
The Structure of Black- Operated Agriculture in Alabama:

Characteristics and Trends

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Information contained herein is available to all persons without regard to race, color, or national origin.

THE STRUCTURE of BLACK-OPERATED AGRICULTURE in ALABAMA:

Characteristics and Trends

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INTRODUCTION

IN THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES, the structure of American agriculture has been characterized by a shift toward fewer and larger farms and a decrease in the number of individuals engaged in farming (2). Increasing costs of labor, machinery, and energy inputs continue to push the minimally viable farm size toward the large-scale enterprise (3). These national trends also are reflected in changes in agricultural structure in the Southern region and in Alabama (9).

Farm numbers in the United States declined 53 percent between 1940 and 1970, while Southern and Alabama totals decreased by 60 and 67 percent, respectively. Nonwhite farmers, who are mostly blacks, were displaced at a much faster rate than whites; some 87 percent of all nonwhite-operated farms disappeared. The decline was particularly dramatic for nonwhite tenant farmers in the United States, as there were 364,000 nonwhite tenants in 1950, but only 18,000 in 1969 (4). Less than 5,000 black-operated farms remain in Alabama today and only a fifth of these have more than \$2,500 in annual sales.

The South historically has had a large number of small farms, a trend continuing to the present. Nonwhite-operated farms, more than 86 percent of which are in the South, are overwhelmingly small. Southern farmers tend to be older than United States farmers in general, and black farmers tend to be older than whites. Almost a third of all black farmers in Alabama are 65 years of age or older. The high percentage of black farmers who are older and who have smaller operations will likely mean even fewer black farmers in Alabama in the future (4).

For those individuals who remain in farming, the industry is becoming increasingly complex. Production and marketing decision making is influenced by a myriad of factors such as market structure, foreign market development, government policy, weather, and other conditions, all of which may vary in diverse directions. Thus, individual farmers face greater uncertainties in a shrinking world (2). Mounting energy costs also serve to increase the risks inherent in any decision.

The entry costs of farming continue to increase, tending to filter and limit the kind and number of individuals who can enter the industry. Small operators are frequently forced to seek non-farm employment to supplement farm income. Indeed, small-scale farms are increasingly kept as "hobby farms" where farm income is viewed as an irregular supplement to a non-farm occupation. Black-operated farms have been particularly vulnerable to shifting economies of scale and the rising cost of production inputs.

Because the entry costs of farming have increased so rapidly in recent years, young people of all races have experienced difficulty establishing themselves as full-time farmers. Racial discrimination, real and perceived, presents an additional obstacle for black youth. Changing social values have also served to propel young blacks toward urban areas and nonagricultural occupations that present more readily available employment opportunities. In addition, the most recent black generation often perceives agriculture as symbolic of older patterns of subjugation, and as a consequence, farming and agriculture in general have a lesser-valued status.

Thus, economic and social factors are acting to diminish the number of blacks engaged in agriculture. The future for blacks in production agriculture will depend on several factors. Individuals currently engaged in farming will have to be flexible in their responses to new cropping patterns, production techniques, and marketing strategies. Public and private agencies will have to segment their efforts to overcome mistrust, educational barriers, and program incongruities so as to address the needs of this often hard-to-reach, clientele group. Finally, educational institutions should endeavor to overcome negative attitudes among young black people toward agricultural occupations. Future black farmers will require realistic attitudes and sound management skills to take advantage of opportunities in agriculture.

This report profiles a shrinking group of individuals and firms in Alabama agriculture. It will take the combined effort of many individuals and institutions to forestall the disappearance of this unique set of physical and family resources. The information presented here is intended to assist these efforts.

OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this report is to examine the number, distribution, and characteristics of black-operated farms in Alabama. Specifically, the objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the location, size, and ownership characteristics of black-owned farms, based on data obtained in the 1974 Census of Agriculture.

2. To review the social and personal characteristics of black farm operators in Alabama, comparing them to state and national profiles.

3. To assess the sales, income, and credit levels of black-operated farms in Alabama.

4. To examine the forest and woodland holdings of black-operated farms in Alabama.

This study profiles the nature and type of farms operated by blacks in Alabama. The recent period is one in which major changes have occurred in the structure of Alabama agriculture. These include shifts in the types of crops grown in the State, increases in land values, as well as pressures toward greater economies of scale in agricultural production (1). A study of the distribution and characteristics of black-operated farms should contribute to the design of public programs assisting minority operators as well as to the informed perspectives of community leaders and other interested individuals seeking to understand the special problems of black farmers.

DATA AND METHOD

Data for this study were obtained from three principal sources: the 1969 and 1974 Censuses of Agriculture conducted by the United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, as well as special tabulations of the 1974 Census of Agriculture undertaken by the United States Department of Agriculture (6, 7, 8).

Emphasis is placed on the relative proportion of black farms in various farm attribute categories relative to state and national figures for black and total farms. In this way, black-operated farms in Alabama can be compared to others in the

nation to identify major similarities and differences, and the central tendencies can be related to the national profile.

Problems of comparability between censuses of agriculture occur in two respects: the definition of a farm and the availability of county-level data on black operators. The definition of a farm operator in 1969 and 1974 was different from 1964 and earlier years. Data for 1969 and earlier show a higher number of small farms because separate categories for part-time and part-retirement farms were established in 1974. For purposes of the 1969 and later agricultural censuses, a farm is defined as 10 acres of land from which \$50 worth of farm products have been sold in the preceding 12 months, or, any size land holding from which \$250 worth of farm products have been sold in the last year.

In Alabama, the number of nonblack, nonwhite (e.g. Spanish-origin, Japanese) farmers is very small. There were 4,659 black farmers reporting to the census of agriculture in 1974. Blacks constituted 98.9 percent of nonwhite farmers in Alabama at that time. For data taken from Census of Agriculture county summary reports, separate tabulations for individual races were not available. The small number of individuals in other racial categories (54 or 1.1 percent of all minority farmers in the State) is a secondary consideration in the analysis of these data. The special tabulations do, however, show state-level data for blacks alone.

FINDINGS

Number and Location of Black Farmers

Figure 1 shows the number and location of nonwhite farmers in Alabama by county. As previously noted, most nonwhite farmers in the State are black. Black farmers are concentrated in several counties in west central Alabama, commonly known as the "Black Belt" after the predominant soil type found in the area. As the former center of cotton cultivation, these counties were historically the residence of the majority of the State's black population.

The tenure characteristics of farmers in the 11 counties with 100 or more nonwhite farmers are shown in table 1. Much variability is to be noted in these data. The percent of full-owner farmers ranges from a high of 76.6 percent in Macon County to a low of 49.3 percent in Greene. Only three counties were above the overall State proportion of full owners, 71.1

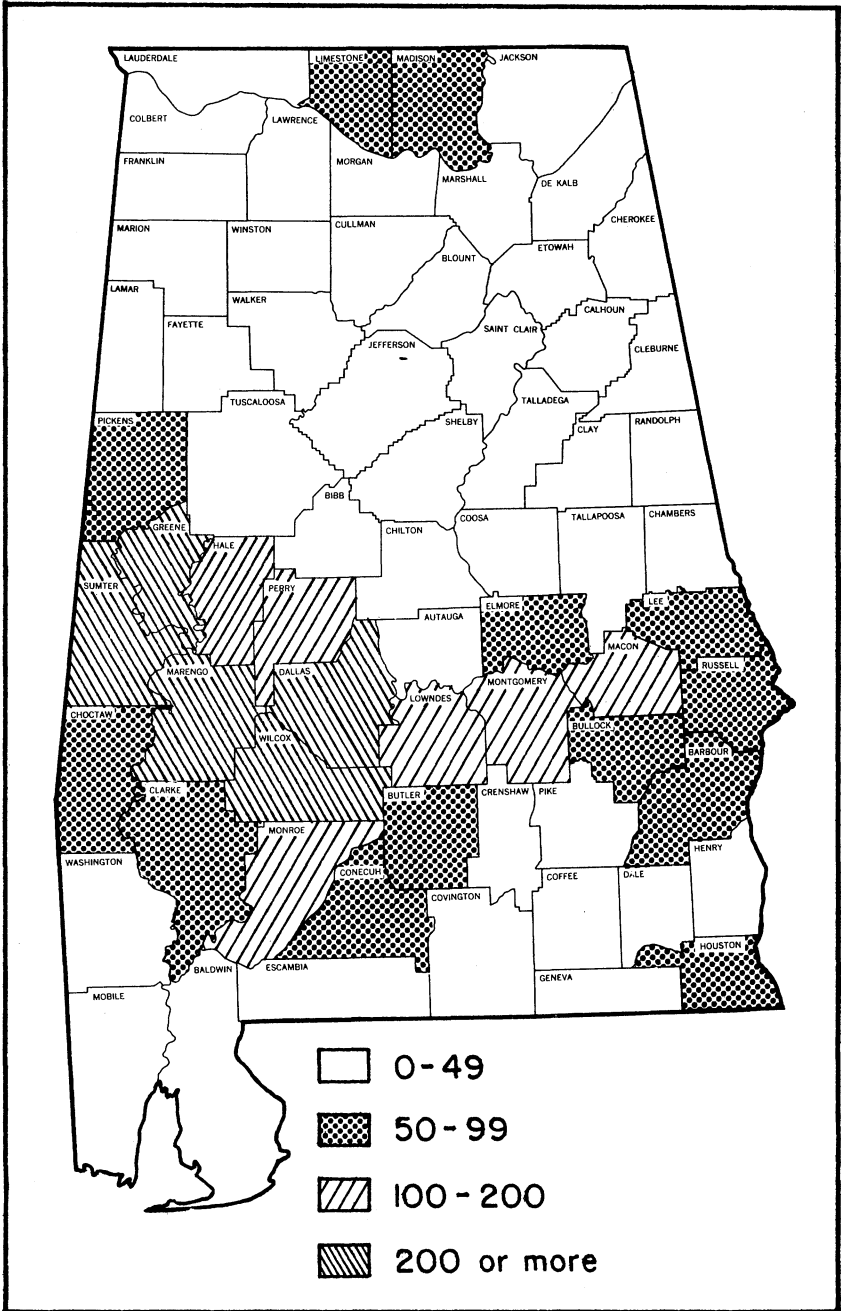


FIG. 1. Number of nonwhite farmers by county, 1974.

TABLE 1. TENURE CHARACTERISTICS OF NONWHITE FARM OPERATORS IN ALABAMA COUNTIES WITH 100 OR MORE NONWHITE OPERATORS, 1974

County	Number of nonwhite farmers	Percent			Average farm size (acres)
		Full-owners	Part-owners	Tenants	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>A.</i>
Dallas	227	59.0	15.4	25.6	57.6
Greene	207	49.3	27.5	23.2	98.4
Hale	183	74.9	13.7	11.5	100.2
Lowndes	244	50.0	32.1	17.9	107.1
Macon	171	76.6	18.7	4.7	114.2
Marengo	225	66.7	14.7	18.7	70.9
Monroe	187	64.3	21.0	14.7	79.4
Montgomery	135	65.5	16.4	18.2	121.8
Perry	156	71.2	14.7	14.1	88.0
Sumter	251	56.2	22.3	21.5	161.4
Wilcox	242	63.6	18.6	17.8	67.4

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. *1974 Census of Agriculture*, Volume 1, Part 1, Alabama. State and County Data. 1977.

percent. Counties with lower proportions of black full-owners and high proportions of tenancy, such as Dallas and Greene counties, are areas most vulnerable to future losses in farm numbers. Tenancy also is highest in those counties with the smallest average farm size.

A wide range of average farm sizes is found across the 11 counties. Sumter County is the largest in the State with 161.4 acres. No county average for black-operated farms, however, is comparable to the overall State average farm size of 209 acres.

The proportion of all farmers who are nonwhite in Alabama counties is illustrated in figure 2. Four counties have nonwhite farm operators in proportions greater than 35 percent: Greene, Hale, Macon, and Wilcox. Three counties have no black farmers: Etowah, Walker, and Winston. Again, black farmers are most intensively represented in the so-called Black Belt soil-type areas, but comprise intermediate proportions of the total number of farmers in some north and almost all south-central counties.

Selected Farm Characteristics

Table 2 shows the number and selected characteristics of black-operated farms in Alabama and for the country as a whole. There are fewer black-owned farms in the United States than there are total farms in Alabama. Corresponding data are presented for all farmers in the United States and in Alabama for comparison purposes.

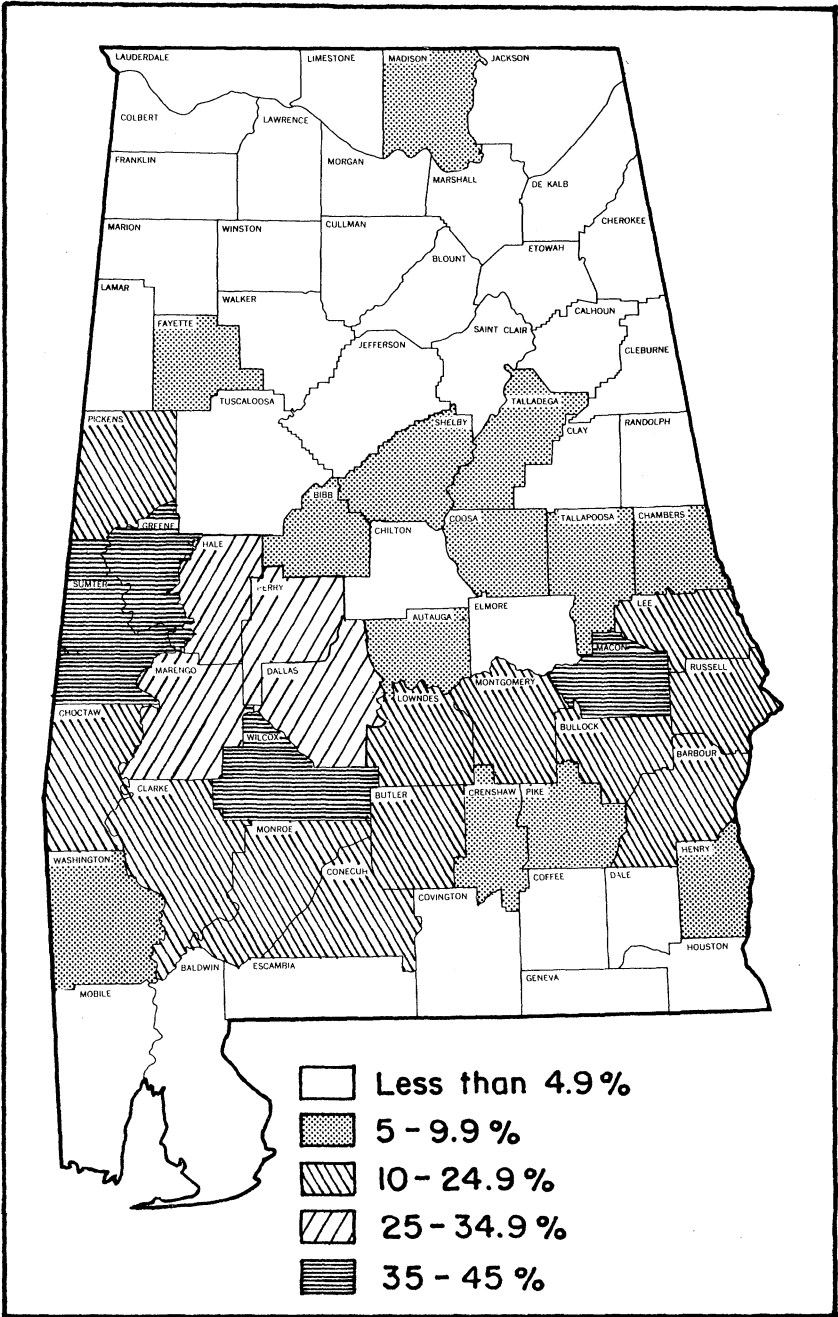


FIG. 2. Percent of all farmers who are nonwhite, 1974.

TABLE 2. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF FARMS: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic (unit)	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Number of farms	4,659	56,678	52,917	2,314,013
Average size of farm (acres)	89	209	87	440
Percent farms with cropland	90.0	90.5	92.0	84.5
Average cropland acreage	44.2	103.3	50.5	204.0
Average harvested acreage	20.5	68.1	31.5	155.0
Average per farm value land and buildings	\$34,196	\$76,049	\$42,158	\$147,838
Average per acre value land and buildings	\$383	\$364	\$483	\$336
Farms by size:				
Percent 1 to 49 acres	53.7	32.7	53.2	21.9
Percent 50 to 99 acres	20.8	22.7	22.8	16.6
Percent 100 to 179 acres	14.5	18.4	13.8	19.2
Percent 180 to 259 acres	4.8	8.3	4.7	10.9
Percent 260 to 999 acres	5.6	14.5	4.9	24.6
Percent 1,000 acres or more	0.6	3.4	0.6	6.7

In 1974, there were approximately 4,700 black-operated farms in Alabama, representing a 53 percent reduction from 1960 and a 68 percent reduction from 1964. In comparison, farm numbers in Alabama declined 22 percent since 1969 and 39 percent since 1964.

Black-owned Alabama farms have similar proportions of farms with cropland as blacks in the United States, but much smaller cropland and harvested acreages. The average value of land and resources also was less in all comparisons. Black farmers in Alabama have fewer farm resources than their white counterparts in the State and nation. The average per acre value of land and buildings, however, is higher for blacks because houses and outbuildings comprise a higher proportion of total value on smaller acreages.

In Alabama, the distribution of black-operated farms across size categories was skewed toward the small operation. More than 53 percent of black farms were smaller than 49 acres and more than 80 percent were less than 180 acres.

Farm Operator Characteristics

Selected characteristics of black farm operators are presented in table 3. Black operators in the State have a slightly lower proportion of full-ownership, and a higher level of tenancy than blacks in the United States, as a whole. In contrast, Alabama as a whole has a slightly higher rate of full-ownership and a much lower level of tenancy than the country as a whole.

TABLE 3. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF FARM OPERATORS: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic (unit)	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Number of farm operators:	4,659	56,678	52,917	2,314,013
Percent full-owners	69.0	71.1	69.8	61.5
Percent part-owners	17.1	17.1	18.5	27.1
Percent tenants	13.9	21.8	11.6	11.3
Percent principal occupation farming .	51.3	45.0	59.1	61.6
Percent 50 or more days off-farm work	56.3	66.5	66.0	37.9
Farm operators by age groups:				
Percent under 35	5.2	11.5	6.0	12.6
Percent 35 to 44	8.9	17.1	10.4	17.3
Percent 45 to 54	17.9	24.5	20.8	24.9
Percent 55 to 64	32.9	27.2	29.4	25.4
Percent 65 and older	35.1	19.1	33.4	18.2
Average age	58.7	52.3	57.7	51.7
Percent farm operators residing off-farm	42.4	40.0	40.4	35.1

Fewer Alabama black farm operators reported their principal occupation as farming and slightly fewer reported 50 or more days of off-farm work than blacks in the United States. The seeming inconsistency may reflect a large number of retired individuals on farms, as well as those subsisting on marginal operations. Many of these individuals may rely on very intermittent employment, social security, or public assistance payments to maintain their farm residence status.

Alabama black farm operators tend to be older than the blacks in the United States. The total set of Alabama farmers, however, are much younger than the black operators in the State but are slightly older, on the average, than United States operators as a whole.

In 1974, 42.4 percent of Alabama black operators resided off-the-farm, more than the State and national figures. Similarly, more Alabama operators resided off-the-farm than for the nation. These data may reflect dispersed land holdings as well as the effect of increased part-time farming.

Sales Characteristics

Table 4 displays selected sales characteristics of black-operated farms. Only 959 black-operated farms, or 20.6 percent of the total, had sales of \$2,500 or more in 1974—a much smaller proportion than United States blacks, the State, or the nation. Individual or family farms comprised 97.1 percent of all black-operated farms with sales of \$2,500 or more. The average size of these farms approximated the State average. No black-operated farms in Alabama were of the corporate type.

TABLE 4. SELECTED SALES CHARACTERISTICS OF FARMS: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic (unit)	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Farms with net income from sales \$2,500 or more				
Number	959	29,269	20,235	1,695,047
Percent of total	20.6	51.7	38.2	73.3
Farms by type of organization (\$2,500 or more sales):				
Individual and family (percent of total)	97.1	92.1	95.8	89.5
Average acreage	181.6	209.1	135.9	446.8
Partnership (percent of total)	0.6	3.4	2.7	8.6
Average acreage	361.1	731.3	189.9	858.6
Corporation (percent of total)	—	0.5	—	1.7
Average acreage	—	1,094.5	—	3,377
All farms by value of sales:				
Percent under \$1,000	54.8	27.1	39.4	12.4
Percent \$1,000 to \$2,499	25.3	23.0	23.3	15.7
Percent \$2,500 to \$4,999	7.8	12.1	12.9	11.2
Percent \$5,000 to \$9,999	6.7	10.7	11.4	12.8
Percent \$10,000 to \$19,999	3.0	8.0	6.7	13.3
Percent \$20,000 to \$39,999	1.4	6.3	3.7	13.9
Percent \$40,000 and over	1.0	12.7	2.6	20.6
Average value of agricultural products sold per farm	\$2,924	\$19,805	\$6,200	\$35,324
Percent operators with total family income from off-farm sources greater than total value of agricultural products sold	42.9	49.9	33.6	34.3

More than half the black-operated Alabama farms had net sales less than \$1,000, and nearly 80 percent had sales of less than \$2,500, suggesting that very few black-operated farms currently exist as viable economic entities. These individuals apparently were receiving government transfer payments to supplement their incomes, as well as returns to labor at non-farm occupations.

The average value of agricultural products sold from black-operated farms (\$2,924) was much less than State and national averages. However, *fewer* black operators reported family incomes from off-farm sources greater than the total value of agricultural products sold. These data suggest the poverty-level, subsistence-type of existence, experienced by many blacks living on farms in Alabama. Low educational attainment, low skill levels, and little non-farm work experience, coupled with the advanced ages of many of these individuals, profile a life situation with few alternatives other than the farm, a plight common among many small farm operators.

Farm Income

The net income of farms is shown in table 5. Only 846 black operators in Alabama had net income in 1974 and the majority had incomes of less than \$8,000.

Slightly more than one-third of Alabama's black farmers received off-farm income from wages and salaries, whereas, 60.2 percent of black operators in the nation reported off-farm wages. The primary difference, however, between black operators in Alabama and the nation was in the very small proportion with interest and dividend income. In addition, comparatively fewer received non-farm rental income than for the State or the nation.

Of the 959 black-operated Alabama farms with sales of \$2,500 or more, only 2.4 percent reported a net loss in 1974. Alabama black farmers reported fewer net losses than blacks nationally, 2.4 percent versus 7.1 percent. However, the very few who did report \$2,500 or more in farm income, as well as the very few who reported nonfarm wages or income from assets, again point to a group of individuals living in minimal conditions who are very vulnerable to economic dislocation

TABLE 5. SELECTED INCOME CHARACTERISTICS OF FARMS: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic (unit)	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Number of farms with net income: ...	846	(NA)	18,793	(NA)
Percent \$0 to \$999	7.9	(NA)	5.6	(NA)
Percent \$1,000 to \$1,999	9.1		9.3	
Percent \$2,000 to \$2,999	10.8		9.7	
Percent \$3,000 to \$4,999	16.4		15.7	
Percent \$5,000 to \$7,999	14.8		15.8	
Percent \$8,000 to \$9,999	4.7		7.9	
Percent \$10,000 to \$19,000	13.2		14.6	
Percent \$15,000 and over	22.9		21.2	
Percent of farms with sales \$2,500 or more receiving off-farm income	49.3	58.7	45.7	57.4
Sources of off-farm income:				
Percent receiving nonfarm business income	9.1	11.1	15.3	9.9
Percent receiving wages and salaries	36.7	39.9	60.2	35.6
Percent receiving interest and dividends	5.4	18.0	24.7	25.6
Percent receiving social security and pensions	10.6	11.6	16.8	10.5
Percent receiving nonfarm rentals ..	3.9	4.7	7.2	4.8
Percent of farms with sales \$2,500 or more with net loss	2.4	(NA)	7.1	(NA)
Percent of farms with sales \$2,500 or more with net gain	97.6	(NA)	92.9	(NA)
Number of farms with sales \$2,500 or more	959	29,269	20,235	1,695,047

and the inflationary erosion of income obtained through government transfer programs.

Farm Credit

Credit characteristics of black-operated farms are shown in table 6. Nearly 40 percent of all farmers in the United States had debt in 1974, while only a third of all farmers in Alabama were in debt. Since returns are generally proportional to the level of inputs invested in the production, farmers who are unable or unwilling to assume debt liabilities have little basis for expanding their potential for increasing income.

The average debt of black farmers in Alabama was \$11,208 which was much lower than the State total and less than a quarter of the national level. Most farm debt is secured by real estate, although black operators in Alabama had the least debt

TABLE 6. FARM CREDIT CHARACTERISTICS: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic (unit)	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Number of farms with debt	317	9,852	5,496	675,418
Percent of farms \$2,500 or more in sales with debt	32.4	33.7	27.9	39.8
Average debt (farms in debt)	\$11,208	\$31,815	\$14,068	\$49,877
Percent of farms with debt secured by real estate	59.3	75.4	68.9	75.2
Average debt	\$11,218	\$11,218	\$13,541	\$44,040
Percent of debtors owing to Federal Land Bank FmHA, insurance company, bank, or PCA	47.6	(NA)	58.0	(NA)
Average debt	\$10,289		\$12,737	
Percent owing to saving and loans, mortgage companies, etc.	9.5		11.8	
Average debt	\$7,400		\$7,575	
Percent owing to individuals	8.2		1.1	
Average debt	\$12,769		\$10,245	
Percent of farms with debt not secured by real estate	61.8	54.3	55.9	60.5
Average debt	\$7,352	—	\$18,004	\$27,686
Percent of debtors owing to Federal Land Bank, FmHA, insurance company, bank, or PCA	42.3	(NA)	41.3	(NA)
Average debt	\$7,852		\$8,467	
Percent owing to business firms and suppliers	28.7		24.1	
Average debt	\$4,429		\$4,009	
Percent owing to relatives and other individuals	9.1		8.2	
Average debt	\$2,333*		\$3,482	
Percent of farms \$2,500 or more in sales without debt	65.6	66.3	72.8	73.3
Number of farms \$2,500 or more in sales	959	29,269	20,235	1,695,047

* Minority average for disclosure.

secured in this manner as compared to State and national totals.

The distribution of debt to the major lending sources indicated that Alabama black farmers owed a much greater proportion of their debt to individuals than blacks in the nation. This may reflect a higher reliance on family and friendship patterns to support farm operations.

Slightly fewer Alabama farmers had debt not secured by real estate, than United States levels. However, black farmers in the State had a greater proportion of their debt secured in other ways, but this proportion was less than the average for other groups. A much higher proportion of Alabama blacks with farms having sales of \$2,500 or more had no debt in 1974 compared to the national total for blacks. This average, however, was comparable to total United States and Alabama averages.

Crops Produced

A profile of crops grown by farmers is shown in table 7. The predominant crops grown by black farmers in Alabama were corn, cotton, sweet potatoes, and peanuts. For the State as a whole, however, corn, soybeans, cotton, and peanuts predominated, although not in the concentrations noted for black farms. Black-operated agriculture in Alabama is much less diversified than the industry as a whole, and less involved with new cropping patterns in the State, such as soybeans. Soybeans, only popular in the State in the last 15 years, have

TABLE 7. CROPS PRODUCED: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Percent of all farms growing:				
Corn for all purposes	49.6	39.6	42.1	42.7
Corn for grain	49.2	38.1	41.3	38.2
Sorghum for all purposes	0.7	2.6	4.3	6.7
Soybeans	5.0	15.1	24.2	23.4
Peanuts	10.0	7.7	8.2	1.4
Wheat	0.4	2.2	6.2	23.1
Other small grains	0.4	1.4	4.5	20.7
Cotton	20.8	12.0	16.8	3.9
Tobacco	0.2	0.1	23.0	8.5
Irish potatoes	2.6	3.1	4.4	2.2
Sweet potatoes	11.5	3.0	7.7	0.7
Land in orchards	2.9	4.5	9.6	4.6
Berries for sale	—	0.2	1.5	0.7
Total farms	4,659	56,678	52,917	2,314,013

provided good returns to many farmers and adapt well to local soil and climatic conditions (4).

Farms with Woodlands

The characteristics of farms with woodlots are shown in table 8. Alabama black operators have fewer and smaller woodland holdings than the State as a whole, but more than farmers nationally. Alabama black farmers tend to have larger holdings than their counterparts in other states.

More Alabama black operators sold timber than did blacks in the nation, but the State total was greatest for all groups. The average dollar value of black-owned woodland sales was nearly half the State total, corresponding to acreages which also were nearly half the State total.

Woodlands are a source of building material, fuel, and other useful products. They serve as an important supplement to farm income and can be used on a sustained basis if proper management practices are applied.

TABLE 8. CHARACTERISTICS OF FARMS WITH WOODLANDS: ALABAMA BLACKS, ALABAMA TOTAL, U. S. BLACKS, AND U. S. TOTAL, 1974

Characteristic (unit)	Alabama		United States	
	Blacks	Total	Blacks	Total
Percent of farms with woodland	47.1	60.5	46.0	41.1
Average acreage per farm with woodland	60.6	125.7	50.2	97.4
Farms by acres of woodlands:				
Percent 1 to 9 acres	9.9	(NA)	10.8	(NA)
Percent 10 to 49 acres	21.6		22.3	
Percent 50 to 99 acres	7.0		5.8	
Percent 100 to 149 acres	5.0		4.5	
Percent 150 acres or more	3.6		2.7	
Farms selling forest products (percent of farms with woodland)	7.1	12.6	5.2	7.6
Average dollar value of products sold per farm with woodland sales	\$2,615	\$5,113	\$1,785	\$3,241
Farms with woodland	2,196	32,593	24,365	949,945
Total farms	4,659	56,678	52,917	2,314,013

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This report has reviewed the number and characteristics of black-operated farms in Alabama. Black-operated farms tended to be concentrated in the central part of the State corresponding generally to the Black Belt soil-type region. The ownership characteristics of these farms showed a high rate of tenancy among black farm operators, but also wide variability across counties.

Black-operated farms were about half as large as the State average for all farms and had even disproportionately less

harvested acreage. Over half the black-owned farms in Alabama were less than 50 acres in size.

More black operators reported their principal occupation as farming and fewer reported off-farm work than the State total. This is partly attributable to the advanced age of black operators in Alabama, two-thirds of whom are 45 and older; whereas, less than half of the State total averaged that age.

Only 21 percent of black-operated farms had sales of \$2,500 or more in 1974, suggesting that these farms make a minor contribution to Alabama's agricultural industry, but play a major role in the personal lives of many individuals and families living on the edge of poverty. The future of blacks in agriculture will undoubtedly depend on the ability of this small segment to remain competitive in an increasingly uncertain environment. Even so, only 89 percent of the farms with gross sales of \$2,500 or more reported any net income in 1974. Slightly more than 200 black farmers reported net incomes greater than \$10,000 in 1974.

Black farmers in Alabama incurred less debt than other groups. They had less debt secured by real estate and more debt extended by private individuals and family members.

More corn and cotton were grown by black operators than other commodities. Fewer blacks grew soybeans or peanuts than were grown in the State at large.

Alabama black-operated farms had more woodlands than farms nationally. Fewer black-operated farms in the State have woodland, however, and those that did have smaller acreages and smaller sales than State averages. This profile is due to the overall smaller scale of black-operated farms.

A number of trends and conditions underlie the structure of black-operated agriculture in Alabama. Many black operators are older and their life experience and perspective is grounded in the dual society and the dual economy that predominated for many generations. Many of these individuals lack the personal skills, resources, knowledge, and motivations to effectively participate in commercial agriculture on an equal footing with younger, better-educated farmers. For many, land represents a family resource and source of identity, but is not often effectively viewed as an exploitable resource. Government agencies and extension services can design optimum farm plans, marketing strategies, and even provide capital assistance. However, not everyone may possess the

attitudes, basic skills, and orientations that allow them to effectively respond to new programs and approaches.

Previous research has repeatedly found that advanced age and low education present barriers to innovation and personal change for many individuals. More intensive approaches to agricultural production often are viewed as disruptive and personally threatening. An individual who has accumulated many years of partial success and experience is less likely to risk failure and personal embarrassment with the adoption of new approaches. For many individuals, the small absolute amount of resources to be invested in adopting an innovation may represent a high relative proportion of personal resources to risk in what may be perceived as an unknown or uncertain venture. For many older farmers, the economic returns to more intensive approaches to agriculture production do not outweigh the costs of disrupting an orderly, predictable semi-retirement.

The future of blacks in agriculture is largely dependent on the interest and recruitment of young people into production occupations. The values and perspectives of recent generations of young blacks have realistically viewed agriculture as an area of declining opportunity and that the great increase in occupational opportunities lies in urban, white-collar, and technical careers. The few individuals who will succeed in farming in the future will require the acumen, motivation, and skills to effectively manage in an environment exhibiting high technology, increasing government regulation, and greater marketing uncertainty.

A new breed of agricultural managers will contribute to the bulk of the nation's agricultural production. Other individuals may enter farming, provide their offspring with a family farm experience, but generally will be forced to seek off-farm employment to supplement their incomes.

Fast-rising land values, capital equipment outlays, and off-farm input costs will continue to confront farmers with cost-price squeezes and raise the barriers for those seeking to enter agriculture.

Successful black farmers in Alabama in the year 2000 will doubtless be effective managers of energy, money, men, and equipment, who operate on a larger scale than present, and who use their abilities and education as a basis for responding to changes and new developments in the agricultural industry. Others may reside on agricultural land and qualify in a statisti-

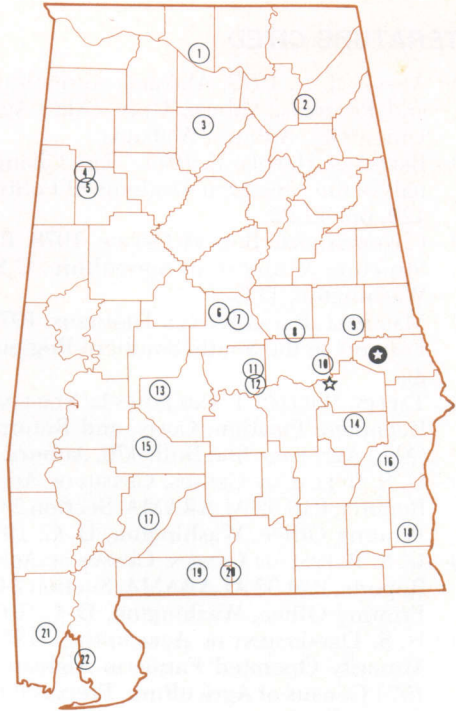
cal sense as farmers, but will make little contribution to the agricultural industry or the State's economy.

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Alabama's Agricultural Experiment Station System AUBURN UNIVERSITY

With an agricultural research unit in every major soil area, Auburn University serves the needs of field crop, livestock, forestry, and horticultural producers in each region in Alabama. Every citizen of the State has a stake in this research program, since any advantage from new and more economical ways of producing and handling farm products directly benefits the consuming public.



Research Unit Identification

- ★ Main Agricultural Experiment Station, Auburn.
- ☆ E. V. Smith Research Center, Shorter.

1. Tennessee Valley Substation, Belle Mina.
2. Sand Mountain Substation, Crossville.
3. North Alabama Horticulture Substation, Cullman.
4. Upper Coastal Plain Substation, Winfield.
5. Forestry Unit, Fayette County.
6. Foundation Seed Stocks Farm, Thorsby.
7. Chilton Area Horticulture Substation, Clanton.
8. Forestry Unit, Coosa County.
9. Piedmont Substation, Camp Hill.
10. Plant Breeding Unit, Tallassee.
11. Forestry Unit, Autauga County.
12. Prattville Experiment Field, Prattville.
13. Black Belt Substation, Marion Junction.
14. The Turnipseed-Ikenberry Place, Union Springs.
15. Lower Coastal Plain Substation, Camden.
16. Forestry Unit, Barbour County.
17. Monroeville Experiment Field, Monroeville.
18. Wiregrass Substation, Headland.
19. Brewton Experiment Field, Brewton.
20. Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center, Covington and Escambia counties.
21. Ornamental Horticulture Field Station, Spring Hill.
22. Gulf Coast Substation, Fairhope.