

***** NOTICE *****

Farm operators participating in this study will soon receive another telephone call from us. Again, they will be asked to share information about their household and farm business.

We certainly appreciated their help last year and thank them in advance for their cooperation again this year. We realize that the telephone interview takes substantial time to complete. We feel the information from these interviews is well worth the effort, and we hope the farm operators feel the same.

Farm operators are assured that all information is kept confidential. Published results use only aggregated data.

Farm Family Characteristics and Participation in Organizations

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This is the ninth in a series of reports describing the characteristics of nearly 1,000 farm operators surveyed by The Ohio State University in 1987. Anyone who has ever been involved in farming knows that all family members are important to the survival of the farm business, whether through their direct efforts in farm production or through their contributions to off-farm and household work. In this article we focus on the characteristics of farm operator families. Later in the article we examine farm operators' involvement in community and farm organizations.

Nearly all (98 percent) of the farm operators in our survey are men and about 90 percent are married. Other important operator background and family characteristics are displayed in Table 1. The average operator has a high school education and is about 52 years old. Spouses of farm operators (who are mostly farm wives, given our sample of male operators) have slightly higher education

levels and are somewhat younger than their husbands. These couples are committed to one another; the length of their marriages averages 27 years.

Larger commercial farms tend to be operated by younger and somewhat more highly educated operators (Table 1). As previous reports have shown, these sales classes also have the highest debt-to-asset ratios. The turbulent farm economy of the 1980's is particularly unsettling because it has hit hardest the younger, educated farmers - traditionally, those most likely to have been successful in agriculture. Operators in these high sales classes also tend to have more children living at home. This reflects the stage of the family life cycle of these younger operators. It also suggests that a future generation of farm operators has been affected by the farm crisis in the 1980's.

Spouses make important contributions to the household, both through their farm and off-farm work (Figure 1). Almost 40

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percent of all married operators have a spouse who works off-farm. Spouses are somewhat more likely to work off-farm when the farm operation is smaller. They tend to work at clerical and service occupations and as teachers. About 40 percent of the operators also report that their wives performed work on the farm. Their work on the farm is especially important during planting and harvesting seasons, but their contribution to the farm business extends beyond production activities; many spouses keep financial records for the business.

Generally, farm families are active in the community. Farm operators participate in many organizations including (a) general farm organizations such as Farm Bureau, National Farmers Organization, Farmers Union, and Grange, (b) commodity organizations such as the Ohio Corn Growers, Ohio Soybean Association, and the Pork Producers, (c) local farm organizations such as the Young Farmers, (d) civic associations such as Jaycees, Elks, and Masons, and (e) boards of directors or trustees of organizations.

Most hold membership in general farm organizations (Figure 1). Of those belonging to general farm organizations, nearly two-thirds belong to the Ohio Farm Bureau, and the remainder are nearly evenly divided among Grange, National Farmers Organization, and Farmers Union. A very small proportion has membership in more than one general farm organization.

Membership in commodity organizations is not as widespread as it is in general farm organizations. However, these organizations do attract a significant proportion of the operators of larger commercial farms (Figure 2).

Local civic organization membership remains fairly constant across farm size. However, participation on boards of directors or trustees is closely related to farm size. Over 40 percent of the operators of the largest farms report membership on boards. Organizations benefit from farmer support, but farmers also benefit from interaction with others and cohesion provided by the group.

Table 1. Farm Family Characteristics.

Sales Class	Operators			Number of Children at Home	Number of Years Married
	Age	Education	Years Farming		
<\$10,000	56.1	12.3	27.0	0.9	30.3
10-19,999	53.0	12.9	26.8	1.1	27.9
20-39,999	52.7	12.4	26.9	1.1	28.1
40-99,999	47.8	12.2	22.7	1.4	23.7
100-249,999	46.1	12.6	24.0	1.5	23.0
250-499,999	48.5	13.2	25.9	2.0	25.4
<=\$500,000	48.3	13.2	26.0	1.6	24.1
All farms	51.8	12.5	25.7	1.2	27.1

Figure 1.

Spouses Working On & Off farms

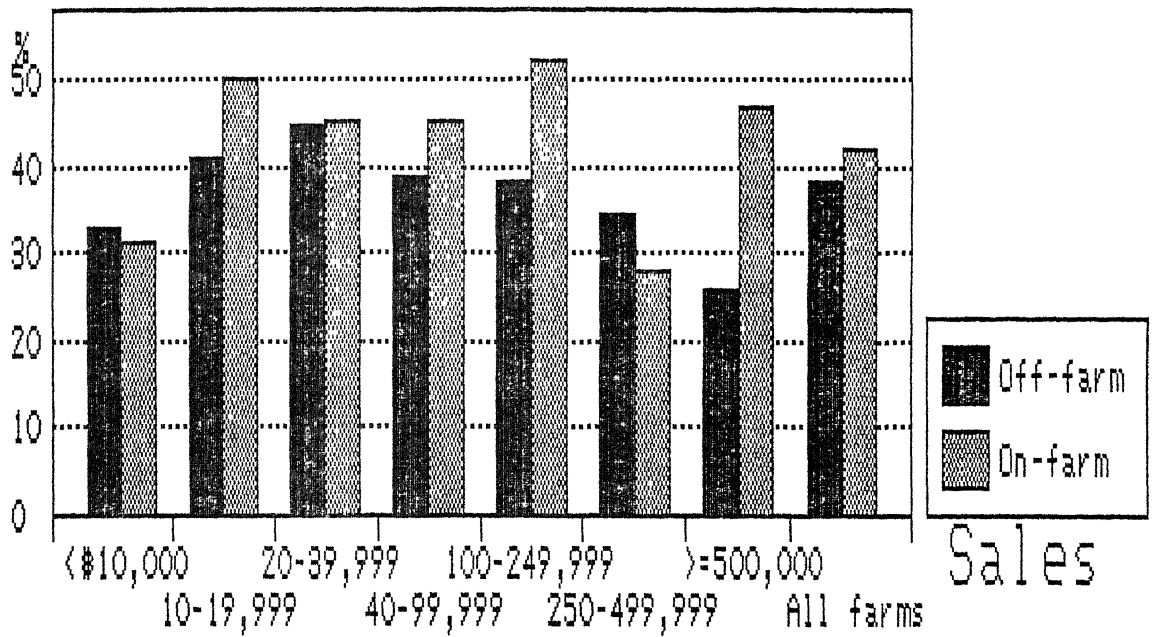
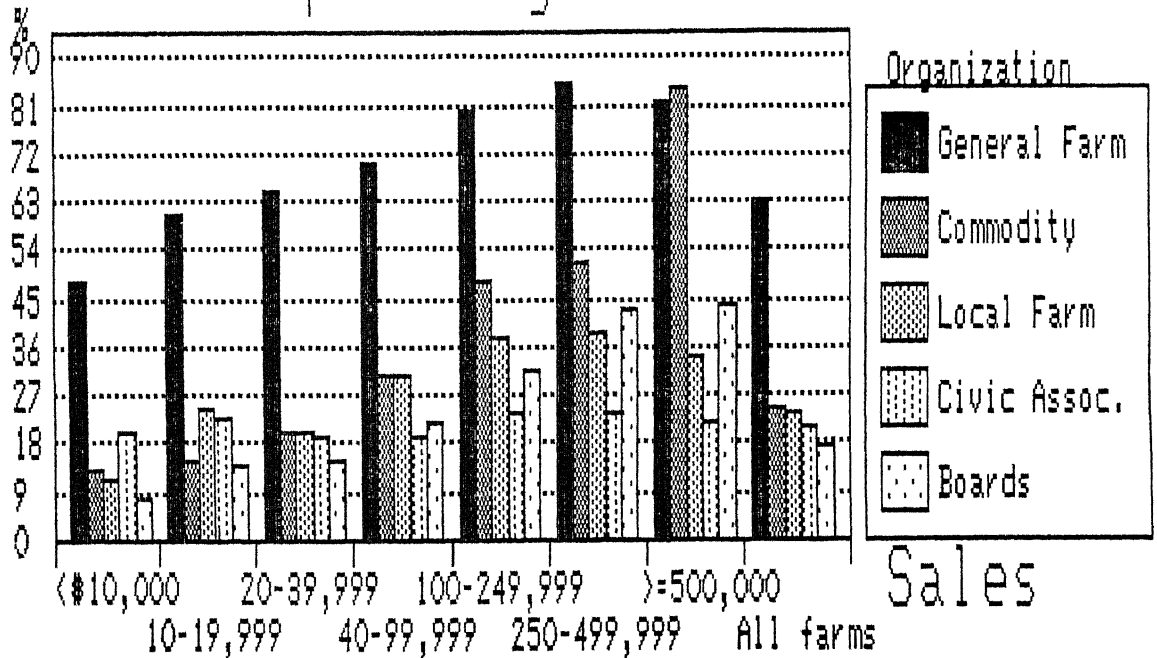


Figure 2.

Membership in Organizations



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