

The socioeconomic portrait of Canada's evolving farm population, 2016

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There were 187,492 agricultural businesses recorded by the 2016 Census of Agriculture (CEAG). In addition to agricultural businesses, there were approximately 6,000 additional hobby farms, which were also counted by CEAG in 2016 and are included in this linkage. However, collective dwellings are excluded. A key determination of a hobby farm is whether the farming activities are undertaken in pursuit of profit or personal pleasure.

The publication "Agriculture–Population Linkage Data" provides a socioeconomic profile of Canada's farm population by linking data from the 2016 CEAG with data from the 2016 Census of Population. This linkage produces socioeconomic characteristics describing the Canadian farming community. Canada's farm population comprises farm operators (persons responsible for the management decisions in operating an agricultural operation) and individuals in their households.

Canada's farm population continues to evolve much like their agricultural operations

The face of Canada's farming population has changed. Results from the 2016 CEAG, along with data from the 2016 Census of Population, show that not only are farm families smaller than they once were, but they are more affluent, and fewer of them live in rural areas.

Due to the increased automation, sophistication and size of agricultural operations, the sheer number of operations across Canada has been declining. So too has the farm population. In 1971, 1 in 14 Canadians was a member of the farm population. By 2016, that number had decreased to 1 in 58 Canadians. Overall, from 1971 to 2016, the farm population declined by 62.7% to 592,975 persons.

Table 1
Farm population as a percentage of the total population in Canada, 2016

	Farm population		Total population	
	number	number	%	%
Canada	592,975	34,348,240	100.0	1.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	1,125	512,255	0.2	0.2
Prince Edward Island	4,390	139,685	0.7	3.1
Nova Scotia	10,000	908,340	1.7	1.1
New Brunswick	6,790	730,705	1.1	0.9
Quebec	95,410	7,965,450	16.1	1.2
Ontario	160,415	13,242,160	27.1	1.2
Manitoba	44,175	1,240,700	7.4	3.6
Saskatchewan	93,925	1,070,555	15.8	8.8
Alberta	118,785	3,978,145	20.0	3.0
British Columbia	57,970	4,560,235	9.8	1.3

Note(s): Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source(s): Agriculture–Population Linkage Database, 2016 and the Census of Population, 2016 (3901).

Farm households are not only smaller, they are also more affluent

With the advent of automation, the reliance of agricultural operations on manual labour has decreased over time. While decreasing birth rates have affected the size of the household, the reduction in demand for manual labour on agricultural operations may also have influenced the size of the farm household. In 1971, the average size of a farm household was 4.3 persons. By 2016, it had decreased 35.5% to 2.8 persons.

By comparison, the average household size for the total population in 1971 was 3.5 persons. By 2016, it had fallen by almost one-third to 2.4 persons.



Not only are farm households smaller than before, their total household income is higher than households in the total population. In 1971, the total median income of farm households was 33.8% lower than households within the total population, accounting for a median total income in 2015 constant dollars of \$33,737. However, this pattern has changed.

Taking a look at the past three census periods, total median income levels have been higher for farm households. In 2006, the median total income of farm households was \$65,088, 2.6% higher than total population households at \$63,457. By 2016, the median total income of farm households was \$82,456, 17.3% higher than the total population median income of \$70,275.

The farm population is gravitating towards farm types which produce higher household incomes

Farms can be classified by the predominant type of work that is carried out on the farms. Certain types of farms produce higher household incomes for the farm population.

For example, in 2016, nearly one-third of the farm population reported an association with oilseed and grain farming. From 2006 to 2016, households who reported oilseed and grain farming saw their median total income increase by 41.2%. One reason for this growth in household income could be due to oilseed and grain farming having one of the best national expense-to-receipt ratios from 2010 to 2015.

Prices for oilseeds and grains peaked in 2012 and 2013, but have since decreased for the majority of crops. At the same time, the cost of inputs for this type of production has been increasing. As a result, this type of farming had a less favourable expense-to-receipt ratio in 2015 than in 2010.

Table 2
Median total income in constant dollars by farm type in Canada, 2006 to 2016

	2006	2011	2016	
	dollars	dollars	dollars	% of farm population
Oilseed and grain farming	64,338	82,363	90,861	31.6
Beef cattle ranching and farming, including feedlots	59,245	67,290	78,411	17.5
Other crop farming	65,041	71,037	75,499	15.1
Other animal production	74,054	79,687	84,348	10.1
Dairy cattle and milk production	65,488	68,850	70,343	7.8
Fruit and tree nut farming	74,187	80,126	88,306	4.8
Greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production	77,665	80,423	85,211	3.7
Vegetable and melon farming	68,742	76,657	80,944	3.2
Poultry and egg production	83,507	89,767	96,399	2.7
Hog and pig farming	61,470	71,769	77,761	1.9
Sheep and goat farming	65,371	70,085	73,593	1.7

Note(s): 2006 and 2011 median total income figures were calculated using 2015 constant dollars.

Source(s): Agriculture–Population Linkage Database, 2016 and the Census of Population, 2016 (3901).

After oilseed and grain farming, the most reported association by farm type within the farm population was beef cattle ranching and farming, including feedlots. In 2016, 17.5% of the farm population reported an association with this farm type. Beef cattle ranching and farming, including feedlot households, reported a median total income of \$78,411, or \$8,136 higher than the median total income of the total population.

The diversification of income sources within the farm population has evolved over time

While the median total income of farm households may be higher due to the prevalence of particular farm types, it may also be due to increased opportunities for income outside of the agricultural operation.

In 1971, the average self-employed non-farm income was \$776. By 2016, it had increased 97.8% to \$1,535. This increase in non-farm income may indicate that the agricultural operation is not the sole contributor to farm household income. External income opportunities for the farm population may also be influenced by the population density of where they live.

The farm population is adapting to the evolving migratory patterns of the total Canadian population

More of the total population is migrating from rural to urban areas, and the same can also be said for the farm population. In 1971, 7.9% of the farm population resided in urban areas. By 2016, that figure had grown to 16.1%. This suggests that the farm population residing in urban areas is capitalizing on its area of residence. The proportion of the farm population living in urban areas differs widely by province, with the highest proportion reported in Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia.

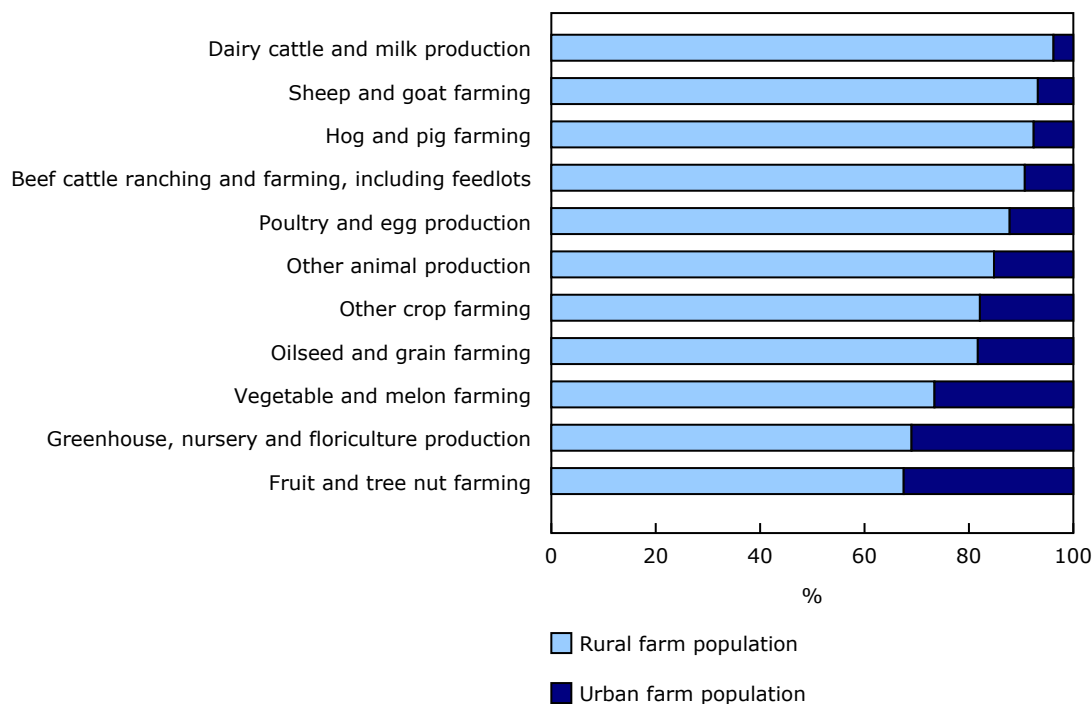
Table 3
Proportion of the farm population living in urban centres in Canada, 2016

	Urban farm population		Total farm population number
	number	%	
Canada	95,280	16.1	592,975
Newfoundland and Labrador	425	37.8	1,125
Prince Edward Island	320	7.3	4,390
Nova Scotia	985	9.9	10,000
New Brunswick	590	8.7	6,790
Quebec	13,435	14.1	95,410
Ontario	20,790	13.0	160,415
Manitoba	4,730	10.7	44,175
Saskatchewan	18,100	19.3	93,925
Alberta	20,415	17.2	118,785
British Columbia	15,490	26.7	57,970

Source(s): Agriculture–Population Linkage Database, 2016 (3901).

In 2016, nearly one-third of the farm population reporting an association with fruit and tree nut and vegetable and melon farms resided in urban areas. These two types of farms are more likely to engage in direct marketing activities as a source of income. Therefore, it is to their advantage to be located close to populated areas, as it allows them to more easily sell their products directly to consumers.

Chart 1
Rural and urban farm population distribution by farm type in Canada, 2016



Source(s): Agriculture–Population Linkage Database, 2016 and the Census of Population, 2016 (3901).

While increasing proportions of the farm population migrate to urban areas, there is still a dedicated segment of the farm population residing in rural areas. Most do so out of necessity as many of the farm types primarily situated in rural areas have a demand for large areas of agricultural land, both for grazing livestock and growing field crops.

For example, in 2016, 92.4% of the farm population associated with hog and pig farm types lived in rural areas.

Dairy cattle and milk production farm types also reported a significant proportion of their associated farm population residing in rural areas. In 2016, 96.2% of the farm population associated with the dairy cattle and milk production farm type resided in rural areas. On average, this farm type reported the third-largest average farm area by acre in Canada. It would be quite difficult for these farm types to exist in urban centres. Moreover, dairy cattle require frequent supervision and intervention (for example, milking twice a day), meaning that operators and subsequently, operators' associated household members would likely be residing in close proximity to the agricultural operation.

The modern farm

The farm population is evolving in much the same way as their agricultural operations. Gone is the stereotypical notion of large farm households solely located in rural areas. From 1971 to 2016, the average household size of the farm population declined by 35.5%. Over that same period, the total median income of farm households increased by 144.4%, surpassing the total median household income of the total population.

Not only are fewer members of the farm population residing in rural areas than before, but a segment of those who do live in urban areas are associated with farm types that are modernizing their business practices. Vegetable and melon farms and fruit and tree nut farms are two of the three farm types with the highest proportion reported in urban areas and they are also two of the three most reported farm types engaging in direct marketing activities.

With the increasing modernization and automation of agricultural operations, the farm population has evolved to better position themselves within the current agricultural climate, including an increased emphasis on formal education. Please visit the "[Canadian farm operators: An educational portrait](#)" (11-627-M) to learn more about the educational attainments of Canada's farm operators.

Note to readers

Population data excludes Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut and [collective dwellings](#).

Farm population refers to all persons who are members of a farm operator's household.

The **expense-to-receipt ratio** is the average amount incurred in operating expenses for a dollar in gross farm receipts. The ratio is calculated using current dollars while the rest is in constant dollars.

Price indices were used to obtain constant dollar estimates of receipts, expenditures and capital values in order to eliminate the impact of price change in year-to-year comparisons.

The concept "**urban**" includes small population centres, medium population centres and large urban population centres, which are defined in the [Census of Population dictionary](#).

Available tables: [32-10-0004-01](#), [32-10-0009-01](#) to [32-10-0012-01](#) , [32-10-0020-01](#), [32-10-0024-01](#), [32-10-0027-01](#), [32-10-0030-01](#), [32-10-0035-01](#), [32-10-0041-01](#), [32-10-0064-01](#) and [32-10-0084-01](#).

The product *Agriculture–Population Linkage Data* ([95-633-X](#)) is now available.

The infographics : "[The socioeconomic portrait of Canada's evolving farm population](#)," "[Canadian farm operators: An educational portrait](#)," and "[Canada's immigrant farm population](#)," which are part of the product *Statistics Canada–Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)), are also now available.

For a more complete list of our products, visit the [2016 Census of Agriculture](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3438](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).