Fact Finders for Agriculture:

NASS at Work

United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

Our Mission...

to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture

Agricultural producers, farm organizations, policymakers, community groups, researchers, government agencies, agribusinesses, and a host of related industries all need consistent, reliable data on U.S. agriculture. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts hundreds of surveys each year and prepares reports on virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture. Every five years NASS also conducts a detailed census of every farm and agricultural producer in the country.

NASS staff and partners who collect, assemble, and analyze these rich information sources are rightly called "fact finders for agriculture."

DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING

As the statistical agency for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), NASS is the official source of comprehensive, current information on the farms, ranches, and people who provide food, feed, and fiber to our nation and the world. NASS collects data and reports on agricultural production and inventories, the prices farmers pay and receive, farm labor and wages, farm income and finances, kinds and amounts of chemicals used, and rural development, among many other topics.

In addition, NASS works to advance the accuracy of statistical science by conducting research on survey design, sampling, and other issues. NASS provides key statistical information and basic research that informs decision making. NASS headquarters in Washington, D.C., manages surveys, analyzes data, conducts cutting edge statistical research, and publishes national reports. Field offices across the country collect and publish similar data specific to their regions, states, and localities.

STAFF AND PARTNERS

NASS employees come from many different geographic areas and academic backgrounds, and they are some of the best statisticians, mathematicians, and agricultural economists anywhere. They also include geographers, computer scientists, managers, and communications professionals, among other disciplines.

Cooperating partners play an essential role in data collection. NASS's partners include state agriculture departments, land grant universities, community-based organizations, and agriculture industry organizations.

NASS Reports

The topics NASS covers include:

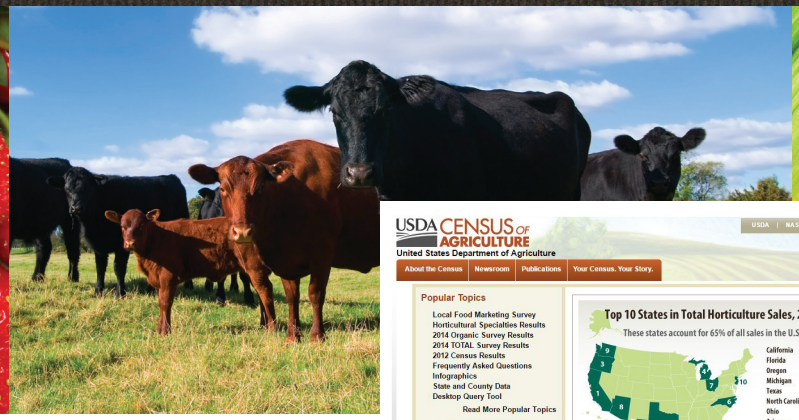
- Land use and ownership
- Operator characteristics
- Farm labor
- Farm income
- Production costs
- Machinery and equipment
- Irrigation
- Prices paid and prices received
- Market value of land and buildings
- Crops planted, harvested and sold
- Livestock and poultry inventory and sales

- In-season crop progress
- Organic and other specialized farming
- Fertilizer and chemical use
- Grain storage capacity
- Farm program participation
- Computer/Internet use
- Agricultural industrial production

See the full list of surveys and reports.

NASS Counts...

the farms and people who feed our nation and the world



In conducting its work, NASS relies on those who know the situation best—farmers and ranchers, livestock feeders, slaughterhouse managers, grain elevator operators, and others involved in agriculture. They supply data and are also among the major users of the reports, forecasts, and estimates NASS produces. In fact, they participate in NASS surveys because they know complete and accurate data about their industry help them make better production and marketing decisions.

SURVEYS, ESTIMATES, AND FORECASTS

Every year, NASS conducts hundreds of surveys using a statistically valid sample of the target population. In these surveys, NASS collects information from a cross-section of a specific group (corn growers, feedlot managers, dairy producers, etc.). Depending upon the particular crop, livestock, or topic of concern, surveys vary in size (from a few hundred to tens of thousands), frequency (weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually), and coverage (the number of states involved).

After the data are collected, statisticians analyze the information to prepare estimates and forecasts. At NASS, an *estimate* is a determination of size or value and refers to what has already occurred, such as last year's wheat harvest or cattle inventory. A *forecast* is an approximation of what may occur by the end of the season, such as average corn yield or total production for the current harvest year.

THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Every five years, NASS conducts the Census of Agriculture. Similar to the population census that attempts to count and collect data on every man, woman, and child in the United States, the Census of Agriculture takes a complete count of farms, ranches, and agricultural production in the entire country.

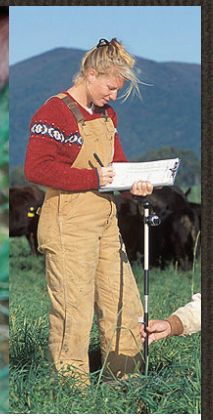
Conducting the Census of Agriculture is a large undertaking requiring coordination among field offices and with NASS headquarters in Washington, D.C. Participation by every farmer and rancher, regardless of the size or type of operation, is vitally important. Most NASS surveys are voluntary, but in the case of the census, participation is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). By responding to the census, producers help themselves, their communities, and U.S. agriculture overall.

Responding to a NASS Survey

Increasingly NASS encourages those who receive a survey or census questionnaire to respond online. It is fast, easy, and secure. Other options include returning the questionnaire in a postage-paid envelope or by fax. In some instances, a NASS representative may telephone nonrespondents to offer assistance and take their information over the phone or arrange a personal interview.

NASS Data Serve...

farmers, ranchers, and others concerned about agriculture



Farmers, ranchers, policymakers, community planners, agribusinesses, researchers, USDA, and other federal and state government agencies use NASS data for planning, market assessment, decision making, and ongoing research.

Farmers and ranchers use the data to:

- Make specific decisions about their operations, such as what crops to plant, how many cattle or other livestock to raise, when to buy or sell agricultural commodities, and many more

Policymakers use the data to:

- Allocate funds based on state and community needs
- Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of programs and policies
- Determine who may be affected by proposed agricultural legislation

Community planners and cooperatives use the data to:

- Identify needed services and facilities
- Plan recreational, educational, and community awareness programs based on the interests and concerns of local producers

Companies and industry groups use the data to:

- Monitor trends
- Evaluate financial performance
- Develop unbiased baseline industry information
- Determine supply, prices, and export potential

Researchers and analysts use the data to:

- Monitor industries and their impacts on the economy
- Adapt new technologies to increase agricultural productivity
- Forecast trends, evaluate responses, and determine the social and economic implications

USDA agencies use the data to:

- Administer farm loan, insurance, disaster assistance, and other programs
- Allocate local and national funds for farm programs (including extension service projects, agricultural research, conservation, farm loans, and land grant colleges and universities)

Federal and state agencies use the data to:

- Plan and administer agriculture programs as well as conservation, consumer protection, education, land valuation, recreation, trade, transportation, water and irrigation use, and worker safety programs

High-quality statistical information is essential to those involved in agriculture. But it is equally essential to directly and indirectly related industries, services, programs, and economic sectors.

Good data provide an understanding of current conditions as well as future trends and possibilities. In addition to creating an accurate, up-to-date picture of U.S. agriculture, the information NASS provides contributes to a stable economic climate and reduces risk. By being equally available to all users, NASS data help to level the playing field.

Quick Stats: Online Access to NASS Data

NASS makes past and current data available through Quick Stats, an easy-to-use online query tool. This comprehensive tool allows users to access NASS data by commodity, geography, and date. Users can put the data on a map, manipulate and export the results, and save a link for future use.

NASS Protects...

your privacy and your data

A number is only as good as the reputation of the organization that stands behind it. NASS realizes the importance of providing timely and reliable data, remaining free from political influence, and refraining from policy advocacy. We are committed to preserving a relationship of mutual respect and trust with those who supply and those who use the information we collect and provide. We go to great lengths to ensure the data remain both confidential and secure.

CONFIDENTIALITY

NASS is required by law to keep every survey respondent's information confidential. This includes names, addresses, personal identifiers, and reported data. Only authorized persons working for or on behalf of NASS can access individual data records and only for approved official purposes. Anyone who discloses the information is subject to a fine, a jail term, or both.

SECURITY

Another top priority at NASS is data security during data collection and report preparation. NASS prepares reports under tight security until they are publicly released at preannounced dates and times. Market-sensitive reports in particular are protected through an elaborate set of physical and electronic security measures—called Lockup—to ensure no one has access to the information before anyone else. Not even the Secretary of Agriculture knows a report's contents until he enters the Lockup area to sign the report just prior to release.

Lockup: Protecting Market-Sensitive Reports

Anyone having early access to sensitive information such as production forecasts for corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, poultry, or livestock would have an obvious advantage in trading on the commodities market. Lockup ensures that no information is released early to anyone.

The process begins when NASS field offices transmit the survey data they collected to headquarters through specially encoded equipment. The encoded data are saved on portable storage devices and locked in a safe; the files are immediately purged from the computer system.

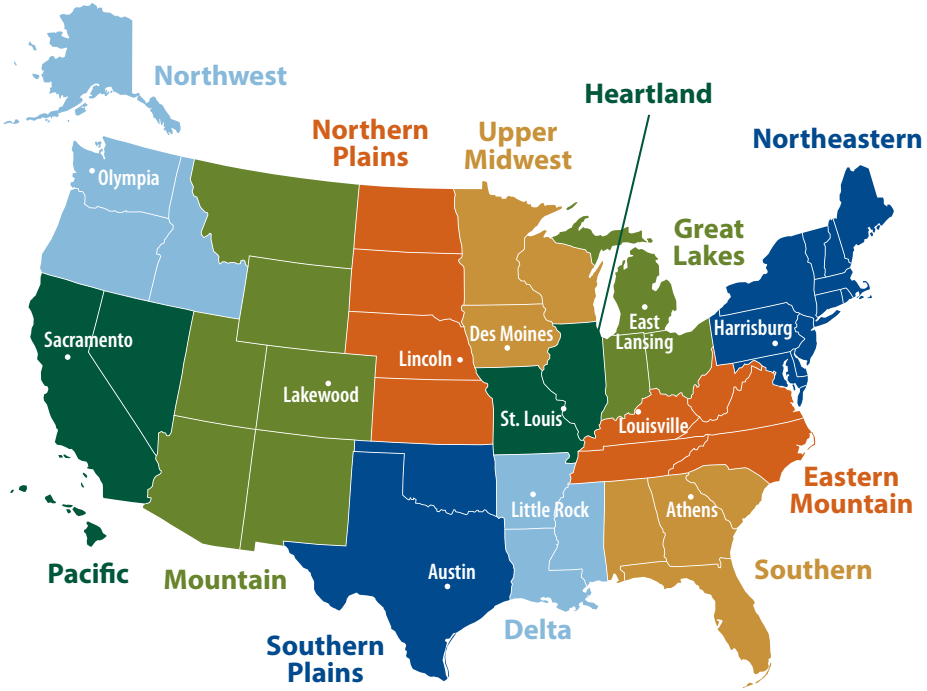
In the hours before a report is released, employees prepare the forecast or estimate in a secure locked area guarded by officers stationed in the hallways. Telephones are disconnected, cell phones must be left outside, vinyl shades with steel reinforcers are drawn over windows, and computer systems are secured against tampering. Anyone entering the Lockup area prior to release of the report has neither Internet nor telephone access and may not leave or contact anyone outside the Lockup area until the report has been issued.

NASS Offices

Headquarters
Washington, D.C.
800-727-9540
NASS@nass.usda.gov

National Operations Center
St. Louis, Missouri
314-595-9501
NOC.administration@nass.usda.gov

Regional Offices and the State Offices they serve



• *Regional Field Office Location*

Delta Region
Little Rock, Arkansas
800-327-2970
nassrfodlr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Arkansas *(Little Rock)*, Louisiana *(Baton Rouge)*, Mississippi *(Jackson)*

Eastern Mountain Region
Louisville, Kentucky
800-928-5277
nassrfoemr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Kentucky *(Louisville)*, North Carolina *(Raleigh)*, Tennessee *(Nashville)*, Virginia *(Richmond)*, West Virginia *(Charleston)*

Great Lakes Region
East Lansing, Michigan
800-453-7501
nassrfoglr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Indiana *(West Lafayette)*, Michigan *(East Lansing)*, Ohio *(Reynoldsburg)*

Heartland Region
St. Louis, Missouri
800-551-1014
nassrfohlr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Illinois *(Springfield)*, Missouri *(Columbia)*

Mountain Region
Lakewood, Colorado
800-392-3202
nassrfomtr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Arizona *(Phoenix)*, Colorado *(Lakewood)*, Montana *(Helena)*, New Mexico *(Las Cruces)*, Utah *(Salt Lake City)*, Wyoming *(Cheyenne)*

Northeastern Region
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
800-498-1518
nassrfoner@nass.usda.gov
Serving Delaware *(Dover)*, Maryland *(Annapolis)*, New Jersey *(Trenton)*, New York *(Albany)*, Pennsylvania *(Harrisburg)*, New Hampshire *(Concord)*, which also serves Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont

Northern Plains Region
Lincoln, Nebraska
800-582-6443
nassrfonpr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Kansas *(Topeka)*, Nebraska *(Lincoln)*, North Dakota *(Fargo)*, South Dakota *(Sioux Falls)*

Northwest Region
Olympia, Washington
800-435-5883
nassrfonwr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Alaska *(Palmer)*, Idaho *(Boise)*, Oregon *(Portland)*, Washington *(Olympia)*

Pacific Region
Sacramento, California
800-851-1127
nassrfopcr@nass.usda.gov
Serving California *(Sacramento)*, Hawaii *(Honolulu)*, Nevada *(Sparks)*

Southern Region
Athens, Georgia
800-253-4419
nassrfosor@nass.usda.gov
Serving Alabama *(Montgomery)*, Florida *(Maitland)*, Georgia *(Athens)*, South Carolina *(Columbia)*

Southern Plains Region
Austin, Texas
800-626-3142
nassrfospr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Oklahoma *(Oklahoma City)*, Texas *(Austin)*

Upper Midwest Region
Des Moines, Iowa
800-772-0825
nassrfoumr@nass.usda.gov
Serving Iowa *(Des Moines)*, Minnesota *(St. Paul)*, Wisconsin *(Madison)*

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