

Agricultural and Demographic CHANGES in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Implications for Ethnic and Specialty Produce

Introduction

Will mid-Atlantic farms survive recent changes in agricultural and population patterns? Rapid change has led to concern about the future of farms in the region. Urban development and rapid population growth are having a significant impact on mid-Atlantic farmers and farming practices. Remaining farmers must adapt to these changes in order to survive in this competitive market. Many farmers are looking at high-value crops, as well as alternative marketing strategies, innovative management planning and value-added enterprises, to make the difference between success and failure.



Ethnic and specialty produce presents a significant opportunity for mid-Atlantic farmers—as high-value alternative crops and an excellent source of income for farmers. For consumers, ethnic produce is not only a source of food and fiber but also a source of cultural values in a foreign land. These products can be produced by farmers in the region and sold through wholesalers, retail grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and restaurants.

This fact sheet is the first of a series of fact sheets on ethnic and specialty produce. While this publication emphasizes the trends in mid-Atlantic agriculture and population, and their implication for ethnic and specialty produce, subsequent fact sheets will discuss market potential, production guidelines, and nutritional aspect of ethnic vegetables in the mid-Atlantic region.

Changing Patterns in Mid-Atlantic Agriculture

There are three major trends in mid-Atlantic agriculture: farms and farmland losses, agriculture cash patterns, and crop production trends.

The number of farms and farmland has drastically dropped in most mid-Atlantic states since 1987 (Table 1). A sharp decline

in both the number of farms and farmland acreage occurred in Maryland (18% and 10% respectively) and Delaware (11% and 5% respectively).

Agricultural cash sales have increased in all four states in the last ten years (Table 1). The fastest growing industry in the last ten years has been the crop industry, which includes nurseries and greenhouses (41% in both Delaware and Maryland, 24% in New Jersey, and 20% in Pennsylvania). Low transportation costs, a fast growing suburban population and its demand for nursery and greenhouse products have made the mid-Atlantic region a perfect location for nursery products.

Vegetable acreage has decreased in both Maryland (6%) and New Jersey (11%) in the last decade. Delaware vegetable acreage has, however, increased by 6 percent since 1987 (Table 2).

Tobacco is grown in Maryland (and Pennsylvania). Statistics indicate declines in Maryland in both number of tobacco farms (48%) and acreage (26%). The decline in tobacco production has created the need for farmers to develop alternative enterprises (including ethnic produce markets) in Maryland in general and Southern Maryland in particular.

Table 1. Agriculture Farmland and Real Cash Sales¹ Change (1987-1997).

	Percentage Change			
	Delaware	Maryland	New Jersey	Pennsylvania
Farm number	-11.2%	-18.2%	0.1%	-11.8%
Farmland acreage	-4.8%	-10.1%	-6.9%	8.9%
Crop real cash sales	41.1%	40.6%	24.1%	20.3%
Livestock and poultry sales	15.2%	-10.1%	-35.3%	-6.4%
Agriculture real cash sales	20.8%	2.97%	9.1%	0.8%

¹Cash sales are in billions of real dollars (base year 1992). Real dollars were obtained by deflating nominal dollars using the gross domestic product deflator.

Source: Census of Agriculture, <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>

Since 1987 sales of livestock and poultry in Delaware have increased by 15 percent, but have decreased in Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania by 10 percent, 35 percent, and 6 percent, respectively. Despite these decreases in sales in Maryland only, the Delmarva poultry industry has flourished in the last decade due to its strategic location to the East Coast markets. In fact, the rural Delmarva peninsula, combined with its surrounding urban population, has spurred the production and sales of poultry products. The growth of poultry in the Delmarva region is offset by declines in dairy and meat products over the last decade.

Trends in the Mid-Atlantic Population

The mid-Atlantic population is highly diverse. The total population is currently estimated at 12.3 million in Pennsylvania, 8.4 million in New Jersey, 5.3 million in Maryland, and 0.8 million in Delaware (Table 3). Delaware has had the largest increase in total population (18%) since 1990, followed by Maryland (11%), New Jersey (9%), and Pennsylvania (3%).

While the total population of the mid-Atlantic states has increased less than 12

Table 2. Selected Crop Acreage Change (1987-1997).

	Percentage Change			
	Delaware	Maryland	New Jersey	Pennsylvania
Corn	20.56%	-6.23%	19.10%	-9.29%
Soybean	-1.29%	13.22%	9.65%	n.a.
Tobacco	n.a.	-26.35%	n.a.	n.a.
Vegetable	5.70%	-5.96%	-10.86%	n.a.
Wheat	65.15%	36.47%	n.a.	-10.00%

n.a.-denotes data not available.

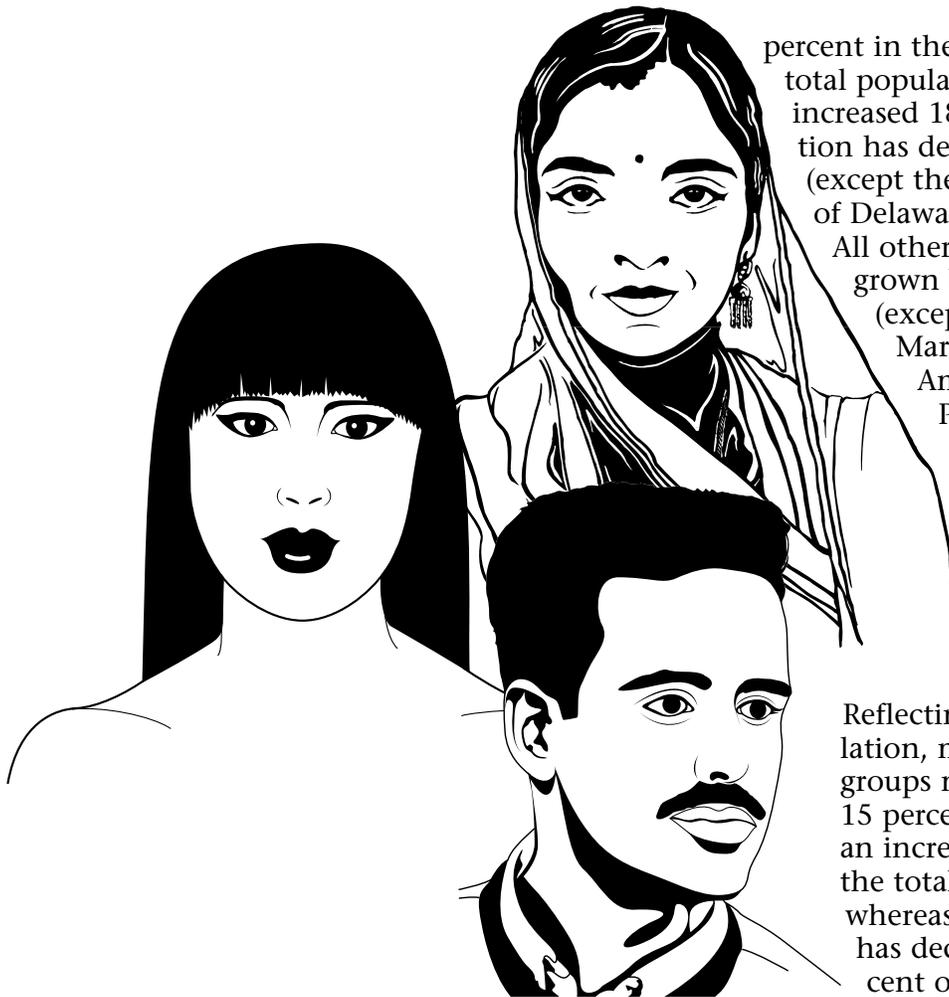
Source: Census of Agriculture, <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>

Table 3. Mid-Atlantic Population (1990 and 2000).

	Delaware		Maryland		New Jersey		Pennsylvania	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Native American	2.0	2.7	13.0	15.4	15.0	19.5	14.7	18.3
Asian	9.1	16.3	139.7	210.9	272.5	480.3	137.4	219.8
African American	112.5	150.7	1,189.9	1,477.4	1,036.8	1,141.8	1,089.8	1,224.6
Hispanic	15.8	37.3	125.1	227.9	739.9	1,117.2	232.3	394.1
Caucasian	535.1	584.8	3,394.0	3,391.3	6,310.5	6,104.7	10,520.2	10,484.2
Total Population	666.2	783.6	4,781.5	5,296.5	7,730.2	8,414.4	11,881.6	12,281.1

All figures are in thousand.

Source: Census of Population and Housing, <http://www.census.gov/population> and <http://factfinder.census.gov>



percent in the last decade (except the total population of Delaware, which increased 18%), the Caucasian population has decreased less than 4 percent (except the Caucasian population of Delaware, which increased 9%). All other ethnic populations have grown by more than 24 percent (except Native Americans in Maryland, 19%; and African Americans in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, 10% and 12%, respectively). In fact, both Asian and Hispanic populations grew by more than 50 percent in the last decade. The Hispanic population grew by as much as 136.1 percent in Delaware (Table 4).

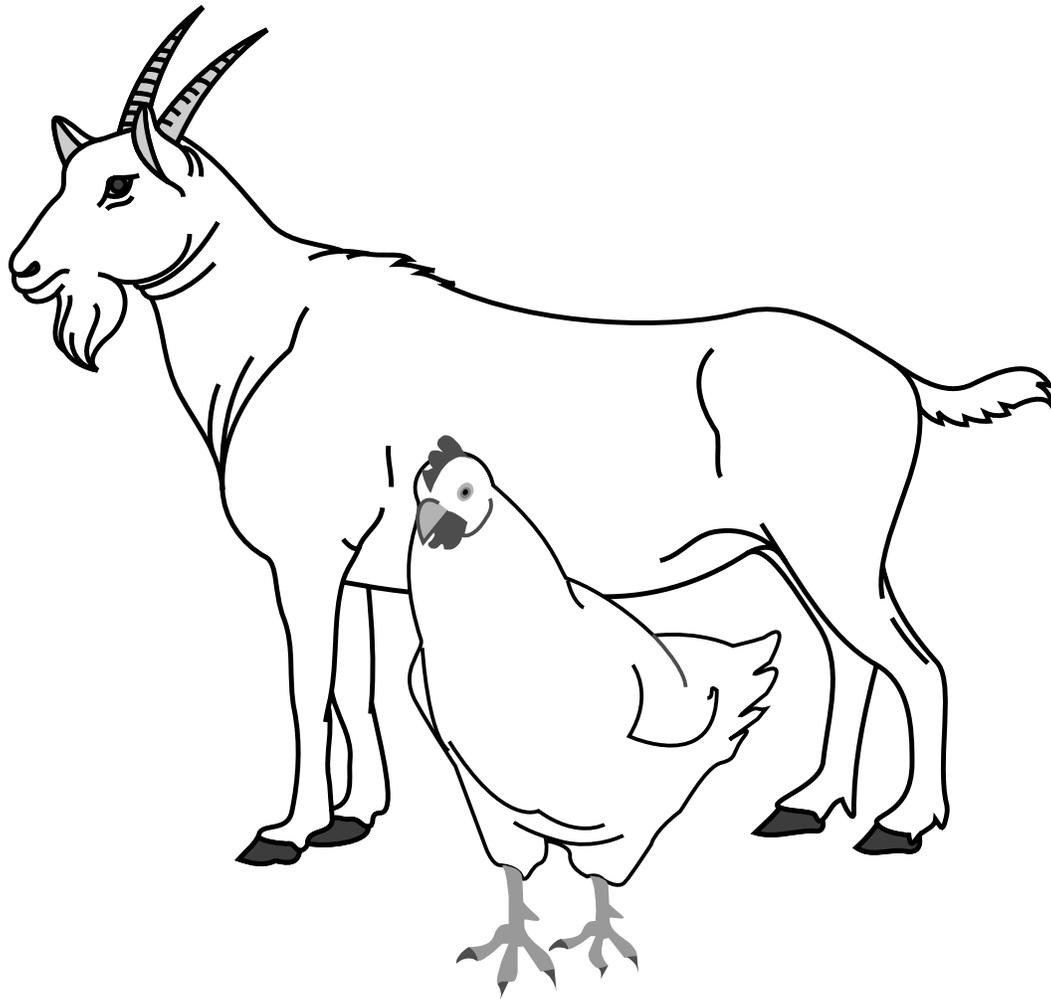
Reflecting trends in the U.S. population, mid-Atlantic minority ethnic groups now make up more than 15 percent of the total population, an increase of at least 8 percent of the total population since 1990, whereas the Caucasian population has decreased by more than 8 percent of the total population since 1990.

Even though the actual demand for ethnic produce (and its determinants) in the mid-Atlantic region is yet to be examined, the fast growing ethnic population implies a growing demand for ethnic and specialty products in the region.

Table 4. Mid-Atlantic Population Growth (1990-2000).

	Percentage Change			
	Delaware	Maryland	New Jersey	Pennsylvania
Total Population	17.6%	10.8%	8.9%	3.4%
Native American	28.6%	18.5%	30.0%	24.5%
Asian	79.1%	51.0%	76.3%	60.0%
African American	34.0%	24.2%	10.1%	12.4%
Hispanic	136.1%	82.2%	51.0%	69.7%
Caucasian	9.3%	-0.1%	-3.3%	-0.3%

Source: Census of Population and Housing, <http://www.census.gov/population> and <http://factfinder.census.gov>



Ethnic Produce Market Opportunities in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Consumer tastes and preferences drive the nation's food and fiber system. A key job of the food market is to ensure that food products are accurately targeted at market niches regardless of the size of the niche. An ethnic produce market is one of the targeted market niches. Changing agriculture patterns in the mid-Atlantic, coupled with a fast growing ethnic population provide a good reason to establish ethnic produce markets in the mid-Atlantic region.

Currently, ethnic produce markets are not yet well established in the mid-Atlantic region. Ethnic products bring additional income to farmers and help bridge the cultural gaps between producers and ethnic market operators. For instance, Just Food,

a New York-based organization, in cooperation with Cornell University created a farmer-Hispanic community connection in New York. In Ontario, Canada, cultural and demographic changes helped introduce new vegetable crops traditionally associated with Asian countries. New Jersey, Cornell, Massachusetts, and Maryland Cooperative Extension services are currently doing research, and promoting production of ethnic produce in the mid-Atlantic region.

Culturally based food habits are often one of the last traditions people change when they move to a new country. Given the ever-growing mid-Atlantic ethnic diversity and opportunity offered by untapped ethnic produce markets, excellent opportunities exist for mid-Atlantic communities in general and farmers in particular. Potential ethnic produce includes African, Asian, and Hispanic fruits, vegetables, and specialty herbs. Ethnic markets also are outlets for goat meat, commercial rabbits, and live poultry.



Prospects for the Future

The future of ethnic produce in the mid-Atlantic region is promising. First, changing patterns in mid-Atlantic agriculture support the establishment of such a market. As the mid-Atlantic states lose more land to urban development, and given reversing trends in major crop production, there is increasing pressure on remaining farmers to adjust to the new trends. High value crops, and alternative and value-added enterprises are no longer an option but a necessity if farmers are to survive.

Second, growing mid-Atlantic ethnic diversity is a positive asset for establishing new and alternative agriculture in the region. Asian, Hispanic, and African American communities are a large portion of the fast growing population. Responding to the food needs of these diverse ethnic groups could be a rewarding challenge for both farmers and mid-Atlantic communities.

Third, helping farmers meet the challenge of adjusting to the new economic and agri-

cultural environment is a priority. Farmers should be provided with several alternatives to choose from in order to help them succeed and satisfy their clientele. This might be in the area of both agricultural production and marketing.

Finally, establishment of a mid-Atlantic database for potential producers, buyers, researchers, and educators of ethnic products could be crucial in ensuring a networking venture.

References

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Further Information

Useful Resources

The Small Farm Institute
Maryland Cooperative Extension
University of Maryland
7320 Ritchie Hwy, Suite 210
Glen Burnie, MD 21061
410-222-6759

A program of Maryland Cooperative Extension serving small farm operators.

University of Maryland, College Park. "PRO-FARM Leadership and Management: Leadership and Management of Farm Businesses." Fact Sheet 667.

University of California, Davis. *Specialty and Minor Crops Handbook*, 1998. Small Farm Center. ISBN 1-879906-38-4 (\$)

NCR Cooperative Extension Services.

"Developing a Longer-Range Strategic Farm Business Plan." NCR 610A. (\$)

NCR Cooperative Extension Services. "Income Tax Management for Farmers." NCR 2. (\$)

Selected Ethnic and Specialty Seed Companies

Johnny's Selected Seeds

1 Foss Hill Road, RR 1, Box 2530
Albion, ME 04910-9731

207-437-4395

Fax: 800-437-4290

Info: 207-437-4357

A variety of ethnic/specialty vegetables and herbs.

Nichols Garden Nursery

1190 North Pacific Highway
Albany, OR 97321-4580

541-928-9280

Fax: 541-967-8406

Broad selection of ethnic/specialty herbs and vegetables.

Abundant Life Seed Foundation

P.O. Box 772

Port Townsend, WA 98368

Catalog and newsletter available.

Thompson & Morgan, Inc.

P.O. Box 1308

Jackson, NJ 08527

Free catalog, specialty and European vegetables.

Shepherd's Garden Seeds

30 Irene Street

Torrington, CT 06790-6658

(860) 482-3638

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