



Indian Country's

# History of the Census of Agriculture

Gathering and collecting information for the goal of counting in Indian Country, whether agricultural and/or population data, has looked different throughout the ages. Take a look at this timeline drafted by the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, which features condensed highlights of the history of the Census of Agriculture in Indian Country.

## PRE-COLONIAL

- Tribes across the Americas have varied ways of counting natural resources and food sources.
  - This could include incorporation into beadwork and other textile arts or other traditional methods of counting and recording, varying from community to community.

## TREATY ERA

- **1777 - 1800s** – While Tribal Nations signed treaties with other nations, once the United States formed, they had more permanency with the federal government.
- **1790** – The U.S. conducts its first Census, which does not count agriculture statistics nor include Indian Nations or their people.
- **1820** – The Census begins collecting information on agriculture and farming across the U.S., not including Indian Country.

### FACT:

*Tribes lost 1.75 billion acres of land in the contiguous U.S. due to treaty signing.*

## REMOVAL ERA – 1825-1850

- **1828** – President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law.
- The federal census in Tribal communities – known as 'rolls' – served as a tool in the removal process, helping document those forced to remove from their homelands to west of the Mississippi.

## RESERVATION ERA – 1850 - 1887

- The federal Census had few provisions for counting Tribal citizens, with Native Americans appearing in Census calculations based upon whether they were "assimilated" or not.
- Throughout this era, the Federal government also conducted one-off census counts of Tribal communities across Indian Country, which the government used to enact allotment policies and encourage Tribal citizens to adopt Western agricultural practices.
- **1840** – The Census establishes separate schedules for agricultural population data collection.
- **1860** – The 1860 Census acknowledged that Native people existed in an appendix, but did not count them.
- **1864** – USDA established a Division of Statistics, known today as National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).
- **1870** – The Census again makes no mention of Native Americans.
- **1880** – The 1880 Census reflects deeper insights into Indian Country agriculture, likely in part influenced by possible gains to be had on Tribal lands by non-Indians.

## ALLOTMENT ERA – 1887-1934

- **1887** – The Dawes Act of 1887 set to divide Tribal lands, distribute as allotments to Tribal citizens, and then allow non-Native settlement on the remaining acres after the allotment process ended.
- **1900** – This is the first time Tribal agriculture is mentioned in the Agriculture Census, with an entire section titled 'Agriculture on Indian Reservations'
- **1920** – The 1920 Agriculture Census counted 16,680 Indians as farmers from 1900-20.





## REORGANIZATION ERA – 1934-1940

- **1935** – The Agricultural Census includes Indian reservations and allotted Indian land. Where land had been allotted to Indians, an individual schedule had to be secured for each Indian whose use of the land would bring it under the classification of a farm. An Indian that had no allotted land, but had livestock pastured on unallotted reservation, national forest, or public domain, were considered a farmer if their total livestock production in 1934 was valued at least \$250.

## TERMINATION ERA – 1940 - 1961

- **1940** – There were 29,742 farms in the United States operated by Indians. Each census has shown an increase in the number of Indian operators, except that of 1920. In that year the lower number of recorded Tribal farmers was largely attributed to a difference in the method of enumerating Indian reservations, many reservation groups being enumerated as single farms in that year.
- Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and South Dakota, in the order named, led in the number of Indian farm operators. These states accounted for 76.3 percent of all Indian farm operators in the U.S.
- On Indian reservations, lands allotted to individual Indians were considered as owned whether the allotment was in fee, in trust, or merely the designation of a certain acreage as the place of resident or agricultural activity of the operator
- Similarly, operations representing grazing lands held or controlled by cooperative groups, such as grazing associations, are usually considered managed, as are grazing lands in Indians reservations used for grazing reservation livestock. In the latter situation, the Indian agent was usually reported as the manager, and such operations were generally included with the statistics for farms of white operators.
- **1950** – In some instances, the entire reservation was reported as one farm.

## SELF-DETERMINATION – 1961 - PRESENT

- **1964** – Size of Farm: the average size of managed farms, other than commercial, was very large, as this group included abnormal farms such as Indian reservations and grazing associations.
- **1969** – this Census reported 5,000 Indian producers. More than one-half of these Indian operators were located in North Carolina and Oklahoma
- Most, if not all, of this 32.5 million acres was in Indian reservation, or parts of Indian reservations, operated by Indians.
- **1982** – Census of Agriculture Appendix A notes that land in Indian reservations used for crops or grazing was included as land in farms, while reservation lands not reported by individuals (Tribal or non-Tribal) was reported as cooperative group's name who used it. In some instances, entire reservations were one "farm."
  - 1974 only applied data to individuals, family operations and partnerships.
  - Farm operator data wasn't collected on reservations. In 1978 and 1982, it was.
  - Appendix A from 1982 notes 'Black and other races' includes American Indian producers.
- **1997** – Congress transfers the Census of Agriculture responsibilities from the Census Bureau to the USDA.
- **2007** – The 2007 Census of Agriculture was the most comprehensive effort for Indian Country provisions to date.
- To maximize coverage of American Indian and Alaska Native farm operators, special procedures were followed in the Census of Agriculture. A concerted effort was made to get individual reports from every American Indian and Alaska Native farm operator in the country. If this was not possible within some reservations, a single reservation-level census report was obtained from knowledgeable reservation officials. These reports covered agricultural activity on the entire reservation.

### FUN FACT:

From 1954 - 1974, the Census of Agriculture occurred on years ending in 4 and 9 before changing to years ending in 5 and 7 in 1997.





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## SELF-DETERMINATION — 1961 - PRESENT

- **2012** — State and county infographic sheets provide data on Indian Country producers.
  - American Indian and Alaska Native Farm Operator Follow-up. The American Indian report form (12-A200) was mailed to all operations in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah thought to have an American Indian or Alaska Native operator. It was included in the initial mailout, but due to poor mail response a personal enumeration data collection strategy was utilized with no additional mail followup. A concerted effort was made to get individual reports from every American Indian and Alaska Native farm operator in the country. If this was not possible within a reservation, a single reservation level census report was obtained from knowledgeable reservation officials.
- **2017** — NASS tried to improve minority producer outreach for the 2017 Census of Agriculture, which included obtaining mailing lists from organizations focused on minority producers and populations.
  - 2017's Agriculture Census showed a growth of Indian Country's food and agriculture systems compared to declines elsewhere.
- **2022** — Data from the 2022 Census of Agriculture show the market value of Indian Country-produced agricultural products rose by nearly 3 billion dollars, now averaging almost \$6.1 billion in annual economic impact.
  - 78,316 American Indian/Alaska Native producers were counted in this Census of Agriculture.
  - The 2022 data also indicates the average age of Tribal producers was slightly lower than the national average, and the number of young Tribal farmers counted increased.
  - The number of total acres that Tribal producers farm and ranch on increased by more than 4 million acres for a total of 63 million acres in Tribal agricultural production.
  - The data also show continued growth for Tribal food production in areas like poultry, crop production, and fruit and tree nut farming. Meanwhile, beef cattle ranching continues to represent the largest percentage of Indian Country's ag production at 39% of all Tribal farms.

The Census of Agriculture is a reminder of the significant economic impact Indian Country food and agriculture has, as well as the incredible variety of agricultural products that Tribal producers work hard to grow, raise, and harvest, and forage every year.

The Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative acknowledges that work remains to improve the Census of Agriculture so that it paints a more complete picture of Indian Country food and agriculture.

“Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving Tribal leaders, government agencies, Native organizations, and Indian Country producers,” said Erin Parker, IFAI Executive Director. “Recognizing the unique circumstances of Tribal lands and incorporating culturally sensitive approaches are essential steps toward obtaining accurate agricultural census data.”

Visit the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative's website for more information:  
[indigenousfoodandag.com](http://indigenousfoodandag.com).



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