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National Agricultural Statistics Service Strategic Plan

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Contents

MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR	1
MISSION STATEMENT	2
VISION	2
VALUES AND PRINCIPLES	2
LEGISLATIVE MANDATE	3
PARTNERS, CUSTOMERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS	4
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND TOP PRIORITIES	4
KEY EXTERNAL FACTORS	5
STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK	5
STRATEGIC GOAL 1: ENHANCE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS	7
<i>Objective 1.1: Agricultural Markets have Unbiased Data to Operate Efficiently with Fair and Equitable Price Discovery</i>	7
<i>Objective 1.2: Support International Economic Development and Trade Capacity Building Through Technical Assistance</i>	9
<i>Objective 1.3: Provide the Science-Based Knowledge and Technologies to Generate New or Improved High Quality Products and Processes to Expand Markets for the Agricultural Sector</i>	10
<i>Objective 1.4: Statistical Data are Available for Risk Management Programs and as a Financial Tool for Decision Making in Agriculture</i>	10
<i>Objective 1.5: Statistical Data Promotes an Efficient and Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Marketing System</i>	11
STRATEGIC GOAL 2: SUPPORT INCREASED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AMERICA	14
<i>Objective 2.1: Provide Statistically Sound Information for Economic and Business Decision-making at the Local Level in Rural Communities</i>	14
<i>Objective 2.2: Provide Science-Based Technology, Products and Information to Facilitate Informed Decisions Affecting the Quality of Life in Rural Areas</i>	16
STRATEGIC GOAL 3: ENHANCE PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF THE NATION'S AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SUPPLY	16
<i>Objective 3.1: Help Monitor and Reduce Foodborne Contaminants Through Science-Based Statistical Information</i>	16
<i>Objective 3.2: Chemical Usage Statistics Enable Informed Decisions Using Sound Science in Risk Analysis</i>	17
STRATEGIC GOAL 4: IMPROVE THE NATION’S NUTRITION AND HEALTH	19
STRATEGIC GOAL 5: PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE NATION’S NATURAL RESOURCE BASE AND ENVIRONMENT	19
<i>Objective 5.1: Provide Statistical Information to Improve the Management of Forests and Rangelands</i>	19
<i>Objective 5.2: Statistical Data are Available for Improved Management of Soil, Air and Water</i>	19
OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES	22
<i>Improve Human Capital Management</i>	22
<i>Competitive Sourcing Initiatives</i>	23
<i>Improve Financial Management</i>	23
<i>Expand Electronic Government</i>	24
<i>Establish Budget and Performance Integration</i>	24

APPENDIX A: PROGRAM EVALUATIONS..... 26
APPENDIX B: CROSS-CUTTING PROGRAMS..... 27
APPENDIX C: STRATEGIC CONSULTATIONS..... 28

MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR



We in the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) are responsible for providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. We are positioned within the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Providing key statistical information is basic research for making informed policy decisions.

Our efforts also provide statistical data that are essential for orderly production and marketing decisions made by farmers, ranchers, and numerous other agricultural businesses. We are the measuring stick for the performance of U.S. agriculture.

I present to you in the following pages the NASS Strategic Plan. It has been linked to the REE plan which in turn is tied to the USDA Strategic Plan. Our role is to be the official source of comprehensive, current, and reliable information on U.S. farms and ranches. This includes inventory, production, demographics, structure, resources, prices, economic situation, and environmental practices. We have a tremendous responsibility. Our Strategic Plan must therefore be implemented by employees who believe in our basic core values: Trust, Respect, Unbiasedness, Service, and Teamwork. These values are vital to fulfilling our current and future goals because we work with and in service to the public. Our values are a source of pride in our work activities and daily lives at NASS.

Agriculture is the base that supports 13 percent of our nation's gross domestic product and employs more than 16 percent of our workforce. It is vital that the American people and agricultural communities Trust us to provide the reliable and unbiased information they need. As part of our commitment, NASS must continue to show high appreciation and Respect for our voluntary data providers, our current and future cooperative partners, and those who use the data and services we provide.

As you read this Strategic Plan, visualize your contribution to our combined success. To be successful, we will listen to our customers, be flexible, and be responsive to changing needs. We must be Unbiased in our work and in our relationships. Service is the final word in NASS and will ultimately define our success. Strong Teamwork promotes our combined success and contributes to better customer decisions affecting agricultural communities and the public.

R. Ronald Bosecker
Administrator

MISSION STATEMENT

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

VISION

NASS sees itself as:

- The world's most comprehensive, current, and reliable source of information on U.S. agricultural production, resources, food supplies, and the rural U.S. economy and environment.
- The acknowledged statistical leader for those seeking counsel, survey services, or data products regarding agricultural and rural statistics; a *standard* achieved by consistently demonstrating sound methodology, effective resource utilization, and a focus on customer service.
- Continually earning the trust and respect of those who provide data by protecting the confidentiality of reported information, by minimizing reporting burden, and by being fair to all through equal access to official statistics.
- Having employees who are strengthened by the diversity of their cultures and backgrounds, enjoy their important and challenging careers, and share an unsurpassed level of dedication and competence in service to the United States.

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

NASS Values

In carrying out the goals of this plan, NASS will adhere to the key values articulated by President Bush (see text box at right). NASS employees will be guided by the following Core Values:

Trust
Respect
Unbiased
Service
Teamwork

President George W. Bush articulated this Administration's values to Federal employees on November 19, 2001, specifically:

- "First, we must always maintain the highest ethical standards. In addition to asking, 'what is legal,' we must also ask, 'what is right.'"
- We must confront the tough problems, not avoid them. We are here to serve the public's long-term interests, not just to apply quick, short-term fixes.
- We must remember that political and career employees are part of the same team. The American people do not distinguish between them, and neither do I. The American people and I have high expectations for our entire Government. To meet those expectations, we need to work together.
- Finally, we should always remember that every dollar we spend is the taxpayer's money. People worked hard to earn it, and we should spend it wisely and reluctantly."

Trust: We will earn the trust of data providers by protecting the confidentiality of their data, data users by providing high quality and relevant agricultural statistics on time and at the same time for all customers, colleagues in the workplace by being just and fair.

Respect: We will respect our data providers, data users, and colleagues. We will earn the respect of others for our integrity and excellence as a world class agricultural statistics organization serving agriculture.

Unbiased: We will be fair and unbiased in our dealings with our colleagues and customers, and objective in our preparation of official statistics.

Service: We will excel at providing effective and efficient service and at being responsive to those who serve agriculture and require reliable data for decision making. We will invest in the development of our employees to ensure excellence in our products and services.

Teamwork: We will communicate openly and interact as a cohesive team within our Agency to produce products and services, and collaborate as partners with others outside our Agency.

NASS Principles

NASS employees will be guided by the following principles:

Quality: We are dedicated to highest standards of statistical excellence.

Service: We are available and responsive to customers, providing products and services that are relevant to their needs.

Accuracy: We strive to provide the best official estimates the first time, minimizing the need for revisions.

Error-Free: We strive to release our official estimates without error, removing the need to issue errata.

On Time: We meet published due dates.

In Time: We deliver high quality service to customers as quickly as possible.

Efficiency: We use available resources and technology effectively.

Fairness: We are honest and impartial in the performance of our duty, and trustworthy in our interaction with others.

Respect: We have deep respect and appreciation for American agricultural producers, our data customers, and for each other.

NASS's Core Values and Principles overlap with USDA's guiding principles of strong ethics, service, team work, inclusive decision making, and fiscal responsibility. To achieve NASS's strategic goals, this plan emphasizes results that rely on teamwork not only within the agency but also across USDA. As part of this plan, we intend to work hard to improve the short-term and long-term leadership abilities that the Agency needs to serve the public. All actions will be consistent with our equal opportunity and civil rights responsibilities; NASS will act in a manner that is both inclusive and open to public scrutiny.

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

The foundation of NASS began with the establishment of USDA in 1862. Agricultural supply information was one of the purposes for the new Department. The first official report on the condition of crops began in July 1863. The basic, mission-oriented program continues today in the USDA forecasts and estimates provided by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's responsibilities are authorized under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 and other sections under Title 7 of the U.S. Code (U.S.C.), Agriculture; Chapter 55, Department of Agriculture; Section 2204, General duties of the Secretary; advisory functions; research and development.

Responsibility for the quinquennial census of agriculture program, which provides comprehensive information about the Nation's agriculture down to the county level, was transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Agriculture in 1997. NASS thereby assumed responsibility for the 1997 Census of Agriculture and subsequent censuses and special studies. NASS's responsibility to conduct the census of agriculture is authorized under Public Law 105-113, the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997 (Title 7 U.S.C. 2204g).

The NASS program utilizes 46 State Statistical Offices (SSOs) serving all 50 States and Puerto Rico. About one-third of the Agency's staff is located at its Washington, D.C. Headquarters offices with two-thirds of the staff located in the SSOs. Most SSOs are operated under cooperative funding arrangements with State Departments of Agriculture and/or land-grant universities. These arrangements serve the agricultural data needs at both the State and Federal levels, eliminates duplication of effort, provides State input, maintains national consistency, and minimizes overall costs to Federal and State Governments. The Agency maintains a list of all farms and ranches in the U.S., one of its unique federal roles. NASS performs important reimbursable agricultural survey work for other Federal, State, and producer organizations and provides technical assistance for agricultural statistics programs in developing countries.

PARTNERS, CUSTOMERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS

As the primary statistical Agency for the USDA, NASS services the data needs of many agencies inside and outside of the Department. Partnerships have been in place with State Departments of Agriculture and land-grant universities through cooperative agreements since 1917 to ensure statistical service meets State and local as well as national needs without duplication of effort. This coordination maximizes benefits while minimizing respondent burden and costs to the taxpayers. NASS also considers the thousands of voluntary data suppliers as partners in the important task of monitoring the Nation's agricultural output, facilitating orderly and efficient markets, and measuring the economic health of those in agriculture.

NASS uses numerous forums to obtain program content and customer service feedback. For many years NASS has sponsored Data User Meetings which are a primary source of customer input that keeps the NASS agricultural statistics program on track with the needs of the user community. Data user responses have played a vital role in shaping the agency's annual and long-range planning activities. The transfer of the census of agriculture program to NASS brought with it an Advisory Committee which now provides guidance on the entire agricultural statistics program.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND TOP PRIORITIES

We have identified twelve factors which are critical to our success. Each of these factors contributes to our effectiveness and impacts each of the goals in the NASS Strategic Plan and the agency's ability to implement the President's Management Agenda. These factors are:

- Voluntary respondent cooperation
- Corps of trained data collection interviewers
- Diverse, dedicated, and skilled employees
- State cooperators
- Customer service
- Reputation for excellence
- Timeliness, accuracy, and relevance
- Neutrality, credibility
- Responsiveness
- Confidentiality and security
- Technological efficiencies
- Data management

Additionally, the Administrator and Senior Executives defined ten top priorities that are important to the agency in order to assure our continued success in fulfilling our mission. Ranked in priority order, these are:

1. Reduce Respondent Burden
2. Ensure Security, Confidentiality, and Continuity of Operations
3. Measure Employee Satisfaction and Reward Innovation and Dedication
4. Measure NASS and Staff Performance
5. Achieve NASS Operational Efficiencies for Staff
6. Develop Staff for NASS Career Opportunities
7. Complete PRISM II Systems for Timely and Quality 2007 Census

8. Improve Timeliness, Accuracy, and Usefulness of Agricultural Statistics
9. Strengthen Communication and Service
10. Use Historic NASS Data and Administrative Data to Full Advantage

KEY EXTERNAL FACTORS

Customers and stakeholders described trends and external factors having important implications for the NASS program in the next decade:

- Globalization has had a major impact on American agriculture;
- Increase in global population, demographic changes, and economic growth will continue;
- Changing structure of agriculture is occurring with continued concentration in agricultural production, leading to fewer, larger, and more vertically integrated and more specialized farms;
- Emerging forces influencing agricultural policy include food safety, consumers, food security, terrorism, nutrition, environmental quality, and trade;
- Declining voluntary cooperation as requests for information increase;
- Rising expectations from the public for accuracy, timeliness, and relevancy of statistics;
- Fewer employees with a background and education in agriculture;
- Changing lifestyles in rural America, including more off-farm work, and a decline in the share that agriculture represents in rural communities;
- Explosive changes in information technology;
- An increasing need for accessing and sharing of information across agencies;
- Rising use of and demand for new kinds of information faster and in different forms; and
- Future funding will influence the ability of NASS to fulfill this critical role.

Producers must be able to adapt to a more market-oriented farm policy, shifting trade opportunities, and changes in the structure of agriculture, such as vertical integration and concentration. Accurate and timely statistical data and economic analysis will help producers and policy makers respond quickly to economic, social, and environmental changes that affect production and the sale of agricultural products, both domestically and globally. We must be able to use innovative data collection methods, such as web-based data collection, to help reduce survey respondent burden and improve voluntary cooperation. Advances in information technologies should be adapted to increase information sharing electronically, to meet the rising demands for new information, increase employee productivity, and continue to meet the public's high expectation of accurate, timely, and relevant agricultural statistics. NASS will employ a diverse, highly technical and competent workforce that is high performing and has the ability to fully utilize all available resources to provide top quality agricultural statistics and service.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

The NASS goals are consistent with those of the other agencies in the Research, Education, and Economics mission area. The five strategic goals contained in this plan support the Department's major program policies and objectives. Planning, sound management, and measuring results are an inherent part of achieving these goals. While this plan focuses on program goals and objectives for NASS, we are developing strategies for managing human capital, competitive sourcing, eGovernment, financial management, and budget and performance integration. This strategic plan also supports OMB's assessment and evaluation criteria for rating NASS programs using OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). The plan was revised in January 2005 to realign several of the Agency's strategic measures with OMB's FY 2006 PART measures.

NASS's five strategic goals mirror our commitment to provide first-class service, state-of-the-art-science, and consistent management excellence. To reflect this, these goals contain important objectives that cover the statistical programs and services within USDA's responsibilities.

Through these objectives, we will strive to:

- Provide unbiased data and statistical information for agricultural markets to operate efficiently with fair and equitable price discovery;
- Support international economic development by providing technical assistance;
- Provide statistical data for risk management programs and as a financial tool for decision makers in agriculture;
- Promote an efficient and economically viable agricultural production and marketing system with sound statistical data;
- Provide sound, statistically based information for economic and business decision making at the local level in rural counties;
- Provide chemical use statistics to enable informed decisions using sound science in risk analysis, and;
- Provide statistical data for improved management of soil, air, and water resources.

A set of performance measures will help us track our progress in attaining our goals and objectives. Each measure specifies baseline information and long-term performance targets. Actionable strategies delineate the activities needed to reach the strategic goals.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: ENHANCE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

Expanding markets for agricultural products is critical to the long-term economic health and prosperity of our food and agricultural sector. The well-being of U.S. agriculture is tied to its performance in the global agricultural market place. In order for U.S. agricultural commodities, products, and processes to be competitive in the global economy, the production and processing system must provide reliable supplies of desired products to buyers at a reasonable price. U.S. farmers have a wealth of natural resources, cutting edge technologies, and a supporting infrastructure that result in a production capacity beyond domestic needs that can be used in expanding global markets.

The REE Agencies produce and disseminate science-based information to promote market efficiency, to overcome technical barriers to trade, to enhance sales of agricultural products to buyers worldwide, and to adjust to shifting trade opportunities and challenges. New knowledge and technologies fuel the agricultural system and the basic data, analyses, and information needed to enable the system to operate efficiently and effectively. Timely, reliable, and useful research, education, and information leading to technological and economic advantage are keys to helping U.S. agriculture remain strong and expand international marketing opportunities.

Objective 1.1: Agricultural Markets have Unbiased Data to Operate Efficiently with Fair and Equitable Price Discovery

It is imperative for NASS to deliver high-quality, objective, relevant, timely, and accurate statistics to producers and other data users in order to promote sound, informed production and marketing decisions. Official agricultural statistics promote a level playing field in production agriculture with impartial information available to all at a predetermined and publicized date and time. Areas of work include, but are not limited to: domestic crop, livestock, and poultry production statistics; crop conditions and progress; numbers of farms; state and county agricultural statistics; rural demographics; dairy and egg products; cold storage; aquaculture; agricultural prices; farm labor; grain stocks; livestock slaughter; processing statistics, and crop and livestock agricultural usage and practices.

The Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) calendar of official reports provides data users with the date and time of each report to be released during the year. These releases supply commodity and agricultural markets with unbiased, timely and accurate market-sensitive data throughout the year. This is essential to maintaining an efficient, fair, and equitable market environment for price discovery to occur. The data contained in these releases is necessary for public officials and private interests to make informed decisions. Likewise, USDA policymakers and Congress, also use this information to help them make informed decisions and enact policies that promote a strong, sustainable U.S. farm economy.

Performance Measures

Percent of time official reports are released on the date and time pre-specified to data users.

Baseline: 2003 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 99.8% of the time.

Target: 2008 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 100% of the time.

Percent of key survey point estimates meeting statistical precision targets.

Baseline: 2003 – 67 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Target: 2008 – 90 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Percent of total U.S. agricultural production covered annually by official USDA statistics.

Baseline: 2003 – Estimated total cash receipts for NASS statistical programs accounted for 96 percent of the U.S. total cash receipts.

Target: 2007 – Estimated total cash receipts in NASS statistical programs accounted for 100 percent of the U.S. total cash receipts.

Customer satisfaction improves as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline: 2001 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS is 72.

Target: 2008 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) increases an average of 1 point per year to a score of 78.

Compare annual survey development and data collections costs to the annual rate of inflation.

Baseline: 2003 – The annual survey development and data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI) is .4.

Target: 2008 – The increase in the annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is less than one.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) to publicize the NASS release policy and the annual release calendar to the public.
- Conduct surveys to obtain important statistical data for agricultural commodities information.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, processing, and estimation of production statistics to evaluate their quality, accuracy, timeliness, and frequency.
- Conduct surveys and field visits to enable the Agricultural Statistics Board to forecast crop yields and livestock productive capacity for a meaningful period into the future and quickly respond to emergency data needs such as those resulting from floods, droughts, and freezes.
- Use the ASB to assure objective evaluation of survey indications to provide unbiased official USDA estimates.
- Issue timely, accurate, and user-friendly reports of official estimates that are useful for the efficient and effective marketing of U.S. agricultural outputs.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture at the quinquennial release of the census of agriculture and adjust the NASS statistics programs accordingly.
- Report accuracy and coverage measures to data users.
- Ensure that security procedures protect impartiality and safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and integrity of official statistics from improper disclosure.
- Provide statistical services and technical assistance to other USDA agencies, State Departments of Agriculture, universities and institutions, and agriculture and associated industries.

- Provide quality statistical data for economic research and policy and program analysis with USDA.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers, and other outreach activities.
- Provide customer service that meets NASS standards.

Objective 1.2: Support International Economic Development and Trade Capacity Building Through Technical Assistance

The United States carries out a broad range of activities and initiatives that fosters economic growth and trade capacity building in developing countries around the world. Promoting economic development through technology transfer so that developing countries can improve their income and buying power which helps expand international trade in agriculture. However, developing countries are concerned that limited technology and poor infrastructure may hinder their ability to compete effectively in global markets.

NASS works with the U.S. Agency for International Development and other Federal agencies supplying technical statistical assistance to improve and expand a developing country's capacity to produce agricultural statistics and information. Education and technology transfer can help move those methods into developing countries. Economic and statistical research can illuminate the role of technology transfer and the degree to which it improves incomes and increases trade.

Performance Measures

Agricultural exporting countries provided with statistical technical assistance.

Baseline: 2003 – NASS provides technical assistance to improve agricultural statistics systems in countries representing 25 percent of export value of the target countries.

Target: 2008 – NASS provides technical assistance to improve agricultural statistics systems in countries representing 40 percent of export value of the target countries.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Provide technical assistance requested by developing and transitioning countries to help them develop credible statistical processes and systems to collect, analyze, and report statistics needed to monitor agriculture sector performance, to formulate agriculture policies, and to implement agriculture programs.
- Provide technical assistance requested by developing and transitioning countries to improve market-intelligence around the world on global agricultural production.
- Provide quality service to countries that encourage donor agencies to allocate funds for initiating new projects and continuing existing projects.
- Develop new funding strategies to enable NASS to provide quality service to countries initiating new projects.
- Participate in international forums where NASS capabilities can be demonstrated.
- Provide NASS International Programs Office with technical staff to assist foreign governments.

Objective 1.3: Provide the Science-Based Knowledge and Technologies to Generate New or Improved High Quality Products and Processes to Expand Markets for the Agricultural Sector.

Technological progress is increasingly pushing the market for agricultural products in new directions. Biobased technologies promise new opportunities for energy, industrial, and pharmacological markets for U.S. farmers. For example, agriculture is the source of: clean-burning fuel and industrial ethanol, a variety of specialty chemicals, soy-based inks and diesel fuel, industrial adhesives, biopolymers, and films, all derived from plants rather than from petroleum or other mined raw materials. In addition to the emergence of new markets for products made from agricultural materials, new markets are emerging for environmental activities and products that mitigate environmental concerns, such as offsetting greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration and other farming and ranching activities. Key priorities for USDA will be research to support development of new markets and products, including implementation of Title IX of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 FSRIA), the first energy title ever in a farm bill. NASS does not devote any appropriated resources to this USDA objective.

Objective 1.4: Statistical Data are Available for Risk Management Programs and as a Financial Tool for Decision Making in Agriculture.

Agricultural producers, like other business owners, use a variety of tools to manage risks, including crop insurance, credit, direct payments (including countercyclical payments), and marketing alternatives. Today, about three-quarters of the acreage planted to major crops is at least minimally insured and coverage is expanding through the provision of crop insurance to more crops and the development of new types of coverage. These programs, along with diversified production, marketing, use of futures and options, and other federal program alternatives allow each producer to customize their risk management strategy. USDA's role is to expand and improve these safety net programs and to provide research and education to help producers better manage their natural and economic risks.

NASS produces and disseminates statistical information that provides U.S. producers with agricultural facts. County and local level statistics and price information help decisionmakers manage the inherently risky environment of agricultural production. The U.S. production system must be responsive to ever changing political, economic, technological, environmental, and consumer-driven market forces. Agricultural production and marketability are constantly affected by such factors as unpredictable weather and growing conditions, disease and pest outbreaks, and consumer purchasing power.

Performance Measures

Percent of time official reports are released on the date and time pre-specified to data users.

Baseline: 2003 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 99.8% of the time.

Target: 2008 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 100% of the time.

Percent of the 42 relevant county estimate States having statistically defensible survey precision.

Baseline: 2003 – There are no States setting county estimates with statistically defensible survey precision.

Target: 2008 – 100 percent of the 42 relevant county estimate States set estimates with statistically defensible survey precision.

Customer satisfaction improves as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline: 2001 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is 72.

Target: 2008 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) increases an average of 1 point per year to a score of 78.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) to publicize the NASS release policy and the annual release calendar to the public.
- Conduct surveys to obtain important statistical data for commodities and economic information.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, processing, and estimation of production and price statistics to evaluate their quality, accuracy, timeliness, and frequency.
- Official release dates for crop county estimates will be coordinated with the Risk Management Agency.
- Provide timely and accurate statistical information used in the calculations of payments to farmers in accordance with the 2002 FSRIA.
- Use the ASB to assure objective evaluation of survey indications to provide unbiased official USDA estimates.
- Issue timely, accurate and user-friendly reports of official estimates that are useful for the efficient and effective marketing of U.S. agricultural outputs.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust States included in U.S. market year average price calculations and States included in the county estimates statistics program accordingly.
- Report accuracy and coverage measures to data users.
- Ensure that security procedures protect impartiality and safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and integrity of official statistics from improper disclosure.
- Provide quality statistical data for economic research and policy and program analysis with USDA.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers, and other outreach activities.
- Provide customer service that meets NASS standards.

Objective 1.5: Statistical Data Promotes an Efficient and Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Marketing System

Fundamental to the long-term viability of an agricultural producer is his or her ability to manage an efficient operation that realizes a profit. While factors such as market conditions, weather, and plant and animal pests and diseases play roles, it is the efficiency of farm or ranch production systems that ensures the economic viability of each operation. In simplest terms, this means producing the right products at low enough costs to realize a profit at market prices. This, not a complex, ever changing, and never ending set of support and disaster payments, is the desire of farmers and ranchers. The long-range function of USDA is to help farmers and ranchers achieve this goal.

REE sponsors and carries out research and extension programs dedicated to developing and transferring to farmers and ranchers the technology, production practices, and business and marketing tools that are

the center pieces for efficient and economically sustainable farms. Efforts are directed toward reducing per unit and overall production costs, increasing production efficiency, improving yields and quality, and improving management and marketing decisions. The overarching objective is to provide the science and technology to keep our farmers and ranchers ahead of everything that could hinder their success.

The annual Agricultural Resources Management Survey (ARMS) jointly sponsored with the Economic Research Service (ERS) is USDA's primary vehicle for obtaining information on a broad range of issues about the farm sector financial conditions and agricultural resource use. The ARMS provides the most definitive, annual description of the rapidly changing structure of the nation's farms. While a smaller number of large farms account for a growing proportion of agricultural production, other farms maintain profitability by entering into production and marketing agreements with agri-businesses. The ARMS provides an annual measure of the effect agri-business has on farm income through such contracts. Without the ARMS, important measures such as farm income, farm operator income, and farm household income would not be available. This program also provides the critical information to analyze the effect government programs, such as loan deficiency payments, are having on net farm income by size and type of farm. Equally important, ARMS data can be used to evaluate the possible effects of alternative government policies and programs such as formulating indices, cost estimates, and farm economic indicators. Data from the ARMS survey are the foundation for the body of research that has led to the recognition on the part of decision-makers of the diversity of the farm sector and the differential impact of alternative policies and programs across the farm sector and among farm families.

Each year, a number of new and emerging issues in agriculture are identified. These issues need to be researched and addressed using sound facts and information. When funding is provided, NASS often conducts surveys to support this research and provides timely, accurate, and useful information on these new and emerging agricultural issues. Funding and data requests may come from Congress, USDA, other Federal agencies, universities, industry, and others. Examples of surveys and emerging issues are census follow-on surveys, biotechnology adoption, utilization of computer technology by farmers, BSE issues, organic issues, and the need for equine statistics, to name a few.

Performance Measures

Percent of time official reports are released on the date and time pre-specified to data users

Baseline: 2003 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 99.8% of the time.

Target: 2008 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 100% of the time.

Percent of key survey point estimates meeting statistical precision targets.

Baseline: 2003 – 67 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Target: 2008 – 90 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Percent of survey point estimates of key total expenditure items for which the relative standard error is reported.

Baseline: 2003 – None of the key total expenditure items have standard errors reported.

Target: 2008 – All of the identified key total expenditure items have standard errors reported.

Percent of U.S. cash receipts for which State level estimates of key farm production expenditure variables are reported.

Baseline: 2003 – NASS produces only regional and national level estimates of farm production expenditures.

Target: 2008 – NASS produces state level estimates for key farm production expenditures for states totaling 75% of U.S. cash receipts.

Be responsive to new and emerging agricultural issues at the Federal level in addressing data user needs by providing timely, accurate, and usable statistics on emerging issues.

Baseline: 2003 – NASS specialty statistics include monitoring farmer adoption of biotechnology, adoption and utilization of eGovernment and eBusiness systems, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Target: 2008 – NASS is responsive to emerging agricultural issues and is appropriated adequate funding to provide data users with timely, accurate and usable statistics on emerging issues important to agriculture.

Customer satisfaction improves as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline: 2001 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS is 72.

Target: 2008 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) increases an average of 1 point per year to a score of 78.

Compare annual survey development and data collections costs to the annual rate of inflation

Baseline: 2003 – The annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is .4.

Target: 2008 – The Increase in the annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is less than one.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) to publicize the NASS release policy and the annual release calendar to the public.
- Conduct surveys to obtain important statistical data for economic information and emerging issues.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, and processing of ARMS and other economic statistics to evaluate their quality, accuracy, timeliness, and frequency.
- Use the ASB to assure objective evaluation of survey indications to provide unbiased official USDA estimates.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust the ARMS statistics program accordingly.
- Issue timely, accurate and user-friendly reports of official estimates that are useful for the efficient and effective marketing of U.S. agricultural outputs.
- Annual Farm Production Expenditures will be released on or before July 30 following the reference year. Farm labor wage rate and hired workers official estimates are released within one month after the survey reference date.
- Report accuracy and coverage measures to data users.

- Conduct the census of agriculture follow-on surveys to provide greater detail than the basic data collected on the quinquennial census of agriculture.
- Provide statistical services and technical assistance to other USDA agencies, State Departments of Agriculture, universities and institutions, and agriculture and associated industries.
- Ensure that security procedures protect impartiality and safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and integrity of official statistics from improper disclosure.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers, and other outreach activities.
- Provide customer service that meets NASS standards.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: SUPPORT INCREASED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AMERICA

Of the 60 million people who live in rural America, only 2 million are directly engaged in production agriculture. A diversity of other enterprises, including support services for agriculture, forestry and mining, recreation, and manufacturing, provide most of the jobs and income in rural America. USDA's role is to enhance the economic opportunities and quality of life for rural residents by providing financial and technical assistance for business and industry, water and waste disposal and other essential community facilities, advanced telecommunications, electric utilities, and housing. Our objective is to ensure that rural residents have equal opportunity to share in the Nation's prosperity and technological advancement.

The economic opportunities and quality of life enjoyed by communities, their residents, and businesses depend significantly on their capacity to take full advantage of the resources available to them and to adjust to changing circumstances. The well-being and needs of rural communities and their residents vary widely and, in general, meeting those needs lag behind national averages. Rural minorities are especially disadvantaged. Disparities between urban and rural America, and across rural America, are found in income, savings, education, housing, and other quality-of-life measures.

Objective 2.1: Provide Statistically Sound Information for Economic and Business Decision-making at the Local Level in Rural Communities

One of USDA's core missions is ensuring that rural Americans enjoy economic opportunities equivalent to those of other Americans. A robust, sustainable local economy is a major factor in creating stronger communities, and fostering a desirable social and natural environment for individual, families, businesses, and community organizations. Understanding the dynamics of a strong local economy and the policies and programs that promote strength is critical to success. The REE mission area promotes the well-being of rural America through research and analysis to better understand the economic, demographic, and environmental forces affecting rural regions and communities. Using that knowledge, REE can help to develop strategies that build on local assets. Through education and extension activities, REE facilitates placement of skills and knowledge in the hands of rural residents and community and business leaders to empower them to help their communities thrive in the global economy.

NASS statistical information, particularly the census of agriculture, is designed to enhance National, State, and local information on U.S. Agriculture and to facilitate locality-based policy and business

decisions. Detailed information on production, supply, economic, and demographic data from the census of agriculture are critical for new businesses in developing local level strategies and plans for successfully starting up in or relocating to rural America.

Performance Measures

Months following the end of the census year when census data are available nationally.

Baseline: 2004 – A preliminary release for 2002 Census of Agriculture was published February 2004, 14 months after the initial mailing in December 2002.

Target: 2009 – The 2007 Census of Agriculture is scheduled to be published February 2009, 14 months after the initial mailing in December 2007.

Percent of total U.S. farms and farmland with sales of \$50,000 or more included in census list tabulations based on an independent measure of undercoverage.

Baseline: 2002 – The 2002 Census of Agriculture covered 94.5 percent of U.S. farms and 99.1 percent of the farmland on farms with \$50,000 or more in sales.

Target: 2007 – The 2007 Census of Agriculture will cover more than 95 percent of U.S. farms and 99 percent of the farmland on farms with \$50,000 or more in sales.

Percent of total U.S. minority operated farms included in census mail list from an independent measure of undercoverage.

Baseline: 2002 – The 2002 Census of Agriculture mail list covered 68 percent of minority operated farms.

Target: 2007 – The 2007 Census of Agriculture mail list will cover 73 percent of minority operated farms.

Customer satisfaction improves as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline: 2001 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS is 72.

Target: 2008 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) increases an average of 1 point per year to a score of 78.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Conduct the census of agriculture to provide detailed data at the National, State, County, and local levels on the characteristics of America's agricultural sector.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection and processing of the census of agriculture.
- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) to assure objective evaluation of the census data to provide unbiased official results.
- Report the results of the census in a timely and user-friendly manner to enable decision making for localities across the U.S.
- Improve coverage of socially disadvantaged farm operators in the census of agriculture.
- Report accuracy and coverage measures to data users.
- Involve and maintain partnerships with State Departments of Agriculture, land-grant colleges and universities, other cooperators, and local supporters for program development and evaluation.

- Ensure that security procedures protect impartiality and safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and integrity of official statistics from improper disclosure.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers, and other outreach activities.
- Provide customer service that meets NASS standards.

Objective 2.2: Provide Science-Based Technology, Products and Information to Facilitate Informed Decisions Affecting the Quality of Life in Rural Areas.

If new businesses are to start up in or relocate to rural America, the local rural community must possess the amenities that businesses require and employees' desire. These include not only access to such basic needs as clean water, adequate housing, and reliable electricity and telecommunication services, but also access to essential needs such as quality education, health care, day care, etc. NASS does not devote any appropriated resources to this USDA objective.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: ENHANCE PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF THE NATION'S AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SUPPLY

USDA has unique and critical responsibilities to help ensure the safety of the U.S. food and fiber supply chain and the security of the U.S. agricultural production system. The Department will continue to assess current systems and develop countermeasures against threats to farms and ranches, in coordination with the private sector, other Federal agencies, and State governments. Research programs lead to the development of methods of early detection, rapid and accurate assessment, and immediate responses that prevent spreading and control of harmful agents. These abilities are essential to an effective U.S. agricultural biosecurity program. USDA facilities and operations must also be secure from external and internal threats.

For the Nation to have high quality, affordable, and safe food, the production system must be protected at each step from production to consumption. Crop and livestock production systems must be protected from the ravages of diseases, whether domestic or exotic in origin. The food supply must be protected during production, processing, and preparation from contamination by organisms that cause disease in humans. The REE agencies will provide scientific information, technology and education to producers, manufacturers, regulatory agencies, and consumers to support their efforts to provide productive and safe food.

Objective 3.1: Help Monitor and Reduce Foodborne Contaminants Through Science-Based Statistical Information

USDA will improve public health by further reducing the prevalence of food borne hazards from farm to table, striving to become a model for all other public health institutions. Emerging pathogens and the dynamic nature of food borne hazards mean that our food safety systems must be continually assessed and updated in order to maintain consumer confidence in our food supply. Our Nation's prosperity relies upon

an abundant and safe food supply. REE research and education strive to protect the health of consumers from harmful microbial or chemical contamination in the food we eat. REE also aims to make our domestic agricultural production system as secure as possible from the effects of pests, diseases, weather extremes, climate changes, and other natural disasters. Critical to this effort are programs to ensure that producers, processors, and consumers understand safe food and handling practices. NASS does not devote any appropriated resources to this USDA objective.

Objective 3.2: Chemical Usage Statistics Enable Informed Decisions Using Sound Science in Risk Analysis

Safeguarding America's animal and plant resources from invasive pests and diseases is essential to housing, feeding, and clothing our Nation and to enhancing the agricultural trade that underlies much of America's prosperity. To keep crop and animal pests and diseases out of the U.S. and to manage those inside our borders, USDA sponsors prevention activities that reduce the number of pest and disease outbreaks and coordinates effective pest and animal disease emergency response systems that reduce the severity of pest and disease outbreaks. USDA partners with Federal and State agencies, industries, and professional organizations to develop and maintain effective emergency response systems to detect, respond to, and eliminate outbreaks of invasive pests and diseases. USDA also partners with other nations and Federal agencies in research and operations that proactively prevent such outbreaks.

The integrity of the natural resource base is important to maintaining sustainable agricultural production systems and enhancing and preserving environmental quality. REE programs actively protect the Nation's natural resource base by developing and transferring new technologies and farming practices that balance long-term sustainability goals with improved agricultural competitiveness and economic growth.

NASS publishes chemical usage statistics on the acreage treated with fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, and other pesticides. Each chemical product is classified by its active ingredient. Postharvest chemical usage data are collected obtained from storage facilities, processors, packers and shippers to maintain a chemical use database on pesticides and other chemicals applied to commodities after harvest. Each chemical product is classified by its active ingredient. These data are used for both public education and regulatory decision making purposes. These surveys are part of a continuing program which provides chemical use data to other government agencies to respond effectively to food safety and water-quality issues.

Performance Measures

Percent of time official reports are released on the date and time pre-specified to data users

Baseline: 2003 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 99.8% of the time.

Target: 2008 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 100% of the time

Percent of key survey point estimates meeting statistical precision targets.

Baseline: 2003 – 67 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Target: 2008 – 90 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Percent of U.S. production covered by chemical use surveys

Baseline: 2003 – Chemical use surveys account for 97 percent of U.S. production.

Target: 2008 – Chemical use surveys account for 95 percent of U.S. production.

Customer satisfaction improves as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline: 2001 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS is 72.

Target: 2008 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) increases an average of 1 point per year to a score of 78.

Compare annual survey development and data collections costs to the annual rate of inflation

Baseline: 2003 – The annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is .4.

Target: 2008 – The increase in the annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is less than one.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) to publicize the NASS release policy and the annual release calendar to the public.
- Conduct surveys to provide needed information concerning quantities of chemicals applied to agricultural commodities, including livestock and facilities.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, processing, and estimation of chemical use statistics to evaluate their quality, accuracy, timeliness, and frequency.
- Use the ASB to assure objective evaluation of survey indications to provide unbiased official USDA estimates.
- Supply important economic information relevant to policy and production decisions associated with chemical use and integrated pest management on U.S. farms and ranches.
- Supply information relevant to measuring the adoption of integrated pest management practices in production agriculture.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust the NASS chemical use statistics program accordingly.
- Ensure that security procedures protect impartiality and safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and integrity of official statistics from improper disclosure.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers and other outreach activities.
- Provide customer service that meets NASS standards.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: IMPROVE THE NATION'S NUTRITION AND HEALTH

USDA promotes America's health through food and nutrition education, guidance and promotion to the general public and to targeted groups. We teach, inform and motivate Americans to use this information to improve their diets and physical activity patterns. We expand research and scientific knowledge about public health. By promoting better diets, reaching children early and ensuring access to healthy food, we make a major contribution to the Nation's health. NASS does not devote any appropriated resources to this USDA goal.

STRATEGIC GOAL 5: PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE NATION'S NATURAL RESOURCE BASE AND ENVIRONMENT

The management of our natural resources, both public and private, is often a balancing act between contrary and competing concerns. However, longer-term management strategies combined with adequate knowledge of the complex natural systems can yield maximum sustainable benefits from our resources are benefits that can satisfy most competing concerns. The development of the knowledge base and educational efforts to achieve maximum sustainable benefits from our natural resources on both public and private lands is a goal of REE.

Objective 5.1: Provide Statistical Information to Improve the Management of Forests and Rangelands.

USDA has stewardship responsibility for the natural resources on 192 million acres of federally managed lands. Policies are carried out to ensure sustainable forest and rangeland ecosystems and natural resource amenities that are resilient to natural and human disturbance. USDA manages our natural resources for a sustainable flow of uses, products, and services for the American public. NASS does not devote any appropriated resources to this USDA objective.

Objective 5.2: Statistical Data are Available for Improved Management of Soil, Air and Water.

Farmers, ranchers, and private forest owners manage more than 70 percent of the Nation's land. These groups are the primary stewards of soil, water, and related resources on those lands. USDA provides a portfolio of services to help owners be good stewards. These services include research, education, and technical assistance; cost share and incentive payments for conservation practices; and rental payments or easements to protect fragile or environmentally important land. USDA develops conservation technology tailored to local conditions based on continuing USDA resource assessments and response to local needs and priorities. USDA's field staff works in partnership with local conservation districts, extension universities, Tribal and State staff, and volunteers. USDA plays a key role in protecting property and natural resources on non-Federal lands by increasing preparedness, mitigating hazards, and preventing fires. USDA will adopt a holistic approach that ensures compatibility of conservation and trade policies and effective coordination of conservation and farm policies.

In general, American farmers and ranchers use water responsibly to produce an abundant food supply. NASS conducts the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey to provide detailed information on irrigation practices and systems used by farmers and ranchers; this information helps industry representatives, leaders and planners chart the best course for maintaining and stable future for on farm irrigation. Information from the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) is used to study water quality issues along with production practices. Examples include information on machinery use and crop rotation help to identify tillage systems and crop residue level affecting soil erosion. Cropland Data Layer information provided by NASS, in cooperation with Foreign Agriculture Service and the Farm Service Agency, provides crop specific digital data layers, suitable for use in geographic information systems (GIS) applications used to improve the management of the Nation's natural resources. The Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) is a survey conducted in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA). The information NASS collects on land management and conservation practices will be used by NRCS and FSA to assess environmental benefits associated with implementation and installation of conservation practices. This assessment will be used to report progress annually on Farm Bill implementation to Congress and the general public. The CEAP will be conducted in the Fall each year of the 2002 Farm Bill (2003 through 2007).

Performance Measures

Percent of time official reports are released on the date and time pre-specified to data users.

Baseline: 2003 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 99.8% of the time.

Target: 2008 – Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 100% of the time.

Percent of key survey point estimates meeting statistical precision targets.

Baseline: 2003 – 67 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Target: 2008 – 90 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS standards.

Percent of crops where acreage targets are met as they relate to management of natural resources.

Baseline: 2003 – 60 percent of the targeted crop acreage is accounted for the 2002 corn, soybean, winter wheat, other spring wheat and durum wheat crops.

Target: 2008 – 100 percent of the targeted crop acreage is accounted for the 2007 corn, cotton, fall potatoes, and rice crops.

Number of states with cropland data layer increases.

Baseline: 2002 – There are 8 states with GIS cropland data layers.

Target: 2008 – A total of 10 states will be using GIS cropland data layers.

Customer satisfaction improves as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline: 2001 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS is 72.

Target: 2008 – The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) increases an average of 1 point per year to a score of 78.

Compare annual survey development and data collections costs to the annual rate of inflation.

Baseline: 2003 – The annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is .4.

Target: 2008 – The increase in the annual survey development and the data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is less than one.

Actionable Strategies

Future actions:

- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) to publicize the NASS release policy and the annual release calendar to the public.
- Conduct surveys to provide needed information concerning irrigation practices, water quality issues, and production practices affecting soil erosion.
- Conduct the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) to assess environmental benefits associated with implementation and installation of land management and conservation practices.
- Conduct research on collecting crop information using satellite mapping data to create cropland data layers suitable for use in geographic information systems (GIS) applications.
- Release the Cropland Data Layer within 2 weeks of the release of major county estimates.
- Establish a new office in an area central to the new states incorporated into the GIS system on cropland resource management.
- Use the ASB to assure objective evaluation of survey indications to provide unbiased official USDA estimates.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, processing, and estimation of production and price statistics to evaluate their quality, accuracy, timeliness, and frequency.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust Farm & Ranch Irrigation and ARMS I and II statistics, and geospatial programs accordingly.
- Report accuracy and coverage measures to data users.
- Ensure that security procedures protect impartiality and safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and integrity of official statistics from improper disclosure.
- Provide quality statistical data for economic research and policy and program analysis with USDA.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers and other outreach activities.
- Provide customer service that meets NASS standards.

OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

NASS is working to strengthen USDA's management through execution of the President's Management Agenda (PMA). Better management will result in more efficient program operations that offer improved customer service and more effective stewardship of taxpayer funds. We expect to:

- Ensure NASS has an efficient, high-performing, diverse workforce that is aligned with our mission priorities and works cooperatively with USDA and NASS partners and the private sector.
- Enhance internal controls, data integrity, management information, and program and policy improvements as reflected by an unqualified audit opinion and a reduction of erroneous payments by NASS.
- Implement business processes and information technology needed to make more of our services available to the public electronically.
- Link budget decisions and program priorities more closely with program performance and begin to recognize the full cost of our programs.

Detailed plans are being developed for each of the PMAs. Below is a brief summary of our plans.

Improve Human Capital Management

The President has identified strategic management of human capital as a means to making government more citizen-centered and creating a high-performing workforce. Our REE Mission Area Human Capital Plan has been developed for all of the REE agencies and it is aligned with USDA's Human Capital Plan. The REE Human Capital Plan focuses on strategic workforce planning and maximizing employee performance while meeting the challenges of developing a (technologically competent, skilled, responsive, and effective) workforce for the future that also embraces customer service and supports a broader scope of program responsibilities.

The Plan will be a guide for creating innovative human resource solutions to meet the current needs of our customers and our future challenges. NASS has developed a Human Capital Workforce Plan for FY2005-2009 detailing a variety of programs, initiatives, activities, and tools to address the human capital issues related to recruitment, development and retention of the workforce, succession planning, and leadership development. NASS will continuously strive for better and new methods of operation, publicize best practices and share lessons learned with other agencies. In managing our human capital and in delivering our services to customers, NASS will continue to focus on ensuring civil rights and equal employment opportunity for everyone and is committed to continuous civil rights progress in the workplace, in program delivery, and in processing complaints in a timely and efficient manner.

Our plans include:

- Linking human capital planning activities with our business strategies and plans.
- Communicating our human capital plans to management and employees
- Using workforce planning and flexible tools to recruit, retain, and reward employees while developing a high-performing, accountable workforce.
- Ensuring employment opportunities for all members of the workforce while focusing on critical occupations with projected skill gaps, and underrepresented groups.
- Implementing recommendations developed by the NASS Career Opportunities Development Team.
- Developing succession plans and promoting leadership development.
- Using competitive sourcing as a management tool, as needed.
- Ensuring timely resolution of employment civil rights complaints.

Competitive Sourcing Initiatives

The foundation of competitive sourcing is the annual inventory of federal activities (FAIR Act Inventory) in which USDA agencies identify their functions as either inherently governmental or commercial in nature. REE developed a mission area approach for its annual FAIR Act Inventory which formalized the process for reviewing and coding for all activities. The purpose in having this methodology is to assure consistency within each REE agency and across the mission area. Competitive sourcing will be used as a management tool by the Under Secretary, Agency Administrators and Senior Management, as needed.

The competitive sourcing area of the REE Mission Area website provides information on:

- Under Secretary communications to REE employees on competitive sourcing plans/decisions
- Administrators' communications with respective agency employees
- Frequently asked Questions & Answers
- Communication Plans
- Links to Departmental, OMB, and other related Competitive Sourcing/A-76 websites

The REE Competitive Sourcing/A-76 Working Group is charged with the responsibility of reviewing all REE activities/functions and developing recommendations on competitive sourcing opportunities to facilitate decisions on specific studies. The group actively works with USDA's Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). Their recommendations are presented to the REE Under Secretary and Agency Administrators for consideration. The REE Under Secretary notifies the OCFO of specific competitive sourcing studies that REE will pursue annually.

Continued attention will be given to expanding the REE competitive sourcing initiative after OMB issues its revised OMB Circular A-76 to ensure that a more comprehensive strategy is developed for the out-years beyond FY 2003. This initiative is being pursued within REE with close attention given to showing a demonstrated commitment to competitive sourcing. However, REE is mindful that it must balance this commitment with an awareness that it must minimize disruption to mission operations and goals and to preserve and continue the recruitment of quality employees to carry out REE's work during the next 5 years. This process can easily overload the human and financial resources of REE if not managed carefully. NASS is committed to carefully working towards this balance.

Improve Financial Management

Effectively managing the use of taxpayer dollars is a fundamental Federal responsibility. NASS will ensure that all funds spent are properly accounted for to the taxpayers, the Congress, and the GAO. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) works to improve financial management, in partnership with the REE Chief Financial Officer, as a core attribute of our operating culture. Due to our recent efforts to improve financial management, USDA received an unqualified opinion on the 2002 financial audit. OCFO is working closely with USDA agencies to eliminate all material weaknesses by 2004.

The OCFO is leading the efforts to improve management information by helping USDA's agencies in crafting and accessing useful, timely information, such as monthly financial reports, on-line access to real-time information, and program cost reporting. By enhancing the integrity of financial and administrative data, we will protect corporate assets and conserve scarce resources.

Our plans include:

- Assisting the OCFO in maintaining an unqualified audit opinion on USDA Financial Statements.
- Eliminating all material weaknesses.
- Improving financial reporting procedures and systems.

Expand Electronic Government

Expanding Electronic Government is one of the five key elements in the PMA. USDA's various eGovernment governance bodies have emphasized and communicated broadly the tenets of the PMA: defining a strategy linked to a fundamentally reformed Capital Planning and Investment Process, leveraging investments, taking a citizen-centered approach, and seeking tangible, and measurable results. This will fundamentally transform how the manner in which the USDA does business by using innovative electronic solutions that apply the eCommerce principles of "faster, cheaper, better" to public service.

USDA has crafted an enterprise-wide eGovernment Strategic Plan that establishes a clear mission, vision and set of goals and objectives for eGovernment. Each of the REE agencies has developed an eGovernment Tactical Plan that establishes how the agency will transform its core business processes to fulfill the Departmental eGovernment Mission, Vision, Goals, and Objectives and satisfy its own unique stakeholder demands.

Our plans include:

- Updating the NASS eGovernment Tactical Plan on a regular basis;
- Implementing the 24 eGovernment Initiatives which have been categorized into 5 major categories as outlined in the NASS eGovernment Tactical Plan;
- Supporting the launch and refinement of REE mission area and/or agency specific eGovernment Programs which align with the Departmental eGovernment strategic efforts and enterprisewide collaborative solutions. This will help us focus on improving mission execution and developing better business capabilities rather than on cutting-edge technology and avoiding redundant approaches and additional costs, and;
- Evaluating REE mission area and/or agency-specific environments for implementing eGovernment by allowing the agencies to anticipate and plan for the future by thinking beyond current capabilities and old business models.

Establish Budget and Performance Integration

NASS is committed to improving its management to formally integrate our performance with budget decisions to produce performance-based budgets as part of the President's Management Agenda, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department. USDA's strategic plan and the planning efforts in the REE Mission Area and the REE agencies will support the new integration process for the budget and in building a new way of measuring its desired performance.

NASS's performance plans and its integrated budget will show the relationship between program funding levels and expected results. It will identify the relationship between dollars and results and be able to explain any new relationships that were created, as well as comparing these results with previous outcomes or outputs. Budget accounts will be aligned with agency program outcome goals, output targets and resources requested. Program effectiveness will be documented and analyses will show how program outputs and policies affect desired agency outcomes. NASS will incrementally apply performance to its budget and will be able to demonstrate how program results will help management make informed budget decisions. By doing this, the overall effect will provide NASS managers with a starting point for monitoring agency performance and present real opportunities to measure costs as well as results.

NASS will explore and find new ways to implement budget and performance integration in an "incremental" fashion since it is unlikely that a comprehensive approach for the entire REE Mission Area would require sweeping changes in the way funding flows to the programs. In the long-term, full budgetary costs should be calculated and charged to accounts and activities with the cost of outputs and programs integrated with performance and budget requests and execution.

Over the next few years, we will continue to improve our performance information and use program evaluations more effectively. Our plans include:

- Providing a systematic means to review and evaluate performance information during all stages of the budget process;
- Evaluating and assessing the Agricultural Statistics Program using the OMB’s Program Assessment Rating Tools (PART);
- Evaluating programs in a systematic manner and integrating the results of those evaluations into the budget decision-making process;
- Creating budget line items and cost accounting systems that align with Department and Mission Area goals and encourage effective management.
- Implementing a new “results oriented” performance management program that is used by supervisors and managers in assessing individual performance which is aligned to the Agency’s goals.
- Giving an appropriate level of recognition to employees for their accomplishment of goals and contributions in attaining the desired Agency outcomes in this plan.

APPENDIX A: PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

NASS used several tools that fed the development of this Strategic Plan. The types of tools included:

- Program Evaluations
- Advisory Committees
- Office of the Inspector General (OIG), General Accounting Office (GAO), and Other External Reviews
- Internal Management Studies and Performance Measurement Systems

The following table highlights some of these tools as they relate to NASS’s strategic goals and management initiatives.

Program Recommendations and Input Used to Develop the Strategic Plan				
Goal	Evaluations/Analyses	Brief Description	What Was The Effect	Date
All Goals	Review of the Relevance and Adequacy of the Research, Education and Economics (REE) agencies’ budget	As required by law, annually the National Research, Education, Extension, and Economics Advisory Board reviews the relevance, priority, and adequacy of REE funding. The Board then sends the results to the Secretary in a letter.	Influenced budget decisions.	Annually
	Review of NASS Agricultural Statistics Program including the census of agriculture	As required by law, annually the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics reviews the NASS statistical program including the census of agriculture.	Influence program decisions and meet data user needs.	Annually
	Review of NASS Agricultural Statistics Program including the census of agriculture.	Schedule USDA Data User meetings.	Influence program decisions and meet data user needs.	Annually
	OMB Program Performance Assessment using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	Agricultural Estimates Program including the census of agriculture.	Structured OMB Review as part of the budget process to help determine program effectiveness.	FY2006 Budget

The following table highlights some of the longer-term studies as they relate to NASS’s strategic goals and management initiatives.

Future NASS Program Evaluations and Other Analyses				
Goal	Evaluations/Analyses	General Scope	Methodology	Timetable
All Goals	Review of NASS Agricultural Statistics Program including the census of agriculture	The Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics makes recommendations for program changes and assesses data needs.	Meetings conducted with NASS senior managers to discuss data needs to develop recommendations.	Annually
	Review of NASS Agricultural Statistics Program including the census of agriculture	The outcome of the USDA Data User meeting includes recommendations for program changes and assesses emerging data needs.	Meetings conducted with NASS senior managers to discuss data needs to develop recommendations.	Annually
	OMB Program Performance Assessment using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	PART is used to assess the management and results of selected programs.	NASS and OMB staff develops responses to a series of questions assessing program management and performance.	Annually

APPENDIX B: CROSS-CUTTING PROGRAMS

As the primary statistical Agency for the USDA, NASS services the data needs of many agencies inside and outside of the Department. NASS data are an important part of the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates, issued monthly by the World Agricultural Outlook Board, which measure total world supplies and demand for major commodities. NASS data play a very important role in the Department’s purchases of food for the school lunch program and impact policy issues such as the Export Enhancement Program and the management of the Conservation Reserve Program. NASS data are used administratively to establish Federal Market Order milk prices which ultimately determine the price every consumer pays for milk and dairy products. USDA’s Risk Management Agency uses NASS data to administer the crop insurance program. Wage rate data from the labor survey are used by the Department of Labor to set the adverse effect wage rates. Grazing fees for publicly owned land are set using a formula based on NASS estimates of grazing fees on private land along with prices received data. The grazing fees are jointly administered by the Forest Service in USDA and the Department of the Interior.

Partnerships have been in place with State Departments of Agriculture and land-grant universities through cooperative agreements since 1917 to ensure statistical services met State and local as well as national needs without duplication of effort. This coordination maximizes benefits while minimizing respondent burden and costs to the taxpayers. NASS also considers the thousands of voluntary data suppliers as partners in the important task of monitoring the Nation’s agricultural output, facilitating orderly and efficient markets, and measuring the economic health of those in agriculture.

NASS uses numerous forums to obtain program content and customer service feedback. For many years NASS has sponsored the USDA Data User Meetings which are a primary source of customer input that keeps the NASS agricultural statistics program aligned with the needs of the user community. Some data user meetings have featured the NASS strategic plan as a means of generating discussion of the NASS program and the plans themselves. With the transfer of the census of agriculture program, NASS now has the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics which provides guidance on the entire agricultural statistics program. Also, the mission area has the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board which provides input for all REE agencies.

Our work often cuts across jurisdictional lines—within USDA, with other Federal agencies, and with State, local, and private partners. This table lists the primary partnerships that will enable NASS to reach the outcomes in this Strategic Plan.

Cross-cutting Programs		
Goal	USDA Primary Agencies & Staffs	External Organizations
Goal 1	Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, Office of the Chief Economist, World Agriculture Outlook Board, Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration (GIPSA), Economic Research Service (ERS), Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS)	Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, State Departments of Agriculture, U.S. Agency for International Development, cooperators, land grant colleges and universities, commercial warehouse operators, cooperative marketing associations and private industry trade groups.
Goal 2	Department-wide	Local, State, and Federal Governments
Goal 3	Department-wide	Local, State, and Federal Governments
Goal 4	No Cross-cuts with other agencies	
Goal 5	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Forest Service (FS), FSA, ERS	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Geological Survey

APPENDIX C: STRATEGIC CONSULTATIONS

NASS stakeholders are its data providers, customers and data users, its staff, cooperators, and the public. NASS has identified its primary customers to be the farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses, that not only provide data to NASS, but use NASS information to routinely make their production and marketing decisions. NASS shapes its program and products principally to serve these key decision makers: the White House and USDA program managers; the U.S. Congress; other Federal agencies; State and local government officials; farmers and ranchers; and environmental, agribusiness, consumer, and other groups that use and are interested in agricultural statistics. The ultimate beneficiaries of NASS’s statistical program are the American people, whose well-being is improved by well informed public and private decision making.

We regularly consult with external groups, customers, policy experts, industry and consumer groups about the effectiveness of our programs. While many of the consultations were not conducted expressly for this Strategic Plan, they have had a deep influence on the development of this strategic plan.

Strategic Consultations			
Goal	Date	Who	Purpose
All Goals	Ongoing	Producers, producer groups and associations, land grant colleges and universities, state and Local Governments and other Federal Agencies	Discuss any proposed new programs or evaluations of existing programs and share information and provide input on program delivery and outreach.
	Annually	Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics	Advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the scope, timing, and content of the censuses and surveys of agriculture. Make recommendations regarding the content of agriculture reports. Presents the views of major suppliers and users of statistics.
		Public forum for data users	Provide updates on pending changes in statistical and informational programs. Seek feedback from data users.
		Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics	Advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the scope, timing, and content of the censuses and surveys of agriculture. Make recommendations regarding the content of agriculture reports. Presents the views of major suppliers and users of statistics.
		USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum	Discuss developments in global agricultural markets and exchange information with customers.
		Outside organizations	Maintains numerous partnerships with outside entities, covering a range of topics.
	Quarterly	National Agriculture, Research, Education, Economics, and Extension Advisory Board	Advise the USDA and its land-grant university partners on research, extension, education, and economic policies, priorities, and on the effectiveness of those policies and priorities.
	Fall 2005	OMB Program Performance Assessment using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	Structured OMB Review as part of the budget process to help determine program effectiveness.