

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



Small 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).

2007 and Earlier Census Years – California

	<u>2007</u>	<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	81,033	79,631	74,126	77,669	83,217	82,463	73,194	67,674	77,875	80,852	99,274
Small Farms	68,536	67,327	61,979	67,022	73,679	66,798	59,737	56,246	70,493	73,809	99,274

1978, 1982, 1987 showed significant 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 2007 census, farms were grouped according to the “Market Value” of Agriculture Products sold including direct sales. This 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	81,033	68,536	85 %
San Diego	6,687	6,290	94 %
Fresno	6,081	4,738	78 %
Tulare	5,240	4,095	78 %
Stanislaus	4,114	3,335	81 %
San Joaquin	3,624	2,818	78 %
Riverside	3,463	3,165	91 %

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture: Table 2 Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold

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 (2007 Ag Census <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>)

<u>African American</u>	<u>American Indian</u> <u>Alaska Native</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u> <u>Spanish</u>	<u>Native Hawaiian</u> <u>Pacific Islander</u>
California 383	California 1,597	California 4,177	California 11,294	California 283
Los Angeles 37	San Diego 143	Fresno 919	Fresno 1,187	Fresno 28
Sacramento 29	Tulare 134	San Diego 316	Tulare 1,150	San Diego 22
Riverside 29	Fresno 112	Sutter 236	San Diego 1,090	Stanislaus 21
Fresno 28	Stanislaus 72	Riverside 217	Riverside 651	San Bernard 20
Kern 28	San Joaquin 61	Tulare 216	Stanislaus 516	Santa Barb 12

* 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).

**There are at least 1,300 Asian refugee vegetable farmers in Fresno County. A 2008 survey of Asian farmers conducted in Fresno County indicated that 69% of Asian vegetable farmers were Hmong, 23% were Lao, 1.2% Chinese, 1.2% Mien. These numbers are similar (slightly higher) to another survey taken in 1992.

Small farms make up about 9% of the value of agricultural products sold, 33% of the acres farmed, and 85% 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 the number of people involved are considered, it is indeed a very important part of agriculture.

References: 2007 Census of Agriculture, USDA-NASS
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Richard Molinar
Farm Advisor
(559) 456-7555

Michael Yang
Field Assistant
(559) 456-7189

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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics – U.S. Department of Agriculture,
University of California and Fresno County Cooperating