
U.S.A. - Agricultural Census 1987 - Explanatory Notes

Historical outline: The 1987 Census of Agriculture was the 23rd undertaken in the United States of America. The first agricultural census was taken in 1840 as part of the sixth decennial census of population. From 1840 to 1950, agricultural censuses were taken every ten years, while from 1954 to 1974 agricultural censuses were taken every five years, for years ending in 4 and 9. In 1976 an adjustment in timing was established, to let agricultural censuses coincide with economic censuses; for this reason collection of data was established on a 5 year cycle, for years ending in 2 and 7.

Organization: The 1987 Census of Agriculture was carried out by an agency of the US Department of Commerce: the US Bureau of the Census. The Agriculture Division was the division, of the Bureau of the Census, mostly involved in census undertaking; collaboration was also given by the Economic and Programming Division, the Field Division, the Data Preparation Division, and various Data Processing and Publication Divisions.

Enumeration period: The mailout/mailback enumeration method (adopted in the 50 states for the first time in 1969) started with an initial mailing of questionnaires between 16 and 21 December 1987. A reminder card and five followup mailings were carried out at 1-month intervals between January and June 1988.

Reference date: The reference dates/periods are: 31 December 1987 for inventory data, and the calendar year 1987 for data on production.

Definition: A farm is any place involved in agricultural operations under the day-to-day control of an individual or a management, having US \$1000 or more in total value of sales of agricultural products, during the reference year.

Coverage: The census covered all places meeting the farm definition in the 50 states.

Frame: The Census Bureau compiled the mailing list for the 1987 Census of Agriculture from mail lists of previous censuses and from current administrative records of various federal agencies concerned with agriculture. The list was integrated with additional addresses drawn from the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Methods: The mailout/mailback enumeration method required compilation of a mailing list of names and addresses of possible agricultural operators. The mailing list was organized by state in eight geographic segments. The Census Bureau assembled a list of over 16 million possible farm addresses, which were subsequently reduced to approximately 4.1 million addresses. An initial mailing of questionnaires was carried out, followed by a reminder/thank you card and five followup mailings. A telephone followup operation was used for selected large nonrespondent operations. As a result, a total of 2,087,759 farms were enumerated.

Data source: US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census - 1987 Census of Agriculture - United States - Vol.1, Part 51 - November 1989.

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