Large Farms in Domestic Agriculture

2020-2021 Topic Proposal

National Federation of High Schools Topic Selection Committee

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## Introduction

When I first began debating in high school back in 1986, the policy topic was “Resolved: That the federal government should implement a comprehensive long-term agricultural policy in the United States” (nfhs.org). It is very fitting that agriculture is the topic area that I chose to write my first topic paper. And while several resolutions in the intervening years have yielded case areas dealing with agriculture, 1986-87 was the last time an exclusively agriculture topic was debated as a national policy topic. According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS), agriculture (and related areas) contributed 5.4 percent to the GDP and provided 11 percent in US employment in 2017 (ers.usda.org). Agriculture plays a large role in our everyday lives, from the food we eat to the fuel in our cars and the clothes that we wear. It is a topic area that is ripe for exploration. This topic would be easily accessible for debaters in rural areas since many rural economies depend on some form of agriculture. It would be educational for debaters in urban areas who may be less familiar with how agriculture affects their daily lives. Focusing on the impact of large farms or regenerative agriculture increases the debatability because it would be difficult to argue against agriculture in general.

Large farms can be seen to have both positive and negative impacts. Positively, large farms reduce the prices of our agricultural goods which means that more people can access food. Also, large farms can afford to invest in research and development which leads to better products – bigger, healthier, more resistant. However, large farms can have negative impacts as well. The biggest negative impacts are on the environment. Soil depletion, soil erosion, emissions, and so on. Large farms also impact their communities by making farm land more expensive and forcing smaller farms to sell out. A recent article in Time talks about how large farms are using loopholes to collect more than the federal cap from the recent Trump tariff aid package, an impact on the taxpayers paying for the aid and the smaller farmers that are struggling because of the tariffs (<https://time.com/5619801/trump-farmers-aid-package-loopholes/>).

Regenerative agriculture is the idea that crops can be grown in a way that is not only not negatively impacting the environment, but it can actually make the environment better, mainly through carbon recapture. This can be appealing to those less interested in actual agriculture who may want to focus on climate change or other environmental issues. Negatively, the term lacks a clear standard definition and there is an argument to be made that it is being used as more of a way to seem better than “organic”.

## Timeliness

It’s hard to deny the on-going presence of agriculture and thus it remains timely. Specifically, the increase in the existence and impact of large farms on the agriculture industry are particularly timely. Another issue I came across recently is the idea of regenerative agriculture, which is becoming a buzzword in the food industry. The bulk of agriculture legislation comes in the form of the Farm Bill which is enacted by Congress every five years (agriculture.senate.gov). The most recent Farm Bill was passed in 2018 (as of April 16,2019, it was still awaiting the final step of implementation – the implementation progress can be seen here<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/06/26/usda-farm-bill-implementation-progress-update>). Of course, amendments to that legislation occur, but this should prevent any new substantial agriculture laws from being passed within the 2020-2021 debate season. With regenerative agriculture, much legislation is being passed at the state level, which could provide evidence and arguments for and against federal legislation. Other legislative areas that impact agriculture include immigration, environment, crop insurance, energy, infrastructure, and technology, to name a few. The impacts of and on agriculture are really immeasurable. The upcoming presidential elections in 2020 will also impact agriculture. A recent article on [www.agri-pulse.com](http://www.agri-pulse.com) examined the agricultural priorities of several Democratic presidential candidates. The impact of climate change on agriculture cannot be overestimated nor overlooked. This will also ensure that agriculture will remain timely in the coming years. A Google search of 2019 large farm issues produces several news articles less than a month old. The inclusion of some international articles could provide ground for disadvantages and counterplans.

## Scope

As discussed briefly above, agriculture impacts everyone on a daily and ongoing basis. Every state in the US has agricultural production. According to the USDA ERS, in 2017, the state with the least amount of agriculture production cash value is Alaska, and even that state produces almost $38 million annually. The state with the highest production is California with over $50 billion annually. The US is also a net exporter of agricultural products. China and India outproduce the US but consume a larger portion of their products due to their large populations and the US, China, and India each outproduce the entire European Union put together (Investopedia.com). Other issues affecting the large scope of agriculture are climate change and food accessibility and sustainability. Limiting the topic to the area of large farms or regenerative agriculture should prevent the topic from being overwhelming or too broad in scope. As I discussed in my introduction, students from rural areas may have an initial advantage with an agriculture topic, but both rural and urban students will benefit from researching agriculture. Regenerative agriculture may be more appealing to urban students since it links to climate change and carbon capture.

I would also argue that, while agriculture may not seem that exciting at first blush, students will discover many interesting issues connected to agriculture as they research. In addition, as an educator, I feel that we should be encouraging our students to learn about this very important issue and how it affects us all on a daily basis.

## Range

The universality of agriculture makes it easily accessible to all debaters, both novice and varsity. The impacts of large farms span a wide range, from local economies to the global environment. This should appeal to both new and experienced debaters. Novices can debate affirmatives centered around regulation of large farms while more seasoned debaters can examine more complex issues like digital farming and critical areas like capitalism and biocentrism. Technological issues surrounding farming can also appeal to young debaters, both novice and varsity. Internet access is becoming increasingly necessary in farming and high school debaters are very familiar with the necessity of the Internet.

## Quality

The diverse nature of agriculture means that there should be plenty of different areas for high school debaters to explore. Although I suggest a focus on the issue of large farms, that doesn’t mean that debaters should only talk about large farms. Looking at the impact these farms have on food, energy, the environment, biodiversity, technology, and many other areas means that there shouldn’t be a lot of repetition in debate. As with any topic, there will probably be case areas that will be popular, but even similar plans should lead to different harms and negative arguments. There are also lots of different areas of harms surrounding large farms. According to seedstock.com, five major challenges facing agriculture due to large farms are: resource depletion, land management, food waste, demographic changes, and a variety of political issues. Regenerative agriculture looks at dealing with three major problems: soil-loss, nutrition, and climate change.

Large farms

Resource depletion refers to not only the way that large-scale farming depletes the soil of nutrients or making water unusable due to chemical runoff, but also the amount of fossil fuels used to maintain large farms. Climate change will also impact these resources and current farming techniques used in large farms are adding to the problem. Large farms also tend to be monocultural, meaning they continually plant the same crop year after year which depletes the soil without rotating crops. Large livestock farms also tend to overgraze land, which can lead to desertification. While large farms do lead to an increase in food availability, this overabundance actually leads to food waste. Especially here in America, consumers want produce without blemishes and supermarkets and restaurants end up throwing out perfectly good food because of its appearance. This also can increase the cost because supermarkets buy more then throw out what isn’t purchased, and the cost of that waste is passed on to consumers. So even though large farms produce more, it is not being utilized to help the people who need it (food deserts in urban areas, starving and/or undernourished people). Plus, the food that is thrown out goes into landfills and contributes to greenhouse emissions. Another issue is the disconnect between the consumer and the farm. Around 80% of people in the U.S. live in urban areas and have no idea how their food gets to them other than “the grocery store”. Of course, we also have food deserts in these urban areas because of the lack of availability of fresh food. As urban areas grow, they encroach on rural areas so that the land becomes too expensive for small farmers not to sell. This disconnect also affects farmers that are close to suburban areas that do not want to tolerate the sounds and smells of farms. Then there is politics. Agriculture is a multi-billion dollar industry with powerful lobbyists. Imports and exports of agricultural goods are huge and the trade agreements with other countries over those goods affect our economy. Then there are the migrant workers that work in the fields and those policies. Affirmatives could legislate that farms cannot be monocultural, legislate controls on the price of farmable land, incentivize more environment-friendly practices, limit food waste, perhaps a critical affirmative on how minorities are most affected by food deserts and provide ways to remedy this through legislation, legislating money for ag tech, encouraging more small farms linked to urban areas.

Negatives can argue that limiting these large farms will affect our access to food thus harming our food security. The research done in these larger facilities has led to better products. Not to mention that they provide jobs. Large farms are pushing out small farms: so? Why is that a bad thing? Negatives could definitely make that argument. Larger farms have access to more resources and more capital. They are better able to withstand outside influence and can recover faster from disaster. Large farms can produce more and thus make food more affordable. Negatives could advocate for larger farms to do better rather than to get rid of them. Large farms often export to countries that can’t produce and curbing large farms may hurt these countries (insert hegemony arguments here). An argument that would overlap with regenerative agriculture is that only large farms could afford to implement regenerative techniques. Even though there has been an increase in the number of women involved in farming, it is still not a lot and a Feminism Kritik would be a possibility. Knowing the history of agriculture in the U.S., and particularly in the South, race is a significant issue. An article on Eater.com (<https://www.eater.com/2019/1/25/18197352/american-farming-racism-us-agriculture-history>) looks at race in agriculture and finds that over 96% of farm owner-operators are white. Seems like a good area for critical arguments.

Regenerative agriculture

Regenerative agriculture is way to not only “do no harm” to the environment, but the goal is to actually improve the environment. Proponents suggest that regenerative agriculture can capture carbon and help reduce its effects on climate change. Some of the practices include no or less tilling, using crop rotation or cover crops to improve the soil, using natural fertilizers like manure and compost, decreasing the concentration of livestock to limit over-grazing. This can help with soil erosion and soil depletion. Not using chemical fertilizers can also help the water supply. Regenerative agriculture also claims to increase the nutritional value in food which can help combat malnutrition. Most of the reasons that regenerative agriculture practices are not being utilized today have to do with the current administration and its lack of support for environmental issues. In addition, the practices of regenerative agriculture are discouraged by the federal administration in the form of crop insurance (how that happens seems to be confusing but this article <https://newfoodeconomy.org/regenerative-agriculture-cover-crops-no-till-usda/> attempts to explain it). Although much of what regenerative agriculture advocates is based in the way things used to be done, it goes against what farmers have been doing the past twenty years and many are resistant to change. Affirmatives can legislate incentives to encourage regenerative agriculture practices (one, some, or all), change crop insurance to encourage regenerative practices, look at some state legislation and adapt it to a federal plan.

Some of the negative arguments against regenerative agriculture include those that suggest the claims are exaggerated. Many of the principles of regenerative agriculture are known to be good farming principles, but the assertions seem too good to be true in some cases. Another concern is that regenerative agriculture will just become another buzzword like “organic” that won’t have any standards, so that companies will use it as a label to attract consumers without following through on all of the practices. Another negative angle would be a counterplan using private support. Companies with a large carbon footprint could offset that by supporting regenerative farming that captures that carbon. Another argument that could overlap with the large farm topic is that only large farms could afford to implement regenerative techniques which would force out smaller farms and farmers with all of those negative impacts. Negatives could also argue that farmers would be resistant to change, and that legislating does not change minds. Farmers could find ways to circumvent. The federal government may need to subsidize farms making the transition which would be costly. Arguments on gender and race could apply here like they do with large farms. The more I think about the race and gender arguments, the more I think this could be a really strong area of debate on this particular topic area.

## Material

My initial Google search for “important issues in agriculture 2019” indicated to me that I needed to narrow my topic. Two areas that seemed to repeat in the different articles and pages that I read suggested that large farms and GMOs (genetically modified organisms) were the top issues. I chose to focus on large farms because I felt that GMOs are too controversial and perhaps too prevalent in the media and large farms have bigger and more documented impact. Large farms are definitely in the news, but not usually “front page”. I think this is good because one goal of debate is education. Choosing a topic that is less sensational means that debaters will need to look beyond what the popular news outlets are saying. There are lots of agriculture specific websites including some that I visited in my research like AgWeb.com, Agriculture.com, PrecisionAg.com, and Seedstock.com. Organizations like the USDA (specifically the earlier-mentioned Economic Research Service department), the American Farm Bureau Federation (fb.org), the Frontier Group, and Science Daily also have up-to-date articles and publications. Think tanks and political organizations like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute also weigh in on agriculture issues.

## Interest

I think that agriculture is very interesting. I may be biased because I grew up and live in a rural agriculture area and my original college major was in the College of Agriculture at Texas A&M University. However, even students and adults who are not interested in agriculture specifically will find the related areas that can be debated interesting. As stated earlier, there are many topics related to the field of agriculture such as climate change, technology, and immigration. Although important, an agriculture topic will not just be about corn, soybeans, and cows. Students who want to debate race and/or gender will find lots of fodder in agriculture.

## Balance

Although my initial research focused on the harms caused by large farms, there are also benefits to large farms. Large scale farming reduces food costs and increases the diversity and accessibility of food. The economic impacts on our economy and our trade with other countries is substantial. Plus, there is plenty of disadvantage and counterplan ground, especially when looking at global impacts. Some possible affirmatives could include subsidies to encourage small and medium scale farms, penalties to discourage large scale farming, increasing regulations for large scale farms to mitigate negative impacts, funding to improve broadband access to small and medium scale farms, funding alternative farming techniques aimed at helping small and medium scale farms. Negative arguments could include disadvantages (economic, food security, food accessibility, hegemony, trade, politics), counterplans (international actors, non-governmental actors, states), and kritiks (capitalism, feminism, biocentrism). Some negatives on regenerative agriculture could argue that legislation is best at the state level (<https://newfoodeconomy.org/soil-health-regenerative-agriculture-cover-crops-climate-change-state-legislature-bills/>), the status quo is changing, farmers can circumvent legislation, that there is no definitive proof that regenerative techniques actually do what they claim. Traditional politics DAs, economy DAs can work, as well as Federalism DA with States CP. As I said above, kritiks on gender and race are particularly suited to agriculture topics since farming has relatively few women and even fewer non-whites.

## Proposed resolutions

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially increase its regulation of large scale farms in the United States.

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially increase incentives to promote regenerative agriculture practices in the United States.

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially increase its environmental regulation of farms in the United States.

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially improve its agriculture policy in one or more of the following areas: crop insurance, environmental regulation, farm subsidies, labeling standards.

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially increase assistance to small and medium scale farms.

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially decrease regulations for small and medium scale farms.

Resolved: the United States federal government should substantially restructure its crop insurance policies in the United States.

## Definitions

**Agriculture**

agriculture – *noun* – the science, art, or occupation concerned with cultivating land, raising crops, and feeding, breeding, and raising livestock; farming (dictionary.com)

agriculture – *noun* – the science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products (merriam-webster.com)

agriculture – *noun* – The science or practice of farming, including cultivation of the soil for the growing of crops and the rearing of animals to provide food, wool, and other products. (en.oxforddictionaries.com)

agriculture – The science or practice of farming, including growing crops and raising animals for the production of food, fiber, fuel and other products. (US, Environmental Protection Agency)

agriculture – The science or art of cultivating the ground, especially in fields or large areas, including the tillage of the soil, the planting of seeds, the raising and harvesting of crops, and the rearing of live stock. Dillard v. Webb, 55 Ala. 474. And see Bin- zel v. Grogan, 67 Wis. 147, 29 N. W. 895; Simons v. Lovell, 7 Ileisk. (Teun.) 510; Springer v. Lewis, 22 Pa. 191. A person actually engaged in the “science of agriculture” (within the meaning of a statute giving him special exemptions) is one who derives the support of himself and his family, in whole or in part, from the tillage and cultivation of fields. He must cultivate something more than a garden, although it may be much less than a farm. If the area cultivated can be called a held, it is agriculture, as well in contemplation of law as in the etymology of the word. And if this condition be fulfilled, the uniting of any other business, not inconsistent with the pursuit of agriculture, does not take away the protection of the statute. Springer v. Lewis, 22 I’a. 193. (Black’s Law Dictionary)

Harris, David R. and D. Q. Fuller (2014) Agriculture: Definition and Overview. In Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology (Claire Smith, Ed.). Springer, New York. pp 104-113. Updated February 27, 2017. Accessed 4/28/19.

Agriculture is the most comprehensive word used to denote the many ways in which crop plants and domestic animals sustain the global human population by providing food and other products. The English word agriculture derives from the Latin ager (field) and colo (cultivate) signifying, when combined, the Latin agricultura: field or land tillage. But the word has come to subsume a very wide spectrum of activities that are integral to agriculture and have their own descriptive terms, such as cultivation, domestication, horticulture, arboriculture, and vegeculture, as well as forms of livestock management such as mixed crop-livestock farming, pastoralism, and transhumance. Also agriculture is frequently qualified by words such as incipient, proto, shifting, extensive, and intensive, the precise meaning of which is not selfevident. Many different attributes are used too to define particular forms of agriculture, such as soil type, frequency of cultivation, and principal crops or animals. The term agriculture is occasionally restricted to crop cultivation excluding the raising of domestic animals, although it usually implies both activities. The Oxford English Dictionary (1971) defines agriculture very broadly as “The science and art of cultivating the soil, including the allied pursuits of gathering in the crops and rearing live stock (sic); tillage, husbandry, farming (in the widest sense).” In this entry, we too use the term in its broadest, inclusive sense. In the published literature on early agriculture, there is a tendency for the word agriculture and many of its subsidiary terms to be used vaguely without precise definition, and sometimes their connotations overlap, for example, proto/incipient and shifting/extensive. There is need to clarify much agricultural terminology to avoid confusion (Harris 2007: 17-26), particularly because the multidisciplinary nature of research on the subject leads to many concepts being used that derive from disparate disciplines; principally archaeology, anthropology, biogeography, genetics, linguistics, and taxonomy. In this entry, we cannot review comprehensively all the typological terms currently used in discussions of the origins and early development of agriculture. Instead we focus on the two most fundamental processes that led to agriculture, cultivation and domestication (of plants and animals), and then comment on some of the terms used to denote particular categories of agricultural production. In conclusion, we return to agriculture itself as a process of landscape-scale food production. This approach, leading from consideration of cultivation through domestication to agriculture (Fig. 1), proposes that agriculture is a form of land use and economy that resulted from the combination of cultivation (a bundle of human actions focused on preparing soil and planting, tending, and harvesting plants) and domestication (a bundle of genetic and morphological changes that have increased the ability of plants to adapt to cultivation). Cultivation and domestication are related as cause and effect, a change in human strategy with consequences in genetic adaptations of another organism, which increased the interdependencies of both. In the next two sections, we explore the nature of and interaction between cultivation and domestication over time in light of mainly archaeological evidence together with some genetic data, including exploration of the concept of “pre-domestication cultivation.”

DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURE- The term "agriculture" means farming in all its branches, including— (i) cultivation and tillage of the soil; (ii) the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any commodity grown on, in, or as an adjunct to or part of a commodity grown in or on, the land; and (iii) any practice (including preparation and processing for market and delivery to storage or to market or to carriers for transportation to market) performed by a farmer or on a farm incident to or in conjunction with an activity described in clause (ii). (Source: TITLE 42 / CHAPTER 6A / SUBCHAPTER II / Part D / subpart (254b-HealthCenters\_ Section (g) from the National Center for Farmworkers Health)

[**https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs12.htm**](https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs12.htm)

**Wage and Hour Division (WHD)**

**(Revised July 2008)** ([PDF](https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs12.pdf))

Fact Sheet #12: Agricultural Employers Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

This fact sheet provides general information concerning the application of the [FLSA](https://www.dol.gov/whd/flsa/index.htm) to agricultural employment. The FLSA is the federal law which sets [minimum wage](https://www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm), [overtime](https://www.dol.gov/whd/overtime_pay.htm), recordkeeping, and child labor standards.

Agriculture includes farming in all its branches when performed by a farmer or on a farm as an incident to or in conjunction with such farming operations.

[Coverage](https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs14.pdf)

Virtually all employees engaged in agriculture are covered by the Act in that they produce goods for interstate commerce. There are, however, some exemptions which exempt certain employees from the [minimum wage](https://www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm) provisions, the [overtime pay](https://www.dol.gov/whd/overtime_pay.htm) provisions, or both.

Employees who are employed in agriculture as that term is defined in the Act are exempt from the overtime pay provisions. They do not have to be paid time and one half their regular rates of pay for hours worked in excess of forty per week.

Agriculture does not include work performed on a farm which is not incidental to or in conjunction with such farmer's farming operation. It also does not include operations performed off a farm if performed by employees employed by someone other than the farmer whose agricultural products are being worked on.

Any employer in agriculture who did not utilize more than 500 "man days" of agricultural labor in any calendar quarter of the preceding calendar year is exempt from the [minimum wage](https://www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm) and [overtime pay](https://www.dol.gov/whd/overtime_pay.htm) provisions of the FLSA for the current calendar year. A "man day" is defined as any day during which an employee performs agricultural work for at least one hour.

Additional exemptions from the [minimum wage](https://www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm) and [overtime](https://www.dol.gov/whd/overtime_pay.htm) provisions of the Act for agricultural employees apply to the following:

* Agricultural employees who are immediate family members of their employer
* Those principally engaged on the range in the production of livestock
* Local hand harvest laborers who commute daily from their permanent residence, are paid on a piece rate basis in traditionally piece-rated occupations, and were engaged in agriculture less than thirteen weeks during the preceding calendar year
* Non-local minors, 16 years of age or under, who are hand harvesters, paid on a piece rate basis in traditionally piece-rated occupations, employed on the same farm as their parent, and paid the same piece rate as those over 16. (U.S. Department of Labor)

**Farm**

farm – *noun* – a tract of land devoted to agricultural purposes; a plot of land devoted to the raising of animals and especially domestic livestock. (merriam-webster.com)

farm – *noun* – (1) a tract of land, usually with a house, barn, silo, etc., on which crops and often livestock are raised for livelihood; (2) land or water devoted to the raising of animals, fish, plants, etc.; (3) a similar, usually commercial, site where a product is manufactured or cultivated. (dictionary.com)

farm – *noun* – an area of land and its buildings, used for growing crops and rearing animals. (en.oxforddictionaries.com)

farm – *noun* – n. A certain amount of provision reserved as the rent of a messuage. Spelman. Rent generally which is reserved on a lease; when it was to be paid In money, it was called “blanclie firmc.” Spelman; 2 Bl. Comm. 42.A term, a lease of lands; a leasehold interest. 2 Bl. Comm. 17; 1 Reeve, Eng. Law,301, note. The land Itself, let to farm or rent. 2 Bl. Comm. 30S.A portion of land used for agricultural purposes, either wholly or in part. The original meaning of the word was “rent,” and by a natural transition it came to mean the land out of which the rent issued. In old English law. A lease of other things than land, as of imposts. There were several of these, such as “the sugar farm,” “the silk farm,” and farms of wines and currents, called “petty farms.” See 2 How. State Tr. 1197-1206.**In American law. “Farm” denotes a tract of land devoted in part, at least, to cultivation, for agricultural purposes, without reference to its extent, or to the tenure by which it is held.** In re Drake (D. C.) 114 Fed. 231; People ex rei. Rogers v. Caldwell, 142111. 434. 32 X. E. 091; Kendall v. Miller, 47 How. Prac. (N. Y.) 448; Com. v. Carmalt, 2Bin. (Pa.) 238. (Black’s Law Dictionary)

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-household-well-being/glossary.aspx>

A farm is defined as any place from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the year. Since the definition allows for farms to be included even if they did not have at least $1,000 in sales, but normally would have, a system is developed by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service for determining when a farm normally would have. These are called point farms. If a place does not have $1,000 in sales, a "point system" assigns dollar values for acres of various crops and head of various livestock species to estimate a normal level of sales. Point farms are farms with fewer than $1,000 in sales but have points worth at least $1,000. Point farms tend to be very small. Some, however, may normally have much larger sales, but experience low sales in a particular year due to bad weather, disease, changes in marketing strategies, or other factors. For farms with production contracts, the value of the commodities produced is used, not the amount of the fees they receive. Changes are made to the point system over time. For example, beginning with the 1997 Census of Agriculture, operations receiving $1,000 or more in Federal government payments were counted as farms, even if they had no sales and otherwise lacked the potential to have $1,000 or more in sales. And, for 2002, a farm that had $500 point value and $500 in government payments was considered a farm. This would not have been true for the 1997 census. The most recent Census of Agriculture is for 2007 ([USDA, NASS. 2007 Census of Agriculture, United States, Summary and State Data, Vol. 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 51, February 2009](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/usv1.pdf)). More than one-quarter of farms have no sales in a typical year, and at least another 30 percent have positive sales of less than $10,000.

**Small farm**

According to 7 USCS § 2666 (Title 7, Agriculture; Chapter 59; Rural Fire Protection, Development, and Small Farm Research and Education; Rural Development and Small Farm Research and Education), the term "small farm" means “any farm (1) producing family net income from all sources (farm and nonfarm) below the median non-metropolitan income of the State; (2) operated by a family dependent on farming for a significant though not necessarily a majority of its income; and (3) on which family members provide most of the labor and management.” (USLegal.com)

**Family farm**

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-household-well-being/glossary.aspx>

The general concept of a family farm is one in which ownership and control of the farm business is held by a family of individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption. Family ties can and often do extend across households and generations. Historically, it was not uncommon for the family farm to provide all of the labor for the farm and to own all of the land and capital of the farm. That is no longer true today, although the extent to which individual farms hire nonfamily labor, rent-in land or other capital, or contract for various farm services varies greatly across farms. In short, the organization of family farms changes over time.

There is no hard-and-fast definition of a family farm, unlike the farm definition. In its program of analyzing the well-being of farm operator households using microdata, the ERS definition of family farms has changed over time. A preferred definition of a family farm would allow for organizational changes in the way in which operators structure their farm businesses as they respond to changes in technology, the marketplace, and policies, but still capture the general concept of a family farm in which a family unit maintains majority control and ownership.

The current definition of a family farm, since 2005, based on the Agricultural Resource Management Survey is one in which the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator by blood, marriage, or adoption, including relatives that do not live in the operator household. Although the definition of a family farm has changed somewhat over time, the share of U.S. farms classified as family farms has changed little since 1996, ranging from 97.1 to 98.3 percent of all farms (see the [Farm Household Income and Characteristics](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/farm-household-income-and-characteristics/) data product table on family and nonfamily farms, by farm size class (gross sales).

Immediately prior to the implementation of the current definition, farms were considered family farms unless they were: organized as cooperatives, organized as corporations with the majority of shareholders not related (by blood, marriage, or adoption) or operated by a hired manager. In 2004, 98 percent of farms were classified as family farms using this definition with data from the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (see for more information). When the family farm definition was established using USDA's Farm Costs and Returns microdata in 1988, farms were defined as family farms unless they were organized as cooperatives or nonfamily corporations, or when the operator reported not receiving any of the net income of the business. At that time, 99 percent of farms were classified as family farms (see [The Economic Well-Being of Farm Operator Households, 1988-90](http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/CAT93990859/PDF)). USDA microdata were first collected in 1984 on the Farm Costs and Returns Survey; at that time, no distinction was made between family and nonfamily farms.

For farms where there is more than one operator and the multiple operators do not share a housing unit, detailed household data and off-farm income are not collected for the additional operators on either the Census of Agriculture or the ARMS; household data is only collected for a single principal operator. Hence, this data limitation has the effect of undercounting the total number of family farm households.

Family farm – An agricultural business which (1) produces agricultural commodities for sale in such quantities so as to be recognized as a farm rather than a rural residence; (2) produces enough income (including off farm employment) to pay family and farm operating expenses, to pay debts, and to maintain the property; (3) is managed by the operator; (4) has a substantial amount of labor provided by the operator and family; and (5) may use seasonal labor during peak periods and a reasonable amount of full-time hired labor. (Agriculture Fact Book, USDA)

**Farm size classification**

<https://lpelc.org/usda-small-farm-definitions/#.UsV_8ifCYx4>

USDA Small Farm Definitions, LPELC Admin, March 5, 2019 (Livestock and Poultry Environmental Learning Community)

Farm Classification System

The USDA Economic Research Service ([USDA-ERS](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FarmStructure/glossary.htm#collapsed)) has developed a farm classification system to divide U.S. farms into eight mutually exclusive and more homogeneous groups. The farm typology focuses on “family farms,” or farms organized as proprietorships, partnerships, and family corporations that are not operated by a hired manager. To be complete, however, it also includes nonfamily farms. A collapsed farm typology combines the eight groups into three categories.

Small Family Farms (gross sales less than $250,000)

***Rural-residence family farms:***

* **Retirement farms.**Small farms whose operators report they are retired.
* **Residential/lifestyle farms.** Small farms whose operators report a major occupation other than farming.

***Intermediate family farms:***

**Farming-occupation farms.** Family farms whose operators report farming as their major occupation.

* **Low-sales farms.**Gross sales less than $100,000.
* **High-sales farms**. Gross sales between $100,000 and $249,999.

**Commercial Family Farms: (gross sales more than $250,000)**

* **Large family farms.** Gross sales between $250,000 and $499,999.
* **Very large family farms.** Gross sales of $500,000 or more.

***Nonfamily farms:***

* Any farm not classified as a [family farm](http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/wellbeing/glossary.htm#type), that is, any farm for which the majority of the farm business is not owned by individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

The National Commission on Small Farms selected $250,000 in gross sales as the cutoff between small and large-scale farms.

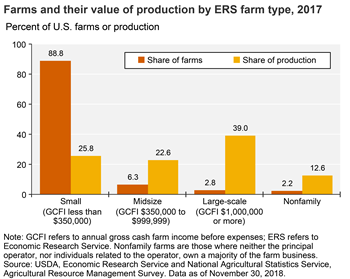
Collapsed Farm Typology

The collapsed farm typology combines the seven farm typology groups into three categories:

* **Rural residence farms.** Includes limited-resource, retirement, and residential lifestyle farms.
* **Intermediate farms.** Includes farming occupation/lower-sales and farming occupation/higher-sales farms.
* **Commercial farms.** Includes large, very large, and nonfamily farms.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/farming-and-farm-income/>

## [Distribution of farms and value of production vary by farm type](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=58288)

[](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=58288)

Gross cash farm income (GCFI) includes income from commodity cash receipts, farm-related income, and Government payments. Family farms (where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator) of various types together accounted for nearly 98 percent of U.S. farms in 2017. Small family farms (less than $350,000 in GCFI) accounted for 89 percent of all U.S. farms. Large-scale family farms ($1 million or more in GCFI) accounted for about 3 percent of farms but 39 percent of the value of production.

This publication <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/81408/eib-164.pdf?v=0> illustrates how the USDA classifies farms. Very informative.

<https://nifa.usda.gov/family-farms>

Family Farms

The vast majority of farms and ranches in the United States are family owned and operated. USDA classifies family farms as “any farm organized as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or family corporation. Family farms exclude farms organized as nonfamily corporations or cooperatives, as well as farms with hired managers”.

Under this definition, the National Agricultural Statistics Service’s Census of Agriculture reported that family farms account for almost 96 percent of the 2,204,792 farms in the United States.

The census makes the following useful distinctions among these family farms, based initially on their gross annual sales:

* Very large family farms (101,265) gross over $500,000
* Large family farms (86,551) gross between $250,000 and $500,000
* Small family farms (1,925,799) gross under $250,000

Many people are surprised that farms are classified as small, large, and very large based on their annual sales rather than on their physical size. While a size-based measure seems intuitive, farm acreage can mean very different things in different places. An acre of non-irrigated land in a low rainfall area, such as southern Utah, is hard to compare to an acre of very fertile, high rainfall land in the Pelouse region of eastern Washington.

Most of the U.S. domestic production of food and fiber comes from relatively few large operations. Large and very large family farms produce over 63 percent of the value of all products sold, while non-family farms produce approximately 21 percent, and the nearly 2 million small farms and ranches (sales under $250,000) produce approximately 15 percent.

Several, inter-related issues must be considered when discussing the long-term viability of the nation’s family farms. An estimated 70 percent of U.S. farmland will change hands in the next 20 years, but many family operations do not have a next generation skilled in or willing to continue farming. If a farm or ranch family has not adequately planned for succession, it is likely to go out of business, be absorbed into ever-larger farming neighbors, or be converted to non-farm uses.

On the positive side, the increasing popularity of local produce and direct or regional marketing is often seen as an important new opportunity for small and beginning farmers and ranchers to become financially secure. After decades of decline the number of family farms has grown by about 4 percent.

**Industrial farm**

This article <http://www.beyondfactoryfarming.org/get-informed/industrial-vs-family-farms-comparison> compares industrial farms and small farms, but with an obvious bias for small farms.

**Regenerative agriculture**

<http://www.regenerativeagriculturedefinition.com/>

Regenerative Agriculture is a system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity, enriches soils, improves watersheds, and enhances ecosystem services.

Regenerative Agriculture aims to capture carbon in soil and aboveground biomass, reversing current global trends of atmospheric accumulation.

At the same time, it offers increased yields, resilience to climate instability, and higher health and vitality for farming and ranching communities.

The system draws from decades of scientific and applied research by the global communities of organic farming, agroecology, Holistic Management, and agroforestry.

<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-04-15/regenerative-agriculture-world-saving-idea-or-food-marketing-ploy/>

So what does it regenerative mean? Many things to many people. To some, it’s a way organic and conventional farmers can work together on achieving environmental ends, rather than fighting over the means. To others, it’s a move to make farms sop up carbon. Still others consider it a tactic to attract customers who buy organic, or maybe a quasi-spiritual concept.

“There’s a lot of different meanings, a lot of different philosophies, and just a little bit of greenwashing already occurring,” said Matthew Dillon, director of agriculture for Clif Bar, told a reporter at a food expo. (For companies like Clif Bar, which have bet their marketing budgets branding themselves “organic,” the label “regenerative” could look like a threat.)

But there’s one definition everyone seems to agree on: Regenerative farming means you’re getting carbon out of the air and into the soil. There have been some eye-popping claims about how much carbon we could capture. According to the Rodale Institute, a nonprofit that supports organic farming, regenerative techniques “could sequester more than 100% of current annual CO2 emissions with a switch to widely available and inexpensive management practices.”

There’s nothing arcane about those management practices. They’re the sort of things ag-schools are teaching students across the country. The various different sects of regenerative ag each have their own special techniques, but they all share the basics: Minimize tillage (i.e. soil disturbance, like plowing), keep the land covered with plants at all times, rotate a diversity of crops and livestock across the fields.

<https://2igmzc48tf4q88z3o24qjfl8-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Regen-Ag-Definition-2.23.17-1.pdf>

“Regenerative Agriculture” describes farming and grazing practices that, among other benefits, reverse climate change by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity – resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle. Specifically, Regenerative Agriculture is a holistic land management practice that leverages the power of photosynthesis in plants to close the carbon cycle, and build soil health, crop resilience and nutrient density. Regenerative agriculture improves soil health, primarily through the practices that increase soil organic matter. This not only aids in increasing soil biota diversity and health, but increases biodiversity both above and below the soil surface, while increasing both water holding capacity and sequestering carbon at greater depths, thus drawing down climate-damaging levels of atmospheric CO2, and improving soil structure to reverse civilization-threatening human-caused soil loss. Research continues to reveal the damaging effects to soil from tillage, applications of agricultural chemicals and salt based fertilizers, and carbon mining. Regenerative Agriculture reverses this paradigm to build for the future.

(This document goes on to explain some of the key practices of regenerative agriculture)

## Annotated Bibliography

“Top 10 Megatrends in Agriculture” Ed Clark, Top Producer, Business and Issues Editor, AgWeb <https://www.agweb.com/article/top-10-megatrends-in-agriculture-ed-clark/> Accessed 4/28/19

This article was particularly useful when first researching important issues in agriculture. The ten trends are: shifting farm structure, acceleration in technology, biotechnology strategy, specialization continuing, resource scarcity, changing commodity environment, meat consumption shift, public scrutiny of livestock treatment, growing environmentalism influence, and government policy in flux. Several of these trends linked back to large farms and GMOs which helped in my beginning research. It’s not a very in-depth article though.

“Five Major Challenges Facing North American Agriculture” Noelle Swan, Seedstock, April 18, 2012 <http://seedstock.com/2012/04/18/five-major-challenges-facing-north-american-agriculture/> Accessed 4/28/19

This article is a bit older, but it also helped me in my initial research. The five challenges the article lists are: resource depletion, land management, food waste, demographic changes, and political issues. All five of these challenges can trace their origins to large or industrial farms. This article goes much more in-depth and provides lots of statistics. It also discusses not only the US, but Mexico and Canada as well and the implications of trade agreements between the three.

“Big, small or bust: The hollowing out of mid-sized U.S. farms” Mario Parker, Bloomberg News, April 11, 2019. [https://www.agupdate.com/news/national/big-small-or-bust-the-hollowing-out-of-mid-sized/article\_401f6b94-5c68-11e9-82e2-0f71cc70fe26.html Accessed 4/28/19](https://www.agupdate.com/news/national/big-small-or-bust-the-hollowing-out-of-mid-sized/article_401f6b94-5c68-11e9-82e2-0f71cc70fe26.html%20Accessed%204/28/19)

I came across this article while continuing my initial research and it helped me to focus on farm size rather than GMOs. Interestingly, this article talks about the increase in large *and small* farms, but a sharp decrease in mid-size or medium farms. Small farms are increasing because some people are going into farming for leisure or fun. It is a fairly short article but it brings up interesting points, including the idea that large farms are not necessarily bad.

“Top Ten Political Issues Facing Agriculture” Boyce Thompson, AgWeb, May 22, 2013 <https://www.agweb.com/article/top_ten_political_issues_facing_agriculture/> Accessed 4/28/19

Another article from AgWeb (it seems to be a pretty good website for ag issues) which, although older, seems to still hold true. It identifies ten issues facing agriculture in the political realm. It is another overview, but includes things such as immigration, taxation, trade, GMOs and aging farmers.

“Census of Ag: 2017 results show larger farms, older operators” AgUpdate, April 11, 2019 [https://www.agupdate.com/news/national/census-of-ag-results-show-larger-farms-older-operators/article\_04e95cbe-5c78-11e9-9f23-2bdca201078c.html Accessed 4/28/19](https://www.agupdate.com/news/national/census-of-ag-results-show-larger-farms-older-operators/article_04e95cbe-5c78-11e9-9f23-2bdca201078c.html%20Accessed%204/28/19)

This article examines the results of the recent Ag Census of 2017 released by the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). As the title implies, the data shows that farms are getting larger and the people working/owning the farms are getting older. It echoes the AgUpdate article that mid-sized farms are declining in number. It is a relatively short analysis but includes statistics from the Ag Census along with some graphic representations and a link to the report.

“The Problems of Industrial Agriculture, Now and for the Future” Elizabeth Ridlington, February 7, 2018, Frontier Group [https://frontiergroup.org/blogs/blog/fg/problems-industrial-agriculture-now-and-future Accessed 4/28/19](https://frontiergroup.org/blogs/blog/fg/problems-industrial-agriculture-now-and-future%20Accessed%204/28/19)

This blog post and the document it refers to (<https://frontiergroup.org/reports/fg/reaping-what-we-sow>) discusses the harms linked to large farms and offers solutions to the problems. This would be great for affirmatives as both harms and solvency evidence. The harms are similar to those stated in other articles but focus on our health and the environment.

“Regenerative Agriculture” Terra Genesis International, <http://www.regenerativeagriculturedefinition.com/> accessed July 8, 2019

This is a definition of “regenerative agriculture” and includes the principles and accepted practices associated with regenerative agriculture. The website does say that the definition is changing and encourages people to submit their own definitions as well. I saw no indication of how often the definition is updated.

“’Regenerative Agriculture’: World-Saving Idea or Food Marketing Ploy?” Nathanael Johnson, Resilience.org on April 15. 2019 (originally in Grist on March 19, 2019) <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-04-15/regenerative-agriculture-world-saving-idea-or-food-marketing-ploy/> accessed 7/8/19

This article discusses how regenerative agriculture is becoming a buzzword in the food industry as well as the pros and cons associated with it and even contains a link to the origins of the term back in the late 1980’s.

“Regenerative agriculture could save soil, water, and the climate. Here’s how the U.S. government actively discourages it.” Jessica McKenzie, The New Food Economy, March 14, 2019 <https://newfoodeconomy.org/regenerative-agriculture-cover-crops-no-till-usda/>

This is a good article about how the status quo is not only not encouraging regenerative agriculture, but is actually discouraging it. The article argues that the crop insurance structure is what is actively working against good farming practices.

“To address the climate crisis, state legislatures are pushing dozens of bills on soil health” Sam Bloch, The New Food Economy, May 30, 2019 <https://newfoodeconomy.org/soil-health-regenerative-agriculture-cover-crops-climate-change-state-legislature-bills/>

This is an interesting article on how state legislatures are passing legislation to help with soil health and even argues that states are a better actor for enacting better change.

“Large Farms Are Using ‘Loopholes’ to Collect Thousands More than Federal Caps on Trump’s Tariff Aid Pacakage” Steve Karnowski and Balint Szalai, Time, July 3, 2019 <https://time.com/5619801/trump-farmers-aid-package-loopholes/>

I included this article to show how timely the issue of large farms is. This is a very recent article about how large farms are able to take advantage of assistance way more than smaller farms. It also highlights how farms are being hurt by the Trump China tariffs.

“Challenges Facing Agriculture and the Regenerative Solution” Alexis Baden-Mayer, Regeneration International, March 22, 2017 <https://regenerationinternational.org/2017/03/18/challenges-facing-agriculture-regenerative-solution/> accessed 7/8/19

Brief article about regenerative agriculture and what problems is has the potential to solve.

“’American Soil’ Is Increasingly Foreign Owned” Renee Wilde, NPR, May 27, 2019 <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/27/723501793/american-soil-is-increasingly-foreign-owned>

I included this article as a possible negative CP area or something along those lines. It talks about how American farmland is being bought up by foreign companies and there are no federal guidelines addressing or restricting this. Some states restrict but others do not. One area of concern is that they are not buying this land to use as farmland.

“Big changes ahead in land ownership and farm operators?” Ed Maixner and Sara Wyant, Agri-Pulse.com, 2/5/19 <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/11869-big-changes-ahead-in-land-ownership-and-farm-operators>

Interesting article about predicted trends in agriculture. Toward the end of the article, it discusses the six trends that could act as disruptors in U.S. agriculture: consolidation, farmer psychology, technology, consumers, markets, and government.

“How Racism Has Shaped the American Farming Landscape” Megan Horst, Eater.com, Jan. 25, 2019 <https://www.eater.com/2019/1/25/18197352/american-farming-racism-us-agriculture-history>

Fascinating article about the role of race in agriculture her in the U.S. While I assumed that the majority of farm owners were white, I was surprised that 96% of owner-operators and 86% of tenant operators were white. The article also gives suggestions on improving this, which could be useful when constructing plans or arguments.

“Envisioning Racial Equality in Agriculture” Jean Willoughby, Racial Equity Instititute, April 2,2019 <https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/blog/2019/4/2/envisioning-racial-equity-in-agriculture>

An article looking at racial inequality in agriculture and attempting to find the causes. Lots of links embedded as well.

“Regenerative Agriculture: Solid Principles, Extraordinary Claims” Andrew McGuire, Center fir Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, Washington State University, April 4, 2018 <http://csanr.wsu.edu/regen-ag-solid-principles-extraordinary-claims/>

This article examines the claims made by advocates of regenerative agriculture and suggests that some of these claims are overstated. This includes links to other articles as well.

## Websites

[www.fb.org/issues](http://www.fb.org/issues) -- this is the website for the American Farm Bureau Federation. Organization description, “Farm Bureau is an independent, non-governmental, voluntary organization governed by and representing farm and ranch families united for the purpose of analyzing their problems and formulating action to achieve educational improvement, economic opportunity and social advancement and, thereby, to promote the national well-being. Farm Bureau is local, county, state, national and international in its scope and influence and is non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-secret in character. Farm Bureau is the voice of agricultural producers at all levels.”

Lots of white papers, fact sheets, and analysis of a variety of agriculture issues, including legislation.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/plants_animals/food_and_agriculture/> -- this is the food and agriculture page for Science Daily. A good source for articles about current issues in agriculture. I imagine this would be a great site to have updates from if this topic is debated.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/> -- the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. This is a great resource for statistics. Their FAQs page (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/faqs.aspx>) links to several of their publications and addresses some misconceptions about farming.

“The mission of USDA's **Economic Research Service** is to anticipate trends and emerging issues in agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America and to conduct high-quality, objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision making.

ERS shapes its research program and products to serve those who routinely make or influence public policy and program decisions. Key clientele include White House and USDA policy officials; the U.S. Congress; program administrators/managers; other Federal agencies; State and local government officials; and organizations, including farm and industry groups. ERS research provides context for and informs the decisions that affect the agricultural sector, which in turn benefits everyone with efficient stewardship of our agricultural resources and the economic prosperity of the sector.

As a federal statistical agency covered by the [Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directives](https://www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/policies-and-standards/omb-statistical-policy-directives/), ERS is responsible for ensuring the quality, objectivity, and transparency of the statistical information it provides. Our [policies and procedures for publishing research and data](https://www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/policies-and-standards/) are designed to ensure that we provide high quality and objective analysis.”

[https://www.nass.usda.gov](https://www.nass.usda.gov/About_NASS/index.php) – the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service. Lots of statistics as well. This agency is also the one responsible for the Ag Census.

“The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture. Production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical use, and changes in the demographics of U.S. producers are only a few examples.

NASS is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. To uphold our continuing commitment, NASS will:

* Report the facts on American agriculture, facts needed by people working in and depending upon U.S. agriculture.
* Provide objective and unbiased statistics on a preannounced schedule that is fair and impartial to all market participants.
* Conduct the Census of Agriculture every five years, providing the only source of consistent, comparable, and detailed agricultural data for every county in America.
* Serve the needs of our data users and customers at a local level through our network of State field offices and our cooperative relationship with universities and State Departments of Agriculture.
* Safeguard the privacy of farmers, ranchers, and other data providers, with a guarantee that confidentiality and data security continue to be our top priorities.”

<https://rodaleinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/rodale-white-paper.pdf> -- the white paper from the Rodale Institute on regenerative agriculture. Lots of information on what regenerative agriculture can do as well as how to achieve it. Robert Rodale was the one who coined the term “regenerative agriculture” and founded the Rodale Institute.

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/06/26/usda-farm-bill-implementation-progress-update> -- this has the current state of implementation of the different parts of the 2018 Farm Bill.

<https://www.usda.gov/> -- the United States Department of Agriculture. Obviously, a good source for agriculture information. It also links to the ERS and NASS.

<https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/> -- the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

<https://agriculture.house.gov/> -- the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture.