

Commentary on Results

Introduction

While the Census of Agriculture 2000 is essentially a snapshot in time of farming, it is useful to view the results of the Census of Agriculture in the context of previous results, to see what is different, to see how much things have changed. The most recent fully comparable results that are available are provided by the Census of Agriculture 1991. This commentary remarks upon some of the principal findings of the Census of Agriculture 2000 and how these findings compare with the 1991 position.

Two principal themes underlie the comparison between 2000 and 1991. These are concentration and diversification. Concentration in this sense refers to the tendency for specific lines of agricultural activity to be pursued on a decreasing number of farms at an increasing scale. Diversification, on the other hand, refers to the changing mix between farming and other gainful activities.

What follows is a brief tour of the Census results tables, visiting features of interest along the route, with a particular emphasis on those features which have changed significantly since 1991.

Classification of farms by location and by main farm characteristics

Tables 1 to 10 profile the number of farms in the State. They classify farms by physical size, economic size, economic type, geographical location and characteristics of holder.

Table 1 presents the number of farms classified by farm size in each province and county. There were 141,527 active farms in June 2000. The average farm size (Agricultural Area Used or AAU) was 31.4 hectares. This compares with 26.0 hectares in 1991. As such, 2000 continues the historical trend of a decreasing number of farms with an increasing average size (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Farms and average farm size

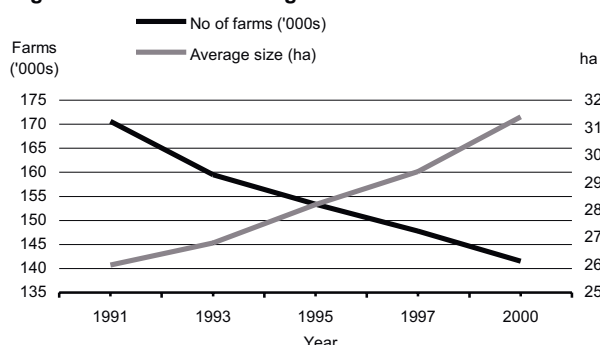


Table 2 presents the number of farms classified by type of farm in each province and county. When comparing the results with 1991 it is interesting to note that *Specialist beef production* has increased its dominance of agriculture to the point where it now comprises more farms than all the other types put together (see figures 3(a) & 3(b)). This reflects the falling numbers of farms in the *Specialist dairying* and *Mixed grazing livestock* categories. All other types have retained their share of farms between the two Censuses.

Figure 3(a): Farm type 1991

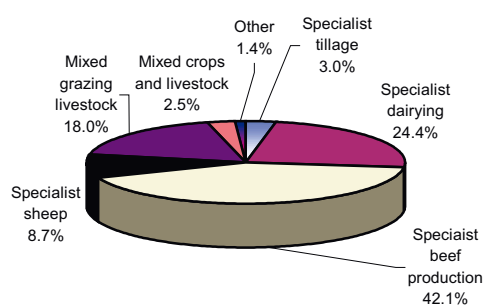


Figure 3(b): Farm type 2000

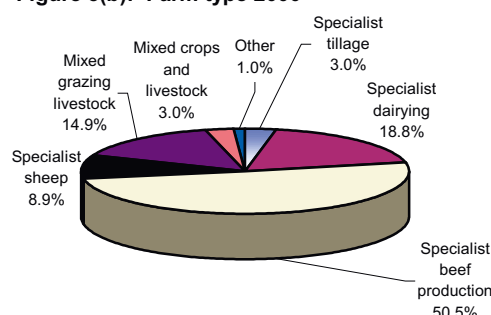


Table 3 gives the number of farms classified by economic size in each province and county. The average economic size of all farms was 20.7 European Size Units or ESU.

Table 4 gives the number of farms classified by characteristics of holder in each province and county. It is noteworthy that more holders (36,332) are in the 45-54 year age bracket than any other bracket. This is a significant change from the 1991 age profile of holders, when the most populous age bracket was 65 years or over (see figures 4(a) & 4(b)).

In 1991, 73.4% of holders listed farm work as their sole occupation. In 2000 only 55.7% of holders did so (see figures 5(a) & 5(b)). Time spent on farm work has also diminished. In 1991, 68.7% of holders worked a full annual work unit, whereas in 2000 only 55.3% of holders did so (see figures 6(a) & 6(b)).

Figure 4(a): Age of holder 1991

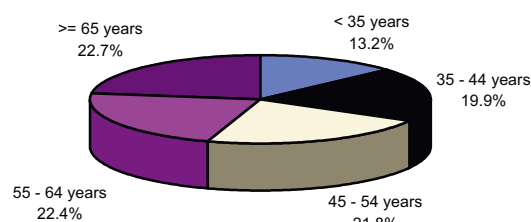


Figure 4(b): Age of holder 2000

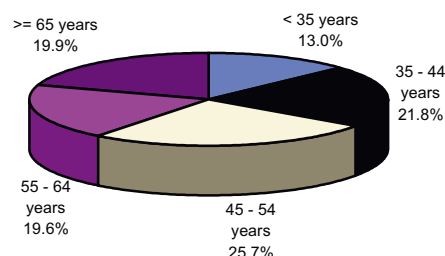


Figure 5(a): Importance of farmwork 1991

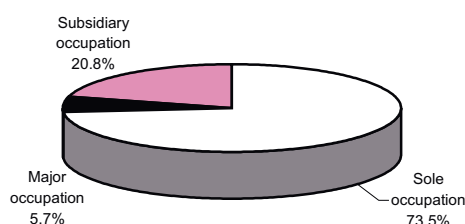


Figure 5(b): Importance of farmwork 2000

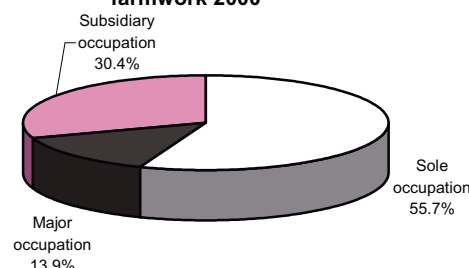


Figure 6(a): Time spent on farm work, 1991

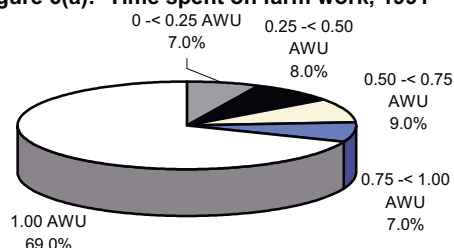
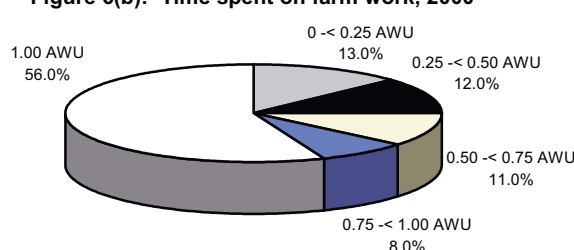


Figure 6(b): Time spent on farm work, 2000



Tables 5 to 10 cross-classify farm size, farm type, economic size and characteristics of holder at State level. Such cross-classification adds dimension to tables 1 to 4, enabling one to relate directly one aspect of agriculture to another. While many interesting results emerge from these tables only one will be remarked upon here. This is the striking disparity in economic size of the various farm types (see Table 7). While *Specialist beef production* farms have an average economic size of only 9.4 ESU, less than half the overall average of 20.7 ESU, *Other* farm types (which include pigs, poultry and horticulture) have a very large average economic size of 144.4 ESU, about seven times the overall average.

Figure 7: Average economic size of farm types

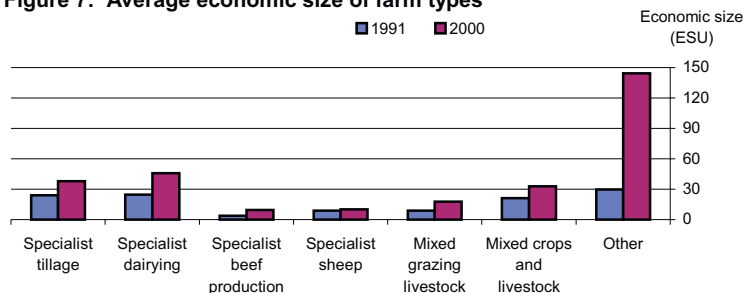
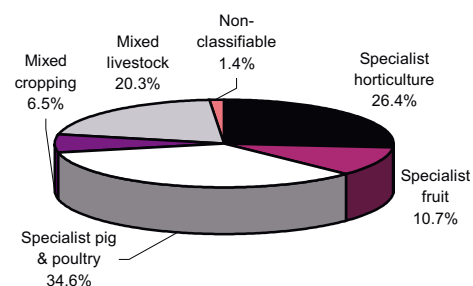


Figure 8: Other farms breakdown, 2000



Inventory of farm activities

Tables 11 to 14 inclusive provide full inventories of the areas under various crops, livestock numbers and agricultural machinery in each province and county. In addition table 15 provides details of milk quota in each province and county. The number of farms reporting under each heading are also shown.

Figures 9(a) to 14(b) below provide provincial breakdowns of selected inventory data, and comparable data for 1991. It is apparent from these comparisons that Leinster has retained its dominance of cereal growing and sheep farming. Munster has retained its dominance of cattle farming and increased its relative share of pig farming. Ulster has increased its dominance of poultry farming.

Figure 9(a): Total cereals 1991

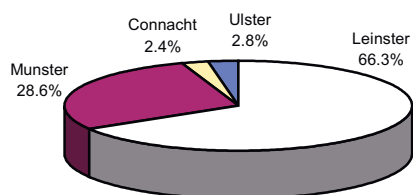


Figure 9(b): Total cereals 2000

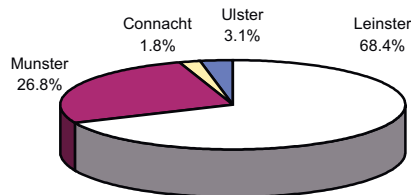


Figure 10(a): Potatoes 1991

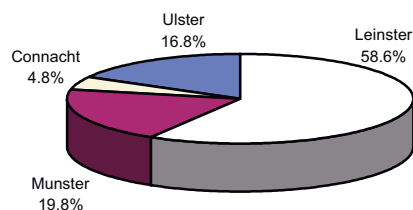


Figure 10(b): Potatoes 2000

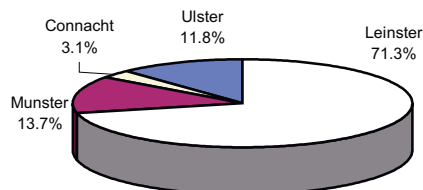


Figure 11(a): Cattle 1991

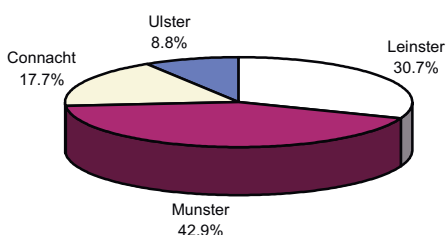


Figure 11(b): Cattle 2000

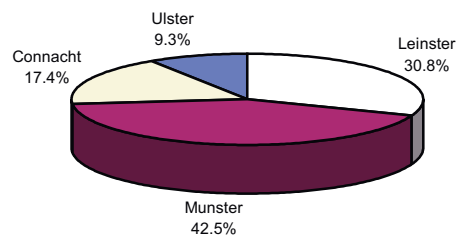


Figure 12(a): Sheep 1991

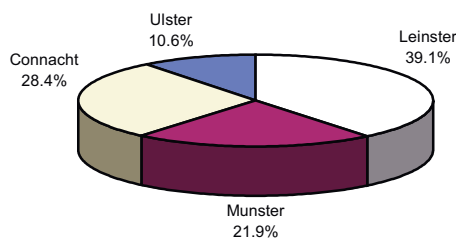


Figure 12(b): Sheep 2000

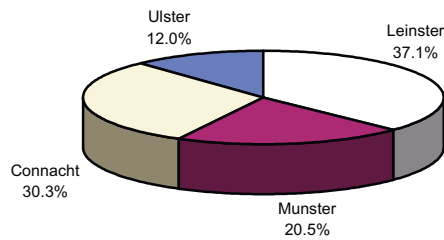


Figure 13(a): Pigs 1991

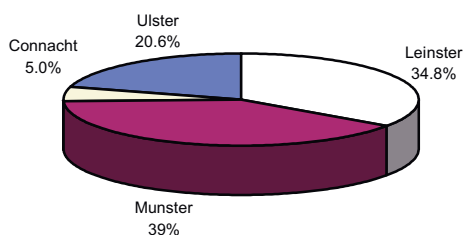


Figure 13(b): Pigs 2000

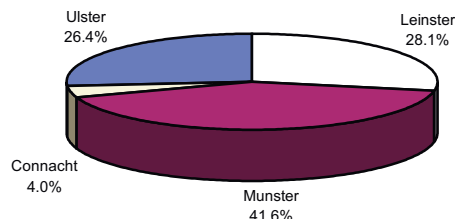


Figure 14(a): Poultry 1991

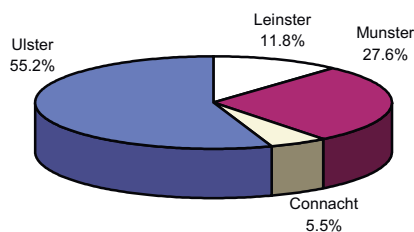
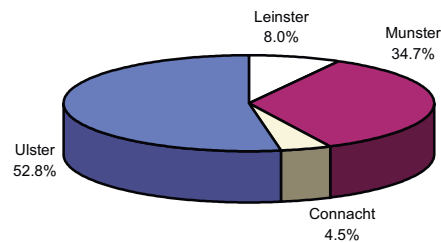


Figure 14(b): Poultry 2000



Structural analyses of farm activities

Tables 16 to 34 present a range of detailed structural analyses of farms in respect of their land use and livestock activities. The tables cross-classify the number of farms engaged in a particular activity by the level of activity on that farm (i.e. the area under individual crops, size of livestock herd etc.) and by (a) farm size (AAU), (b) farm type and (c) economic size (ESU). Distributions of the average levels per farm of crop (or land use) and livestock activities are given for each of the three latter characteristics.

One of the developments evident from these analyses is the changing structure of cereal farming, particularly the growing of oats and barley. The general trend of concentration of farming activity is especially apparent in these two crops. In 1991, for instance, 39.7% of farms growing oats grew just one hectare or less (see figure 15). In 2000 only 12.6% of farms growing oats grew one hectare or less. In 1991 the percentage of farms growing barley was highest in the 2-<5 hectares crops area category (see figure 16). In 2000 the percentage of farms growing barley was highest in the 10-<20 hectare crop area category.

Figure 15: Farms growing Oats

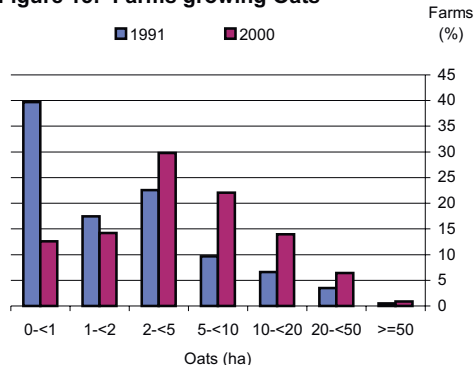
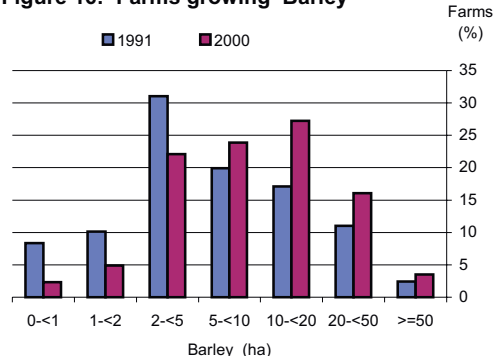


Figure 16: Farms growing Barley



Another trend apparent within these analyses is the increasing share of pastureland given over to *Specialist beef production*. In 1991 *Specialist beef production* accounted for 34.6% of all pastureland (see figures 17(a) & 17(b)). In 2000 it accounted for 45.2% of all pastureland. The shares of *Specialist dairying* and *Mixed grazing livestock* decreased by 5.3% and 2.9% respectively.

Figure 17(a): Pastureland 1991

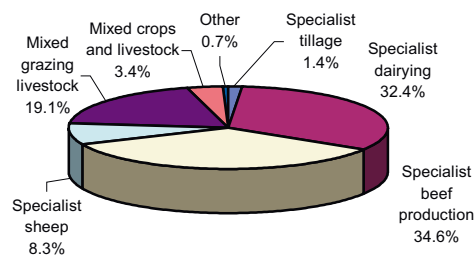
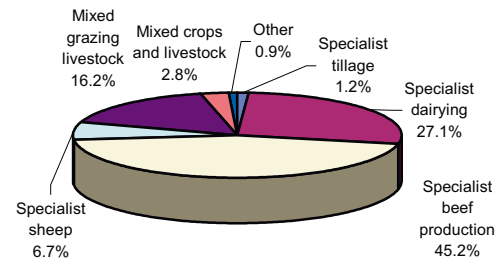


Figure 17(b): Pastureland 2000



These tables also show the striking process of intensification that has occurred in the pig and poultry sectors. The average size of herd for pigs in 2000 is 1,345.4 animals (in 1991 it was 453.8 animals). The average size of flock for poultry in 2000 is 1,310.6 birds (in 1991 it was 452.7 birds). There also seems to be an increasing tendency within these sectors to combine both pig and poultry farming with other types of farming. This is suggested in part from the changed farm size (AAU) profile of pig and poultry farms (see figures 18 and 19) and is also visible in the sizeable number of poultry in particular that are reared by farms specialising in other activities. For example over 3 million birds, or 21.9% of all poultry, are reared on farms where the principal activity is *Specialist dairying*.

Figure 18: Pig population by farm size, 1991 & 2000

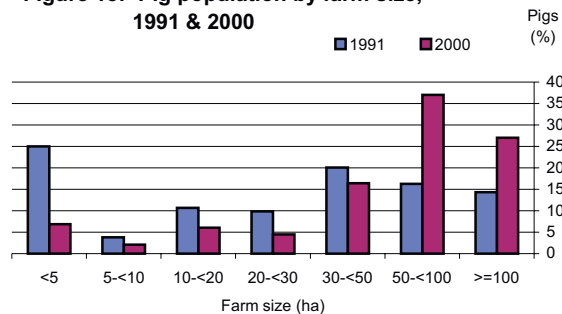
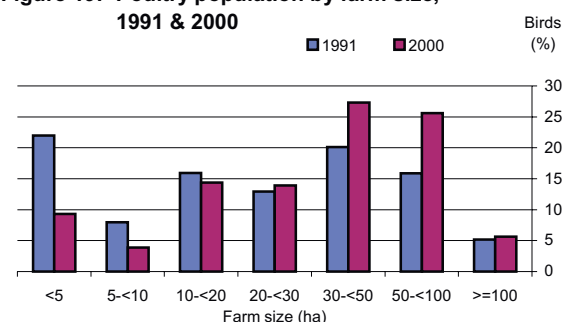


Figure 19: Poultry population by farm size, 1991 & 2000



Farm labour force

Tables 35 to 39 present details of the farm labour force. Tables 35 to 37 provide details of family and regular non-family workers, classified by province and county, farm characteristics and worker characteristics. Table 38 lists total labour input (including casual, contract or relief workers) in each province and county. Table 39 categorises farm managers by level of training and farm characteristics.

There were 257,948 family and regular non-family workers engaged in farming in 2000. In 1991 there were 312,729 such workers. So in the intervening nine years the regular farm workforce shrunk by 17.5%. This reduction is very much in line with the overall decline in the number of farms, which has decreased by 17.0% in the same period. Another important finding is that family and regular non-family workers provided a total of 163,898 annual work units in 2000. The comparable figures for 1991 is 245,199 annual work units. So the actual time spent on farm work by these workers has decreased by 33.2% between the two Censuses (despite the fact that average farm size increased from 26.0 to 31.4 (or 20.8%) in the same period). This suggests that farming in 2000 is significantly less labour intensive than in 1991, and that this change has broadly resulted in the same number of workers per farm working less hours than in 1991, rather than less workers per farm working the same hours as in 1991.

It is interesting to look at the relative contributions made to farming by the various categories of workers, and to compare the position with 1991. While the share of labour input held by other family members, regular non-family workers and casual, contract and relief workers has remained almost static, there has been a significant transfer of workload from spouses to holders (see figures 20(a) & 20(b)). However, it should be noted that in all categories the average annual work units per person has decreased (see figure 21). Where spouses do work on farms, on balance they now work longer hours than all other workers except holders.

Figure 20(a): Total labour input 1991

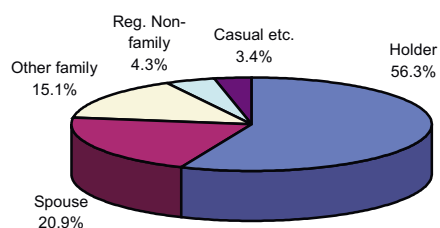


Figure 20(b): Total labour input 2000

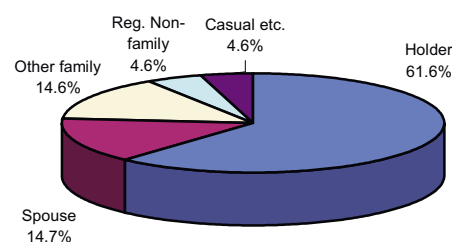
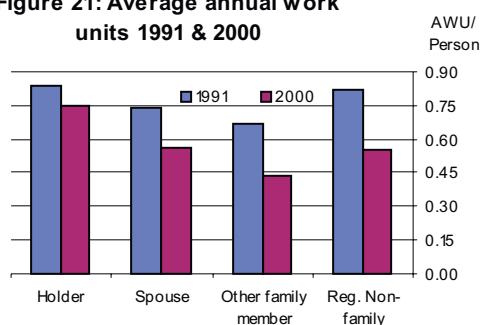


Figure 21: Average annual work units 1991 & 2000



It is also interesting to look at the breakdown of annual work units among the various farm types. It is apparent, for example, that *Specialist dairying* holders work longer hours than any other type of holder (see figure 22). It is also evident that a higher proportion of both spouses and other family members work on *Specialist dairying* farms than any other type of farm (see figure 23).

Figure 22: Holder average annual work units, 2000

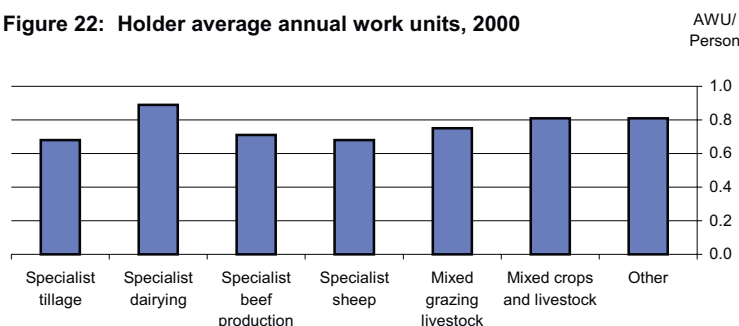
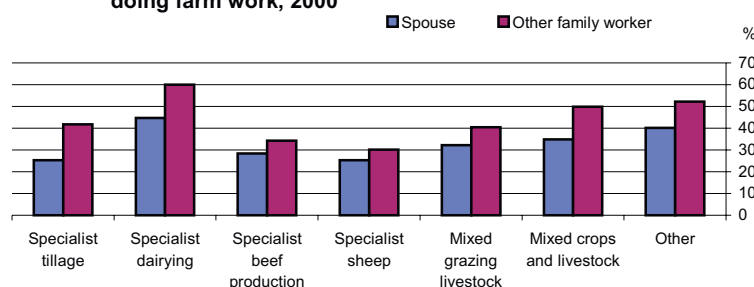


Figure 23: Proportion of spouses and other family members doing farm work, 2000



The traditional gender imbalance in the farm workforce has increased marginally. In 2000, 27.2% of the farm workforce was female (as opposed to 29.8% in 1991). In 2000, 22.3% of all annual work units were worked by females (as opposed to 26.8% in 1991). On the other hand a marginally higher proportion of holders were female in 2000 as opposed to 1991 (10.7% versus 9.7% respectively).

The level of training of farm managers has increased noticeably. In 2000, 2.5% of farm managers had a full-time third level farming qualification and 10.4% had a certificate in farming or had completed a farm apprenticeship. The corresponding percentages for 1991 were 1.3% and 4.8% respectively. However, in both years the majority of managers had practical experience only (85.4% in 1991 and 75.3% in 2000).

Other details

Tables 40 to 46 analyse various other features of land use. Tables 40 and 41 present data on the number of farms with rented land. Tables 42 and 43 give details of land fragmentation and use of commonage respectively. Tables 44 and 45 show the number of farms engaged in organic farming and growing woodland respectively. And table 46 shows the number of farms that combine farming with other commercial activities on the holding.

In 2000, 45,363 farms (32.1% of all farms) rented in a total of 832,362 hectares of agricultural land (an average of 18.3 hectares per farm). This compares with 36,479 farms in 1991 (21.4% of all farms) that rented in a total of 553,011 hectares of agricultural land (an average of 15.2 hectares per farm). The use of rented land for farming has clearly become more prevalent between the two Censuses.

Land fragmentation has also increased noticeably. In 1991 the average number of parcels per farm was 1.9. In 2000 it was 3.1. Farms are more fragmented in Galway, with 3.7 parcels of land per farm, than in any other county.

Organic farming has increased almost threefold, albeit from a very small base. In 1991, 574 farms were involved in organic farming. In 2000, 1,558 farms were involved. This latter figure represents just 1.1% of all farms.

The number of farms with woodland has also risen. In 1991, there were 12,880 farms with woodland, with a total of 75,177 hectares of woodland between them. In 2000, there were 15,134 farms with woodland, with a total of 103,756 hectares of woodland between them. This represents an increase of 17.5% in the number of farms with woodland and 38.0% in the area of woodland.

Finally, the number of farms reporting gainful non-agricultural activities on the holding has risen. In 1991 just 1,917 farms (1.1% of all farms) reported one or more gainful non-agricultural activities, with farm tourism being the favourite activity. In 2000, 6,996 farms (4.9% of all farms) reported one or more such activities, with the 'Other' category (which in itself represents a diverse range of over 100 different activities) being most prominent. This illustrates, perhaps more than any other single finding, the increasing diversification of life on the farm.

