South Dakota Farm Facts from 1964 Census of Agriculture

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SOUTH DAKOTA

FARM FACTS

FROM 1964 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
What is happening on South Dakota farms? Perhaps, in 1967 a better question might be, "What is happening to them?"

Every five years since 1920 the Bureau of the Census has conducted the United States Census of Agriculture to help answer such questions. This giant undertaking has grown tremendously through the years. The 1964 report for South Dakota contains 45 tables in 325 pages with a mountain of statistics for the state and its 67 counties. The following is a summary of basic characteristics and trends concerning the South Dakota farm operators and farms from the 1964 and earlier United States Censuses of Agriculture.

FARM OPERATORS

There were 190,169 people living in farm households in South Dakota in 1964. This figure represented about 28% of the state's total population. At that time there were 49,703 farm operators in South Dakota, and the average farm household consisted of 3.8 persons.

Trend in number of farm operators. Under the impact of an improved agricultural technology, the size of South Dakota farms has been increasing. This change has resulted in a steady decline in the number of farms and farm operators from the all time high of over 83,000 in 1935. Figure 1 illustrates the trend.

Between the years 1954-59 South Dakota lost nearly 7,000 farm operators; the decline between 1959 and 1964 was slightly less than 6,000. Since 1954 one of every five farm operators has changed occupations or retired without being replaced.

Increasing age of farm operators. The average age of South Dakota farm operators has been gradually increasing in recent years. The average age of South Dakota farmers was 46.6 in 1940 as compared to 48.6 in 1964. During the five years between the Censuses of 1959 and 1964 the average age of farm operators increased 1.1 years.

Fewer young men in farming. A shortage of young adults, due to low birth rates in the 1930's and age selective net out-migration, was characteristic of South Dakota's population in the early 1960's. What had been true of the State as a whole was even more pronounced in rural areas and was reflected in the age distribution of farm operators. In 1954 nearly 20% of South Dakota's farm operators were between the ages of 25 and 34; by 1964 only 13% of the farm operators were aged 25-34 (figure 2). As long as the initial capital investment needed to enter farming remains high in relation to profits, proportionately fewer young men will be encouraged to enter farming and the average age will continue to increase.

By Marvin P. Riley, professor, and Darryll R. Johnson, student research assistant, Rural Sociology Department
Fewer young farm families. The age-sex pyramid (figure 3) illustrates the relatively small number of adults in the age categories under 34. The decrease in the proportion of persons under five reflects the currently declining birth rate and the proportionately fewer young adults in the reproductive ages. The profile of the age-sex pyramid will be of interest to anyone planning programs dealing with the farm population.

![Age-Sex pyramid of the population in farm operator households, South Dakota, 1964.](image)

Younger farm operators have more education. In 1964 over twice as many (14%) of the farm operators under 35 years of age had attended college as compared to those farmers ages 55 to 65 (6%). Despite the increased schooling for younger farm operators, only 1,258 (2.5%) of all South Dakota farm operators had completed four years or more of college in 1964.

Looking to the 1960 U.S. Census for comparison, 5.7% of the total population in South Dakota had completed four or more years of college in 1960. In 1964, approximately 39% of South Dakota farm operators had from one to four years of high school and 53% had only eight or less years of formal education. For the entire state in 1960 nearly 44% of the total population had eight years or less education and 39% had completed one to four years of high school. From these data it can be seen that farm operators tend to have less formal education than other residents of South Dakota.

More owners and fewer tenants on South Dakota farms. In 1959, 26% of South Dakota farm operators were reported as all tenants. By 1964 the percent had fallen to 22% or had decreased by 4%. Approximately 33% of South Dakota farmers owned all their land and 44% were part owners. This represented a 1.3% and 2.6% increase, respectively, since 1959.

Eleven percent work off-farm 100 days or more. Approximately 11%, or 5,270 of South Dakota’s farm operators reported off-farm work 100 days or more in 1964. This was slightly more than the 10% reporting in 1959.

About 28% reported doing some off-farm work in 1964 compared with 26% reporting in 1959. Despite the increased percent of farmers reporting doing off-farm work it must be remembered that fewer farmers are working off-farms because of the decline in total number of farm operators. About 14,589 farm operators reported doing off-farm work in 1959 as compared to 13,770 in 1964.

One-fifth with over $3,000 income from off-farm sources. Approximately 75% of South Dakota’s farm operators reported their households as having income from sources other than farm-operated in 1964. About 10,594 or 21% of the total farm households reported having an income of $3,000 or more from other sources. Thirty-one percent of South Dakota farm operators reported members of their households, excluding themselves, as having an income from off-farm sources in 1964.

FARMS

There were 49,703 farms in South Dakota in 1964. The number of farm operators is equal to the number of farms so all data presented previously with regard to number of farm operators is applicable to number of farms.

Average size and value continues upward. The average size South Dakota farm in 1964 was 916.8 acres. This represented a substantial increase in size (almost 14%) since 1959. The average farm value in 1964 was $61.60 per acre and $56,615 total value in land and buildings. This compares to an average per acre value of $50.76 and a total value of $40,852 in 1959. The average total farm value in land and buildings increased 39% from 1959 to 1964.

Half sell less than $10,000 in farm products. The low income level of many South Dakota farm households is clearly shown be the fact that in 1964 some 6,764 or 14% of South Dakota farm operators sold less than $2,500 worth of farm products per year. Approximately 45% or 22,250 reported selling between $2,500 and $9,999 in farm products and 20,689 or 42% reported selling over $10,000. These data suggest that the adjustment in number of farms and average size of farms is not yet complete in South Dakota, and there are still a number of marginal farms which will soon disappear unless their operators supplement their earnings elsewhere (figure 4).

More field crop and fewer livestock farms. The number of South Dakota livestock farms, other than poultry and dairy, decreased by 23% from 36,093 in
1959 to 27,857 in 1964. In terms of percent, the number of livestock farms, other than poultry and dairy, made up 65% of the total number of farms in 1959 as compared to 56% in 1964.

On the other hand the number of field crop farms, other than vegetable, fruit, and nut, increased by 27% (from 6,353 in 1959 to 8,055 in 1964). Only 11% of South Dakota farms were classified as field crop farms in 1959, but by 1964 their proportion had risen to 16%.

Dairy farms showed the largest proportionate increase. Constituting only 5% of the total farms in 1959, they represented 8% of the total in 1964. The number of poultry and general farms increased during the years 1959-64 while the number of miscellaneous and unclassified farms dropped slightly. Figure 5 illustrates the percent of South Dakota farms by type in 1964.

Rapid increase in farms using hired workers. Approximately 51% more farms had regular workers (hired 150 days or more) in 1964 than in 1959. A total of 5,766 farm operators reported hiring regular workers in 1964 as compared to 3,828 in 1959. There were 8,267 regular workers on South Dakota farms in 1964, an increase of 63% since 1959.

Fertilized acreage doubles. The number of acres fertilized increased 120% from 781,515 acres in 1959 to 1,716,633 acres in 1964. Approximately 17% of South Dakota's farm operators reported using fertilizer in 1959; by 1964 the percent using fertilizer had risen to 33%.

More trucks, fewer automobiles. As might be expected with fewer farm operators, the total number of automobiles on farms is decreasing. There were about 1.5% fewer automobiles on farms in 1964 than in 1959. When the data is compared with earlier years, however, the decline becomes more apparent. Since 1950 there has been an approximate 15% decline in number of automobiles on South Dakota farms.

Conversely, the number of trucks on farms is increasing despite the decreasing number of farm operators. The number of trucks (including pickups) increased 8% on South Dakota farms from 52,278 to 56,517 during the years from 1959 to 1964.

More tractors. The number of tractors on South Dakota farms increased from 115,639 in 1959 to 120,100 in 1964, or approximately 4%. Proportionately fewer farmers reported owning only one tractor but 78% of the total farm operators reported owning two or more tractors as compared to 71% in 1959.

More telephones. More farmers had telephones in 1964 as compared to 1959. Approximately 72% of South Dakota farm operators reported having a telephone in 1959, while in 1964 the proportion had risen to 83%. As far as the total number of farm telephones was concerned, however, the increase was only about 2% or 984 telephones.

More home freezers. There was a substantial increase, 14%, in the number of home freezers on South Dakota farms from 1959 to 1964. Approximately 72% of South Dakota farms had home freezers in 1959 as compared to 83% in 1964. Ninety percent or 44,669 farmers had television sets.

Figure 5. South Dakota farms by type of enterprise, 1964.