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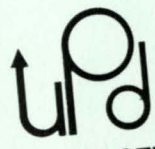
Satterlee, J. L. and Goreham, G. A., "Changes in South Dakota Farms, 1935-1982" (1985). *Agricultural Experiment Station Circulars*. Paper 249.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/agexperimentsta_circ/249

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Changes in South Dakota Farms, 1935-1982

Update Series C229, No. 21
Department of Rural Sociology
Agricultural Experiment Station
South Dakota State University
Brookings, South Dakota
August 1985



POPULATION UPDATE

CHANGES IN SOUTH DAKOTA FARMS, 1935-1982.*

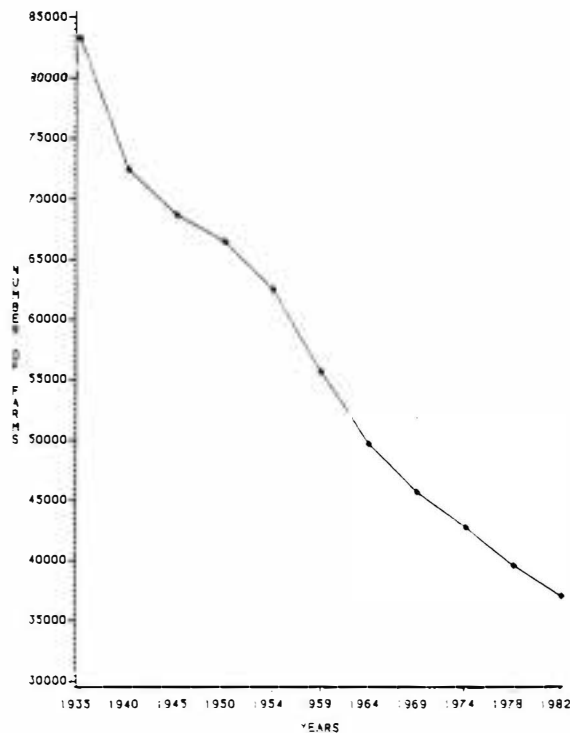
James L. Satterlee, Professor, and
Gary A. Goreham, Graduate Research Assistant

The structure of farming in South Dakota has undergone rapid and dramatic change over the past several decades. Information from the Census of Agriculture, conducted every five years by the United States Bureau of the Census, indicates many of these changes. Some of the changes highlighted below include: (1), a decline in the number of farms; (2) an increase in the size of farms; and (3) a change in the characteristics of farmers.

DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF FARMS.

The decline in the number of farms in South Dakota has slowed somewhat. The number has dropped from a high of 83,303 farms in 1935 to a low of 37,148 farms in 1982, a 55.4% drop. Since 1978, when there were 38,741 farms, the state has lost 1,593 farms. This represents a 4.1% loss over the four-year period of time. Figure 1 illustrates the drop in the number of farms in South Dakota between 1935 and 1982.

FIGURE 1. DECREASE IN NUMBER OF S. D. FARMS,
1935 THROUGH 1982.



Note: The South Dakota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service has estimated the number of farms in the state to be 37,000 in 1983 and 1984.

* A farm, as defined for the 1982 and 1978 censuses, is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. All information listed in this bulletin has been taken from the 1982 Census of Agriculture AC82-A-41, South Dakota: State and County Data.

Despite the fact that there has been a 4.1% decrease in the number of farms in the state, medium-size farms (those with 180 to 999 acres) have experienced even greater decreases. Table 1 lists the changes between 1978 and 1982 in the number of farms by size in acres.

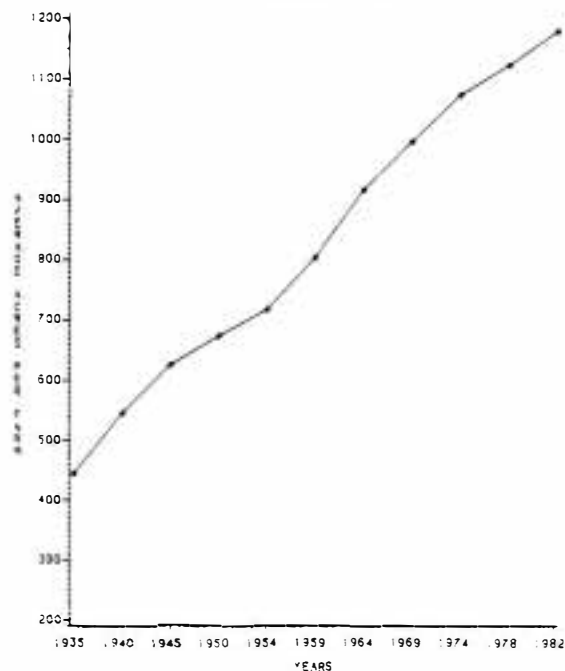
TABLE 1 CHANGES IN NUMBER OF FARMS BY SIZE IN ACRES
1978 THROUGH 1982

| Size of Farm (in acres) | 1978 | 1982 | Change | Percent Change |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|
| 1-9 | 1,730 | 1,919 | 189 | 10.9% |
| 10-49 | 1,626 | 2,105 | 479 | 29.5% |
| 50-179 | 5,368 | 5,248 | -120 | -2.2% |
| 180-499 | 10,833 | 9,505 | -1,328 | -12.3% |
| 500-999 | 8,962 | 8,206 | -756 | -8.4% |
| 1,000-1,999 | 5,945 | 5,723 | -222 | -3.7% |
| 2,000 + | 4,277 | 4,442 | 165 | 3.9% |
| TOTALs | 38,741 | 37,148 | -1,593 | -4.1% |

INCREASE IN FARM SIZE.

The average acreage per South Dakota farm has increased substantially to correspond with the decline in the number of farms. Between 1978 and 1982, the average farm size increased from 1,147 acres to 1,179 acres. This is an increase of 32 acres per farm, a 2.8% increase over the four-year period of time. The average farm in 1982 was 264.9% (or over two and one half times) larger than the average farm in 1935.

FIGURE 2. INCREASE IN AVERAGE SIZE OF S. D. FARMS,
1935 THROUGH 1982.



Note: The South Dakota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service has estimated the average size of farms in the state to be 1,203 for both 1983 and 1984.

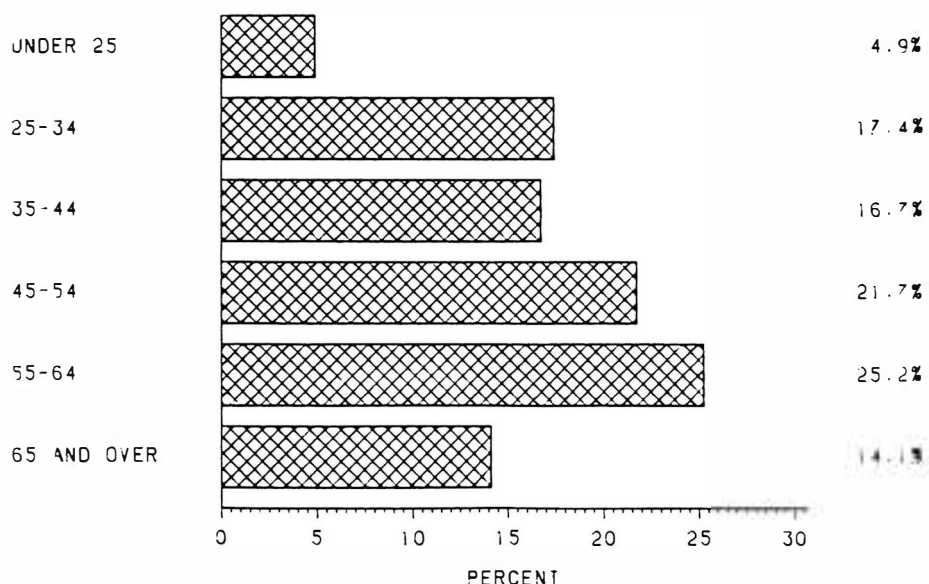
CHANGES IN CHARACTERISTICS OF FARM OPERATORS.

Age.

The average age of farm operators in South Dakota had been gradually increasing over time. The average age of farm operators reached a high of 50.1 years in 1974. This trend appears very slowly to be reversing. In 1978, the average age of farm operators had dropped to 48.7 years. Four years later, the average age had dropped to 48.6 years.

Although the bulk of farm operators were between the ages of 55 and 64 years (9,362 farmers), the greatest increases in the number of farmers came in the 25 to 34 year age group. In 1978, the 25 to 34 year age group accounted for 5,822 farmers and had increased to 6,454 farmers by 1982, a 10.9% increase. Thirty nine percent of all farm operators in 1982 were under age 45. Figure 3 depicts the percent of South Dakota farm operators by age group as of 1982.

FIGURE 3. PERCENT OF S. D. FARMERS BY AGE, 1982.



Ownership.

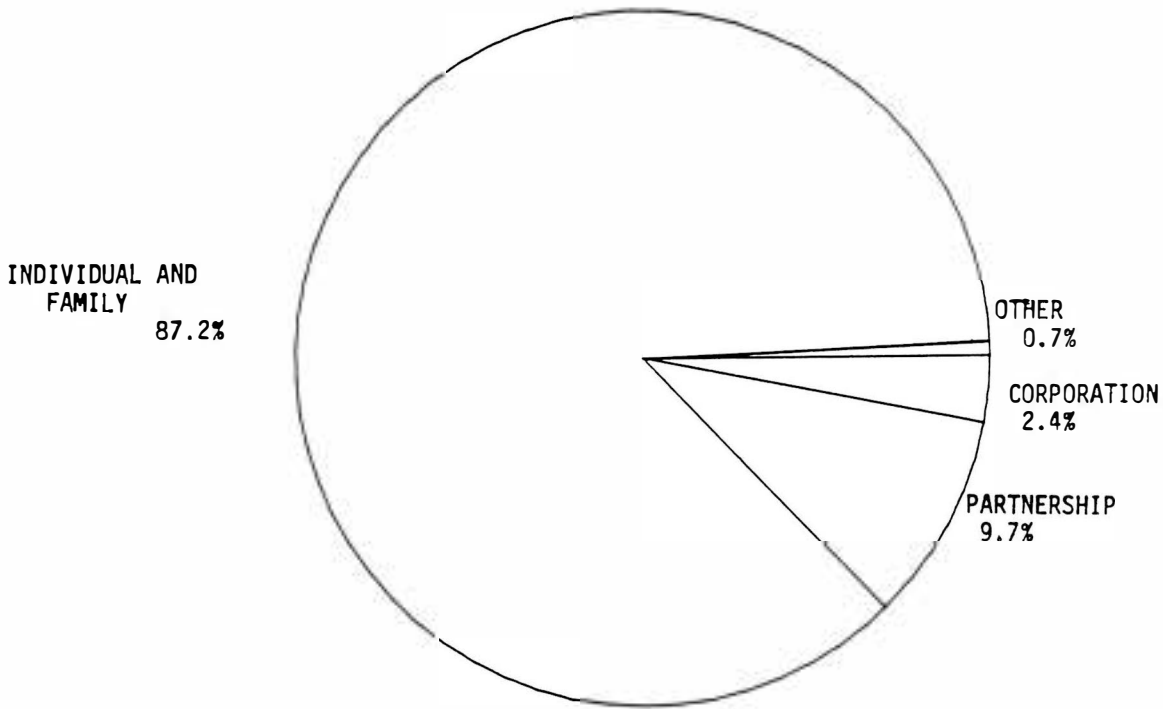
After a 14.5% drop in Full Owners between 1974 and 1978 (17,300 to 14,796), the number of Full Owners remained nearly unchanged in 1982 (14,815). As of 1982, 39.9% of the farm operators were Full Owners, 44.1% were Part Owners, and 16.0% were Tenants.

Types of Organization of Farms.

Although there was a net-loss of 1,762 Individual or Family Farms between 1978 and 1982, that type of farm ownership continued to predominate in South Dakota. There were 34,158 Individual or Family Farms in 1978 and 32,396 in

1982. Partnership Farms increased by 0.3% between 1978 and 1982, from 3,602 to 3,613 farms. The number of Corporation Farms grew from 776 in 1978 to 885 in 1982, a 14.0% increase. Most (87.6%) of the Corporation Farms were family held with 10 or less stockholders. Other types of farms (Cooperative, Estate or Trust, Institutional, etc.) grew by 23.9% during that period of time, from 205 to 254. Figure 4 shows the percentage of each type of organization of farms in South Dakota as of 1982.

FIGURE 4. PERCENT OF S.D. FARMS BY TYPE OF ORGANIZATION, 1982.



Principal Occupation of Farm Operators.

As of 1982, 81.5% of all farm operators considered farming their principal occupation. This represents a 4.4% drop since 1978. The number of farm operators whose principal occupation was other than farming dropped during that time period by 2.6%.