

Department Press Release

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USDA Report Shows Impressive Five-Year Gains For Florida Agriculture *Agriculture providing good economic news during these challenging times, Bronson says*

TALLAHASSEE - The number of Florida farms and the value of Florida agricultural products sold rose substantially from 2002 to 2007, according to a report recently released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles H. Bronson said the impressive performance by the state's agricultural industry in the past five years shows that it remains a vital pillar of Florida's economic strength.

"For decades, this economic engine has provided Florida with a dependable source of revenue and jobs," Bronson said. "While other sectors of the economy have been on shaky ground lately, agriculture has strengthened and become more productive. This report about Florida agriculture comes at a time when we all really need some positive economic news."

According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, the number of Florida farms increased by 7.7 percent, from 44,081 in 2002 to 47,463 in 2007. Additionally, the market value of agricultural products sold by Florida farmers hit \$7.8 billion in 2007, the highest recorded level in the state's history.

"These statistics are a testament to the determination of our state's farmers," Bronson said. "Even when confronted by drought, hurricanes, pests, disease, and stiff foreign competition, they continue to plant, harvest, rebuild and innovate. Florida's farmers not only produce food and fiber for consumers, they provide a solid economic base for our state."

The USDA Census shows that 90 percent of Florida's farms are family operations, while about 10 percent are corporate entities. About 32,000 Florida farms, or approximately 70 percent, have 50 acres or less.

The report also reflects that changing face of agriculture in Florida, with increases in the number of farms owned by a variety of ethnic groups including Native Americans, Asians, Hispanics and African Americans. Ethnic ownership of farms increased by 26 percent, from 2,038 farms in 2002 to 2,582 farms in 2007.

Augmenting the results of the USDA Census is the University of Florida's report, "Economic Contributions of Agricultural, Food Manufacturing, and Natural Resource Industries in Florida in 2006," which indicates that more than 766,000 jobs are attributable to these sectors, up from 648,000 jobs in 2002. Additionally, these sectors generate an estimated \$100 billion overall economic impact and contribute \$2.98 billion in indirect taxes to local, county and state governments.

"While the USDA report indicates an overall expansion of Florida agriculture, it also raises some points of concern," Bronson said. "Farmers' net earnings, or income, declined significantly for the last three years surveyed. This means that our farmers are working harder for less return, due in part to increases in the cost of inputs such as fuel, electricity, seed and fertilizer."

The USDA Census showed that net earnings declined from 40 percent in 2005, to 29.8 percent in 2006, to 22.1 percent in 2007.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is statutorily mandated to provide professional marketing services to Florida's agricultural community through its Division of Marketing and Development. These marketing promotions are part of the ongoing "Fresh from Florida" campaign. For more information about Florida agriculture, visit www.Florida-Agriculture.com.

For more information about the USDA Census of Agriculture, visit:
www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Census_by_State/Florida/index.asp