

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



Family Farms in Fresno, California

Family (small) farms have been an integral part of American agriculture for centuries. Virtually all farms in the 18th century and prior were small farms. A small farm is defined as one which is family operated and grosses less than \$250,000 in farm sales (changed from \$100,000 in 1999). The number of farms has gradually changed as some farms became larger, others were bought, sold, or merged, and some were developed and owned by non-ag corporations such as the oil companies.

California Small Farms

The chart below shows the decline in farms since 1959 in California. The numbers reflect all farms and compared to small family farms grossing less than \$250,000 (the definition of a small farm).

2002 and Earlier Census Years – California

	<u>2002</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1959</u>
All Farms	79,631	74,126	77,669	83,217	82,463	73,194	67,674	77,875	80,852	99,274
Small Farms	67,327	61,979	67,022	73,679	66,798	59,737	56,246	70,493	73,809	99,274

1978, 1982, 1987 showed increases in total farms and small farms, which may be attributed to an influx of refugees from Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, etc.

County Statistics

For the 2002 census, farms were classified according to a new North American Industry classification which allows for a more expanded classification based on gross sales. In 1999, the definition of a small farm was changed to include a family-run farm which grosses less than \$250,000. The chart below shows the top six California counties with the greatest number of small farms (< \$250,000).

	<u>Total Farms</u>	<u>Number of Small Farms</u>	<u>% Total</u>
California	79,631	67,327	85 %
Fresno	6,281	4,994	80 %
Tulare	5,738	4,558	79 %
San Diego	5,255	4,830	92 %
Stanislaus	4,267	3,578	84 %
San Joaquin	4,026	3,211	80 %
Sonoma	3,447	3,072	89 %

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture: Table 2 Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold by North American Industry Classification.

Fresno's Rich Diversity in People

Almost one half of all small farms in Fresno County are operated by minorities including Asian, Hispanic, African American, and American Indian. The high proportion of Asian farmers is attributed to Hmong, Mien, Lao, and other groups which came to the U.S. between 1979-1998 as a result of persecution following the Vietnam War. It can be seen below that minorities make up a significant proportion of farms in the state. Not included in these numbers are groups from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Punjab (Sikhs), etc. It is also noted that not all small farmers (and especially minority farms) were included in the Ag Census and therefore the numbers are low estimates. Informal grower surveys of Hmong revealed that at least one third of the growers did not receive a census form.

California Minority Operated Farms
Top Five Counties (2002 Ag Census <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>)

<u>African American</u>		<u>American Indian</u>		<u>Asian</u>		<u>Hispanic</u>	
California	336	California	1,357	California	4,022	California	9,784
Fresno	33	Fresno	111	Fresno	759	Fresno	1,073
Riverside	32	San Diego	110	Sutter	292	Tulare	949
San Diego	21	Tulare	106	Merced	241	San Diego	736
Kern	21	Stanislaus	65	Tulare	224	Riverside	571
Madera	17	Riverside	57	San Diego	215	Merced	475

* While total numbers of farms in California declined with each census, minority operated farms in all groups increased in the new census (e.g. Hispanic farms increased 16% in 1997 from 3,883 in 1992 to 4,515, and 117% from 1997 to 2002).

A 1992 survey of Asian farmers conducted in Fresno County indicated that 62% of Asian vegetable farmers were Hmong, 30% were Lao, 3.4% Chinese, 1.5% Mien, and 1.3% Vietnamese. Of great significance in these numbers is the fact that 93%+ (Hmong, Lao, Mien) of the Asian farmers are recent arrivals to the U.S. (since 1978-1998) as political refugees from the Vietnam War. The average size of a Hmong farm in the survey was 3.25 acres, 5 acres for Mien, and 10 acres for a Lao farmer.

Small farms make up about 9% of the value of agricultural products sold, 33% of the acres farmed, and 66% of all farm operators (California). Some people would argue that small farms are unimportant to the economy of the state. However, when their value, acreage, and numbers of people involved are considered, it is indeed a very important part of agriculture.

References: Census of Agriculture, USDA-NASS
1992 S.E. Asian Small Farm Survey, Pedro Ilic UCCE

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