South Dakota Farm Facts from 1974 Census of Agriculture

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South Dakota

Farm Facts

From 1974

Census of Agriculture

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
South Dakota Farm Facts

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Fred Bender, student research assistant,
Rural Sociology Department

What's happening to South Dakota's farm and farm operators? Every five years since 1920, the Bureau of the Census has conducted the United States Census of Agriculture to help answer such questions. This undertaking has grown tremendously over the years. The 1974 report for South Dakota contains 1,100 tables in 408 pages with a mountain of statistics for the state and its 67 counties. This fact sheet is a summary of the basic characteristics and trends concerning South Dakota farm operators and farms from the 1974 and earlier censuses.

South Dakota Farms

There were 42,825 farms in South Dakota in 1974, based on the new definition of "farm" used by the U.S. Census of Agriculture.* This number represents 2,893 (6.3%) less farms than shown in the 1969 census.

Trend in the Number of Farms

The decline in the number of farms in South Dakota is continuing, but at a slower rate. Under the impact of an improved agricultural technology, the size of South Dakota farms has been steadily increasing, while the number of farms and farm operators has been steadily decreasing. Over the last 40 years there has been a steady decrease in the number of farms, from an all-time high of over 83,000 in 1935, to an all-time low of less than 43,000 farms in 1974 (Figure 1).

In 1974 South Dakota had only about one-half the number of farms it had in 1935.

Trend in Farm Size

While the number of farms in South Dakota has declined over the last 40 years (since 1935), the average acreage per farm has increased substantially (Figure 2). The total number of acres in farms has increased by about 24% (from 37 to 46 million acres). The average size of the state's farms has more than doubled in the last 40 years, from an average of 445 acres in 1935, to an average of 1,074 acres in 1974. Variations in average farm size among South Dakota's 67 counties reflect the state's topographical differences from east to west. Shannon County, which is in the southwest corner of the state, had the largest average farm size (7,834 acres) in 1974, while Lincoln County in the southeast had the smallest (273 acres). Lincoln County, which is about ½ the size of Shannon County in total number of acres in farmland, has more than eight times the number of farms. From 1969 to 1974 the average farm increased by 77 acres; larger farms (those with sales of $2,500 and over) increased by 150 acres. The percentage increase for all South Dakota farms (including those with sales of under $2,500) was just less than 1% between 1969 and 1974.

Farm Operators

There were 42,825 farm operators in South Dakota at the end of 1974. The number of farm operators is equal to the number of farms, so all data previously presented regarding the number of farms applies to the number of farm operators.

Increasing Age of Farm Operators

The average age of farm operators has gradually been increasing in recent years. The average age of South Dakota farmers was 46.6 years in 1940 (data were not available for 1935), as compared to 50.1 in 1974. From 1969 to 1974 the average age of farm operators increased by about one year (49.2 to 50.1). Average age of operators in 1974 ranged from the youngest (47.5 years) in McPherson County to the oldest (55.1 years) in Pennington County.

*The definition of "farm" was changed for the 1974 census to exclude places having sales less than $1,000 for agricultural products during 1974. This change eliminated 897 farms from the 1974 count of farms that would have been included under the 1969 definition of "farm." Statistics for 1974 reflect this new definition and are not fully comparable with earlier years.
It is interesting to note that the number of young operators under 25 years of age has been increasing. In 1974 there were 1,642 young operators, nearly 400 (over 30%) more than there were five years earlier, and nearly 52% above the 1964 figure.

**Fewer Farmers Under 45 Years of Age**

While there was an increase in the number of farmers under 25 years of age, there was a decrease in the number of farmers under 45. Only one-third (33%) of the farmers in South Dakota were under 45 years of age in 1974. This compares with 36% in 1969 and 40% in 1964. Conversely, the percentage of farmers 45 and over has increased in the last ten years from 60% to 67%. At the same time, the proportion of farmers 65 years and over increased by 2½% from 1969 to 1974. Figure 3 shows the 1974 age distribution.

![Figure 3. Farm Operators by Age Groups 1974.](image)

More Owners and Fewer Tenants on South Dakota Farms

In 1964, 22% of the farms in the state were operated by tenants; by 1974 this figure had dropped to 15%, a decrease of nearly 5% from five years earlier. In 1974, 40% of the owners owned all their land, and 45% were part-owners. The percentage of part-owners has increased by less than ½% since 1964, while the percentage of full-owners has increased by 7% during the same period.

Off-farm Work

Of the 30,747 South Dakota farm operators who reported, 34% had some off-farm work. Of the 10,206 farm operators reporting off-farm work, 43% worked off the farm less than 100 days, 16% worked off the farm and 100 days, and 41% reported working more than 200 days off the farm in 1974.

Off-farm Income

Of the 27,405 farm operators reporting some off-farm income, 16% reported an income equal to or greater than the value of their farm products sold, 84% of the operators reported off-farm income less than the value of their farm products sold.

Principal Occupation of Farm Operators

Of the 30,747 South Dakota farm operators who reported, 34% had some off-farm work. Of the 10,206 farm operators reporting off-farm work, 43% worked off the farm less than 100 days, 16% worked off the farm between 100 and 199 days, and 41% reported working more than 200 days off the farm in 1974.

Principal Occupation of Farm Operators

Over 98% of the operators answered the question of "principal occupation." Of those responding, 87% considered farming their principal occupation; 13% considered it to be another occupation.

Hired Workers

In 1974, farmers who hired workers on South Dakota farms numbered 14,194 or 33%. This is down 13% from 1969, when 49% of South Dakota farmers had hired workers. Close to 50,000 people were employed in 1974 as farm workers by those 33% of South Dakota farmers.

**Characteristics of South Dakota Farms**

Value of Land and Buildings

The monetary value of farms in this state has been influenced by several different factors for the last 35 years the U.S. Census of Agriculture has reported individual and composite worth of South Dakota farm land and buildings. The value of the average farm, as expressed in dollars, increased 74½% from 1969 to 1974. Incidentally, the average farm in South Dakota in 1974 was worth twenty times more than the average 1940 farm. Inflation, increased farm size, technological and productivity advancements have all contributed strongly to the increased worth of South Dakota farms.

Average Value of Farm Land per Acre

The average value per acre of farm land in this state has also increased significantly—from $84 in 1969 to $145 in 1974, an increase of nearly 73%. Variations among the state’s 67 counties range from $455 per acre in Lincoln County to only $56 per acre in Shannon County. These two counties also represent highest and lowest average acreage per farm, as mentioned earlier. The average farm was estimated to be worth just over $155,000 in 1974. This state average was an increase of 46% from 1969 to 1974.

Change in Class of Farms

One of the major farm classifications presented in the U.S. Census of Agriculture concerns the value of agricultural products sold by farms. The years between 1969 and 1974 saw continuing trends in increasing farm size, improved agricultural technology and national inflation, which contributed to an increase in value of farm products sold. Table 1 presents a breakdown of South Dakota farms according to the value of agricultural products sold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of Farms</th>
<th>1969</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1974</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $2,500</td>
<td>5,529</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3,231</td>
<td>7½%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,500 &amp; over</td>
<td>40,141</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>39,518</td>
<td>92½%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,500-9,999</td>
<td>12,324</td>
<td>30½%</td>
<td>7,442</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-39,999</td>
<td>23,216</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>19,692</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-99,999</td>
<td>3,818</td>
<td>9½%</td>
<td>9,804</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-199,999</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>1½%</td>
<td>1,903</td>
<td>4½%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 &amp; over</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>½%</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>1½%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. farm sales</td>
<td>$23,665</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$41,848</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent change 1969 - 1974: 77%

Fertilized Acres

The number of acres commercially fertilized increased from 3,473,777 in 1969 to 4,917,000 in 1974 (29%). Approximately 43% of South Dakota farm operators reported using commercial fertilizer in 1969; in 1974 that figure was up to 51%.
Irrigated Acres

The number of acres irrigated increased to 152,000 in 1974. It is surprising to see that irrigated acreage increased over 14% from 1964 to 1969, but increased less than 3% from 1969 to 1974.

The number of farms using irrigation in 1974 was 1,072. This was only 9 farms more than in 1969, but 67 more farms than in 1964.

Type of Organization

Figure 4 represents a breakdown of South Dakota farms according to their type or organization. The term "partnership" includes family partnerships and the term "corporations" includes family corporations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual and Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Type of Organization for Farms with Sales of $2,500 and Over in 1974.

South Dakota Agriculture in Perspective

It has become more and more important in recent years to look at South Dakota's agricultural trends with respect to the region we live in and also the entire nation's agricultural industry. Increasing national and world populations, the development of intricate systems of communications, and technological, environmental, and genetic advancements in the field of agricultural production have brought agriculture to the forefront, not only as big business but also as the nation's future leading exporter and major source for checking the annual international trade deficit. South Dakota agriculture exists not just to feed its own state's population, but as a collection of over 40,000 businesses in competition with the nation's agricultural producers and the world's industry.

In view of these recent changes in the role of agriculture in the nation's economy, it becomes essential to examine not only state trends, but to see South Dakota's agriculture in perspective. This can be done by comparing the state to the general trends of the agricultural region in which South Dakota is located, and also to the agricultural trends of the nation as a whole. The North Central census region (in which South Dakota is located) includes twelve states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. (See Map 1.)

While emphasis in recent years has been placed on South Dakota's slowly declining farm population, comparisons of the state's agricultural trends with those of the North Central region and of the entire United States show some interesting results. For the period from 1969 to 1974, South Dakota showed an increase in land in farms, harvested cropland and irrigated acreage. It also showed a slower decline in the total number of farms and, probably as a result of this, a slower increase in the average farm size than any of the twelve North Central region states or the United States as a whole. Table 2 compares some general state agricultural trends with those of the North Central region and the United States as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land in Farms</th>
<th>Harvested Cropland</th>
<th>Irrigated Acreage</th>
<th>Total No. of Farms</th>
<th>Average Farm Size</th>
<th>Value of Ag Products Sold</th>
<th>Production Expend's</th>
<th>Value per Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>-3.9%</td>
<td>+ 9.6%</td>
<td>+3.2%</td>
<td>-10.3%</td>
<td>+76.5%</td>
<td>+60.3%</td>
<td>+76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC Rgn.</td>
<td>-3.1%</td>
<td>+13.2½%</td>
<td>+31.9%</td>
<td>-7.2%</td>
<td>+78.4%</td>
<td>+59.4%</td>
<td>+81.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>+1.5%</td>
<td>+18.5½%</td>
<td>+2.6%</td>
<td>-1.6%</td>
<td>+74.0%</td>
<td>+65.2%</td>
<td>+77.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. South Dakota Agricultural Trends in Perspective 1969-1974. (South Dakota Compared to the North Central Region and the United States.)