

Ag Census

During my 30 plus years as a farm broadcaster, I read and interpreted many Census of Agriculture reports. The Census of Agriculture, conducted every 5 years by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), includes producer responses to questions about their farming operations. It takes at least a year to get all the info tabulated and released to the public. When the numbers would start to roll out, I would get on the phone with state and national ag leaders to help decipher the information. The info is massive and very detailed. I still read some of the findings but I don't have to do the radio interviews anymore.

The latest press release from the 2022 Ag Census showed for the first time since before the Civil War, that the number of farms in the U.S. dropped below 2 million. The number of farms in the U.S. was 1,900,487, down 7 percent from 2017.

USDA's definition of a farm is an establishment that produced and sold, or would have sold in normal conditions, at least \$1,000 in agricultural production in a year. The latest Census also reported that the total U.S. land in farms declined 2.2 percent to 880 million acres in 2022. This decline, when combined with the higher proportional decline in the number of farms, meant that the average farm size increased by 5 percent to 463 acres per farm.

Now to bring this closer to home, I researched through the many pages to see how Dodge County, Minnesota numbers looked. In Dodge County, the number of farms is now at 614 farms with an average size of 457 acres. Total cropland acres in Dodge County were put at 262,797 acres.

For comparison, I researched the 1974 Census of Agriculture numbers and found the average size farm in Dodge County was 246 acres. In 1969 it was 219 acres. Dodge County had 1015 farms in 1974 and in 1969 there were 1202 farms.

Dodge County corn growers have had some good years recently. In 2022, the county wide average yield on corn was 221.5 bushels per acre (bpa). In a much drier year, 2023, the average corn yield was 189.6 bpa. Watowan County had the highest average yield last year at 209.3bpa; Renville County was second at 208.3bpa.

Soybean fields in Dodge County in 2023 averaged 51.1bushels per acre compared to 2022 when the county average was 61.9 bpa on beans. Waseca County had the highest state average soybean yield in 2023 with 60.7 bushels per acre. Evidently there was a little more rain to the west of Dodge County.

Some other statistics I ran across in my going through a lot of pages with very small print. Dodge County's total area is 439.4 square miles calling it the 74th largest county. In Texas, that

would be impressive but in Minnesota with only 87 counties, it makes Dodge County the 14th smallest in the state.

One last statistic that had nothing to do with agriculture but I found it interesting from the general U.S. Census take in 2022. Looking at ancestry of Dodge County residents, German heritage was the highest at 37.2 percent. Norwegian was second at 20.8 percent; Irish was third at 9.8 percent. I'm of both Norwegian and German descent so I'm in that 58 percentile.

Going through a lot of numbers and statistics makes me think of comedian Steven Wright who once said that 42.3% of all statistics are made up on the spot. And I have a 62.7 percent chance that I'm correct to attribute that to Steven Wright.