

# Statistical Brief

## Who Owns America's Farmland?

*There are nearly 2 million fewer owners of U.S. agricultural land now than in 1945. This dramatic drop is mostly due to our steadily declining population of farmers. Periodic censuses and surveys by the Census Bureau detail farm production, operations and owners. The 1988 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey features data on farmland ownership for calendar year 1988, and this Brief highlights data from that survey.*

### Most Land Owners Are Farm Operators

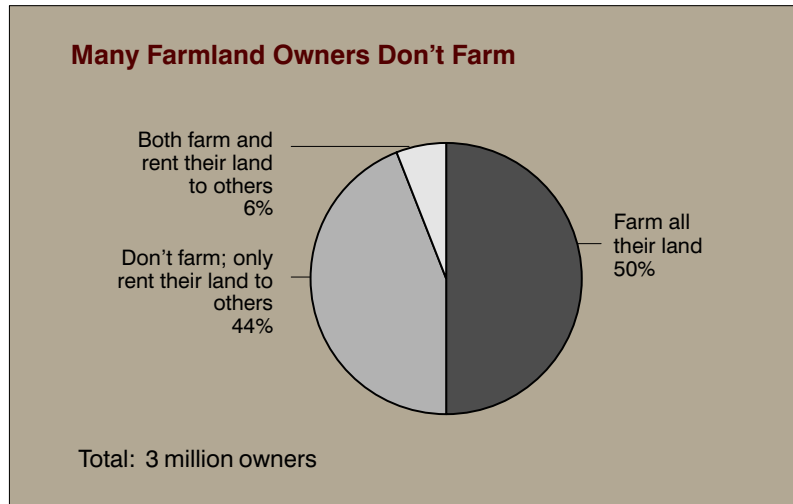
The U.S. has nearly 3 million owners of farmland. Half are operators that farm all the land they own and another 6 percent farm part of their land and lease part to other farmers. The remaining 1.3 million owners, or 44 percent, only rent land to other farmers; they do not operate farms on it.

People own most farmland. Some 2.6 million owners are individuals or families, and they own more than two-thirds of all farm acreage. Fewer than 32,500 non-family-held corporations own farmland, and they own less than 5 percent of all U.S. farmland.



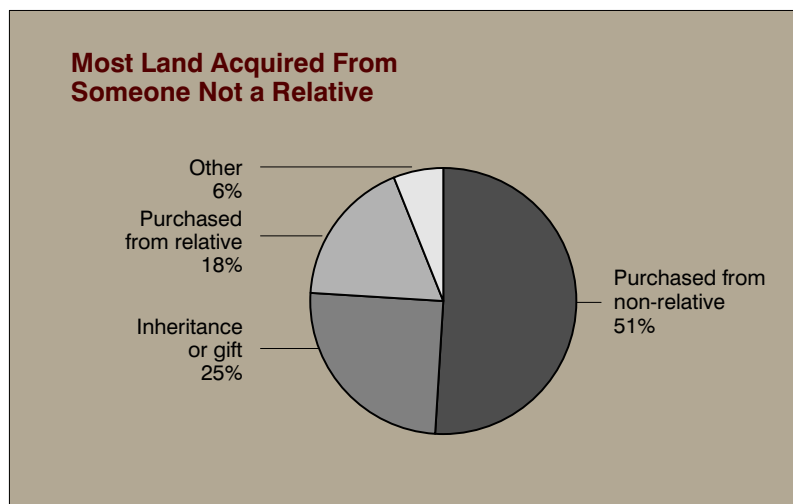
SB/93-10  
Issued May 1993

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and  
Statistics Administration  
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS



Farmland owners hold an average of about 280 acres each. They purchased over one-half of their acreage from non-relatives, received about one-fourth through inheritances or gifts, and tend to take a "long view" of their holdings.

- Over 60 percent report owning land more than 20 years ago.
- Only 5 percent report selling any land between 1983 and 1987.



### Operators Have High Financial Stakes

The 1.7 million owners who farm all or part of their land hold 60 percent of all U.S. farmland, and 62 percent of the more than \$600 billion in farmland and buildings. Thus, their land holdings are larger and higher in value than those of non-operator owners. In addition:

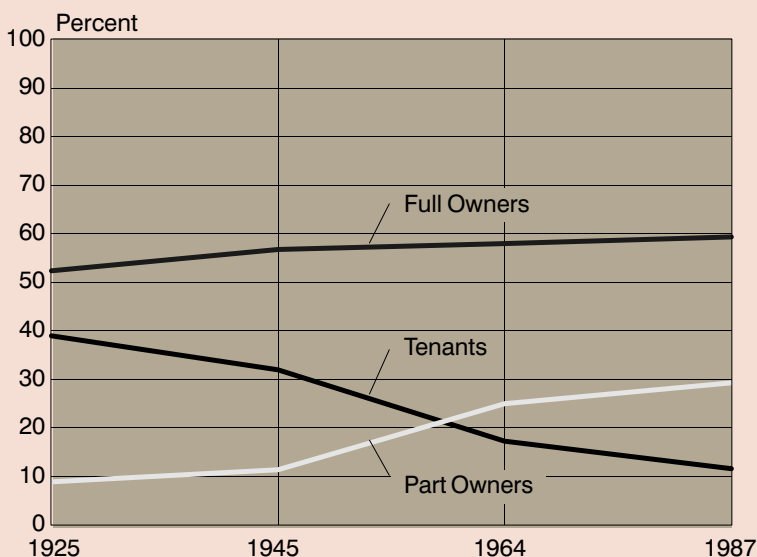
- They account for 86 percent of all gross farm sales, 81 percent of all operating expenses, and 87 percent of farm debt.
- Thirty-five percent are at least 60 years old, 2 percent are minorities, and 1 percent are Hispanic.

Growth in owner-operators is a major structural change in U.S. farming since 1940. Nearly 90 percent of all operators now own part or all of the land they farm, whereas only 65 percent were owners 5 decades earlier. This reflects both an increase in part-owner and a decrease in tenant (non-owner) farmers.

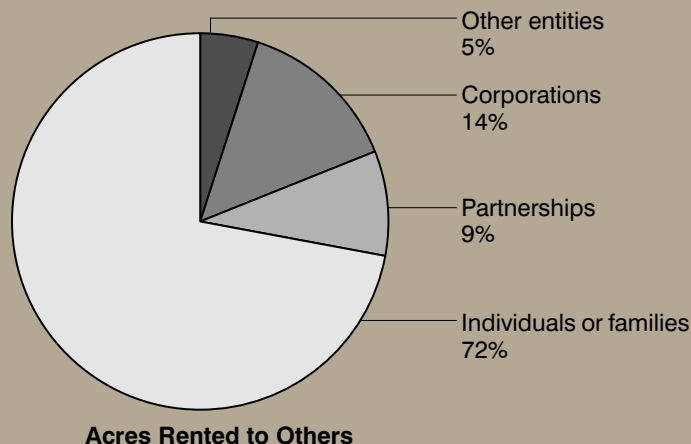
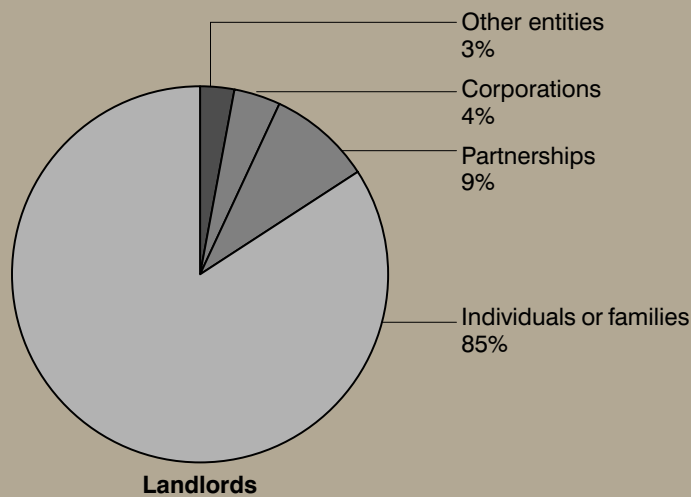
### Landlords Influence U.S. Agriculture

Landlords are owners who rent land to others for farm use. They include the 1.3 million owners who do not farm themselves, and nearly 170,000 owner-operators who farm part of their land and rent part to other farmers. A landlord may rent land to several farm operators, and the 1.5 million landlords have some 1.8 million separate rental arrangements.

### Owners Have Replaced Tenants



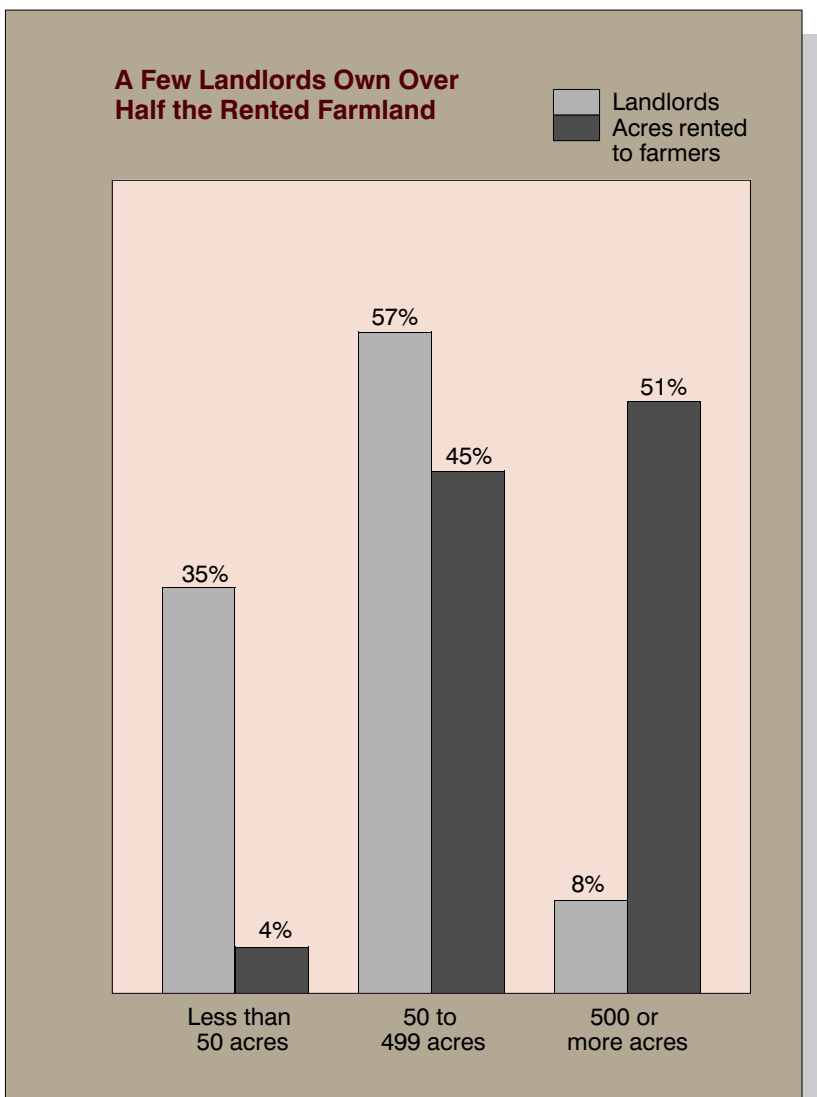
### Landlords are Individuals and Families



Decisions and participation by landlords are important to current and future performance of U.S. agriculture. They own some 45 percent of all agricultural land, and over one-third of all privately held agricultural land. Among landlords:

- Land ownership is highly concentrated; only 8 percent own more than half of all land owned by landlords.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 lease land to only one farmer; reflecting the structural decline of tenant operators.
- Nearly 70 percent involve female ownership (including 40 percent as sole owners), two-thirds are at least 60 years old, and 35 percent are employed.
- Some 15 percent live more than 150 miles from their land.

Over half the landlords report rent receipts that are less than 6 percent of the value of their rented land and buildings. They own over 30 percent of the value of assets used in farming, pay 42 percent of the real estate taxes on farmland, and hold only 8 percent of all farm debt.

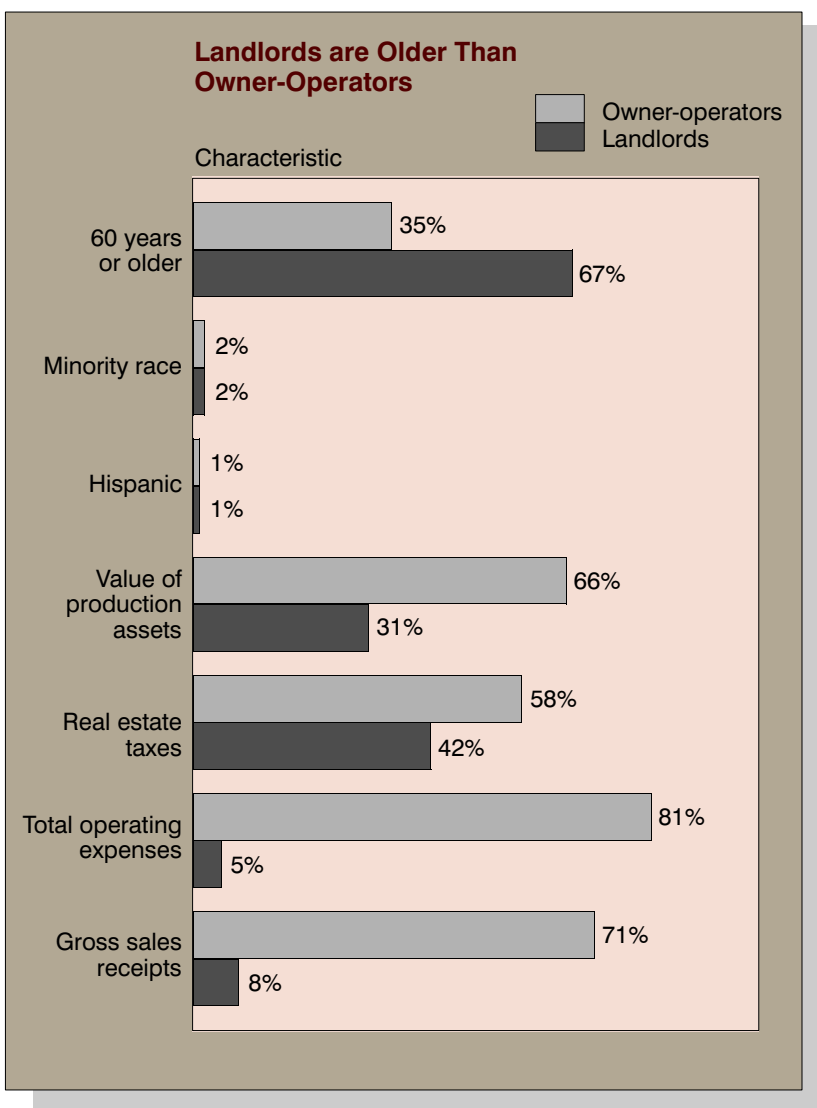


**Ownership Changes Affect Rural Communities**

In addition to there being many fewer farm owners today, access to agricultural land is limited by land prices, zoning practices, urbanization, recreation, and other competing land uses. As opportunities to own or use agricultural land become restricted, the characteristics of land owners increasingly affect how farms are run and vitality of rural communities.

The actions of today's 3 million land owners directly affect the opportunities for the entry of new farmers and expansion of existing farms, they also have social and political implications. For example, as rural land-owners age, households have fewer children, the need for local schools decreases, and the demand for medical services increases. As absentee land owners increase, local income tax revenues are lost and pressures for new public service programs increase.

*This is one of a series of occasional reports from the Census Bureau that provide information about our people and economy. The data are from a survey that supplements the 1987 Census of Agriculture. Survey and census data may differ because of collection method, reference period or other differences. The data are subject to sampling and nonsampling errors but have been tested and found to meet applicable standards. Appendix*



*A of the report cited below provides a complete description of statistical methods, quality, and limitations.*

**Data Report**  
 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (1988)

**Contacts**  
 Farmland and Ownership  
 John Blackledge  
 (301-763-8559)

Economic Statistical Briefs  
 Kathy V. Friedman  
 (301-763-2747)