

Locational and Socio-Economic Characteristics of New Small Farms in Mid-America:
1970 to 1985

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ABSTRACT

With the two most recent Censuses of Agriculture showing a net increase in the number of small farms, many researchers have examined this phenomenon in recent years. These studies, however, have not examined the locational aspect of these new small farms, nor the socioeconomic characteristics of the individual small farmers. The assumption has been that these new "small farms" are not actual farms, but rural residences.

The purposes of this study were to determine if the new small farms tend to be located on rough land rather than flatter land, and if the new small farmers have distinct socioeconomic characteristics that may provide an insight as to what types of people are repopulating nonmetropolitan America. These purposes were achieved through a methodology that involved topographic map examination, questionnaire evaluation, and a county typology.

The results of this study indicate that new small farms are twice as likely to be located on the rough land of a county than on flatter land. New small farmers tend to be employed off the farm in high wage/salary occupations, are mostly under the age of forty, and have a farm background. New small farm characteristics are very similar even across economically distinct types of counties in mid-America.