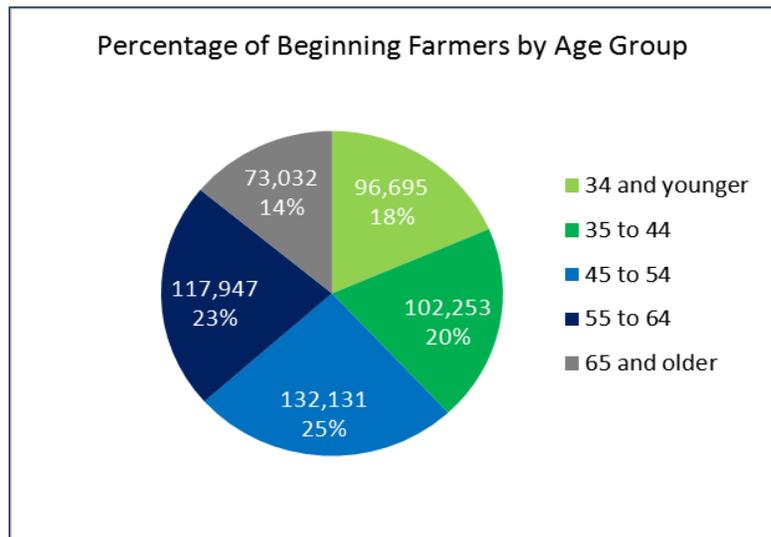


BEGINNING FARMERS

BACKGROUND

- USDA defines beginning farmers as individuals who have been operating a farm for *10 years or less*. The 2012 Census of Agriculture provides information about operators' experience on their current farm, "years on present farm" and, for the first time, "years operating any farm." The published tables, however, include experience ranges that don't line up exactly with the USDA definition.
- The National Agricultural Statistics Service, however, published a Beginning Farmer fact sheet containing national level data about principal operators with 10 years or less experience on their current operation.¹ We used information from this special tabulation to produce a pie chart depicting beginners by age.
- Below, we've provided data from the census tables representing operators with *fewer than 10 years of experience*. Using this information enabled us to provide historical comparisons and data by state. Unless noted, numbers are for principal operators.



YEARS ON PRESENT FARM

- Nationwide, the number of beginning farmers has reached a 30-year low. Just between 2007 and 2012, the number of beginners dropped 20 percent to 469,098.
- Beginning farmers now represent the smallest share of principal operators (22 percent) in 30 years.
- Nineteen percent of beginners are 34 and younger, but only 6 percent of *all* principal operators fall in this age group. Twenty percent of beginners are 35 to 44; 25 percent are 45 to 54; 22 percent are 55 to 64; and 14 percent are 65 and older. Sixty-one percent of beginning farmers are 45 and older, whereas 71 percent of *all* principals are 45 and older.
- Overall, beginners are more likely to be female than all principals. Women operators represent more than 17 percent of beginners but less than 14 percent of all principal operators.
- Beginners are also more likely to be "Spanish, Hispanic or Latino" than all principals. Spanish, Hispanic or Latino operators make up 4.6 percent of beginners compared to 3 percent of all principal operators.

¹ 2012 Census Highlights Beginning Farmers - Characteristics of Farmers by Years on Current Farm available at: http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/Beginning_Farmers/

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- Nationwide, the largest number of beginning farmers were in:
 1. Texas 65,547
 2. Missouri 21,545
 3. California 20,648
 4. Oklahoma 19,873
 5. Kentucky 17,257
- Nationwide the largest percentages of beginning farmers were in:
 1. Alaska 34.65%
 2. Rhode Island 30.81%
 3. Maine 29.67%
 4. Hawaii 29.23%
 5. Vermont 28.14%

(Sources: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 1: National Level Data Tables 57, 59 and Table 69)

California

- The number of beginning farmers decreased, falling 23 percent between 2007 and 2012 to 20,648—a 30-year low.
- The percentage of beginning principal operators also fell to 27 percent, a 30-year low.

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa

- The number of beginning farmers (4,084) and percentage of beginning farmers (18 percent) reached a 30-year low.

Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia

- The largest numbers of beginning farmers were reported in Pennsylvania (12,586) and Virginia (10,199).
- The largest percentages of beginning farmers were in Virginia (22 percent) and Pennsylvania (21 percent).

New England

- In 2012, the number of beginners hit a 30-year high at 9,484. This is a 4 percent increase from 2007, and a 29 percent jump from 1997 adjusted data.
- The proportion of beginning principal operators held steady at 27 percent, nearly the same percentage reported in 2007.
- The largest numbers of beginning principal operators were reported in Maine (2,425), Vermont (2,065) and Massachusetts (1,954).
- The largest percentages of beginners were in Rhode Island (31 percent), Maine (30 percent) and Vermont (28 percent).

New York

- Between 2007 and 2012, the number of beginning principal operators fell 11 percent to 8,016.
- The number of beginners fell for the second consecutive COA reporting period.

- The proportion of beginners dropped from 25 percent to 23 percent of principals between 2007 and 2012.

Washington

- The number of beginning operators fell 16 percent to 10,100 in just five years between 2007 and 2012.
- The proportion of beginners also fell from 31 percent in 2007 to 27 percent in 2012.
- Washington continues to have a large proportion of beginning farmers, ranking 7th in the United States.

YEARS OPERATING ANY FARM

- In 2012, 382,396 principal operators reported they had less than 10 years operating *any* farm.
- Twenty-two percent of these beginners are 34 and younger, whereas only 6 percent of all principal operators fall in this age bracket. Twenty percent are 35 to 44; 25 percent are 45 to 54; 21 percent are 55 to 64; and 13 percent are 65 and older. Fifty-eight percent of beginning farmers are 45 and older, whereas 71 percent of all principals are 45 and older.
- Overall, beginners are more likely to be female. Women operators represent more than 18 percent of beginners but less than 14 percent of all principal operators.
- Beginners are also more likely to be “Spanish, Hispanic or Latino.” Spanish, Hispanic or Latino operators make up 4.7 percent of beginners compared to 3 percent of all operators.
- The largest number of beginning farmers were in:

1. Texas	53,302
2. Missouri	17,133
3. California	16,493
4. Oklahoma	15,854
5. Kentucky	13,595
- The largest percentages of beginning farmers were in:

1. Rhode Island	28.08%
2. Alaska	27.69%
3. Maine	24.85%
4. Hawaii	23.81%
5. Florida	22.61%

(Sources: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 1: National Level Data Tables 57, 59 and Table 69)