

# AGRICULTURAL LANDOWNERS AND WOMEN OPERATORS

## AGRICULTURAL LANDOWNERS (OWNER-OPERATORS AND NON-FARMING LANDOWNERS)

### Owner Operators

- In 2007, there were 2,204,792 *principal* operators. A principal operator is the person responsible for the on-site, day-to-day operation of the farm or ranch.
  - They *manage* (i.e., farm) 922,095,840 acres, which accounts for all of the “land in farms.”
  - They *own* 646,247,118 acres and farm 88 percent of them (571,303,487 acres).
  - They leased most of the land they didn’t farm to other operators, but we can’t say exactly how much.
- Principal operators aged 55 and older represent 57 percent of all principal operators.
  - They *manage* 527,405,083 acres or 57 percent of the total land in farms.
  - They *own* 415,968,305 acres and farm 87 percent of them (360,524,321 acres).
  - They leased most of the remaining acreage to other operators, but we can’t say exactly how much.
- Principal operators 65 and older make up 30 percent of all principal operators and are the fastest growing age group.
  - They *manage* 267,257,464 acres or 29 percent of land in farms.
  - They *own* 232,257,320 acres and farm 85 percent of them (197,097,454 acres).
  - They leased most of the remaining acreage to other operators, but we can’t say exactly how much.

Age Group	Principal Operators	Percentage of Principal Operators	Owned Land in Farms	Rented or Leased Land in Farms	Land in Farms	Land Owned
Under 25	11,878	0.54%	887,848	1,797,591	2,685,439	1,001,630
25 to 34	106,735	4.84%	12,841,205	20,908,171	33,749,376	14,511,852
35 to 44	268,818	12.19%	59,462,726	49,431,997	108,894,723	64,342,001
45 to 54	565,401	25.64%	137,587,387	111,773,832	249,361,219	150,423,330
55 to 64	596,306	27.05%	163,426,867	96,720,752	260,147,619	183,710,985
65 to 74	412,182	18.69%	197,097,454	70,160,010	267,257,464	232,257,320
75 and over	243,472	11.04%				
All Ages, Total	2,204,792	100.00%	571,303,487	350,792,353	922,095,840	646,247,118

- Based on the figures for operators aged 65 and older, we can say that **at least 230 million acres are likely to change hands in the next 20 years.**
  - This is about 25 percent of land in farms.
  - This figure is low because it does not include agricultural land owned by non-operators. As far as we know, there are no current or reliable nationwide data about this group.

*Note: Many farms have more than one operator. To better inform work related to farm and ranch land transfer, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) staff recommended that we request a special tabulation to look at the age of additional operators who farm with operators 65 and older and the associated “owned” land. This would improve our estimate of acres likely to change hands in the foreseeable future.*

(Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 1: U.S. National Level Data, Table 63 and NASS Farmers by Age Fact Sheet)

### Non-Farming Landowners

- A significant amount of land is owned by non-farming landowners (we estimate about 275 million acres but can’t say for sure because of land that is subleased). Little is known about this group.

- In the past, the NASS conducted Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Surveys (AELOS) to capture information about agricultural land ownership (operators and non-farming landowners). NASS has not conducted the AELOS since 1999.
- Data from this survey were used by Virginia Tech professor David Kohl to support his statements that 70 percent of United States farmland would change hands over the next 20 years.<sup>1</sup>

## WOMEN OPERATORS

### All Women Operators

- In 2007, more than 1 million women operated farms (1,008,943).
  - Women represented 30 percent of *all* farm operators.
  - From 2002 to 2007, the total number of women operators grew 19 percent and the percentage of women operators increased 11 percent.
  - The increase in the number of women operators outpaced the 7 percent increase in the number of all operators.

(Source: NASS Women Farmer and Farmers by Age Fact Sheets)

- Farms with a woman operator *manage* nearly 300 million (298,009,940 acres) or 32 percent of land in farms.

*Note: Land in farms data are limited to farms reporting that a woman is either a principal, second or third operator.*

(Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 2: State Level Data, Table 48)

### Women Principal Operators

- In 2007, 306,209 women were principal operators.
  - Women principal operators made up 14 percent of all principal operators.
  - From 2002 to 2007, the number of women principal operators jumped 29 percent and the percentage of women principal operators increased 24 percent.

(Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 1: U.S. National Level Data, Table 50)

- Women principal operators *manage* 64,264,566 acres of land in farms or 7 percent of land in farms. They own and operate 50,101,842 acres.

(Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 2: State Level Data, Table 48)

- Women principal operators are more likely to own all of the land they farm.
  - In 85 percent of operations headed by women, women own all of the acres being farmed.
  - Among operations headed by men, only 66 percent own all the land they farm.

(Source: NASS Women Farmer Fact Sheet)

## LINKS TO DATA SOURCES

2007 Census of Agriculture: <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/index.php>

NASS Fact Sheets: [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Fact\\_Sheets/index.php](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/index.php)

AELOS: [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide\\_to\\_NASS\\_Surveys/Agricultural\\_Economics\\_and\\_Land\\_Ownership/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide_to_NASS_Surveys/Agricultural_Economics_and_Land_Ownership/index.asp).

The 1999 AELOS: [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/1997/Agricultural\\_Economics\\_and\\_Land\\_Ownership/](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/1997/Agricultural_Economics_and_Land_Ownership/)

---

<sup>1</sup> David Kohl and Martha H. Izzi, *From Farm Women to Granny Landlords: Their Roles in the Future of American Farmland*, Capstone Paper (Brattleboro, Vt.: School for International Training, 1999) and David Kohl and Alex White, "The Challenge of Family Business Transition," *Horizons* 13, no. 5, (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Tech, 2001).