

## Canadian Agriculture at a Glance

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by Saneliso Mhlanga

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# Canadian Agriculture at a Glance



## Mushroom, greenhouse and highbush blueberry farming play pivotal role in British Columbia

by Saneliso Mhlanga

British Columbia's varied terrain, dense population and high land values make it an ideal place for smaller, specialized farms. Moreover, the province's moderate climate, fertile soils and access to water and technology provides added benefits for fruit and vegetable farming. Data from the 2021 Census of Agriculture shows how British Columbia has positioned itself amongst the nation's leaders in capital intensive agriculture that uses less land, such as greenhouse and mushroom farming.

### British Columbia has the second largest greenhouse area

In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported the second largest greenhouse area in Canada, with 66.0 million square feet, up 14.0% from 2016. The province accounted for one-fifth (20.0%) of Canada's reported greenhouse area.

The province also reported the largest greenhouse area for herbs. In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported 1.9 million square feet of greenhouse area for herbs. This accounted for 62.3% of Canada's greenhouse area for herbs.

### British Columbia has the largest mushroom area

In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported a 50.8% increase in mushroom area, surpassing Ontario to become the province with the largest mushroom area in Canada. The province reported 3.4 million square feet, followed closely by Ontario, with 3.3 million square feet. Larger farms (those with \$2 million and over in revenues) accounted for 90.4% of the reported mushroom area in British Columbia.

In 2021, the vast majority (87.9%) of total mushroom area reported by farms in Canada was made up of Agaricus mushrooms, and farms in British Columbia accounted for nearly half (48.0%) of that.

### British Columbia accounts for vast majority of Canada's highbush blueberry and sweet cherry acreage

In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported 27,008 acres of highbush blueberries, which accounted for 88.6% of Canada's total. Highbush blueberries

**Table 1**  
**Number and proportion of farms by farm type, British Columbia, 2021**

	number	percent
Dairy and milk production	492	3.1
Beef farming and feedlot	2,284	14.4
Hog and pig farming	93	0.6
Poultry and egg production	1,266	8.0
Sheep and goat farming	636	4.0
Other animal production	2,350	14.8
Oilseed and grain farming	419	2.7
Vegetable and melon farming	1,077	6.8
Fruit and tree nut farming	3,036	19.2
Greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production	1,167	7.4
Other crop farming	3,021	19.1
Total	15,841	100.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2021 (3438).

were grown for local consumption, as well as for the export and processing markets. In particular, the [increase in highbush blueberry exports over the last five years](#) has seen farmers replace raspberry crops with highbush blueberries.

British Columbia is also home to the most sweet cherries in Canada. In 2021, the province reported 7,046 acres of sweet cherries, which made up 94.7% of Canada’s total. From 2016 to 2021, sweet cherry area increased by 43.5% in British Columbia. Greater

foreign demand was the key driver behind the increase in sweet cherry acreage. Warmer temperatures in the province have allowed for an expansion of usable cultivated land and the introduction of new sweet cherry varieties.

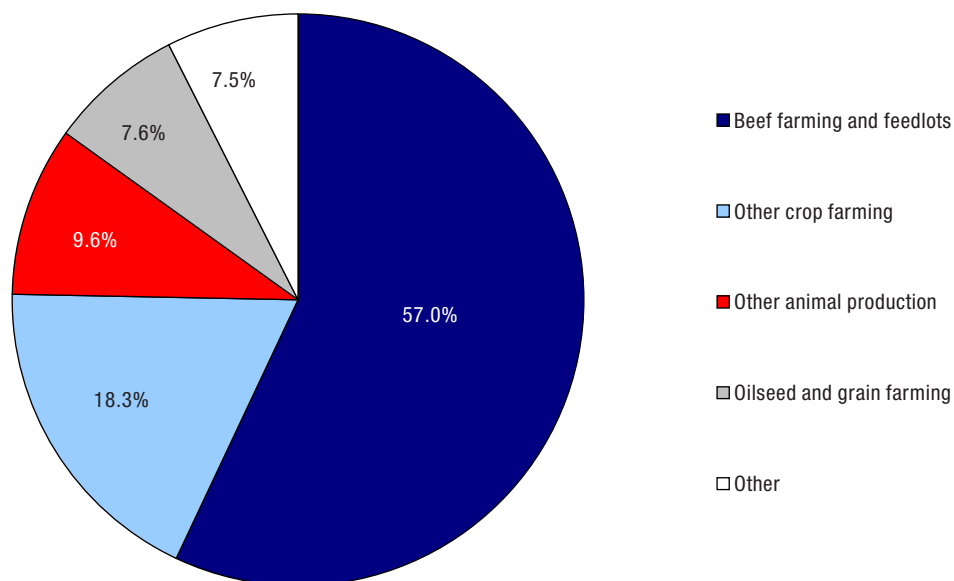
Meanwhile, grape acreage also increased in the province. From 2016 to 2021, grape acreage in British Columbia increased by nearly a third (32.9%). In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported 12,829 acres, accounting for 36.7% of Canada’s total.

## Number of farms is declining

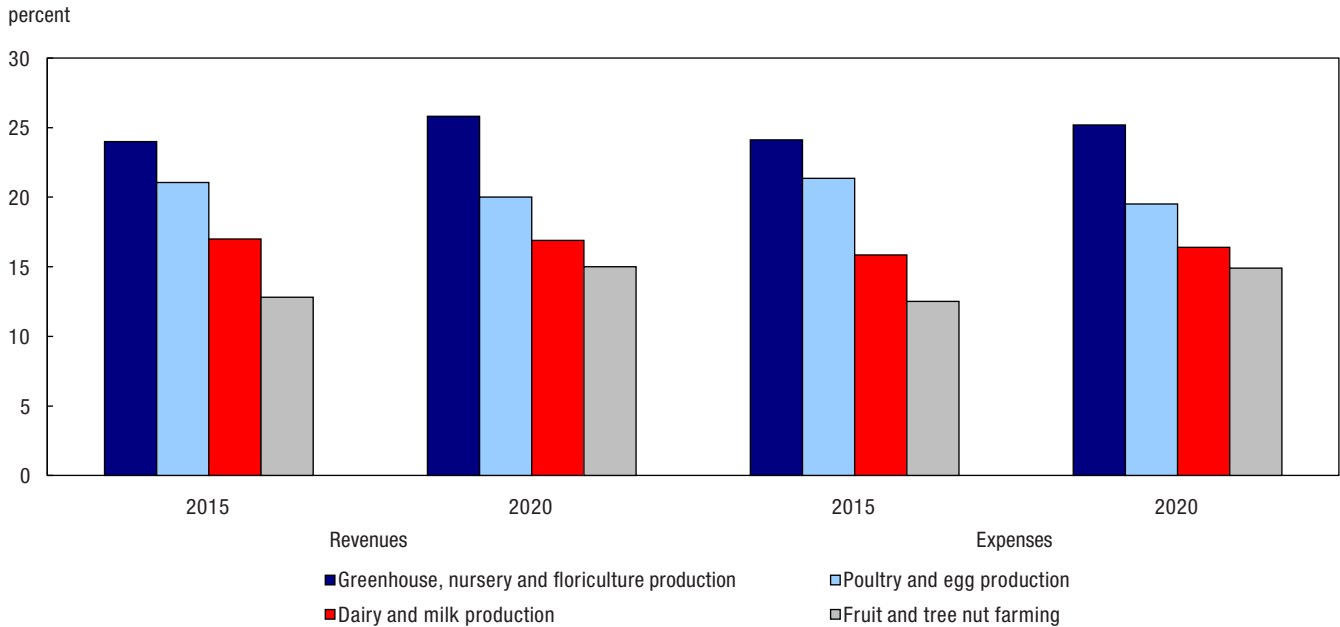
From 2016 to 2021, the total number of farms reported in British Columbia decreased by 9.6%. This was more than five times higher than the decrease reported at the national level (-1.9%).

In 2021, British Columbia had the largest number of farms reporting highbush blueberries, grapes and sweet cherries in the country. As highbush blueberries, grapes and sweet cherries are reported under fruit and tree nut farms, this farm type made up the largest proportion (19.2%) of farms in the province. Following very closely behind were other crop farms, representing 19.1% of all farms in the province.

**Chart 1**  
**Proportion of farm area by farm type, British Columbia, 2021**



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2021 (3438).

**Chart 2****Proportion of total farm revenues and expenses by top four farm types, British Columbia, 2015 and 2020**

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2016 and 2021 (3438).

## Greenhouse farms make up a small proportion of total farm area

Despite being the top source of operating revenue in the province, farms classified as greenhouse, nursery and floriculture accounted for only 0.7% of total farm area in 2021. This is not unexpected, given that greenhouse and mushroom farming is sometimes referred to as high-yield agriculture, as it allows farmers to grow more food on less land. By comparison, farms classified as beef and feedlots accounted for 57.0% of British Columbia's total farm area.

## Field crop and hay acreage is declining but still integral to farming in British Columbia

While field crops and hay acreage decreased (4.5%) in the province from 2016 to 2021, it still accounted

for over a fifth (22.7%) of the province's total acreage. In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported 1.3 million acres of field crops and hay. The top three contributors were other tame hay and fodder crops (404,770 acres), followed by alfalfa and alfalfa mixtures (379,069 acres), and canola (103,340 acres).

From 2016 to 2021, British Columbia's other tame hay and fodder crops acreage increased by 8.9% and canola acreage increased by 8.6%, while alfalfa area decreased by 22.6%.

## Greenhouse farms have the highest operating revenues and expenses in the province

In 2020, farms classified as greenhouse, nursery and floriculture accounted for 25.8% of the province's \$4.8 billion in farm operating revenue. This was followed by poultry and egg production (20.0%), dairy and milk production (16.9%), and fruit and tree nut farming (15.0%).

## Farms with smaller operating revenues lead the way in direct sales

In 2020, more than half of the farms (51.1%) that reported direct sales in British Columbia had operating revenues of less than \$10,000. This was significantly higher than the trend reported across Canada, where less than a third of farms (32.4%) in the same revenue class reported direct sales.

British Columbia had the highest proportion of farms reporting in the lowest revenue class (less than \$10,000). In 2020, farms with operating revenues of less than \$10,000 accounted for 40.6% of total farms in the province, which was more than double the national rate (19.2%).

In 2020, 34.0% of farms in the province reported direct sales. This was 2.5 times the national rate (13.6%). Farms classified as fruit and tree nuts made up the largest portion (19.3%) of the 5,381 farms that reported direct sales in 2020 in the province.

## British Columbia among the national leaders in field vegetables

Farms in British Columbia reported the third largest field vegetable acreage in Canada. In 2021, farms in the province reported 14,957 acres of field vegetables, accounting for 5.7% of the national share. Sweet corn, squash and zucchini, and green peas account for just under a third (32.6%) of field vegetable acreage reported in British Columbia.

In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported the country's second largest acreage of kale and Brussels sprouts. The province accounted for 22.7% of national kale acreage and 33.5% of national Brussels sprout acreage.

## British Columbia has the third most chicken and eggs in Canada

From 2016 to 2021, the number of hens and chickens (22.9 million) reported in British Columbia increased by 10.9%, which is more than double the national rate (4.7%). Meanwhile, the number of table eggs (95.9 million dozens) increased by 33.5% from 2015 to 2020, compared with 20.8% across Canada.

In contrast, the number of reported turkeys (733,784) decreased by 14.9% from 2016 to 2021, compared with a 27.8% decrease at the national level.

## Sheep and lamb numbers drop while bison numbers increase

In British Columbia, the number of cattle and calves decreased by 6.4% from the previous census. In 2021, farms in the province reported 617,336 cattle and calves. The total number of sheep and lambs also decreased by 7.8% over the same period. In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported 54,608 sheep and lambs. By contrast, the number of bison more than doubled from the previous census. In 2021, farms in British Columbia reported 14,888 bison, which accounted for 10.0% of Canada's total bison.

## British Columbia has the highest proportion of female operators among provinces

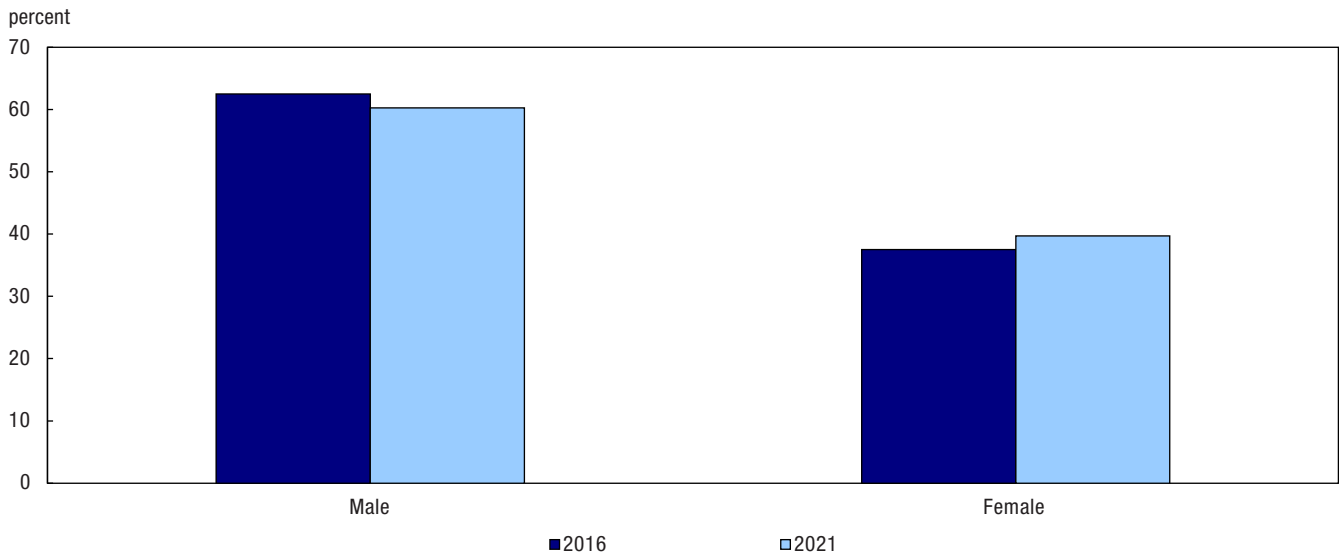
As was the case in 2016, British Columbia had the highest proportion of female operators (39.7%) among provinces in Canada. This was a slight increase compared with 2016 (37.5%). The province accounted for 11.8% of total female operators. In 2021, farms classified as sheep and goat and other animals reported the highest share of female operators in the province.

British Columbia also reported the largest proportion of female farm operators between 35 and 54 years of age. In 2021, 41.8% of the province's operators between 35 and 54 years of age were female. This was higher than any other province and also higher than what was reported at the national level (31.6%).

## Majority of farm operators are getting older

As was the case at the national level, the average age of farm operators in British Columbia increased, from 56.3 years in 2016 to 57.8 years in 2021. Nearly two-thirds (66.2%) of farm operators in the province were 55 years and older, which was above the national level (60.5%).

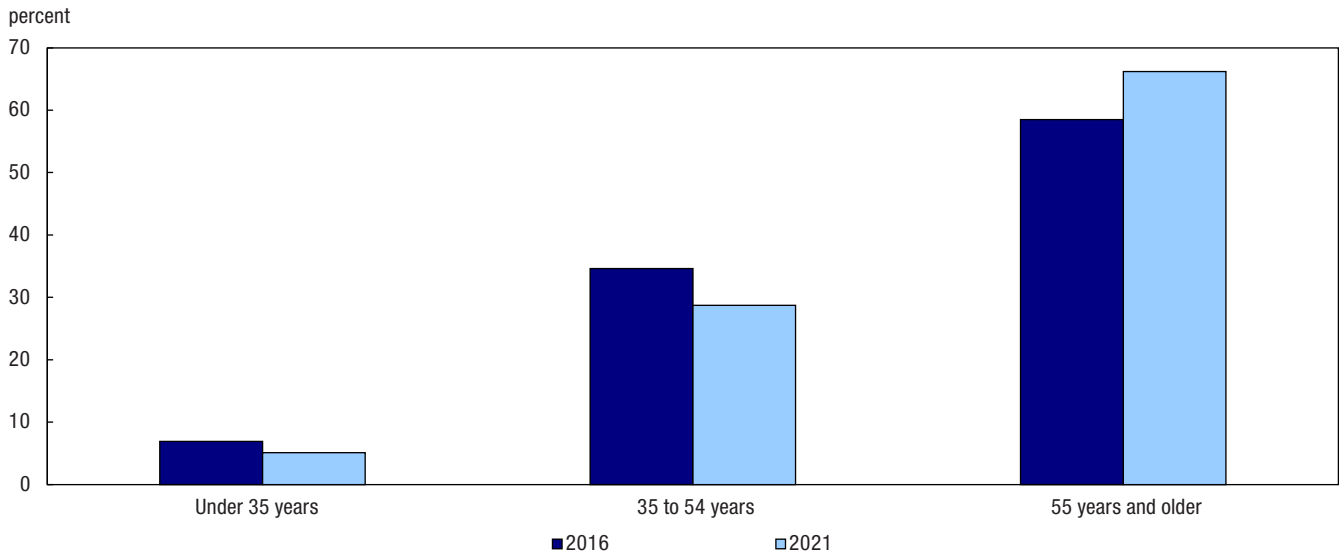
**Chart 3**  
**Percentage of farm operators by sex, British Columbia, 2016 and 2021**



**Note:** Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2016 and 2021 (3438).

**Chart 4**  
**Percentage of farm operators by age category, British Columbia, 2016 and 2021**

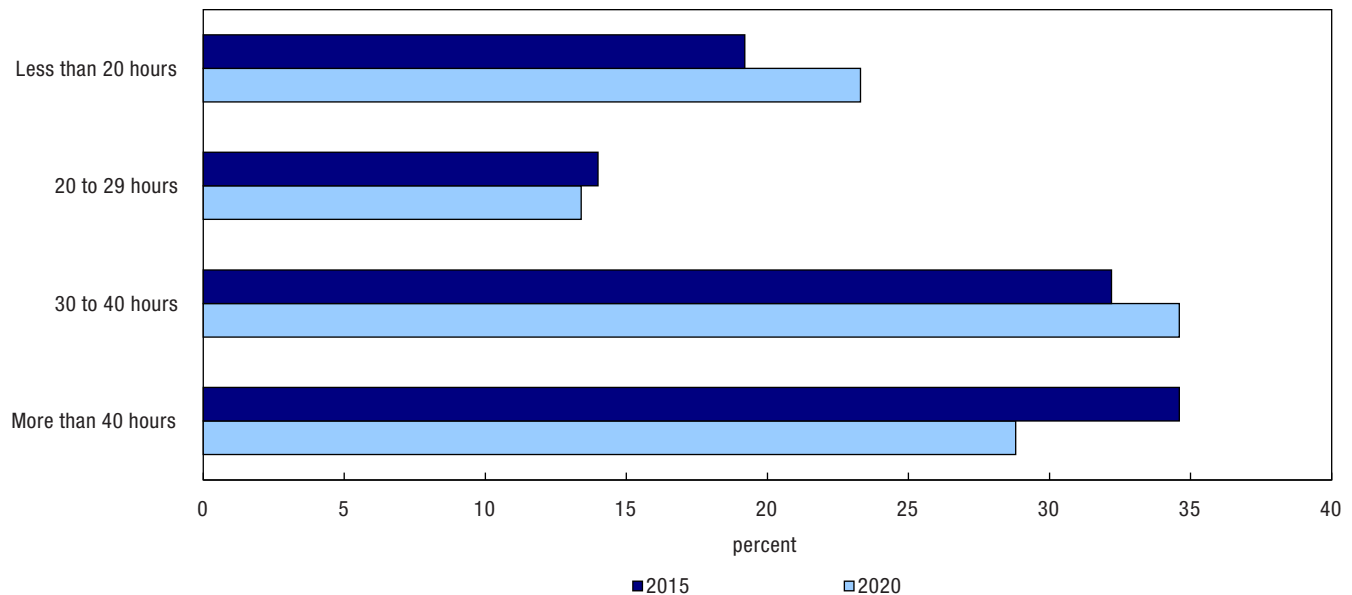


**Note:** Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2016 and 2021 (3438).

**Chart 5**

**Distribution of farm operators who reported off-farm work by hours per week category, British Columbia, 2015 and 2020**



**Note:** Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2016 and 2021 (3438).

## The rate of succession planning is up, but still below the national level

In 2021, 9.7% of farms in British Columbia reported a succession plan, up from 6.7% in 2016. By comparison, 12.0% of farms across Canada reported a succession plan.

Out of the 1,530 farms that reported a succession plan in the province in 2021, over a fifth (21.6%) of them were classified as fruit and tree nut farms.

## There is an increasing proportion of farm operators working off the farm

In British Columbia, the proportion of farm operators reporting working off the farm increased from 51.1% in 2015 to 53.5% in 2020. The biggest change was in the proportion of farm operators working more than 40 hours off the farm. In 2015, 34.6% of farm operators working off the farm worked more than 40 hours, and in 2020, this decreased to 28.8%.

## Notes to readers

### Definitions and concepts

A significant conceptual change to the main statistical unit used by Statistics Canada’s Agriculture Statistics Program has been introduced for the 2021 Census of Agriculture: a “farm” or an “agricultural holding” (i.e., the census farm) now refers to a unit that produces agricultural products and reports revenues or expenses for tax purposes to the Canada Revenue Agency. Before 2021, a “farm” was defined as an agricultural operation that produced at least one agricultural product intended for sale.

In 2021, there have been changes to the definition of a census farm; in Yukon and Northwest Territories, some activities that were previously included within the definition are not included in 2021. Caution should be taken when comparing the 2021 Census of Agriculture data with data from previous censuses.

The data displayed by geography have undergone random tabular adjustment. The Canada total data for geographic breakdowns may differ from the Canada total data displayed in tables by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) category and sales class.



The data for Yukon and the Northwest Territories are not included in the national totals; they are presented separately.

The Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years and is a census of all agricultural operations that produces agricultural products and reports revenues or expenses for tax purposes to the Canada Revenue Agency. Important concepts used in this analysis include:

**Total farm area**, which is land owned or operated by an agricultural operation, includes: cropland, summer fallow, improved and unimproved pasture, woodlands and wetlands, all other land (including idle land and land on which farm buildings are located).

Total farm area includes the total area of land owned, leased, rented, crop-shared or used by this operation minus land area used by others.

**Cropland** is the total area of field crops, hay, field vegetables, fruits, berries, nuts, sod, nursery products and Christmas trees.

**Farm type** is established through a procedure that classifies each census farm according to the predominant type of production. This is done by estimating the potential revenues from the inventories of crops and livestock reported on the questionnaire and determining the product or group of products that make up the majority of the estimated receipts. For example, a census farm with total potential revenues of 60% from hogs, 20% from beef cattle and 20% from wheat, would be classified as a hog and pig farm. The farm types presented in this document are derived based on the 2017 NAICS.

**Farm operator** refers to any person responsible for the management decisions in operating a farm or agricultural operation. Also known as an agricultural operator, farmer, operator or rancher.

Farm employees include both farm operators and agricultural workers.

**Price indexes** were used to obtain constant dollar estimates of sales, export values and farm assets in order to eliminate the impact of price change in year-to-year comparisons.

## Farm operating revenues

Farm operating revenues come from the Agriculture Taxation Data Program (ATDP). Previously, revenues for agricultural operations were reported to the Census of Agriculture. Caution should be taken when comparing the 2021 Census of Agriculture data with previous censuses.

The Census of Agriculture measures farm operating revenues (in current dollars) for the calendar or accounting year prior to the census. Farm operating revenues (before deducting expenses) in this analysis include: operating revenues from all agricultural products sold, program payments and custom work revenues.

The following are not included in farm operating revenues: sales of forestry products (for example: firewood, pulpwood, logs, fence posts and pilings); sales of capital items (for example: quota, land, machinery); and revenues from the sale of any goods purchased only for retail sales.

## Total operating expenses

Total operating expenses come from the ATDP. Previously, expenses for agricultural operations were reported to the Census of Agriculture. Caution should be taken when comparing the 2021 Census of Agriculture data with previous censuses.

The Census of Agriculture measures operating expenses (in current dollars) for the calendar or accounting year prior to the census. Total operating expenses include any expense associated with producing agricultural products (such as the cost of seed, feed, fuel, fertilizers).

The following are not included in total operating expenses: the purchase of land, buildings or equipment, and depreciation or capital cost allowance. Depreciation represents economic “wear and tear” expense. Capital cost allowance represents the amount of depreciation written off by the tax filer as allowed by tax regulations.

## Expenses-to-revenues ratio

The expenses-to-revenues ratio is the average amount of operating expenses incurred for a dollar in farm operating revenues. The ratio is calculated in current dollars.

Census Day was May 11, 2021. Farmers were asked to report their operating revenues and expenses for the last complete fiscal or calendar year (2020).

**Full-time employment** is classified as farm operators who worked 30 hours or more per week; **part-time employment** is classified as farm operators who worked less than 30 hours per week.

Some data refer to a reference period other than Census Day. For example, for financial data the reference period is the calendar or accounting (fiscal) year prior to the census.