

Canadian Agriculture at a Glance

Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait

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Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait

by **Nicolas Gauthier** and **Julia White**

Aboriginal peoples have a history of agriculture that goes back many centuries, long before the arrival of Europeans on the land that today includes Canada. Very little data, or for that matter analysis, on Aboriginal peoples and agriculture has been published. This article represents Statistics Canada's first attempt at filling this gap.

One of the key products from the 2016 Census of Agriculture is the Agriculture–Population Linkage Database, a rich source of information on the socioeconomic characteristics of the agricultural population, which is defined as all persons who live in agricultural households. By linking farm-level data from the Census of Agriculture to individuals in the Census of Population, a portrait emerges of Aboriginal peoples and agriculture.

It should be noted that Aboriginal history has been marked by government policies that affected Aboriginal access to farmland, tools and markets.¹ The recent statistics, then, should be viewed with this history in mind.

Strong growth in the number of Aboriginal people in the agricultural population

In 2016, of the 592,975 people in the agricultural population, 15,765 individuals (2.7%) self-identified as Aboriginal. By comparison, Aboriginal people accounted for 4.9% of Canada's total population.

Métis (10,960) represented the largest group of Aboriginal people living in agricultural households in 2016, accounting for 69.5% of the total (Table 1). In addition, 4,135 First Nations people and 115 Inuit were part of the agricultural population.

Table 1
Agricultural population and total population by Aboriginal identity, Canada, 2016

Aboriginal identity categories	Agricultural population	Total population	Agricultural population	Total population
	number		percent ¹	
Total Aboriginal population	15,765	1,673,785	100.0	100.0
First Nations	4,135	977,230	26.2	58.4
Métis	10,960	587,545	69.5	35.1
Inuit	115	65,025	0.7	3.9
Multiple Aboriginal identities	300	21,310	1.9	1.3
Aboriginal identities not included elsewhere	255	22,670	1.6	1.4

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

Source: Statistics Canada, Agriculture–Population Linkage Data, 2016.

Nationally, the number of Aboriginal people in the agricultural population in 2016 was 21.4% higher than in 1996, the first year in which comparable data were collected. During the same period, the total agricultural population fell 39.3%.

Several factors may have contributed to the increase in the number of Aboriginal people in the agricultural population. One may be that greater numbers of Aboriginal people chose agricultural careers.

Two other factors likely played a role as well. The first is relatively high natural growth in the Aboriginal population, while the second is changes in self-reported identification. More people are newly identifying as Aboriginal on the Census of Population, continuing a trend over time.²

1. For example, the *Indian Act* (1876) and its amendments prohibited First Nations homesteading and restricted the sale of First Nations agricultural products.

2. Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*. Published in *The Daily*, Wednesday, October 25, 2017.

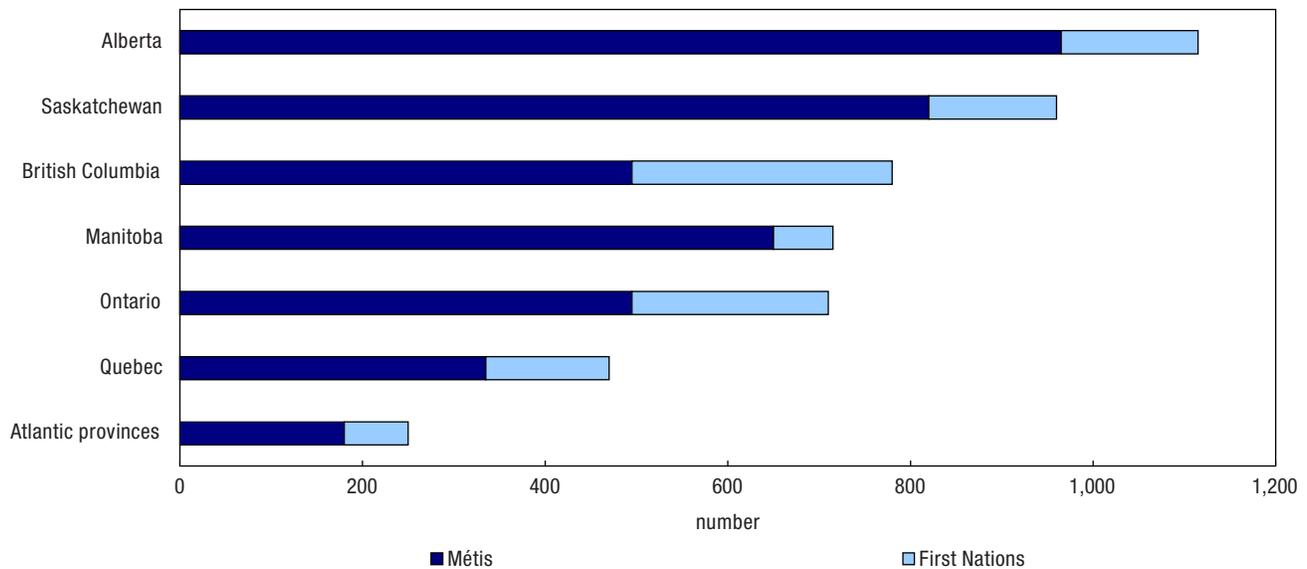
Aboriginal farm operators increase in number

In 2016, Aboriginal agricultural operators represented 5,160 (1.9%) of the 270,720 agricultural operators in Canada. The number of Aboriginal agricultural operators in 2016 increased 53.7% compared with 1996. In contrast, the total number of agricultural operators declined 30.1% over the same time period.

Of the 3,940 agricultural operators who self-identified as Métis, the largest number (965) farmed in Alberta, followed by those in Saskatchewan (820) and Manitoba (650) (Chart 1 and Map 1). Métis made up more than half of Aboriginal agricultural operators in all regions (Chart 1).

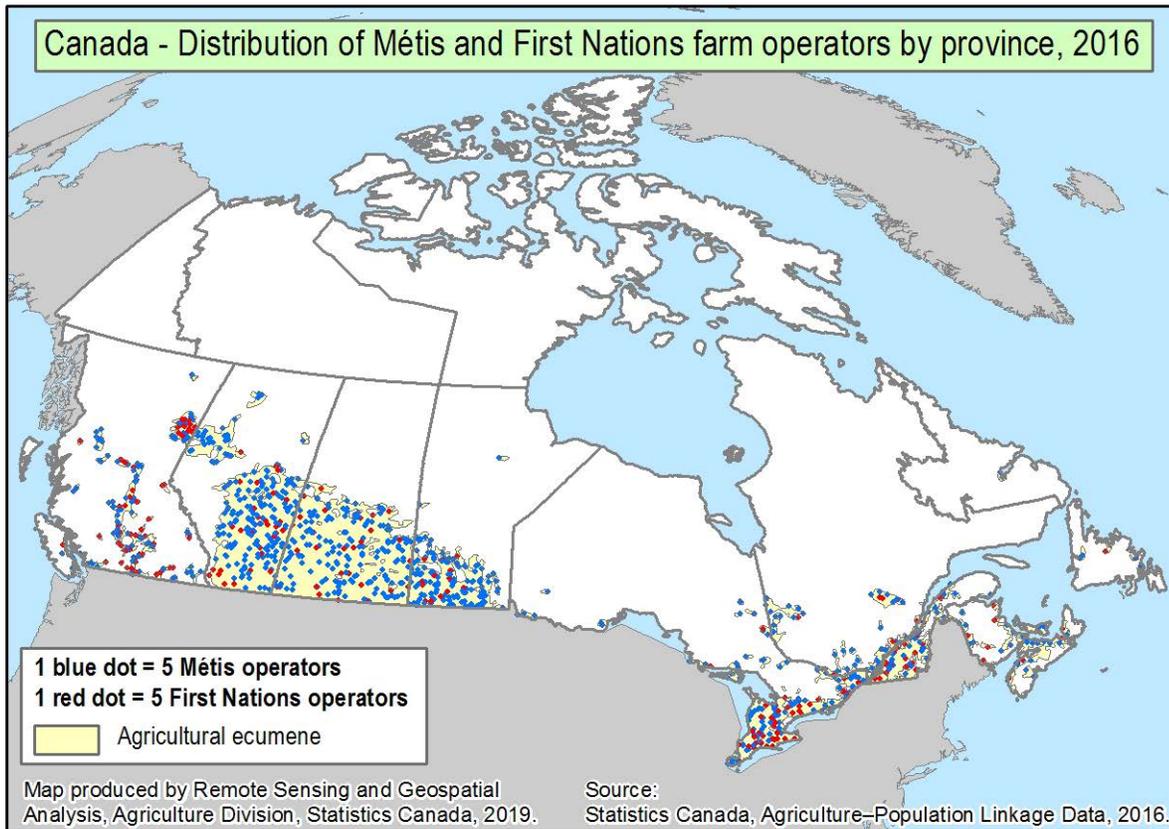
Among all agricultural operators, 1,060 self-identified as First Nations in 2016. British Columbia (285) had the largest number of First Nations agricultural operators, followed by Ontario (215) and Alberta (150) (Chart 1 and Map 1).

Chart 1
Number of Métis and First Nations farm operators by province, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Agriculture–Population Linkage Data, 2016.

Map 1



Métis farm operators focus on beef cattle

On average, Métis agricultural operators were 52.3 years old in 2016, younger than their non-Aboriginal counterparts whose average age was 55.0. Women accounted for 33.3% of Métis farm operators, compared with 28.6% of non-Aboriginal agricultural operators.

At the Canada level, 76.0% of Métis agricultural operators reported English as their first language, while 22.1% reported French. In all regions, Métis agricultural operators were more likely than non-Aboriginal farmers to speak French as a first language.

Across Canada, Métis were involved in managing 3,510 agricultural operations in 2016. Beef cattle farming was the most common farm type, representing 24.2% of Métis-managed operations (Chart 2). Another 23.2% were mainly involved in 'other crop farming' (see text box).

Agricultural operations managed by Métis had a median size of 210 acres, compared with 225 acres for agricultural operations managed by non-Aboriginal operators. The median gross farm revenue from Métis agricultural operations was \$26,528, or 38.4% of the median gross farm revenue of non-Aboriginal agricultural operations (\$69,000).

These discrepancies were partly due to Métis agricultural operators being underrepresented in higher-revenue sectors, such as dairy farming. Another factor is that Métis agricultural operators (56.1%) were more likely to have off-farm employment than non-Aboriginal operators (44.3%). When agricultural operators combine farming with off-farm work, farm revenues tend to be lower.

Key facts

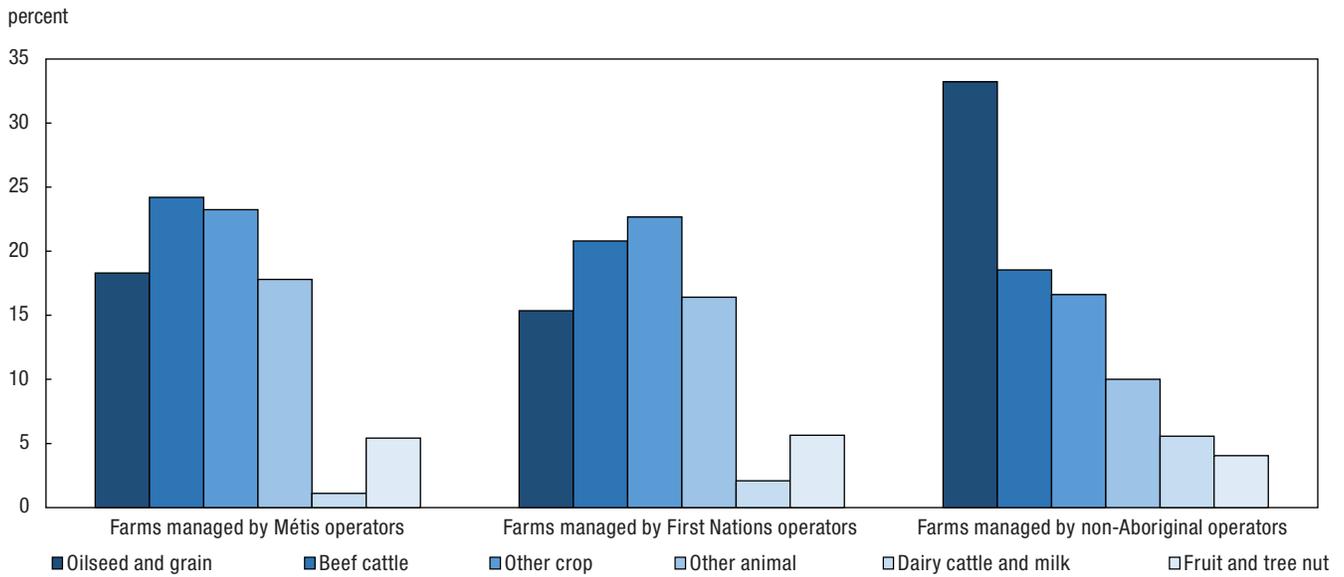
The Métis farm operator in 2016:

- Average age: 52.3
- Average total income: \$59,126
- Marital status:
 - ▶ Married (73.7%)
 - ▶ Living common law (9.6%)
 - ▶ Never married (not living common law) (8.2%)
- Average household size: 2.9 persons
- Highest level of education completed:
 - ▶ High school (28.2%)
 - ▶ College (23.2%)
 - ▶ Trades qualification (18.5%)
 - ▶ No diploma (17.4%)
 - ▶ University (12.7%)
- Top three major fields of study:
 - ▶ Business (13.7%)
 - ▶ Mechanic and repair technologies (12.5%)
 - ▶ Health professions (11.0%)
- Employed off-farm: 56.1%
- Top three farm types:
 - ▶ Beef cattle (24.2%)
 - ▶ Other crop (23.2%)
 - ▶ Oilseed and grain (18.3%)
- Rural farm: 92.3%

More details on farm operators can be found in the [2016 Agriculture–Population Linkage Data](#).

Other crop farming: This farm type includes establishments, not classified in any other group, that are primarily engaged in growing crops such as hay, sugar beets, ginseng, tobacco, herbs and spices, hemp, and hops. Combination crop farming and harvesting maple sap are included in this category.

Chart 2
Selected farm types classified by farm operator identity, Canada, 2016



Note: Farm type is based on the major source of farm receipts.
Source: Statistics Canada, Agriculture–Population Linkage Data, 2016.

First Nations farm operators more likely to be women

Women made up 36.8% of First Nations agricultural operators, compared with 28.6% of non-Aboriginal agricultural operators.

English was reported as the first language by 79.4% of First Nations agricultural operators, followed by 14.5% who reported French and 4.2% who reported an Aboriginal first language. Multiple first languages were reported by 2.0% of First Nations operators.

Among the 960 agricultural operations managed by First Nations people, 'other crop farming', representing 22.7%, was the most common type of agriculture practised (Chart 2). Beef cattle production was the main activity of another 21.1%.

Agricultural operations managed by First Nations people had a median area of 151 acres, or about two-thirds the size of operations managed by non-Aboriginal persons. The median gross farm revenue of First Nations agricultural operations was \$18,000, or about one-quarter of the revenue of farms managed by non-Aboriginal operators.

These differences are partly explained by the concentration of First Nations agricultural operators in British Columbia, where it is more common to find small agricultural operations that focus on specialty crops, such as berries. It is notable, as well, that First Nations operators were more likely to be 'part-time' farmers. In 2016, 60.8% of First Nations agricultural operators worked at an off-farm job or business.

Conclusion

Aboriginal people represented one of the few growing sectors of the agricultural population in 2016, posting large increases even as the total agricultural population declined. Compared with non-Aboriginal farm operators, Aboriginal farm operators were more likely to be female, and were more likely to combine farming with off-farm paid employment. More research on Aboriginal peoples and agriculture remains to be done, particularly on the subject of Aboriginal access to agricultural land.

Note to readers

The Aboriginal population is defined in this article using the concept of [Aboriginal identity](#).

Please refer to the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](#), for additional information on the census variables.

In the 2016 Census, enumeration was not permitted, was interrupted before it could be completed or was considered inadequate for 14 Indian reserves or Indian settlements. These geographic areas are called 'incompletely enumerated.'

Data for census farms located on these incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements are not available. The impact of the missing data is very small for higher-level geographic areas (Canada, provinces, and census agricultural regions). However, the impact is more

Key facts

The First Nations farm operator in 2016:

- Average age: 52.3
- Average total income: \$45,111
- Marital status:
 - ▶ Married (61.7%)
 - ▶ Common law (17.4%)
 - ▶ Never married (not living common law) (11.6%)
- Average household size: 2.9 persons
- Highest level of education completed:
 - ▶ High school (28.7%)
 - ▶ College (20.8%)
 - ▶ No diploma (20.1%)
 - ▶ Trades qualification (14.2%)
 - ▶ University (16.2%)
- Top three major fields of study:
 - ▶ Business (14.4%)
 - ▶ Mechanic and repair technologies (9.8%)
 - ▶ Health professions (9.6%)
- Employed off-farm: 60.8%
- Registered or Treaty Indian: 50.9 %
- Top two Aboriginal mother tongues:
 - ▶ Blackfoot (1.2%)
 - ▶ Ojibway (0.8%)
- Top three farm types:
 - ▶ Other crop (22.7%)
 - ▶ Beef cattle (20.8%)
 - ▶ Oilseed and grain (16.4%)
- Rural farm: 87.3%

More details on farm operators can be found in the [2016 Agriculture–Population Linkage Data](#).

significant for those smaller areas (census divisions and census consolidated subdivisions) in which the affected reserves and settlements are located.

For a listing of the names and locations of the 14 incompletely enumerated Indian reserves and Indian settlements, please refer to [Incompletely enumerated Indian reserves and Indian settlements](#).

Data for agricultural operations located in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are not included in national totals because of the different definition of an agricultural operation in those regions and because of confidentiality constraints. [Collective dwellings](#) are excluded.

Terms

Agricultural household: a household which includes at least one agricultural operator.

Agricultural operation: any operation that produces agricultural products intended for sale.

Agricultural operation managed by First Nations people: agricultural operation of which at least one operator self-identifies as First Nations.

Agricultural operation managed by Métis: agricultural operation of which at least one operator self-identifies as Métis.

Agricultural operation managed by non-Aboriginal people: agricultural operation of which all operators self-identify as non-Aboriginal.

Agricultural operator: an individual responsible for the management decisions of an agricultural operation.

Farm (agricultural) population: Farm population refers to farm operators and the individuals in their households.

Farm type: Farm type is established through a procedure that classifies each agricultural operation 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 Census of Agriculture and determining the product or group of products that makes up the majority of the estimated receipts. For example, an agricultural operation 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 based on the 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Other animal production: This industry group comprises establishments, not classified to any other industry group, primarily engaged in raising animals, such as bees, horses and other equines, rabbits and other fur-bearing animals, llamas or deer. The production of animal products, such as honey and other bee products, are also included. Establishments primarily engaged in raising a combination of animals, with no one predominating, are also included in this industry group.