

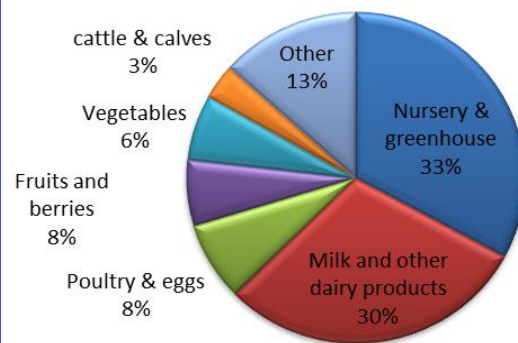
Looking Back On New Hampshire Agriculture, and Looking Ahead

What does farming look like in New Hampshire? Many people without a connection to agriculture may envision acres of wheat fields, or barnyard with chickens running around, or maybe something along the lines of their own *Farmville* spread, perhaps on a larger scale. But you don't see much of that when you drive around the state, even in the more rural regions, and some might conclude that all the stories about a resurgence in local farms is little more than hype, something that makes for nice glossy photos in magazines, but nothing substantial. They're wrong.

The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service publishes a Census of Agriculture every five years; the most recent one is from 2007 (the 2012 Census is being compiled right now, and will be released sometime next year), and if you compare the numbers from that year from those from 2002, there is strong evidence that farming is still a strong presence in the state.

According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the most recent one available, the market value of agricultural products in New Hampshire is over \$199 million. Nursery and greenhouse crops account for about a third of those sales (see chart), but milk and other dairy products is close behind. Poultry and eggs, fruits, and vegetables each comprise smaller proportions of sales, but are still substantial; the value of vegetables alone exceeds \$12 million statewide – that's a lot of corn and tomatoes.

Market value of NH Agricultural Products, 2007



Those numbers are impressive enough, but looking a little deeper reveals some other encouraging trends. A common lament is that many farmers sell their produce wholesale, and that processors and retailers get all the money instead of farmers themselves; nationwide, direct-to consumer sales account for less than one percent of agricultural sales. In New Hampshire, however, 8% of agricultural sales were direct-to-customer. In fact, our state ranks first in the number of farms that sell directly to customers, and we rank third in the market value of direct-to-consumer sales – over \$16 million.

Even better, these numbers are all increases from the 2002 Census of Agriculture. Ten years ago, there were 3,363 farms growing crops on 95,983 acres, with a market value of \$144 million. In 2007, there were 4,166 farms on 99,520 acres with \$199 million; that's 803 more farms growing crops and raising animals on more than 3500 acres of additional cropland and contributing to the state's economy with an additional \$55 million in sales of agricultural products.

The 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture is being compiled right now, and it will be released sometime later next year. It remains to be seen if the trends we saw between 2002 and 2007 will continue. However, if the increased numbers of farmers' markets and conversations about consuming more locally-produced foods are any indication, we may be in for another pleasant surprise.