

# 125 Years of Farmland Values in Kansas

1870 - 1997

Notable changes have taken place in agriculture since 1870. Technology, yields, and production methods have vastly improved. These changes, in conjunction with fluctuating crop price trends, have led to an extremely different picture today for farmland values in Kansas. As of 1997, Kansas had more than 83.1 million acres of farmland valued at just under \$48 billion. These numbers suggest an average value of \$577 per acre, which compares to \$381 per acre in 1977 and \$11 per acre in 1880 (Census of Agriculture Values). These comparisons demonstrate that land values are one aspect of agriculture that has experienced dramatic changes during the last century.

The Census of Agriculture has provided farmland values by state and by county since 1860 and 1870, respectively. Pressly and Scofield previously used Census reports to assemble and publish per acre land values for 1850 to 1959. Land values, as published by the Census Bureau, include land and improvements and are current market values (dollars at the date of the Census). All farms were enumerated until 1950; since then, values have been estimated from samples of farms (Pine).

This publication presents farmland value data dating back approximately 125 years and provides a brief discussion of the trends occurring during that time period. Data provided are taken

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

from the Kansas State Board of Agriculture's *Price Patterns* (1957) and 58th Annual Report (1975), Kansas Farm Facts (1998), and Wilfred H. Pine's *100 Years of Farmland Values in Kansas*.

## **State Trends**

Table 1 provides historical data on wheat and corn yields and prices from 1870 to 1997. Table 1 also offers data encompassing the same time period for the per head inventory value of cattle. Finally, this table provides average land values for the state of Kansas from 1870 to 1997. Figure 1 illustrates the data compiled in Table 1.

Based on Census reports, average farmland values in Kansas fluctuated around the \$50 mark until 1940 when values began a strong upward trend. From 1870 to 1880, land values decreased from \$13 to \$11 per acre, but swung upward again to \$19 in 1890. The overall increase was short-lived because by 1900 farmland values had again decreased to \$15 per acre (Figure 1). By 1920, land values had increased fourfold to \$62 per acre, which was a peak level for a few decades. From 1920 until the 1940s, farmland values again took a downward turn, reaching a low of \$30 per acre in 1940. After 1945, values rapidly increased, eventually peaking in 1982 at \$601 per acre. Between 1982 and 1987, values sharply decreased to \$413 per acre. Since this point, farmland values have recovered to the 1997 mark of \$577 per acre. However, they still have not topped the 1982 pinnacle. Historically, farmland value fluctuations have trended with farming income. Therefore, values have typically been reflections of yield and price movements.

Yield fluctuations primarily occur due to weather and technology changes. Figure 2 shows changes in wheat and corn yields from 1870 to 1997. Wheat yields decreased from 1870 to 1880, stabilized in 1890 and decreased again in 1900 to 13.3 bushels per acre. With only minor increases in 1910 and 1925, wheat yields plummeted until reaching an all-time low of 11.1 in 1940. Wheat yields began increasing after this time, with minor setbacks in 1954 and 1978. Yields reached their highest level in 1987 at 37.2 bushels per acre. Between 1987 and 1997, wheat yields once again declined. Aside from minor increases in 1910 and 1925, corn yields declined until 1940. However, after the 12.9 bushel per acre

low in 1940, corn yields have trended upward with the peak in corn yields corresponding with the end of the data series, 1997.

Prices tend to be influenced by a variety of factors. Some internal factors, like yield, directly involve and can be strongly influenced by the farming community. Other external factors, such as wars and economic depressions, cannot be controlled or influenced by the agricultural sector. Wheat prices decreased from 1870 until 1900 to a low of \$0.57 cents per bushel. Wheat prices peaked at \$1.29 per bushel in 1920 and then declined again. Prices decreased back to \$0.57 per bushel in 1935 and then increased from there until the 1954 peak of \$2.12 per bushel. From 1954 to 1969, prices declined to \$1.35 per bushel. Since 1969, wheat prices increased to \$3.54 per bushel in 1982, declined to \$3.01 per bushel in 1992, and increased again to \$3.73 per bushel in 1997. Corn prices by 1920, at \$0.94 per bushel, had nearly doubled from the 1870 price of \$0.48. This high, like that in wheat, was not to last. Corn prices then trended downward until 1935. Between 1935 and 1940, corn prices started back up and increased until roughly 1954. Corn prices then dramatically dropped from the 1954 level of \$1.53 per bushel to \$1.09 in 1964. After this low, corn prices, like wheat, increased until 1982 when they reached a high of \$2.69 per bushel. Prices decreased through 1992, and then increased again to \$2.63 per bushel in 1997.

Cattle prices hovered around the \$20 per head range from 1870 until 1920, at which time, per head prices virtually doubled to \$42. Prices trended downward from 1920 until recovering to \$51 per head in 1945. Cattle prices, like wheat and corn, then increased dramatically until 1954. Again like wheat and corn, prices fell after that time through 1964. For roughly the next 10 years, 1964-1974, cattle prices were on the rise again. After a small decline between 1974 and 1978, cattle prices began rising through 1997, with large increases occurring in 1982 and 1992.

# **County and Area Trends**

Land values for Kansas counties were first reported by the 1870 Census. Values for all 105 counties as they are now organized (Table 2) were not reported until 1890. Figure 3 illustrates the Kansas counties comprising the nine Kansas Agricultural Statistics

Service crop reporting districts. Table 2 indicates that all counties, except Wyandotte, have followed the same basic trend of increasing farmland values peaking in 1920 and 1982 and dropping somewhat sharply until 1987. After 1987, the majority of counties' land values began increasing again; some rising sharply and others rising more gradually.

Home to the capital city and fertile Kansas River land, Shawnee County had the highest average farmland values in 1870 at \$36 per acre. In 1974, Pine noted that counties near Kansas City and Wichita had experienced the largest increases in farmland values since 1870. The 1997 values of Wyandotte, Johnson and other Kansas/Missouri border counties (which include a major portion of Kansas City, Kansas) reflect that this trend continues. Johnson County progressed from being valued at equal to or less than its neighboring northeastern counties in 1870 to leading the farmland valuation rank at \$2,349 per acre in 1997. Wyandotte's value increase is not quite as remarkable. Wyandotte's farmland was valued second only to Shawnee County in 1870 and led farmland values from 1880 to 1992. As of 1997, both Johnson and Wyandotte farmland values were roughly double that of Shawnee County. Johnson and Wyandotte counties were singled out as leaders; however, all of the northern Kansas/Missouri border counties have experienced rapidly increasing farmland values since 1987, reflecting the impact of urbanization.

The effect of urbanization on farmland values also was experienced in Sedgwick County, which includes the city of Wichita. As of 1997, Sedgwick County farmland values were more than double those of land in most of its border counties. Farmland values in Sedgwick County have increased from \$7 per acre in 1870 to \$1,329 in 1997. Sedgwick County land values were second only to counties in the Kansas City area as of 1997.

In 1920, Brown county was considered the best corn county in the state (Pine). At that time, land values in Brown County averaged \$202 per acre, which was far greater than in any other county except Wyandotte. Without considering the border counties mentioned above, Brown County farmland values were some of the highest in the state until after 1982. Although the increase in Brown's land value between 1920 and 1997 was impressive, other non-border counties, such as Douglas (from \$109 to \$1,135) and

Leavenworth (from \$107 to \$1,724) also experienced significant increases.

Irrigation in western Kansas and mineral resources in various areas have had varying effects on county land values. Haskell County, which is highly irrigated, increased in value from \$18 per acre in 1940 to \$828 in 1997. Wichita County values increased from \$9 in 1940 to \$525 in 1997, while Thomas County values rose from \$15 in 1940 to \$565 in 1997.

Table 3 provides the changes in land values occurring in the nine Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service districts. District land values in Table 3 were derived by grouping the counties into the nine districts and weighting the county land values by the number of acres in farms for each county as reported in the Census of Agriculture. As expected, counties encompassing Kansas City and Topeka have traditionally been the leaders in land values. The East Central (Kansas City area) and South Central (Wichita area) districts have rotated ranking second and third, until after 1987, when East Central land values began increasing much more sharply. District values follow the same trends as the county values. Value increases were more gradual in the western than in the eastern districts. By 1997, values per acre in the upper eastern districts were more than \$200 higher than in the western districts. Nominal growth rates for the entire state have a volatile history (Figure 4). Except for brief periods between 1959 and 1969, and 1992 and 1997, each census marked a dramatic shift in growth rates, especially in the western districts.

## **Conclusion**

Urban influences have been a driving force of farmland values in Kansas as evidenced by the growth in eastern and south central area values. Changes in production practices and production potential have contributed to the volatility in western Kansas land values. Through 1974, the "catching up" of land prices and area development were key factors affecting the increases in southeastern Kansas (Pine). Competition for agricultural land, from urban development speculators to larger farming operations, has increased values throughout the state.

Figure 5 illustrates that statewide nominal land values have increased more than tenfold. However, real land values from 1930 to 1997 have increased only 8 percent. This statement means that when the effect of inflation is removed, Kansas agricultural land values grew at a rate of only 0.12 percent between 1930 and 1997. On the other hand, from a starting reference point of 1945, annual real growth was slightly more than 2 percent. Future trends in land values are dependent on several factors. In 1974, Pine surmised that the general inflation rate and the cost of energy would quite likely be major factors influencing land values. These are likely significant factors today. In addition, both internal factors (prices, yields and costs of inputs) affecting land owners' incomes and external factors (national economic events, farm policy, tax policy, consumer buying power, and consumer preferences) will continue to play vital roles in establishing land values. Through the last 125 years, observed Kansas land values have experienced an increasing trend. Although individual years will vary due to changes in relevant factors, expectations are for this trend to continue.

### References

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**Table 1.** Yields and Prices of Wheat and Corn, Inventory Value of Cattle, and Land Values in Kansas, 1870-1997

	Wh	eat	Co	rn	Cattle	Land
	Yield (bu/acre)	Price (\$/bu)	Yield (bu/acre)	Price (\$/bu)	\$/Head	Values (\$/acre)
1870	15.5	1.07	31.3	0.48	19	13
1880	14.1	0.86	29.7	0.29	20	11
1890	14.1	0.69	28.6	0.30	24	19
1900	13.3	0.57	21.2	0.30	20	15
1910	14.0	0.71	22.4	0.43	23	40
1920	13.2	1.29	15.5	0.94	42	62
1925	13.4	1.16	22.5	0.65	34	50
1930	12.8	1.18	19.9	0.72	39	49
1935	12.6	0.57	13.3	0.50	28	31
1940	11.1	0.83	12.9	0.71	29	30
1945	15.8	1.09	23.6	0.87	51	41
1950	15.9	1.90	24.7	1.49	92	66
1954	15.7	2.12	25.5	1.53	129	80
1959	19.7	1.92	32.6	1.19	104	100
1964	24.4	1.76	47.1	1.09	127	122
1969	24.0	1.35	68.4	1.14	130	159
1974	33.1	2.37	87.8	1.87	221	301
1978	28.8	3.03	89.3	2.41	208	501
1982	32.0	3.54	109.8	2.69	361	601
1987	37.2	3.09	119.6	2.55	353	413
1992	33.6	3.01	125.0	2.28	537	463
1997	32.4	3.73	137.8	2.63	566	577

Yields and values for each census year are averages for years since the preceding census. Cattle inventory value is the January 1 inventory value.

Sources: Kansas State Board of Agriculture: 58th Annual Report, 1975; Price Patterns 1957, Kansas Farm Facts, 1998.

 Table 2. Average Dollar Value per Acre for Farmland and Improvements in Kansas by County, by Census Year 1870-1997

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County	1870	80	90 1900	1900	10	20	25	30	35	40	45	20	54	59	64	69	74	78	82	87	92	97
Allen	20	12	20	21	49	71	58	47	34	29	40	63					.,	541	613	445	١.	869
Anderson	12	14	21	28	42	89	50	45	30	24	34	50					•	475	593	352	_	558
Atchison	21	23	37	39	80	142	109	87	48	48	59	87					`	724	89/	564		932
Barber		4	12	2	23	37	28	28	20	23	30	44					•	399	522	298	_	353
Barton		$\infty$	14	15	57	77	71	75	47	52	77	111	128	146 1	165 1	179	3867	557	729	451	514	573
Bourbon	19	14	21	19	37	69	50	37	26	23	31	46					•		541	393		493
Brown	19	20	37	47	26	202	144	116	75	64	85	130				·	•	_	90	654		961
Butler	∞	12	18	15	40	59	47	45	56	33	41	99							629	497		715
Chase	17	15	16	13	53	99	46	4	25	26	35	53							404	288		490
Chautauqua		8	13	10	21	36	59	56	14	17	20	34					270	355	458	239		414
Cherokee	6	10	22	22	38	71	54	42	24	25	34	52							999	541		752
Cheyenne		7	7	$\mathfrak{S}$	14	37	59	56	16	17	31	49							442	311		473
Clark		$\mathcal{E}$	∞	7	16	28	22	23	18	14	21	42							360	242		499
Clay	∞	10	22	20	57	98	69	09	45	41	48	73							899	426		809
Cloud	9	10	19	18	27	42	62	09	39	38	20	69							635	407		570
Coffey	18	15	22	20	42	70	29	48	30	29	35	55	[	104	109	155 2	7 887	468	548	357	440	610
Comanche		$\mathcal{E}$	∞	$\mathfrak{S}$	16	38	24	29	19	18	26	49							362	566		390
Cowley	4	10	21	17	38	70	54	50	31	35	38	65					•		551	385		540
Crawford	11	12	27	25	48	69	51	43	28	25	35	53							748	436		889
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Dickinson	11	14	26	20	09	1111	79	82	51	51	63	96							645	446		638
Doniphan	26	20	31	43	81	162	119	104	99	99	29	91				•	-	_	002	741	_	161
Douglas	31	23	33	33	27	109	88	77	20	48	28	82			•	•	•		944	827	_	135
Edwards		S	10	9	42	27	52	53	35	33	52	79					_		609	423		495
Elk		∞	15	12	29	46	39	33	17	18	25	42							429	277		428

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92	427	722	484	591	390	952	498	487	443	331	612	453	300	365	518	317	476	434	339	439	490	305	664	565	505
87	320	562	436	451	412	854	445	470	336	280	442	380	257	322	399	309	392	423	321	374	466	272	565	482	448
82	554	834	628	683	509	916	650	741	467	312	731	702	419	467	610	480	809	661	502	573	582	488	898	778	663
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69	166	245	192	178	125	268	166	180	147	101	209	191	106	26	167	124	162	174	117	150	157	100	94	199	184
64	121	173	149	116	26	157	140	123	115	92	126	126	95	80	109	86	133	144	78	114	133	66	66	132	162
29	104	172	120	109	78	1117	108	102	26	68	116	96	11	61	66	69	113	129	99	101	128	11	154	101	143
54	75	137	66	82	62	98	85	78	72	65	88	4	65	47	69	62	88	115	49	79	117	63	149	85	130
20	69	125	77	74	65	61	74	27	82	46	83	25	4	38	99	47	71	26	38	28	87	51	112	79	96
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40	33	4	46	43	19	31	33	31	33	8	46	56	17	17	31	21	37	40	18	32	43	19	62	38	54
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30	57	83	75	80	33	57	55	42	54	22	84	43	34	33	28	38	49	99	35	28	58	31	74	9/	72
25	63	80	72	84	23	69	09	49	62	16	85	49	30	35	28	46	99	99	40	09	51	30	89	80	71
20	80	109	95	111	27	88	71	4	78	19	130	89	31	40	74	51	71	69	48	74	73	33	68	95	90
10	42	61	99	69	20	51	49	39	4	7	74	41	18	27	43	34	43	49	33	45	4	17	59	69	28
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County 18	Lyon	McPherson	Marion	Marshall	Meade	Miami	Mitchell	Montgomery	Morris	Morton	Nemaha	Neosho	Ness	Norton	Osage	Osborne	Ottawa	Pawnee	Phillips	Pottawatomie	Pratt	Rawlins	Reno	Republic	Rice

Riley Rooks Rush Russell Saline	18 10	21 4 4 7 51 21 4 4 7 51	20 20 24 11 24	20 7 9 11 19	47 32 33 35 51	44 47 74 74 79	69 36 49 40	71 29 52 40 70	40 19 38 27 44	39 18 33 27 47	52 28 45 41 75	79 77 60 60	81 55 98 74 112	122 68 102 83 83	143 85 125 101 163	184 105 135 117 181	323 203 262 211 304	550 308 443 360 569	622 460 558 518 683	448 310 322 280 471	508 315 363 324 556	673 338 421 359 730
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Table 3. Value per Acre of Farmland and Improvements in Kansas for Census Years 1880 to 1997, by Crop Reporting District and for the State

	MN	WC	SW	NC	C	SC	NE	EC	SE	STATE
1880	\$3	\$3	\$4	88	\$10	88	\$18	\$17	\$11	\$11
1890	7	9	7	17	18	18	50	25	19	19
1900	5	4	3	16	16	14	33	24	17	15
1910	20	16	18	47	47	49	69	47	37	40
1920	32	22	27	69	77	75	118	83	61	62
1925	30	23	24	55	62	54	91	69	48	50
1930	28	24	31	20	64	58	82	61	41	49
1935	18	16	20	32	40	39	51	38	25	31
1940	15	12	15	59	42	43	46	35	27	30
1945	25	22	27	39	28	58	57	44	33	41
1950	46	51	09	58	85	98	83	<i>L</i> 9	53	99
1954	09	09	99	70	102	111	92	81	71	80
1959	75	72	85	98	119	134	121	113	92	100
1964	94	101	104	111	138	143	143	134	112	122
1969	113	114	137	146	164	179	211	200	156	159
1974	250	234	276	569	294	361	367	365	312	301
1978	375	373	463	476	509	605	664	548	481	501
1982	514	464	540	571	679	724	774	653	578	601
1987	331	320	411	380	409	475	538	486	395	413
1992	390	365	424	433	467	511	629	969	434	463
1997	462	425	533	528	573	613	863	752	268	577
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District values derived using county values weighted by the number of acres in farms.

**Figure 1**. Kansas Farm Land Values, Wheat and Corn Prices, and Cattle Inventory Values, 1870-1997

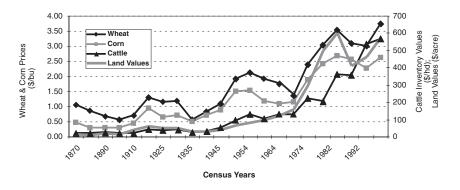


Figure 2. Kansas Wheat and Corn Yields, 1870-1997

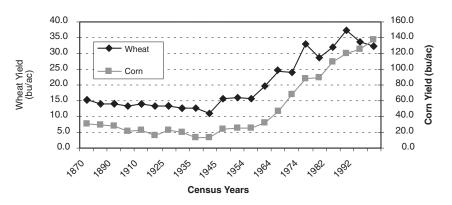


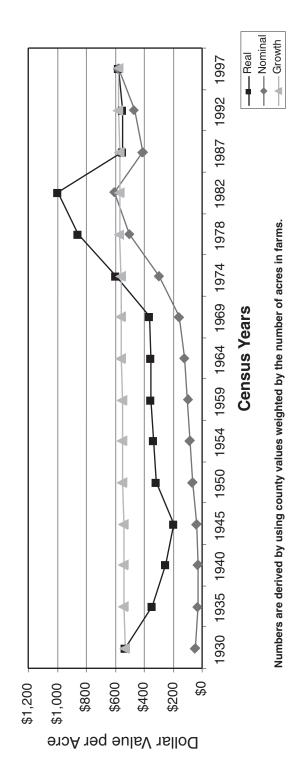
Figure 3. Kansas Agricultural Statistics Crop Reporting Districts

Cheyenne	Rawlins	3 1	Decatur	Norton	Phillips	Smith	Jewell	Republic	Washington	Marshall	Nemah	a Brown	_	~.
	NW	-10					NC-40			l	NE-		Doniph	an S
Sherman	Thoma	as	Sheridan	Graham	Rooks	Osborne	Mitchell	Cloud	Clay	liley Potts	watomie J	ackson	Atchison (	,
								Ottawa		۳ کر			Jefferson (	\(
Wallace	Logan		Gove	Trego	Ellis	Russell	Lincoln	Saline	Dickinson	Geary	Wabaunsee	Shawnee		~
	wc	-20					Ellsworth	Sallie	}	Morris		Osage	Douglas	Johnson
Greeley	Wichita	Scott	Lane	Ness	Rush	Barton	C-50	McPherson	Marion		Lyon	EC-80	Franklin	Miami
					Pawnee	Ц	Rice			Chase		Coffey	Anderson	Linn
Hamilton	Kearny	Finney		Hodgeman	Ъ .	Stafford	Reno	Harvey	Butler		Greenwood	Woodson		
	sv	V-30	Gray	Ford	Edwards	<u> </u>	-	Sedgw	_			Woodson	Allen	Bourbon
Stanton	Grant	Haskell		)	Kiowa	Pratt	SC-60	T				Wilson	Neosho	Crawford
Morton	Stevens	Seward	Meade	Clark	Comanche	Barber	Harper	Sumner	Cowley			Montgomery	Labette	Cherokee
							· imper			c	hautauqua			Cherokee

N N ■ ™ WC SW ■ **№** C SC NE EC **SE 466** L 1885 **188**1 1985 846 F 746L 696 L 796L 496P 796 L 1960 9761 1640 1832 1830 1925 1920 1910 1900 1890 25.0 20.0 15.0 0.0 10.0 5.0 -10.0 -5.0

**Figure 4.** Nominal Growth Rates in Kansas Land Values by Crop Reporting District by Census Period

Figure 5. Nominal vs. Real Land Values in Kansas, 1930-1997



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