

## Alberta has the most beef cattle in Canada and the second largest total farm area



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## Standard table symbols

The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0<sup>s</sup> value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- <sup>P</sup> preliminary
- <sup>r</sup> revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- <sup>E</sup> use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

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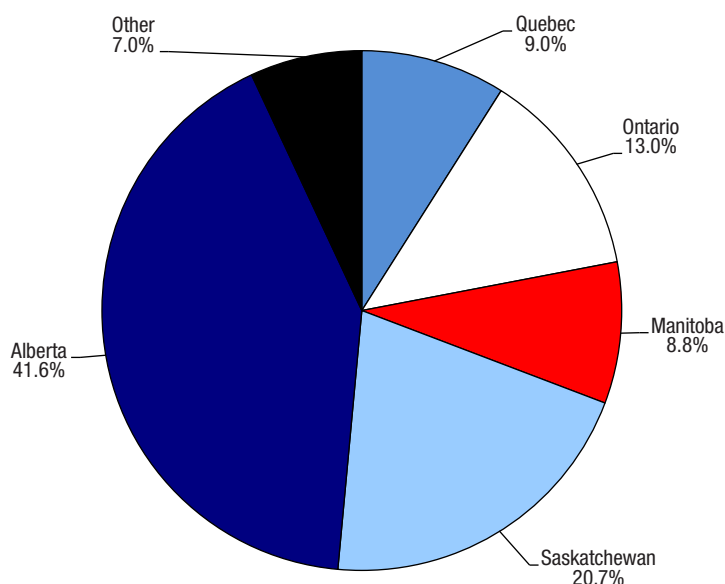
## Alberta has the most beef cattle in Canada and the second largest total farm area

For the first time since the 2001 Census, Alberta reported an increase in beef cattle inventory, despite fewer farms reporting beef cattle.

Alberta once again reported the largest cattle herd in Canada in 2016, accounting for just over two-fifths of the national total. Alberta also accounted for two-fifths of all beef breeding stock nationally and nearly three-fifths of all feeder cattle.

Although total farm numbers were down from five years earlier, Alberta continued to have the second largest number of farms in Canada following Ontario.

**Chart 1**  
**Provincial distribution of cattle and calves, 2016**



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

**Source:** CANSIM table 004-0221.

Alberta also ranked second in terms of both total farm area and field crop area. Canola remained the leading field crop by area in 2016, up slightly from 2011, while spring wheat and barley area edged down.

Area planted with sweet corn was down by over one-third from 2011, while greenhouse flower and vegetable area were almost one-tenth higher.

Just under half of [farm operators](#) in Alberta reported having an off farm job in [2015](#), the second highest rate in the country following British Columbia.

Primary agriculture represented 1.5% of provincial gross domestic product (agricultural GDP) in 2013. This percentage increased to 4.0% when agricultural input and service providers, primary producers, food and beverage processors, and food retailers and wholesalers industries were taken into account (Statistics Canada, 2013. Special tabulation, based on 2013 gross domestic product by industry – provincial and territorial).

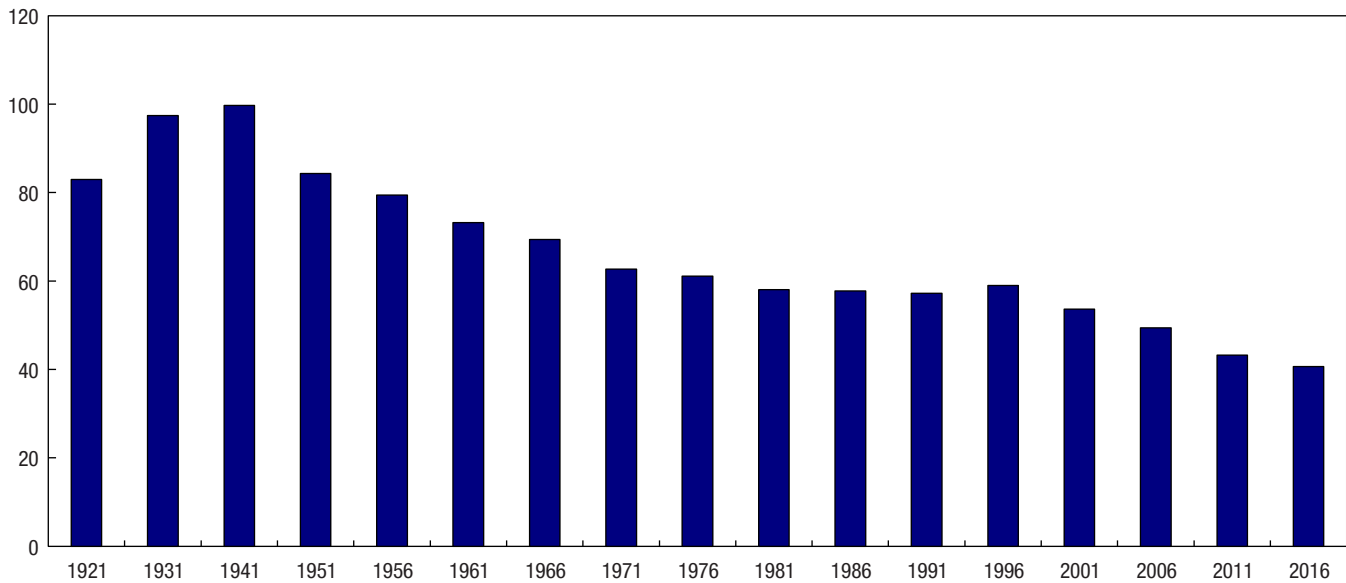
Agricultural operations in Alberta employed 33,498 people in 2015.

## Fewer farms in Alberta

The 2016 Census of Agriculture counted 40,638 [census farms](#) in Alberta, down 6.0% from 2011 and similar to the 5.9% decline at the national level. Despite the decrease, Alberta continued to have the second largest number of farms in the country following Ontario.

**Chart 2**  
**Total number of agricultural operations, Alberta, 1921 to 2016**

number of operations (thousands)



Sources: CANSIM tables 004-0002 and 004-0204.

## Alberta leads in beef

Once again, Alberta had the most cattle in Canada in 2016, accounting for 41.6% of the national herd. Alberta’s feeder cattle (steers and heifers for feeding or slaughter) accounted for 59.6% of the national total, while its beef breeding stock (beef cows and heifers for beef herd replacement) accounted for 42.3%.

For the first time since the 2001 Census, Alberta reported an increase in the number of beef cattle (beef cattle for breeding and beef cattle for feeding/slaughter). This contrasted with the continued decline at the national level (-2.4%). Alberta’s beef cattle inventories rose 1.3% from 2011 to 3.34 million head — despite fewer farms (-9.0%) reporting beef cattle. Close proximity to processing capacity and availability of feed and pasture land provide Alberta’s beef sector with a comparative advantage over other provinces. In addition, volatility in the beef sector from 2011 to 2016, partially due to price fluctuations, may have affected beef cattle inventories.

The number of dairy cows in Alberta decreased 0.8% from 2011 to 80,014 head in 2016, while the number of farms reporting dairy cows declined by 12.6%.

While there were fewer dairy cows, this was offset by increased production per animal, attributable to improved animal nutrition, genetics and production practices. Annual milk production increased 11.0% to 732.3 million litres from 2011 to 2016 (CANSIM table 003-0011, accessed April 25, 2017).

From 2011 to 2016, the number of pigs in Alberta rose by 4.6% to 1.5 million head, while the number of farms reporting pigs increased 41.3%. The growth was due to better market conditions, which boosted the price of pigs relative to the period preceding the last census. Prior to the 2011 Census of Agriculture, the pig sector had been beset by high feed costs, disease and low pig prices, resulting in significantly fewer farms and a smaller pig herd (CANSIM table 002-0068, accessed April 25, 2017).

## Total farm area down, but cropland up

Alberta reported the second largest total farm area over which farmers had stewardship in 2016, following Saskatchewan. The total farm area in Alberta declined 0.5% from 2011 to 50.3 million acres in 2016. This decrease came about as the sector shed lower quality and non-agricultural lands and upgraded or divested generally less productive pasture lands.

While the total farm area fell, the average farm size grew from 1,168 acres in 2011 to 1,237 acres in 2016 and the area of cropland increased by 4.8% to 25.3 million acres. This five-year period saw shifts of area away from hay to field crops.

Total farm area, which is land owned or operated by an agricultural operation, includes:

- cropland;
- summerfallow;
- improved and unimproved pasture;
- woodlands and wetlands;
- all other land (including idle land, and land on which farm buildings are located).

**Table 1**  
**Components of cropland in percentage, Alberta, 2011 and 2016**

Component of cropland	Percent of cropland <sup>1</sup>	
	2011	2016
Field crops	78.6	83.2
Hay	21.3	16.7
Others <sup>2</sup>	0.1	0.1
<b>Total cropland</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

1. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

2. Includes fruits, berries and nuts, vegetables, sod and nursery.

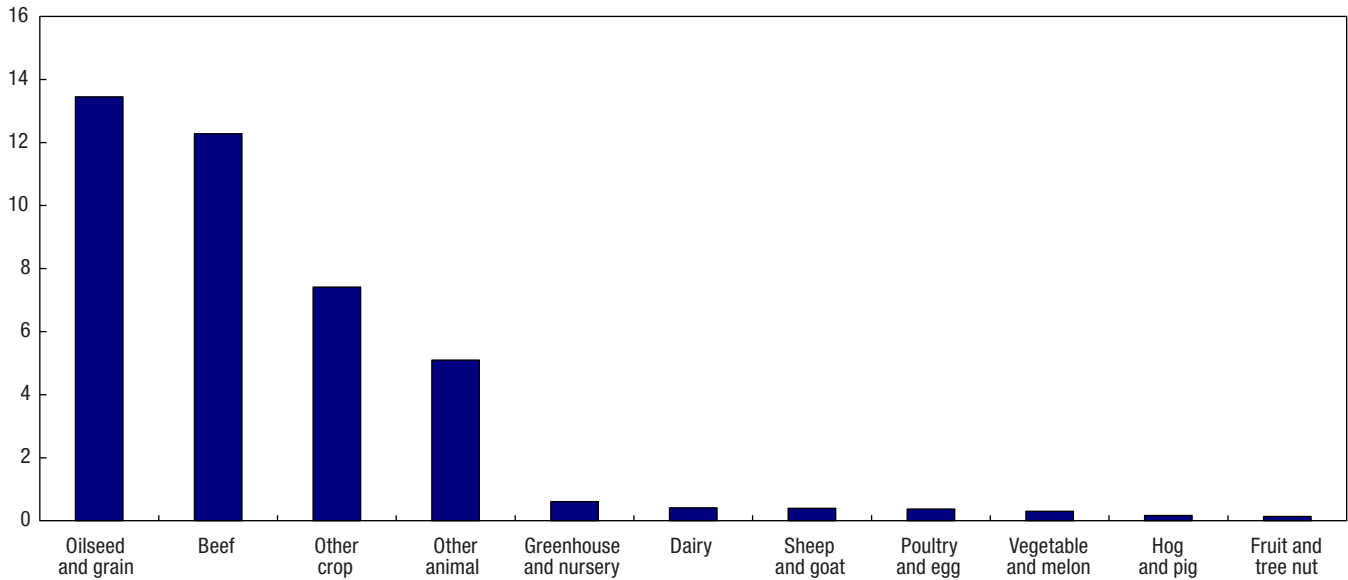
Source: Census of Agriculture (3438).

## Canola is the leading crop

[Oilseed and grain type operations](#) accounted for roughly one-third of farms in the province. Canola remained the leading field crop by area reported in Alberta in 2016, followed by spring wheat and barley. Alberta ranked second in terms of field crop area.

**Chart 3**  
**Total number of agricultural operations by operation type, Alberta, 2016**

number of operations (thousands)



Source: CANSIM table 004-0200.

**Table 2**  
**Largest three field crops, Alberta, 2011 and 2016**

Field crop	Acreage	
	2011	2016
Canola	6,071,744	6,165,746
Spring wheat	5,971,359	5,728,527
Barley	3,610,111	3,413,856

Source: CANSIM table 004-0213.

### Area planted with sweet corn down by over one-third

The total field vegetable area in Alberta decreased 5.7% from 2011 to 10,108 acres in 2016, due in large part to a decline in sweet corn. Area planted with sweet corn has fallen by 38.4% since 2011 to 2,475 acres. As a result, sweet corn fell to second, passing the leading spot in field vegetable area to green peas (3,721 acres).

The total area of land dedicated to fruits, berries and nuts production declined 17.1% to 2,164 acres. The leading fruit crops in 2016 were Saskatoon berries (1,314 acres) and strawberries (205 acres).

The area dedicated to greenhouse flower and vegetable production rose 8.6% from 2011 to 12.0 million square feet in 2016. Greenhouse area dedicated to vegetable production increased by 8.5%, while area dedicated to greenhouse flowers grew by 8.7%.

Alberta's beekeepers reported the highest number of honeybee colonies in Canada. From 2011 to 2016, the number of honeybee colonies in Alberta increased 29.2% to 304,846. Alberta accounted for 39.5% of national honeybee colonies.

### Alberta has the second highest proportion of female operators

There were 57,605 farm operators in Alberta in 2016, down 7.2% from 2011 and exceeding the decline in the number of farms (-6.0%).

Alberta had the second highest proportion of female operators in 2016, following British Columbia. Women accounted for 30.8% of farm operators in Alberta, up from 29.0% in 2011. Nationally, women accounted for 28.7% of farm operators.

From 2011 to 2016, the proportion of farm operators in the oldest age category (55 years and older) rose to 56.5%. The proportion of young operators (under 35 years old) rose to 8.5%. Over the five-year period, the average operator age rose from 54.5 years to 55.7 years.

**Table 3**  
**Proportion of farm operators by age group, Alberta, 2011 and 2016**

Age group	Percent of farm operators <sup>1</sup>	
	2011	2016
Under 35 years old	7.3	8.5
35 to 54 years old	43.1	35.0
55 years and older	49.6	56.5
<b>Total farm operators</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

1. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: CANSIM table 004-0239.

In 2015, 35.3% of farm operators in Alberta worked more than 40 hours a week on average on farm operations, compared with 37.8% in 2010. At the national level, this percentage was 37.5% in 2015.

Meanwhile, fewer farmers worked off the farm in 2015, with 47.3% of farm operators in Alberta reporting an off farm job compared with 52.0% in 2010. Nationally, 44.4% of farm operators worked off the farm. Despite the decrease, Alberta reported the second highest rate of off-farm work following British Columbia.

## Gross farm receipts and operating expenses grow

Gross farm receipts reached \$17.7 billion in 2015, while operating expenses totalled \$15.0 billion. On average, for every dollar in gross farm receipts, farms in Alberta incurred 84 cents in operating expenses in 2015, down slightly from 85 cents in 2010.

The expense-to-receipt ratio varied among farm types. In 2015, operations classified as dairy and milk had of the most favourable expense-to-receipt ratio at 0.75, a deterioration from 0.73 in 2010.

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

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

Census Day was May 10, 2016. Farmers were asked to report their receipts and expenses for the last complete fiscal or calendar year (2015).

## Other agriculture highlights in Alberta

- In Alberta, 4.7% of farms reported having renewable energy producing systems in 2015, compared with 5.3% of farms nationally.
- In Alberta, 24.8% of farms were incorporated in 2016, up from 17.6% in 2011. Nationally, incorporated farms accounted for 25.1% of the total farms in 2016.
- The 2016 Census of Agriculture marked the first time farm operators were asked to report whether they had a written succession plan. In 2016, 8.5% of farms in Alberta had a written succession plan compared with 8.4% nationally.
- The proportion of farms producing organic products in Alberta edged up 0.2 percentage points to 1.0% in 2016. Nationally, farms producing organic products accounted for 2.2% of all farms in Canada in 2016.

- In Alberta, 25.7% of farms reported using automated steering technology in 2015.
- In Alberta, 5.1% of farms reported selling agricultural products directly to consumers in 2015.
- The value of the land and buildings per acre in Alberta increased 26.5% (in 2016 constant dollars) from 2011 to \$2,354 in 2016. At the national level, this value was \$2,696 per acre.

## **Canada 150: Farming in Alberta**

Alberta joined Confederation on September 1, 1905. In 1911, the first census year in which the province of Alberta was included, there were 60,559 farms reported, 17.4 million acres of farm land and 739,725 cattle. In 2016, agricultural producers reported 50.3 million acres of farm land and 5.2 million cattle, seven times more than in 1911.

Statistics Canada would like to thank the farming community of Alberta for their participation and assistance in the 2016 Census of Agriculture.



**Census farm:** An operation is considered a census farm (agricultural operation) if it produces at least one of the following products intended for sale:

- crops: hay, field crops, tree fruits or nuts, berries or grapes, vegetables, seed;
- livestock: cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, game animals, other livestock;
- poultry: hens, chickens, turkeys, chicks, game birds, other poultry;
- animal products: milk or cream, eggs, wool, furs, meat;
- other agricultural products: Christmas trees, sod, greenhouse or nursery products, mushrooms, honey or bees, maple syrup and its products.

The data for Yukon and the Northwest Territories are not included in the national totals because of the different definition of an agricultural operation in the territories and confidentiality constraints. The data for Yukon and the Northwest Territories are presented separately.

**Farm type:** 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 receipts 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 receipts 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 2012 North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS).

**P.T.O. hp (Power Take Off horsepower):** The measure of the power available from a tractor engine to drive implements.

**Gross farm receipts:** The Census of Agriculture measures gross farm receipts for the calendar or accounting year prior to the census. Gross farm receipts (before deducting expenses) in this analysis include:

- receipts from all agricultural products sold;
- program payments and custom work receipts.

The following are not included in gross farm receipts:

- sales of forestry products (for example: firewood, pulpwood, logs, fence posts and pilings);
- sales of capital items (for example: quota, land, machinery);
- receipts from the sale of any goods purchased only for retail sales.

**Total operating expenses:** The Census of Agriculture measures operating expenses 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, etc.).

The following are not included in total operating expenses:

- the purchase of land, buildings or equipment;
- 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.

**2010 to 2015:** 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.

**Farm operator:** According to the census, a farm operator is any person responsible for the management decisions made for an agricultural operation as of May 10, 2016.

## Contact information

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](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).