



Wisconsin farmers counted in 2012 Census data

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MADISON – The numbers are in. You can count on Wisconsin agriculture. The final results of the 2012 Census of Agriculture were released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service. These numbers build on the preliminary data released in February.

“The 2012 Census of Agriculture enumerates the trends that have taken place on Wisconsin’s farms in the last five years,” said Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Secretary Ben Brancel. “The type, size and production of the state’s farms continue to change, incorporating new technologies and methodologies to be profitable and meet consumer demand.”

The state is known for its diverse and productive agricultural industry and the final Census numbers continue to support that.

The market value of Wisconsin of agricultural products was \$12 billion in the 2012 census, a 30% increase from \$9.2 billion in 2007. This includes Wisconsin market value of crops, livestock, poultry and their products, including dairy and government payments. The amount of net cash income of Wisconsin’s farms continues to increase. Wisconsin farmers averaged about 1% more net cash income per farm than the national average.

A farm is defined as any place from which \$1,000 of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the Census year. Wisconsin is home to nearly 70,000 farms and while the total number of farms decreased over the last five years, the number of oilseed and grain farms increased 46% from 2007 to 2012. The number of sheep and goat farms increased 4% in 2012 compared to the previous census. Sheep and goat operations also increased their amount of sales from 2007 to 2012 in all size categories.

There was a decrease in the number of 1 to 49 acre farms but they still accounted for nearly a third (32%) of all Wisconsin farms in the 2012 census. Farms with more than 1,000 acres accounted for only 3% of the state’s farms in this report.

“We were a little surprised at the drop in smaller farms,” added Secretary Brancel. “We thought that number would have remained steady or increased with the growing interest and popularity of local and regional foods and community supported agriculture.”

There are about 14.5 million acres of land in farms in Wisconsin according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. In the five years between the reports, the biggest decrease in farmland came in woodland acres that was sold and separated from the farm. Florence and Vilas counties had the largest decrease in land in farms statewide among counties.

“While no one likes to see the decrease in the number of farms and land in farms, it represents the evolving agricultural industry,” said Brancel. “There are several trends we’ll look for as we analyze these numbers such as neighbors and multiple families combining farms to develop efficiencies or acreage in production through a rental or lease agreement rather than sole ownership. Land may have been repurposed from agricultural production to recreational use.”

The 2012 Census of Agriculture also looks at principal operator demographics with a principal operator defined as the person primarily responsible for the on-site, day-to-day operation of the farm. This person could be an owner, hired manager or a business manager. While the average age for a principal operator in Wisconsin is 56 years of age, the average age of the second operator is younger at 52 years and the third operator is 44 years. Nine percent of Wisconsin farm operators are age 34 years or younger.

The 2012 Census of Agriculture included new data such as internet access and renewable energy. Seventy percent of Wisconsin farms had internet access in 2012. More than 1,500 Wisconsin farms had renewable energy producing systems, including solar panels, geexchange systems and wind turbines.

“Thank you to the Wisconsin farmers who completed the 2012 Census of Agriculture, contributing to the quality of this data,” concluded Brancel. “By participating, policy makers and the industry leaders will have a better picture of Wisconsin’s agricultural industry and be able to provide more meaningful support and make informed decisions.”

The Census, conducted every five years, counts U.S. farms and operators. Eighty-four percent of Wisconsin farmers responded to the Census, one of the highest return rates in the country. To learn more about the Census results, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.