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POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF BLACK FARMERS
IN THE SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Almost 94 percent of black farms in the United States have been lost since 1920, remaining 57,271 farms constituted only 2.3 percent of all farms in 1978. Most (95 percent) black farm operators were located in the South. However, they constituted only 5.4 percent of all farm operators in the South. Since 1959, there have been some dramatic changes not only in the number of black farms but in their composition also. Ninety three percent of the South's black farmers were small, both in size and product sales, and they operated only 1.4 percent of all operated land. These black farmers were older than their white counterparts and worked fewer days off-farm. Thus most black operated farms in the South were small and they faced several unique problems along with those problems faced by other small farmers. The paper identifies, compares, and contrasts resources and characteristics of black farm operators in the 14 southern states. Relevant unpublished and published census of agriculture data were used to provide insights into the black farmers in the South. Paper provides background material for researchers and policy makers and attempts to identify those voids which may receive emphasis in future work.

POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF BLACK FARMERS
IN THE SOUTH¹

INTRODUCTION

In February 1982, the United States Commission on Civil Rights released a report to the President and Congress entitled, The Decline of Black Farming in America. The report described the crisis facing black farmers as "a blight on the conscience of this Nation", and called for immediate Federal intervention to help solve problems and the extinction faced by black farmers in this country. Despite the importance given to blacks in agriculture and farming as early as 1881 by Booker T. Washington, there has been very little written about black farmers, in recent years. This may be due to the fact that the importance of blacks in agriculture was clouded by their migration in large numbers from farms to cities. Thus, attention was paid to the problems of black farmers who had left agriculture rather than to those remaining in agriculture. Few studies that exist are descriptive and lead to a dismal prognosis for the continued survival of black operated farms (Ponder, 1971; Beale, 1976; Lewis, 1976; Salamon, 1976). The main purpose of this paper is to summarize relevant secondary data that can give some insights into the black farmers in the South. The paper identifies resources and characteristics of black farmers and compares them with those for white and/or all farmers. Such an analysis recognizes that "problems of the people differ because of differences among them in age, education, geographic location and other attributes" (President's National Commission on Rural Poverty, 1967). Paper provides background material for researchers and policy makers and identifies those voids

BACKGROUND

Structural changes affecting farms operated by blacks can not be separated from changes in agriculture generally. The structure of agriculture in the South and across the nation has changed tremendously during the past few decades. The number of farms has declined drastically while at the same time the size of individual farms has increased. Decline in the number of farms has been attributed to several factors including the capital intensity of agricultural technology. This has transformed the structure of the small diversified farm firm, for which land and labor dominated the resource base into a more specialized production unit which is capital intensive and heavily dependent upon production inputs purchased off the farm. Fundamental problems in agriculture may arise also due to the fact that land, some capital items, and labor are not immediately transferrable. Therefore, resource adjustments made in response to cost saving technology may create new problems. This has been the case with Southern agriculture in general. After the Second World War, the triple triumph of tractors, pickers, and weed control released thousands of tenants from work - the majority of them black and in the South. Also, the proportion of cotton raised in western states - Arizona, California, New Mexico, and West Texas rose from 2 percent in 1919 to 34 percent in 1959 (Beale, 1976: 207). This change in the methods of cotton production and its relocation in the southwest reduced job opportunities for share croppers and farm laborers in the South and forcing blacks, who were mostly engaged in cotton cultivation, out of farming and into the Northern cities.

Before World War I, about three-fourths of the black population lived in nonmetro areas, virtually all in the South (Havighurst and Neugarten, 1975). By 1977, only 26 percent of the total black population was residing in nonmetro America and of which 90 percent lived in the South. There were 222,000 blacks on farms in 1981, representing 3.8 percent of the nation's 6 million farm population. Whereas blacks accounted for 12 percent of the non-farm population (Farm Population of the U. S.: 1981). About 95 percent of all black farmers are located in the South. Where they represent 10.4% of the employed farm population age 14 and over, and as much as one quarter of all southern residents employed in agriculture for wage and salaries (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1982: 45). However, only 5.4 percent of the South's farmers are black and this number is rapidly declining. The above described push out of rural areas has particularly affected the status of black farmers in the South. Black farm residents have experienced higher rates of decline than whites over the period for which statistics have been collected (Farm Population of the U. S. 1981). Table 1 describes the total farm population by blacks and whites for selected years. In 1920, about 16% of the farm population was black as compared to 81.5% white, but in 1981 only 4% of farm population was black (Table 1). During the 1970-80 decade, the black farm population declined 65% as compared to a 22% decline for whites.

(Table 1 about here)

Table 1. Total Farm Population and Black Farm Population in Selected Year, United States

Year	Population (thousands)						Percent in Farm Population	
	Farm Popu- lation	Farm % of Total Popula- tion	White		Black		White	Black
			Total Popu- lation	% of Total	Total Popu- lation	% of Total		
1920	31,974	30.2	94,821	27.5	10,463	48.7	81.5	15.9
1930	30,529	24.9	110,287	22.9	11,891	39.4	82.6	15.3
1940	30,547	23.2	118,215	21.5	12,866	35.0	83.4	14.7
1950	23,042	15.3	134,942	14.6	15,042	21.1	85.5	13.7
1960	15,635	8.7	158,832	7.5	18,872	7.9	76.0	9.5
1970	9,712	4.8	174,641	5.0	23,972	3.5	90.4	8.7
1978	8,005	3.7	184,806	4.0	24,757	1.7	93.5	5.2
1981	6,942	3.1	189,056	3.5	25,930	1.1	94.6	4.0
1978*	6,501	3.0	184,806	3.0	24,757	1.4	93.3	5.4
1981*	5,790	2.6	189,056	2.9	25,930	0.9	94.7	3.8

*Numbers using current definition of farm population which consists of all persons living in rural territory on places from which \$1000 or more agril. products were sold, or normally would have been sold, in the reporting year. In the top section of the table data is given using the previous farm definition - which consist of all persons living in rural territory on places of 10 or more acres if at least \$50 worth of agricultural products were sold from the place in the reporting year.

Source: Farm Population of the United States: 1981 Current Population reports, Farm Population Series P-27, No. 56. 1982.

SOURCE OF DATA

In this paper fourteen southern states of the U. S. are referred to as the South. These states included: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. These are also the states where 1890 Land Grant Colleges or Universities are located². Detailed data for black farmers were obtained from unpublished 1978 Census of Agriculture tabulations provided by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, office of Minority Affairs. **Unpublished data on black farmers were combined with published data to facilitate comparison with white and all farmers.**

BLACK FARM OPERATORS-TREND

Historically, black entrepreneurship in the rural South has been associated with agriculture and forestry. However, blacks have never enjoyed equal opportunities with whites to acquire and retain farm land.

The freedom gained by 4 million slaves after the Civil War did not transfer economic independence to most blacks. Federal promises of land distribution among the freed slaves were not fulfilled. Share cropping, while more subtle form of dominance than slavery, yielded similar patterns of control and thus, was not a stepping stone to advancement. Whites in the South made every effort to maintain their superior social and economic position (Commission on Civil Rights, 1982). Freedom from slavery brought blacks only limited opportunity to purchase farm land, and their land holdings tended to be small. **At the same time blacks were denied an equitable share in public education, general government relief, and special farm program. Credit was generally controlled by white merchants who required black farmers to cultivate cotton rather than to diversify their**

crops. When crisis in the cotton market threatened southern agriculture, institutional economic support was extended to some white farmers—but not significantly to blacks. Thousands of black farmers, unable to meet their mortgage payments, lost their farms and left agriculture to seek jobs in urban areas. Two significant developments for black farmers in 1880's and early 1900 were: (a) establishment of black owned lending institutions and, (b) establishment of black agricultural and teachers colleges, although inadequately funded and staffed. By comparing the trends for all farmers, black and white, some judgement can be made about the relative position of black farmers in southern agriculture.

THE GREAT DECLINE - NUMBER OF BLACK FARMS AND FARM OPERATORS

The number of black farmers in the United States grew from 746,716 in 1900 to a peak of 925,703 in 1920 tapering down to a mere 57,271 in 1978. Thus, almost 94% of the black farms have been lost since 1920 as compared to only 56% loss in white operated farms (Table 2). In 1978, blacks operated only 2.3 percent of all farms in the U. S., compared with 15 percent in 1920. In 1920, about 99 percent of all black farmers were located in the South. In 1978, the percentage in the South declined but remained more than 95 percent³ (Table 2). The greatest decline (80%) in number of black farms occurred during the period 1959-78, more than 2½ times of that their white counterparts. During the 1969-1978 period, the decline in white and all farms was about 9%, considerably less than the decrease in the previous decade. But for black farms during the same period, the decline (57%) was higher than the previous decade (Table 2).

(Table 2 about here)

Table 2. Number of All Farm Operators, Black, and White Farm Operators in The United States, 1900-1978.

Year	All Farms		Black Farms			White Farms	
	Number (1,000)	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change	Percent in South	Number	Percent Change
1900	5,739	--	746,717	--	--	4,970,129	--
1910	6,366	+10.9	893,377	+19.6	--	5,440,619	+9.5
1920	6,453	+1.4	925,710	+3.6	98.9	5,499,707	+1.1
1930	6,295	-2.4	882,852	-4.6	98.7	5,373,703	-2.3
1940	6,102	-3.0	681,790	-22.8	98.6	5,378,913	+0.9
1950	5,388	-11.7	559,980	-17.9	98.5	4,802,520	-10.7
1959	3,711	-31.1	272,541	-51.3	98.0	3,419,672	-28.8
1969	2,730	26.4	133,973	-50.8	97.6	2,639,744	-22.8
1978	2,478	9.2	57,271	-57.3	95.2	2,398,726	-9.1
Overall percentage loss between 1920-1978			-93.8%			-56.4	

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1974 Census of Agriculture, Vol. II; 1978 Census of Agriculture, Vol. I; 1959 Census of Agriculture Vol. II, General Report. The Decline of Black Farming in America - A report of the United States Commission of Civil Rights. February, 1982, p. 3.

There were 265,255 black farm operators in South in 1959 (Table 3). During the 1959-1969 decade black commercial farm operators in the South declined by 84.1%. In contrast, white operated commercial farms declined only by 26.3% during the same period (Commission on Civil Rights, 1982). Between 1969 and 1978, number of black operators in the South declined from 85,249 to 54,510. Thus between 1959-1978 more than 79% of black farmers quit farming, compared with 35% of white farmers and 38% of all farmers in the South.

(Table 3 about here)

There was wide variation across the South by states in the distribution of black farms. In both 1959 and 1969, 58% of all black farms were in the four states of Mississippi, Alabama, North and South Carolina and ten out of fourteen states contained 95% of all black farms in the South (U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1959 and 1969). The state of Mississippi ranked first in number of farms in both of these years. The remaining states changed rank only slightly during the 1959-1969 period. In 1959, the number of black operators varied from as many as 54,927 in Mississippi to as few as 1,957 in Maryland. In 1978, Mississippi still had the largest number of black farmers (8,817) followed by North and South Carolina. The smallest number of black farmers (851) were in Oklahoma. South Carolina had the largest percentage of black farm operators (19.3%) among all farmers, followed by Mississippi (16.3%), and North Carolina (8.6%). During the 1959-1978 period, the biggest percentage decline in black farms was 86% in Arkansas and least was 34% in Florida. Other states with more than 80% decline were Mississippi,

Table 3. Number and Percent Change in All Farms, Black and White Farms in the South, 1959, 1969, and 1978.

Year	All Farms		Black Farms		White Farms	
	Number (1,000)	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change
1959	1,645	--	265,255	--	1,379,407	--
1969	1,161	-41.7	85,249	-67.9	1,076,150	-22.0
1978	1,014	-12.7	54,510	-36.0	900,610	-16.3
1959- 1978		-38.4		-79.4		-34.7

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1959, 1969, and 1978 Census of Agriculture. Washington, D. C.

Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina and Louisiana. Other variables presented in Table 4 (farm size, age, etc.) but not discussed, will be discussed in the following sections.

(Table 4 about here)

Land in Farms and Their Size

There has been a marked decrease in total acreage owned and operated by blacks in the South. This acreage is well under half of what it once was, judging from available Census data. Southern blacks operated 8.6 million acres of land in 1959 (full owners and part owners only), which declined to 6.6 million acres in 1969 and 4.3 million acres in 1978 (Brown and Larson, 1979). Thus land operated by blacks declined approximately 50% during 1959-1978 period. Only 1.4% of all land in farms in the region was operated by blacks (5.4% of all farmers were black) with the largest percentage in South Carolina (5.1%) followed by Mississippi (4.9%) in 1978 (Table 4). In none of the states in the region, however, the acreage held by blacks was proportional to the number of land owners. Much of the black owned land has traditionally been concentrated in a relative handful southern states. In 1969, Mississippi alone accounted for almost one quarter of the black farm land owners in the South. Furthermore, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina accounted for almost 60 percent of all black farm land owners and 52% of all black operated land (Salamon, 1976: 3). In 1978, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina contained more than 42% of black operated land in farms. Black owned land is concentrated not only among a handful of southern states but also is concentrated within them (Salamon, 1976).

Table 4. General Characteristics of Black Farms in The South, 1978.

States	Number of Farms	% Change 1959-1978	% of All Farms Operated by Blacks	% Farms Less than \$20,000 Sales	Av. Size of Black Farms (Acres)	Av. Size of Black Farms as % of Av. Size of All Farms	% Land Operated by Blacks	Av. Age of Operators (Yrs.)
Alabama	4,791	-83.6	8.3	96.0	86	43	3.6	56.8
Arkansas	2,067	-85.7	3.5	91.8	94	36	1.3	56.1
Florida	2,307	-34.0	7.9	92.6	65	22	1.1	56.0
Georgia	4,485	-76.8	7.6	91.8	85	36	2.8	53.6
Kentucky	1,092	-66.6	0.99	90.3	76	55	0.5	56.3
Louisiana	3,296	-81.4	8.5	94.3	69	28	2.4	55.2
Maryland	953	-51.3	5.1	92.4	51	35	1.8	55.1
Mississippi	8,817	-84.0	16.3	97.3	77	30	4.9	56.8
North Carolina	7,680	-82.0	8.6	83.5	55	43	3.7	55.1
Oklahoma	851	-74.8	1.1	95.9	158	36	0.4	58.8
South Carolina	6,451	-79.0	19.3	94.6	50	26	5.1	53.7
Tennessee	2,405	-83.2	2.5	93.6	74	54	1.4	57.0
Texas	5,420	-64.0	2.8	97.2	118	16	0.5	58.9
Virginia	3,895	-73.9	6.8	89.4	85	48	3.3	56.2
SOUTH	54,510	-79.4	5.4	93.0	82.0	--	1.4	56.1

Source: Unpublished 1978 Census of Agriculture tabulations provided by the USDA Office of Minority Affairs.

Farms owned and operated by blacks and other races were small as more than 56% of such farms in the United States were below 50 acre in size in 1978 and only 11.1% were over 220 acres, compared with 34.7% for all farms (Table 5). In the South black owned farms were even smaller. Although the average size of black farms in the South has trended upward, it was only 78 acres in 1969 as compared with 303 acres for white operated farms. In Table 4, average size of black farms in various states is given for 1978, the largest average size 158 acres was in Oklahoma compared with 415 acres for all farms in the U. S. in the same year. In 1978, the smallest average farm size was in South Carolina (50 acres) followed by Maryland and North Carolina (Table 4). In most states, black farms were one-third the size of all farms, or less. While the average size of black operated commercial farms (with sales \$2,500 or more) in the South was 128 acres, the average white operated commercial farm was more than three times that size - 428 acres (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1982: 50). This points to one of the central characteristics of black operated farms in the South: their relatively small size. Only in Kentucky, where there are relatively fewer black farmers, does the average size of the black operated farms reach even 55% of the average size of all farms in the state.

The farmer who does not control the land he works does not control his own destiny. Thus the typical black farmer with his limited capital and lack of ownership experience at a tremendous disadvantage. He/she lacks the land resource that could be used as collateral to borrow money to improve and expand farming operations. Black farmers not only face difficulty acquiring new land by purchase or rental, but they also face problems holding the land they now have. Partition sales, tax foreclosures,

and other devices have been employed over the years to cause the loss of much black held land (Marshall and Thompson, 1976: 54). Other variables presented in Table 5 but not discussed will be discussed in the following sections.

(Table 5 about here)

Tenure of Operators

Until 1950, half or more of all black farmers were landless tenants working for a share of the crops they produced. The number and proportion of black tenants has been greatly reduced in the last thirty years. In 1959, 52% of southern farmers were tenants, 33% full-owners and 14.1% part-owners, compared with 16, 60, and 24 percent respectively in 1978. Among the southern states, Florida had the highest percentage (70%) and Maryland had the lowest percentage (50%) of full-owners in 1978 (Table 6). Also, Maryland had the largest percentage of black operators as tenants (29%), followed by Louisiana (25%) and South Carolina (21%). If land ownership is used as the measure, the tenure status of blacks remaining in farming has improved. However, the percentage of tenants was higher in the South as compared with all farmers in the United States (Table 5). In every state of the region, relatively more black farm operators than all farm operators were tenants. Even though the percent of black full-owners has increased between 1959 and 1978, their number has sharply declined from over 100,000 to 32,645 as a result of the decline in the total number of black farm operators. In 1978, black full and part-owners made up more than 84% of black operators and farmed more than 2.9 million acres. Only about 1.8% of land owned by all full-owners in the South were owned by black owners in 1978, but the percentage of black ownership of land varied

Table 5. Percent of Black and All Farm Operators in Different Age, Size and Sales Groups, United States, 1978.

Item	Operators (Percent)	
	Black and Other Races ¹	All
Operators:		
Under 35 yrs. of age	10.0	16.2
35 - 54 yrs.	37.8	43.6
55 - 64 yrs.	27.1	23.7
65 years and over	25.1	16.4
Average age	54.2	50.1
Operators with farms:		
Under 50 acres	56.5	27.8
140-219 acres	7.8	13.4
220 acres or more	11.1	34.8
Operators with agril. sales:		
Under \$20,000	85.6	63.9
\$20,00-\$99,000	10.9	27.0
\$100,000 or more	3.5	9.0
Land Tenure:		
Full-owner	59.4	58.5
Part-owner	23.7	28.9
Tenants	16.9	12.6

¹In 1978 Census of Agriculture, data is for Black and other races. Blacks comprise 72 percent of all Black and other races.

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1959, 1969, and 1978 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Washington, D. C.

from a high of 5.1 in South Carolina to a low of 0.4 in Oklahoma (Table 4). Although black farmland owners constitute a significant number of the farm owning population of several southern states, their share of land is significantly below what their numbers would suggest.

(Table 6 about here)

Economic Class and Type of Farms

There are many definitions of small farms, however, probably the most widely used definition is "families operating a farm business selling less than \$20,000 in farm products per year" (Carlin and Crecink: 1979). According to this definition, 93% of black farms in the South were small compared to 85.6% farms of black and other races and only 63.9% of all farms in the United States in 1978 (Tables 5 and 6). Moreover, about 57% farms sold products valued at less than \$2,500 in a year. The percent of black farmers in different economic classes (groups according to farm products sales) by state is provided in Table 6. Most black farms are small not only in size but also in market power. Only 2.8% of black farms had sales over \$40,000 and 0.73% over \$100,000 in 1978. The largest percentage (97.3%) of small black farms were in Mississippi followed closely by Texas (97.2%). North Carolina had the least percentage (83.5%) of black farms that were small. Mississippi also had the largest percentage (75%) of farms with sales below \$2,500. This is also an indication that large number of black farm families are living below poverty level in southern states. The median income of black farm families in 1978 was \$7,584 compared with \$17,323 for white farm families. The proportion of black farm residents living in poverty is

Table 6. Percent of Black Farms by Value of Agricultural Products Sold and Tenure, South, 1978.

States	Value of Sales					Percent of Black Farmers		
	\$100,000 or more	\$40,000 or more	\$40,000 or less	\$20,000 or less	Less than \$2,500	Full- Owners	Part- Owners	Tenants
Alabama	0.6	1.6	98.4	96.0	73.2	61.6	22.5	15.8
Arkansas	0.9	2.9	97.0	91.8	49.7	56.5	24.0	19.5
Florida	1.3	3.2	96.7	92.6	66.5	70.3	20.1	9.6
Georgia	1.2	3.8	96.2	91.8	62.6	59.0	21.0	20.0
Kentucky	1.1	3.7	96.3	90.3	32.0	70.0	15.7	8.2
Louisiana	0.8	2.8	97.2	94.3	67.2	54.0	20.5	25.4
Maryland	1.4	4.3	95.7	92.4	35.9	50.3	20.6	29.1
Mississippi	0.2	0.9	99.0	97.3	75.0	68.6	19.0	12.3
North Carolina	1.2	6.3	92.4	83.5	39.3	53.9	29.5	16.5
Oklahoma	0.6	2.0	98.0	95.9	59.1	53.2	32.9	13.9
South Carolina	0.6	2.1	97.9	94.6	67.3	51.7	27.0	21.3
Tennessee	0.6	2.8	97.8	93.6	51.2	67.6	21.0	11.4
Texas	0.1	1.4	98.6	97.2	63.4	63.9	25.3	10.8
Virginia	1.0	3.9	96.0	89.4	37.8	53.7	32.7	13.6
SOUTH (Percent of all black farmers)	0.7	2.9	96.5	93.0	56.6	60.0	24.0	16.0

Source: Unpublished 1978 Census of Agriculture tabulations provided by the USDA Office of Minority Affairs.

currently about double that for white farm residents (Farm Population of the U. S. 1981, 1982: 2).

With the mechanization and relocation of cotton cultivation, number of black farmers growing cotton declined. Tobacco took the place of cotton and by 1959 black farmers were growing one-sixth of cigarette tobacco and one-tenth of the cotton (Beale, 1976). A rapid shift in type of black farms occurred in the decade between 1959 and 1969. The number of cotton farmers declined from 87,074 to 3,191 and tobacco farmers declined from 40,670 to 9,083 during this period. By 1974 cash grains and crops other than cotton or tobacco made up 56 percent of all black operated commercial farms in the South (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1982: 40). In 1978 there were only 8,194 tobacco farms, with the majority now hogs and pig farms followed by beef cattle operations (Table 7). There were 20,434 (37.5%) field crops and cash grain farms but only 1,342 (2.5%) cotton farms.

On the basis of acreage under a crop in 1978, soybean was the important crop with largest number of acres - 460,814, followed by corn with 257,953 acres. In 1969, however, cotton had the second largest acreage after soybean. In 1978, cotton dropped one more place to third, wheat fourth and peanut was fifth in acreage of crops grown by black farmers in the South (unpublished USDA Data; 1978). Thus since 1959, there have been some dramatic changes not only in the number of black farms but in their composition also.

(Table 7 about here)

Table 7. Type of Farms Operated By Black Farmers in the South, 1978.

States	Percent of Farms						
	Cash Grain Farms	Tobacco	Cotton	Vegetable	Beef Cattle	Hogs & Pigs	Field Crops
Alabama	13.1	0.0	2.6	3.5	33.3	56.5	7.8
Arkansas	39.7	--	12.2	1.4	23.1	36.2	13.4
Florida	8.2	5.4	--	6.3	20.7	58.7	11.6
Georgia	16.9	4.6	0.3	3.0	13.3	65.3	13.4
Kentucky	7.1	50.3	--	9.4	18.2	31.5	51.6
Louisiana	20.1	--	6.4	0.3	25.8	49.8	16.0
Maryland	12.5	68.3	--	1.0	1.6	24.4	69.0
Mississippi	15.7	--	5.8	2.9	36.9	48.7	7.6
North Carolina	13.0	44.3	0.1	1.4	2.0	56.9	48.2
Oklahoma	6.8	--	0.2	0.3	69.8	33.7	4.0
South Carolina	25.8	18.8	0.2	4.3	4.6	69.3	20.1
Tennessee	18.4	14.9	4.7	1.0	16.9	56.8	20.8
Texas	4.7	--	1.5	1.4	70.8	39.5	4.3
Virginia	15.4	43.0	--	1.3	10.2	51.7	49.3
SOUTH	16.1	15.0	2.5	2.6	24.3	54.4	21.4

Source: Unpublished 1978 Census of Agriculture tabulations provided by the U. S. D. A. Office of Minority Affairs.

Age and Days Worked Off-Farm

Age of the operator may be an important variable when considering improvements on farms. An important trend for black farm operators has been the steady rise in the average age structure. More than half of all black full-owners were over 55 years old as of 1964, and this figure rose even further by 1969 (Salamon, 1976). Average age of operators of black and other races was 54.2 years compared with 50.1 years for all farmers in 1978 (Table 5). In the South, black farm operators were older than white farmers with an average age of over 56.1 years. Their average varied from 53.6 years in Georgia to 58.9 years in Virginia (Table 4). More than 29% of the South's black farmers were 65 years or older and 28 percent were between 55-64 years of age. Also black farmers were older than other farmers on the average regardless of economic class (Unpublished USDA Data). Tables 5 and 8, give the distribution of black farmers in different age groups and for numbers of days reported working off-farm in the U. S. and the South. A much larger percentage of black farmers in the U. S. were older than were white farmers. Ninety percent of black farm operators were male. A relatively larger percentage of female operators were black as compared to all farm operators (Census of Agriculture, 1978).

Number of black farmers employed off-farm 100 days or more increased from 21.0% in 1959 to 37% in 1969 and 63% in 1978. Thirty-six percent of black farmers reported working off-farm 200 days or more in 1978 (Table 8). In general, operators of small farms tend to work off the farm more than large farm operators; yet blacks, who have disproportionately smaller holdings, have less off-farm employment than whites (U. S. Commission on

Civil Rights, 1982: 46). The unemployment rate for the black farm population is more than four times that for the white farm population in the South. Higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of participation in off-farm employment for black farm operators may be a result of: the limited employment opportunities open to blacks, the age of operator, and the lack of education and technical skills.

(Table 8 about here)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Farming is a declining industry in terms of employment, opportunities and a disproportionately larger number of black farmers have quit farming since 1920. Those blacks who have survived as farmers continue to be placed in disadvantageous competitive position due to the changes that have taken place in agriculture in this country. In the past, more attention has been paid to problems of black farmers leaving agriculture than to those remaining in agriculture.

Blacks currently represent only 5.4 percent of the South's farmers, however about 95 percent of all black farmers are located in the South. In 1978, these farm operators were unique in that they differed from other farmers in several characteristics identified in this paper.

The adverse conditions which historically affected black farmers can generally be summarized as: (1) smaller size operations and lower resource levels except labor, (2) low levels of formal education, (3) discriminatory racial practices among agriculture agencies and related institutional systems, (4) slower transition to expanding enterprises in the South, such as livestock and poultry, and (5) a

Table 8. Operators Working Off-Farm, Black and All Farm Operators, South, 1978.

States	All Black Farm Operators	Operators reporting days off-farm work			
		100-199 days		200 days or more	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Alabama	4,791	495	10.3	1,840	38.4
Arkansas	2,067	167	8.0	654	31.6
Florida	2,307	374	16.2	968	42.0
Georgia	4,485	325	7.3	1,872	4.7
Kentucky	1,092	74	6.8	389	35.6
Louisiana	3,296	432	13.1	1,107	33.6
Maryland	953	134	14.0	360	37.8
Mississippi	8,817	1,109	12.6	3,094	35.1
North Carolina	7,680	754	9.8	2,501	32.6
Oklahoma	851	82	9.6	326	38.3
South Carolina	6,451	848	13.2	2,369	36.6
Tennessee	2,405	172	7.2	815	33.9
Texas	5,420	694	12.8	2,317	42.7
Virginia	3,895	370	9.5	1,171	30.0
SOUTH	54,510	6,030	11.0	19,783	36.0

Source: Unpublished 1978 Census of Agriculture tabulations provided by the U. S. D. A. Office of Minority Affairs

generally older farm population. The small size of their land holdings combined with apathy toward small farms, current economic conditions, governmental policies and institutional practices place black farmers at a competitive disadvantage with large farm operators most of whom are white. A recent Civil Rights Commission Report (1982) lists and discusses various disadvantages and problems faced by black farmers. According to this report "the disparities resulting from these structural biases are compounded by discrimination, both real and perceived". The report further concludes "that racial discrimination in credit and in selling of land has resulted in smaller and less productive land holdings for blacks. These disadvantages have been compounded by current lending practices, research, technology, commodity price and income supports, and tax structures which are geared to benefit large farm operations. Thus, black small farm operators have been placed in increasing disadvantageous and noncompetitive positions vis-a-vis predominantly white large farm operators" (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1982: 69). The rate at which farm land ownership by blacks is declining is a major concern. Despite the underuse of farms (due to lack of capital) by some black farmers, the possession of land is nevertheless a key to future participation by blacks in American agriculture (Beale, 1976: 307). Furthermore, land ownership in the rural South, in effect, confers on blacks a measure of independence, security, dignity, and perhaps even power (Brown and Larson, 1979: 172).

The problems of black farm operators are grave and there has not been any significant Federal response to reduce the alarming rate at which blacks are leaving agriculture and losing their ownership of farm land.

Black farmers will continue to face their own unique problems along with those problems generally associated with small farms, unless these problems are addressed by Federal, State and Local governments. If future policies are to be outlined to slow down or reverse past trends, it is important to determine causes and magnitude of the problems black small farmers face. Present agricultural policies are not neutral, because program benefits are heavily skewed in favor of large farm operations (Humphries, 1980: 884). These facts and the problems identified earlier suggest the need to address a wide variety of issues confronting black farmers in the areas of: (1) Technology, (2) marketing, (3) financing, and (4) knowledge. Especially important is greater opportunity for employment for farm operators and/or their spouses.

Despite the large scale displacement of black farmers in the South and in U. S. since World War II, many still remain, and their welfare is an important concern not only to rural communities but the nation as a whole. A rationale for assisting black small farmers is partly based on equity and humanitarian grounds, and partly on efficiency, or economic grounds. Programs and policies to assist black small farmers may be less expensive in the long-run than welfare payments. Therefore, additional research studies should be undertaken to determine specific problems, solutions, approaches, and programs to help maintain black farmers in American agriculture.

FOOTNOTES

¹The author thanks two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

²The two other states in which 1890 Land Grant Colleges or Universities exist are: Missouri and Delaware, in 1978, these states had only 279 and 60 black farmers, respectively.

³Outside the fourteen states of the South, Ohio had the largest (433) number of black farmers followed by California (388). Majority of the other states in the nation had less than 100 black farmers in 1978.

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