

News Releases

New Agricultural Census Shows Diversity in Maryland Farming

Number of Farms Rises; Use of Conservation Practices Increases; Cropland Decreases while Woodland and Pastures Increase

ANNAPOLIS, MD (February 5, 2009) – The U.S. Department of Agriculture yesterday released its every-five-year Census of Agriculture showing that in Maryland since the last Census conducted in 2002 there are 636 or 5 percent more farms, 25,874 or 1 percent fewer acres of farmland, and 16 percent more female principal farm operators. The latest figures indicate that farmers enrolled 57 percent more farms and 48 percent more acreage in conservation programs between 2002 and 2007. From an economic standpoint, the value of agricultural products sold increased 42 percent to \$1.84 billion while production expenses increased by 137 percent to \$1.55 billion. Average net farm income increased 59 percent from 2002 to 32,161 per farm.

“These data show a true and increasing commitment by farmers to use conservation practices as part of their farm management and to protect the environment for future generations and I thank them for that commitment,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “Agriculture is resilient and a critical part of our state’s economy, quality of life, environment and food supply and one that we are committed to strengthening.”

“While the numbers and economic importance of small farms has increased in Maryland, the relatively small numbers of very large farms still generate the largest value of production,” said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Roger Richardson. “Our agricultural industry remains as diverse as the State itself and these data show that the diversity is increasing. While we are pleased to see that most segments of agriculture truly are strong and are meeting new market interests and conservation roles, we need to be mindful of the mid-sized operations, which are struggling.”

“The Census of Agriculture is a complete count of the nation’s farms and the people who operate them,” said Barbara Rater, director of the NASS Maryland Field Office. “In many ways Maryland follows national trends and other ways it is unique. The numbers are invaluable tools to guide business and policy decisions.”

The 2007 Census of Agriculture also found that:

- The counties with the greatest number of farms are Frederick (1,442), Carroll (1,148), Washington (844), Baltimore (751) and Harford (704).
- The counties with the largest value of production (in millions of dollars) are Wicomico (\$197.8), Somerset (\$192.5), Caroline (\$186), Worcester (\$185.7), and Dorchester (\$166.7).
- The average farm size decreased to 160 acres down from 170 acres in 2002.
- 146 farmers say they operate organically.
- 131 farms generated on-the-farm energy.
- 161 farms marketed products through community supported agriculture operations (CSAs).
- 76 percent of farmers have access to the Internet.
- Almost 60 percent of farms have less than \$10,000 in sales.
- 7 percent of farms have sales of \$1 million or more.
- 1,525 farms contributed 87 percent of the value of production.
- Government payments rose 1 percent from \$33.1 million to \$33.3 million in 2007.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service surveyed all agricultural landowners during the first six months of 2008 about their farm operations for calendar year 2007. A farm is defined as any place from which \$1,000 of agricultural products were produced and sold or would have been sold during the census year.

For further information about the Census of Agriculture in the nation and in Maryland as well as comments by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, log onto www.agcensus.usda.gov.

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