

Overview of Agriculture in Kentucky

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Introduction

Agriculture is the pillar of Kentucky’s rural economy. Kentucky’s farmers produce diverse agricultural products ranging from broilers (chickens) and horses to corn and tobacco. Annually, agriculture contributes approximately \$45 billion to Kentucky’s economy. Kentucky is home to more than 75,000 farms (which ranks sixth in the United States) and approximately 90% of the farms are considered small. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a small farm as having gross cash farm income (GFCI) between \$1,000 and \$350,000.



Who are Kentucky farmers?

The commonwealth of Kentucky has approximately 124,000 producers, and 65% are men and 35% are women. Fifty-nine percent of the farmers are between 35-64 years of age. Approximately 98% percent of the producers are white; the table below represents the race of farmers in the commonwealth.

The Race of Kentucky’s Producers

Race	Number
African American/Black	585
American Indian/Alaska Native	227
Asian	140
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	41
White	122,505
More than one race	497
Other characteristics	
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin	789



In addition, Kentucky has 12,998 veteran farmers and 35,433 new and beginning farmers. The USDA defines new and beginning farmer or rancher as an individual or entity who has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years.

How much land is used for agricultural production?

Approximately 13 million acres of land are used to produce agricultural commodities, and the average farm size is 171 acres. The following counties have the largest acreage of farmland: Christian, 345,581; Logan, 276,309; Breckinridge, 275,105; Warren, 262,198; and Barren, 253,834.

What are the leading agricultural commodities?

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, cash receipts from crops and livestock exceeded \$5.7 billion. Kentucky farmers led the nation in the production of horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys. Also, Kentucky ranked second in tobacco production and other animals and animal products, and seventh in broiler production. Furthermore, Kentucky ranked 14th in poultry and eggs; 15th in grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and peas; 16th cattle and calves; and 17th in hogs and pigs. Overall, Kentucky ranked 26th in the U.S. for total agricultural sales.



What counties lead in agricultural sales?

The top five counties in agricultural sales are in central and western Kentucky: Graves, \$346.2 million; Fayette, \$215.5 million; Bourbon, \$209.6 million, Christian, \$205.3 million, and McLean, \$190.8 million.



What are the top exports?

Kentucky's farmers provide food and other agricultural commodities to other countries. In 2018, Kentucky's top five exports were horses, \$466.7 million; soybeans, \$401.4 million; tobacco, \$283.6 million; corn \$191.2 million; and feeds and other feed grains, \$158.5 million.



Conclusion

Agriculture is the backbone to the commonwealth of Kentucky's economy. As Kentucky residents, we should be proud of our farmers' commitment to producing quality agricultural commodities to feed the state, country and world.

Reference

Kentucky Ag Facts (2018). *Quick facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.kyfoodandfarm.com/ky-ag-facts>.

National Agricultural Statistic Service (2019). *2017 census of agriculture state profile: Kentucky*. USDA: Washington, DC.