



# Special Article: Census of Agriculture Reveals Long-term Trends

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## Total Value for Vegetables Up, Despite Acreage Decline

The 2017 Agricultural Census reveals interesting trends for U.S. vegetables at the national level. According to census data, the total value of vegetables grown in the United States had increased by about 16 percent since the 2012 census. This continues the trend of growth in vegetable value, which increased 15 percent between the 2007 and 2012 censuses. Value increased in 2017, even as the total number of acres harvested declined at the national level. Although production has waned, the increased value is explained by a 24-percent increase in total vegetable prices between the 2012 and 2017 censuses. Vegetables with the largest decreases in acres harvested were sweet corn, tomatoes, peas, and green beans. All the commodities decreased by at least 10 percent: sweet corn decreased 722,369 acres harvested, tomatoes decreased 596,409, peas decreased 422,092, and green beans decreased 330,463. The decrease for peas is especially surprising, since the 2012 census reported a 200-percent increase in acres harvested for that commodity from 2007. Broccoli and turnips fell by 13.2 and 14.3 percent, respectively; though their decrease in acres harvested pales in comparison to that of the previous four commodities. Despite some vegetable acreage decreasing, acreage increased for the majority of commodities. Artichokes, brussels sprouts, okra, and pumpkins all

rose by 100 percent or more from 2012 in recorded acres. Spinach and garlic reported the greatest increases, at around 200 percent over the 5-year period. These trends are more evident after separating the fresh and processing markets.

## Fresh Vegetable Acres Wane

Acreage harvested for the fresh market is dominated by six main commodities: potatoes, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, sweet corn, and sweet potatoes. Potatoes make up 29.8 percent of the fresh market, but acres harvested for potatoes only increased about 9,600, or 0.7 percent from the 2012 census (figure 1). Idaho produced around 55 percent of potatoes in 2017 and 2012, but the State's production has steadily decreased since 2007. In contrast, lettuce production has been on the rise, likely due to consumer interest in fresh commodities and healthier diets. No State has been affected more than California, whose farms account for 70 percent of U.S. lettuce production. California lettuce production has been growing since the 2007 census. California also leads in the production of sweet corn, followed by Florida and New York. Fresh sweet corn production in California has increased by 11.9 percent since 2012, from 83,122 to 93,005 acres harvested. Despite increasing production in California, national sweet corn production has fallen in every census since 2007. Field-grown tomatoes are another commodity on a downward trend. The 2012 census showed that acreage of fresh field-grown tomatoes decreased by 2.2 percent from 2007 to 2012, then by 27 percent from 2012 to 2017. Greenhouse tomato production, however, has risen steadily since 2007, recording a 25.6-percent increase between 2007 and 2012 and a 15.7-percent increase between 2012 and 2017.

Figure 1  
**Selected fresh vegetable acres, 2007-17**



Source: Prepared by USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from the USDA, National Agriculture Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture.

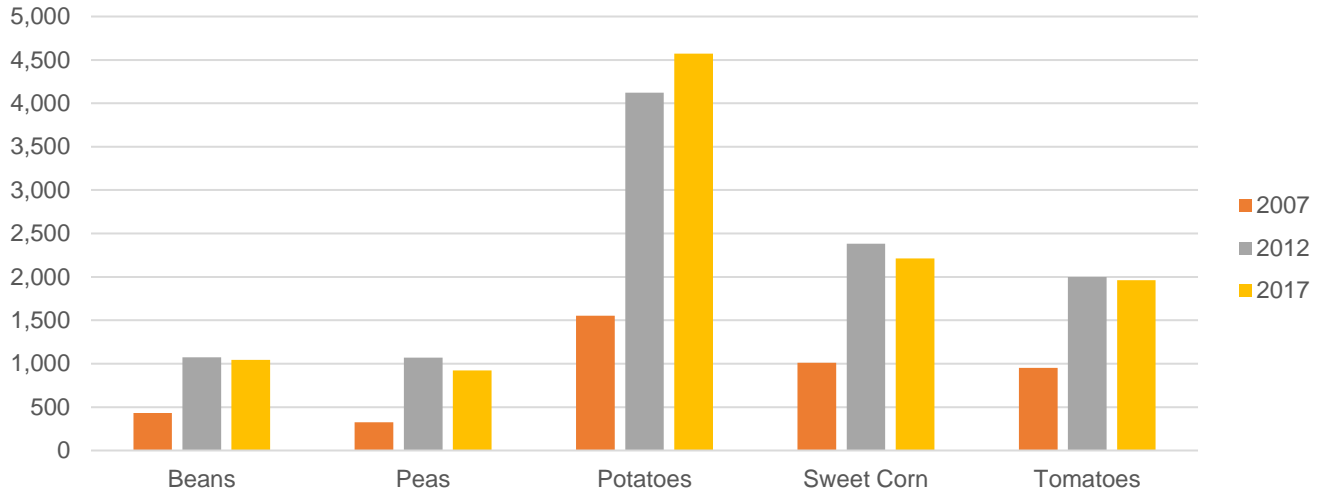
## *Processed Vegetable Acres Trending Down*

The processed vegetable market has also seen acreage declines according to the 2017 Agricultural Census. The census reported the largest losses in processing market acres for broccoli, peppers, and asparagus. Broccoli suffered the most, decreasing from 22,371 to 3,506 acres harvested, or 84.3 percent since 2012. Tomatoes and sweet corn acres harvested decreased by a lower percentage, 7.2 percent and 1.8 percent, respectively; together, these two commodities account for 37.7 percent of the processing market. California dominates the processed tomato market, responsible for 95 percent of the production, compared to only 35 percent of fresh field-grown tomato production. Cucumbers, onions, potatoes, and spinach were the only commodities whose production increased between the 2012 and 2017 censuses. Cucumbers increased the most at 20.0 after having decreased significantly between 2007 and 2012. However, cucumbers make up less than 2 percent of the processed vegetable market, and their increase amounts to an additional 26,000 acres harvested in 2017. As shown in figure 2, potatoes have the highest harvested acreage in the processing market, making the other commodities in the top five appear small by comparison. The top five consist of beans, peas, potatoes, sweet corn, and tomatoes; however, processing potatoes are the only commodity that increased in acreage when compared to the previous

census. Potatoes increased by 11.0 percent, while peas lost the most acreage, decreasing by 13.8 percent.

Figure 2  
**Selected processed vegetable acres, 2007-17**

Acres harvested (1,000 acres)



Prepared by USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from the USDA, National Agriculture Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture.

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