



The Status and Changing Face of Ohio Agriculture

Summary of Ohio Farm Trends 1997–2017

KX
Insights

KNOWLEDGE
EXCHANGE



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

The Status and Changing Face of Ohio Agriculture

Summary of Ohio Farm Trends 1997–2017

Authors

Florence Becot, Shoshanah Inwood, Douglas Jackson-Smith
School of Environment and Natural Resources

Ani Katchova
*Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and
Development Economics*

Becot, F., Inwood, S., Jackson-Smith, D., & A. Katchova, (2020). [The Status and Changing Face of Ohio Agriculture: Summary of Ohio Farm Trends 1997–2017](#). College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, SENR Technical Report. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University.

Table of Contents

About the Report	02
Ohio Ag by the Numbers	03
How Has Ohio Farming Changed?	04
What Does a Mid-size Farm Look Like?	06
Fewer Farmers are Mainly Farming	10
Farmers are Aging... Why Does That Matter?	11
More Farms Raised Corn in 1997... Now Poultry is King	12
Cost-price Squeeze	13

About the Report

Farmers deal with many stressors, most of which are out of their control: extreme weather, market changes, COVID-19, trade wars, fluctuating market prices, and environmental challenges.

In 2019 particularly, a harsh winter followed by high spring and early summer rainfall led to damaged hay fields, delays in the planting of corn and soybean crops and an inability to harvest early season crops in a timely manner. Tariffs on exported farm products led to declines in soybean and corn prices and contributed to uncertainty about the long-term security of global trade relationships. Growing attention to harmful algal blooms and other water quality challenges has

increased pressure on farmers to reduce nutrient runoff from farm fields.

Is this an unprecedented time in history, or have farmers experienced similar levels of stress in the past? It's helpful to place current events in the context of long-term trends.

Researchers from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences explored 20 years of data from the U.S. Census of Agriculture and multiple public sources to understand long-term trends in Ohio. Here's what they discovered.

Ohio Ag by the Numbers

*Unless otherwise noted, data is from 2017.

\$9 billion

agricultural products sold in Ohio

60%

of farm operators rely on off-farm income

40%

of all farmland is rented

3%

more farms (since 2012)

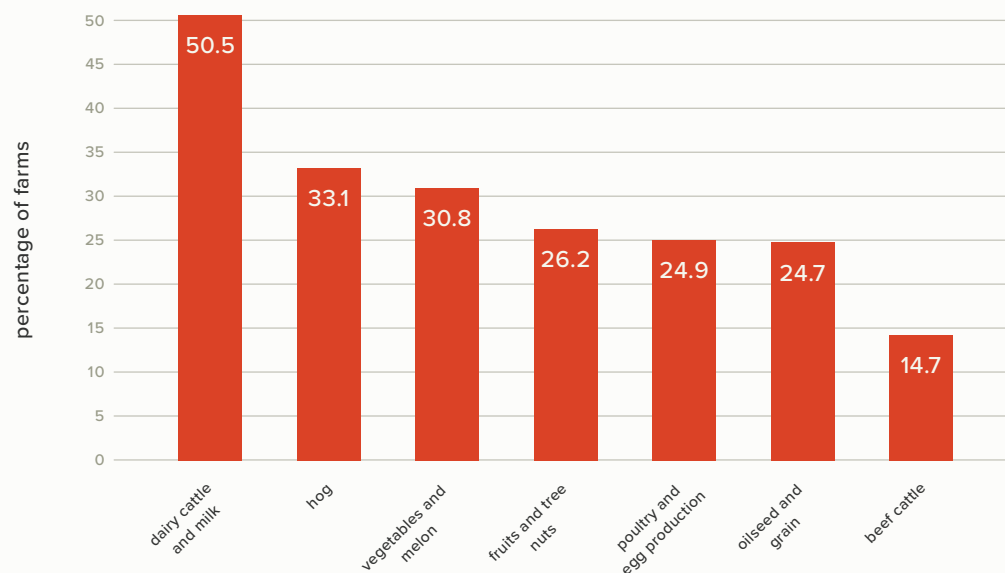
77,805

total Ohio farms

900,000

jobs generated by farming (2015)

Percentage of farms with hired labor, by product



How Has Ohio Farming Changed?

The middle is dropping out

While the number of Ohio farms remains relatively stable, their overall size has decreased by 8 acres for an average size of 179 acres.

In 1997, farmland covered almost 15 million acres in Ohio. Today, it's close to 14 million. **But farm size is measured by more than acreage.**

The state has a thriving population of relatively small (usually part-time) farms.

Most farm output now comes from a relatively small group of large operations who need to expand their sales and production to survive on increasingly small profit margins.

Operators of mid-sized farms who aren't consolidating or diversifying their products are disappearing from the landscape.

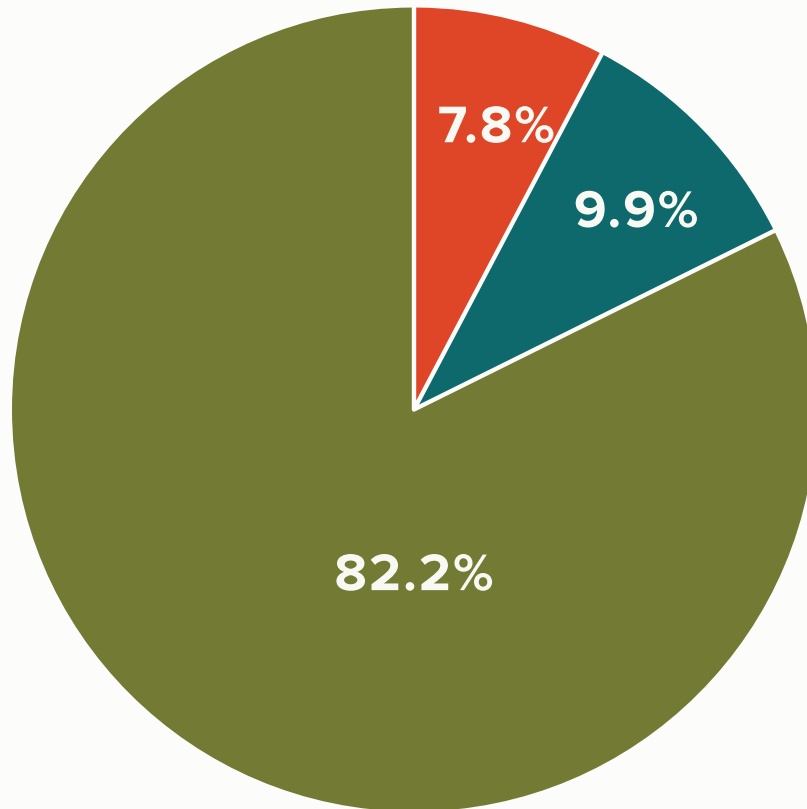


When talking about farm size, number of acres is not the best indicator. Why?

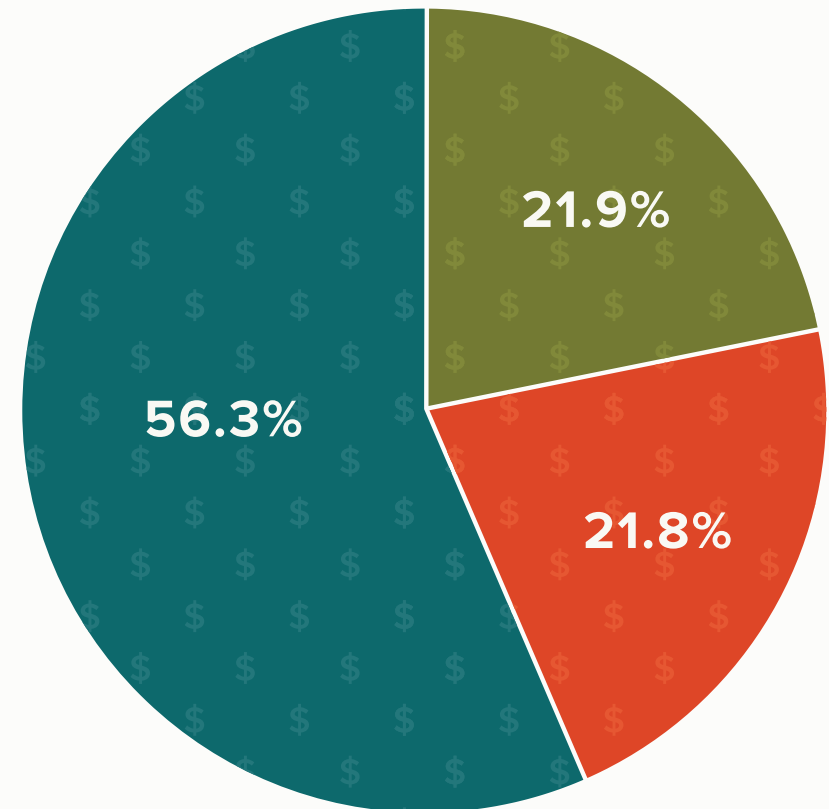
Because size is not equal to profit. Small acreage farms can sell over \$100,000 in products. And farms with high acreage can be low profit. Experts use farm sales for size references.

1997


percentage of all farms



percentage of total farm sales



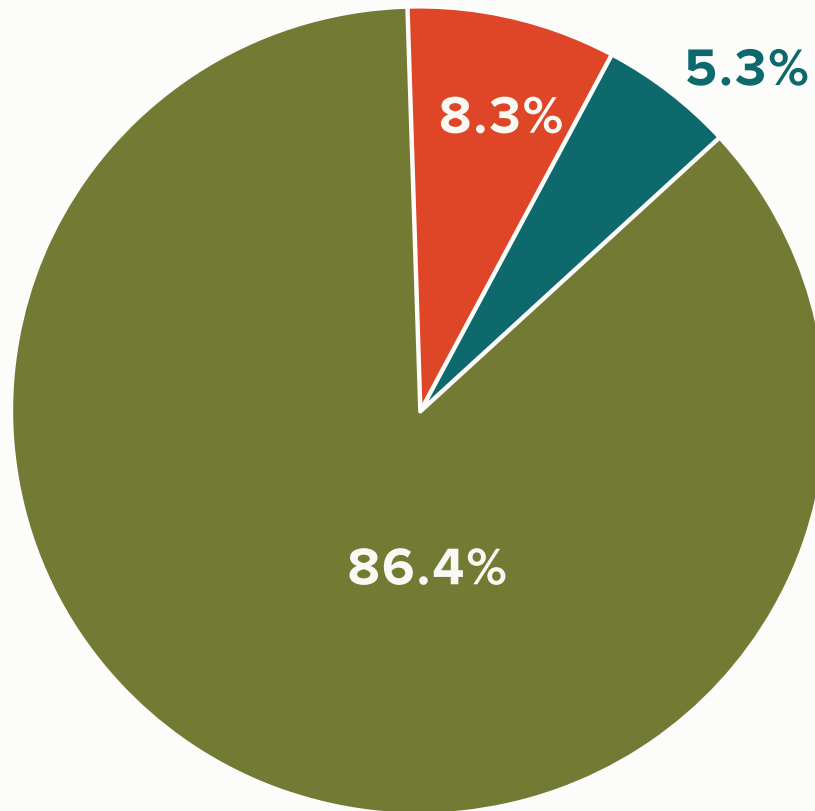
 **small farms:**
sales under \$100,000

 **mid-size farms:**
sales between \$100,000 and \$249,999

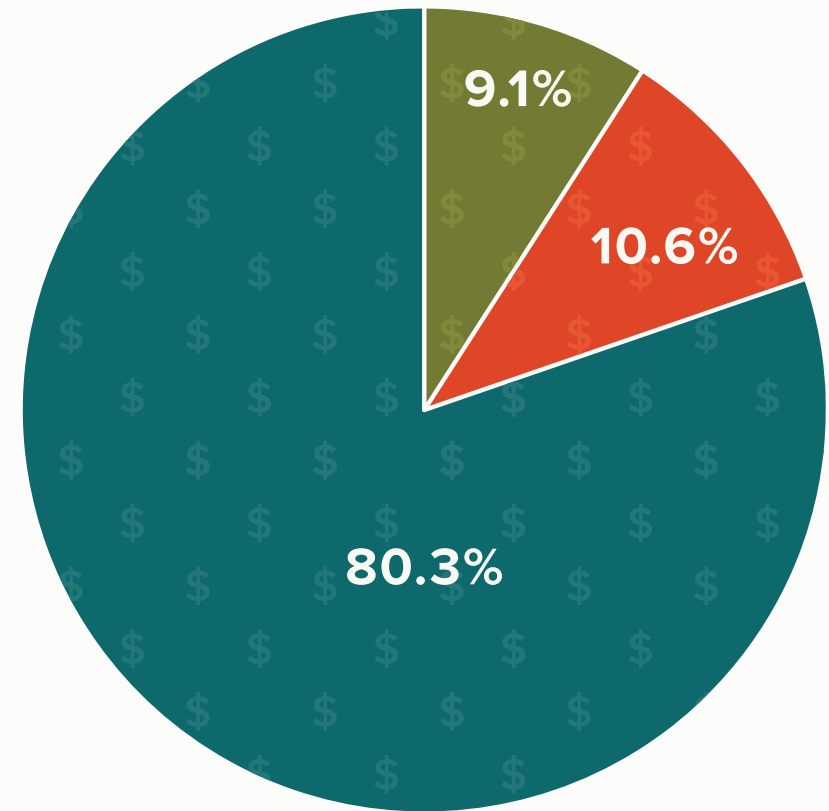
 **large farms:**
sales over \$250,000

2017


percentage of all farms



percentage of total farm sales



 **small farms:**
sales under \$100,000

 **mid-size farms:**
sales between \$100,000 and \$249,999

 **large farms:**
sales over \$250,000

What Does a Mid-size Farm Look Like?



Stollers Organic

kx.osu.edu/story/the-faces-behind-agricultural-trends

Scott and Charlene Stoller raise and milk 175 dairy cows with their eight children on a certified organic farm near Wooster, Ohio. Scott comes from a long line of farmers and has turned the farm over to his five adult sons. Originally a conventional dairy farmer, the Stollers decided to become fully organic in 2001. They are now a trusted source of information about organic farming.

Like many other mid-size farms in Ohio, Stoller's Organic Dairy has faced financial challenges through the years. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a massive drop in milk demands, and the so-called "golden age" of organics has plateaued in recent years. As a result, the Stoller family has had to diversify their business endeavors, working in tiling, dirt moving, and other agriculture-related fields. The Stoller's resilience in a volatile market continues with the next generation ready to provide high-quality organic products.



Talisman Farm

talisman.farm

Greg and Kristin Flowers grow corn and soybeans on 300 acres in northwest Ohio, the fourth generation in the family to farm. They added a fresh-cut flower business in 2018 to experience a different side of agriculture. The flowers are sown and harvested by hand and sold both wholesale to local florists and through direct sales to the public. They've recently added a U-pick option for customers that includes scavenger hunts for kids.

Harsh weather has made growing corn and soybeans increasingly difficult in recent years. The Flowers both work off-farm jobs to provide additional income for their family. Like many other farmers, their business is impacted by the environment and economy, two factors completely out of their control. But diversifying, creatively with a blossoming flower business, is one way farmers can find success in the industry.



Fuhrman Orchards

fuhrmannorchards.com

Leanne and Paul Fuhrmann raised their five children on a 65-acre farm along the southeastern border of Ohio. The whole family is involved in selling the farm's fresh fruit, vegetables, and flowers. Their adult children help with everything from growing and harvesting to selling at farmers markets and social media. They're active in the local community and volunteer with 4-H.

About 15 years ago, Fuhrmann Orchards was considered a large farm, selling mainly bulk produce commercially. Due to increasing costs and increased demand for local produce, they switched to retail sales. They only sell what they grow and their customers at area farmers markets have come to expect that. They've expanded their offerings to include an annual Apple Fest and farm tours. Their story shows how farmers have to adapt to market and consumer demands to survive.

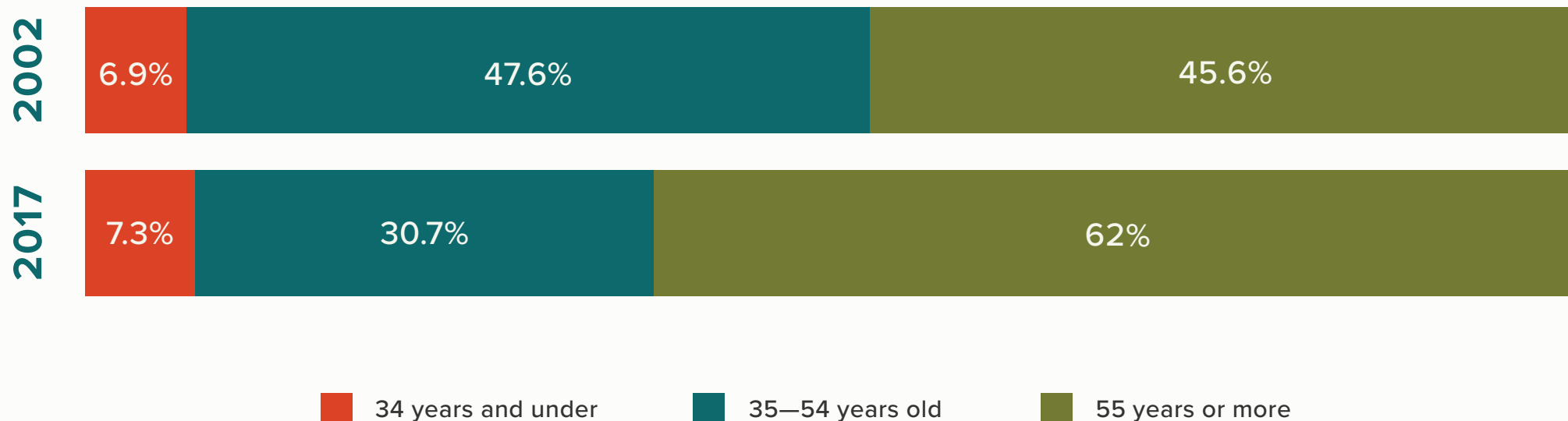


Fewer Farmers are Mainly Farming

In the last 20 years, it's become increasingly harder for farm families to support their operation with farm sales alone. Three in five farmers use off-farm jobs for income, health insurance benefits, and child care.

Farmers are Aging... Why Does That Matter?

On the surface, news that farmers are aging seems like nothing new. But it hints at a deeper story. Fewer young people are entering the farming industry. Less than 1% of farmers are under the age of 25, while 62% of farmers are 55 or older.



More Farms Raised Corn in 1997...

Trends in overall number of farms can disguise changes in the composition of farms over time. There were significant changes in the types of commodities produced over the last 20 years.

Since 1997, the number of farms producing oats and wheat in Ohio declined by nearly 80 and 60%, respectively. Over the same time period, decreases were also noted in the number of farms raising corn, soybeans, and cow calf beef operations. For the dairy industry, there has been a significant decline in farm numbers as farmers leave the milk business.



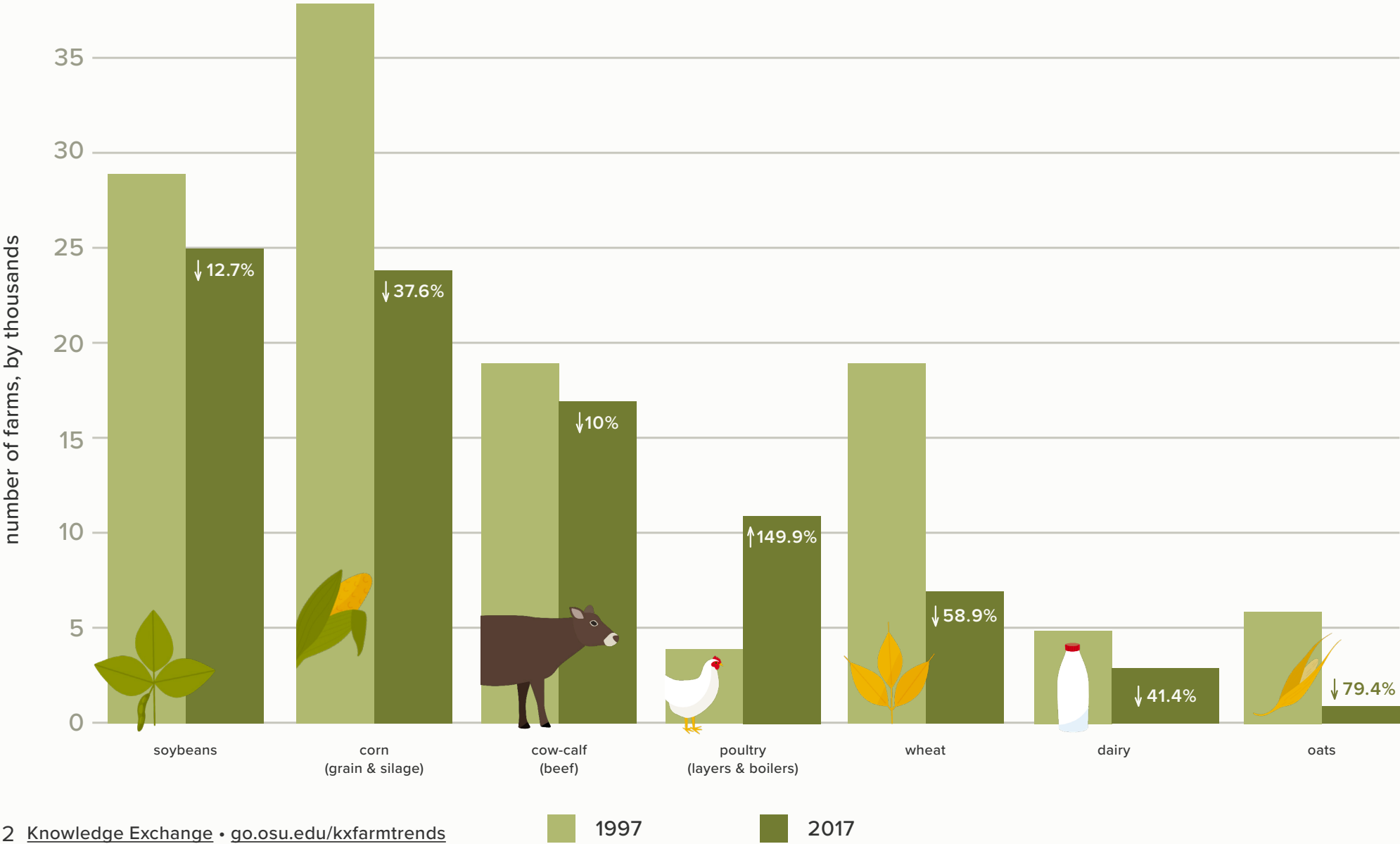
...Now Poultry is King

Meanwhile, the number of farms producing poultry (layers and broilers) increased by 150% and the vegetable and orchard crop farms grew by 14% and 5% respectively. The number of farms producing hay and haylage remains relatively stable.

These trends reflect consolidation in some sectors where a smaller number of farms produce a larger quantity of key commodities (like corn, soybeans, and milk). Growth in poultry farming results from both expansion in production on existing farms and the entry of new farms into the commercial broiler or egg laying industry.



Number of Farms Raising Different Crops and Livestock



Cost-price Squeeze

Since the mid-70s, prices that farmers across America receive for their products have been rising more slowly than the prices they pay for seeds, fertilizer, equipment, fuel, and labor—all of the inputs needed to farm.

Over the 20-year period, both the gross net income and total expenses increased faster than net income, squeezing our farms running on tight margins. This “cost-price squeeze,” which directly affects net income, is forcing farmers to change the way they operate to keep the same level of net income.

In 2017, Ohio farms brought in gross income of more than \$10 billion. However, after production expenses totaling over \$7 billion were taken out, farms received just slightly more than \$2 billion in net income. Of that, one-third goes to 94% of all Ohio farms.

Learn more on the KX website at kx.osu.edu/topic/agricultural-trends.

