



AGRICULTURE COUNTS

LESSON PLANS

INTRODUCTION

During the Civil War, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) collected and distributed crop and livestock statistics to help farmers assess the value of the goods they produced. At that time, commodity buyers usually had more current and detailed market information than did farmers. This circumstance often prevented farmers from getting a fair price for their goods. Producers in today's marketplace would be similarly handicapped were it not for the information provided by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

NASS conducts weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual surveys and the five-year census of agriculture. Surveys provide current information about production, economics and environmental topics.

The five-year census of agriculture is the most comprehensive, detailed information-gathering program for agriculture. It is a complete accounting of agricultural production in the United States and is the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation. From 1840 to 1920 the census of agriculture was taken every 10 years. Since 1925 the census has been taken every five years (currently in the years ending in 2 and 7) to coincide with other economic censuses covering manufacturing, mining and construction.

The 2002 Census of Agriculture is the

nation's 26th census. Anyone who receives a census report form is required by law to complete and return it.

NASS requests information from farm operators on the following subjects:

- Land use and ownership.
- Irrigated land.
- Crop acreage and quantities harvested.
- Livestock and poultry.
- Value of products sold.
- Product contracts and landlord shares.
- More detailed farm-related income.
- Computer and Internet use.
- Multiple operator characteristics.

Twenty-five percent of the report forms include additional questions on the following:

- Production expenses.
- Fertilizer and chemicals.
- Machinery and equipment
- Market value of land and buildings.
- Income from farm-related sources.

Report forms are tailored for various parts of the country and are specific to the crops grown in a farmer's particular area.

Besides helping the farmer get a fair price for the goods produced on his or her farm, census of agriculture data helps all of us as we plan for the future sustained by a safe and secure food supply.

Agribusinesses use census data to develop market strategies and to determine the most effective locations for service to agricultural producers. Farm organizations use it to evaluate and propose programs and policies that can help agricultural producers. Our elected representatives use census data to develop programs to protect and promote U.S. agriculture. Rural electric companies use the data to forecast future energy needs for agricultural producers and their communities. Colleges and universities use it in research programs to develop new and improved methods to increase agricultural production. State departments of agriculture use census data to plan for operations during drought and emergency outbreaks of diseases or infestations of pests.

HISTORY OF THE U.S. CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

In 1791, President George Washington received a letter from an Englishman named Arthur Young, who had written to several farmers requesting information on land values, crops, yields, livestock prices, and taxes. By personally conducting a mail survey and compiling the results, Washington was able to gather enough information to reply fully to his English correspondent. This was, in effect, the nation's first agricultural survey.

Between September 24 and November 18, 1791, Washington sent Young three letters that provided agricultural statistics on an area extending roughly 250 miles from north to south and 100 miles from east to west. The strip ran through an area which is today Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, where most of the

young country's population lived.

In 1796, Washington tried to establish a National Board of Agriculture to collect data about our nation's agriculture. Congress rejected the idea at that time.

In 1839 Henry Ellsworth, Commissioner of Patents, asked Congress to designate \$1,000 from the Patent Office Fund for "collecting and distributing seeds, carrying out agricultural investigations, and procuring agricultural statistics." Congress approved his request, and in 1840 the first official census of agriculture provided a nationwide inventory of production. When the 1840 census information arrived, Ellsworth was able to combine it with other information to estimate production by states and territories. His estimates, made yearly through 1844, established the general pattern of annual agricultural reports that continues to this day.

THE BEGINNING OF THE USDA

USDA was established by Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The first USDA crop report appeared in July, 1863. NASS traces its roots all the way back to 1863, when USDA established a Division of Statistics.

The creation of USDA's Crop Reporting Board in 1905 (now called the Agricultural Statistics Board) was another landmark in the development of a nationwide statistical service for agriculture. A USDA reorganization in 1961 led to the creation of the Statistical Reporting Service, known today as NASS. The Agricultural Statistics Board is a part of this agency.

The Board prepares and releases the NASS reports. It consists of a permanent chairperson and secretary, and other NASS staff members chosen to partici-

pate in the preparation of a specific report based on their detailed knowledge of a particular topic.

Each year, NASS conducts hundreds of surveys and prepares reports covering everything about agriculture in the United States— production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, chemical use, and other various aspects of the farming and ranching industry. In addition, NASS' 45 State Statistical Offices publish data about many of the same topics for their individual states.

NASS publications cover a wide range of subjects, from traditional crops, such as corn and wheat, to specialties, such as mushrooms and flowers; from calves born to hogs slaughtered; from agricultural prices to land in farms. Because of the amount of information produced by the agency, NASS has earned the title, "The Fact Finders of Agriculture."

THE LESSONS

The enclosed lessons are intended as a starting point, to help you, as educators, discover the abundant learning opportunities available through exploration of the NASS data.

The six lessons were developed for students in grades K-3, 4-6, 7-8 and 9-12. One lesson is designed specifically for secondary level (9-12) language arts classes and one for secondary level math classes. All the data needed for completing the central part of each lesson is available with this packet, but for further exploration, additional data is available on the NASS Web site: www.nass.usda.gov.

Information is power, as farmers during the Civil War discovered when they were provided with the information they needed to get fair prices for their goods. The same will be true for your students as they learn where to find the reliable information they need to make good choices as consumers and citizens.