



Highlights of the 2012 Census of Agriculture: Number of Farms

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The Census of Agriculture is a national account of all U.S. farms, ranches, and operators. The Census is taken every five years and provides valuable information on land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income, and expenditures. For many pieces of information on the farm sector and the rural economy, the Census serves as the only source of county-level information. On Friday May 2, the USDA released a complete report of state and county-level farm and ranch statistics for the 2012 Census (available [here](#)). The report provides a wealth of information valued by farmers and ranchers, agribusiness firms and cooperatives, community planners, and legislators at almost all levels of government. This post explores one of the important measures of the Census of Agriculture, the number of farm operations.

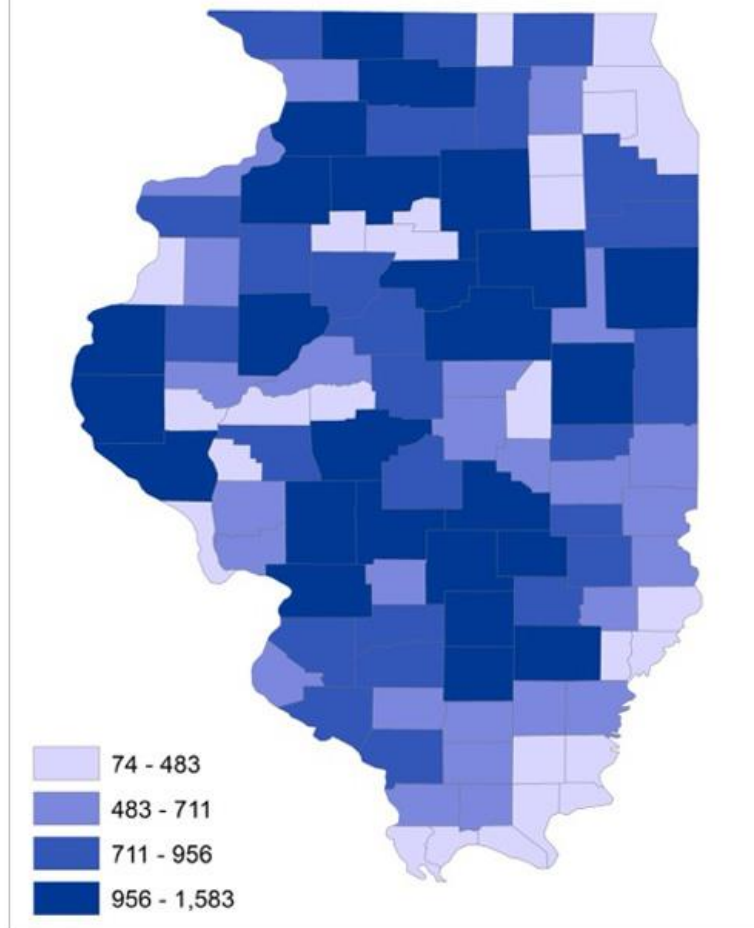
Number of Farms in Illinois

The Census defines a farm as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the reference year, and this definition has been used since 1974. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, the United States is home to 2,109,303 farms, and 75,087 of these farms are located in Illinois. On aggregate, the number of US farms decline by 4.3% since the previous Census in 2007. Illinois also experienced a decline in aggregate farm numbers, but the loss is much less pronounced at 2.3% (or 1,773 farms).

The map below shows the distribution of farms in Illinois by county based on the 2012 Census of Agriculture. The map is shaded by quartile, with the darkest counties representing the greatest number of farms. While the number of farms varies to some degree by the geographic size of the county, the bulk of Illinois farms appears to be concentrated in the north-central and south-central regions of the state. LaSalle County is home to the greatest number of farms at 1,583, and DuPage County is home to the fewest number of farms at 74.

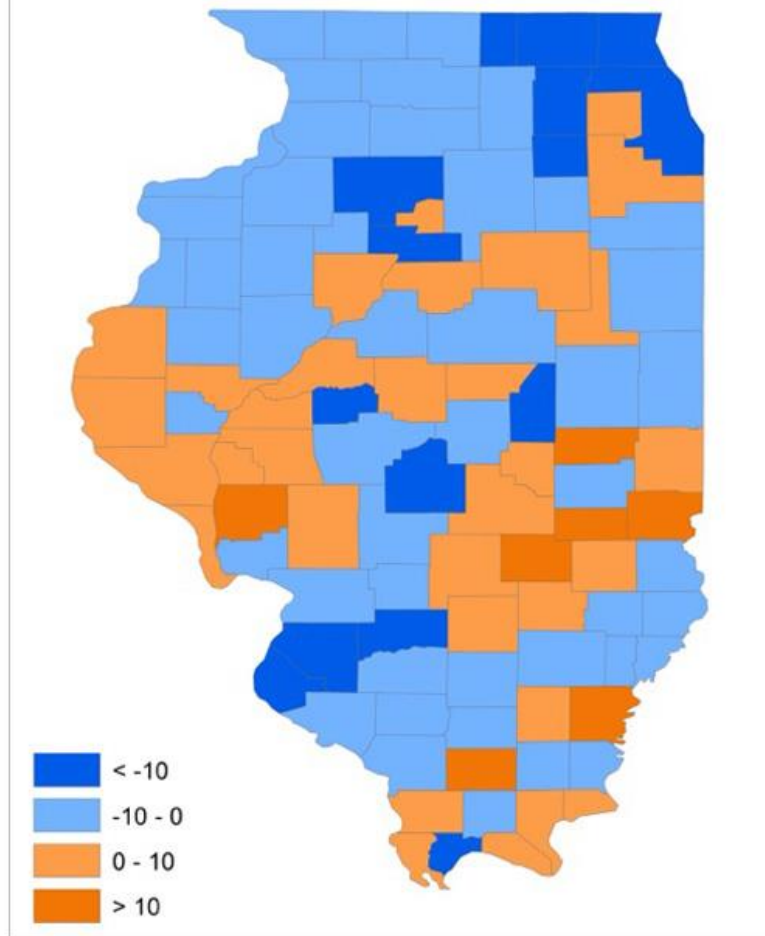
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Figure 1: Distribution of Illinois Farms by County, 2012



While the state as a whole experienced a decline in the number of farms between the 2007 and 2012 Census of Agriculture, 40 of Illinois' counties actually experienced a gain in aggregate farm numbers (or 39.2% of Illinois counties). The second map shows the percent change in the number of farms between the 2007 and 2012 Census by county. Counties that experienced a decline in the total number of farms are shown in blue (with darker blue representing a greater than 10% decline), and counties that experienced a growth in the total number of farms are shown in orange (with a darker orange representing a greater than 10% increase). The counties that experienced a growth in total farm number appear clustered in the central and southern portions of the state. Cook County was home to the greatest loss in farms in percentage terms at 31%. White County, on the other hand, was home to the greatest gain in farm in percentage terms at 21%.

Figure 2: Percent Change in Farm Numbers between 2007 and 2012



References

USDA Census of Agriculture. *2012 Census Publications*.
<https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/>