

Status of Agricultural Land in Wyoming

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural lands are an important part of the landscape in Wyoming. The 2002 Census of Agriculture (2004) estimates that there were 34.4 million acres of land in agricultural production in Wyoming. This represented nearly 55 percent of the total surface area in the state. Agricultural lands are particularly important in terms of privately owned lands in Wyoming. The Equality State Almanac (2004) indicates that there were 27.1 million acres of private land in Wyoming in 2002. The Wyoming Department of Revenue's 2002 Annual Report indicates that 25.6 million acres of land is taxed as agricultural land in the state. Since land classified as agricultural for tax purposes is presumably privately owned this suggests that agricultural land represents more than 94 percent of total private land in the state.

Agricultural lands are, of course, important in terms of agricultural production. In 2001 agricultural lands in Wyoming produced 652.7 million pounds of beef, 31.2 million pounds of sheep and lamb, 3.0 million bushels of wheat, 7.0 million bushels of barley, 6.4 million bushels of corn, and 1.9 million tons of hay. This agricultural production represented \$1.1 billion of gross income to Wyoming (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). It also represented \$185.6 million in net farm income and \$74.3 million in hired farm labor earnings. This income and earnings supported 12,345 agricultural jobs and affected over 11,000 households and more than 24,000 individuals in the state. While Wyoming probably wouldn't be considered a "bread basket" in terms of agricultural production it does rank among the top 25 states for production of 14 agricultural commodities (Wyoming Agricultural Statistics, 2005). The State also ranks number 1 in terms of average size of agricultural enterprises and number 8 in terms of total land in agriculture.

Agricultural lands have been traditionally viewed primarily as a source of food and fiber. Perhaps less well known is the other important product that agricultural land provides – open space. Open space offers landscapes, lifestyles, and wildlife habitats that are highly valued in Wyoming. Open space is particularly important because it determines the character of the land surrounding our communities. Out of economic necessity, most commercial agricultural operations in Wyoming are based on large land areas. Thus agricultural lands are an important source of open spaces in Wyoming, particularly on private lands.

There are numerous examples of the importance of maintaining open space. In a recent survey conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Wyoming for the Wyoming Department of Agriculture it was found that 97 percent of Wyoming residents consider agriculture important to their quality of life (Survey Research Center, 2002). In neighboring Steamboat Springs, Colorado, Rosenberger et al (1994) found residents were willing to pay an average of \$226 per household annually to protect rangeland open space. They also found that rangeland open space ranked second only to the natural environment in terms of contribution of natural and man-made assets to the enjoyment of living in the area. In a related study Walsh et al (1994) found that the loss of rangeland open space would result in an annual direct loss of \$12.3 million in summer visitor

expenditures for Steamboat Springs. They also found that ranchland open space generated a total annual benefit of \$3.9 to \$9.8 million to current summer visitors to Steamboat Springs.

Coupal et al (2004) found that 56 percent of yearlong and 44 percent of winter big game habitat in Wyoming is located on private land. As note above, the vast majority of private land in Wyoming is in agricultural use. The authors estimate that private land (i.e. primarily agricultural land) supported more than \$58 million in hunter expenditures in Wyoming in 2000 or just under 50 percent of the total. In a related study Coupal et al (2002) found that on average across Wyoming, converting 35 acres of agricultural land to residential use creates \$1.13 in county government and school district expense for every dollar of revenue. Thus the fiscal implications to local governments from the conversion of agricultural to residential development are another important aspect of maintaining agricultural land in open space.

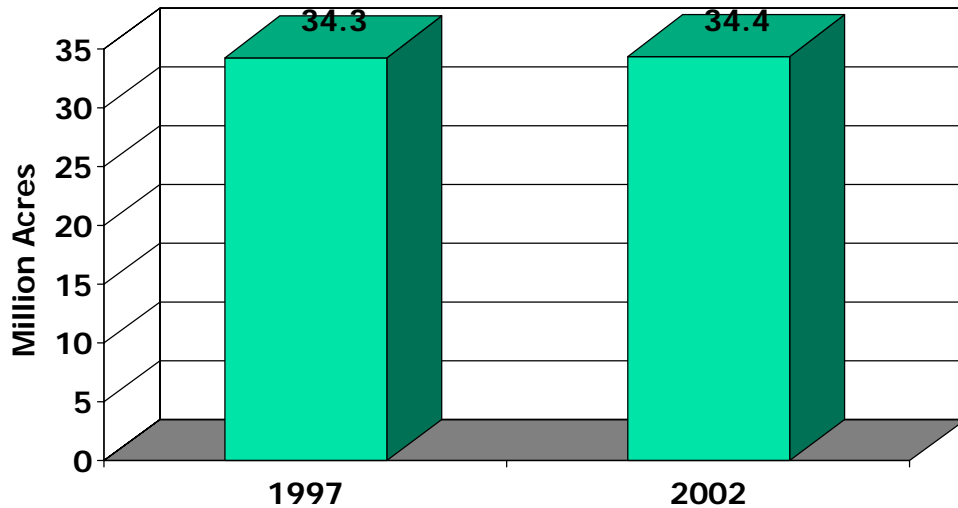
The conversion of agricultural land is a concern in Wyoming. The American Farmland Trust (AFT) has estimated that 2.6 million acres of “prime” ranchland in Wyoming could be converted to residential development over the next 20 years. The AFT defines “prime” ranchland as high quality land with desirable wildlife characteristics including proximity to publicly owned land, year-round water, mixed grass and tree cover, and a variety of vegetation. The AFT identified five counties in Wyoming that are among the top 25 in the Rocky Mountain region in terms of acres of prime ranchland that could potentially be converted in the next 20 years. The five counties include: Sublette (336,000 acres), Park (334,080 acres), Uinta (315,520 acres), Big Horn (308,480 acres), and Fremont (296,960 acres).

Gosnell et al (2005) document over 609,000 acres of ranch sales (>400 acres) between 1990 and 2001 in four Wyoming counties in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (Fremont, Lincoln, Park, and Sublette). Less than 30 percent of these sales were to traditional ranchers. The remainder of the sales went to nontraditional buyers including amenity purchasers, investors, developers, part-time ranchers, corporations, conservation organizations, and others. In some cases the authors found that almost half of the large agricultural operations in a county had changed hands in the 1990s. The authors note that the long-term plans of these nontraditional buyers for the purchased land is unknown. This leads to uncertainty regarding the future role that these agricultural lands will play in land use in Wyoming.

Because of its importance there is a great deal of interest in the status of agricultural land in Wyoming. The 2002 Census of Agriculture for Wyoming provides insight into the status of agricultural land in the state. This paper attempts to summarize some of the major findings from the 2002 Census. In most cases, the results from the 2002 Census are compared with the 1997 Census to determine trends in agricultural land in Wyoming.

ACRES OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Figure 1. Acres of Agricultural Land in Wyoming

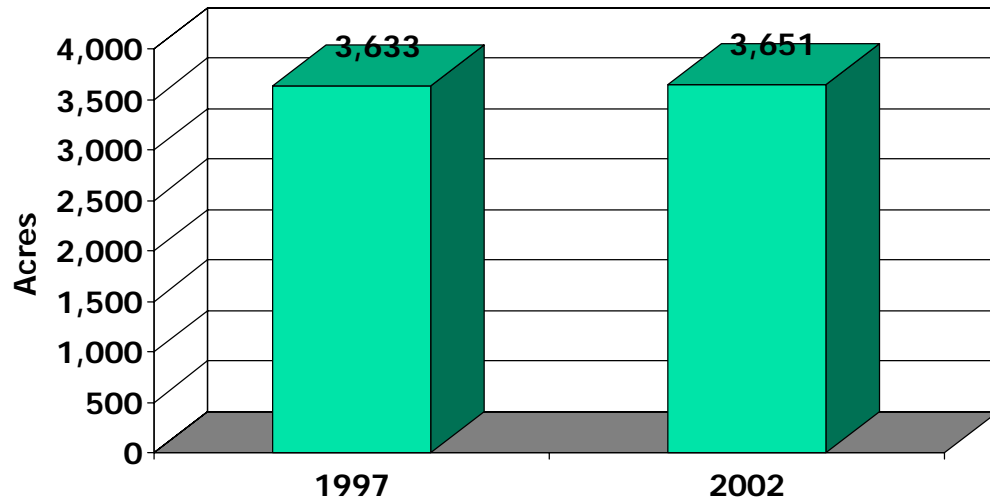


Summary:

- The 2002 Census of Agriculture estimates that there were 34.4 million acres of land in agricultural production in Wyoming. This total includes private, state, and some federal lands.
- In 2002 land in agricultural production represented nearly 55 percent of the total surface area in the state (62.7 million acres).
- In terms of private land, land classified as agricultural for tax purposes (25.6 million acres) represented more than 94 percent of the total private land in Wyoming (27.1 million acres).
- The total number of acres in agricultural production in Wyoming in 2002 was essentially unchanged from 1997 (1997 = 34.3 million acres vs. 2002 = 34.4 million acres).
- Due to the large number of acres involved and their relative location, how agricultural lands are managed has important implications for the Wyoming landscape.

AVERAGE SIZE

Figure 2. Average Size of Farms/Ranches in Wyoming

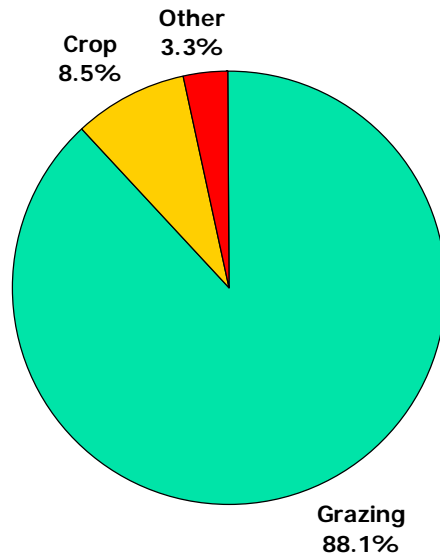


Summary:

- In 2002 the average size of a farm/ranch in Wyoming was 3,651 acres.
- Wyoming had the largest average size of agricultural enterprise of any state in 2002. The Wyoming average was more than eight times the national average for the U.S. (441 acres). The Wyoming average was also substantially higher than most other rangeland states in the western U.S. such as Montana (2,139 acres), Nevada (2,118 acres), and New Mexico (2,945 acres). The only state that had a comparable average size of enterprise was Arizona (3,645 acres).
- The average size of a farm/ranch in Wyoming in 2002 was essentially unchanged from 1997 (1997 = 3,633 acres vs. 2002 = 3,651 acres).
- The large size of Wyoming agricultural enterprises suggests that they can be an important source of large blocks of land for wildlife habitat and other open space benefits.

AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

Figure 3. Agricultural Land Use in Wyoming, 2002

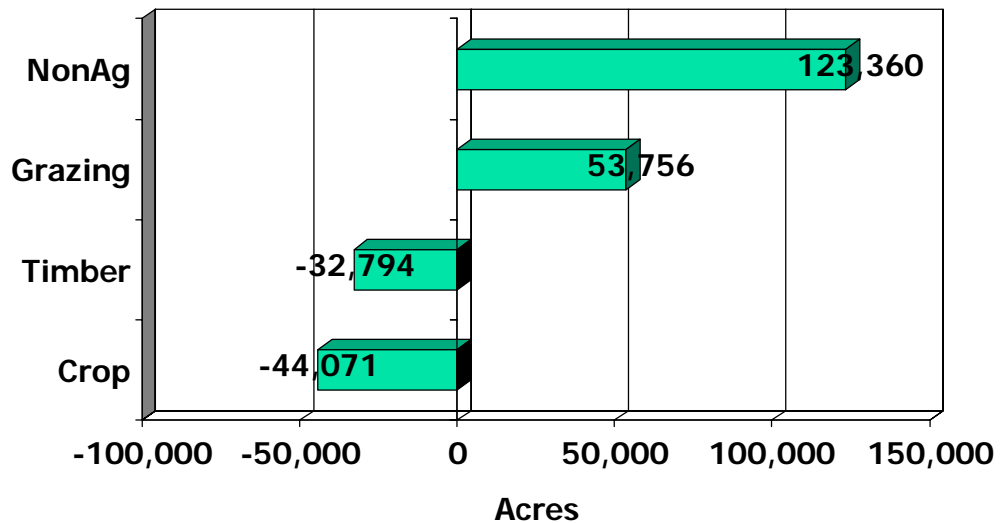


Summary:

- Nearly 90 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming is grazing land (30.2 million acres).
- Cropland represents about 9 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (3.0 million acres).
- The “Other” classification includes woodlands and non-agricultural land (1.2 million acres). Non-agricultural lands include house lots, ponds, roads, wastelands and other lands that are not used in agricultural production.
- The fact that most agricultural land in Wyoming is grazing land supports the notion that agricultural lands in the state are an important source of wildlife habitat.

CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

Figure 4. Change in Wyoming Agricultural Land Use 1997 to 2002

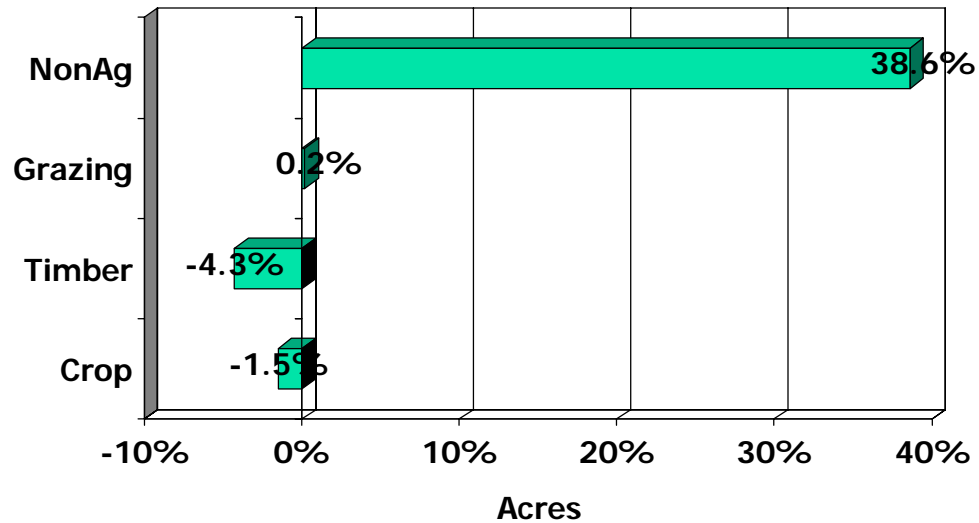


Summary:

- Although there was little change in the total number of land in agricultural production in Wyoming between 1997 and 2002, there were some shifts in how the agricultural lands in the state is used.
- In particular, there was a 123,360 acres increase in non-agriculture land use (house lots, ponds, roads, wasteland, etc.). There was also a small increase in agricultural grazing lands (53,756 acres).
- On the other hand, there small decreases for agricultural land in cropland (-44,071) and woodland (-32,794).
- Overall, these changes represent only small changes in total agricultural acreage in Wyoming. But they may indicate a shift in management emphasis.

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

Figure 5. Percent Change in Wyoming Agricultural Land Use 1997 to 2002

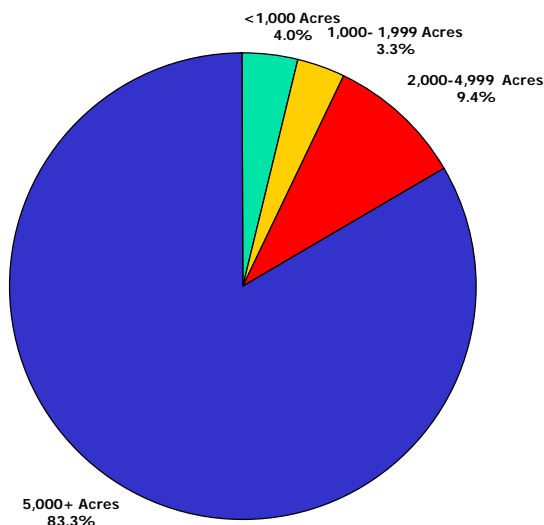


Summary:

- Most of the shifts in agricultural land use in the state were a small percentage of the total for the state (Grazing = +0.2 percent, Timber = -4.3 percent, Crop -1.5%).
- However, on a percentage basis the increase in agricultural land in non-agricultural use (house lots, ponds, roads, wasteland, etc.) was relatively large (+38.5%).
- This increase in non-production acres may reflect a shift away from the traditional management emphasis on agricultural production to a more non-traditional management emphasis such as amenity and lifestyle for some landowners in Wyoming.

DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND BY SIZE

Figure 6. Distribution of Agricultural Land by Farm/Ranch Size for Wyoming, 2002

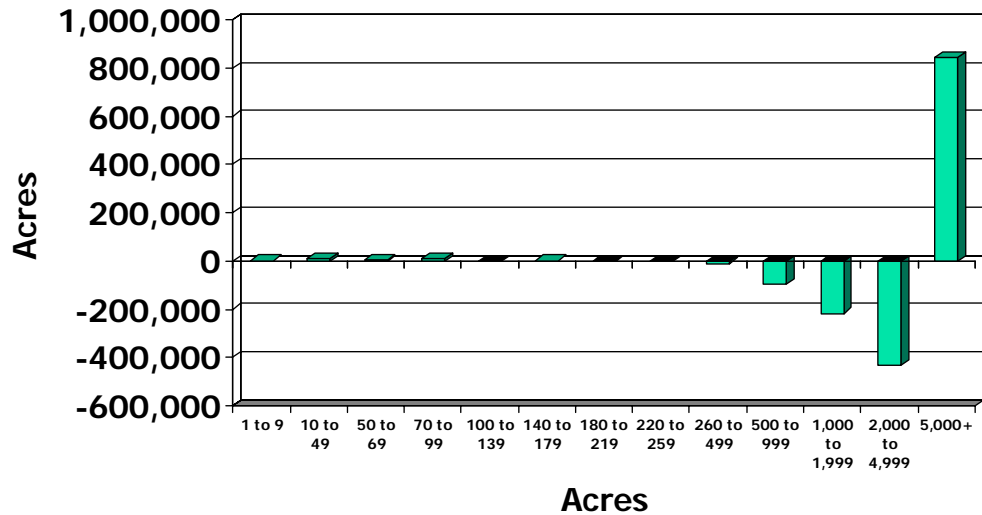


Summary:

- Most of the agricultural land in Wyoming is held in agricultural operations of 5,000 or more acres (28.7 million acres).
- Of the remaining acres, nearly 10 percent of the land is in agricultural operations of 2,000 to 4,999 acres (3.2 million acres), with about 3 percent in operations of 1,000 to 1,999 acres (1.1 million acres), and 4 percent in operations of less than 1,000 acres (1.4 million acres).
- The large size of agricultural operations in Wyoming is reflected in the fact that the average size for operations of 5,000 acres or more is over 20,000 acres. This indicates the scale necessary to be an economically viable agricultural operation in the extensive agricultural production systems found in Wyoming. It also suggests that agriculture is an important source of large blocks of mostly privately owned and perhaps contiguous land for wildlife habitat and other open space considerations.
- In comparison, the average size for agricultural operations in Wyoming that are less than 1,000 acres in size is 220 acres.

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND BY SIZE

Figure 7. Change in Agricultural Land by Farms/Ranches Size in Wyoming, 1997 to 2002

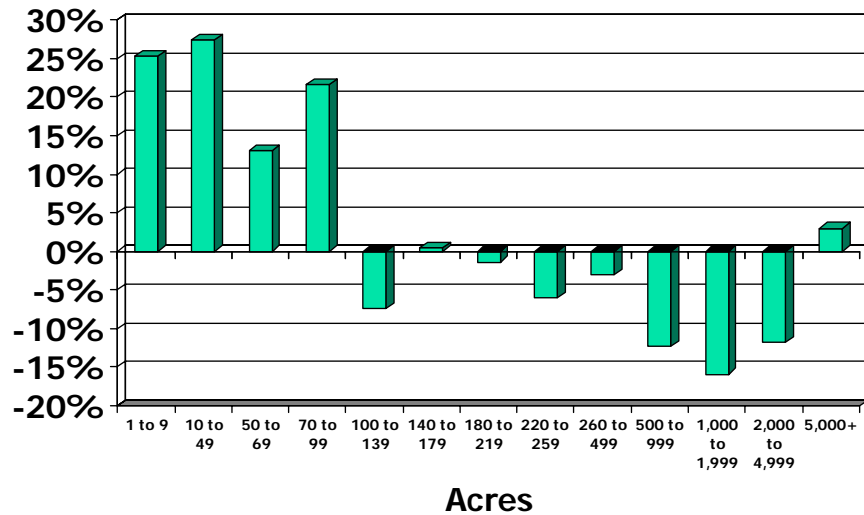


Summary:

- The 2002 Census of Agriculture data suggests two trends in agricultural land ownership in Wyoming between 1997 and 2002.
- One was a large (800,000+ acres) increase in land in agricultural enterprises of 5,000 acres or more. This may represent a consolidation of commercial agricultural enterprises into larger more economically viable units. In some cases it also may reflect consolidation by amenity buyers seeking privacy and protection of their property (Travis et al).
- The second trend was a smaller increase of nearly 20,000 acres in land in agricultural enterprises of less than 100 acres. This may reflect a fragmentation of agricultural lands into smaller non-commercial/lifestyle based enterprises.
- These changes were offset by a 764,000 acres decrease in land in agricultural enterprises of 100 to 4,999 acres. Most of this decrease was in the 500 to 4,999 acre enterprises with over 400,000 coming from the 2,000 to 4,999 acre enterprises.

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY SIZE

Figure 8. Percent Change in Agricultural Land by Farms/Ranches Size in Wyoming, 1997-2002

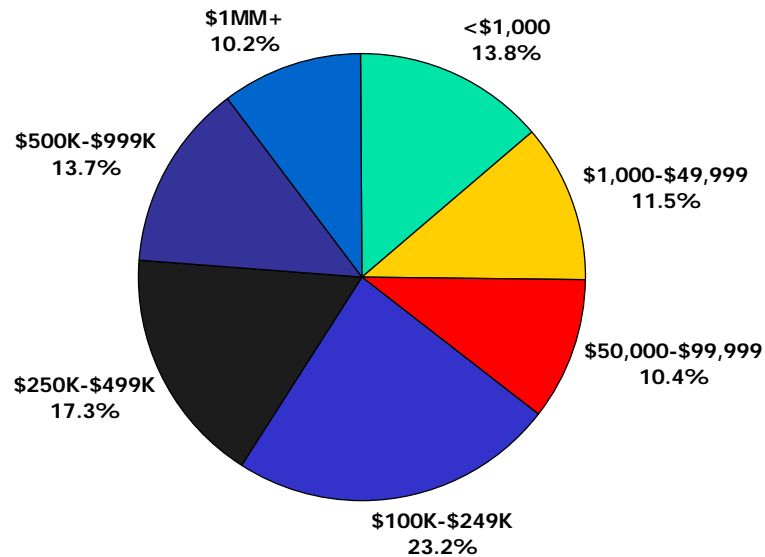


Summary:

- From a percentage basis, the Census of Agriculture paints a very different picture of the change in agricultural land ownership in Wyoming between 1997 and 2002.
- The large increase in the acres in agricultural enterprises of 5,000 acres or more between 1997 and 2002 represents only a 3 percent increase in this size category.
- The smaller increase in the acres in agricultural enterprises of less than 100 acres between 1997 and 2002 represents a 22 percent increase in this size category, with the 10 to 49 acre size category increasing by over 27 percent.
- The decrease in acres in agricultural enterprises between 100 and 4,999 acres represents a 12 percent decrease in this size category, with the 1,000 to 1,999 acre size category decreasing by nearly 16 percent.
- These results indicate that while agricultural enterprises of less than 100 acres represent only a small portion of the total agricultural land in Wyoming, they are the fastest growing size category.

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY GROSS SALES

Figure 9. Distribution of Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Gross Sales Per Farm/Ranch, 2002

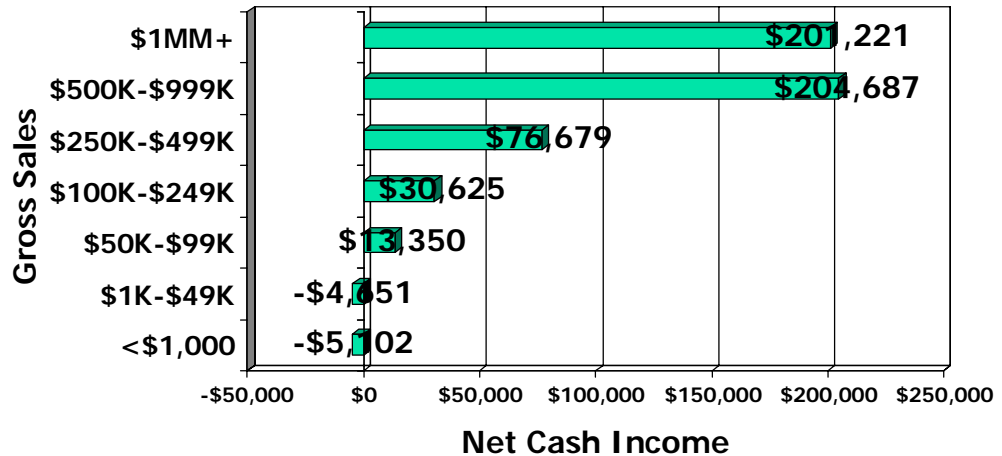


Summary:

- The percentage of agricultural land in Wyoming by gross sales per enterprise is fairly evenly distributed. The largest is the \$100,000 to \$249,999 gross sales category, which represents slightly more than 23 percent of the total acres. The smallest is the \$1 million or more category, which represents slightly more than 10 percent of the total acres.
- If \$100,000 were considered the minimum gross sales necessary to support a commercial agricultural enterprise in Wyoming, it would mean that nearly two-thirds of the agricultural land in Wyoming is in commercial agricultural enterprises (22.1 million acres).
- If \$50,000 to \$99,999 in gross sales represents part-time agricultural enterprises in Wyoming, it would mean that about 10 percent of the land is in part-time agricultural enterprises (3.6 million acres).
- Under this typology, the remaining one-fourth of the land with gross sales of less than \$50,000 might be considered non-commercial/lifestyle enterprises (8.7 million acres).

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY NET CASH INCOME

Figure 10. Average Net Cash Income by Gross Sales for Wyoming Farms/Ranches, 2002

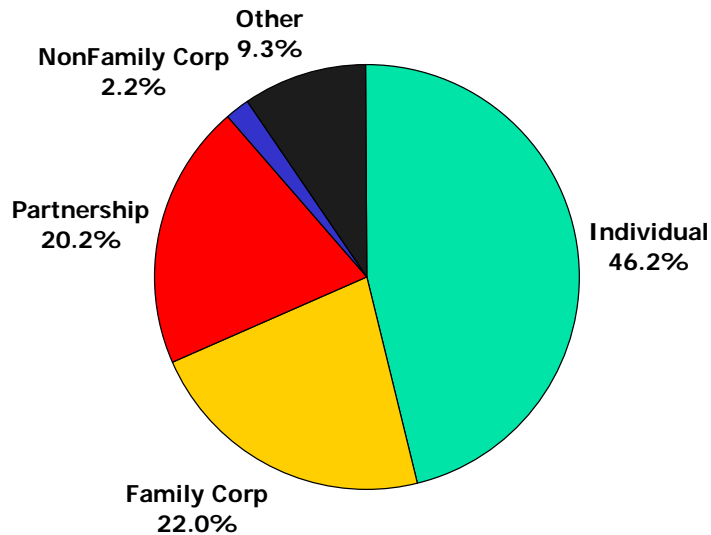


Summary:

- Following the classifications suggested on the previous page, commercial agricultural enterprises (Gross Sales = \$100,000 or more) in Wyoming would have had an average net cash income of between \$30,625 and \$204,687 in 2002.
- Similarly, part-time agricultural enterprises (Gross Sales = \$50,000 to \$99,999) in Wyoming would have had an average net cash income of \$13,350 in 2002.
- Finally, noncommercial/lifestyle agricultural enterprises (Gross Sales = Less than \$50,000) in Wyoming would have had average net cash income of between -\$4,051 and -\$5,102 in 2002.
- It is important to note that for an average commercial agricultural operation in Wyoming, the net cash income for 2002 represented a return of between 1.4 and 4.6 percent of the estimated market value of land and buildings.
- The results indicated that 22.1 million acres of agricultural land in Wyoming was in enterprises where the average net income in 2002 was more than \$30,000 per year. This may suggest some degree of economic viability for these enterprises.

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY BUSINESS TYPE

Figure 11. Agricultural Land Ownership in Wyoming by Business Type, 2002

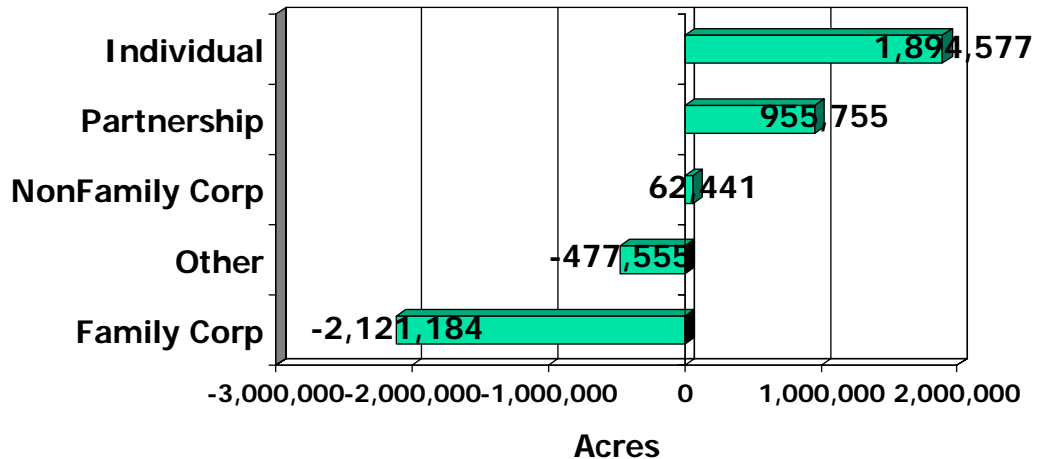


Summary:

- Individuals, family held corporations, and partnerships manage more than 88 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (30.4 million acres). Individuals (sole proprietors) are the largest category of business type representing nearly one-half of the total acres in the state. Family held corporations and partnerships both manage about 20 percent of the total acres.
- Non-family corporations manage only slightly more than 2 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (about 765,000 acres).
- Other business types manage about 9 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (3.2 million acres). Other business types include cooperatives, estates/trust, institutional owners, etc.
- The results indicate that traditional corporations own only a small portion of the agricultural land in Wyoming.

CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY BUSINESS TYPE

Figure 12. Change in Agricultural Land Ownership in Wyoming by Business Type, 1997 to 2002

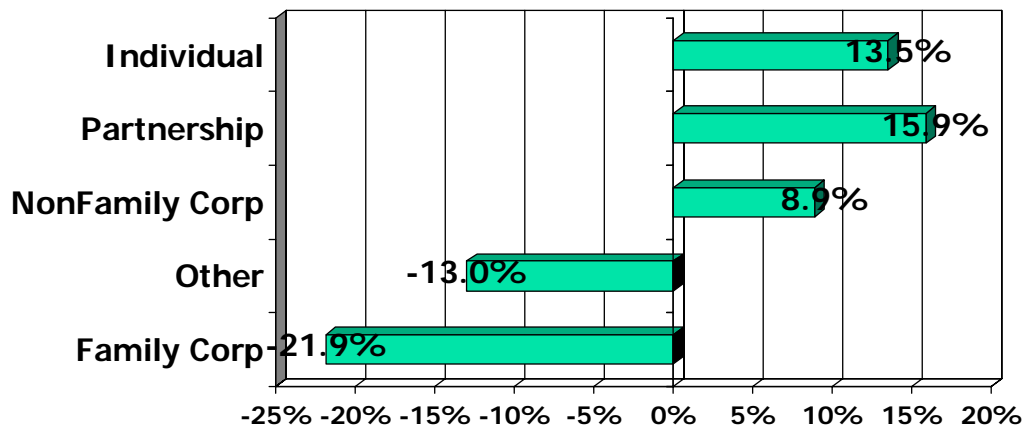


Summary:

- The acres of agricultural land in Wyoming managed by individuals (sole proprietors) increased by nearly 2 million acres between 1997 and 2002.
- The acres of agricultural land in Wyoming managed by partnerships increased by nearly 1 million acres between 1997 and 2002.
- The acres managed by non-family corporations increased slightly (+62,000 acres), while the acres managed by other business types (cooperatives, estates/trusts, institutional owner, etc.) declined by nearly 500,000 acres.
- There was also a large decrease in the acres managed by family held corporations. This type of business organization decreased by 2.1 million acres between 1997 and 2002. While the cause of this decrease is unclear, it may reflect a fairly significant change in ownership of agricultural land in Wyoming between 1997 and 2002. This assumes that a change in business organization also reflects a change in ownership.

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY BUSINESS TYPE

Figure 13. Percent Change in Agricultural Land Ownership in Wyoming by Business Type, 1997 to 2002

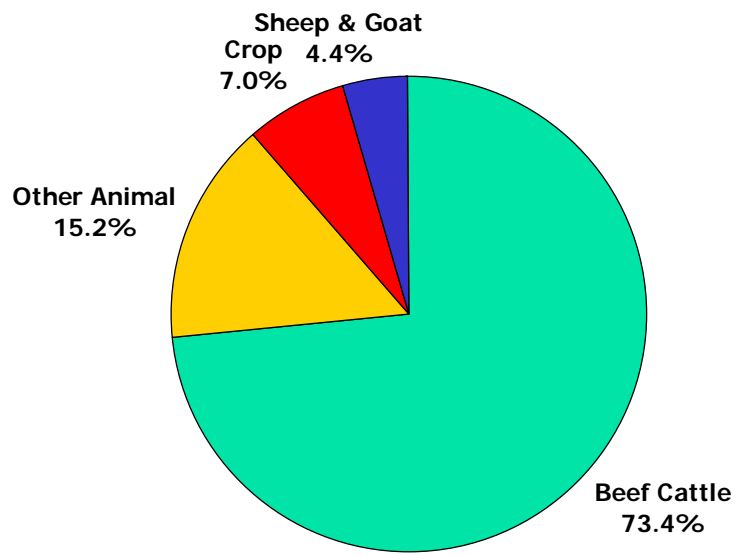


Summary:

- On a percent basis the fastest growing type of business organization in terms of acres of agricultural land in Wyoming was partnerships (+15.9%). Following partnerships were individuals (+13.5%), and non-family corporations (+8.9%).
- These increases were offset by a 13 percent decrease in acres of agricultural land in other business types (cooperatives, estates/trusts, institutional owners, etc.) and a nearly 22 percent decrease in land held in family corporations. The decrease in acres managed by family held corporations are fairly consistent with the national level where acres managed by family held corporations decreased by 17 percent.
- As a result of the decrease in land held in family corporations, this category of business organization decreased from more than 28 percent in 1997 to 22 percent in 2002.
- While family corporations are often seen as a way for farm families to retain agricultural land, these results may suggest that they in fact may also facilitate the sale of agricultural land.

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY TYPE OF ENTERPRISE

Figure 14. Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Type of Enterprise, 2002

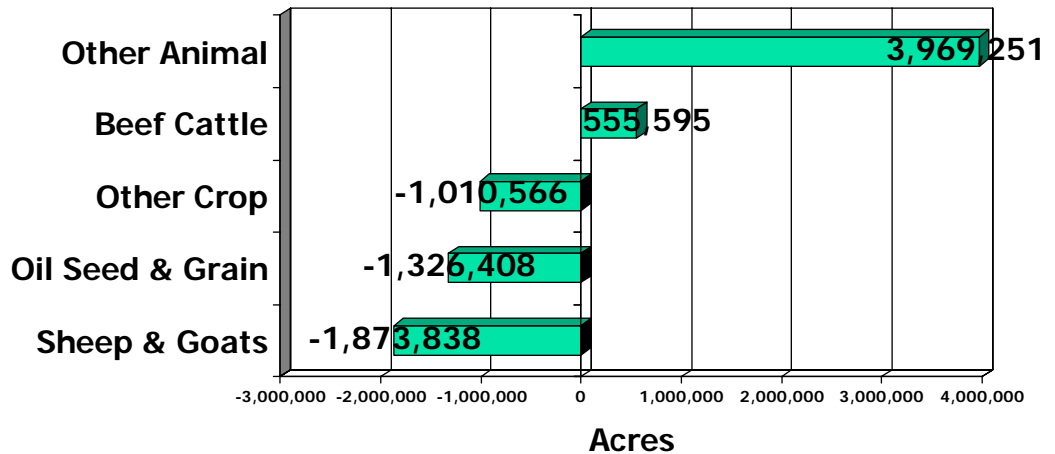


Summary:

- The dominant type of agricultural enterprise in Wyoming in terms of acres of agricultural land is beef cattle ranching (25.3 million acres). This represents nearly three-fourths of the total agricultural land in the state.
- Following beef cattle ranching is other animal production (15.2%), crops (7.0%), and sheep & goats (4.4%). Other animal production includes feedlots, dairy, hogs, poultry, and other production excluding sheep and goats.
- For land in crop enterprises, about 30 percent is in oilseed and grain farming. The remaining 70 percent is in other crop crops, probably primarily hay production.
- The fact that nearly 80 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming is in cattle and sheep ranching enterprises indicates the extensive nature of most agricultural production in Wyoming. This extensive nature should have positive implications for wildlife habitat and open space on these lands.

CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY TYPE OF ENTERPRISE

Figure 15. Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Type of Enterprise – 1997 to 2002

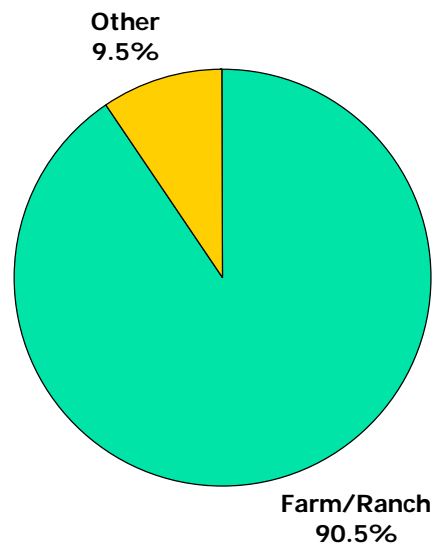


Summary:

- Although the total number of acres of agricultural land in Wyoming is similar between 1997 and 2002, Figure 15 suggests some significant shifts in the acres of land by type of agricultural enterprise.
- The biggest increase was in land in other animal production enterprises (+4.0 million acres). Land in beef cattle ranching enterprises also increased by more than 500,000 acres. These increases were offset by fairly large decreases in agricultural land in sheep & goat enterprises (-1.9 million acres), oil seed and grain farming (-1.3 million acres), and other crop enterprises (-1.0 million acres).
- The increase in acres in other animal production occurred in the category that includes aquaculture, bees, horses, fur-bearing animals & rabbits, and enterprises where no one animal accounts for one-half of the agricultural production. Although the average size for these enterprises is 2,313 acres, they average only \$13,563 in the value of agricultural production. This suggests a very low intensity of agricultural use and may reflect a shift in management emphasis from agricultural production to an amenity/lifestyle focus for some agricultural enterprises in Wyoming.

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY OCCUPATION OF OPERATOR

Figure 16. Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Primary Occupation of Principle Operator, 2002

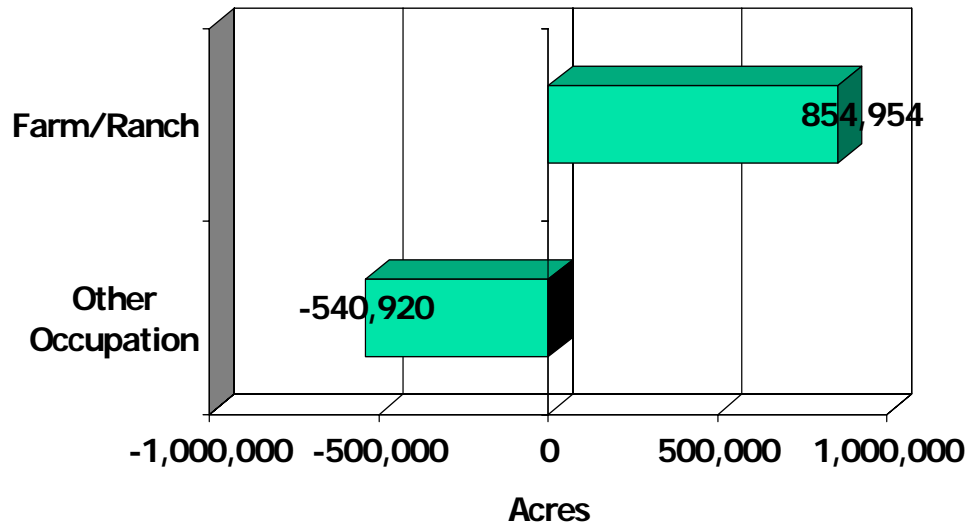


Summary:

- In 2002, more than 90 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (31.1 million acres) was in an enterprise where the principle operator indicated that his primary occupation was farming/ranching.
- Less than 10 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming was in an enterprise where the principle operator indicated that his primary occupation was **not** farming/ranching.
- At the national level, slightly more than 80 percent of the agricultural land in the U.S. was in an enterprise where the principle operator indicated that his primary occupation was farming/ranching.
- These results suggest that over 90 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming is managed by operators who are probably interested in retaining land in farming/ranching.

CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY OCCUPATION OF OPERATOR

Figure 17. Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Primary Occupation of Principle Operator, 1997 to 2002

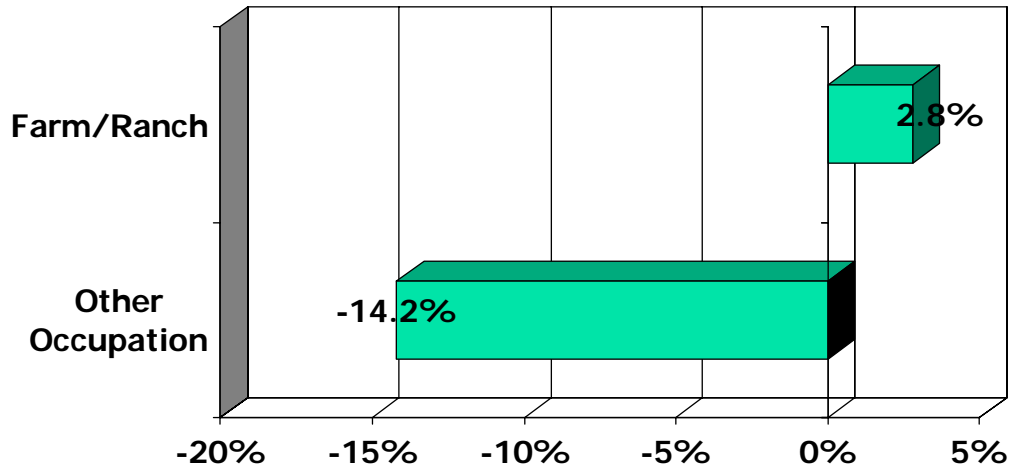


Summary:

- Between 1997 and 2002, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the principle operator indicated that his primary occupation was farming/ranching increased by over 850,000 acres.
- During this same time period, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the principle operator indicated that his primary occupation was **not** farming/ranching decreased by more than 540,000 acres.
- These results suggest that the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming managed by operators who are concerned with retaining land in farming/ranching may be increasing.

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY OCCUPATION

Figure 18. Percent Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Primary Occupation of Principle Operator, 1997 to 2002

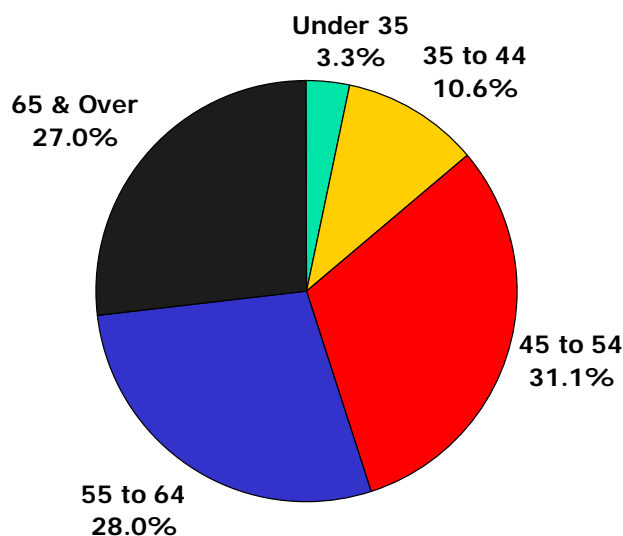


Summary:

- On a percentage basis, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the principle operator indicated that his primary occupation was farming/ranching increased by slightly less than 3 percent between 1997 and 2002.
- During this same time period, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the principle operator indicated that this primary occupation was **not** farming/ranching decreased by more than 14 percent.
- This indicates a significant decrease in acres of agricultural land in Wyoming that are managed by an operator whose primary occupation is something other than agriculture. It should be noted that the operator is not necessarily also the owner of the property.

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY AGE OF OPERATOR

Figure 19. Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Age of Principal Operator, 2002

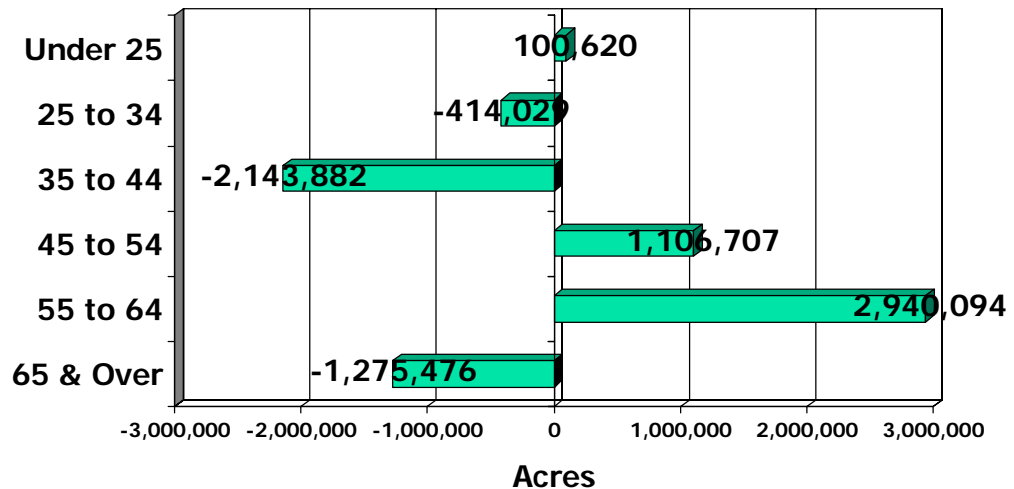


Summary:

- Operators in three oldest age groups manage more than 86 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (29.6 million acres). The largest is the 45 to 54 age group (31.1%), followed by the 55 to 64 age group (28.0%), and the 65 & over age group (27.0%).
- In contrast, operators in the two youngest age groups manage only slightly more than 20 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming (4.8 million acres). Operators in the 35 to 44 age group manage most of this land. Operators under 35 managed only slightly more than 1 million acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in 2002.
- Of particular concern is what happens to the 9.3 million acres of agricultural land in Wyoming managed by an operator 65 & over when these individuals retire. This is a particular concern since less than 5 percent of the agricultural operators in Wyoming were under 35 years of age in 2002 and less than 50 percent of these younger operators indicate that they were currently primarily engaged in farming/ranching.

CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY AGE OF OPERATOR

Figure 20. Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Age of Principal Operator, 1997 to 2002

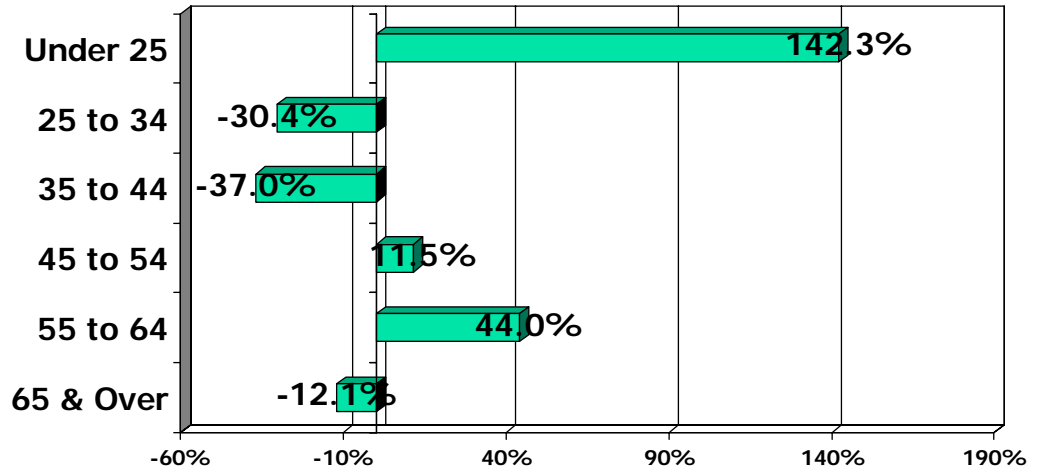


Summary:

- There was a significant increase in the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming managed by operators from 45 and 64 (4.0 million acres) between 1997 and 2002. Nearly three-fourths of this increase was in the 55 to 64 age group.
- The increase in these two age groups appears to have primarily come from two other age groups. One is the nearly 1.3 million acres decrease in agricultural land managed by operators 65 and over. This probably represents the retirement of some older operators. The second is the more than 2.1 million acre decrease in agricultural land managed by operators 35 to 44 years of age. The cause of this decline is unclear, but it does seem to indicate that operators in this age group may be leaving the industry.
- The apparent transfer of agricultural land in Wyoming from the 65 & over age group into other age categories is encouraging for the retention of land in agriculture. However, the decrease in land managed by operators in the 35 to 44 age group is a concern. The increase in the acres of agricultural land in the 45 to 64 age groups suggests that assuming control of agricultural land may take place relatively later in life for many operators in Wyoming.

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY AGE OF OPERATOR

Figure 21. Percent Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Age of Principal Operator, 1997 to 2002

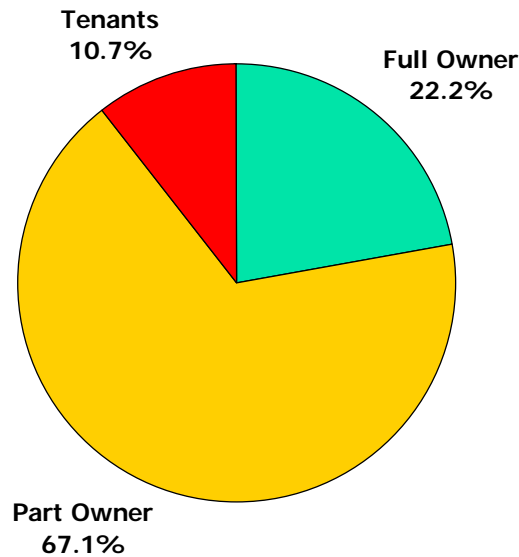


Summary:

- On a percentage basis, the largest change in acres of land in Wyoming between 1997 and 2002 was in the under 25 age group (142.3%). However, this represents a very small change in total acres (+100,620 acres). There were also significant percentage increases in the 55 to 64 age group (+44.0%) and the 45 to 54 age group (+11.5%) that involved a larger number of acres.
- Figure 21 also indicates substantial percentage decreases in the acres of land managed by operators in the 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 age groups. This may reflect an exodus of younger operators from the industry. In fact the number of operators in Wyoming in these age groups decreased by more than 17 percent between 1997 and 2002.

AGRICULTURAL LAND BY TENURE OF PRINCIPAL OPERATOR

Figure 22. Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Tenure of Principal Operator, 2002

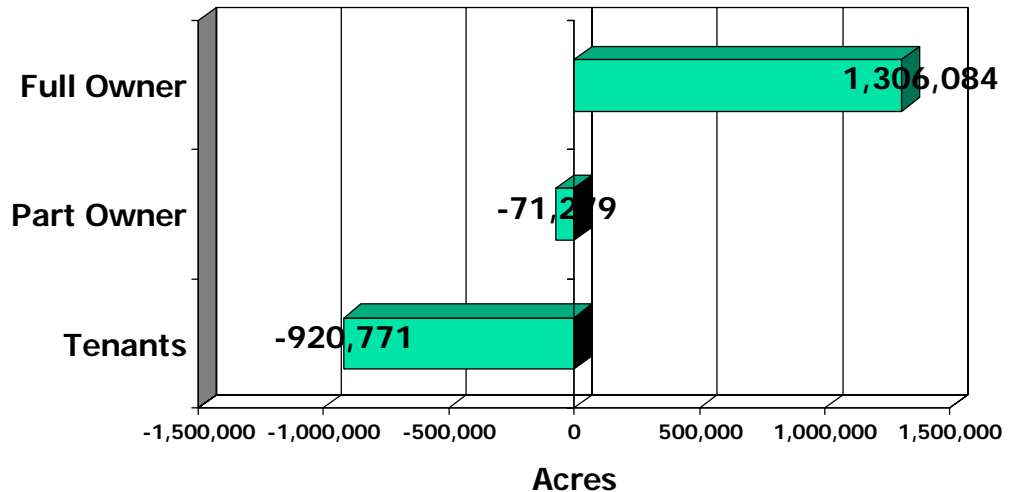


Summary:

- For over two-thirds of the agricultural land in Wyoming the operator manages both owned and rented land (22.8 million acres).
- For over 20 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming the operator manages only owned land (8.9 million acres).
- For over 10 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming the operator manages only land rented from others or worked on shares for others (2.7 million acres).
- This indicates that an operator who has a direct interest in at least part of the land in the enterprise manages nearly 90 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming. This suggests at least some commitment to the protection of the resource.

CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY TENURE OF OPERATOR

Figure 23. Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Tenure of Principal Operator, 1997 to 2002

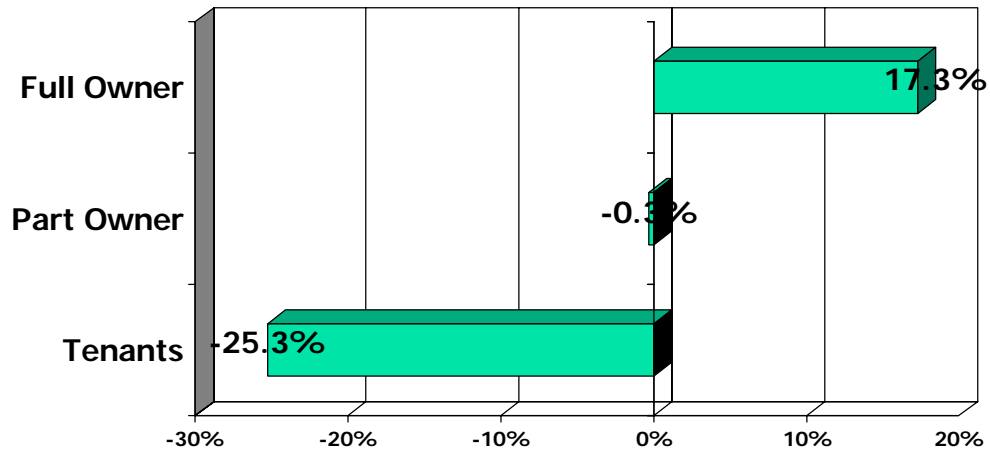


Summary:

- Between 1997 and 2002 the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the operator managed only owned land increased by 1.3 million acres.
- Between 1997 and 2002 the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the operator managed both owned and rented land decreased by more than 70,000 acres.
- Between 1997 and 2002 the acre of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the operator managed only land rented from others or worked on shares for others decreased by nearly 1 million acres.
- This may represent a shift for some enterprises from an emphasis on agricultural production where the total acres available for production regardless of ownership is of primary importance to an emphasis on amenities/lifestyles where ownership of the property for privacy and protection is more important.

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND BY TENURE OF OPERATOR

Figure 24. Percent Change in Agricultural Land in Wyoming by Tenure of Principal Operator, 1997 to 2002



Summary:

- On a percentage basis, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the operator managed only owned land increased by nearly 20 percent between 1997 and 2002.
- On a percentage basis, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the operator managed both owned and rented land was essentially unchanged between 1997 and 2002.
- On a percentage basis, the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming in enterprises where the operator managed only land rented from others or worked on shares for others decreased by more than 25 percent.
- This indicates that the acres of agricultural land in Wyoming managed by an operator who has a direct interest in the land increased between 1997 and 2002. This change in tenure may also indicate a change in ownership of the property.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results suggest that agricultural land remains an important part of the Wyoming landscape. Agricultural land represents 55 percent of the total surface area in the state and 94 percent of the total private land. Commercial agriculture is the dominant use of these lands, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the acres in the state. Agriculture appears to be a sustainable land use in Wyoming. Although 2002 was not a particularly good year for agriculture, commercial agricultural operations in Wyoming had an average net cash income of over \$30,000 in 2002. Although this represents a low return on the estimated market value of land and buildings, it does suggest some degree of economic viability for commercial agricultural land in the state, particularly for larger enterprises. Operators who consider farming/ranching their primary occupation and hold an ownership interest in at least part of the enterprise manage over 90 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming. This suggests some degree of management stability for agricultural land in the state. Finally, traditional corporations hold less than 3 percent of the agricultural land in Wyoming. Thus very little agricultural land in Wyoming is subject to the dictates of corporate management and stockholders.

Agricultural land also remains an important source of open space on private lands in Wyoming. The relatively large size of agricultural enterprises in Wyoming means that they remain an important source of large blocks of mostly private land for wildlife habitat and other open space aspects. The fact that most of these acres are grazing land also supports the use of these areas for wildlife habitat and open space.

Although the total acres of agricultural land in Wyoming was relatively unchanged between 1997 and 2002, there were some significant changes in the status of agricultural land in the state during this time period. One change was the increased amount of land in both larger (5,000+ acre) agricultural enterprises and small (less than 100 acres) agricultural enterprises. This suggests that both a consolidation and a fragmentation of agricultural land occurring at the same time. Although the total number of acres going into consolidation was much greater, the acres of fragmentation were growing much faster.

Another change was the apparent shift away from traditional management emphasis on agricultural production to a more non-traditional management emphasis such as amenity and lifestyle for some agricultural enterprises in Wyoming. This change may be reflected in the more than 38 percent increase in agricultural land in non-agriculture uses such as house lots, ponds, roads, wastelands, etc. It may also be reflected in the movement of nearly 4 million acres of agricultural land in Wyoming into the relatively low intensity "other animal production" category of agricultural enterprise between 1997 and 2002. Land in "other animal production" generated only \$5.86 of agricultural production per acre in 2002 versus an overall average for 2002 of \$26.21 of agricultural production per acre for all agriculture in Wyoming. While there are some definitional problems in comparing the 1997 and 2002 Census of Agriculture, this shift may suggest a decreased emphasis on agricultural production for these enterprises. Finally, the decrease in acres of rented agricultural land in Wyoming between 1997 and 2002 may suggest a shift for

some enterprises from an emphasis on agricultural production where total acres regardless of ownership is of primary importance to an emphasis on amenities/lifestyle where ownership of the property for privacy and protection is of primary importance to the enterprise. If there actually was a change it could mean a shift in management emphasis for about 12 percent of the agricultural land in the state between 1997 and 2002. One concern is that the long-term sustainability of this type of land use for agricultural land is unknown.

Perhaps the major concern regarding the future of agricultural land in Wyoming is what will happen to the 9.3 million acres of agricultural land held by individuals 65 & over when these operators begin to retire. This is of particular concern given the lack of agricultural operators under 35 in Wyoming and the decline of operators in the 35 to 44 age group. It is also reflected in the 2.1 million acre decrease in agricultural land in the state managed by operators 35 to 44 years old.