



WHAT'S **trending**

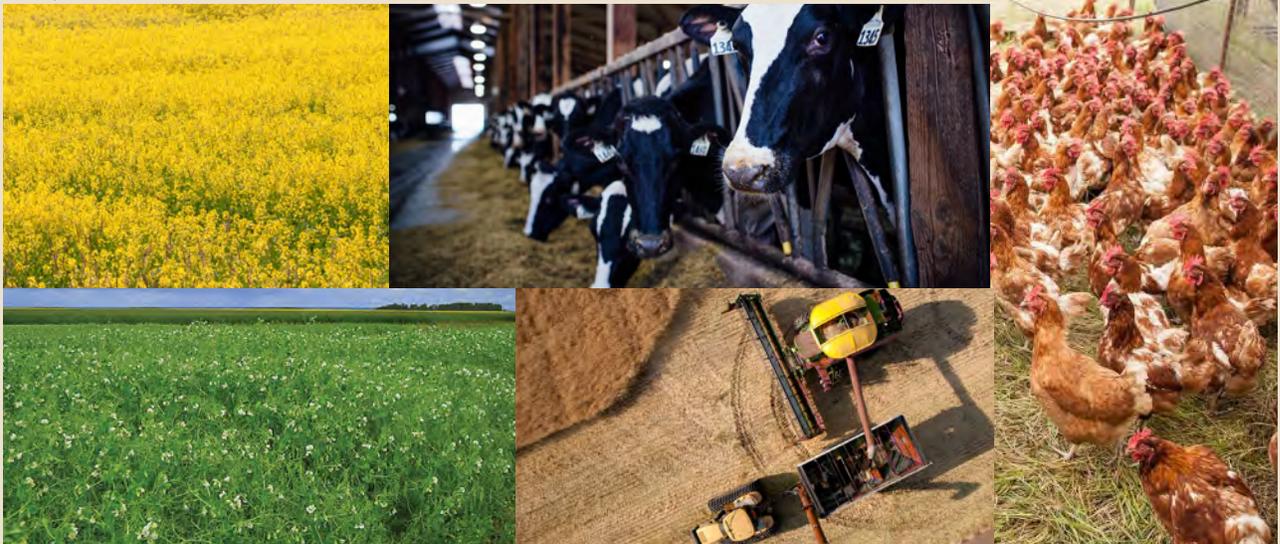
Farmers and consumers are interested in many of the same topics. Both care about food safety, food quality, the environment and good jobs. These concerns are often called trends in farming and agriculture. A **trend** is a pattern of change or a movement that occurs over time.

What are some Canadian farm trends? One trend has shown that the average age of farmers has increased. The average age of farmers in 2016 was 55. However, the number of women farmers and farmers who are under the age of 35 increased for the first time since 1991.

The number of farms has decreased. In 2016, there were over 193 492 farms in Canada, which was down about 6 percent from 2011. In 1931, there were over 728 000 farms across Canada. However the average size of farms increased by about 40 acres between 2011 and 2016.



Farm Variety



There are almost 230 000 farms in Canada that produce **commodities** - crops and animals grown and raised on farms. These commodities range from grains and oilseeds, vegetables and fruits to dairy cows, beef cows, chickens and hogs.

In 1931, one out of every three Canadians lived on a farm. In 2016, one out of every 50 Canadians lived on a farm. Farm families have been getting smaller over time. In 1971, the average size of a farm family was 4.3 people. In 2006, the average size of a farm family was 3.1.

Farmers produce more food on less land. They use less water, fertilizer and other resources to produce this food. In 1900, one farmer produced enough food for 10 people. Today, that same farmer feeds more than 120 people.

The use of new technology and modern, efficient equipment is a trend that has caused these changes. It has also resulted in increases in the amount of food one plant or animal can provide. For example, cows today produce more milk than they did 50 years ago.

Family farms still make up almost all of Canadian farms. In fact, all dairy farms in Alberta are family farms!

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What effect do you think any one of these trends has had on the food that is available for you to eat?



Census of Agriculture

Every five years, the government conducts a **census**, which is a survey that gathers information about people living and working in Canada. This information is used to help the government identify needs, plan services, like transportation, health care and education, and set budgets.

At the same time, the government sends out the **Census of Agriculture**. This survey asks people who are involved with agriculture to answer questions about farming and food production. The last Census of Population and Census of Agriculture were conducted in 2016.

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When will the next census take place? How do you know this?

What trends can you identify in the four Farm Number Trends bar graphs that follow? Find and describe three trends.

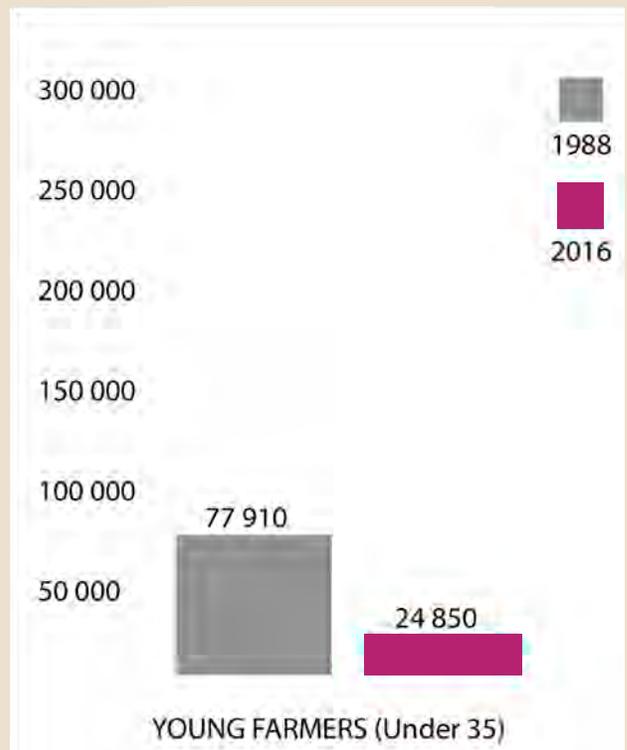
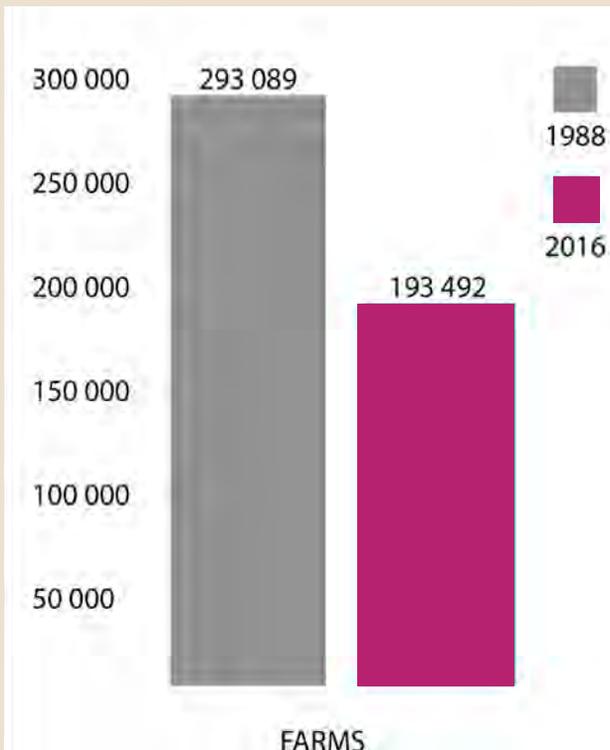


Farm Number Trends

These bar graphs show changes, according to Statistics Canada, in the number of farms, the age of farmers and farm size across Canada and in Alberta. **Statistics Canada** uses acres to measure farm size. An **acre** is about three-quarters the size of a football field.

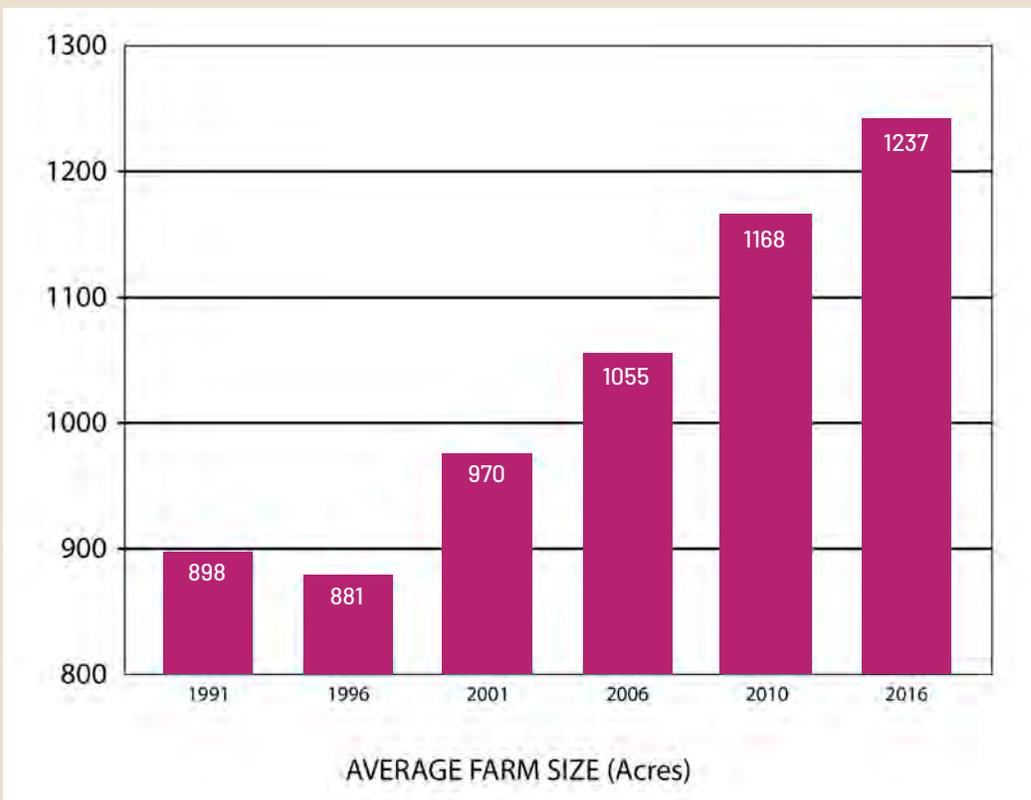
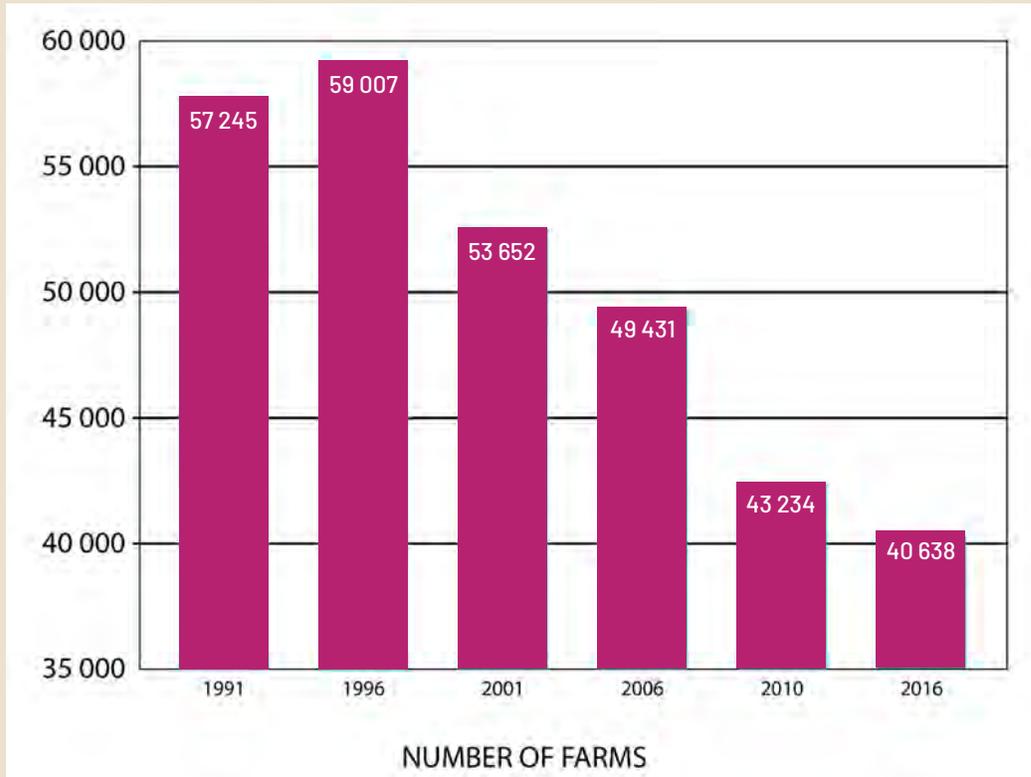
Statistics Canada describes farms as "agricultural operations" that produce agricultural products intended for sale. These operations include hay and field crops, vegetables, sod, fruits, berries or nuts, seed, chickens, turkeys and other poultry like ducks and geese, cattle, pigs, sheep and other livestock like bison. They also include animal products like milk, eggs, wool, fur, meat and other products like maple syrup and bees. Small farms that do not sell a lot - commonly called **hobby farms** - are also considered to be agricultural operations.

Canada's Farms and Farmers





Alberta Farm Number Trends



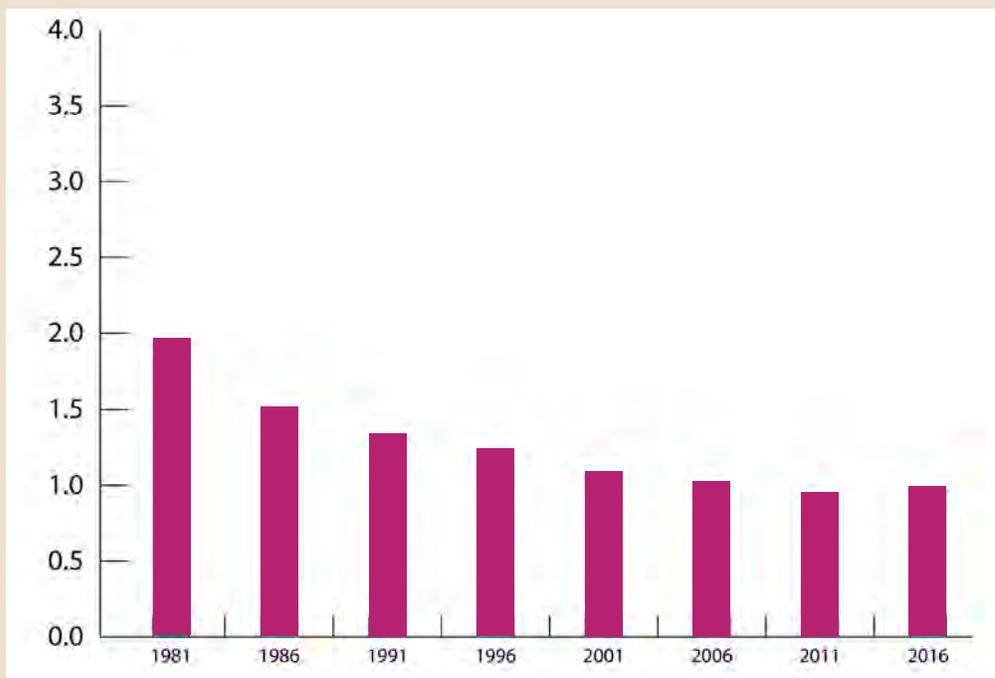
Trends in dairy farming are similar to trends in other types of farming. Grain, beef, pig, sheep and canola farms have also experienced similar conditions.

- ◆ The total number of dairy farms has decreased over time. However, the size of the farms has increased.
- ◆ Larger farms mean that some rural people now live further away from an urban community. Dairy farms in Alberta can be located close to the province's cities and towns as well as further away from urban communities.
- ◆ The average age of farmers has gone up. Fewer young people are involved with farming. However, many young people are focusing on agriculture with their education and coming back to the farm later in their careers.
- ◆ Dairy farmers have learned to use technology, animal nutrition and better farming methods to increase their production of milk. Dairy barns with robotic milking systems have continued to grow.
- ◆ Technology has allowed farmers to produce the same amount of milk with fewer cows. Although the total number of dairy cows have decreased, the average number of cows on each farm has actually increased over time.



Dairy Cow Number Trends

Number of Dairy Cows from 1981 to 2016 (in millions)



This bar graph shows how the number of dairy cows found on farms across Canada has changed.

What about trends in technology?

Some farmers use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to provide information about how they farm. They share information on their crops and the products they produce. They also reach out to other farmers for help with challenges or to ask for suggestions.

Farmers also use GPS systems to map their fields and identify places to take soil samples. The soil is then analyzed to identify levels of nutrients and water. Smartphones make apps that help farmers manage their animals and crops. This can provide them with additional time for other activities – like improving their farms or spending more time with their families. More and more dairy farmers are also using renewable energies on their farms.



Technology on a Modern Farm

by Patricia Grotenhuis

So many people seem to look back at the “good old days” as the way things should be now on farms. That would, however, put an end to the tremendous growth and development we have seen recently.

Technology is everywhere on the farm. GPS technology was used in tractors and for tracking soil types on farms long before it was common in vehicles. My parents have had a home computer to do tasks related to the farm for as long as I can remember. Radio Frequency Identification, or RFID, tags are used to track [animals] so that if there is a disease outbreak, [finding the diseased animals] will be simpler.

Today’s modern farms are technology-dependent. And in many ways, [technology helps] the farmers become more environmentally conscious. It is true that today’s farms are dependent on fossil fuels. . . it would not be possible to feed as many people as we do otherwise. Farmers are trying to cut back on that reliance, though.

It is not just the farmers who have benefited from advancements on the farm. Consumers can now enjoy products year-round that used to be seasonal, such as eggs.

The environment has benefited from farmers using new equipment and technology. Animals on the farm have benefited from larger stalls, improved handling systems and technologies, like alarm systems, that alert the farmers when the power goes off.

There will always be a nostalgia [a good feeling when the past is remembered] associated with the farms of the past. When looking at the farms of today, though, we should take notice of the large advancements we have made in caring for the land and animals, and be proud of those changes. Just think of what the next generation or two of farmers can accomplish!

From Let’s Talk Farm Animals website. www.realdirtblog.ca/technology-on-the-modern-farm/



Farm Drones



Some types of technology help keep track of the weather. Other technologies are used to help with practices like making sure crops are planted in straight rows and that animals are fed and watered properly. Drones are used to watch over crops and animals.

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Do you think the use of technology in agriculture is a trend? Why do you think this?

