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Nebraska Highlights from the 1997 Census of Agriculture

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Cornhusker Economics

Cooperative Extension

Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources
Department of Agricultural Economics
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Nebraska Highlights from the 1997 Census of Agriculture

| Market Report | Yr Ago | 4 Wks Ago | 2/5/99 |
|---|--------|-----------|--------|
| <u>Livestock and Products,</u> | | | |
| <u>Average Prices for Week Ending</u> | | | |
| Slaughter Steers, SE/CH 65-80%, Weighted Avg. for Nebraska Feedlots. | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Feeder Steers, Med. Frame, 600-650 lb, Dodge City, KS, cwt. | | | |
| Feeder Steers, Med. Frame 600-650 lb, Nebraska Auction Wght. Avg. | | | |
| Carcass Price, Ch. 1-3, 550-700 lb Cent. US, Equiv. Index Value, cwt. | | | |
| Hogs, US 1-2, 220-230 lb Omaha, cwt. | | | |
| Feeder Pigs, US 1-2, 40-45 lb Sioux Falls, SD, hd. | | | |
| Vacuum Packed Pork Loins, Wholesale, 13-19 lb, 1/4" Trim, Cent. US, cwt. | | | |
| Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., 115-125 lb Sioux Falls, SD, cwt. | | | |
| Carcass Lambs, Ch. & Pr., 1-4, 55-65 lb FOB Midwest, cwt. | | | |
| <u>Crops,</u> | | | |
| <u>Cash Truck Prices for Date Shown</u> | | | |
| Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Kansas City, bu. | | | |
| Corn, No. 2, Yellow Sioux City, IA, bu. | | | |
| Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Sioux City, IA, bu. | | | |
| Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Kansas City, cwt. | | | |
| Oats, No. 2, Heavy Sioux City, IA, bu. | | | |
| <u>Hay,</u> | | | |
| <u>First Day of Week Pile Prices</u> | | | |
| Alfalfa, Sm. Square, RFV 150 or better Platte Valley, ton. | | | |
| Alfalfa, Lg. Round, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton. | | | |
| Prairie, Sm. Square, Good Northeast Nebraska, ton. | | | |
| * No market. | | | |

Early results from the National 1997 Census of Agriculture were released to the public over the Internet February 1st. The Ag Census, which is conducted at five-year intervals, serves as a key benchmark of structural conditions and trends in agriculture. In addition, it provides valuable detailed information about production agriculture down to state and county levels.

While the wealth of the 1997 census data will be forthcoming in the next few months, here are some highlights for Nebraska from the initial releases.

In 1997 there were 51,454 farms in Nebraska, down 2.8 percent from the number in 1992. Average size of Nebraska farms was 885 acres up from 839 acres in 1992. The estimated per farm value of land and buildings was \$567,500 which was up 32 percent from the previous census benchmark. Machinery and equipment value averaged nearly \$85,000 per farm in 1997.

Total annual market value of agricultural products sold by Nebraska farms was \$9,831,519,000, averaging over \$191,000 per farm. Livestock and poultry accounted for 61 percent of the state's total agricultural marketings with crop sales being the remainder.

For 69 percent of the Nebraska farms in 1997, farming was considered the principal occupation of the operator. This compares with 74 percent in 1992. Even though the majority considered farming their principal occupation, 43 percent of operators reported working off-farm as well in 1997, with 26 percent of the operators working off-farm 200 days or more annually.



While these averages of Nebraska farms and farm operators are interesting and somewhat revealing when compared with previous census benchmarks, one must keep in mind that production agriculture is extremely diverse. And in the case of a major agricultural state like Nebraska, the diversity is even compounded. That's why one must always look beyond the averages, realizing that what constitutes our farms represents a huge continuum of size and configuration. In fact, even finding an actual farm that is remotely close in characteristics to the state "average" may be quite a challenge.

Perhaps the above is most clearly evident in Figure 1 which classifies the states farms by annual market value of agricultural products sold. A huge number of "census-definition" farms in Nebraska are quite small in sales activity and account for a very small amount of marketings. For example, some 11,500 Nebraska farms (22.4 percent of total farms in the state) had annual sales of under \$10,000 in 1997 and contributed only 0.4 percent of the state's agricultural marketings. Their average sales were just \$3,400 per year – essentially a 4-H project or the direct sales marketings off a profitable sweet corn patch. Yet, since the census defines a farm as any unit with annual agricultural marketings of \$1,000 or more, they still get counted.

Even after moving up the size class a bit further and combining all farms with sales of less than \$50,000 annually, their combined annual marketings were only \$403 million or 4.1 percent of the state's total sales. Yet they accounted for essentially half (49 percent) of all Nebraska farms in 1997.

In contrast, at the other end of the size spectrum, the 1997 census counted 4.9 percent of Nebraska farms, some 2,500 farms, as having annual agricultural sales of at least \$500,000. These accounted for over 55 percent of Nebraska's agricultural marketings. Average annual sales by this group exceeded \$2 million per farm.

To sum up, these initial findings from the 1997 census of agriculture give us only a taste of the huge and complex industry of Nebraska production agriculture. Quite frankly, this state's agriculture defies simple summarization and averages, and in many ways no longer fits the historic agricultural census template designed for a more simple and modest farming structure. Nevertheless, it is a census benchmark. And the more detailed findings scheduled for release in the coming months will prove useful to those seeking more indepth understanding of the fascinating and dynamic industry of production agriculture.

For those who want to access Agricultural Census Information via Internet, the website address is: <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census97/highlights/ne/ne.htm>

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