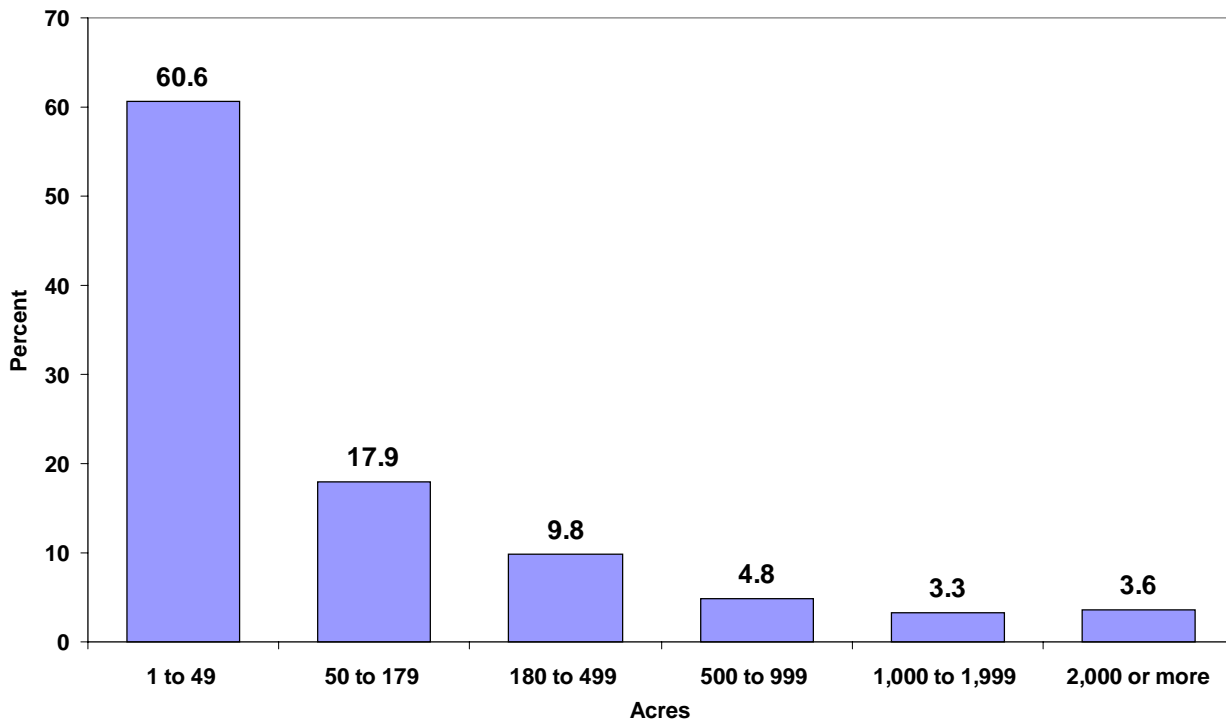
Sources:

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Agriculture*, 1940-1992.
2. USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *1997 Census of Agriculture*.

■ In 1997, more than 75% of California farms were less than 180 acres, yet the “average farm” size was 374 acres. These two statistics highlight the fact that a small percent of large farms account for a large percent of total acreage. These large farms include ranches that graze livestock and may generate relatively little total revenue.

FIGURE 9

Percent of California Farms by Acres per Farm, 1997



Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 1997 Census of Agriculture.

■ A greater portion of California farmers (72.7%) are full owners of their farms than the United States as a whole (60%). Full ownership in California has been about 2/3 or more since 1940.

TABLE 10

Land Ownership of Farm Operators, 1940-1997

	All Farm Operators	Full Owners	Part Owners	Tenant	Full Owners	Part Owners	Tenant
CALIFORNIA							
Census Year	Number of Farms				Percent of Farms		
1940	132,658	89,843	13,991	28,824	67.7	10.6	21.7
1945	138,917	102,948	14,106	21,863	74.1	10.2	15.7
1950	137,168	100,834	17,478	18,856	73.5	12.7	13.8
1954	123,002	88,870	18,328	15,804	72.3	14.9	12.8
1959	99,232	68,489	17,756	12,987	69.0	17.9	13.1
1964	80,852	53,218	15,818	11,816	65.8	19.6	14.7
1969	77,875	53,727	14,361	9,787	68.9	18.4	12.5
1974	67,674	47,339	12,377	7,958	70.0	18.3	11.7
1978	73,194	51,729	12,702	8,763	70.7	17.4	12.0
1982	82,463	60,556	12,692	9,215	73.4	15.4	11.2
1987	83,217	60,639	12,218	10,360	72.9	14.7	12.4
1992	77,669	56,559	11,471	9,639	72.8	14.8	12.4
1997	74,126	53,878	10,888	9,360	72.7	14.7	12.6
UNITED STATES							
Census Year	Number of Farms				Percent of Farms		
1940	6,096,799	3,084,138	615,039	2,397,622	50.6	10.1	39.3
1945	5,859,169	3,301,361	660,502	1,897,306	56.3	11.3	32.4
1950	5,379,250	3,091,473	840,924	1,446,853	57.5	15.6	26.9
1954	4,782,393	2,736,941	856,931	1,188,521	57.2	17.9	24.9
1959	3,703,642	2,116,026	809,600	778,016	57.1	21.8	21.1
1964	3,152,611	1,816,259	780,781	555,571	57.6	24.8	17.7
1969	2,730,250	1,705,720	671,607	352,923	62.4	24.5	12.9
1974	2,314,013	1,423,953	628,224	261,836	61.5	27.2	11.3
1978	2,257,775	1,297,902	681,112	278,761	57.5	30.2	12.3
1982	2,240,976	1,325,773	656,249	258,954	59.2	29.3	11.6
1987	2,087,759	1,238,547	609,012	240,200	59.3	29.2	11.5
1992	1,925,300	1,111,738	596,657	216,905	57.7	31.0	11.3
1997	1,911,859	1,146,891	573,839	191,129	60.0	30.0	10.0

Sources:

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Agriculture, 1940-1992*.
2. USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *1997 Census of Agriculture*.