

The 2007 Census of Agriculture is the farmer's voice, future and responsibility.

The history of collecting data on U.S. agriculture dates back to President George Washington, who was known for keeping meticulous statistical records describing his and other farms. Such information was essential during this time when 9 out of every 10 Americans lived on a farm. They needed to know what crops they should produce to ensure a plentiful bounty for the people to eat.

While much has changed since then, the importance of accurate agricultural data to today's farmers and ranchers is no different. As a highly technical industry, American agriculture relies heavily on statistical information to feed, fuel and clothe a growing world. From selecting inputs to determining when to sell their goods, America's farmers need detailed, statistical information to effectively run their businesses. Thankfully, there are tools like the Census of Agriculture that help in this regard.

Taken every five years, the Census of Agriculture is a survey of America's farms, ranches and the people that operate them. It is the most complete agricultural data resource available, providing the only source of uniform, comprehensive information for every county in the nation.

In light of this, I'm pleased to report that the 2007 Census of Agriculture will soon be underway. Right around the first of the year, Census forms will be arriving in ranch and farm mail boxes across the country, providing agricultural producers a voice in the future of their industry and community.

Not only does the Census give the farmers and ranchers of Wyoming the chance to be heard, but it gives them the valuable opportunity to influence key decisions that will shape the direction of American agriculture in general and our community in particular for years to come.

Their Census response can help determine federal support for crucial services that aid local communities. Policy-makers factor Census data into decisions concerning agricultural and rural programs. Community planners use Census information when developing local programs and services. Companies factor Census data into decisions concerning where to locate their operations. And farmers rely on Census data when making critical decisions about their businesses.

The Census offers a tremendous value to rural stakeholders, and the time it takes to complete the form pales in comparison to what they get in return. Responding will be even easier this year as producers may fill out the form online via a secure web site.

So if you receive a Census report form, please fill it out accurately and return it. Your responses are required by law and held strictly confidential. But, more importantly, your participation provides you with a voice in shaping your future.

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